

A Smile and A Sword In Your Arms

written by

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Breathing Space includes mature content such as adult language, sexual situations, violence and substance use.

This episode contains mentions of human trafficking.

Additional sensory contact warnings can be found in the show notes.

Intro plays

I ain't got no home to go to
I ain't got nothing to sell
But my stars will never leave me
Even when I'm sold to hell
I was born under a blue sky
And I'll die out in the black
When I'm gone don't no one mourn
me
'cause my debts will drag me back

Intro fades out

CHUCKWAGON NOISES

GREY LINKSKIN

This... *This* is your idea of a low profile spot for some chatter?

ETIANNE

No, this is my idea of secure.

GREY LINKSKIN

A chuckwagon.

ETIANNE

We have history here.

GREY LINKSKIN

I hope you trust these people.

ETIANNE

I do. Did you apologize to Link yet?

GREY LINKSKIN

(groans)

I did, but then they asked me to explain what I was apologizing for. And, well. Things thus went tumbling down hill and I'm left with nothing but this broken crown.

ETIANNE

You disappeared for four months.

GREY LINKSKIN

It's all part of the dogwalker thing. Hush hush secret missions that we've got to keep zipper-lipped about. It's mportant for mystique, don't you know.

ETIANNE

Well, people worry.

GREY LINKSKIN

Oh, there's no need. I'm very good.

ETIANNE

Speaking of...

GREY LINKSKIN

Right right, I put my ear to the train tracks and got all the squashed pennies. S'far as the entire system is concerned, that ship's one of yours.

ETIANNE

And the disappearances?

GREY LINKSKIN

Oh, par for the course for a Family ship going through a port. People expect a Houdini now and again.

ETIANNE

It says a lot about our reputation that these sorts of actions can go

uncommented upon. What about your contact with the Rangers?

GREY LINKSKIN
Please, contacts. Plural.

ETIANNE
Okay. Contacts.

GREY LINKSKIN
Thank you. The Port Guard are about ready to boil over about the warships - you're quite welcome for that, by the way - but that's about the only thing on their scopes as far as the Family's concerned, for the moment.

ETIANNE
For the moment. And you know this Judge?

GREY LINKSKIN
Yes, Judge Marinos is about as senior legal official as the Rangers have got. Unreasonably committed her upstanding nature, if you ask me, doesn't respond well to bribery, but otherwise, she's quite personable.

CARMY
Annie! You wee thing. I thought that was you.

ETIANNE
Carmy! It's been too long.

CARMY
Aye look at ye, a Captain!
Probably been a while since you scrubbed a pan of stemmed mushrooms.

ETIANNE
You might be surprised.

CARMY

It better have been a while cause
you were pretty shite at all that.
I'm sure your time's better spent
captainin'.

ETIANNE

(laughing)

Oh, I'm still cleaning up messes,
but bigger ones now. Carmy, this
is Grey Linkskin, dogwalker at
large for the Family.

CARMY

Put her there, lad.

Clap of a handshake

GREY LINKSKIN

A pleasure, Mister...?

CARMY

(pause, appraising)

You're Linkskin, eh? Well, in most
of the system I'm Carmine Earl but
if you're family then I'm Captain
Farson.

GREY LINKSKIN

Okay...

ETIANNE

How are things with the train?

CARMY

I could complain till your ears
fell off, love, and never repeat
myself.
My accountant's just run off with
his boyfriend so my books are
shit. I've got weevils infesting
the larder ship. I've got the
Redline fellow barging through
here in the week and to throw
everything to hell. And the folks
in the Heavenly Body, that's our
Brass Wagon, are threatening to
unionize again, even though they

restructured to an employee-owned collective ages ago.

ETIANNE

Well, muck rolls uphill, that's why they made you the boss.

CARMY

Aye, speaking of muck. I've got your judge stashed down in the abby.

ETIANNE

I'm sorry, in the abby? With the meat-

CARMY

No no no, it's clean as a brass ass. We're going hundred percent plant based for the next three stops. But, look, I've arranged a lot of meetings for the Family in my time but never with the law. Is there trouble? Can we help?

ETIANNE

I'm just handling a situation.

CARMY

How fucked is it?

ETIANNE

I'm the fourth lawspeaker so far.

CARMY

Aye, proper fucked then. Well, I'll let you get chopping then and find you after.

ETIANNE

You need something?

CARMY

You know me, I always need something. But it can wait and I need to make sure you eat while you're here anyway. Like I said: after.

Carmy Leaves. They start walking.

GREY LINKSKIN

Okay, play schoolmarm again for me.

ETIANNE

Hm?

GREY LINKSKIN

He put so much implied significance on the name "Farson" that I expect I was meant to clock it from about ten clicks away. Who's precisely is Far?

ETIANNE

Far is in "far away". The chuckwagons are friends. Something between Ulko and Family. As their leader, that makes Carmy a Captain as far as we're concerned and a Farson is one of the names the Friends use to identify themselves, like a shibboleth.

GREY LINKSKIN

Right... and if someone happens to actually be named Farson? That doesn't cause rubble?

ETIANNE

We don't *only* go by the name; for example, people can lie.

GREY LINKSKIN

I know.
And I know why Link is really mad. I can clock that one from the next stellar body over.

ETIANNE

And yet you couldn't give them an appropriate apology?

GREY LINKSKIN

I am not... good at all this...
Family stuff.

ETIANNE

We're all just making it up as we go along. If you just tell them the truth, I'm sure they'll understand.

GREY LINKSKIN

Even if it involves something that could hurt them?

ETIANNE

Such as?

GREY LINKSKIN

Mrrngh. Okay so, my little sibling spent some time with the void wanderers before they stowed away on the Brave and got adopted.

ETIANNE

That's not uncommon for adoptees. The NoGos are a pain in our asses but I can see how their life would appeal to the same sort of people who'd find their way to the Family.

GREY LINKSKIN

Okay, sure. Well, they talk about that time a bit, right? And there was this old matriarch who they hung around with for a while. Blue Giant. NoGo queen. Real heartwarmer of a story, taking a helpless rich brat under her wing to show them the ropes. Even gave the kid their moniker.

ETIANNE

Oh yeah?

GREY LINKSKIN

Yeah. Spin Gravity. Kid doesn't know why that particular nickname. Mentions it a couple of times, enough that even I realize it bugs them. Only, of course, I'm the

kind of person who can find things out. It's sort of my whole deal. So I go have a Remy to see if I can maybe find out the story behind it. I mean, I've not been a brother very long but I've got the instincts to know when I could lord that knowledge over my sib's head for a bit of fun.

ETIANNE

Sounds about right.

GREY LINKSKIN

Now, NoGo's ain't easy to track by traditional means, of course. But they all like to talk if you've got vollattes and are willing to listen. So I stock up and clean the cobwebs out of my ears and start at the nearest jungle. I had to hear every bit of NoGo black brass from Arcturus to Luna, but I found a line on Blue Giant.

(pause)

Unfortunately, it was on Diatoma.

ETIANNE

Oof, how'd she land there?

GREY LINKSKIN

Official charge was corporate larceny but I haven't a cobalt clue how a ship hopper without two credits to her name commits *that*.

ETIANNE

Minimum stay on Diatoma is long, right?

GREY LINKSKIN

Couple of years at least, yeah. And although I'm known as a man of many virtues, patience is not one of them. So I did the only reasonable thing and got myself arrested.

ETIANNE

(holding her head in her
hands)

Aye-ya. Grey...

GREY LINKSKIN

What? Easiest way to get in. And
I'm here now, so obvious I got
back out okay. No worries.

ETIANNE

Did you at least find this Blue
Giant person?

GREY LINKSKIN

I did. What you have to understand
is Diatoma's not an easy place to
live. The corporations that run it
make a flat fee per prisoner, so
to make bank, they provide the
bare minimum for survival. Now,
NoGos are nothing if not
survivors, but everyone's got
their limits.

She was at hers. She was already
sick when I found her. No idea
what it was, but it gave her the
shakes. Pretty bad. Made getting
down to the food distro difficult.
I sidled up to her with a bit of
smuggled booze and got the info I
wanted. But when I went to beat
feet, I couldn't just leave her.

ETIANNE

Really?

GREY LINKSKIN

I- I know. It just didn't seem...
right. And I'm trying very hard to
listen to my gut when it says
stuff like that. So I took a
couple of extra weeks to get some
things in order and when I finally
broke out, I brought Blue Giant
with me. Got her to the nearest
NoGo jungle.

ETIANNE

Not a hospital?

GREY LINKSKIN

I could have, see if they could fix her. But she asked for the jungle. Said she wanted to see her friends again. Nearest one was Vesta. How she knew she'd have friend there, I don't know, but she did. They made her comfortable at least.

(pause)

So, here's the kicker: Blue told me she had a couple dozen Spin Gravities over the years. Called them all that so she didn't mix them up. She could spot a rich kid slumming with the NoGos from the other side of system. She'd play mother hen, show them the ropes, and they'd use their dosh to keep her pleasantly drunk. And then they'd get tired of NoGo life and go back home. Usually when things got hard or they ran out of money. That's why it was *Spin Gravity*. Artificial. Not real. It just looks like from one perspective.

ETIANNE

And that's what you can't tell Link?

GREY LINKSKIN

Yeah, well, they cared for this old bint. They got good memories of her. Who am I to ruin that by telling them the truth?

ETIANNE

Grey...

(pause)

You're right. You are very not good at this. What you just told me is that you went looking for someone Link cares about deeply, and you found them in one of the

worst places in the system. Alone.
Dying. And, despite already having
what you came for, you put
yourself on the line to break her
out of there and take her back to
the place she wanted to be and
people she wanted to be with. And
you think Link will be upset about
the story about their nickname?

GREY LINKSKIN

Well, I uh...

ETIANNE

Go.

GREY LINKSKIN

What?

ETIANNE

Robert Greyfriar Linkskin, go call
your sibling right now. I will not
say it again.

GREY LINKSKIN

All right, all right. No need to
use the Captain voice on me.

ETIANNE

Go. I'll handle the judge.

GREY LINKSKIN

Well, naturally.

Grey leaves. Etianne resumes moving through the ship. She
approaches a bulkhead and goes through. The Martian Madness
championship game can be heard over the radio.

JUDGE MARINOS

Which one is she again?

LUCE

Gal Axe-y.

ETIANNE

Ahem.

Sound of a gun being readied.

ETIANNE

Well, that's rather impolite.

JUDGE MARINOS

At ease, Marshal.

LUCE

Yes, ma'am.

The P^G game is turned off.

JUDGE MARINOS

Pardon Marshal Brackett's vigilance, Captain. We were distracted and I think she startled a bit.

ETIANNE

Well, she didn't shoot me at least. So that's a blessing. Judge Marinos, correct?

JUDGE MARINOS

Correct, and you're the perrie I'm supposed to meet with?

ETIANNE

Yes. I'm Captain Etianne Toraswife of the Freetrader *Look To The Stars And Find Hope* and current Lawspeaker for the Peregrination.

LUCE

Lawspeaker?

JUDGE MARINOS

Haven't heard that one since Legal History 101. An old scandy title.

ETIANNE

My people draw deep for useful ideas.

JUDGE MARINOS

Sorta like a judge, right? You my equivalent?

ETIANNE

In history, yes. For us, the lawspeaker is prosecution, defense, and judge rolled into one.

LUCE

That doesn't sound very fair.

ETIANNE

There are checks: If the council disagrees with my finding, either in fact or in interpretation, I'm dismissed as speaker and another is chosen.

JUDGE MARINOS

And if they disagree with the next one's ruling?

ETIANNE

Then the process repeats.

JUDGE MARINOS

That sounds like a hell of a kessler.

ETIANNE

If a lawspeaker gets invoked, the situation is already a kessler.

JUDGE MARINOS

Is that what this business is with your rotten ship is? A fuck up so bad you have to call the neighbors for help?

ETIANNE

(hesitating)

Judge, no offense to your guard, but I would prefer if they-

JUDGE MARINOS

My usual Marshal is off handling a sticky situation with a Yukon astroid being taken over or abandoned, or something. Now Luce here, when she's not babysitting me in my bad ticker, is our one gal anti-trafficking task force.

Now I am a wisened old crone, and
I know enough about what's going
on to know she'd best sit in on
what you have to say.

ETIANNE

I see. Very well.

(takes a breath)

Yes, I am here to lay the
groundwork for a...an extradition?
I think that's the word.

JUDGE MARINOS

You want to hand us over some
outlaws?

ETIANNE

Possibly. Their exact status is
unclear, but we have evidence and
confessions for what I think are
prosecutable crimes under your
laws.

LUCE

Really? Hm.

JUDGE MARINOS

That'd be a shocker. I've been on
various sides of the bench for,
and I'm just guessing here, longer
than you've been alive. And I have
never heard of the Perries handing
anybody over to the Rangers. And
we have asked.

ETIANNE

Raiding any family ship that
crosses a Marshal's path on the
guise of looking for "wanted folk"
is a bit more than asking.

LUCE

Our jurisdiction is clearly
defined as-

ETIANNE

I think you'll find, Marshal, with
regards to your jurisdiction, that

the Family is not a signatory of
the Ceres Accords.

LUCE

What? Neither am I, but I'm still
subject to them. Everyone is, belt
and beyond.

ETIANNE

What do you think, Judge?

JUDGE MARINOS

Y'all have always held yourselves
to apart from the rest of the
system. Like a sovereignty unto
yourselves. If that were true, you
wouldn't be subject to the accords
unless your government signed.
O fcourse, the validity of that
stance has never been established,
at least not in our law.

ETIANNE

So it's an open question then?

JUDGE MARINOS

Might be. Although we are rapidly
approaching the point where
"system of law" breaks down and
"who has the bigger stick"
diplomacy sets in.

ETIANNE

I'll steer us back to safer waters
then.

Etianne passes a sheaf of papers over.

ETIANNE

Three weeks ago, a vessel calling
itself the *Settle For No Bitter
Compromise* was taken into
Peregrination custody after
several of our ships answered a
greenline distress call from
individuals aboard. In our
factfinding about the incident, we
arrived at evidence of several

crimes by this vessel's crew.
You'll find copies of the evidence
in these packets.

JUDGE MARINOS
"Settle For No Bitter Compromise"?
Sounds like one of yours.

ETIANNE
It very much is not.

JUDGE MARINOS
How is that determined?

ETIANNE
I'm sorry?

JUDGE MARINOS
How do you decide what ship is and
is not one of yours? I never got
the impression y'all were that
formal about these things.

ETIANNE
Internally, we keep a list; as we
do with all members of our Family.
Newly sponsored ships are added
after their first crew christen
the hull and appoint a captain,
who asks our Council to add the
ship name to the registrar. This
vessel never went through this
process.
Externally, a good indication
would be look at a ship's home
port, or lack thereof. Family
ships are comm registered but call
no port home. On the other hand,
the vessel in question was
registered out of Charon.

JUDGE MARINOS
Hm, interesting...
Impressment?

ETIANNE
And murder.

JUDGE MARINOS

Marshal, look at this.

(to Etianne)

You say this ship isn't one of yours, but you didn't mention that nearly everyone on it was.

ETIANNE

If by "didn't mention" you mean "put in the first paragraph of that stack of evidence" then... okay.

JUDGE MARINOS

Why are you turning over your people all of a sudden?

ETIANNE

(cold)

They're not our people.

LUCE

Says here they were all "Family in good standing" until they-

ETIANNE

Until they forsook-

(catches herself)

Marshal, what is the worst sort of person in the system?

LUCE

Pirate. Trafficker specifically.

ETIANNE

Worse than a murderer?

LUCE

Yeah. Depriving someone of their freedom, their humanity, is worse than just killing them.

ETIANNE

Now, imagine a Ranger who turned pirate.

ETIANNE

From the look on your face, I think you understand our position very well.

These...these Saasta did what everyone in the system thinks we do. The black lie. That we steal people. Cart them off against their wills to join us, or die.

JUDGE MARINOS

Now, I don't think anyone really believes that, Captain.

ETIANNE

(sigh, then bitter
sarcastic)

It's just a story belter parents tell their kids at night to scare them, right? Or a joke drunk yardies like to tell. No harm meant. No one really thinks all of my people are kidnappers. Except the ones who do. That stay locked in their apartments when one of our ships are docked at their stations. Or just leave a room when we enter. Or refuse us to let us dock at all. Or the ones who think it's all an exaggeration, but that there's got to be some truth to it. Somewhere. Or just the ones who think "oh, the Perries, they're fine, but I wouldn't want my child to marry one."

(almost under breath)

Jävla ulko.

JUDGE MARINOS

Okay. Okay, point taken. I think. In that case I'm surprised you haven't just dealt with it yourself. Ship out in the black like that. We never even would have known.

ETIANNE

(regaining her composure)

Our law. The Law We Carry With Us is very clear. It applies to the Family only and these people are

not Family. Not anymore. I have the paperwork.

JUDGE MARINOS

And so you're just going to dump them in our laps.

ETIANNE

I would think the governments you represent would be eager to try them.

JUDGE MARINOS

Heh, shiiit. They hit two of the three capital crimes here: murder and impressment. If they vultured some ships along the way, we'd have the hat trick.

ETIANNE

Is what I've given you enough to convict?

JUDGE MARINOS

What do you think, Marshal?

LUCE

If the ones who got press-ganged are willing to testify, yeah, very likely. But I'd also lean on some of the small fish with accessory charges. I bet we get them to flip. I'd aim for ten or twelve of the command crew, including the captain.

JUDGE MARINOS

Sounds about right.

ETIANNE

There will be a trial?

JUDGE MARINOS

Probably. Sometimes we'd let someone plead guilty to a lesser charge in order to avoid that, but with, what? A dozen murders and twice that many impressments. And good evidence, thank you for that.

We go for the rope. That means a trial.

ETIANNE

Where?

JUDGE MARINOS

Technically the Rangers just enforce the law at the behest of the Outer governments, so in a case like this with multiple crimes over multiple jurisdictions, they'll end up in a dick measuring contest over it. End of the day, better'n even money it'll be Ganymede.

ETIANNE

Ganymede is very... populated.

JUDGE MARINOS

Yeah, and there are Redlines operating there now. It'll be a goddamn circus.

ETIANNE

(heavy sigh, sits)

We made such progress in the last few years, and now... poof.

JUDGE MARINOS

What do you mean?

ETIANNE

Your custom is a public trial. And as good as that is for justice, its going to be bad us. I don't expect the watching public to understand that these people *left* the Peregrination. In the public eye, their sins will stain our fingers. Now, we will never be rid of the black lie about us.

JUDGE MARINOS

Sounds like you'd have been a lot better off if you'd done like I

said and just spaced a lot of these folks.

ETIANNE

That was considered.

JUDGE MARINOS

And you brought this to us anyway because...?

ETIANNE

For us, almost every crime you can think of is handled inside of a ship. Different ones have different systems. Trial by peers. Martial courts. Whatever. Even when a crime happens that crosses between two ships, that's usually negotiated by the two captains alone. No need to involved the Family as a whole.

When a situation is particularly messy, when fighting about how to resolve it would threaten to cause a rift in the family, we appoint a single person to go in and unfuck everything. That's the lawspeaker. We establish what happened, to the best of our ability, and decide which, if any, of our laws have been broken, and who should be punished and how. Then we present this all to the Council of Captains. If two-thirds think this is a good solution, they all agree to abide it. If not, the lawspeaker is dismissed and another is appointed in their place.

I am the fourth lawspeaker to try to unfuck this situation. All three of those who came before proposed some version of what you have just said. We wipe the records, space all the people we think deserve it, and keep the vessel. That would be better for us.

But it is not the law. Our laws.
These people are not Family. And
they are not under our
jurisdiction. We did not catch
them in an act of piracy. We
cannot legally or morally punish
them.

So I bring them to you, the ones
who can. And when you find the
captain and her conspirators
guilty, I would suggest preparing
whatever station has the privilege
of hanging them for a large crowd.
Because every Family ship will be
there to witness it.

JUDGE MARINOS

Hm, I think I can respect that.

LUCE

Judge? You know procedure better
than I do. Won't it be necessary
during the trial to establish who
these people are?

JUDGE MARINOS

Depends on how the prosecutor
wants to run their case. But
possibly.

LUCE

If they do, it would probably be
helpful for some of Captain
Toraswife's people to testify on
how this ship split from the
Peregrination.

JUDGE MARINOS

It might. Do you think some of
your folks might want to go on
record about that?

ETIANNE

This would be public?

JUDGE MARINOS

Yep.

ETIANNE

I can ask. It would be good to establish that we are not the same.

LUCE

Some people might listen.

JUDGE MARINOS

Right, well. We'll take your extraditions. When will you deliver the suspects?

ETIANNE

Depends on where you want them. Arcturus would be fastest.

JUDGE MARINOS

What about Gany?

ETIANNE

A few weeks. We'll bring them on the Settle and it's not a high-g courier.

LUCE

You're not keeping the ship?

ETIANNE

It's not ours. We responded to a distress call and found people aboard, so there's no claim of salvage.

JUDGE MARINOS

According to it's Charon registry, it's owned by this Elliemay Settlesdottir. That's a nightmare waiting to happen if we convict. Astrotime ship ownership laws are more twisted than a pig's tail. I presided over a civil matter about one recently. Did you hear about that tanker that blew a seal and left some scouts stranded? They had to get rescued and ended up flying it home.

ETIANNE

I'm familiar.

JUDGE MARINOS

Three years that case lasted.
Insurance company, title company,
Ganymede government, captain's
next of kin, the scouts, even
YuKon. Everybody laid claim to it.
Generated a pile of opinions you
could smother a mule in.

LUCE

Didn't the kids end up getting it?

JUDGE MARINOS

Yep. Salvage rights. I figured
they'd cash out immediately but I
hear they've got a renovation team
starting to get her space worthy
again.

ETIANNE

Good for them.

LUCE

Scouts never give up. Good for
them.

JUDGE MARINOS

Y'all sure you don't want that
ship? Say's here the owner has a
daughter who could inherit,
currently on the uh... *Pass*
Unnoticed In Unsafe Space.

ETIANNE

Had.

JUDGE MARINOS

She died?

ETIANNE

No. But they are not mother and
child anymore.

JUDGE MARINOS

By your laws maybe. Ours are a
little different. She could still
make a claim.

ETIANNE

If asked, the official stance of the Peregrination is: Sell it, split the proceeds among whoever you find not-guilty and the families of the victims. Or do whatever you want, but that hull has no place in our fleet.

JUDGE MARINOS

Ok. Marshal, send this packet to the jurisdictions in question. We can sort out the dick measuring while the defendants are delivered to Ganymede.

Wait a sec, you said this has to be cleared by some sort of council? They are going to agree, right?

ETIANNE

If they don't, I'm fired, and it won't be my problem anymore. But they will, now that you officially know, this is the only path forward.

JUDGE MARINOS

Right. Well, thank you, I think. Although the cynic in me says that you know damn well what you're doing here.

ETIANNE

Oh? What's that?

JUDGE MARINOS

By accepting this arrangement, we'll be treating the Peregrination quite a lot like a foreign government. In my line of work that's called a precedent. Very useful thing to establish.

ETIANNE

A prize not worth the price, I think.

It's been a pleasure, Judge
Marinos. Marshal Brackett.

Etianne turns to leave. As she's in the hall, footsteps
follow after.

LUCE
(calling from a ways
away)
Captain! Wait!

Etianne stops.

ETIANNE
Yes, Marshal?

LUCE
Y'all don't send out distress
signals.

ETIANNE
Don't we?

LUCE
Cut that inscrutable crap. I
looked up the records. Your ships
respond to greenlines but never
send them.

ETIANNE
Perhaps we learned a long time ago
that our calls into the void
always went unanswered.

LUCE
Right. Well, it doesn't have to be
that way. We could help each
other. Y'all have those ships now,
the ones you 'acquired' from
Vista, and I know a lot of your
Free Traders are well armed.

ETIANNE
As are your Port Guard ships.

LUCE
Yeah, well, what I care about are
the other ships out there with
guns.

ETIANNE

Terrans?

LUCE

Pirates.

ETIANNE

Yes. Well, we've been blowing pirate ships out of the sky for years now, as have you, and it doesn't appear to have thinned their herds.

LUCE

Being evil is still too profitable. New people are always willing to stoop to that level.

ETIANNE

And you think cooperation will make the difference?

LUCE

It's worth trying.

ETIANNE

As a start, I can have our history of attacks and sightings forwarded to you.

LUCE

Okay, great. That is a start. And I'll send you ours. Maybe if we've both got all the data, we can find more patterns. Help keep people safe.

ETIANNE

If we can, that would be worth doing.

Luce's Terminal beeps.

LUCE

Um... sorry that's my niece calling. I should take this.

ETIANNE

Absolutely. Family comes first.
I'm off to get something to eat.

LUCE

Thanks.
Kit? Yeah. Oh! That's great, I
knew you'd win. Wait, what do you
mean 'engaged'?

Etianne walks through the ship. As she approaches Grey, we
hear the conversation between Link and Grey grow louder.
Link is over comms, like a speaker phone.

LINK

Yeah, he's normally on security
but he's been doing a rotation
through engineering. Very grumpy.
Doesn't give me the time of day.
So naturally I really like him.

GREY LINKSKIN

You'll get your nose burned off
one of these days. Remind me when
I'm on the Brave to corner this
lad and show him my spur. I'll put
the fear of Grey into him.

Link makes a frustrated scoff.

GREY LINKSKIN

That reminds me, how's my ship?

LINK

Oh, I finally managed to
recalibrate the reactor manifolds
to get rid of that stupid noise.

GREY LINKSKIN

Noise? What, what noise? Wait, you
mean the rumble?

LINK

Yeah.

GREY LINKSKIN

But- but! That's the best part! It
makes the Bacall sound like a
growling tiger.

LINK

Oh my god, It's literally the sound of your dee three resonating in the mag fields, Grey. It's why you have to degauss so often.

GREY LINKSKIN

Aw, fuck, I paid extra for the acoustic package.

LINK

Yeah, well, the reactor's gonna last five times longer now. You're welcome.

Etianne clears her throat.

GREY LINKSKIN

Ah, kid. I've got to go. I'll be on the look when she docks for the Thing at Arcturus. See you then.

LINK

Stay out of trouble, Brother.

GREY LINKSKIN

You too, little sib.

Grey hangs up the comm.

ETIANNE

Sounds like you two are okay.

GREY LINKSKIN

Yeah, you were right.

ETIANNE

I never get tired of people saying that. But, come on, we need to find Carmy before we go. Are you hungry?

GREY LINKSKIN

Yeah, sure, I could eat.

ETIANNE

Good. Because he's going to insist you eat something if you come

along. Have you ever had European White Chili?

GREY LINKSKIN
Can't say that I have.

ETIANNE
It was the best thing about working here on my Wander. It's got five different kinds of shellfish in it. I hope they've got some in the mess.

GREY LINKSKIN
Eka keeps jabbering about that to me. Wandering. No idea what they're on about.

ETIANNE
It's just about moving around a bit until you found your permanent place. Or not. You can Wander for the rest of your life if you like.

GREY LINKSKIN
Right, and how do you know when you've found a "permanent place"?

ETIANNE
Maybe you don't. Oh, there he is. Carmy!

CARMY
Aye, Captain Annie. Did your meeting go well? Fixed the entire system yet?

ETIANNE
Hardly.

CARMY
Well, you both look half starved. I'm gonna grab you some plates and I expect them to be clean before you leave.

ETIANNE
Is there white chili?

CARMY

(starting to ladle food
into a bowl)

Oh aye, I know well enough who was
coming. Lad, what can I get you?

GREY LINKSKIN

Uh, fungal steak?

CARMY

Right and chips with gravy
o'course.

GREY LINKSKIN

Oh, yes.

CARMY

I'll sort you out. How long you
been with the Family?

GREY LINKSKIN

Nearly two years now.

CARMY

Well if you're ever in the same
patch of space as us and need to
fill your belly or want a place to
bunk down. The wagons are here for
ya. I can't tell you the number of
Family kids we've had through.
Including our wee Annie here.

GREY LINKSKIN

Ah, that was on your Wander?

ETIANNE

Mmhmm. I spent a year here on the
chuck wagons after I left the *Hold
Tight To Those You Love*. It's a
lot easier to start with Friends
than jump head first into
strangers. Then I hired on to a
series of ulko freighters as an
ablebody. Got as sunward as Venus.
Then I went to Terra. Have you
ever been there?

CARMY

I've never been past the belt,
myself.

GREY LINKSKIN

I have. Doing a bit of this and
that requires some well-diving now
and again. Stuck my toes in the
ocean and everything.

ETIANNE

I tried that, got as far as the
shore and froze up. Couldn't look
at it. There was just so much
space.

CARMY

As opposed to all the emptiness on
the other side of that bulkhead
over there?

ETIANNE

That's the void. This was blue sky
and water and cities and
mountains. And just... not one bit
of it had to be built. People need
a little extra room and they can
just go find somewhere. They
didn't have to claw it tooth and
nail from the very fabric of the
system.

If we went there, the entire
Family, the chuckwagons, probably
the whole belt, could disappear
into the cities on Terra and no
one would even notice. We'd be a
rounding error on the population.
And we could live out our lives
reasonably sure we'd never run out
of air or water.

CARMY

Aye, but then we wouldn't be who
we are. The place makes the
people.

(pause)

Are you doing alright?

ETIANNE

Me? I'm fine.

CARMY

I don't hear *all* the Family brass but with as many wandering kids as I get the pleasure of showing how to peel vegetals, I hear enough. That business with your ship when you went back, the Build. Something bad enough to need a lawspeaker to clean up. Now I see you again but this time you're doing that job. It's enough to make an old man worry.

ETIANNE

I appreciate that, Carmy. I really do. But I'm fine.

CARMY

Right. If you say it, than it's so. Now that you've got warm food in front of ya, I can finally ask that favor.

ETIANNE

What do you need?

CARMY

It's about the *Jolly Butcher*. She's a good old ship, but the years are piling on . We're getting to the point where we'll need to put the lass out to pasture and get a new one. Only I don't have the capital for that. Or...

ETIANNE

Or you send her to Arcturus and we take her apart and fix her up like new.

CARMY

Aye. I know it's a lot to ask. The Butcher's a big ship. We'll be tying up your dock for months and

I know you've got ships of your own that need-

ETIANNE
Consider it done.

CARMY
Aye?

ETIANNE
Carmy. I have relatives who were pulled off Neptune on that ship. And more that were on other Chuck Wagons. Or Ships that would be chuck wagons.

CARMY
We didn't stay though.

ETIANNE
Hard as it was, your grandmother made a call. And the people that had the chance to leave and make a new life never forgot us and we never forgot you. Visits from your wagon train saved us from starvation. You were the only sizeable influx of calories that we had for years. And in return we've fixed your ships and traded back food and void knows how many of our people have adopted back and forth over the decades. You're our friends, and when you need us, we'll be there. As you have been for us.

CARMY
Thank you, lass.

ETIANNE
When you get to Acturus, tell the Superintendent to call me and we'll take care of you.

CARMY
You can boss around the head of the drydock?

ETIANNE

The privilege of being his
favorite sister.

CARMY

Aye, that I can see. I'll let you
finish your meal. Linkskin, can I
have a moment?

GREY LINKSKIN

Um, okay?

CARMY

(low as if whispering)

You keep an eye on that one for
me. She takes a lot weight on her
shoulders. Maybe too much.

GREY LINKSKIN

If that was the case, and knowing
the dear captain as we both do.
How exactly should I go about
stopping her from... well,
anything?

CARMY

Good point. Well, have her back
then.

GREY LINKSKIN

Rest assured. We are all way ahead
of you.

CARMY

(normal volume resumes)

Right! Well, I'll let you two
finish your food than without
having to entertain an old
gobshite. If either of you want a
doggie bag just holler.

ETIANNE

Will do.

Carmy leaves.

ETIANNE

Did he tell you to look after me?

GREY LINKSKIN

Mmhmm.

ETIANNE

I hope that man never changes.

(pause)

About finding your place, did you see the mountains on Terra?

GREY LINKSKIN

Only from orbit.

ETIANNE

After I got my legs working in the open air I hiked up one while I was there, just to say I did it. And when I got to the top, breathing and wheezing, feeling like the 8VAC for the whole planet was broken, I looked out at all that natural beauty... and I knew. I realized I wanted to go home. Not the Hold specifically, The Family. I wanted to help claw a life out of nothing. Build homes in the void.

GREY LINKSKIN

But, then why give up that ship to the ulko? That could be a home right there. Oh, don't give me that look, of course I was eavesdropping.

ETIANNE

(sighs)

You have been told the story of how the Family formed, right?

GREY LINKSKIN

Of course. Good Samaritans rescuing punters on Neptune.

ETIANNE

That's not the important part. The important part was when we called back to Terra, and the Terrans

said they'd arrest the fleet. And everyone, rescued and rescuer and people just along for the ride, agreed that was wrong. And they refused.

Our first law was formed that day: If a call for help comes from the black, you help no matter what. We carry that law wherever we go. And more came after. But the core of it is that to be who we are, we have to do the right thing, even when it's hard.

GREY LINKSKIN

And when, to do the right thing, you need to do some things that's the wrong thing?

ETIANNE

Pick the bigger right or the smaller wrong and burn hard in that direction.

GREY LINKSKIN

Huh, I think I can plot that course.

ETIANNE

That's all any of us are doing. Do you have plans for after the Thing?

GREY LINKSKIN

Well, it sounds like I'm about to.

ETIANNE

One of the people who sent the distress call that started this whole mess. We need you to quietly get them to Luna.

GREY LINKSKIN

Ooh, vacuum quiet or freshly serviced 8VAC quiet?

ETIANNE

Uh... Normal quiet? Just don't attract a lot of attention.

GREY LINKSKIN

Okay, and am I going to be told who this person is and why they need to be on Luna or do I need to suss it out myself?

ETIANNE

More cleanup from this Settle dritt. There was a NoGo aboard, and they and a Family kid were the ones who sent the distress call.

GREY LINKSKIN

Wait, I thought they all left-[the family]

ETIANNE

The adults did, yes. But there were children on that ship as well. Too young to have made the decision to leave themselves. Ripped away from cousins and siblings. From parents, Grey. One of this kid's dads is X.O. of the *Stand Tall and Be Proud*. He's Eka's cousin. My cousin. Yours too, then. And when those monsters on the Settle burned through a sixcent hatch door and tried to kill him, our Family. This NoGo threw themself in the way and took the hit.

They lived, thank Rook, but we can't get them back on their feet with our medical facilities. But there are some Family Friends on Luna, or they will be in a few weeks. The Carnivale. They have a surgeon with them who can help.

GREY LINKSKIN

Who can get them back on their feet?

ETIANNE

Yes. They'll *make* a new pair of feet if they have to. We owe this NoGo at least that much.

GREY LINKSKIN

Okay, can do.

(pause)

Oh, do you think it would be a problem is I brought Link along?

ETIANNE

I... don't see *why*. You'd know better than I would. You think you'd need their help?

GREY LINKSKIN

No, I just thought that the next time I was back on the Greencheeze that I... I feel a compulsion to go see Lunawlins again. Where I grew up. I think I'd like to have Link there for that. As a bit of backup.

ETIANNE

Backup?

GREY LINKSKIN

Emotional backup.

ETIANNE

I'm sure they'd love to go. Now, eat your steak, and let's get back.

Scene fades out

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Breathing Space.

This episode, A Smile and A Sword In Your Arms, is
written by Scott Paladin
directed by Scott Paladin
and edited by Scott Paladin

Grey Linksin was voiced by Vic Collins

Ettiane Toraswife is voiced by
Christina McClain
Captain Carmine Earl is voiced by
Scott Paladin
Judge Marinos is voiced by Ally
Amador
Luce Brackett was voiced by Emma
Johanna Puranen
Link is voiced by Kasha Mika

Our theme, Blues for the Black,
was composed by Michael Freitag
with vocals by Jeremiah and lyrics
by Scott Paladin.

You can find links to learn more
about our cast and crew in the
show notes and more information
about our show at our website,
breathingspace.lawofnames.com.

Breathing Space is a Law of Names
Production.