

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 16: El Triste.

By Joe Fisher

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SFX: THE UNDERSIGNAL THEME SONG.

MR. UNDERSIGNAL

This is the Undersignal, the voice of freedom in the triad. For many days now Midnight Burger has been tearing a path of chaos through the systems, as the Ted Empire struggles with damage control. On the planet of Benijessica, Leif of Midnight Burger puts the troubled planet on the path of energy independence...

LEIF

This planet's energy grid was about as efficient as a canvas-topped submarine, with these new schematics you'll be able to stop importing fuel from the Teds and stand on your own two feet.

BYSTANDER

We love you, Leif!

LEIF

We love you!

MR. UNDERSIGNAL

Then, on the planet of Cariel-3, Dr. Ava Maddox confronts the Science-Priests of the High Temple of Moog...

AVA

Listen guys, I'm not going to lie, Science-Priest is a pretty amazing title, I'm kind of jealous. But if you're going to throw the word science in there without any actual scientific knowledge, let's consider the words of Kepler: "Before we go all in on this religion garbage, maybe we should, you know, try literally everything else." I'm paraphrasing.

MR. UNDERSIGNAL

And warring factions of the planet of Fikin-G were finally brought to the bargaining table by Midnight Burger's leader, Gloria, and peace was forged using a sacred Earth tradition...

GLORIA

Look, you guys, the Teds have been funding both sides of this war for years, why don't we stop fighting and talk about who the REAL enemy is? And remember, when all five dice are the same, you have to shout "Yahtzee".

MR. UNDERSIGNAL

Now the entire Triad waits with bated breath to see where the mysterious diner will appear next. And when they do, will the Ted Empire finally have an opportunity to put an end to Midnight Burger's path of chaos that has inspired the downtrodden all across the system? Stay tuned to The Undersignal, the voice of freedom in The Triad, as the story develops...

SFX: VERY BUSY DINER.

GLORIA

Jesus, these people are hungry!

LEIF

There's a line out the door, I can't even see where it ends!

AVA

I just finished emergency inventory and it's pretty Dickensian in the walk-in, we're basically out of food.

GLORIA

We've only been here an hour! Why are they so hungry?

LEIF

I don't know, I can't understand a word they're saying.

AVA

This is what happens when you open the rebellion cafe, everyone wants to come here with their beret on.

EFFIE

Gloria, this ain't just a busy shift. We can't understand a word these people are saying either but their situation is dire.

AVA

We've been in a billion dire situations in the last two weeks, guys.

EFFIE

But this is something new. Not just a dire situation but... what is the word?

ZEBULON

Portent, dear.

EFFIE

That's it, dear. Thank you. Portent, Gloria.

GLORIA

Whatever, guys.

EFFIE

Something important is to happen here.

ZEBULON

It's so strong that I feel it myself. There is a weight to this day.

EFFIE

A weight. That's it indeed.

ZEBULON

I feel it is a day of a great sermon.

EFFIE

Yes, amen.

GLORIA

Guys. We're in the weeds here, there's not going to be any time for Zebulon to give a sermon.

ZEBULON

That is the puzzling bit, Gloria.

EFFIE

The sermon will not be given by us.

AVA

I'll do it.

EFFIE

You will not.

AVA

C'mon, you don't think they want to hear a lecture on Magnetars? It's a barn burner, I have jokes.

GLORIA

I need to understand what these people are saying, where's Shel?

AVA

I sent Shel outside to talk to people, maybe they can figure out what's going on.

ZEBULON

Mmm. Can you feel it coming together, my Dear?

EFFIE

Oh, yes, husband. Throngs of the hungry, seeking guidance. All of them gathered together, their confusion their only commonality.

ZEBULON

Not to mention it's a lovely day out.

EFFIE

It is sermon o'clock and we are late, dear.

ZEBULON

How might we contribute to this day of importance, I wonder?

EFFIE

Well, we've got the throngs of people, we have an eagerness for guidance, we've got the sunshine, what else do we need?

ZEBULON

Apostles.

AVA

I'll be an apostle.

EFFIE

No, you will not.

AVA

I love flowing garments.

ZEBULON

Perhaps not Paul and Mark and the rest but a way to spread the good word far and wide.

AVA

I can spread the good word far and wide.

EFFIE

What did I just say?

AVA

Not in a Jesus way, in a science way.

ZEBULON

How do you mean, Ava?

SFX: BACK DOOR SLAMMING.

SHEL

WOW, these people are chatty! Okay, everybody huddle up. It was hard to get them to talk to me. They kept screaming and running away in fear.

(MORE)

SHEL (CONT'D)

I mean, seriously am I really the only  
photosynthetic motherfucker in the galaxy?

GLORIA

Stop teaching Shel to curse!

AVA

Skills are important.

SHEL

So, I stopped trying to talk to people and I just  
stood really still. Eventually they mistook me for  
a bush and they started yapping away.  
Everyone, welcome to the planet Milinov. They are  
BIG fans of you guys. Such big fans that as soon as  
we started our war with The Teds, they shut down  
their warp gate in protest.

GLORIA

Oh, great.

LEIF

This is what we were afraid of.

SHEL

Apparently this was a really bad idea.

LEIF

Yeah, it was.

SHEL

All their food comes from somewhere else, I guess?  
What's the place that makes food?

GLORIA

A farm.

SHEL

Right, there's none of those.

GLORIA

On the whole planet?

SHEL

Is that bad?

GLORIA

Yes!

SHEL

Also, basically all they have on this planet are  
restaurants. That's what we are right?

GLORIA

The whole planet?

SHEL

Yes. People come here from other planets to eat at the restaurants and then go to something called a spa.

LEIF

Shit, it's a leisure planet.

AVA

It sounds excellent except for the small detail of everyone starving.

LEIF

This is exactly what I was talking about.

GLORIA

Don't start with me.

LEIF

What the fuck were they thinking? They shut off their only means of getting food, what was their endgame?

GLORIA

Sometimes you're too miserable to think about the endgame.

LEIF

That sounds familiar.

GLORIA

I said don't start with me.

AVA

On a related note, I just checked the calendar and it's National Use Your Doomsday Device Day and I know a great way to celebrate.

LEIF

That'll just make it worse.

SHEL

Also, there's something floating in the parking lot.

AVA

Oh my God, Leif, your ex is here.

GLORIA

Great, what is this now?

SFX: DOOR CHIME. THE SOUND OF THROGS OF PEOPLE AND SOMETHING HOVERING IN THE PARKING LOT.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

What the hell is this?

LEIF

It's a message drone.

DRONE

You have one message.

LEIF

Don't listen to it.

GLORIA

Play the message.

TED

(From message drone.)

Oh hey, Midnight Burger. Ted Empire calling. I decided to leave you a little message on every planet just because I wanted to let you guys know that your highly-publicized guerrilla warfare is, guess what? Worthless! I'm sure you guys think you're out there fighting the good fight but you're basically congratulating yourselves for shooting an elephant with a rubber band. But this is what I expect from you Earthlings. Your planet has not spent NEARLY enough time thinking about the futility of your actions. Except for the Danish. They've really got the pointlessness of life nailed. A bunch of existentially exhausted beans over there. Oh, and by the way, this message has just pinged us with your location. Better hope there's no Ted ships in the area! See you soon!

DRONE

End of message. Would you like to reply?

LEIF

Don't reply.

GLORIA

I'm replying.

LEIF

Telling them to fuck off isn't going to do anything.

GLORIA

What do you want me to do, beg for our lives?



LEIF

The people on this planet are begging for their lives because of what we started.

GLORIA

I didn't ask anybody to starve themselves.

LEIF

Gloria, for two weeks we've been on an anti-goodwill tour, did you think people were just going to sit there? No. They're going to get all riled up like this planet has and then expect us to save them somehow. Now we've shown up on a starving planet without any food. This was bound to happen.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA

Leif, I'm taking Effie and Zebulon up to the roof, come with me.

LEIF

What?

AVA

I have an idea.

LEIF

An idea about what?

AVA

Haven't you heard? There's going to be a sermon today.

LEIF

What are you talking about?

AVA

Effie and Zebulon said so.

LEIF

Who are you?

AVA

I'm the person in the diner who's smarter than you. Come up to the roof.

LEIF

Fine, whatever.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

You think this is a good time to say "I told you so"?

LEIF

I did tell you so. So, yes.

DRONE

Would you like to reply?

GLORIA

...What's going to happen to them?

LEIF

They'll surrender eventually. Probably get a heavy fine from the Teds. It'll take a generation for them to pay it off. But they'll be okay. You're right, you didn't ask them to do this. It was irrational of them, you can't go up against these guys unless you have a plan.

GLORIA

Are you talking about them or me?

LEIF

...Look. I'm going to go in there, serve the last of our food and apologize. It's all we can do at this point.

GLORIA

Then what do we do?

LEIF

Honestly, after that, I'm making a gun.

GLORIA

The fuck for, leif?

LEIF

The Teds just got pinged with our location, this could be the end of the road. If they think I have a weapon they might hesitate for a second, give us a chance to slip away.

GLORIA

What about the purple nurple?

LEIF

Purple Nullifier. That only works once, they'll have a plan for it next time. So I'm making a plasma cannon. It'll only have one shot but they'll have to go into a standoff protocol and that'll take some time.

GLORIA

Whatever.

LEIF

We weren't going to be able to keep this up forever. Honestly, I'm surprised we made it this long. I'll be on the roof.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

DRONE

Would you like to reply?

SHEL

Psst. Gloria.

GLORIA

Shel, you don't have to pretend to be a bush anymore.

SHEL

I'm kind of enjoying it. Ava calls it "doing spy shit".

GLORIA

Okay. Enjoy.

SHEL

It kind of scares me when you and Leif fight.

GLORIA

I know, I'm sorry.

SHEL

You've been fighting a lot lately.

GLORIA

Yes, I'm sorry.

SHEL

I also can't quite tell what you're fighting about. It's almost like when humans argue they're arguing about two things at the same time but one of those things isn't being said and the other one is.

GLORIA

Yeah, we definitely do that.

SHEL

So, what's the thing that isn't being said?

GLORIA

I don't know, Shel.

SHEL

... it's messy out here.

GLORIA

What's messy?

SHEL

Out here. All these planets, all these people, it's a mess.

GLORIA

It really is.

SHEL

I feel like you've been trying to make some sense of it. I've really appreciated that.

GLORIA

I don't know what I've been trying to do.

SHEL

I knew what things were on my planet, it was a lot simpler. Sun coming up: good. Lightning storm: bad. Things are a little different out here, though. Something can be good, but is it though? Something can be bad, but have you considered this that and the other thing? Maybe when you consider this that and the other thing maybe the thing you thought was bad is actually good and that good thing you've been talking about is actually a total fucking disaster. It's confusing. But recently you've been heading out into this uncertainty and you've been saying "Hey. This is wrong and this is right and shut up about it." And I've appreciated that. It's understandable, like the sunrise and lightning storms.

GLORIA

It doesn't feel that way.

SHEL

Hey, come here. Get off the parking lot and put your feet on the dirt.

GLORIA

Why?

SHEL

Just do it.

GLORIA

Okay. What?

SHEL

It's a shame they don't have farms on this planet. The soil here is amazing. You can't feel it but I can. All kinds of weird bacteria, complex nutrients, and don't even get me started on the mycelial network.

GLORIA

The what?

SHEL

Mushrooms. You like mushrooms, right?

GLORIA

Sure.

SHEL

The mushroom is just the visible part. Under a mushroom is a network of fungus strands that can run for miles, colonies of fungus all talking to each other. When I stand here they talk to me, too.

GLORIA

What's it saying?

SHEL

I mean, not with words, it's not talking fungus, I mean... I can feel the whole planet. And under the ground, underneath all the complexity and confusion and anger... something is working, and it's working perfectly.

GLORIA

I wish I could feel that like you can.

SHEL

The soil is just begging to have things planted in it. I wonder how it got that way?

GLORIA

I guess from the people here not using it.

SHEL

No, it's more than that. At first I thought it was volcanoes. Volcanoes make for great soil, but nothing this complicated. It's... oh wait...

SFX: THE CALL OF A HUGE ANIMAL.

SHEL (CONT'D)

Megafauna.

SFX: HEAVY FOOTSTEPS OF THE JUHREEK.

GLORIA

Whoa. Who is that?

SHEL

THAT's where the soil is coming from.

GLORIA

From this thing?

SHEL

This must be a Juhreek. It's the sacred animal of Milinov. People come from other planets to eat at the restaurants, go to whatever a spa is and watch huge herds of Juhreek run by.

GLORIA

Huge herds.

SHEL

Yeah. There's some sort of story about how the Juhreek are the spirits of their ancestors or something.

GLORIA

How many are there?

SHEL

I don't know. They're all over the planet, though. Nothing makes great soil like a big dumb animal crapping everywhere.

GLORIA

Really?

SHEL

They're pretty adorable, huh?

GLORIA

They're something. Good job, Shel.

SHEL

Good job at what?

DRONE

Would you like to reply?

GLORIA

Yes.

DRONE

Begin message.

GLORIA

Oh, hi, Ted Empire. This is Gloria. Word of advice, when you want to let someone know that what they're doing is insignificant, don't go out of your way to let them know they're insignificant, don't send them a "just to let you know, I'm totally over you" message. You're kind of showing your whole Ass on that one, were you drunk when you sent this? It is pretty adorable that you're trying to intimidate me. But honestly, between the sexists, the racists, shitty tipplers, and the guys screaming "go back to your country" from their car, to me, you're just the next asshole. See you soon!

DRONE

Thank you for using TedMessage.

SFX: DRONE FLYING AWAY.

SFX: SOUNDS OF THE CROWD FADES OUT. SOUND OF THE OCCASIONAL SPOT WELDING.

AVA

Look, I don't like riffing. I like long and drawn out equations. I mean, I know the word "theoretical" is the first part of theoretical physicist and that implies I'm going to look for animal shapes in the clouds or whatever but I've always been more partial to the "physicist" part of theoretical physicist than the "theoretical" part... Leif?

LEIF

What?

AVA

I feel like I don't have your attention and I hate that.

LEIF

I'm listening. I can do two things at once.

AVA

Okay... so as you know, I am an unraveler of mysteries.

LEIF

Oh yeah? What is the diner and how does it work?

AVA

... Don't sass me.

LEIF

Sorry, you're an unraveler of mysteries.

AVA

Yes. Not the least of those mysteries is of course, your friends and mine, Effie and Zebulon Mucklewain.

ZEBULON

It's awfully nice up here.

AVA

People can't just talk out of a box, and there's no such thing as a question without an answer so, then, what the fuck?

LEIF

Ok.

AVA

So, I have several theories but there is one particular theory that is currently sitting on my lap and I am stroking lovingly.

LEIF

Great.

AVA

I still feel like I don't have your attention.

LEIF

You have my attention.

EFFIE

Leif, stop messing with things.

LEIF

Is this really the most important thing right now?

ZEBULON

We have told him how important this day is, have we not, dear?

EFFIE

We have, dear. I certainly hope Leif was paying attention when we explained this, other wise I would have to be very disappointed in him.

LEIF

The people on this planet are starving, we don't have any food and the Teds are coming, you want to talk about theoretical physics?



ZEBULON

We would like to talk about an important day, Leif. There will be a great message delivered and Ava, though we don't understand her particular divinations, has said she would like to help.

EFFIE

Which is a miracle all on its own.

LEIF

I'm not getting out of this, am I?

EFFIE

You are not.

LEIF

Okay. You were saying?

AVA

Consciousness needs a complicated arrangement of atoms, right?

LEIF

I guess.

AVA

But over my shoulder are a couple of conscious minds with no atoms.

LEIF

Yeah.

AVA

So hear me out, what if, instead of a complicated arrangement of atoms, it's a complicated arrangement of waves.

LEIF

What are you saying?

AVA

A microwave. You put your frozen burrito in the microwave but you only have microwaves coming from one direction, what happens?

LEIF

Nothing.

AVA

Right, but multiple microwave emissions from multiple points, all crossing each other at the point of your burrito and what do you get?

LEIF

Lunch.

AVA

Exactly.

LEIF

You're saying that Effie and Zebulon's consciousness is a hot burrito.

AVA

Yes. Except the product of the arrangement of waves is not a hot burrito, but in fact a conscious mind.

LEIF

That's insane.

AVA

I know! Mad scientist Thundercrash!

LEIF

I thought you told me they were... I feel uncomfortable talking about this in front of them.

AVA

They don't understand what we're talking about.

ZEBULON

It's true, Leif, it's all gobbledegook to us.

AVA

See?

LEIF

I thought you told me their consciousness was fabricated by some sort of unknown entity.

AVA

I never said fabricated.

LEIF

Effie and Zebulon Mucklewain were real people. They lived in Arkansas in 1925 and that's not them.

AVA

Well, by that logic everyone's fabricated. You were fabricated by the 3D printer in your mothers womb. The ink in the printer was the genetic information from your mother and your father. I'm assuming you're more than your genetic makeup.

LEIF

Yes.

AVA  
Effie and Zebulon were created based on two real people, but that's just where they started.

LEIF  
You can't just create a consciousness based on two people.

AVA  
Tell that to your mother, that's what she did.

LEIF  
Okay, forget I asked, at what point am I building something?

AVA  
I don't need you to build something. I just need an analysis of this planet's radio frequency traffic.

LEIF  
Why?

AVA  
There's some sort of relationship between the Mucklewains and waves. If they're made of wave forms then they can kind of y'know, "speak wave form".

LEIF  
You're the only theorist I've ever met who says things like "kind of, y'know".

AVA  
It's going to work, Leif.

LEIF  
What's going to work?

AVA  
This planet's an advanced civilization, they probably have communication satellites right?

LEIF  
I guess.

AVA  
If we can get the Mucklewains to grab the right signal, we can broadcast to the entire planet.

LEIF  
What for?

AVA  
Because there's going to be a sermon, dude.

LEIF

You don't care about the sermon you just want to mess around with your toys.

AVA

What difference does it make?

EFFIE

Leif, this is the most disagreeable I've ever seen you, who put the snakes in your pants?

LEIF

I don't have snakes in my pants, I just don't understand why we're thinking about this right now.

EFFIE

Because it's an important day, Leif.

LEIF

You're right, it is an important day, it's the day we get caught by the Teds and thrown in deep cold storage, do you want me to tell you about deep cold storage!

EFFIE

Do not raise your voice to me, young man!

LEIF

...

EFFIE

Leif. The reason why you've been hemming and hawing for the past weeks is not because Gloria is doing the wrong thing but because she's doing the right thing and we all know it. And that stings a bit for you, Leif, because the right thing that she's doing is the thing you should've done a long time ago. These oppressors who have been chasing us, they're no strangers to you, Leif, but you chose not to oppose them and instead retreated into childish mayhem. But now we see Gloria, ill-equipped though she may be, standing against them as you should have.

ZEBULON

Leif, we understand that to look back and feel that another path should've been taken can be a harsh view to digest.

EFFIE

You may not approve of Gloria's actions, but can you hardly blame her? She has faced down evil and prayed for mighty assistance, as we all should.

LEIF

Even if it's pointless? Even if you suffer and it changes nothing?

EFFIE

Yes, Leif. Even if that. Who do you think you're talking to?

LEIF

Sorry, guys. I wish I could go with you on that. Purity in the face of certain doom is appealing, I guess, but it's not me. I spent the majority of my life with certain death right outside the airlock, I survive things. I've never really cared much how I survive them.

EFFIE

Well you went and messed that up when you got yourself some friends, Leif.

ZEBULON

One cannot be a creature of simple survival and a creature with loved ones. For when you care for another you take on their dangers and complications.

EFFIE

It's dangerous to care for another, Leif. But it's always worth the trade off, and the reason you're so upset is because you know I'm right.

LEIF

... Fuck.

SFX: SEVERAL RADIO FREQUENCIES AT ONCE.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Looks like there's all kinds of frequencies, one of them's got to be a global network of some kind.

AVA

Pick the strongest one, the one without any interference.

SFX: SINGLE SIGNAL ISOLATED.

LEIF

How about this one? It sounds like a data stream.

AVA

Okay, cool. Hey guys, do you hear that sound?

EFFIE

We do.

ZEBULON

It's a very unpleasant sound.

AVA

I know. It's super annoying, so... how about you stop it?

ZEBULON

Stop it?

EFFIE

Stop it how?

SFX: SIGNAL STOPS.

AVA

Like that.

LEIF

Oh, shit.

AVA

Say something, guys.

EFFIE

(Speaking from two places at once.)  
What are we meant to say? Oh!

LEIF

They took over the signal.

AVA

I love it!

ZEBULON

What does this mean, Ava?

AVA

It means, what it usually means, that I'm a genius!

LEIF

They're talking to the whole planet right now, what the hell?

AVA

Guys, introduce yourselves to the whole planet.

ZEBULON

Oh my, well, hello to everyone on this planet. I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife, Effie.

EFFIE

Hi, y'all.

AVA  
You want to give a sermon? How's this for spreading  
the word?

ZEBULON  
Ava, this is quite something, but we mentioned  
before we would not be the ones to give the sermon  
today, that would be by someone yet to be named.

AVA  
That's step two, check it out...

AVA (CONT'D)  
(Speaking in two places at once.)  
Ahem. Testing one, two, three. Hey there cats and  
kittens, this is Ava coming to you live. Sit back  
and relax while I recite the first twenty thousand  
digits of Pi from memory.

LEIF  
That worked! They're a live mic, holy shit.

AVA  
Be sure and stay on this channel, folks. Later  
today will be some sort of sermon by some such  
person, we don't know who yet. Frankly I don't care  
who it is, I was only trying to get this far for  
the sake of a physics thought experiment I was  
playing out in my head, you know how it is.

GLORIA  
(From down on the ground.)  
Leif!

Leif  
Gloria? What's up?

GLORIA  
Give me the gun.

SFX: A LARGE CROWD HAS GATHERED OUTSIDE THE DINER. THE  
OCCASIONAL BELLOW OF THE JUHREEK.

SHEL  
Okay, looks like the crowd is finally getting used  
to me. Nothing like desperation to make you set  
aside your prejudice, am I right?

GLORIA  
Are they all here?

SHEL  
Yeah, everyone who was standing in line is gathered  
in the parking lot.

GLORIA

Okay, good job. Get into the crowd and when I start talking, you translate as much as you can.

SHEL

Okay.

LEIF

Here it is, one homemade particle accelerator.

GLORIA

Does this work the way I think it does?

LEIF

Pretty much. Have you ever shot a gun before?

GLORIA

No, but I was really good at Buck Hunt.

LEIF

That'll work. Remember you've only got one shot, so make it count. And don't forget, Effie and Zebulon are a live global microphone now, so you're talking to the whole planet.

AVA

What's the plan here? You know what? Never mind, I want to be surprised. Also, what's up with the big dumb animal, are we doing pony rides?

ZEBULON

Well, let us see here, throngs gathered for a speech.

EFFIE

Mm hmm.

ZEBULON

A lovely day, a time of need.

EFFIE

We continue to be right about many things and they continue to doubt us, dear.

ZEBULON

Not unlike the apostles, if you don't mind me saying.

EFFIE

I don't mind one bit. I'm going to be writing down a notion or two.

ZEBULON

The Book of Mucklewain.



EFFIE

My, that has a nice ring to it, dear.

GLORIA

Here goes nothing... Everyone! Everyone, listen up.  
My name's Gloria and I'm the manager of Midnight  
Burger.

SFX: APPLAUSE IN THE CROWD.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

As you may have heard, we have run out of food.

SFX: DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE CROWD.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I know. We're sorry, there's just too many of you  
to feed. We're good, but we're not that good..  
Sometimes things get hard. And when things get  
hard, the choices you have to make get even harder.  
I apologize for the choice you're all going to have  
to make. Shel?

SHEL

(From in the crowd.)  
Yeah?

GLORIA

Don't look.

SHEL

Oh, boy.

SFX: PARTICLE ACCELERATOR POWERS UP AND FIRES. THE JUHREEK  
HOWLS AND DROPS TO THE GROUND WITH A MASSIVE THUD. THE CROWD  
IS VERY UPSET.

AVA

Holy Earnest Hemingway.

LEIF

Oh, they are not happy.

AVA

So that's a no on pony rides, then.

GLORIA

Everyone, listen to me. Listen!

SFX: CROWD QUIETS DOWN.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

I'm told you believe these animals are the spirits  
of your ancestors.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

If that's true, would your ancestors want to watch you starve? This planet made a choice to change things. Decisions like that are followed by even harder decisions. This is your next one. You may not like it, it may feel wrong, but if you come back four hours from now, everybody eats. It's up to you. Talk amongst yourselves.

AVA

Maybe we shouldn't have broadcast that to the entire planet.

LEIF

I think they'd rather eat us at this point.

SFX: KNIFE BEING QUICKLY SHARPENED.

GLORIA

It was my decision guys. You don't have to own it, okay?

ZEBULON

We stand with you, Gloria.

AVA

It's super gross, but I have no choice but to support a decision this hardcore.

SHEL

Hey guys, really looking forward to suppressing all my memories of this day.

GLORIA

We're switching over to buffet service. You guys go inside and set up some steamer trays. Effie and Zeb stay with me.

AVA

Come on Shel, let's go inside and act like we're helping.

SHEL

Okay.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

EFFIE

Somebody had to do it.

GLORIA

Did I? I don't even know if this thing is edible.

ZEBULON

There is only one way to find out, Gloria.

GLORIA

Right. Here we go.

SFX: THE REALLY HORRIBLE SOUND OF GLORIA OPENING UP THE BODY CAVITY OF THE JUHREEK.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Oh yeah. All sorts of smells.

ZEBULON

You're quite skilled at dispatching this beast, Gloria.

GLORIA

Thanks... my... Yayo taught me... of course that was a... goat... not something the size of a... Lincoln Towncar.

EFFIE

One more inch and the insides are gonna be on the outside.

GLORIA

Yeah... here they... come...

SFX: THE EVEN WORSE SOUND OF THE INSIDES OF THE JUHREEK SPILLING ONTO THE GROUND.

ZEBULON

Well now. That's all not so foreign is it?

EFFIE

No, you've got the usual insides. Two livers though.

ZEBULON

Yes, there's not enough onions in all of Georgia to fry up all those livers.

GLORIA

Okay, this is what we're working with. Let me talk to Effie and Zebulon the pig farmers for a second.

EFFIE

We're right here.

GLORIA

What do we think of this guy?

EFFIE

Well, I'll tell you right now I'm having some impure thoughts about those haunches and those shoulders.

ZEBULON

You're forgiven.

EFFIE

But you'd need at least a day and a night to get those to taste like something.

ZEBULON

And time is of the essence.

EFFIE

Gloria, what's that thing you do when you grill it and slice it?

GLORIA

Carne Asada?

EFFIE

That's it.

GLORIA

Not a bad idea. I can cook it fast, I just need to be able to butcher it fast enough. But first, I am going to get upwind of this thing because WOW that's a stink.

ZEBULON

You could feed a whole congregation with this one animal, couldn't you dear?

EFFIE

Indeed. All I'm doing right now is thinking about the sausage.

ZEBULON

Oh yes, lovely sausage.

GLORIA

I could put the whole head in a smoker and really get weird with it.

EFFIE

It's a blessing, this animal. You've truly discovered something here, Gloria.

GLORIA

This is nice. I never get to talk about this stuff, it's always Leif and Ava arguing about quarks or whatever...

SFX: GLORIA LAUGHING.

EFFIE

What's funny?

GLORIA

Oh, I don't know. I'm on an alien planet. There's three moons in the sky. And I'm here just trying to feed as many people as I can. It's all the same stuff in the end, isn't it?

ZEBULON

Yes. We're far afield from our home and yet no matter how far our journey, it's all still surprisingly human, isn't it?

LEIF

Hey Gloria, I wanted to- Hoooooooo, God that's disgusting!

GLORIA

What'd you think would happen, Leif? A bunch of perfect round patties we're going to spill out?

LEIF

No, no, I understand. That's just a lot of insides on the outside, is all.

GLORIA

What do you need?

LEIF

Nothing I just... We keep arguing and I keep apologizing and I wanted to apologize again and say that the arguing is going to stop. Maybe not the apologizing but definitely the arguing.

GLORIA

Okay.

LEIF

The Teds scare the shit out of me. I hate to admit it. And here you are, a cook from Arizona, and they're scared of you. It's amazing. And if you can figure out how to cook this thing, and pull another shift out of the fire. Legendary stuff, Gloria.

GLORIA

Thanks, Leif.

LEIF

So to apologize, I brought you this laser-saw.

SFX: THE DEAFENING SOUND OF THE LASER-SAW.

LEIF (CONT'D)

(Shouting over the sound of the laser-saw.)  
I NEVER REALLY HAD A USE FOR IT, BUT IT LOOKED TOO  
AWESOME FOR ME TO THROW AWAY. IT SHOULD CUT THROUGH  
THE BONE REALLY EASILY!

SFX: LASER-SAW SHUTS OFF.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Anyway, just pull the trigger and start cutting.

GLORIA

Thanks, Leif. How are we looking in there?

LEIF

We're ready to fuck em up.

GLORIA

Okay. Everybody eats.

SFX: LASER-SAW FIRING UP AND THEN FADING OUT.

SONG: THE VALLEY OF PEACE BY THE METROPOLITAN QUARTET.

SFX: A RUMBLING CROWD.

ZEBULON

And that was The Metropolitan Quartet with The  
Valley of Peace. Effie, I have to say it has been a  
pleasure these last few hours sharing our words and  
music with this world entire.

EFFIE

It's a lovely place they have here, Husband, it's  
been so moving to see them fight for it so hard.

ZEBULON

Now, if you've been listening in around the world,  
you know that we've all been waiting for Gloria to  
unveil the wonderful repast she's been preparing.

EFFIE

Before we do that, Husband. I feel that there may  
be many in this land who feel reticence in turning  
these sacred beasts into sustenance.

ZEBULON

Of course. And such a feeling is understandable. I  
wont pretend to understand the importance of these  
creatures to the people of this land, but I can  
tell you this. You see these herds of animals that  
roam the hills and valleys as the spirits of your  
ancestors.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

And I can tell you that if it were me, and I were a soul who had passed into the beyond, I would consider it a privilege to be able to make one last sacrifice for those I had left behind.

EFFIE

As would I, dear. But all of you listening at home, we can't make this decision for you. All we can do is show you a way forward, and hope that the decisions you make can feel right in the eyes of your God. Or gods. Or however y'all do it here.

LEIF

It looks fantastic.

GLORIA

Thanks, Leif.

AVA

Would it be rude to eat before all the starving people?

GLORIA

Yes, Ava.

AVA

Bummer.

SHEL

Guys, thanks so much for not making me touch any of this stuff. I'm sure it's an accomplishment but it looks pretty gross.

LEIF

Vegans, am I right?

SHEL

What's a vegan?

AVA

Your worst nightmare, Shel.

GLORIA

None of them are eating it yet. What are they waiting for?

AVA

Maybe one of us should kick it off?

GLORIA

What did I just say?

ZEBULON

Gloria, perhaps they need a bit more convincing. Perhaps someone should stand before them, make a bit of a speech, convince them there is nothing to fear?

GLORIA

You mean like a sermon?

ZEBULON

I did not say sermon, did you say sermon, dear?

EFFIE

I did not say sermon, dear. I don't even know what you mean by that.

GLORIA

Fine, who's doing it?

AVA

All you.

LEIF

I'm not doing it.

GLORIA

Why is it me?

LEIF

Cause you're the boss.

GLORIA

Fine. Fine, okay. Shel, get into the crowd and start translating.

SHEL

Here I go.

GLORIA

Everyone. Everyone, can I have your attention? I know this is a strange day for you, I appreciate you showing up at all... So... On my home planet there's this thing called Top Ramen. It's dried noodles and a packet of flavoring. It's not very good for you but it's food. And you can get them for 50 cents each. That's not a lot where I'm from. I never ate it all that much myself, but it was always nice knowing it was there. You knew you were never going to starve because of a cheap package of dried noodles always waiting for you at any store. It's nice.

(MORE)



GLORIA (CONT'D)

What a lot of people don't know is that the reason why there's dirt cheap noodles at any store, is because one day, a long time ago, two nuclear bombs were detonated on an island called Japan. Thousands of people died in an instant, and in the aftermath thousands more were going to die of sickness and starvation. But one man had an idea to send bricks of dried noodles with a packet of flavoring to anyone who was hungry. They knew they weren't going to starve. On the island of Jamaica they cook chicken in a way that doesn't make any smoke. They do that because a long time ago, they were slaves, and the smoke would've alerted slavers and they would then be running for their lives. Zebulon, why do Jewish people eat unleavened bread?

ZEBULON

Because they too were slaves. When word came from Moses that it was time to flee captivity in the night, they had no time to wait for their bread to rise. So to this day, the flat bread is a reminder of that flight from their oppressor.

GLORIA

For me, when I cook with corn, beans, and squash, it's called the tres hermanas. The same way my ancestors cooked thousands of years ago. My ancestors who were nearly wiped out by foreign invaders... Show me your plate, and I'll tell you a sad, sad story. Your sad story begins today. The day you had to turn to the spirits of your ancestors to keep you alive while you were just trying to do the right thing, and leave a better life for your children. I can't make you eat this food. It's your story, not mine. So Zebulon's going to say a prayer, and then you're all going to make a choice. It's up to you.

ZEBULON

Bless us, O Lord. Bless our food and our drink. Since you redeemed us so dearly and delivered us from evil, as you gave us a share in this food so may you give us a share in eternal life.

GLORIA

Aaaaaand now we wait.

LEIF

You couldn't have made it more plain. You literally served it to them on a platter.

SHEL

Hey, Gloria, that was a great speech.

GLORIA

Thanks, Shel.

SHEL

So eating isn't just a gross thing you do with your face, it's also a story.

GLORIA

It is, absolutely.

SHEL

Okay. I still don't feel like I'm missing out but I get it now.

GLORIA

Good.

AVA

NOW can I eat the big animal?

LEIF

You're going to have to get in line, check it out.

GLORIA

They're eating.

LEIF

You did it.

SHEL

It worked.

AVA

Yeah, I'm not standing in that line.

GLORIA

Holy shit. It fucking worked!

LEIF

Goddamn. Eat shit, Ted Empire.

GLORIA

They're going to be okay.

LEIF

Guys, I want to apologize. I was kind of a dick today but I've worked all of it out of my system.

AVA

I would also like to apologize for nothing. It was a banner day for me and I performed perfectly. Here's to me.

EFFIE  
Zebulon.

ZEBULON  
What is it, Dear?

EFFIE  
We're too late.

SHEL  
What's that in the sky?

GLORIA  
Where?

SHEL  
Up there.

GLORIA  
Maybe it's just some planes or something?

AVA  
Three planes heading right for us?

LEIF  
Shit.

GLORIA  
Leif, what are they?

LEIF  
I'm sorry guys. They found us.

SFX: THREE TED BOTS CRASH DOWN INTO THE PARKING LOT. THE CROWD BEGINS SCREAMING AND RUNNING FOR COVER.

LEIF (CONT'D)  
Everybody inside! Move!

TED BOT  
Staff of Midnight Burger. Do not move.

GLORIA  
Who's got Effie and Zebulon?

SHEL  
I've got them!

TED BOT  
We will fire. Do not move.

AVA  
Hurry up!

SFX: THE BOTS BEGIN FIRING. DOOR CHIME. NOISE FROM THE CROWD  
FADES TO THE BACKGROUND.

GLORIA

How long until we jump?

LEIF

Too long.

GLORIA

So this is it, huh?

LEIF

... Yeah... Yeah, this is it, guys. I'm sorry.

GLORIA

Okay.

SHEL

What does that mean?

GLORIA

Okay, Shel, listen to me. I'm going to need you to get out of here, okay?

SHEL

What? What are you talking about?

GLORIA

They're not looking for you, they're looking for us.

AVA

They're not coming in.

GLORIA

You said yourself, the soil is great here. And you speak the language.

LEIF

They'll come in.

SHEL

I'm not leaving you guys.

TED BOT

Spatial anomaly detected.

GLORIA

You have to.

LEIF

What did it say?

EFFIE

Shel, Gloria is right. You need to get gone before it's too late.

ZEBULON

We'll be fine, Shel.

AVA

Spatial anomaly detected.

LEIF

That can't be us, it's too early.

GLORIA

You need to stay alive for your people, remember?

SHEL

Is that what's going to happen, they're going to kill you?

LEIF

Hang on. Something's happening.

EFFIE

Dear, I feel very strange.

AVA

I see it. There.

LEIF

What the fuck is that?

GLORIA

Is it coming towards us?

AVA

Leif, Valdimir's tape recorder, do we still have it?

LEIF

What? Why?

AVA

Do we have it!?

LEIF

It's behind the counter. What for?

EFFIE

Oh this is a very strange feeling.

GLORIA

It's definitely coming towards us.

SHEL

What is that thing?

AVA

Everybody come here. Leif grab the radio. Everybody hang onto each other.

GLORIA

Ava, what's happening?

AVA

Don't let go of each other.

GLORIA

Do you have a plan?

AVA

I don't have a plan... somebody else does.

SFX: THE SPATIAL ANOMALY RUSHES TOWARD THE DINER. SILENCE.

END