

Round 2: The Key Difference between Wisdom and Intelligence

[Outline version of this segment AKA the Prologue: Think's lying in bed, still recovering from Round 1, when he gets a call from Feels. Answering it, Feels expresses concern for her twin over how he got injured. They get into a bit of an argument over Think's insistence to keep pushing forward without proper rest. Afterwards, Charley's TV shows up to inform Think that while he'd rather let the scientist rest, the show must go on and the next round was about to start. Opens a portal to the next world, which Think Enters]

Unlike the world Think had entered previously, this one started inside a ship. Advanced command panels littered the place, begging for an intelligent mind to try their hand at understanding the mechanisms. In the distance, a planet orbited, daring anyone to venture inside. Looking around, he quickly spotted a different face: A face he had seen a few times before, but never cared too much to talk to.

[Image here, Just Jac with some sci-fi BG]

It took a few moments for the logical scientist to remember the masked face's name: Jac, wasn't it? He was fairly certain that was the name. Nonetheless, Think turned his attention toward the more important item in the room. He sat at the control desk, The buttons were many, but not a match for Think, as with a few presses he managed to get past security. The screen above the panel flickered to life, the faint glow of blue adding a layer of atmosphere to the ship.

"Which log would you like to access?" The computer's voice asked. Think turned back to typing out a command. Nothing happened. He tried again, still the same result. By this point, Jac finally spoke up, having finished his own little investigation of the room.

"Computer!" He commanded, "Access the latest mission statement issued to the crew of this ship"

"Aye, sir," The computer responded, "Accessing mission statement 228-90"

A few seconds of static later, a face appeared on the screen. The face of someone with much higher authority than either of them, it seemed.

"Colonel, I imagine this memo will find itself in your hands at a rather...interesting time," The Individual began, "But this is important. One of our labs on Therreht went cold in communication, and we haven't been able to re-establish communication in three star dates. Your job is to head to that lab, see what's holding them up...and report back your findings. Good luck...Oh, and Congratulations: Heard you finally got-"

The audio became too garbled by that point for either of them to understand what was said. By this point, the ship landed nearby the lab, so there was no time to really pick apart what that person meant.

[Image here: the Lab]

The Lab looked almost as wild as the planet outside: Fauna reclaimed parts of the room; cracks dotted the place. Many of the advanced computers and technology had been rendered inoperable by neglect and damage. Most interestingly, scratch marks dragged across the walls, signaling something dangerous once roamed the halls.

Dr. Think turned his attention to the computers: Trying to turn some of them on, and figuring his way around the flimsy security that guarded their data. Jac, meanwhile, ran his hand over the scratch marks, inspecting the residue. It was dark red in color, dry yet slimy: Possibly blood that had been spilled a long while ago. Jac wiped the residue off his hand using his coat, and turned his attention back to Dr. Think.

“Any luck on prying info out of those computers, Doc?” Jac asked.

“Finally, someone remembers my doctorate,” Think mumbled, looking up from the computer screen.

“Anyways, through thorough research using the tools we have at the moment, something got in here that shouldn’t have even been here.” He added.

“Yeah, no kidding,” Jac commented, “Given the place’s age, I’d say this was a while ago, too,”

“Lines up with what that admiral said,” Think noted, “The communication between the crew and the lab went dead three star dates ago...possibly longer, depending on when communication between the two parties last took place.” He stood up, pushing the chair back underneath the desk one of the functioning computers sat upon.

“Regardless,” He began, “aside from an admin access password and some video logs, my research has been fruitless. I’ll need to search some other computer for additional information.” Jac nodded, leaving almost immediately. Think tailed behind, trying to keep up with the diplomat’s pace. As they left, an old android scanned them both. Afterwards, a simple message appeared on its face

[Image here: OR-608]

“Foreign Materials...detected.”

“Still no sign of the crew...” Jac said.

“Could mean they’re still alive, if a bit traumatized...” Think responded, “or it could mean whatever got to them left no trace of their existence behind.”

“I wouldn’t be shocked if it was the latter,” Jac said, “Happens far more often than the former, I’m afraid” From there, the two quietly navigated the lab, looking for anything of interest. They soon came across a large set of doors, a keypad sitting to the right of the doors. Think punched in the admin code, opening the doors. He walked into the room...

And froze. He couldn't help but stare at the thing he saw in the middle of the room. Following close behind, Jac notices the sudden change in the doctor's behavior. He could even see the man's eyes, surprisingly.

"wha...what?" Think asked, taken aback by the sight, "How did this place..."

[Image here, it's a giant machine that looks like an arch.]

"Know about this?"

Jac's attention turned towards the large machine in the center of the room. While he had no emotional connection to the thing, it became apparent to him that Think had a close connection to it: perhaps, it pertained to a past he never dealt with properly. Although, if this room had something tied to the doctor's past, who's to say it excluded Jac? Searching around, he quickly found the TVS's own little gift of memory for him.

A work bench, riddled with broken masks and basic prototypes of what would become the staple of Theran society: The Protomask. He couldn't help but feel a bit uneasy over it. He was asking the same question Think was asking.

"I'm not entirely sure myself, but knowing this place, the TVS," Jac said, "This is just to get an emotional reaction out of us: Makes for good television, after all."

"Well, to some degree I'll concur that it achieved what it set out to accomplish," Think said, the initial shock having run its course, "Showing elements of our past that this place, hypothetically speaking, should not know about is quite shocking." Turning their attention away from the items from their past, the duo noticed a computer, already on. Approaching it, it simply read "Input Command." Jac took the honors of typing out the command: "Retrieve Latest files". It asked for the admin code, which Think input...

Only for a light to suddenly shine from the camera, scanning the both of them. Alarm bells were ringing in Jac's head: He had a bad feeling about all of this. A prompt showed on screen: Order 608

"Warning!" The computer's voice chimed, "Foreign Materials detected! An Escort unit has been pinged to this location for assistance." Not even a few seconds later, loud metal footsteps echoed closer.

"Please do not resist..." The voice continued, "It will only make your ends much more unpleasant."

The mangled claw of a killing machine thrust forward, hitting the computer but missing the two contestants. Think hit the eject button, and snatched a floppy disk it spat out in response, before the two of them booked it, the android close behind them.

It was hard to tell how long they had been running. Try as they may, the android was hard to lose: It almost seemed like it could predict where they'd turn. But the worst was how Doc was holding up: He was feeling dizzy, fighting his own exhaustion trying to escape. He couldn't afford to run much longer,

less he wanted to pass out and give the android a free kill. Noticing a door, he took his chances and ducked into the room, closing the door and barricading it to prevent an immediate attack. Sure, he was leaving Jac to deal with the threat on his own, but this was a competition: One of them had to win. If Jac bit it to the android, so be it: That'd just give Think an easy win.

Once Jac reached the entrance room, he turned around. One thing was certain: This thing was persistent. And...where did the scientist go? He didn't really give that question much thought: he had a bigger, much more dangerous issue at hand. Nervously, he reached for his gun. It wasn't ideal to use this thing, but he also liked living a lot more. Before it could swing on him, he fired, scrambling its program with the electricity and causing it to fall to the ground. The coils unlatched and slowly wound back up into the gun.

This...better be the only time I have to pull this thing out," Jac said, putting the gun away. With the threat dealt with, he stepped over the broken android and retraced his steps down the halls of the lab. He thought he saw a room of interest in the chase, and he wanted to double check to see if it was actually there or if his sight being bad tricked him into thinking something was there that actually wasn't.

As for the doctor? Jac didn't really care now. Dr. Think seemed capable; he could handle it himself. And if not? Well, then it was an easy victory for the diplomat...

With the room locked down, Think quickly checked out the door's window. The android didn't seem to care about him, sticking to chasing Jac. Good: It gave Think enough downtime to catch his breath, wait for the dizziness to fade, and build himself a weapon. He glanced around the room: There were some discarded prototypes of guns here, alongside brooms, a mop, and... a desk, with a computer on it. Once the worst of the dizziness faded, He made his way to the computer and attempted to turn it on. Like many of the machines before it, nothing happened: But unlike the others, Think noticed, was it could easily be fixed: No fried motherboards or hard drives. Popping the side panel of the desktop tower, he set aside the disk and worked on fixing it.

While the scientist worked on the machine, another creature snuck into the room

[Image here: A Best Boy sneaking in]

Best boy stared at the man working on the computer, keys jangling quietly in its mouth. It left the vent it was hiding in, going for an item that caught its interest to steal, and possibly set in a different game world to mess with its contestants.

The floppy disk.

Once it reached the desk Think set it, it quickly dropped the keys, snatched the disk and ran right back through the vents it came from, making almost no sound in the process. By this time, Think finished repairing the computer and booted it up. He reached over for the disk, grabbing the keys instead. He only noticed once he heard the jangle. He could only stare at what was in his hands.

“Uhm...” Think said, “last time I checked, Floppy disks don’t suddenly become keys.”

He remembered hearing something about stolen keys before the round even fully started, but he figured that he’d have to locate the dog that stole them and chase it down. But this? It was almost insulting how the missing keys were basically handed to him. Sure, it stole the floppy disk in exchange, but that barely removed the sting of a hollow victory.

Eventually he just shrugged: Those Archive might be useful to him, so it was petty to get upset over gaining access to a critical location of research. He pocketed the keys, and turned once again to the computer. Instead of an input command, it simply listed a bunch of video logs, alongside a “Record new log” prompt. Doc had hardly any time to watch all of them, but it would help immensely to look at the latest one: After all, both Jac and Think were supposed to find out what happened to the lab. Any info he could find would give him an advantage. So, he selected the latest log listed: “Final Report – Report 204-51” The Video started to play: a woman, almost around the same age as Think himself and dawning almost the same shaped glasses as he did, began to speak.

“Entry log 204-51: The infection’s reached critical mass,” The log began, “It got Nick, it got Lolita...I don’t know the status of Richard, but I wouldn’t bet too high on him being alive now...All attempts to contain or destroy it have proven futile.”

As some of the log continued, Think noticed a lot of features that oddly matched him or Feels: It was grainy, but he swore she had almost the same skin complexion as both him and Feels: The eye color and hair color as well. But unlike either of them, her hair was long, tied back with a ponytail. He couldn’t help his intrigue: Was it coincidence? Or intentional?

“As the Leader of this project, it is my duty to ensure this project moves as smoothly as possible with as little casualties as possible. Or rather, it was...” She continued, “According to all life readings...I’m the only one left. But in my wake of failures, I may have one final chance to set things right. As of this recording, a kill order has been issued: Order 608. This will hopefully keep this blasted thing from escaping the lab and hurting anyone else. Of course, there isn’t a doubt in my mind that I won’t be spared in the androids’ rampage, nor would they differentiate between infected and normal. But it doesn’t matter: not anymore. What matters is making sure no one else suffers the fate that befell everyone here.” The woman sighed.

“To my loving parents: Sorry, your baby girl’s not going to be around to celebrate your birthdays anymore,” She added sorrowfully, “I just hope that-“

It suddenly went to static, infuriating the logical scientist.

“Oh, Come on!” He shouted, trying to fix the issue to no avail: The computer was on its last legs, and those legs gave out. It annoyed Think greatly: This place was tantalizing him, no doubt. It presented a face that looked almost like his and Feels’s combined, only to cut the video before she could say her name. He was starting to dislike this TVS: it was messing with him on several fronts. But, at the same time: It was motivation. Motivation to win, to keep playing, to keep entertaining the audience. Feeding crumbs and pieces to whoever competes, before giving the full course meal to the lucky son of a bitch

who won the gold prize. And Dr. Think was going to get that prize, find the answer to his question, find the truth...

One way or another.

He took one of the prototype guns hanging on the wall, gave it a quick tune up, filled it with a few bullets and unbarricaded the door, allowing him to leave the room once more, and find a transmitter to inform the admiral of the fate of the lab. A simple task, no doubt: All he had to do was locate the room it was kept in...

Some wandering down the halls later, Jac found it. As it turned out, his mind wasn't playing tricks on him: not this time at least. The room was labeled "Cryogenics". There was a simple glass door barring entry to the room, a smashed keypad to the left: yet, the door was left ever so slightly ajar. Jac pried it open the best he could, but he could only get it open enough to let one person through at a time.

[Image here, the cryogenics room]

This room had seen better days, that was certain: Smashed chambers everywhere, some blackish thing growing both on the ground near a body and on the table. A result of that Order-608, no doubt: and given what he had observed, it was likely to purge the plague that overtook the lab. A last desperate attempt to kill this thing.

Walking around, Jac noticed an oddity among the room: a chamber, left untouched. Looking closer, it wasn't even claimed by the bacterium from within. He could see someone inside, but it was too difficult to make out who this individual was. He did find a note on the side of the chamber, which simply read:

"WARNING: This chamber's automatic timer does NOT work! Do not use this until we get a maintenance guy to fix this! -DR. COLIVER"

"Yeah...and someone at this lab didn't read that note, it seems," Jac said, looking at the chamber again. Turning the knob on the chamber's automatic timer to zero, the chamber suddenly opened, causing its occupant to fall on his face with a THUD!

"Owww..." The occupant said, standing up while rubbing his forehead, "Next time you open it, warn me next time, Ji-su!" Jac watched carefully for any signs of infection on the young man: Maybe some black slime on his body, or coughing up said slime. But from this scientist's face, messy as it was alongside his short curly hair, orange framed glasses and disorganized lab coat, nothing initially stuck out to him as outside the norm. the man looked at Jac, noticing almost immediately his mistake.

"You-You're not Ji-su," he said, embarrassed over the mistake.

"Name's Jac," Jac said, "and you are...?"

“Oliver...” Oliver replied, “Oliver Rivers.” He tried standing up, but fell back on his knees. Jac extended a hand, which Oliver took to help stand back up fully.

“Thanks, man,” Oliver said, “The one downside of Cryosleep: it takes a while for your strength to return to you.”

“Don’t mention it,” Jac replied, “Although... You were aware that the chamber you slept in was defective, right?” He held out the note for Oliver to read.

“That... wasn’t there when I stepped inside...” Oliver said. Fear crept onto his face once he realized he had no idea how long he’d been inside the chamber: but judging by the place’s condition, it had to be a while.

“Oh god,” Oliver stammered, “did the crew forget to wake me up before leaving?? Was I left behind in this lab???”

“The Crew’s dead, Oliver,” Jac explained coldly. Oliver looked at Jac in disbelief.

“... You’re joking,” He said, “If this is some elaborate prank, I’m not laughing: I know my crewmates, there’s no way they-“

“Does that look like an elaborate prank to you?” Jac asked, gesturing to the corpse on the ground. Oliver staggered away from the corpse, nausea overwhelming him. Jac couldn’t help but feel bad for the guy: He had just woken up from cryosleep, and a dead crew member, head and shoulders overcome with bacterium was the first thing he got to see. Suddenly Oliver ran, escaping through the slightly opened door.

“Wait!” Jac shouted, tailing behind. While Oliver managed to slip through easily, it took a second for Jac to get through, as his coat got caught on the frame. Heading down the hall, he eventually found Oliver. He was sitting in the fetal position, quietly sobbing while muttering something under his breath. While Jac couldn’t hear what Oliver was saying, he knew what he was feeling. Jac simply walked up to Oliver and sat down next to him.

“I understand how hard this must be for you,” Jac said, “Survivor’s guilt is a nasty thing, I tell ya” Oliver looked towards Jac, his face as readable as a children’s book.

“How would you even know???” Oliver asked, trying and failing to regain composure, “How the hell would you even know what I’m dealing with right now is ‘Survivor’s Guilt’, as you put it??” Jac looked at Oliver.

“Many worlds I’ve visited, been the representative of Thera for,” Jac began, “Sadly fell to ruin by the time I got there. Be it war, pestilence, or even famine: all the same, they end up dying out. The hardest thing I’ve had to do was offer condolences to the last members of that race. I remember the looks on their faces: It’s the same one upon your face. That despair... that dread... that shame about being alive when it feels like they shouldn’t.” He sighed, sorting out his thoughts.

“Unfortunately, there’s not much you can do when you’re the last man standing,” He added, “But to live, in spite of everything. That’s the best way to honor those who fell while you managed to stand. Because their memory lives on through you” It wasn’t much, but it was the best Jac could come up with in offering comfort to a man who was still reeling from the shock of being alive when everyone else died.

“I...” Oliver began, trying to wipe away the tears that had not even a few minutes ago poured out of his eyes like waterfalls, “Thank you, Jac...I Think I needed that.”

“Was the least I could do, don’t mention it,” Jac replied. Both stood back up, Oliver adjusting his glasses and combing a hand through his hair.

“You came by here to check on the lab?” He asked, voice still shaky but doing better.

“That would be correct,” Jac replied, “And from the looks of things, I’d suggest we get you back to home base: We could both detail from there what happened to the lab.”

“I’m afraid the transport ships might be compromised,” Oliver commented, “But maybe, that machine still works...”

Heading down the hall, Think rehearsed in his head what message he’d send out to the admiral. It was simple enough: Major plague ripped through the lab and killed everyone, and a kill order was issued to prevent it from spreading outside of the lab. Now he just needed to find some way to record and send said message. While Think was lost in thought, he ran into the one person he hoped he wouldn’t have to deal with: His opponent.

“Huh,” Think commented “you survived.”

“Could say the same to you,” Jac said, “But I get the feeling the android wanted a challenge.” Doc grumbled: Jac being alive and well threw a wrench in his plans. Well, no plan ever works out 100% of the time: He’d have to simply change strategy.

“Anyways-“ Think began, before noticing Oliver by Jac’s side.

“...Who’s this?” He asked.

“Oliver Rivers,” Oliver replied, “the uhm...the sole survivor of this tragedy.” Dr. Think looked at him funny. This was in conflict with the info he already had: everyone in the lab died.

“And where exactly did you find this sole survivor?” Think asked, trying to pry some additional information to possibly explain this discrepancy.

“In the Cryo Room,” Jac replied, “He was in one of the cryo chambers...a faulty one, at that”

“A faulty chamber...” Think pondered. That was incredibly convenient: almost too convenient. Not to mention, The lady on the logs said that life readings showed she was the only one alive. Thinking more on it, he suddenly realized something. Think tightened his grip, and whipped out the gun, pointing it at Oliver. Oliver panicked, while Jac put himself between the two

“Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?!” Jac asked, taken aback by the sudden shift in behavior in the scientist

“Oliver is patient Zero, Jac,” Think informed him, “A puppet to this bacterium. He needs to die.” Jac looked back at Oliver.

“Hold on, doc,” Jac said, “How can you be so sure of your ‘Patient Zero’ Theory?”

“Have you not paid any attention to the environment around us?” Think asked, frustration growing, “The probability of someone still being alive without being infected is near zero. He cannot leave this lab, period.”

“You’re insane if you think this will help,” Jac replied, “I’m not going to let you kill someone on the possibility that you’re right on some theory.” Think stared, a little confused. This man was how old again? Surely, he’d know how much of a bad idea it was to assume the sole survivor wasn’t infected, right? He turned his gun towards Jac.

“...You’re Infected”

“That’s impossible, Doctor,” Jac said

“Belief does not translate into Reality, Jac,” Think said in turn, “You should know this”

“I am also aware of the fact that I’ve visited all sorts of worlds and planets: Dealt with all sorts of bacterium, parasites, viruses,” Jac pointed out, “my immune system’s simply far too strong.”

“And how are you so certain that your immune system will keep something like this plague out?” Think asked, not convinced, “We’re not playing by the rules of your world, Jac.”

“That doesn’t mean you get to dismiss what I just said, Doctor,” Jac said, “That’s a dangerous game to play, especially in a situation like this”

“Then best we resolve this situation before it gets out of hand...wouldn’t you agree?” Doc asked. Jac stared at Think.

Gods, this man is insane, Jac thought to himself. No, perhaps he was the one who was infected, and the plague was fucking with him. Neither of them knew what the symptoms of this plague was, which Jac had to concede since there wasn’t a way to disprove the theory of Oliver being infected.

“You’re right...” Jac replied, “But not in the way you’d want to be” Jac whipped out the gun before Think could pull the trigger, shooting the taser at Think. It shocks him, causing him to fall to the ground, the gun he was carrying dropping on the ground, breaking into pieces. He looks to Oliver [Image here: Think being shocked]

“Come on,” Jac said, “we best get out of here before he gets back up.” They raced off, taking advantage of the situation. Think gets up slowly, head hurting as we get an odd flashback. It’s the message room, he had just finished recording something: The door’s slammed open, a man shouting to him while sirens echo.

“Chalsey, we need to get out of here, NOW!” An unknown voice shouted.

Think shook his head, slightly confused yet intrigued. Chalsey? He had heard that name before: it was the detective’s name from the previous round. Was Ava Chalsey the name of his creator? Frankly this was the only memory he finally had that gave him a name to the person that made them.

“Hm...So Ava Chalsey was our name once” Think muttered, intrigued, “And she was here, in this exact same game show? ...What was she seeking here?” Using some of that memory, he bolts in the opposite direction...There was an admin panel somewhere, and he had said code...maybe he still had a chance to win this. No, he HAD to win this: This place had exactly what he was looking for. Be it by sheer luck of the draw or an intentional move on the TVS’s part, He now had the thread he needed to actively pursue winning...

Jac and Oliver raced down the hall, trying to reach the machine as quickly as possible.

“How long did you say it takes to get the portal up and running?!” Jac asked.

“Uh, not long, maybe 5 minutes, max?” Oliver replied

“Great, all we just need to do is- “Jac began, before getting cut off by a door suddenly closing in front of them. Oliver quickly went to the keypad, and tried scanning his card. It’s rejected.

“What?! Hold on- “Oliver said, trying again with his clearance card. It fails a few more times

“I’m locked out of the system,” Oliver said, defeated, “we’ll have to go another way!”

“Great, just what we needed! More inconveniences!” Jac shouted.

“You think that guy got up sooner than expected?” Oliver asked

“Possibly,” Jac replied, “but does that matter?! Regardless, we’re still ahead of him, so we possibly-” Another door slams. Frustration was growing in Jac, while anxiety was taking Oliver.

“That motherfucker...” Jac growled.

“He’s trying to keep us away from the portal,” Oliver said

“That isn’t his only plan, Oliver,” Jac noted, looking behind them to see another door close behind them.

“He’s stalling for time.”

Meanwhile in the admin security room, Think recorded a quick message for the Admiral.

“Admiral, this is Dr. Think,” Doc began, “Laboratory was eviscerated by a currently unknown plague; the leader of the project issued a kill order to prevent it from spreading. Do not attempt a rescue, I repeat, do not attempt a rescue, there is no one left!” Once he finished, he sent the audio to the ship, but it’s taking time. He looked back at the security cameras: He had stalled a decent amount as is, but he’d need way more time to make sure the message got through first.

Meanwhile Jac and Oliver looked around the room they were trapped in, no thanks to a doctor’s desperate actions, trying to find some way out.

“There!” Oliver said, pointing to the vents, “Admin controls can’t seal these” Jac pops the vent cover off, and both enter the vents. Think observed their movement on the cameras: crap, on this front he was outsmarted. He turned to the file progress: 15%. Things weren’t looking good for him. He decided to try one last thing: Pinging the androids to the Portal room. Hopefully those could put enough stress on the two to make them mess up. Hitting a few buttons and entering the admin code, he directed the last couple of operational androids to the room.

Jac and Oliver finally reached the portal room, pushing the vent cover out of the way and climbing out. Oliver started keying some things into the panel.

“So uh, where are we going?” Oliver asked, turning back towards Jac.

“Should be the main ship,” Jac replied “You know what that is?”

“I think so? It’s been a while since I visited it” Oliver said, “Cover me!”

Jac turned around in time to see the doors open and a couple androids make their way inside. He pulls out his gun once more and shoots one, causing it to fall to the ground. The other one proved to be much more of a hassle to deal with: His gun needed time to recharge, but it was fast. He narrowly dodged its attack, the claws cutting his jacket. Jac in response tripped it, rendering it unable to get up due to its weight

Doc growled. He was running out of options. He checked the progress once more: 64%. It was possible, but he needed a much better signal than this. He quickly moved the antenna around a few times. It was coming down to the wire. As Oliver typed in the coordinates, Think's message slowly sent. Finally, the portal whirred to life.

"It's open!" Oliver shouted.

Oliver entered first, Jac following close behind. Once both made it through, the machine and the power in the entire facility shuddered, before going dead, leaving Doc in the dark.

"SHIT!! Of all times, why now?!" Think Shouted, "Son of a..."

He looked over at the message display: dead. That...wasn't good. He looks over at the admin table. He can't help but stare, as the portal flickered out.

"I...lost." Think said to himself, "In the game of wits and intelligence, I was in the end left behind. Right at the end as well. This TVS has some sick sense of humor..."

He shook his head. There wasn't any time for dilly-dallying. Best he gets into a ship and accept his defeat. It was time to fly back home.

- "Sorry, Feels..." Think said, exiting the lab and getting on the ship both he and Jac entered the lab in, "Guess we're not getting an answer to that question anytime soon. Although... We have some form of a lead now: Chalsey. Our Creator's name was Chalsey. Maybe, with that information on hand, we can begin to unravel the mystery that is our existence. Maybe..."

He flew the ship back to the main ship, letting out a sigh of defeat. He parked the ship right inside the docking area, stepping out. As he entered the ship itself...

Rather than return to his home like he expected, Dr. Think found himself back on the main stage of Television Space.

"Congrats on your victory, Dr. Think!" Charley exclaimed, followed by the sounds of an audience cheering.

"Is this some kind of joke?" Dr. Think asked, confused about the whole ordeal.

"What do you mean?" Charley asked in turn, cocking his head to the side.

"You know bloody well what I mean," Think replied, confusion turning into annoyance, "The power went out before the signal finished sending, and my opponent made it through the portal first. You know as well as I do that does not result in my victory"

“Welllll...” Charley began, “you see, Dr. Think, it was indeed neck and neck by the end, But if you look closer...”

Charley pulled out a remote and paused the floating TV at the ending of the round. He flicked it a few frames forward...and it showed that Think’s message hit “100%” a few frames before Jac’s foot even touched the portal.

“Your message finished sending first,” Charley concluded, “Pretty close call, I’d say! Consider yourself lucky.”

“That is completely arbitrary, Charley,” Think retorted, “Illogical, even. Most of your viewers would call me a cheater for what would no doubt be perceived as a victory by my opponent.”

“Oh, fret not! We’ll show those frames in broadcast, so everyone will see you clearly won!” Charley said, “...Don’t wanna make that mistake again.”

“‘That Mistake’?” Think asked, intrigued by the mention of a ‘mistake’. Charley stared at him, unresponsive. A slight glitch occurred, his chromatic suit splitting between two different colors for a few seconds, before Charley suddenly returned to his normal cheery self.

“ANYWAYS,” Charley said, trying to change the subject, “We lost the keys a while ago: Best boy, the little rascal, stole them. Did you happen to find them?”

Think considered his options. He could reveal that he did find them, maybe get a prize for it in the form of complete and total access to the Archives...But, at the same token: some of the contestants were no doubt watching the round between himself and Jac. Even with the photo finish shown, there was still the possibility of someone believing he cheated. That he had bribed the host behind everyone’s back, or simply rigged the match to go in his favor no matter how badly he screwed up. So, he already was playing with fire here. That fire could easily turn into an inferno if anyone knew he had access to the Archives. More or less, doing so would paint a target on his back. Lying could also get him into trouble, but who was more dangerous? Ulysses or the other contestants?

“Unfortunately not,” Think replied, “Seems wherever this ‘Best Boy’ took them, it was not in our game world. My apologies.”

“Oh...” Charley said, bummed out, “Well, Ulysses has some shapeshifting capabilities, so I’m sure he could maybe find a solution to the problem. In the meantime, why not head down to the lounge, enjoy some down time? You earned it, after all.”

END OF ROUND 2