

JUNO STEEL AND THE MONSTER'S REFLECTION (PART ONE)

Trigger Warnings

SOPHIE:

Hi Travelers! Co-creator Sophie Kaner here. We wanted to remind you at the start of this particularly intense three-part story that trigger warnings can be found at the bottom of the episode description wherever you're listening to this podcast. If triggers are a concern for you, we recommend that you check. This story deals with some pretty heavy themes but we're proud of it.

SOUND: RAINFALL THROUGH A WINDOW. A TROLLEY IN MOTION-- THE SQUEAK OF THE BRAKES. MECHANICAL CLANKING.

CONDUCTOR:

Ah, good evening Traveler! And welcome to The Penumbra.
Take your seat, please, take your seat.

MUSIC: STARTS.

The junction lies just ahead, Traveler. If you'll allow me
just a moment --

SOUND: TROLLEY WHISTLE.

Pay no mind to our train's backwards motion, dear Traveler.
We are now passing through decades of the past.

SOUND: BRAKES SCREECHING.

Our next stop: Juno Steel and the Monster's Reflection.

SOUND: RAINFALL FADES OUT.

MUSIC: ENDS.

MUSIC: STARTS.

SOUND: BEEPING, IN THE DISTANCE. CELLAR DOOR OPENING, CLOSE BY.
BEEPING GROWS LOUDER. SANDSTORM ROARING.

JUNO:

(HACKING AND COUGHING)

JACKET:

Inside. Quickly.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSING.

JUNO:

Aren't you supposed to be saving my life, theoretically?
Think I've got more sandstorm in my lungs than air.

JACKET:

A sandstorm is mostly air, Juno--

JUNO:

Yeah, yeah, I know. This place have lights, or are we doing
this blindfolded?

JACKET:

I will activate the generator.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

JUNO:

Some service this doctor's got. Makes you wander out into
the middle of the desert, leaves all the lights off...
Where the hell is she, anyway? Hello? Doc? Paging Doctor
Hanataba!

SOUND: GENERATOR CLICKS. LIGHTS BUZZ ON.

Jeez, that's bright!

JACKET:

You have many complaints, and I do not know how to satisfy
them all.

JUNO:

At least we have that in common.
(A COUGHING FIT)
Where the hell is she?

JACKET:

She is not here.

JUNO:

I can see that--

JACKET:

And I have no evidence that she exists.

JUNO:

You what?

JACKET:

And I have no evidence that she--

JUNO:

Yeah, I heard you the first time. I'm sorry, you waited until payday to tell me that the pay doesn't exist?

JACKET:

We will be performing the procedure ourselves. These are your directions.

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLING.

JUNO:

This dinky little piece of paper? That's all we need? "Step one: treat yourself to some Jovian tea from the cabinet above the sink, and have a seat in the waiting room." What the hell?

JACKET:

Would you like to make the tea, or should I?

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS. WATER BOILING.

JUNO:

(GRUNT)

"Step two: ensure your partner has read their list start to finish. Communication is key to a swift recovery."

JACKET:

That is complete.

JUNO:

"Note: it is recommended that you enjoy the tea with two sugars and long, calm breaths between each sip." Are you kidding me, Big Guy? What is this, a recipe?

JACKET:

Would you like to see my directions?

JUNO:

If it's not too much trouble, I'd kind of like to know what's gonna happen to me before you rip my eye out!

JACKET:

Then... here!

SOUND: MASSIVE STACK OF PAPERS RUSTLING AS THEY'RE DROPPED ONTO THE TABLE.

JUNO:

Y'know, on second thought, I think I'll stick with my directions.

JACKET:

That would be best.

SOUND: WATER BOILING. DING!

I have done this before. You have no cause for concern, other than the great danger your life is in.

JUNO:

Good, good, glad that's everything, then.

JACKET:

It isn't. There are, in fact, many other things that could go wrong, but Buddy has told me that patients often find the truth unsettling--

JUNO:

She seems pretty smart. Let's listen to her, huh? Starting now.

JACKET:

All right.

SOUND: DRINK POURING. CLINK OF A GLASS.

Your tea.

JUNO:

I'd really rather just get this over with.

JACKET:

First we will have some light conversation and you will drink your tea.

JUNO:

Listen, I really don't want to wait--

JACKET:

We will follow the directions.

JUNO:

Fine. Let's chat.

JACKET:

Let's.

JUNO:

So how do you know this place, anyway? Out in the middle of nowhere, door hidden underneath a foot of sand... and if you've read that manual you must've been here before.

JACKET:

You are not the first person I've brought to Hanataba's.

JUNO:

So, what, are you a doctor?

JACKET:

No. I am a driver.

JUNO:

Then how--

JACKET:

Hanataba's machine will perform the actual surgery. My role is less medical and more like driving a car into your head.

JUNO:

But less dangerous than the car. Right...? Uh... right? Great. A doctor that doesn't show, might not even exist, builds deathtraps for amateur surgery...what the hell is "Hanataba," anyway?

JACKET:

I had a friend with a device like yours -- a leg, not an eye. No doctor would help him. Then he came to the Cerberus Province and was told to "Ask for Hanataba." And so I brought him here. With tech growing at the rate it has, accepted medical cures for the problems humans cause can no longer keep up. Yet I have been told there are clinics like this across the galaxy for many man-made ailments. All of them, free of charge. All of them built, supposedly, by "Hanataba."

JUNO:

Yeah, okay, she doesn't exist.

JACKET:

On this we do not agree.

JUNO:

What? But you just said--

JACKET:

I said that I had no evidence that she exists. But I choose to believe it.

JUNO:

Don't be a moron. Nobody's that generous.

JACKET:

I believe that she is.

JUNO:

And "Hanataba..." that's a joke. You get that, right? A bad one, but still. That's an old Earth language. I had to learn it for a museum con a few years back. It means "bouquet of flowers" -- as in, "if you have some deadly illness that's going to kill you, ask for a bouquet of flowers." For my funeral. Cuz I'm gonna die.

JACKET:

That is one interpretation.

JUNO:

It's the only interpretation! Those are the facts!

JACKET:

I find that the way I think of the world often affects how

it really is.

JUNO:

Oh, whatever. So you think if you imagine this Hanataba-saint-doctor she'll just poof into existence?

JACKET:

No. But if I believe there is a Hanataba in the galaxy, it affects how I act. And if my actions affect the galaxy, then that which affects my actions affects the galaxy. Juno, I recommend you believe that you will survive this. For yourself.

JUNO:

That was pretty smart, actually.

JACKET:

That was step five.

JUNO:

What? "Step five: take a deep breath and believe that you will survive this." Huh.

JACKET:

Please drink your tea.

JUNO:

Listen, these are good instructions and everything, but I'm just really not into tea--

JACKET:

No. You must drink your tea because it is a powerful sedative, and without it this operation will be more painful than you can imagine.

JUNO:

Yeah okay that's a good reason.

SOUND: SIPPING TEA.

(PAINED NOISE)

JACKET:

Hm?

SOUND: ELECTRONIC SCREECH.

THEIA:

CAUTION: This course of action is dangerous, unnecessary,
and cruel. Would you like me to vomit that tea for you?

JUNO:

No, I...

SOUND: ELECTRONIC SCREECH. ALARM BLARING.

(ANOTHER PAINED NOISE)

THEIA:

You are nothing without the Theia Spectrum.

JACKET:

It is your eye.

JUNO:

Shut up! Both of you!

THEIA:

What Good will you do, blinded and helpless?

JUNO:

(GROANING IN PAIN)

JACKET:

Juno, I am going to give you a medical capsule. You must
take it immediately, no matter how it tastes. Understood?

JUNO:

Uh-huh.

THEIA:

You will never shoot again. It was the one thing you were
good for. Little monster.

JACKET:

Here.

JUNO:

(GAGGING)

God damn it, what is that? It burns, it tastes

like... like...

THEIA:

Poison poison poison trust no one doing Good that's what you're for activate and...

JACKET:

Take the pill!

THEIA:

...escape is here User "Little Monster"...

SOUND: JACKET AND JUNO GRUNTING -- A STRUGGLE.

JACKET:

Swallow it, Juno! Quickly!

SOUND: JUNO SWALLOWING.

JUNO:

(COUGHING)

THEIA:

...do not give away give away give away our life...

JACKET:

How do you feel?

JUNO:

(COUGHING)

Sugar.

JACKET:

I do not know this emotion.

JUNO:

The pill... it was just sugar, wasn't it?

JACKET:

And a finely-tuned electromagnetic pulse. The Theia should be quiet, now... for a moment.

JUNO:

It tasted like... like...

JACKET:
Like I was trying to kill you.

JUNO:
Yeah, that.

JACKET:
That follows. But it is not you we are trying to kill,
Juno. Remember that.

JUNO:
So I... guess that means we're gonna start the operation
soon... Do I get to know what you're gonna do to me?

JACKET:
Do you want to?

JUNO:
No. But I want to die-not-knowing even less.

JACKET:
If you insist.

SOUND: FLIPPING THROUGH PAGES.

Cybernetics like the Theia Spectrum operate like certain
weeds: they grow into the roots of their hosts until the
two are nearly inseparable, then feed off what they make.

JUNO:
So what, like, I'm the root?

JACKET:
You are the tree. Your brain is the root. Metaphorically.

JUNO:
Not a bad metaphor, for a giant, talking block of stone.

JACKET:
I did not get it from a stone. I constructed it after
giving this description several times.

JUNO:
Sure. My mistake. You were saying about the Theia?

JACKET:

The path such cybernetics take when growing into the brain is never the same twice. My friend reported hallucinations of smell: an orange grove, dried lilies, the fogged breath of the Plutonian Yak. Have you experienced such things?

JUNO:

Nothing like that. But... I've been hearing things, I guess. And having weird dreams about...

JACKET:

About?

JUNO:

Things I'd rather not remember, okay?

JACKET:

Memory. Hm. Once you fall asleep I will bring you into the next room and connect you to Hanataba's machine. There I will pilot biodegradable nanomachines into your brain to remove the Theia entirely. The nanomachines' firing will cause some hallucinations. Then it will be finished.

JUNO:

So, what? I just sit back and enjoy the show while you do all the work?

JACKET:

Would you like the answer I have evidence for, or the answer I think is true?

JUNO:

I'll take whatever you've got, honestly.

JACKET:

There is no scientific reason that your actions should affect the process.

JUNO:

But?

JACKET:

I have brought several people to this place now, Juno. All of the ones who survived described their hallucinations as

a story. A task that they succeeded in.

JUNO:

So you think whatever that is, I have to succeed to survive it.

JACKET:

That is what I choose to believe.

JUNO:

But... come on. How do you know everyone doesn't have some dream about slaying a dragon, or whatever? It's not like the ones that died could tell you.

MUSIC: STARTS.

JACKET:

My friend with the cybernetic leg survived his operation. And he described to me his hallucinations -- a nightmare in which his childhood farm was ablaze, and he failed to save it. He spoke of it at length: the cries of the yaks as they burned, the sweet orange-ashes in the air.

JUNO:

But he survived. You just said--

JACKET:

He survived the operation. Three days later he died in his sleep. He was a good man. I choose to believe he had some control over his fate because it reassures me. As does telling you his story.

JUNO:

I... think I get what you mean...

JACKET:

Is something the matter?

JUNO:

Just dizzy. The tea must be kicking in.

JACKET:

It is about that time, yes. Are you ready, Juno?

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I didn't know how to answer the big guy's question. I didn't think I had a choice. All I wanted was to run away, leave the past far behind me, but I knew I couldn't do it dead and I couldn't do it with this anchor to Ramses O'Flaherty in me... My name's Juno Steel. I've been a Private Eye, a criminal conspirator, a cop, a punk, and who knows how many other things. And I don't know what the hell I'm gonna be next, but... God, I wanna know. I have to.

JACKET:

Juno?

JUNO:

(DISTANT, DISTORTED)

Ready.

JACKET:

(DISTANT, DISTORTED)

Good. I am going to bring you to the device, now. And remember: you will survive this. You will...

SOUND: ALL NOISES FADE.

MUSIC: ENDS.

SOUND: A GRANDFATHER CLOCK TICKING AWAY.

JUNO:

(PAINED NOISES)

SOUND: SHEETS RUSTLING.

Big guy? Is it over, or... Oh no.

SOUND: THE RADIO BUZZING AND.

(GASP)

MUSIC: STARTS.

Get it together, Steel. Got to calm down.

SOUND: THE RADIO BZZORTS AGAIN.

The facts, the facts. This is my old bedroom, and that's Ma's old radio, and that song is what Ma was listening to when she... But... this isn't even the right bedroom. This

isn't Oldtown, it's from before that, it's...

SOUND: THE SOUNDS WARPING AROUND HIM.

(SCARED YELL)

SOUND: FADE BACK IN, THIS TIME THE MUSIC FAINTER AND FURTHER AWAY. BIRDS CHIRPING.

JUNO:

(HYPERVENTILATING)

SARAH:

(DISTANT, DISTORTED)

You took your sweet time getting here. What's the matter?
Had something better to do?

JUNO:

No. No way, Steel. Got to get out of here, right back--

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

My legs! I can't stop walking!

SOUND: DOOR OPENING.

JUNO (YOUNG):

(FAINT, ECHOING)

Where is he?

JUNO:

Where is he?

SARAH:

(FAINT, ECHOING)

It's been months since you've seen old Ma, and I don't even
get a hello?

JUNO (YOUNG):

(FAINT, ECHOING)

Tell me where--

JUNO:

Tell me where...

SARAH:

(FAINT, ECHOING)

So you can do what, exactly? Think for a second. You never. Think. Or if you can't manage that, why don't you just sit down and shut up. You talk too much. It's my turn, little monster.

JUNO:

No, no, no, no, no...

SARAH:

You think you've got it all figured out now, don't you? Fancy badge, fancy gun - like a uniform's gonna cage what's in you. What's in both of us. So today I'm giving you a gift. A reality check. Complete the transformation, "It's alive!" and it wishes it was dead. Just like you gave me.

JUNO AND YOUNG JUNO:

What the hell are you--

SARAH:

Because having any control over your life, that's always like paddling upstream, and for people like you, like me, those waters are choppy. But you try. You row 'til your arms wanna fall off and nobody cares, but you try, and some days you even row harder than the current. Gain a few feet. Nothing you won't lose tomorrow, but you're proud of it anyway. And then... something happens. Your idiot kid takes your oar from your tired, tired hands and he smashes it.

(BITTER LAUGH)

Then you've got nothing.

JUNO AND YOUNG JUNO:

Ben? Benten, are you in there?

SARAH:

You did it in one day. One choice. When you let him in, when you let the hero rob us blind without taking a thing.

JUNO AND YOUNG JUNO:

Benten!

SARAH:

Why are you shouting?

YOUNG JUNO:

Give me the key.

JUNO:

Don't, don't...

SARAH:

Why? You know what's in there. I smashed your oar like you smashed mine, so flail all you want, cuz it's not gonna make a difference!

JUNO AND YOUNG JUNO:

Why?

SARAH:

You know I didn't even mean to do it? I thought he was you. He stole my pills and when I told him off he said he didn't know what I meant, gave me attitude, like you, not him, like--

JUNO AND YOUNG JUNO:

Why!

SARAH:

...and for just a second I thought he was you, and I did the only thing I had left. I found the pills at the bottom of my bag a few minutes ago, by the way. Checked that bag a thousand times before that. Proves my point.

YOUNG JUNO:

Ben! Benten, open this door!

JUNO:

Stop, stop, stop, stop, stop...

SARAH:

I couldn't even do this right. No control left. Nothing.
(SNORT)

I've been thinking about it, though, and I think this is better. Much better. Go see him, then. And see how fast the current takes you.

SOUND: KEYS JINGLE.

JUNO (YOUNG):
(GRUNTING, CRYING)

JUNO:
No, stop... stop...

SOUND: THE KEYS CATCH.

JUNO (YOUNG):
Ben!

JUNO:
Stop!

BEN:
Okay.

SOUND: THE ATMOSPHERE WARPS AGAIN. IT STOPS. THE GRANDFATHER
CLOCK TICKING, THE RADIO CHIMING.

JUNO:
(PANTING)

SOUND: THE CHIMES OF THE TIME CHANNEL ON THE RADIO.

BEN:
I love this tune, don't you? Really got a beat you can
dance to.

JUNO:
Ben?

RADIO VOICE:
At the sound of the tone, the time will be eleven thirty
PM.

BEN:
It's been a while, Juno. You miss me?

SOUND: BEN SWITCHES OFF THE RADIO.

JUNO:
Benzaiten!

SOUND: RUSTLING.

BEN:

(OOF)

Hey there, easy on the spine, all right? Backups aren't cheap.

JUNO:

Benten, I never thought I'd see you again, or hear you, or... It's really you, isn't it?

BEN:

Always suspicious. Fine. Test me.

JUNO:

Where was the best spot to eat lunch at Oldtown Elementary?

BEN:

Inside the fake tree behind the basketball court, obviously. Come on, that's the best you've got?

JUNO:

I was just getting started. What about--

BEN:

Oldtown Junior High? The roof, until your friend got us busted up there. Oldtown High? At least a mile away from the building, just in case.

JUNO:

That's right.

BEN:

Ask me a hard one, come on. Deep cuts only.

JUNO:

What was the best episode of The New Adventures of Andromeda?

BEN:

"By Captain Cancer's Claws." That's supposed to be hard?

JUNO:

Ha -- No! No it wasn't, it was "The Cold-Eyed Cops of the Frozen City" and you know it, but you always said it was "Cancer's Claws," always, always...

SOUND: RUSTLING.

BEN:

(OOF)

Well, there goes the reserve spine. You turned into a real toucher since I've been gone, huh?

JUNO:

I've missed you, Benten... It's been so, so hard...

BEN:

I know, Juno. Trust me. I know better than anybody. So are you just gonna spend this whole reunion irrigating my shoulder, or...?

JUNO:

I'm not crying! I just... still had a lot of questions. Then you checked out. It was frustrating, is all.

BEN:

Questions? Like what?

JUNO:

Things you never answered before. Like...

SOUND: RADIO TURNS ITSELF ON.

MUSIC: STARTS.

BEN:

I'll get that.

SOUND: HE CLICKS IT OFF.

Keep going.

JUNO:

Her.

BEN:

Mom?

JUNO:

Yeah. Like... Sarah. I've always wanted to know, Ben, why did you stay with her? You could've left when I did, and then you wouldn't...

BEN:

You want to know why, Juno? Really why?

JUNO:

I do. I always did.

BEN:

Fine. I'll tell you.

(SIGH)

The truth, Juno... the reason that I stayed with Mom... is... Blackmail.

JUNO:

What.

BEN:

It's true. She had pictures of me from seventh grade - you remember? The weird contacts? The hair? If those got out into the world, hell, I'd never get another date again.

JUNO:

No, come on. Enough jokes. Why--

BEN:

Hidden treasure. Old lady's got it under the floorboards, I'm sure of it.

JUNO:

Just tell me--

BEN:

Would you believe me if I said I just really liked waking up to something breaking every morning?

JUNO:

Knock it off! You always do this!

BEN:

Oh, come on, Juno. Lighten up, willya?

JUNO:

Just answer me. Now. Please. I have to know.

BEN:

Hey, so... I guess we're not joking anymore, huh?
Listen, Super-Steel, I don't want to make you upset, but...
I couldn't answer that if I wanted to. I don't even know
what the answer is.

JUNO:

No. You expect me to buy that you threw your life out
without even knowing why? No.

BEN:

It's the truth, all right? If you don't know why I did it,
then... that means I don't know, either.

JUNO:

What the hell is that supposed to... Oh.

BEN:

Oh.

JUNO:

You aren't Benteen. You're just... a hallucination, or
something.

BEN:

Hey, come on. I'm a bigger deal than that. I come with this
room, here -- and everything in it.

JUNO:

Our old bedroom? And that radio, that brought me to...

SOUND: RADIO TURNS ON BY ITSELF. A STORM RAGING, DRAMATIC MUSIC
PLAYING.

CAPTAIN CANCER:

Andromeda!! The rigging's snapped in the wizard's storm!

ANDROMEDA:

Steer us to safety, Captain, and I'll use my chainmail to
keep us afloat! Chain whip!

SOUND: CHAIN WHIP CRACKING. RADIO TURNS OFF.

JUNO:

That's "By Captain Cancer's Claws." I haven't thought about that in years... Memories. This room is for memories.

BEN:

Ehhh... kinda. Do you know how memory works, Juno?

JUNO:

I thought so, but "haunted radio in your childhood bedroom" didn't exactly figure in.

BEN:

People think memory's like a bucket with a hole in it: just a big container that we pour information into and some trickles out -- but that's not right. Memory's associative. We remember things in relation to other things. It's like... Our minds are always sorting memories, right? Like a filing cabinet, kinda. This one's tagged under "Mom" and "Happy." This one's tagged under "times I punched someone who deserved it" and "second grade" and "teachers whose noses I've broken."

JUNO:

Mr. Lowell. Yeah, he had it comin'.

BEN:

The main difference between memory and a filing cabinet is that memories get stronger the more you think about them, and if you don't... they start to fade. They lose tags, one by one, until you've got no way to find them. Doesn't mean they're gone. Just means that... you can't access them anymore. Like you lost not just a file, but the whole cabinet.

JUNO:

Or like you're trying to tune into a station with barely any signal.

SOUND: THE RADIO SQUEALS.

MR. LOWELL:

Juno! Gimme your nose and we'll see what I do with it, you nasty little--!

SOUND: RADIO CUTS OFF.

BEN:

Wow, he really did deserve that, didn't he?

JUNO:

Told you. All right, so, Brown-Jacket says people who go under for this operation start to see things... said there'd be some kind of job I'd have to do.

BEN:

He also said that there was no scientific evidence for that, but hey, who's counting?

JUNO:

How did you... Right. You're me.

BEN:

Got it in one. Keep going; I always wanted to watch you work a case.

JUNO:

Wait a minute. Wait a minute, I think I get this! You, and this room, and that memory with Mom, and... I'm here to solve your murder.

BEN:

Uh, what about it?

JUNO:

What about it? The hell are you talking about? There's obviously... Mom's pills! They went missing and that's why she killed you, right? Where'd they go?

BEN:

She said--

JUNO:

And! Who planted them back in her bag, huh? Don't look at me like that.

BEN:

Like what?

JUNO:

Whatever. Why the hell are you asking me all this, anyway? You run this whole... whatever it is! You tell me why I'm here!

BEN:

I said it already: I don't know anything you don't.

JUNO:

Then what the hell are you doing here? I don't need you, all right? So just buzz off. I don't like this. I don't like people or ghosts or whatever pretending to be things they aren't, so if this is all you've got for me, you can go.

BEN:

Hey, I'm sorry, man. I should've seen this coming, I guess... right now probably wasn't the time for me to...

JUNO:

Stop.

BEN:

Stop what?

JUNO:

Looking like him, sounding like him, knowing what he knew... just stop. Please.

BEN:

That makes a lot of sense.

SOUND: A GUST OF WIND.

SARAH:

Do I make this easier on you, little monster?

JUNO:

What... what are you...

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

SARAH:

What's the matter, Juno? Did you think you'd get away with never seeing me again?

(SNORT)

Figures. You're tough as tissues, aren't you?

JUNO:

Mom... Ben, where's Ben?

SARAH:

You're scared. I can smell it on you, little monster.

JUNO:

You can't do anything to me. You're dead. This is all in my head, and--

SARAH:

And so am I.

(LAUGH)

So am I, Juno. I'm in your head and you'll never get me out.

JUNO:

Stop.

SARAH:

I'm just waiting, and I'm patient, little monster. You won't even notice it happening at first, but I'll get you in the end. First you'll just start snapping at people, and you'll always have excuses. Head hurts. Tired.

JUNO:

Stop!

SARAH:

And you'll hate yourself for snapping, but it's just going to get harder, and harder, and you're going to get more and more tired, and one day you'll just give up, just like I--

JUNO:

Ben!

SOUND: A GUST OF WIND.

BEN:

It... gets pretty bad in here, doesn't it?

JUNO:

(PANTING)

Just... don't do that again. Okay?

BEN:

I didn't. You're the one who's in control, so--

JUNO:

I know. I know. Please. I just need... you, here. Okay? I always felt like... like part of my mind was just gone, whenever we weren't together.

BEN:

I know that feeling. Okay, Super-Steel. Mr. Cop Academy himself. You can do this: what's another cold case, eh?

JUNO:

Ice cold. Been in the freezer thirty years.

BEN:

Come on, I can't do this on my own: while you were acing Detective 101 I was just teaching people the box step. So, expert, tell me how this goes: you have what you're pretty sure is a case. All the evidence you're gonna get is here. So. Where do we start?

JUNO:

Step one. Right. We... figure out what doesn't make sense. There's always something, in every case. Even if it's small... that's the thread you have to pull on to get to the big stuff.

BEN:

And what doesn't make sense here?

JUNO:

The pills--

BEN:

Really? Those make the least sense to you? Really?

JUNO:

(GROAN)

The motive.

SOUND: RADIO BUZZING)

SARAH (FROM THE RADIO):

You did it in one day. One choice. When you let him in,
when you let the hero rob us blind without taking a thing.

SOUND: RADIO CLICKS OFF.

MUSIC: STARTS.

JUNO:

...That. What the hell does that even mean?

BEN:

You're saying you don't remember the day she's talking
about?

JUNO:

No, I remember it, but it's stupid.

BEN:

I bet a lot of leads are.

JUNO:

That's true. Fine. She told the story plenty. What's one
more time?

(SIGH)

Short version: we were four years old and she decided it
was a good idea to leave us home alone for the day. Some
burglar broke in, I didn't stop them, they didn't even take
anything, but Mom flipped out over it anyway. She blew a
gasket at work, lost her job, and blamed me for it forever.
The end. Okay? I'm telling you, she was just--

BEN:

And that's all you remember?

JUNO:

(GROAN)

Who cares what I remember? I was a kid! It doesn't matter!

SOUND: RADIO SCREECHES ON.

TURBO:

Here comes Turbo! The Man of the Future!

BEN:
Doesn't matter, huh?

TURBO:
Have you helped anyone today?

JUNO:
(GROWL)

TURBO:
Just remember, Juno: it's a fact!

SOUND: RADIO CLICKS OFF.

BEN:
What was that first step to detecting, again?

JUNO:
Shut up.

BEN:
Find something that doesn't make sense, right? Because that right there definitely--

JUNO:
Just drop it, all right? I forgot how smug you were.

BEN:
(LAUGHS)
So. You ready to solve a mystery? And don't lie. Remember, I'm basically just you, so I know--

JUNO:
Everything I'm thinking, sure. So why do I have to say it?

BEN:
Because I'm still just me and I think it's fun to watch you admit when you're wrong.

JUNO:
(GRUNT)
I'm ready to solve a mystery.

BEN:
Ha ha, that's more like it! Let's go!

SOUND: ATMOSPHERE WARPING. THEN, SILENCE.

MUSIC: STARTS.

CONDUCTOR:

If you've enjoyed this tale, please consider donating to The Penumbra on Patreon. Our artists work tirelessly to bring you these stories, and if you have the means, we hope you will support our efforts. Every dollar helps. You can find that page at patreon.com/thepenumbrapodcast. If you support us on Patreon at the 10 dollar level or higher, you will receive access to commentary tracks like this one, from co-creators Kevin Vibert and Sophie Kaner...

SOUND: METAL DOOR OPENING.

SOPHIE (COMMENTARY):

...Where are we gonna go with this? Like, where are we gonna find a kid who can really, really act? And if they're not going to, what does that leave us with? Then we considered having him be the same age as Juno because they're twins, and just like, ok, even though he's dead, Juno imagines him as if he had grown up with him, and then we're like, are we gonna Joshua voice Ben?

Kevin (COMMENTARY):

Right...

SOUND: DOOR CLOSING.

You can also support The Penumbra by 'liking' us on Facebook, following us on Twitter (@ThePenumbraPod), following us on Tumblr (@ThePenumbraPodast), telling your friends about us, telling your friends to tell their friends about us, and especially by rating and reviewing our podcast on itunes. Every rating, comment and kind word spreads our stories further and inspires us to keep creating more and better tales to come.

We would like to give special thanks to all who support us on Patreon, but especially to Camille Blanton, Cantelope, Fiona Parker, Ota Arkana, Reagan, Ko, KC, Kim Ziegman, Ethel

Lang, Fran, Charlie Spiegel, Minchowski and Jamie Gunther for their incredibly generous contributions per episode. Thank you.

Did you know that the Penumbra has merchandise for sale? It's true! The Penumbra has partnered with DFTBA to bring you the posters, shirts, and pins your heart desires. Just go to D-F-T-B-A.com and search for The Penumbra Podcast.

This tale -- "Juno Steel and the Monster's Reflection" -- was told by the following people:

Joshua Ilon as Juno Steel;
Alexander Stravinsky as The Man in the Brown Jacket;
Kiki Samko as Sarah Steel;
Mark Pierre as Benzietan Steel;
and Bob Musset as the ensemble.

The Penumbra is created and produced by Sophie Kaner and Kevin Vibert.

The Penumbra is created and produced by Sophie Kaner and Kevin Vibert. If you wish to know more about our ever-expanding infinitely-creative team of artists, musicians, editors, designers, and managers, you can read about them in the show notes of this episode.

I'm afraid this is the end of the line for today, dear traveler. We hope you will ride with The Penumbra again soon.

ALL SOUNDS FADE.

Trigger Warnings:

- Child abuse and abusers
- Sudden loud noises
- Ableist language
- Surgery and body horror
- Violence and threats of violence
- Death, mortality, and illness
- Claustrophobic and dark spaces

- Deception and gaslighting

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"Kind of Girl" by Jeris, featuring spinningmerkaba:

http://ccmixter.org/files/VJ_Memes/35657

"Bell Ding" by Natty23 <https://freesound.org/people/Natty23/sounds/411749/>

"Radio Static" by GowlerMusic

<https://freesound.org/people/GowlerMusic/sounds/262267/>

"handling keys.wav" by Godowan

<https://freesound.org/people/Godowan/sounds/235263/>

"whip crack B.wav" by cetsoundcrew

<https://freesound.org/people/cetsoundcrew/sounds/397662/>

"Thunderclap.wav" by shaka9 <https://freesound.org/people/shaka9/sounds/160514/>

"Xylophone E1" by DANMITCH3LL

<https://freesound.org/people/DANMITCH3LL/sounds/232007/>

Theatrical Trailer (annabloom vs. Jeris) by spinningmerkaba (c) copyright 2011

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<http://dig.ccmixer.org/files/jlbrock44/33300> Ft: annabloom, Jeris If the Weeds

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<http://dig.ccmixer.org/files/gurdonark/11321> Ft: Fireproof Babies