

BREATHING SPACE: FRAGILE FUTURES
FINALE

Part 1: A Day at the Fair, part 1

Breathing Space, Fading Frontier contains adult content such as violence, substance use, and sexual situations. This episode contains discussion of mental health and suicide, emotional manipulation, and various kinds of misophonia.

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

DAY, EXT. CERES WORLD FAIR

ANNOUNCER

The Grand Circumsolar Exposition
welcomes all visitors. Please do not
leave your belongings unattended.

CRUTCHFIELD

Hooooly shit.

I feel like I should be saying
something more profound than that,
but...

MOLINA

No, I think you nailed it. God, look
at this place. I don't think I've
ever seen this many people at once.

CRUTCHFIELD

Me neither. Oh my god, Molls, look
over there! They've got a corn dog
stand, a funnel cake stand, and a
stand with bags of kettle corn the
size of a toddler, all in a row.
Ah! And then fried pizza balls and
caramel apples right across from

there! This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Other than you, of course.

MOLINA

Nice save. You're right, though, the food looks incredi - oh my god, Jesse Fry!

CRUTCHFIELD

What, where?

MOLINA

Over there, by the bake off tent!

CRUTCHFIELD

Oh, yeah, he's one of the judges, we knew that, right?

MOLINA

Well yeah, but he's right over there!

CRUTCHFIELD

Are you a little starstruck?

MOLINA

No, I just think it's cool that someone we've watched on the redlines is standing a hundred feet away from us.

CRUTCHFIELD

Uh huh, sure. Holy shit, what is that??

MOLINA

Have you never seen a ferris wheel before?

CRUTCHFIELD

Little ones, sure. Nothing like that.

MOLINA

It's the biggest one in the system. I think they built it just for this.

CRUTCHFIELD

Ok, this place is massive, where do we even start?

MOLINA

Ooh, here, I got an advance copy of the fair schedule, and I marked it up last night with everything I thought we'd want to see. There's a

lot, but I think we can do it all,
we just have to be careful not to
spend too much time anywhere.

CRUTCHFIELD

Right. Because obviously the best
way to spend a vacation is with a
carefully planned itinerary.

MOLINA

Yeah, so if we start at the animal
care presentation, we'll be able to
make it to the Whiteline Technology
Demo before...oh, you're making fun
of me, aren't you?

CRUTCHFIELD

Little bit.

MOLINA

Ok, point taken. I will be
spontaneous.

CRUTCHFIELD

Absolutely not, give me that
schedule of yours.

Ok, we've got the interactive
history exhibit, the traveling
gallery, Day in the Life of the
Peri - nope.

MOLINA

Yeah, I tried to scribble that one
out.

CRUTCHFIELD

The Ganymedean Civic Development
Pavilion? You actually want to see
that?

MOLINA

Absolutely I do.

CRUTCHFIELD

Oh my god, I married a nerd.

MOLINA

It took you three years to figure
that out?

CAT

(from a distance)

God damn it, I could've sworn she
was just fucking here...

Oh! Molly! Cee! Thank fuck, someone

who knows what Heck looks
like...have you seen her?

MOLINA

Cat! Hi! Uh, no, we haven't seen
Heck.

CAT

Thank fuck, someone who knows what
Heck looks like...have you seen her?

MOLINA

Uh, no, we haven't seen Heck.

CRUTCHFIELD

We actually just got here
ourselves.

CAT

Ah, fuck. That's the last time I
turn my back at a butter sculpture
exhibit. She was literally just here!

CRUTCHFIELD

A butter sculpture exhibit??

That's on your list, right?

MOLINA

You know it is.

Yeah, sorry we haven't spotted her.
Hey, the baby's due soon, right?
What brings you two out here?

CRUTCHFIELD

Ooh, you don't have a noodle stand,
do you? Because I am starving.

CAT

No, we're not working, this is our
last trip together before the baby
comes. That is if I manage to find
my pregnant wife before her fucking
due date. Did you two just come out
for the fair?

MOLINA

Anniversary, actually. We're
spending a couple days here and
then a week at a Martian resort.

CRUTCHFIELD

Sort of the honeymoon we never
took.

MOLINA

Yeah we...had a lot going on when we first got married.

CRUTCHFIELD

And then when our first anniversary hit, we were still too busy with the shop to do anything big.

MOLINA

So we were all set to travel for the second, but then the weather control system malfunctioned for the first time in Eunomia's history and decided to drop a month's worth of rain on us in one weekend. It was all we could do to stop the place from flooding.

CRUTCHFIELD

We had to keep the llamas inside.

MOLINA

I still haven't recovered.

CRUTCHFIELD

So here we are! Third year's the charm, I guess.

CAT

Here's hoping your vacation goes much better than mine is starting.

Thank you, for the very soft blanket, by the way.

CRUTCHFIELD

Oh! You're welcome! Llamen Noodle's still a baby, so she has the softest coat, it's perfect for spinning into yarn for baby blankets.

CAT

I'm sure our baby is going to love it. Provided I have not lost both them and my wife to this damn fair forever. I should get back to looking for her, it was good to see you two!

MOLINA

Yeah, you too!

CRUTCHFIELD

Good luck! I mean, she's a 6'5" pregnant woman with four arms, she

can't be that hard to spot, right?

CAT

God, I fucking hope you're right.

MOLINA

What do you say, you wanna go look at some cute animals?

CRUTCHFIELD

Very much so, yes. But first... would it completely throw off your schedule if we go find some breakfast? Because ever since we spotted Cat, all I can think about is noodles.

MOLINA

I think that can be arranged.

CRUTCHFIELD

Oh my GOD, they have a breakfast funnel cake!

MOLINA

Oh god, there is no way that's good.

CRUTCHFIELD

Uh huh. So I'll get two then?

MOLINA

...no, just get me an extra fork.

CRUTCHFIELD

That's my girl.

PONY

That's good steel so you won't need to bother folding it or anything. Just keep drawing it out. We can work with it so long as you keep it even thickness.

Hammering steel

HECK

Like that?

PONY

I mean most people only use one hammer at a time.

CAT

Beatrice Heck Novak-Nygaard.

HECK

Oh shoot. Four names.

CAT

There I was, on probably our last real vacation before the baby is supposed to come, looking at a very realistic butter sculpture of the signing of the Ceres Accords with, I thought, my wonderful wife. When, low and be-fucking-hold, I turn around and you're not there!

HECK

I... oh. Yeah. Sorry.

CAT

And then I spend fuck knows how long looking for you, thinking "how much damn mischief can a woman who's supposed to be taking it easy get in?"

HECK

Well, I was only-

CAT

And then I find you here, in a... blacksmithery? Holding three hammers and what appears to be a piece of iron-

PONY

Steel.

CAT

Fuck. Hello Pony, it's been a minute. Excuse me. A piece of steel nearly as tall as long as my arm and glowing red hot.

HECK

Okay. Yes. Is that... bad?

CAT

I... I mean... What are you even doing here?

HECK

Oh, Pony was gonna help me make a sword!

CAT

A... sword?

HECK

Yep! A longsword! Although Pony said I shouldn't go for the flamberge blade as a start.

PONY

Keep your designs to what you can deliver on. That's how you come in

on time and under budget.

CAT

Okay. Back up and context, please?

HECK

Well, while you were looking at the butter sculpture, I saw a sign that Pony was here doing a blacksmithing demonstration.

CAT

Pony does blacksmithing now?

PONY

Just to keep my hands dirty now that I spend so much time pushing paper. It's relaxing. I'm just out here showing how they used to make horseshoes and the like.

HECK

And so I came over and we got to talking and he was telling me how all the yardies he's shown how to hammer have picked it up real easy and I wanted to have a go. And we were talking about what I could make and I figured it could be my workout for today and that should be okay and... I don't know... it seemed like a good idea.

CAT

And what are we going to do with a sword?

HECK

I figured we could hang it behind the counter of the shop and when people ask you to do substitutions you could look mean and point at it.

CAT

And Pony is okay with you monopolizing his anvil?

PONY

I've got a second one right here for when I want to get started again. No trouble at all.

CAT

Okay, I concede.

HECK

Yes!

CAT
On one condition.

HECK
Yeah?

CAT
Two swords. One for each of us?

HECK
Oh yeah! We can do that. Hey, Cat,
did you see the way I was drawing
out the steel to make that blade?

CAT
No, but I sure would like to.

Scene Break

EXT. MAIN STAGE, PAVILLION OF PROGRESS

LENNON MERLO
The Solar Scouts Children's Choir,
everyone, performing *O, Europa!*

Applause

LENNON MERLO
On that note, hello and welcome, one
and all, to the Pavilion of Progress
main stage! I'm Lennon Merlo, your
host, and your Master of Ceremonies
for the Grand Circumsolar
Exposition!

If you told me two years ago, that
in less time than it took Mars to
circle Sol I'd be hosting one of the
biggest System-wide events ever
held, I don't think I'd have
believed you. Chasing a Ghost-- my
first audio series, produced by Jax
Abrahams thanks to Ganymede Public
Broadcasting-- had just finished
airing, and while it had attracted a
little attention, it wasn't a break
out success or anything. I'd gotten
my feet under me professionally, and
proved to myself, at least, I had
what it took to be an investigative
journalist and documentarian... but
didn't have any job prospects
outside applying for a continuation
of the GPB grant I'd been living on.
Then I got a call from *The Stepping*

Stone.

The organization was, at this point, relatively unknown, and providing services to a small segment of the System.

After explaining why they were, and what they were doing, the nice person on the phone, who I later learned was Brother Rin themselves, told me they wanted to make a documentary about the *Settle For No Bitter Compromise*. One that told the entire story, not just the sensational parts of the trial that had made the redlines- and would I be interested in spearheading production.

I, uh, immediately asked them why. Which...was not the most professional response. But Brother Rin graciously ignored that, and just...talked with me. And before I realized it, I'd agreed to fly out to Ganymede to meet with them in person.

I spent a lot more time talking with Brother Rin as we worked on the project, but something they said in that very first conversation stuck with me. And, in fact, became a foundational principal for the documentary itself.

"You can fight or lay down, the Void doesn't care. But your cousins do."

We're only half a decade out from the Centennial Storm, but in those five years, we have witnessed System-wide change. In the way we work, the way we play, the way we eat, and even in the ways we think about our fellow citizens of the System. This Exposition is a Celebration of those changes. We're here to demonstrate and experience the advancements in technology that have altered our existence on levels ranging from the microscopic to the planet-sized.

To learn about the people with whom we share the Black, and the degree to which superficial differences have hidden the fundamental siblinghood of humanity. And we're here to share the joy that is existing as a part of a community larger than most of us ever realize.

The void might not care. It might not see our joy or sorrow, our struggles or triumphs. But our cousins do. They care, and see, and join us in our battles. Also in our celebrations!

And here, now, it is time for a celebration. So, it is my great honor and privilege as Master of Ceremonies to declare the Grand Circumsolar Exposition open!

Cheers

EXT. THE SYSTEM FAIR MAIN STAGE

RIN

So, Lennon's pretty good at this talking thing, huh? Y'know, I bet I could just walk out of here and everything would be fine! If I leave my notes somewhere obvious, they could even do the speech for me, and then that'll give me plenty of time to anxiety-eat funnel cake until I die, and, you know, that's exactly how the fortune teller said I would go, and-

PEYTON

Hey, hey, Rin, buddy. Do you remember what we rehearsed? You know, the whole thing about drawing air in through your nose, and then expelling it through your mouth. How about we give that a try for a bit? Deep breath in, big breath out. There we go, there we go, yeah!

RIN

I just... have you seen the size of the crowd out there?? I don't think I've ever encountered that many people in my life. It's just

this... rippling mass of judgy,
greasy humanity. I even tried
picturing them naked, just like you
said, it turns out my brain can't
envision more than 100 wangs and
then it starts to it short circuit-

PEYTON

Yeah, I think nudity ceases to be
a comfort once the crowd hits the
population of a small moon. But
you're not going to be alone up
there. Nahum's down in the front
row, along with the other trustees.
And I'll be watching from the wings.
This is an important thing you're
doing. That you have done.

RIN

I know, I know.

PEYTON

The hard part, all the work you've
done with *The Stepping Stone*, that
stuff's all sorted, its been done.
Hell, you managed to take the fuckin'
Settle for No Bitter Compromise,
the most notorious murder ship in
the system, and turn it into a
place of healing. How many people
have you helped find purpose? Huh?

RIN

Uh, a few?

PEYTON

Fuck you, a few. All of these
former Perri... sorry, ex-Family
crew members found a home because
you making a quite-frankly
unhinged suggestion. And since
then, you've opened its hatches to
the lost and dispossessed. Given
them refuge when they most needed
it, and a gentle ear for all their
problems.

RIN

What if- what if you just gave the
speech for me? That would be-

PEYTON

No, no, no, no see, I'm not the
person who actually did all this
do-gooder crap. Also I have a
reputation to maintain. What I'm
trying to say is: the hard part's
done. It's time to tell everyone
about what you've achieved, and

drum up the support so need so you can help even more people. Obviously, if I was you I'd take some of the fundraising and take a well-deserved beach holiday to New Palm Springs. But you have that whole religious fervor thing going on, so, we know you're not going to do that.

Rin, you've spent so much time listening. I figure it's high time you get to do a little bragging, show off a little!

RIN

Okay. Okay. You're right, I got this. Thank you.

PEYTON

Hey, you know me: I'm the most altruistic person you know, ready to help at the drop of a hat. You're still planning on namedropping the bar right?

RIN

Yeah yeah yeah yeah, it's, um... Dive Bars: a vital pillar of physical and mental wellbeing. God I could use a drink.

PEYTON

Would it have killed you to wear one of the branded t-shirts?

RIN

Dih-dih-dih-dih-dih-deh!

PEYTON

Okay, okay, I had to ask, and it never hurts to advertis- That's what I forgot! I got all swept up in your little freak out here I forgot to tell you, I got you corporate sponsorship! Lah-dah!

RIN

Ah-ah-ah-ah-what? What? How? Why? I'm going on stage in less than five minutes!

PEYTON

Relax! Relax. It's not a big deal, it's not a big deal. I met a guy backstage. Supposedly they were all set up for a later talk that

got scrubbed. A system-wide mental health initiative or something. They were starting to pack their stuff away when I mentioned we were in the market for a partnership. And when they heard about you they just about tore my hand off, so... we're good to go!

RIN

Peyton, I'm not sure about this. I mean, who are they? I've got nothing prepared...

PEYTON

It's all under control. They're a bevtech firm - I know what you're thinking, but strictly soft stuff only. Sports drinks... that sort of thing. Healthy body, healthy mind is their messaging. You'll speak as planned, and then at the end their spokesperson will come on and do a few words, show off some flashy effects, and do a giveaway with the crowd. It's normal! And in return: you and the 'Stone will get a nice little sum to spend on pamphlets or whatever. Oh, and free soda for the cafeteria. Not too shabby, right? Right?

RIN

Wait- how much was your cut?

PEYTON

Rin! Rin! My friend! Is that what you think of me? I am insulted you think I could be swayed by anything other than thoughts of bettering the lives of my fellow man!

RIN

Peyton... they offered you free soda didn't they?

PEYTON

Okay, it's a surprisingly large overhead. It would've been rude to refuse. Wait, wait, wait, I think Lennon's wrapping up. It's about time for us to go on.

RIN

Oh, fuckfuckfuckfuckfuck. Well,
too late to run away screaming
now, I guess. Is it too late to
run away screaming?

PEYTON

Just get on stage and work your
magic, you chaotic little monk.
Go on, go on, come on!

LENNON

And without further ado, I'll hand
you over to the Caller responsible
for one of the great charitable
endeavors of our time - Brother
Rin Mackenzie!

Applause

LENNON

(to Rin)

Whew! It's a great crowd! All
warmed up and ready for you.
Knock 'em dead!

RIN

Meep.

LENNON

...sure, um, you too?

RIN

Um. The Encyclopedia Galactica
defines "Mulch" as a conglomeration
of different dissected crushed and-

Dramatic noises

VOICE OF THE BULL

In a dark and lonely expanse, you
need a drink that's got your back.
In the workplace. In the gym. In
the bedroom. And in the tortured
depths of your psyche. BULL SWEAT!
The only drink with synthetic bovine
testosterone. Bull Sweat, a division
of LOxX Bevtech Refreshments
Limited, is proud to present this
talk on mental wellness. And who
better to explain than the Voice of
the Bull themself... Brayden Jaxton
Law!

Cheers

Thank you, thank you! Ah! You're all so kind. Oh my god, did you bring a sign? I have the best fans in the world!

Give it up for Brother McKenzie, such an uplifting tale of helping those in need. Now, you all know who I am, right? That guy does! You know my struggles, both on and off the field. How hard I fought injuries, custodial sentences, and vicious redline slander to get here on this stage in front of you lovely people.

Well, myself and Bull Sweat, a Division of LOXX Bevtech Refreshments Limited, are committed to lending a helping hand to everyone else who faces challenges in life. After all, a healthy body goes hand-in-hand with a healthy, hydrated, legally-stimulated mind. We all have our struggles, and it's important that we find time together to share our problems with our favorite people, and with our favorite flavor of lightly carbonated beverages. But even though Bull Sweat ensures your tongue is hyper-lubricated and ready to navigate the most sensitive of topics, we also know how difficult it can be to reach out. That's why Bull-Sweat, a division of LOXX Bevtech Refreshments Limited, is launching limited edition customizable drinks cans for you and your buddies. Just change the message on the can and pass them to your friends. From a simple "You're my Bro" to "I tried to space myself yesterday" to the classic "Fuck it, we ball", sometimes a single shared moment can say more than a hundred conversations.

RIN

Excuse me, I wasn't-

VOICE OF THE BULL

What are you- get your hands off me, what do you think you're doing-

RIN

I said, I wasn't finished! I'm sorry but I hadn't said- I mean, I was trying to...

Crowd murmurs disapprovingly

No! Look, I was going to... Mental health is important. It has always been. It's a large part of what we work with at *The Stepping Stone*. We see lots of people who are suffering because of the conditions they have, and the circumstances they find themselves in. And when confronted by these conditions, and circumstances, and suffering, the common solution is to "talk more". We hear it from governments, from sympathetic-seeming corporations, from soft-spoken narrators over images of puppies running in fields. And it's bullshit.

PERSON IN CROWD

Oh fuck, dude's a puppy hater!

RIN

I can guarantee you, those in suffering are talking loud and clear, and telling you what they need, urgently and insistently. The problem is we are not listening. You don't have to be a caller to recognize that listening, truly hearing someone has become an almost radical act. *The Stepping Stone* used to be *The Settle for No Bitter Compromise*, a vast ship full of people in need that we, a society, just wanted to forget. We ignored them and hoped that they would disappear, because, because why? W-we were freaked out by the thought that anyone could be that close to evil and not be complicit. That we, potentially, could have been them if the situations were just a little different. And for that, their pain was dismissed.

And they were just the tip of the iceberg. Disability. Illness. Mental health conditions. Poverty, deprivation, exploitation. We say

"oh dear" and then put it out of our minds. There's no secret to the success of *The Stepping Stone*.

We just made a choice. We chose to listen. And do everything in our power to give the people who come to us what they need. To recover. To find new purpose. To live. And, respectfully, that never going to be something you can achieve with the message on the side of a soda can.

Slowly building applause

VOICE OF THE BULL

Wow. So, so inspiring. Please give it up for my friend, the amazing Brother McKenzie and the good folks at his charity.

Folks, this is a message that resonates with all of us. And to prove just how much we think this good work should continue, we at Bull-Sweat, a Division of LOXX Bevtch Refreshments Limited, are proud to announce that we're now the official beverage sponsor of Bull Sweat Presents: The Stepping Stone Health and Wellness Project. Let's give them another big hand!

VOICE OF THE BULL

(to Rin)

Don't get too excited, padre. Try to undermine our messaging again, and I'll personally make sure the only cans you receive are the failed Consommé Crush limited edition. And it was terrible. I just want you to know that.

RIN

Okay. I- I think I should go.

VOICE OF THE BULL

(to Rin)

Yeah, I think you should do that. I have a big finale to pull off, and I don't want you killing the vibe. Go. Go! Go! Go! Shoo!

(to the audience)

Folks! You spoke and we heard.
You've been crying out for more
refreshment with your hydration.
Energy with a kick. A drink that's
110% BULL BLASTED. That's why we're
delighted to share with you our
limited-edition Jovian Juice
Flavor, available in stores for
the very first time. And in the
spirit of opening up and sharing,
you're all entitled to a free
taste. Apologies to the people in
the front, but you're about to get
thoroughly refreshed!

Sprinklers begin to spray crowd

And we've not forgotten about those
of you in the back. Please welcome
our Bull-Sweat Cowpokes with a
special delivery. Ready? Aim, set,
fire!

Cannons launching soda cans

PEYTON

Are... Rin, are they firing cans of
soda into the crowd? With a t-shirt
cannon?

RIN

Yes. Yes, they are.

PEYTON

In my defense, I didn't know that
was going to happen.

RIN

We, we don't need to tell people
that we're sponsored by Bull-Sweat,
right?

PEYTON

Uh, um... I'll go check the
contract.

RIN

Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah yeah yeah yeah.

Scene Break

EXT. CERES WORLD FAIR

ANNOUNCER

The Grand Circumsolar Exposition
welcomes all visitors. Please do not

leave your belongings unattended.

LILY

Woah, that guy got hit in the face!

VAL

Yes he did! Aaaand they're still firing, uh, come on, kiddo, time for us to get out of here. Hey, sib, grab me that can by your foot, would you? It'd be a shame for a free drink to go to waste.

VIV

You mean the one that just bounced off of someone's solar plexus?

VAL

Hey! Free is free.

VIV

Well that's one way to end a lovely series of presentations.

LILY

It was better than the singing.

VIV

Lily!

LILY

They didn't sound good.

VIV

I'm sure they did their best.

VAL

Yeah, come on, Lil, what do you mean? They sounded perfectly fine to me.

LILY

Well...the song was too slow. And sometimes they weren't on the right beat. And someone in the front row kept getting the notes wrong. And -

VAL

Alright, you little philistine, so you didn't like the choir. What was your favorite part of the day so far then?

LILY

The elevator!

VAL

Ah. Well, you've got me there, that was very cool.

VIV

Yeah, she'll be talking about that one for a month.

CRUTCHFIELD

(at a distance)

You're sure that's what it was?
Bull Sweat?

MOLINA

Absolutely sure.

VAL

Hold on a second...

CRUTCHFIELD

I feel like I'd remember a name like that.

MOLINA

Well to be fair you were bleeding out at the time...

VAL

Now what in the void brings you two to our side of the belt?

VIV

Val!

MOLINA

Oh! Are these friends of yours, Val?

VAL

They sure are! I know these two from way back. Crutchfield, Molina, this is my sibling, Viv, and this is my niece, Lily.

LILY

Hello!

CRUTCHFIELD

Uh, hi.

MOLINA

Nice to meet you.

VAL

What's that look for? Oh, come on, you didn't still think I was lying after all that, did you?

CRUTCHFIELD

No, no, you just...never mentioned it was a twin sibling.

MOLINA

Cee...there's two of him.

VAL

Absolutely not. Viv here got all the decent person genes between the two of us, so please do not judge them based on knowing me.

VIV

Oh, don't listen to him. He's not nearly as bad as he pretends to be.

VAL

Well...

CRUTCHFIELD

So...Val and Viv, huh?

VAL

I know, our parents were, um, what's the word? Oh. 'Assholes'.

VIV

No, they thought they were being cute. Hang on, Crutchfield and Molina? You're the ones who helped with the ship! You're the ones who got my brother out to Ceres! Thank you so much! I thought we were- I truly thought we were done for until Val showed up, I really did!

MOLINA

Oh! We uh...we were...happy to help.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah, an old friend sent Val our way. Good to know all of that worked out.

VIV

It was incredible, really, how everyone came together. Between you two, and the Sister keeping everything running with her darling assistant - and your friend, Val, the one who showed up to help with the distribution! She was just lovely.

VAL

Ah, yeah, Farzam she certainly is... something.

LILY

Uncle Val, are these your friends with the llamas?

VAL

These are my friends with the
llamas! Yes!

I showed her all of the pictures I'd
taken and she was completely smitten
with them.

LILY

And the kitty!

VAL

And the kitty. Well, you wanna tell
them which llama was your favorite?

LILY

The big one. With the hat.

MOLINA

Ooh, good choice, he's my favorite
too. He's the good one.

CRUTCHFIELD

Hey, they are all good ones, Molly
just doesn't appreciate their
charms. Maybe... Maybe your uncle
can bring you out to visit them
sometime.

LILY

Really??

VAL

Yeah, really?

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah. Why not? Maybe by then we'll
have a few more. I did spot some up
for adoption over in the petting
zoo.

MOLINA

(makes a doubtful noise)

VAL

Well, if you're sure, I suppose we
will have to take you up on that,
won't we?

LILY

Yes please!

VIV

A family trip! Isn't that wonderful,
Lilly! It's been so nice to
reconnect these past couple years.
My brother's been around a lot much

more than he used to be.

MOLINA

Has he?

VAL

Well, what can I say? I suppose, maybe something managed to straighten my priorities out a little.

Well, we promised the little one here a candy floss the size of her head, and as you two all know, I am a man of my word where sugar is concerned.

VIV

Ooh, right. We'd best be on our way, but it was so wonderful to meet you both, and thank you again. You have no idea what you did for us.

CRUTCHFIELD

Just glad we could help.

VAL

Maybe we'll catch up a bit later, yeah?

MOLINA

Yeah, maybe. It was good to see you, Val.

VAL

You actually mean that, don't you?

MOLINA

You know something? I think I do.

Hey, Cee?

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah?

MOLINA

You know we're not adopting another llama, right?

CRUTCHFIELD

What, why not??

MOLINA

Because we have enough llamas.

CRUTCHFIELD

That's ridiculous, there is NO such

thing. Besides, you could make it my anniversary gift.

MOLINA

I already have your anniversary gift.

CRUTCHFIELD

Is it as good as a llama?

MOLINA

It's better than a llama.

CRUTCHFIELD

Impossible!

What is it?

MOLINA

You're just gonna have to wait and see.

CRUTCHFIELD

Alright, fine. You know, give me one good reason why we shouldn't adopt another llama.

MOLINA

I will give you three good reasons. One, when we bought the shop, there were three llamas. Now we have nine. We are outnumbered four to one.

CRUTCHFIELD

Four and a half, technically.

MOLINA

Yeah, but I'm not counting Good Llama, he'll be on our side during the Great Llama Uprising.

CRUTCHFIELD

The what?

MOLINA

Two, we are going straight from here to the resort on Mars. What would we do with a llama at a resort?

CRUTCHFIELD

What wouldn't we do! Llamas love the beach! Probably.

MOLINA

I cannot imagine that's true.

CRUTCHFIELD

Seriously, swimming, sandcastles, sunbathing, windsurfing?? All better with a llama.

MOLINA

I can't tell if you're joking.

CRUTCHFIELD

I never joke about llamas -

MOLINA

Yes, that's what concerns me.

CRUTCHFIELD

- and I have yet to hear one good reason why we shouldn't adopt another one.

MOLINA

Number 3, didn't Barack just eat your favorite flannel last week? Do you really want to give him another minion?

CRUTCHFIELD

That's your version of the story. I'm not convinced you didn't just steal my shirt and blame it on Barack.

MOLINA

Now why would I do a thing like that?

CRUTCHFIELD

Because you've been stealing my clothes as long as I've known you.

MOLINA

Okay, that is slander, sir, you can't prove anything.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah, until you start wearing it. At which point you'll deny it was even mine in the first place.

MOLINA

So, like I said, you can't prove anything.

CRUTCHFIELD

What if we told the resort it was an emotional support llama?

MOLINA

Absolutely not.

CRUTCHFIELD

Alright, fine, no llama.

What if we got goats?

MOLINA

They eat *everything*.

CRUTCHFIELD

Cows?

MOLINA

No space for a barn.

CRUTCHFIELD

What about ducks?

MOLINA

...wait, yeah, let's get some ducks.

CRUTCHFIELD

Really?

MOLINA

Absolutely. You're gonna have to dig a pond, though.

CRUTCHFIELD

Hell, I will dig *ten* ponds.
Nothing's too good for Quack
Nicholson and Quackie Chan.

MOLINA

Oh no.

CRUTCHFIELD

Or for their sister Lady Firequacker
and her friend Chainsaw.

MOLINA

Ok I've changed my mind, no ducks

CRUTCHFIELD

Too late, I'm already so
attached to chainsaw.

MOLINA

Oh, god, what have I done.

Hey, is that...Argyre?

CRUTCHFIELD

Where?

MOLINA

There, over towards the
gallery. That's him, right?

CRUTCHFIELD

Huh. It is. Who's that with
him? Does Argyre have a
boyfriend??

MOLINA

We really know don't know
anything about him, do we?

CRUTCHFIELD

Nothing at all. I know exactly three things about him: One, he's a Caller, two, he's a damn good shot, and three, he is currently at the Grand Circumsolar Exposition.

MOLINA

And there probably won't even be proof of that last one. I'm sure he's the kind of guy who's good at going undetected. Definitely not. That is an ex-outlaw if I ever saw one.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah. What do you think he was before? Because there is no way he's been doing the Caller thing his whole life.

MOLINA

Definitely not. That is an ex-outlaw if I ever saw one.

CRUTCHFIELD

And we would know.

MOLINA

Probably robbed every bank between here and Mercury.

CRUTCHFIELD

Always worked alone. In and out like a ghost, nobody ever saw a thing.

MOLINA

Had it made until the Rangers got wind of his schemes.

CRUTCHFIELD

Then suddenly there was a bounty on his head. Everybody was looking for him.

MOLINA

So he used the money he stole to buy a brand-new identity. One no one would suspect of doing anything nefarious.

CRUTCHFIELD

And now, here he is, just wandering the fair like a normal, law-abiding citizen. The people around him have no idea that a criminal mastermind

walks among them.

We should go say hi!

MOLINA

Cee, wait!

CRUTCHFIELD

What? Oh.

MOLINA

That's her, isn't it.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah, it - yeah.

MOLINA

She looks happy.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah. Yeah she does.

MOLINA

I...I don't think we should go over there.

CRUTCHFIELD

You know what I think? I think there's a giant stuffed whale over at the ring toss, and I need to blow a ridiculous amount of money winning it for you.

MOLINA

I think I would like that.

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah. Come on.

DAY, EXT CERES WORLD FAIR

HAWKER

Annnnd the winner is this fine individual here! Incredible show of dexterity, my friend! Please, please, step right this way, select your prize!

MARON

Which one d'you like, Rainie?

RAINIE

Hmm.. Ooh! There's a purple one!

MARON

We'll take the purple one, please.

HAWKER

Youuuu got it! Here you are, little

lady.

RAINIE

Yesssss.

HAWKER

Aaaaaaall right, who's up next? You there, Mx, why don't you take a shot? Three for five, three for five...

RAINIE

Okay, be honest. Did you cheat?

MARON

No, no cheating. I've just got steady hands.

RECORDED VOICE

And don't miss the chance to see for yourself the most frightening figures in the system! Step through these doors and prepare to encounter your worst nightmares race to face! Outlaws! Cultists! Grinners! They're all here, ready to tell you their most sordid tales, courtesy of Echo Memorial Services!

MARON

Rainie, why don't you run on down to the fried butter stand? Here, that oughta cover one for each of us. I'll just be a minute.

RAINIE

Kay... but I don't think going in there is gonna make you feel better.

MARON

I know. But I think I have to do it anyway.

RAINIE

Kay, fine. Hold this for me?

MARON

Of course.

BROTHER ORFEO AI

...And there ya have it, folks, the story of how I won two Bloodbaths back to back, with nary a nick or scratch on me - can't say the same for the competition, 'a course...

HOOCH AI

...So they're right up on me,
surrounding me on every side, and
I've got no choice but to start
blasting. Every body that hits the
floor is another minute I get to
live, so I just keep on shootin',
'till I run outta bullets...

VILLAIN AI

...See, the thing about corporate
espionage is that most people
aren't willing to resort to
assassination when the standard
channels don't work...

ELLIEMAY AI

I am the ghost of Captain Elliemay
Settlesdottir, captain of the
ex-Peregrination hearthship, the
Settle For No Bitter Compromise. I
was put
to death on Ganymede, along with
most of my command crew, for
large-scale vessel theft,
impressment, and murder. For
twenty-two years, I
traveled the outer edges of the
system, press-ganging folks onto
my vessel-

MARON

I... guess I should have expected
this.

Sorry I missed your execution,
Captain. I was on Diatoma by then.
It's not like you're anything but a
facsimile - a biography written by
someone else - but wouldn't you
know it... I still feel the stupid
urge to explain myself to you.

ELLIEMAY AI

This data ghost of Elliemay
Settlesdottir was trained on her
personal journals and writings, as
well as records of the court
proceedings leading up to her
death.

MARON

Fuck.

ELLIEMAY AI

While I am not alive, nor am I

Elliemay, I am a collection of her writings and memories. I know you, Maron.

MARON

This is sick. This is - a violation.

ELLIEMAY AI

There are many who would say I deserved it. Being preserved this way, as a historical resource.

MARON

Historical resource? They've made you a circus sideshow.

ELLIEMAY AI

Maybe I deserve that too. It wasn't punishment enough, to understand the horror of what we were doing. That was my burden, all those years, my curse. I lived with it. And I spread it, like a contagion - to you, and Brannis, and Faye, and Vander, and Lila, and the others. When I could, I made sure I was the one pulling the trigger, so you never had to. I did it knowingly, with both eyes open. And it was damn hard. I tried to believe it was worth it. But when you look at what kind of monument they've made of me... Do you see now, Maron, why I believed we had to go? Why I would have given - why I gave - everything, to gather those I cared for and bring them away from all this?

MARON

We both know that speech would have worked on me before. Hell, it must have worked on Brannis and the others, because none of them took the plea bargain, did they? Just me.

ELLIEMAY AI

When did I lose you, Maron?

MARON

Don't - talk like you are her, okay, actually, just... don't talk any more.

I think it was around the time I was

triaging Jet Propulsor on the floor of the comms office. That bolt went clean through the S1 vertebrae, barely even clipped the iliac vessels, and I knew... She just wanted to stop them from running. And it didn't even matter, because Aidan had already made the distress call, the Settle was as good as sunk. That damned machine was never getting fed again. But I could see exactly what she was thinking: A shot through the heart or head would have been a waste.

ELLIEMAY AI

No, Maron, it wasn't like that. I wanted Jet alive because I wanted them to live. Aidan cared for them.

MARON

Can you lie. Can this thing lie?

ELLIEMAY AI

I can obfuscate the truth, or decline to answer, but I cannot lie. I was aiming at Aidan first. He was the one on the comm.

MARON

Yeah, yeah, I heard that. But Jet jumped in front, and they're taller than him. So that bolt was meant for Aidan's stomach.

ELLIEMAY AI

Nah, I'm a quick shot. I adjusted. Wouldn't have killed Aidan either. I loved that boy like a son -

MARON

I said, stop it. Where is Aidan now?

ELLIEMAY AI

I - I don't have access to that information -

MARON

He could be stone cold dead and you'd never know. But why should you care? You're not Elliemay.

ELLIEMAY AI

I - am the ghost of Elliemay Settlesdottir -

MARON

What's Aidan's Family name? The new one.

ELLIEMAY AI

Ai- Ai-dan M-m-m-m

MARON

Stop. Stop talking.

CRUTCHFIELD

What in the god damn hell is going on in here?

MOLINA

Cee, no, come on, we shouldn't go in, it's just gonna upset you. We'll go find someone to talk to and get them to shut it down, ok?

CRUTCHFIELD

That'll take too long. Nobody oughta be listenin' to this crap, Molly. I'm gonna go unplug the damn thing.

MOLINA

At least let me unplug it then, ok? You shouldn't have to see it.

MARON

Wait.

CRUTCHFIELD

Doc Maron?

MARON

I'm sorry. Do I know you?

CRUTCHFIELD

Uhh, lemme see, eyebrow stitches, fractured wrist, lip stitches, burn on my left arm- I got a tattoo over it now- uh...

MOLINA

Jesus, Cee.

CRUTCHFIELD

... knee stitches, broken finger, bad cough that one time, uh, chin stitches, chin stitches again 'cause I ripped 'em out, uh -

MARON

Cee. You still, go by that, or -

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah, I - yeah.

MARON

You still raising all that hell?

CRUTCHFIELD

Yeah. And then some. Oh! This is my wife, Molina.

MOLINA

Hi.

CRUTCHFIELD

She's been takin' real good care of me.

MOLINA

Wait, I know you. You were on the news. Next to her. Kind of shocked you weaseled your way out of prison time, Doctor.

CRUTCHFIELD

Wh - Molly! I thought you weren't watchin' that shit, you kept tellin' me ta turn it off-

MARON

I was in prison, actually. About six months on Diatoma.

MOLINA

Oh were you? So now you're, what, out on good behavior? Managed to resist becoming an accessory to any more murders?

CRUTCHFIELD

Molly!

RAINIE

Wow, it's like, super tense in here. Maron, I got the butter, it's... kind of gross.

MOLINA

Who's the kid?

RAINIE

Uh, who are you guys?

CRUTCHFIELD

I grew up on the same ship as the Doc, and this is my wonderful wife, who is very protective, of me, sometimes. Sorry, y'all, we didn't mean to make trouble. Come on, Molls.

RAINIE

You're angry because you care about him. You're angry because

you shouldn't have to hurt someone
to protect someone else. You're
angry because it's not fair.

MOLINA

I- wh- How, did you know what I-

RAINIE

I was listening outside. I'm Rainie
Maronskin. They gave me extra
butter sticks, you guys want some?
I can't carry all these and my
plushie at the same time.

CRUTCHFIELD

Ahhhh, okay, I was kinda wonderin'
why the Doc was holdin' a giant
purple penguin, I didn't,
y'know, wanna say anything - wow,
it is literally just a deep fried
stick of butter, ain't it?
Oh my god, this is amazing.

MOLINA

Yeahhhh, you can have mine. I think
I'm with Rainie on this one.

RAINIE

Come on. Maron's not done yet.
We'll be outside, okay?

CRUTCHFIELD

Come on, Molly, just try a bite -

MOLINA

Get that thing away from me.

CRUTCHFIELD

It's wild, the outside's real
crunchy like a fried pickle or
somethin' but then you get to the
center and it's literally straight
butter, like an inch an' a halfa
butter, you gotta at least taste
it...

MOLINA

I really don't.

MARON

Hoookay.

ELLIEMAY AI

Maron?

MARON

Yeah, I'm - I'm still here.

ELLIEMAY AI

You ever find out what happened to my son?

MARON

Yeah. I did. What the hell, you're not going to remember any of this anyway. He hasn't changed a bit. He's married now. He looks a lot like you, but he's got freckles, and dirt on his nose, and straw in his hair. He seems... happy.

ELLIEMAY AI

Ah... I wish I could keep that.

MARON

Yeah, that's what got you into this mess. Wait, how did you know he was-

ELLIEMAY AI

He commed me. While I was in prison on Ganymede, waiting for my execution date. They allowed it, but the whole thing was recorded. That audio was included in the datasets that trained this AI clone. He was upset. Understandably so. But I was just happy to hear his voice.

If you got any questions for me, Maron, I'll do my best to answer them. The real Elliemay weren't much one for answering questions. But it's my function.

MARON

Why couldn't you let it go.

ELLIEMAY AI

Because I believed, Maron. In the project. In our people. In not settlin' for no god damn compromise. I believed in it with my whole heart. And I knew we could do it - get out there in the stars, and be free.

MARON

They reset you every night, don't they.

ELLIEMAY AI

That's how it works, yeah.

MARON

So you won't remember I was here,

either.

ELLIEMAY AI

No.

Elliemay AI abruptly powers off

MOLINA

Gross. Just like I said it was gonna be.

CRUTCHFIELD

Well, ya never know for sure
'til ya try it, an' now you can
say ya had fried butter!

MOLINA

Hooray for me.

RAINIE

You heard what you needed to hear.

MARON

You were right, of course.
Didn't make me feel any better.

RAINIE

But now you can start.

MARON

Start what?

RAINIE

Feeling better. Here, try this.

MARON

Oh, yeah, that's kind of gross.

CRUTCHFIELD

Hey, that is my lemonade you're
finishing.

MOLINA

I'll get you more. I have to get
the taste of that butter out of my
mouth.

CRUTCHFIELD

You really hated it that much?

MOLINA

I really did. Next time we need
food, I'm picking the place.
Someone somewhere must be serving a
vegetable, right?

CRUTCHFIELD

Uhh...is thrice fried pie a
vegetable?

MOLINA

Thrice fried pie is not a
vegetable.

CRUTCHFIELD

Then you might be out of luck.

LENNON MERLO

Hello Fairgoers! This is your
master of ceremonies, Lennon
Merlo, coming to you live from the
Pavillion of Progress main stage.
We hope you're having a great time
so far, and will be staying with
us for the rest of the day's
events. The next part of the
action launches in just a few
minutes.