

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

This episode contains a main character death, implied suffocation, and physical injury.

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

Comm beeps

Sounds of tread moving over soil in the background; occasional mechanical thunk noise, followed by error beeps

ARI

Begin on-site service report,  
Ariel Attison of Red Sky Technical  
Services speaking, contract number  
YMT-309C, today is Day 4 of  
Contract Week 29, time is 14:40  
LMST. I've located CCOW M612,  
approximately three hundred meters  
south of the Hellas-to-New-Philly  
turnpike near radio beacon 58. At  
present, the unit appears to be  
attempting to drive through a ...

... seven meter tall chunk of fine  
Martian sandstone.

Mechanical thunk; error beeps

That is quite the path you've  
picked out for yourself there,  
champ. Good work. A credit to your  
predecessors. You'd make  
Opportunity proud.

Mechanical thunk; error beeps

All right, you big basta-- you  
large robot. First thing's first,  
let's get you to stop mashing your  
face into that boulder, yeah?

Beeping sounds

YUKON C-COW

Override Accepted! The navigation  
system of this YuKon C-COW is now  
set to: Standby! Remember that use  
of contractor override codes is  
subject to algorithmic review, and  
that contractors are liable for  
any missing or delayed cargo  
linked to use of their personal  
override code.

ARI

Oh, no, you're very welcome, Mx.  
Cargo COW. No trouble at all, I  
just love driving ten hours out to  
the middle of Hesperia to replace  
the same damn part for the  
fifteenth time this month. Really  
great scenery up here in the Rust  
Bowl, a hundred klicks of nothing  
in every direction. Entirely my  
pleasure.

OK, assho--  
(clears throat)

OK.

More beeping noises

Let's see how you feel about that one.

YUKON C-COW

The navigation system of this YuKon C-COW is now set to: Active! Please stand clear of this YuKon C-COW within the next

(beat)

fifteen

(beat)

seconds.

ARI

Figure it out ...

YUKON C-COW

This YuKon C-COW has encountered an obstacle. Rebuilding path ...

ARI

There you go, genius.

YUKON C-COW

Path to next highway navigation beacon found. Please stand clear of this YuKon C-COW within the next

(beat)

fifteen

(beat)

seconds.

Sounds of tread moving over soil; sound gets quieter as the C-COW departs

ARI

Yeah, you're welcome.

Well, guess it's ... time to head home. End log.

Comm beeps

Scene Break

ARI

Dispatch, this is Ariel Attison,  
contract number YMT-309C, ready  
for today's 16:00 sync-up.

Dispatch? You receiving?

Okay ... RX and TX are both lit  
up, but could be the antenna  
assembly's wiggled loose again ...

If this garbage kicks off another  
round of complaints about late  
reports I swear--

Comm beeps

JULY

Confirmed receiving, YMT-309C,  
this is Red Sky Dispatch, July  
Lamaire speaking. Current time is  
16:03 LMST.

Hey, Ari.

ARI

Oh!

Oh.

Hey Jules, I didn't ... I wasn't  
sure if it was going to be you on  
the line today, you know, after  
...

JULY

I'm still your designated contact  
for second shift, even when we're  
... frustrated with each other.

ARI

Yeah, sure. Um. I guess I just thought ... I don't know. Never mind.

(clears throat)

C-COW M612 is back on its route; has some pretty substantial dents that are gonna need to be hammered out of the front panel once it gets into the shipping hub in Bogdanov, but it's driving again.

JULY

Noted.

Diagnostics and repair steps?

ARI

Went for a swap test before running the standard script. I figured if it was the same hardware fault on the pathfinding co-processor board, you know, the one we've seen on the last dozen or so COWs that've wandered off, fixing it right off the bat would save everyone a few hours. And it fixed the problem, so no further diagnostics necessary.

JULY

Right. So no diagnostic logs to upload, then. Okay.

Root cause?

ARI

Same as the others; mark it "inconclusive".

JULY

You know the customer doesn't like to see "inconclusive" on a report with no logs. You saw the policy reminder message they sent last week, right?

ARI

Of course I saw the message, Jules. But "the customer" also insists that the components they send us are designed by competent engineers and that they're manufactured from parts that didn't fall out the back of a freight hauler.

They also say that "the navigation system of the YuKon Cargo-Conveyor-and-Offloader-comma-Wheeled is adequately shielded against electromagnetic interference and designed to recover gracefully from any minor hardware failure, software glitch or loss of network signal."

If I put anything for root cause that isn't "inconclusive", I'll start getting direct bluelines from some Visionary Gold Sugar Maple from Logistics in the middle of our off-hours, asking me how I "feel" about my "YuKon extended family" and if anyone at Red Sky knows anyone who might have ties to the IWM.

JULY

OK, Ari, I get it. Jeez. I'll find one of the earlier reports and link to it in this one, hopefully that'll be enough.

I know it's not important to you, but ...

ARI

I'm sorry, you wanna repeat that? I don't think I heard that correctly the first time.

JULY

I said, I know you don't care about getting the reports right, but I'm the one who has to hear from "the customer" when they aren't!

ARI

Well maybe if "the customer" didn't throw a new reporting format at us once a month, and actually read the reports instead of making us repeat everything to them over text chat, and voice logs, and video meetings, I'd be more careful about dotting the T's and crossing the I's!

JULY

I'm just trying to make sure you keep your job! Unless you've actually decided that you're gonna--

ARI

Hey! I'm not the one who couldn't answer a simple yes or no question!

This is not a conversation we should have over a blueline, especially not a *company* blueline during a scheduled sync-up call.

JULY

No. Yeah. You're right.

We can cancel the 22:00 sync unless something comes up on your end? And then talk when you get home tomorrow?

ARI

You know, I could be back in New Portland *before* 22:00. I could cut

north, come down the Old Escarpment Road into Isidis, instead of taking the Turnpike east halfway to Chalmerstown just to get down to the Rust Belt and then coming all the way back west through New Berlin and across southern Utopia.

JULY

Don't do that, the system's routing you the long way around for a reason. They stopped maintaining the beacons on the Old Road when the Elysian Bypass opened up, and the roadway's half gone on some of the switchback corners. It's barely even a road any more.

ARI

I can drive this thing without beacons, Jules, and I know what the conditions are like. Do you remember, we drove up to the Clayborne Point Overlook a month ago?

JULY

On a sports trike, Ari, not a ten ton maintenance rover!

Look, I'd love to see you home tonight and I know you know what you're doing out there. But I want you to get home *safe*, and trying to off-road an eight-wheeled brick down the whole wall of the Rust Belt isn't *safe* even when you know what you're doing.

ARI

Fine.

JULY



Just leave the rover on auto, let it follow the Turnpike back, and try to get some sleep, OK?

ARI

Yeah, I said fine. YMT-309C closing connection.

Comm beeps

Scene Break

Comm beeps

JULY

Hey Ari, just checking in. Alma said you missed your 08:00 sync; just wanted to make sure you're still getting back some time this morning. Comm me when you get this.

Comm beeps

Ari, seriously, if you're receiving this you need to get back here now. We just lost telemetry for C-COWs across half the planet, some sort of big solar flare or something, and if the messages we're getting from the wire from Bogdanov and New Berlin are any indication, losing their connection to YuKon's network is making *all* the C-COWs go haywire. It's chaos, and YuKon wants us to fix it.

Look, I get it if you don't want to talk to me right now, but if you won't comm me, at least comm Rick so he stops asking me where you are and why you haven't brought your rover back yet.

Get. Here.

Comm beeps

Hey Ari. I ... I know you're upset with me, and not all that warm-and-fuzzy about Red Sky right now either, but I haven't heard from you in almost two days now, and with the storm and everything I'm ...

Look, if this is you trying to make a point, the point's been made, and if it's not ...

Just, comm me so I know you're ok, OK?

(softly)

Love you.

Comm beeps

Scene Break

#### YORK VENTURA

While a few ships that were on Earth's surface during the worst of the storm have been able to use their radio equipment to relay \*some\* priority messages from Earth to government and corporate officials on Luna and Mars, one civilian commander we spoke to said that the process of re-establishing consistent public contact with Earth may take weeks or months, due to the sheer number of satellites, habitats, and vessels now disabled in Earth orbit.

They also added that caution must be taken to avoid creating what they described as a "Kessler-type scenario", which would make

navigating in low Earth orbit  
hazardous for years to come.

You're listening to York Ventura  
on Redline UA3, The Voice of the  
System. Up next--

A beep as the news is turned off

RICK

Well, let's get this over with.

Typing sounds

Red Sky Technical Services weekly  
progress update for Contract Week  
29. Report written by lead team  
coordinator Rick Princip, contract  
number YMT-300M.

It's going to be ... difficult to  
judge the performance of our team  
this week based on the standard  
YuKon key performance indicators.

The hardware problems caused by  
the recent events off-planet  
generated more trouble reports for  
Red Sky to investigate and correct  
than had been reported in the  
previous five months of operations  
combined.

Based on the figures provided to  
us, as of 16:00 LMST today we've  
managed to locate, approach and  
replace the damaged hardware on  
roughly 25% of the C-COWs in our  
designated territory.

I know this is substantially below  
the expected number our YuKon  
point-of-contact set for us  
yesterday, but for a twenty-person  
field team hunting down C-COWs

spread across a significant percentage of the planet, I believe my team has performed admirably well, especially given

...

(pause to consider phrasing)

... given the variety of inefficiencies introduced to our standard procedures by the unprecedented--

Door opening

JULY

Give me a rover.

RICK

Uh, hello to you too, July.

JULY

It's been three days, Rick. Emergency responders are still booked up solid, Ari's blueline is still off the network, and none of the other field techs have seen any sign of them, not on the Turnpike, not on the Elysian Bypass, not nowhere.

Give me a rover, so I can go and look for them.

RICK

I can't. You know I can't. We've got every rover we have out there with every tech on the team wrangling strays right now.

JULY

There's one in the charge dock right now, came in an hour ago.

RICK

And the moment it's charged, it needs to be back out there finding

lost cattle. Frankly, if I could afford to give you a rover, July, I'd have sent you out COW-hunting too.

JULY

It's been. Three. Days.

RICK

I know. Believe me, I know. But I told everyone to keep an eye out for them while they're out there, and we're scouring practically every major highway in the damn hemisphere.

JULY

And what if they're not on a major highway? On our last call, they were talking about taking a shortcut down the Old Road, and I thought I talked them out of it but if they decided to try it anyway--

RICK

--then they should have been back in New Portland before all this madness kicked off, so either they're stuck in traffic somewhere, like half the people on this planet right now, or--

JULY

--or unless something happened to them on the way, before the storm. Maybe, maybe now they're stranded somewhere. Maybe they're hurt or irradiated, and unable to contact anyone, and you need to give me a goddamn rover so I can find them!

RICK

Look, I get that you're worried, I'm worried about them too. But I have to worry about a lot of

things right now. We're chasing down who-knows-how-many COWs, some of them dead in place, some of them radio silent but still on the move, and the rest either wandering off into the Rust Bowl, or doing loops in someone's lawn, or trying to monster-truck their way over all the other traffic stuck out there.

Diazo-Kingman is pissed we pulled people off their project to deal with YuKon's slice of this mess, and YuKon's liaison is breathing down my neck. They're talking about taking any damages they decide we could have prevented out of this quarter's bill, and I'm probably going to have to let them, because if I don't they'll cancel the contract instead, and without the YuKon contract there is no Red Sky and we're all out of a job.

JULY

Oh, fuck the job! Fuck Red Sky! Fuck YuKon! And fuck you too, Rick, if you're gonna tell me that my partner's life and limb is less important than whether some dipshit Terran snowbird in some crappy condo in New Palm Springs gets his goddamn laser bidet on time!

The job is already killing this goddamn relationship, I'm not gonna let it kill them, too!

Pause

RICK

I'm sorry, July. I knew ... I'd heard you two have been fighting some, but I didn't realize ...

#### JULY

They keep talking about ... about wanting to get out. Out of the job, out of New Portland, off Mars entirely.

Sometimes there's a plan attached: you know? Find a secondhand cargo skiff, doin' freelance runs to the Belt, just be our own bosses. Other times it's just, "I wonder if I could fuck up just bad enough that 'the customer' would make Rick get rid of me, but not so bad he'd want to fire me outright."

(sniffs)

And then when they talked about leaving, they'd talk about it like it'd be both of us going. But I mean, I grew up on Mars. I like it here. I like living in a gravity well and having air outside the windows, even if it smells like turpentine on hot days the rain is a little gritty.

I always thought-- I always thought we'd save up enough to retire to a crappy condo in New Palm Springs and order our own stupid laser bidet. Not shoot off into space to run odd jobs and scrape to survive until we either die of equipment failure or get lost in the dark somewhere.

Tuesday night, the night before the chaos started, I found out Ari'd had someone at the bank run a credit check for us, to see "how much spaceship we could afford,

hypothetically". I got mad and said they shouldn't do stuff like that without discussing it first. We fought some. But when they finally asked me, straight out, "If I did it, if I found a way to leave, you would come with me, wouldn't you?"

I couldn't answer them. I just stood there for what felt like a goddamn hour, trying to come up with something, and then they ... and then they left.

Pause

RICK

That's ... damn.

JULY

Yeah. And I know it doesn't make sense, but all I can think about is whether they'd be here and safe right now if I'd just ... if I just had an answer.

Sound of keys clattering on the table

RICK

Here.

JULY

What's this?

RICK

Like I said, I don't have a rover to spare, but take my hopper. It was in under the dome when the storm hit, should be working OK. The fuel cells aren't 100% full, but it should get you up and down the Rust Belt, and you'll get a better view from the air anyway.

JULY



I'm ... not a pilot, Rick.

RICK

Neither am I. It mostly flies itself, you just tell it where to go. Easier than driving a trike, and I know you can handle one of them.

Go, get out there and find them. Send me a message when you know if ... well, when you know.

JULY

I will.

Thank you.

RICK

Like I said, I'm worried about them too. Go on, get out there.

JULY

OK.

RICK

Good luck.

Scene Break

Wind howling

ARI

All right, let's give this ... one more try. One more try, and if you don't get it, you can take a break, all right? All right.

Step one: get your rump off the dash and onto the back of the driver's seat.

(grunts, straining)

OK. Step two: reach up and grab the bunk frame, use that and your good leg to stand up.

(another grunt)

All right. Now you use the bunk to lever yourself up onto the side of the workbench thusly.

(breathing hard)

Good. Almost there. Rear hatch release is less than a meter away, all you've gotta do is hold onto the equipment rack and lean out ... and ...

Sound of mechanical straining

Oh no. No you do not. You do not come unscrewed from that panel now, you son of a--

Sound of panel hitting the ground, ARI shouts in pain

Fuck! Fuck ...

Beeping noise

What-- what is ... what is that?

Oh really? That so?

You think it's time for another daily status report, do you?

You know what? Fine. You wanna know my status? Let's give you a status report.

Comm beeps

Begin report, Ariel Att--  
(stops to cough a few times, groans)

Ariel Attison speaking, contract number... who gives a fuck, don't remember. Either you know who I am or you don't.

Overall status is unchanged from the recording I made earlier. Whenever that was. My rover is still nose down in a hollow somewhere off the Old Escarpment Road, probably about halfway down the Rust Belt.

The front access hatch is still pinned closed by rocks, the rear access hatch is still pointed skyward. My left leg is still definitely broken.

(sharp inhale)

Probably just added a rib or two.

#### Beeping noises

Pretty sure I'm not sending out any kind of call for help; I haven't heard anything on any of the standard bands. No blueline, no redline, not even other greenline transmissions, so either I scraped all the antennas off in the crash or something very weird or very bad is going on out there.

Occam's says it's probably the first, but the radiological alarm was making some pretty angry noises for a while there and I've heard zero traffic pass by outside, so who knows?

It's a lonely road, but it shouldn't be *that* lonely.

(chuckles darkly)

On the bright side, power levels are holding steady, so I can record as many of these goddamn reports as I want. And the computer says I've got plenty of food and water, which would be a

comfort if the spigot and ration packs weren't at the back of the rover, and therefore several meters directly above me now. Along with the first aid kit and the manual emergency beacon.

Turns out this rover may not have been designed for one-legged vertical operation.

(coughs)

Jules, looks like you were right. I shouldn't have taken the Old Road.

If you're hearing this, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for storming off, for not talking to you before I... well, anyway, I'm sorry. You should know, for all I talked about leaving, I was never gonna leave without you. You've been--

(cough)

You've been the one thing worth staying here for.

Mechanical noises from outside; engine noises; sounds of footsteps on soil

What in the--

Hatch opens

JULY

Ari? Ari!

ARI

Jules?

JULY

Are you OK?

ARI

Yeah, I'm-- well, no, not really, I'm moderately fucked up and thirsty as hell, but I'm alive.

JULY

Try not to move.

ARI

Thanks, figured that one out the hard way.

JULY

I'll ... I'll go get help. Or, no, I'll ... shit. I don't just want to leave you here.

ARI

Emergency beacon, back of the rover, the yellow box. Send it up, should have someone here within twenty minutes.

JULY

OK. It might take longer than that, it's kind of chaos out there right now, but ... I'm just glad I found you.

ARI

Yeah, me too.

The heck did you come in on, anyway, a ship?

JULY

I borrowed Rick's hopper.

ARI

Rick's hopper? That overpriced sky jalopy?

Does he *know* you borrowed it?

JULY

He gave me the key himself.

ARI

It *must* be chaos out there right now.

Sound of beacon deploying

JULY

OK, that's the beacon taken care of, and I grabbed some water, here.

Still only moderately fucked up?

ARI

No change in the last 30 seconds, Dispatch. You don't ... well, was about to say you don't have to worry about me, but given present circumstances I'm not sure you'd believe me, so ...

JULY

Hey, Ari? Let's ... let's get out of here.

ARI

Yeah, that's what the emergency beacon was for.

JULY

No, I mean, after we get you rescued and all, let's-- let's go. Like you've been talking about. I've got a feeling ship prices are gonna be dropping for the next little while, especially for folks willing and able to do their own system overhauls. We could make a go of it. Freelance.

Pause

ARI

Jules, what's going on out there?

JULY

A lot.

I'll tell you later. So, what do you say?

ARI  
(chuckles)  
And here I thought I'd be the one  
asking you.

Yeah. Let's get off this rock.

Scene fades out

SHAN  
(over comms)  
God that's pretty.

TRUE  
(over comms)  
The sun?

SHAN  
No, your face.

Of course the sun. I imagine  
what's going on is something  
terrible. A solar flare, or a  
supernova or something, and  
there're a lot of people getting  
hurt out there, but look all those  
colors.

... and also your face is pretty.

TRUE  
People are getting hurt here.  
  
But yeah. It's something, alright.  
  
How are you doing?

SHAN  
Umm ...  
  
I'm ok. Looks like O2's at 88%.  
CO2 at 20% lethal limit. Life  
support's steady. Temperature  
regulation's online, a cool 21  
degrees right now. You?

TRUE

Ship's dead in the water, but otherwise ok. Backup 8VAC, and atmo are on. Lights haven't kicked in yet, I'm using the lantern. Propulsion's offline for the foreseeable future. Blue line is dark, but on black line I'm reading you clear.

SHAN

Line of sight communication is an almost indestructible thing.

TRUE

Yeah.

How long do you think it'll hold?

SHAN

How long d'you think I can go in a straight line?

Pause

True?

TRUE

Yeah?

SHAN

You ever wonder why we come out here?

TRUE

I seem to recall *someone* had the bright idea of mudlarking Mercury.

SHAN

(light laugh)

No. Not you and me. Everyone. Humanity. Why do we ever go into the black at all?

TRUE

I dunno.



SHAN

No, come on. Think about it.

Why don't we just stay on Terra?  
We have a good thing going there.  
Air, water, plenty of biomass to  
process. Why do any of us decide  
to give that up for ...

... all this? Space?

TRUE

Things aren't that great on Earth.  
Not for most people.

SHAN

I know that. But think of it this  
way. What happens if you're born  
poor in the Belt? Or on Vesta. Or  
Eunomia.

TRUE

Everyone else is just as poor as  
you are, so you do what you can to  
help each other, and make sure  
your kids are a little better off.

SHAN

Ok. Fine. That's not what I ...

What about on Luna? Say you're a  
station rat. No family, no  
anything. What happens to you?  
What do you do?

TRUE

Anything you got to. And maybe you  
make it. Maybe you don't.

SHAN

Exactly. You salvage or scrounge  
or steal to keep yourself in food  
and O2. Stay out of air debt long  
enough to grow up. If you do,  
maybe you get a real job there. Or

maybe you earn passage to one of the asteroids. Or maybe you never get more than a day ahead. Maybe you sneak onto a ship, trying to get anywhere but there. Maybe you suffocate in the hold.

TRUE

What's your point?

SHAN

Just ... that's not how it is on Terra.

If you don't like where you are, you leave. Just walk away. Get on transit. You can jump cargo transports and ride them wherever you want. You don't have to worry about how you're going to breathe, or if decompression will pop your eyeballs.

It's bad, sure. But there the bad isn't going to kill you.

TRUE

What do you call dying of starvation? Or heavy metal poisoning? Or, fuck, *dysentery*? Water *can't* be clean, all those people shitting and drinking right in the same place with no recycling system. That's not the bad killing you?

SHAN

Yeah, but it's not the same. On Terra, you aren't going to run out of air. I--

Hey, remember that time we hit the di-pent together?

TRUE

The time at Delaney or the one in New Philly?

SHAN

I forgot about New Philly! But yeah, the time on Delaney.

TRUE

Of course I remember. What about it?

SHAN

I was just thinking ...

You know how I acted like I knew what I was doing? Buying it, and taking it, and everything?

TRUE

Yeah?

SHAN

That was the first time.

TRUE

What?

SHAN

It was the first time I'd bought drugs. Or done drugs. I'd never even bio-printed jailbroken alcohol.

TRUE

Are you serious? You were so *calm*.

SHAN

Yeah.

You really wanted to try it! And I could tell you wouldn't on your own. I mean. It sounded fun. But also I didn't want to let you down.

TRUE

(affectionate)

Asshole. You could have just said that!

SHAN

It was the first time you thought I was even a little bit cool! I wasn't going to mess it up!

Pause

So why do you think we do it?

TRUE

What? Drugs?

SHAN

No. What I was saying before. Come out here. Trade our homes for the emptiness?

TRUE

Don't know what you're talking about home. Not all of us are Terran trust fund babies. *My home is on Hektor.*

SHAN

No, I mean bigger than that! Our home as a species. The home of *humanity.*

TRUE

I don't know, Shan, ok? Is that what you're looking to hear? I don't know why we come out here. I don't know why we'd rather be falling into the sun in a plastic bag rather than safe and sound somewhere we can just walk around and breathe as much as we like, ok?

SHAN

I'm not trying to upset you!

TRUE

It's fine. It's just with everything that's happening ... do you think now's really the time for--

SHAN

What else are we supposed to do?

TRUE

I could be trying to figure out how to rescue you--

SHAN

You can't. We both know that. You aren't going to get propulsion back online any time soon, and I'm figuring the net and arm are probably offline permanently.

And I'm ...

So what better time than to think about the motivations that got us here, evolutionarily speaking.

How are things looking over there?

TRUE

About the same. Lights keep flickering, but they aren't staying. I'm trying to redirect to the net arm, but it doesn't want to start working--

SHAN

It's ok. Really. Worry about life support. Not the engines or the net.

TRUE

But if I can get one of them working we can--

SHAN

Already too far away for that to work. Even if you get partial

power back, there's no way you'll have enough to get closer, and then back out of the gravity well. There isn't anything either of us can do. So talk to me.

At least make it a little easier, ok?

TRUE

Fine.

What are your readings?

SHAN

O2 80%. Life support's fine. Temperature's climbing a little bit, but I'm ok.

TRUE

Ok.

Shan ...

SHAN

You know what I think? I think we'd rather be brave. Humans. On the whole, I mean. I think we'd rather prove to ourselves we'll do it, throw ourselves at impossible odds, than admit we don't have the courage to do it.

Even ... especially when the "it" could get us killed. We'd rather get killed. But get killed doing something brave.

I think we're out here, because someone looked up at the sky and thought "That scares me." And knew they had to confront it.

TRUE

Maybe that's true for Terrans. But not Belters.

SHAN

What do you mean?

TRUE

Sure, maybe people who were born with their feet on actual dirt are afraid of the black. But us? We were *born* here. Space ... it's in our blood. We're not afraid of it.

We treat the black with respect. But not fear. That's a dirtsider thing.

SHAN

Yeah that makes sense--

Alarm goes off

Pause

TRUE

Shan? What happened? You ok?

SHAN

(breathing fast)

Radiation spike. Suit's still filtering, not much leaked through.

TRUE

How much?

SHAN

Not much.

TRUE

How. Much.

SHAN

Around 1500 microsieveverts.

TRUE

Ok.

Pause

That's not great.

SHAN

No.

Pause

TRUE

You saved my life once. On Io. Did you know that?

SHAN

Once?

TRUE

(mock defensive)

What do you mean once? How many times do you *think* you've saved my life?

SHAN

... a few.

TRUE

What?!

SHAN

Okay-- the thing on Ceres. The time with that ex of yours at Nowhere Station. The pissed off Taurus Bulls on ... that one moon. New New Vegas, Vesta, with Leer on Jupiter--

TRUE

Ok. Fine. Forget it then.

SHAN

But what about Io?

TRUE

I'm sure you can reflect on all those *other* times you swooped in.

SHAN

Come on.



Come onnnnnn.

True. Come on.

TRUE

You labeled all our gas cans.

SHAN

What?

TRUE

You labeled all our canned air.  
For the exo suits. And the ship.

SHAN

Sure, I always do. It's just good  
practice. You label them too.

TRUE

I don't *color code* them.

SHAN

(slightly defensive)

I just think it's easier! You can  
find what you want just by looking  
at them.

TRUE

Exactly.

SHAN

Still, I don't see what this has  
to do with me saving your life on  
Io.

TRUE

Remember the hull puncture? While  
we were landing?

SHAN

Ohhhh. Yeah. That. That was  
exciting.

TRUE

Exciting?!

I was in a hurry to get my suit on. Just grabbed the canister nearest to me and was going to plug it in, because of course it was O2, it was right next to the suits. But when I start to connect it, there's this neon pink label.

SHAN

Pink label. That's gonna be CO2, not O2.

Oh. Shit.

TRUE

Yeah.

So. You saved my life.

SHAN

Again.

TRUE

(affectionate)

Asshole.

Pause

SHAN

What do you think's happening out there?

TRUE

Beltward?

SHAN

Yeah.

TRUE

It can't be good. Communications blackouts, for sure. Ship's nav systems offline. The EMP alone ...

Based on what hit us, it had to have gone probably all the way to Jupiter. With these flares or

whatever they are, it's our size  
and a whole lot of pure dumb luck  
we didn't get melted into a lump  
of slag.

The Lunar bubbles ... there's no  
way they could avoid getting  
straight-up slapped with it, heat  
and radiation both.

SHAN

What about Terra? How would it  
have affected Earth?

TRUE

They're probably fine. Natural  
atmosphere-- probably could filter  
the worst of it. I mean, there's  
no way they've got comms either,  
but like always, Terra gets a  
pass.

I don't even want to think about  
what probably happened to the  
orbitals, though.

Pause

Oh, shit. Shan. Your family.

SHAN

Yeah.

TRUE

I'm probably being way too  
dramatic. I mean, yeah, they're  
going to lose comms and stuff, but  
look at us, we didn't even lose  
atmo!

SHAN

But like you said, it was blind  
luck.

TRUE

Maybe they got lucky too! Or more likely, they're rich! The platform probably had radiation shielding up the ass! I'm sure they--

SHAN

Don't lie.

There's no point. It's not like I'm going to be around to see how, or if they got through. Anyway--

I don't like them, and they don't like me. My parents didn't care when I left, and I don't really think some system-wide disaster is going to make them start.

They haven't even commed me in a year.

TRUE

I'm sorry.

SHAN

Me too.

Hey, at the very least, they can't remind me of how disappointed they are in my rejection of our family name and business.

TRUE

There's that.

They're fuckheads. Your family.

SHAN

Yeah.

Why do you say it, though?

TRUE

You've never disappointed me.

SHAN

Thanks?

TRUE

No, that...You've just always.  
You're the most reliable partner  
I've ever had. You never take  
shortcuts. You do everything the  
right way, every time. You notice  
the bullshit things I don't think  
about--

SHAN

(sharply)

Thanks.

TRUE

That didn't sound right. What I  
meant is ... you don't overlook  
stuff. Or blow it off because  
it'll probably be fine. You don't  
blow anything off!

SHAN

I mean, there are some things I'd  
like to blow on.

TRUE

I'm trying to give you a  
compliment, asshole.

You're *good* at things, Shan. A lot  
of things. And you're great to  
work with and to be ... friends  
... with. I'm glad ...

Very long pause

Why did you come out here? I never  
asked.

SHAN

To space?

TRUE

Yeah. Off-Earth. You were set down  
there. Or, on your family's

orbital, I guess. Why the hell would you give that up?

SHAN

Because space scared me.

TRUE

What?

SHAN

It scared me. The black. The emptiness. I'd look out at it, and all I could think about was just drifting away. And going on forever.

This whole situation is kind of ironic, if you think about it.

Anyway, I came out here because I was afraid to, and didn't want to live a life with a fear hanging over my head like that.

Like I said, I think humans would rather be brave and dead. And I'm not an exception.

(degrading into static)  
What about you? Why are you out here? I mean here-here. I know you grew up on Hektor. But why out here? Why mudlark? Why not something more legitimate?

TRUE

Shan? Hey!

(tapping on comm)

Come in? Come in? I can't--

Ok. Got you.

TRUE

Reception faded for a second. You still there?

SHAN

Still here. Starting to get a bit warm, though.

TRUE

Shit.

SHAN

Not too bad. Suit reads just about 28 degrees. That's a nice summer day back home.

TRUE

God. Fuck. Fuck. Shan. We. There has to be something we ...

Maybe I can go exo. I'll double tether, and bring out a tow cable. My suit thrusters can probably get me most of the way to you. I can-- I don't know. I can rig a launcher for the cable. That should take it far enough for you to grab and then I--

SHAN

(voice degraded by static)

It wouldn't work twenty minutes ago. It's *really* not gonna work now. The explosion pushed me off the side of the ship too fast. You couldn't reach me before--

And who knows what's going on with Sol there. Maybe as soon as you're exo, he spits out something else, and bam, you're drifting too. Or something else blows up and whiplashes you back around, and you slam into the hull. If that happens, who's going to get paid for the cerium scrap we skimmed out of Mercury's orbit? If I'm

going to die, *someone* should get  
*something* out of it.

TRUE

You're not going to die!

SHAN

Don't think there are really any  
other options. I'm kind of in the  
middle of falling into the sun. At  
least it's happening at a nice,  
steady rate. Something to be said  
for the lack of inertia in 0-g.

TRUE

Oh god.

(emotional)

I'm sorry. This is all my fault.  
You wouldn't even have been out  
there if I had just been happy  
with what we'd ...

If I hadn't wanted to try another  
run. We could have kept the net  
set like it was. We didn't *need* to  
do a second pass. We have plenty  
of-- god. I'm so *stupid!* And  
greedy. I'm sorry. Fuck, I'm  
sorry.

SHAN

Hey, woah, hey. It's ok. It'll be  
ok. It's not your fault. You  
didn't *make* me do anything. We're  
partners, remember? You don't get  
to give me orders. I wanted to do  
another sweep just as bad as you  
did. So I guess we're both greedy.

TRUE

I should have gone out.

SHAN

I'm better at rigging and you know  
it. And neither of us had any idea  
that whatever this is was gonna



happen. Or that the compressor would rupture. This isn't anyone's fault.

(voice further degraded by static)

I mean, outside the laws of physics, which I'm pretty sure had something to do with whatever's happening inside the star--

Comm cuts out

TRUE

Shan!

Come on. Connect.

Comm cuts back on

SHAN

--and I'm *absolutely* sure is the reason I'm flying away from you and toward Sol.

TRUE

Ok.

What are your readings?

SHAN

CO2 60% of lethal and a nice round 30 degrees.

TRUE

Radiation?

SHAN

It's-- um one sec. Uh ... 10 millisieverts.

TRUE

(breath of relief)

Ok. Good. Your suit's holding--

*Milli?*

SHAN

If it makes you feel better, I'm going to die before I have a chance to get cancer.

Pause

Hey, True?

TRUE

Yeah?

SHAN

How come we never dated?

TRUE

What?!

SHAN

How come we never dated?

We've been flying together for five years.

TRUE

Five and half.

SHAN

Yeah. A long time. You're brilliant. And gorgeous. And independent. And ... I mean. You're just amazing.

Why didn't I ever ask you out?

TRUE

I ... uh. I mean...I...didn't think you...um. I didn't...I mean.

What?

SHAN

Why didn't I ask you out?

TRUE

I had no idea you thought about me  
... like that.

SHAN

Thought about? *Think* about.

TRUE

Since when?!

SHAN

Since that very first day in the  
Rabbit's Foot.

TRUE

Oh.

Well. That is. New information.

You turned me down! When I asked  
you to sleep with me!

SHAN

Yeah... it was. Difficult. But, I  
mean, I don't want to *sleep* with  
you. I wanted to *be* with you. Not  
just mess around, you know?

Pause

I shouldn't have said anything. It  
wasn't-- I mean, it isn't a  
problem! It's never been a  
problem! We've got a good thing  
here. As partners. Not *partners*. I  
wouldn't mess that up! And  
everyone knows the fastest way to  
break up a partnership is to start  
sharing a bunk when someone's got  
their feelings involved. Sure,  
you're clever, and strong, and  
beautiful and--

Anyway, you weren't single! First  
you were seeing that salvager.  
Tess. And then that girl from  
Ceres ...

TRUE

Elaine.

SHAN

Yeah, her. So even if it hadn't been a terrible idea, and even if you hadn't been totally uninterested, there never was time to--

TRUE

Who said I was uninterested?

SHAN

I'm sorry, what?

TRUE

You *asshole!*

SHAN

What??

TRUE

You have been attracted to me this whole damn time? For five and a half fucking years?

SHAN

... yes???

TRUE

Why in the name of the all the fucking seas of Europa, did you not *say something?*

SHAN

I-- I didn't think you felt ... oh. Ok. Well, shit.

TRUE

Fucking shit is right.

SHAN

(more out of breath)

Well, hell. Now I'm genuinely upset that I'm going to die.

TRUE

Shan?

SHAN

Yeah?

TRUE

How are you feeling?

SHAN

I'm ok.

TRUE

What are your readings?

SHAN

(slowly)

CO2 87% lethal limit. Temp 32.7.

Radiation's at about 50

millisieverts.

TRUE

Fuck.

SHAN

It's ok. It's really not that bad.

Once you get used to it.

TRUE

Is there anyone ... do you want to say anything to anyone? Should I, uh, should I tell your family what happened?

SHAN

No. They won't care. Wouldn't understand anyway.

(pause; as he speaks his voice degrades further into static)

They're fine with being afraid. It wouldn't matter to them, that I was brave enough to face it.

TRUE

Alright.

It matters to me.

That you were brave.

Shan?

Shan?!

Come on. Come on, please don't do  
this. Come in, Shan. Come in!  
Shan!

Static

Comm beeps; silence

You god damn asshole. Of course  
you got the last word.

I don't think you told me the  
truth, though. About why you came  
out here. You didn't come out here  
to confront your fears. To prove  
that you could do it. You came out  
here because we all seek out our  
own kind.

You were already one of us.

Scene fades out

Thank you for joining us for this  
episode of Breathing Space, Fading  
Frontier.

The first segment, On Rocky  
Ground, was written by James Big  
and edited by Erik Seguinte

Ariel "Ari" Attison was voiced by  
Vic Collins  
The Yukon C-COW was voiced by  
Bunny  
July Lamaire was voiced by  
Meredith McKee

York Ventura was voiced by Sean  
Gettys  
Rick Princip was voiced by M.  
German

The second segment, My Stars Will  
Never Leave Me, was written and  
directed by Lee Seguinte and  
edited by Erik Seguinte

Shan was voiced by JPG  
True was voiced by Mel Nichols

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](http://breathingspace.lawofnames.com).

Breathing Space, Fading Frontier  
is a Law of Names Production