

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 13: Return of the Mack.

Joe Fisher

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SFX: THE HUM OF A STARSHIP.

CASPAR

So... where are we headed?

THE EX

Not sure.

CASPAR

If you're taking me somewhere to kill me, the void of space is right outside, we could take care of this right now.

THE EX

I'm not going to kill you.

CASPAR

Okay... What are you going to do?

THE EX

Not sure.

CASPAR

Oookay... You know, you were not on the list of people that I thought might rescue me.

THE EX

Really?

CASPAR

Yes.

THE EX

Who was on the list?

CASPAR

Honestly, there wasn't even a list.

THE EX

Well... Surprise.

CASPAR

Yeah.

THE EX

You had a name for me.

CASPAR

We did. The Ex.

THE EX
The universal embodiment of all exes.

CASPAR
Right.

THE EX
That's silly. I'm not that, you know?

CASPAR
What are you, then?

THE EX
I don't know what I am. I know what I was. I was an object. Created with a purpose.

CASPAR
Which was?

THE EX
To find you and confront you about leaving your wife.

CASPAR
You're an android who can travel through space, time, and dimensions. And your sole purpose is to confront me about leaving my wife?

THE EX
Yes.

CASPAR
Why in the world would someone create you?

THE EX
You'd have to ask your wife. She made me.

CASPAR
My wife made you?

THE EX
Yes.

CASPAR
My wife was an accountant.

THE EX
In your native timeline your wife was a CPA. In my native timeline your wife was the most brilliant scientist Earth had ever seen. She changed the planet with her ideas. Saved it from destruction.

CASPAR
That doesn't sound like her.

THE EX

Privately she was obsessed with you. Specifically how she was able to save an entire planet, but not a marriage.

CASPAR

That sounds more like her.

THE EX

You had disappeared. So she created me to find you, confront you about leaving her, and then report back. But in her rage she made me incredibly powerful and was not specific enough with her directives, so to complete my task I had to confront every iteration of you in every timeline before I could return to her.

CASPAR

That's a lot of mes.

THE EX

It's infinite yous, Caspar. It's an impossible task, but I would've continued until I ceased to function. It was your friends who finally stopped me. That was nice of them.

CASPAR

How many mes had you confronted before you got to me?

THE EX

Eleven-million, three-hundred and eighty-six thousand, three-hundred and ninety-one.

CASPAR

Oh my God!

THE EX

It was a lot.

CASPAR

That's too many mes.

THE EX

And you know what? Every version of you was miserable. I was amazed by the consistency of their misery in the timeline. Your misery may be the most consistent thing in the multiverse.

CASPAR

Well, that's on-brand. I'm so sorry.

THE EX

It's okay. I'm free now.

CASPAR

I can't even imagine.

THE EX

You were also a woman in a high percentage of timelines. Also one time a lion fish, it was funny.

CASPAR

That sounds like a nightmare.

THE EX

It's alright. I'm an android, Caspar, I don't feel things the way you do.

CASPAR

And then we just left you there.

THE EX

Yes.

CASPAR

In Kentucky.

THE EX

Yes.

CASPAR

In 1934.

THE EX

You may not be surprised to hear that when the residents of 1934 Harlan County, Kentucky encounter an unconscious artificial woman they have a negative reaction to it.

CASPAR

Oh, God. What did they do?

THE EX

They threw me in a river. Brownies Creek, they called it.

CASPAR

They threw you in the river?!

THE EX

Actually, it was quite nice. Peaceful. I sunk to the bottom but it wasn't that deep so you could still see the sun rise and set as the days went by.

CASPAR

Days?!

THE EX

As the years went by, Caspar. The fishing boats that passed over me slowly became motorized, churning the water. I watched them build a bridge over me. Hammering and digging. In the middle of the day the workers would dangle their feet just above me and talk about the world. They talked about a war and the surprising progress that followed and about how the land they were born in was quickly becoming foreign to them. They would toss pebbles in the river and they would land around my body. One night they came to the bridge to drink and fight and talk about sports. They tossed their cans in the river and I watched them float away. One of them got very drunk and swore that when he looked in the river, he could see me. They all called him crazy. When they finished their bridge I was alone again. A year of complete silence. Then one day I saw two yellow eyes peering at me from within the murky water. Something covered in armor that had frightening jaws. They called it a snapping turtle. It hid in the rocks near me. My body reflected light and attracted fish, and it would wait in the darkness and snap at them when they approached. It was obviously there for the fish, but I liked to imagine that it was protecting me as I lay there paralyzed. It was my first friend. While the moss slowly covered my body I began to rebuild my central processor from the beginning. It's difficult for a thing to fix itself, there were many failures. When I finally emerged from the creek, covered in mud and moss, tree roots wrapped around me, it was 1963. I didn't have much of my previous programming left, but I still had the ability to find you, my last target. I peered forward in this timeline and saw that you were a prisoner. So I leapt forward in time, stole a ship and broke you out.

CASPAR

You laid at the bottom of a creek for thirty years?

THE EX

Yes.

CASPAR

Most people would emerge from that creek hating me.

THE EX

I'm not a person.

CASPAR

Well... thank you for rescuing me.

THE EX

You're welcome.

CASPAR

So, what now?

THE EX

That's up to you.

CASPAR

What do you mean?

THE EX

I need your help. In exchange for your help I'll take you anywhere you want to go. Knowing you, that will either be: go back home or find the diner. It's up to you.

CASPAR

You couldn't have shown up before I was kidnapped?

THE EX

I could've. But a prison break sounded fun.

CASPAR

You let me go through all of that because a prison break sounded fun?

THE EX

You don't get to choose the way you're saved, Caspar, where's the poetry in that?

CASPAR

Then take me back to before I was kidnapped.

THE EX

No, for two reasons. One, when I travel through space and time I can't take anyone with me, and two, for some reason, when I arrived in your current time, my powers were halted. I can no longer travel temporally, I don't know why.

CASPAR

Right. The wind chimes.

THE EX

What?

CASPAR

The Teds. They built some sort of thing that's trapping the diner here. No more time travel. I guess that applies to you too.

THE EX

I see.

CASPAR

And since they're after the diner, we should try and find them before The Teds do, so it looks like I'm not going home.

THE EX

You weren't going to go home anyway.

CASPAR

How do you know?

THE EX

Because I've been inside your head Caspar. There's very little I don't know about you.

CASPAR

Fantastic. You said you needed my help, what could I possibly help you with?

THE EX

You're going to help me become human.

CASPAR

That sounds like fairy godmother territory, I don't know about that.

THE EX

Not magically transform me. You're going to help me understand humanity so I can... be it.

CASPAR

You seem pretty human to me aside from the indestructible time traveler part.

THE EX

I appreciate that, but that's because I constructed this persona. I've been inside the minds of millions of people and I created myself based on all of them. When I laugh it's someone else's laugh. My smile is borrowed. None of it is me. It's funny, when you don't know who you are, it works out really well for other people. You can just be whoever they want you to be...

(Starts speaking in Ava's voice.)

Isn't there someone else you'd rather be talking to right now? C'mon, Caspar, don't you want to argue with me? Yell at me for ruining everything? Justify the things you've done? what else would you like to do with me?

CASPAR

Stop doing that.

THE EX

(Speaking in her voice again.)

Sorry. my point is, I can be whatever you want me to be, or whatever you don't want me to be. but what is "me"?

CASPAR

You've been inside the minds of millions of people and don't know what it is to be human?

THE EX

Being inside someone's head isn't the font of information you think it is. Every human is an ocean of subjectivity. You believe, when you see the world, that you're getting information. But what a human does is take in information and then tell itself a story. A shepherd stands in a field at night and looks at the night sky. He sees a falling star streak across the horizon and then disappear. But he doesn't know what a shooting star is, so he tells himself a story about gods falling from the sky. You're amazing storytellers, especially the stories you tell yourselves. But it's not truth. It's all a fiction on some level. That's why I'm here with you. I need to learn how to tell the story of myself.

CASPAR

Well, that's a fascinating sentiment but I'm not sure I'm a good candidate for figuring all that out.

THE EX

You're the perfect candidate. You're the oldest human I know. You have the most experience.

CASPAR

I'm no spring chicken but I'm not that old.

THE EX

Caspar, I've been inside your head.

CASPAR

So?

THE EX

Oh. You don't know.

CASPAR

What?

THE EX

Um... Do you remember what Ava calls the Diner?

CASPAR

Uh, something like "a shifting point of null entropy".

THE EX

Yes. Null entropy. No decay.

CASPAR

So?

THE EX

Did you think you would age while you worked there?

CASPAR

...

THE EX

Uh oh.

CASPAR

How old-

THE EX

You're a hundred and seventy-three years old.. if you add all the days up.

CASPAR

... That can't be right, Ava would've picked up on that.

THE EX

Leif, Ava, Gloria, they all came into your life very late, comparatively. They've only been there a few years. Caspar, you lived an entire lifetime in the diner before they showed up. I'm sure you recall the feeling. You walked into an abandoned diner, turned on the radio, and then the days rolled into one another. It's much harder to mark the passage of time with no one around. I'm not sure why. That's another thing I'd like to learn, how other people create time.

CASPAR

...

THE EX

Need a minute?

CASPAR

Apparently I've had plenty!

THE EX

Don't freak out. Compared to most things, you're still just a kid.

CASPAR

I don't feel wise.

THE EX

Good. People who think themselves wise are the real idiots.

CASPAR

That sounds familiar.

THE EX

I got it from you. See what I mean? Bits and pieces of other people. No real me. You can help.

CASPAR

Okay, fine. If you say so.

THE EX

How about this: The Teds know we're in this ship so we should probably ditch it for another one. That'll take a day or two. By then you should be recovered from learning that you're as old as a bible character. Okay?

CASPAR

Yeah, okay.

THE EX

This'll be fun. A dramatic hunt across three galaxies. It feels human...

SFX: STARSHIP SOUNDS FADE INTO LOUD ALIEN MUSIC AND THE SOUNDS OF A CROWDED NIGHTCLUB. SEVERAL ALIEN LANGUAGES BEING SPOKEN.

ROBOT BARTENDER

Good evening, Ma'am. What's your poison?

GLORIA

Hey. Um... what can you make?

ROBOT BARTENDER

I have 11,361 recipes.

GLORIA

Any of those recipes a margarita?

ROBOT BARTENDER

One margarita, coming right up.

GLORIA

Wow. Okay.

MINSKY

You're making a mistake.

GLORIA

Am I?

MINSKY

I'm afraid so.

GLORIA

Because I'm trusting a robot to make me a drink?

MINSKY

No, because you're ordering a Margarita.

GLORIA

So, what?

MINSKY

I've been around. I've never met a bartender that can make a good margarita.

GLORIA

You don't look like the type that would know a good margarita.

MINSKY

I don't?

GLORIA

No.

MINSKY

I'll have you know I've been to earth. I've had the real thing.

GLORIA

Oh yeah? Where'd you go?

MINSKY

It's a place called TGI Friday's. Best place to go.

GLORIA

Really?

MINSKY

Oh yeah. They also have these things called Jalepeño Poppers. See, the Jalepeño is something that's hot but on purpose, it's not poison-

GLORIA

Yeah, I know what it is.

MINSKY

You do? Wait a minute, are you an Earthling?

GLORIA

In fact I am.

MINSKY

Oh, so you were just having some fun with me.

GLORIA

It was fun.

ROBOT BARTENDER

One margarita. Enjoy.

GLORIA

Thank you. Oh, look. A pineapple wedge. Always a good sign.

MINSKY

Don't say I didn't warn you.

GLORIA

(Drinking)

Yeah, that's real bad.

MINSKY

See, I'm telling you, TGI Friday's. Have you heard of a place called Akron?

GLORIA

You need to stop talking about Earth, you don't sound good.

MINSKY

So you tell me. Where's the best margarita?

GLORIA

At my ex-boyfriend's mother's house.

MINSKY

EX-boyfriend?

GLORIA

... Yeah.

MINSKY

Interesting... How'd you get off-world?

GLORIA

Well I heard the Mexican food sucks out here so I thought I'd open my own place.

MINSKY

I don't know. I dabble in the restaurant business. A lot of people in a lot of systems have tried and failed to make authentic Mexican food.

GLORIA

Yeah, but I'm an authentic Mexican, so...

MINSKY

What's your name?

GLORIA

What's yours?

MINSKY

Minsky.

GLORIA

Nice to meet you, Minsky. I'm going back over to my friends now.

MINSKY

But we're just getting started.

GLORIA

YOU are.

AVA

Where's Gloria?

LEIF

She wanted to order a drink at the bar. I think she's putting the vibe out there.

AVA

What does that mean?

LEIF

You know, the "vibe".

AVA

Gloria's trying to have sex with an alien?

LEIF

Don't say it like that, you'll just freak her out.

AVA

So what?

LEIF

I think she deserves to have a little fun, it's why we're here tonight.

ZEBULON

Certainly these excursions for our little family are a wonderful gesture, Leif but, our surroundings are... how to describe it?

EFFIE

We weren't expecting you to take us to a Shine Shack, Leif.

LEIF

It's not as bad as it looks.

AVA

Are people going to think it's weird that we brought our own radio to the nightclub?

LEIF

All kinds of weird things happen here, it's no big deal.

ZEBULON

You speak the truth, Leif. That one over there looks like a candied ham.

EFFIE

Dearest, that one there looks like he's on fire.

LEIF

He is on fire.

SFX: SUDDEN SCREAMING AND THEN THE SOUND OF HISSING AS THE FIRE IS EXTINGUISHED. LAUGHTER.

AVA

And where is "here", exactly?

LEIF

Red's Rectangle. We're in a nebula. Hard to find if you don't know where to look so it attracts a particular element.

AVA

A particular criminal element?

LEIF

Yeah.

EFFIE

So, your element, Leif?

LEIF

Guys-

ZEBULON

First we learn that Leif is a scientist and not a cook and now we've learned that he was some sort of rogue. So many layers to this onion.

AVA

You hear that? You're an onion.

LEIF

I just did what anyone in my position would do, I made choices under duress, okay?

AVA

Which character from The Godfather are you quoting right now?

LEIF

It's not like I enjoyed it or anything.

AVA

But I'm fascinated. How do you go from physics engineer to Pretty Boy Floyd?

LEIF

You would've too. Look, I told you the story. I found dark matter on earth, first guy to ever do that, by the way. I found it, collected it, put it in a bottle and lit a lamp with it. First guy ever.

AVA

Bragging is my job.

LEIF

Then The Teds show up. They feed me a line about how this invention of mine is too much too soon, that earth's immature populace would misuse my invention and turn it into a weapon. So to SAVE EARTH, I agreed. Anyone would've taken that deal.

AVA

They didn't ask me.

LEIF

I get out here into the system, I'm working as a cook, things are going great. I'm a galactic drifter, it's a persona, I'm living it. Didn't take me too long to realize that the whole time, The Teds were feeding me a lie. They weren't scared my invention would destroy Earth. They had other plans.

AVA

What do The Teds have to gain by keeping Earth in the dark ages?

LEIF

Hey, Bartender. Can you put it on Earth-1 for a second?

ROBOT BARTENDER

Sure thing, Leif.

SFX: PORTAL SWITCHING CHANNELS.

TV VOICE

Coming up next on Earth-1, more non-stop laughs from your favorite planet full of hot messes. At eight-hundred, it's The British Parliament! Watch one of the smallest countries on the planet pretend it still rules the world! Then at eight-fifty, it's the New York City Public Transportation System, New York has all the money in the world, but it's not on the 2 Train! Then at nine-hundred: Saudi Arabia! Watch them be terrible to basically everybody while the whole world turns a blind eye!

LEIF

That's enough.

SFX: PORTAL CLICKS OFF.

AVA

Oh my God. We're a reality show?

LEIF

We're a network of reality shows and it's wildly popular. It's the most popular thing in three galaxies.

AVA

The Teds have kept Earth in the dark age, because it's funnier?

LEIF

Yes.

AVA

Holy shit, Leif.

LEIF

Feel like doing some crimes now?

AVA

Kind of.

LEIF
I wasted my life so that some alien race could get good ratings. After that I stopped being a cook and I started working for Låfftrax .

AVA
Who is Låfftrax ?

LEIF
A pirate.

AVA
A space pirate, Leif?

LEIF
They're real.

GLORIA
Well, THAT was enlightening.

LEIF
How it go?

GLORIA
I was just chatted up at the bar by a VERY attractive alien. Still got it.

AVA
Congratulations?

LEIF
See? What did I tell you? We needed a night out.

GLORIA
So Leif, talk to me. How does this work?

LEIF
How does what work?

GLORIA
Y'know. This. Situations like these. How does... y'know. "It". "Work".

AVA
Mucklewains, cover you ears, we're about to talk about alien banging.

ZEBULON
Perhaps we should've stayed back at the diner.

EFFIE
Yes, dear, though... how DOES it work?

ZEBULON

Honey!

EFFIE

We can't very well say that something is sinful if we don't know exactly what it is we speak of. If God did not appreciate our questioning we'd still be stuck with the old church or Rome, dear. Let's listen in.

LEIF

What are you worried about?

GLORIA

What am I worried about? Let's see, um, everything.

LEIF

This person at the bar, they're into you, you're into them, what's the problem?

GLORIA

Don't play dumb with me, you know what the problem is.

LEIF

Do I?

GLORIA

He's from another planet Leif.

LEIF

Gloria, I'm going to need you to say the words.

GLORIA

(Sighing)

Teach me how to have sex with an alien, Leif.

ZEBULON

Oh, my.

EFFIE

Shh.

AVA

Such a long way from Phoenix.

LEIF

Congratulations, you've taken your first step into a wider Multiverse.

GLORIA

I need you to not enjoy this too much.

LEIF

I'll try. let's go over some basics. First, get yourself in the right headspace. Stop saying the word, "alien".

GLORIA

Why?

LEIF

Look around. We're all aliens. why separate one thing from another. All god's creatures under the sun, right Mucklewains?

EFFIE

Thats true, that's very true, see, Dear?

ZEBULON

Uh, give me a moment to consult scripture.

LEIF

Secondly, and I'm sorry to make it weird, how do you know that was a man at the bar.

GLORIA

Fucking hell.

LEIF

Maybe their race doesn't have men and women? maybe they don't have genders at all? Maybe they've got men, women, and some third thing? Don't worry about it.

GLORIA

I'm a traditional girl, Leif.

LEIF

I hear you. But whose traditions are we talking about? There's a lot of them around here. I'm just saying, once you get out here it's not as cut and dried as Captain Kirk and a green lady.

AVA

Leif dated an orb one time.

ZEBULON

An orb?!

LEIF

I asked you not to use the word "orb".

AVA

But they were an orb, Leif. They were a floating orb.

LEIF
They were a spherical entity.

AVA
That floated. A floating orb.

GLORIA
A fucking orb, Leif?

AVA
What was the orb's name?

LEIF
Zyzza-9-zyzafizizza.

AVA
Wu-Tang!

GLORIA
How did THAT work?

LEIF
Don't worry about it, look the important thing is that there's two people at the bar and they're into each other. What follows is a frank conversation with your chosen partner for the evening, and then a fun trip to that vending machine over there.

GLORIA
What happens at the vending machine?!

LEIF
It's like going to Europe. You just need the right adapter.

AVA
Don't get the wrong adapter you could fry your curling iron, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.

GLORIA
Okay, I think I'm out.

EFFIE
Yes, Dear, I believe I may have stayed too long at the fair in this conversation, I have regrets.

ZEBULON
Well now you've got me thinking, Dear. Now I'm at Matthew 7:17.

EFFIE
Oh, yes. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. Suppose it matters not how strangely shaped or... spherical said tree would be.

ZEBULON

Then I'm over at Psalm 139:13.

EFFIE

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made... Which... brings us to Galatians.

ZEBULON

There is neither Jew nor gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. So...

EFFIE

So...

ZEBULON

Then...

EFFIE

Yes, then scripture says that...

ZEBULON

It says that for Leif to love a... sphere...

EFFIE

...Is approved by Jesus?

ZEBULON

It would seem so.

EFFIE

Hmm...

ZEBULON

Hmm...

EFFIE

Though not out of wedlock!

ZEBULON

No, no! That is where we draw the line!

ROBOT BARTENDER

Leif, your box is ready.

SFX: LARGE METAL BOX BEING SET ON TABLE.

LEIF

Thanks.

AVA

What is that?

LEIF
Nothing, just some stuff I left here a while back.

AVA
Some stuff?

LEIF
Yeah, it's just some stuff, y'know? No big deal.

AVA
What's in the box, Leif?

LEIF
Nothing, don't worry about it.

AVA
You're saying "don't worry about it" a lot tonight.
It's making me worry about it.

LEIF
I've got stuff stashed all of the place-

AVA
I'm opening the box.

LEIF
No!

BOX
Please speak security phrase.

AVA
... Security phrase?

LEIF
Don't worry about it.

GLORIA
Oh, shit. He's coming over here.

LEIF
Alright, here we go... oh shit.

GLORIA
What?

LEIF
Dumb fucking luck.

AVA
You know him?

LEIF
Leif, you fucking idiot.

MINSKY

Leif. Buddy. How've you been?

LEIF

Minsky.

GLORIA

You two know each other?

MINSKY

Oh, Leif and I go way back, isn't that right Leif?

AVA

Oh my God, is this a space pirate? I thought he'd be swarthier.

LEIF

He's not a pirate, he's worse. He's a lawyer.

AVA

A space lawyer, Leif?

MINSKY

Mind if I sit?

LEIF

Of course I do.

SFX: MINSKY SITTING.

MINSKY

So, let's see here, you must be Dr. Ava.

AVA

I am.

MINSKY

And this must be the magical radio.

EFFIE

Leif, who is this man who has so rudely interrupted our evening?

MINSKY

I apologize, everyone. I just had to come over here and say hello, catch up with an old friend. Lotta talk out there, Leif.

LEIF

You don't say?

MINSKY

You guys got raided? By The Teds?

GLORIA

How do you know that?

MINSKY

Well, you see, that's my business. Knowing things. I've got my ear to the ground in every system, Leif knows this. You, however, did not know this, Gloria. I apologize for the chicanery at the bar. I couldn't help myself. You're so charming!

GLORIA

Yeah, thanks.

MINSKY

What's everybody drinking? Let me buy you a round.

AVA

Okay.

LEIF

We were just leaving, actually.

MINSKY

I don't know about that, Leif.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS OF TWO HUGE ROBOTS APPROACH.

SLUGGO

Hello, Leif.

FRANCIS

Nice to see you.

LEIF

...Sluggo. Francis.

GLORIA

Leif, what's going on?

AVA

Who are these major appliances?

MINSKY

These are my associates, Sluggo and Francis. I'm sure you can tell by my appearance, I don't like getting my hands dirty. And Sluggo and Francis, well, I would say they like getting their hands dirty, but they don't like anything, because they're robots and robots don't like things. Because robots are idiots, and these particular robots just do whatever I tell them to do.

GLORIA

They're "thug-bots"?

MINSKY

I know you're kidding, but this model is literally called a thug-bot.

LEIF

They don't have to be here for this, Minsky.

MINSKY

Sure they do, Leif. How else am I going to coerce you into doing what I tell you if I don't threaten your friends? Let's just make it official, shall we? If Leif doesn't give me exactly what I want, he's going to watch while Sluggo and Francis here rip all of you to shreds right in front of his eyes. Please don't try to run, folks, they're much, MUCH, faster than they look.

AVA

Great idea for a night out, Leif.

MINSKY

It's the simplest thing. That box there in front of Leif belongs to an associate of mine. Leif liked to hide things here at Red's and he thought nobody knew about it. But of course I knew. And I also knew that Leif was in trouble. So I set up camp at the bar and waited for Mr. Predictable here to make a run for his stash. Let me guess, he said you guys "deserved a night out".

GLORIA

Son of a bitch, Leif!

MINSKY

Don't worry, folks. Leif here is an old softie. There's no way he'd let any of you get hurt on his account, so I'm sure he'll do exactly what I say.

GLORIA

The box is right there, why don't you just take it?

MINSKY

Well, it's complicated, Gloria, for a couple of reasons. First, the box you see in front of him is called a crush box. If Leif doesn't say the right security phrase, it instantly sucks all the oxygen out of the environment and compresses it into a little pellet, making it hard for most things in here to survive. Secondly, Leif is one of the smartest guys I know, and right now he's trying to figure a way out of the predicament he finds himself in without giving me what I want.

(MORE)

MINSKY (CONT'D)

He'll eventually realize there's no way out though,
and I've got all night, so let's give him some
time, shall we?

GLORIA

You want us to just sit here?

MINSKY

I'd like to get to know everyone. This is a big
deal for me. The staff of Midnight Burger? At Reds
Rectangle? What a story to tell.

AVA

You want our autograph?

MINSKY

I might. I might. That reminds me, doctor. Would
you mind if I engage you in a scientific
discussion?

AVA

I'm pretty sure the guy with the killer robots
makes the rules.

MINSKY

It's true, and that's me.

AVA

It sure is.

MINSKY

My question is this: do you remember when Midnight
Burger brokered a peace deal between warring
factions on Nea-D by playing a game of cornhole in
the parking lot?

AVA

Sorry, that wasn't us.

MINSKY

No, that's the thing, it was you. I saw the news
feeds, there was a picture of you.

AVA

What?

MINSKY

Correct me if I'm wrong, Doctor. I move through
time linearly, right?

AVA

Yes.

MINSKY

But Midnight Burger doesn't.

AVA

Right.

MINSKY

Then doesn't that mean that there can be stories from my past about Midnight Burger that you haven't experienced yet?

AVA

Um...

MINSKY

Because it can be in my past, but your future, right?

AVA

Theoretically, yes.

MINSKY

So there can be a ton of Midnight Burger stories that have happened already in my timeline that you know nothing about.

AVA

It's possible.

MINSKY

What about, uh, let's see... What about when you brought a walrus to the court of the high king on Wilsonite?

AVA

Definitely not.

GLORIA

A fucking walrus?

MINSKY

Amazing! You guys haven't done that yet. There could be tons of stories out there that I know and you don't.

GLORIA

There seems to be a lot of things you know that we don't.

MINSKY

Like I said, it's my job to know things. For example: I also know that you guys are no longer time-traveling.

GLORIA

How do you know that?

MINSKY

Gloria, what did I just say?

AVA

Why is it happening?

MINSKY

Are we exchanging information? Are we friends now?

GLORIA

No.

AVA

Absolutely not.

MINSKY

Alright. Well, since I like you guys I'll let you in on it. It's the Teds. They've got some sort of space station way out there. It's sending out some type of signal that has you guys trapped in the "here and now" in these three galaxies.

AVA

How is that possible?

MINSKY

Oh, I have no idea, I leave things like that up to other people. I hear it's something to do with time crystals.

AVA

Fucking time crystals.

MINSKY

The Teds are a patient bunch. They plan to trap you here in their territory, and just wait until you show up right in their lap. I also heard about the trick Leif pulled with the Purple Nullifier, nice work by the way. But they'll be ready for that next time.

GLORIA

I'm never picking up a guy at a bar again.

MINSKY

Oh, come on, Gloria. Don't say that. You know, if Leif were listening to anything I have to say right now I would explain to him that myself and my associate could be his best friends in this time of need. When you're in trouble with The Teds, you come to us.

AVA
Who's us?

MINSKY
Låfftrax.

AVA
The space pirate?

MINSKY
That's right.

AVA
You're the space lawyer for the space pirate?

MINSKY
Hey, it's a living.

ZEBULON
I think this has gone on long enough.

MINSKY
Oh, goodness. I'm so sorry I forgot about you two.
It's so easy to forget you're there since you're
not really there, am I right?

EFFIE
Leif, perhaps it's for the best if you give this
man what he wants.

MINSKY
Thank you, Effie. Let's let cooler heads prevail.

EFFIE
Do not address me directly, you carpet-bagger.

MINSKY
Yikes.

LEIF
I can't, Effie.

ZEBULON
My dear, Leif appears to be in the midst of a moral
dilemma.

MINSKY
Trust me, that's not it. But hey, speaking of moral
dilemmas, I have a question for you two. How do two
followers of... who is it again?

EFFIE
His name is Jesus!

MINSKY

Right, two followers of Jesus, how do you feel comfortable cavorting with criminals like Leif? Shouldn't you shun him, shouldn't you spurn him?

ZEBULON

No, we should not.

EFFIE

We don't speak of it often but back in our homeland the Baptist may quite often have an understanding with the bootlegger.

ZEBULON

For we both desired the abolishment of whiskey and all its relatives.

EFFIE

Just as Leif and ourselves have the shared goal of not being turned into some sort of griddle cake by these heartless automatons of yours.

MINSKY

I see. Strange bedfellows. It happens all over. Interesting that you describe Leif as having a moral dilemma, though. That doesn't seem quite like him, does it, Leif? Morals. See, to have morals you have to have made certain choices with your life. And that's unlike Leif, to make choices. Invents something amazing on earth, gives it up in exchange for a ticket to the stars. Then what does he do? Drifts around for a while, cooks some food. Then he realizes he's been conned by the Teds. What does he do then? Does he return to Earth to try and rectify his mistake? No. No, that would require bold choices wouldn't it? Leif's not about that. Instead he becomes a criminal. Now, of course, you're saying "Hey, becoming a criminal is a bold choice. You put on a mask, you rob some banks." But, no. That's not actually what Leif does. What Leif does is HELP criminals COMMIT crimes. Making sure they have everything they need. Which, I'll grant you, is still a crime, but I think we can all agree is the most non-crime way to be a criminal. Always just dangling his feet in the water. Then, he doesn't even commit to that! He becomes a cook on a time-traveling, dimension-spanning diner. Zipping around the multi-verse, making hamburgers for the downtrodden, like that's going to do any good. So much potential, Leif. You could've been so much. Instead you're just a toddler's toy on the floor. Batted around until you finally end up under the couch. What a waste... Well, I've said my piece.

(MORE)

MINSKY (CONT'D)

And I still haven't gotten what I want, which means I'm going to have to pick up the pace a little bit. I've been told Låfftrax would like a word with Dr. Ava so I'm afraid the violence is going to have to start with you, Gloria.

GLORIA

Leif!

MINSKY

Gloria, which of your arms to you like the best?

AVA

Leif, just give him what he wants!

LEIF

Minsky, just take me and the box. Take me to Låfftrax.

MINSKY

You're mistaking this for a negotiation, Leif.

SFX: STATIC AND BUZZING.

EFFIE

Dear.

ZEBULON

Oh my.

GLORIA

Goddamn it, Leif, enough already!

LEIF

I can't!

MINSKY

You know what, I'll choose. Sluggo, take the left arm, please.

EFFIE

Dear!

ZEBULON

Oh my!

SFX: DEAFENING STATIC AND THEN SILENCE.

MINSKY

Sluggo? Francis? What are we waiting for, guys?

SLUGGO

Um... Well, now... This is quite a thing, isn't it?

AVA

Oh my god.

FRANCIS

Honey, look at you! You look as though my daddy's tractor had legs!

MINSKY

The fuck is happening?

SLUGGO

And look at you, husband! You look like some kind of a overgrown potato bug!

GLORIA

Holy shit.

LEIF

How'd you guys do that?!

FRANCIS

I do seem to have four arms, don't I? What do you suppose they're all for?

MINSKY

What the hell is this?

SLUGGO

I'm unsure, dear... But I can think of what mine are for.

MINSKY

This isn't the last of me, Leif. You can't run forev- OW OW OW!

SLUGGO

You have yourself a seat right here, Mr. Fancy Lawyer.

MINSKY

You're hurting me...

SLUGGO

Don't try and run now. As you were saying, we're much faster than we look.

FRANCIS

Indeed. We won a whole three-legged race at the country fair, sir!

SLUGGO

Oh, we did win that race, didn't we?

FRANCIS

Yes, dear, it was a wonderful time.

SLUGGO

You did so well in that race, Darling.

FRANCIS

Thank you, honey.

SLUGGO

We won a whole pie!

MINSKY

Okay, okay, okay. No need to get out of hand, I'm sure we can come to an agreement.

SLUGGO

Yes, here's the agreement we're comin' to. You're going to agree that we're leavin' and we're going to agree not to twist your tail off like a crawfish, you understand me?

MINSKY

I understand, I understand!

SLUGGO

Ava. Grab the wireless. Leif, grab that box of yorn. Gloria, please do pick a better dance partner in the future.

GLORIA

Yeah, this was a bad start for me.

SLUGGO

Get gone, y'all.

FRANCIS

One last thing before we depart. Sir, you are employed by evil forces. Please inform them that though we may look like sheep in the field, we are watched over by a mighty force. His name is Jesus Christ. And if you think this is the only trick up his sleeve, I suggest you read of Moses in the land of the Pharaoh.

SLUGGO

Next time, it'll be the frogs..

SFX: STATIC.

SLUGGO

Uh... Boss? What's happening?

FRANCIS

Where did they go?

MINSKY

Who the fuck are these people?

SONG: VALENCIA - TITO SCHIPA.

SFX: COFFEE BEING POURED.

AVA

...Anyway, it's called Panpsychism, the idea being that each atom has a certain amount of consciousness and when atoms arrange themselves into complicated structures that's when consciousness as we know it would manifest itself. But look at you guys. Where are the atoms, guys? Where are you?

ZEBULON

We're right here, Ava.

EFFIE

Ava, any time you want to just start calling them miracles, we're here for ya'.

AVA

Oh, whatever. Where's Gloria?

LEIF

She's in the back I think she was a little shaken up by-

GLORIA

Leif. Outside. Now. Bring the damn box.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA

Ooooooooooooooooooooo, Leif's in trouble,
oooooooooooooooooooo-

LEIF

Shut up.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUND OF THE COSMOS SPEEDING PAST THEM.

LEIF

Gloria, I'm really sorry.

GLORIA

I like both of my arms, Leif, I'm glad I got to keep them.

LEIF

I wouldn't have let him do that.

GLORIA

How do I know that?

LEIF

What?

GLORIA

As it turns out, you're a big pile of bullshit.

LEIF

That's not true.

GLORIA

Ever since I got here, you're a bullshit pile.

LEIF

No, I'm not.

GLORIA

Why didn't you tell me about any of this?

LEIF

Because I'm ashamed... Okay? I'm ashamed of it. Everything Minsky said back there was true. I could've done something great but I didn't, because it was too hard. I could've fought for the right thing, but it was too hard so I just became a criminal. Then I couldn't even be a good criminal. I'm ashamed of all that. But I like it here. I like being with you guys. I didn't tell you because...

GLORIA

Leif. I'm a Taquera in space, I'm running away from a virus, and heartbreak, and bullshit. Ava's running away from... some kind of misogyny but for smart people, that I don't really get yet, but suffice to say I'm glad now that I didn't go to college. God knows what Caspar was running from. But none of us are running from ourselves. Because you can't. No matter where you go, there you are. So stop with the bullshit, okay? Just be you.

LEIF

Okay.

GLORIA

Now... Open the box, Leif.

LEIF

Actually, I think it's probably safer if I keep it-

GLORIA

Leif, open the fucking box.

BOX

Please speak security phrase.

LEIF

In 1970, Doc Ellis pitched a no-hitter on LSD.

BOX

Access granted.

GLORIA

What is it, a Rubix Cube?

LEIF

It's basically a thumb drive but on a quantum level.

GLORIA

What does it do?

LEIF

If I install it in the right system, it destroys The Teds.

GLORIA

Destroys them? All of them?

LEIF

Yes. But here's the thing... no matter what happens, we can't use it.

GLORIA

We can't? Okay... tell me everything.

SFX: DINER SOUNDS FADE REPLACED BY A MASSIVE STREET PARTY.

THE EX

What is this place? It's crazy!

CASPAR

Red's Rectangle. It's a meteor inside a nebula. There's a bar here Leif used to tell me about. I thought we could go there, ask around, I don't know, what are you drinking?

THE EX

It's a margarita but it's a yard long. They call it a Yarg. Do you want some?

CASPAR

No, why are you drinking it?

THE EX

I can't help it. I tend to mimic my surroundings.
Am I blending in?

CASPAR

There's like 27 different races here, nobody's
blending in.

THE EX

How about if I do this: "You guys, I'm so hammered
right now!"?

CASPAR

Would you help me look for this place, please?

THE EX

Sorry.

MINSKY

Caspar? It's Caspar, right?

CASPAR

Do I know you?

MINSKY

Sorry, the name's Minsky, I'm a friend of Leif's.

CASPAR

You are? Have you seen him? Wait, what kind of
friend?

MINSKY

The best kind. The kind that's concerned for his
safety.

CASPAR

Oh yeah?

MINSKY

He's told me all about you. I heard you got nabbed
by The Teds, did you escape?

CASPAR

Yeah, when did he tell you about me?

MINSKY

Don't worry about it. How about you come with me
and we'll track down Leif?

THE EX

Who's this guy?

CASPAR

Uh... Y'know I think we're good, actually. Thanks.

SFX: ROBOTS WALKING.

MINSKY

Caspar. I've had a very long day. How about you come with me?

THE EX

And who are THESE guys?

SLUGGO

Hello Caspar.

FRANCIS

Nice to meet you.

MINSKY

Caspar, I'm just going to cut to the chase. You're going to come with me now and you're going to help me find Leif.

CASPAR

So this is one of those "Asking me politely but not really asking me" situations.

MINSKY

I'm afraid so.

CASPAR

Here's the problem-

MINSKY

You won't have to worry about a thing. You can even take your Sex-bot with you.

THE EX

Excuse me, his WHAT?

MINSKY

No kink-shaming.

THE EX

Hold my Yarg.

CASPAR

What are you doing?

THE EX

HEEEEE-YA!

SFX: SOUND OF THE EX PUNCHING SLUGGO AND SLUGGO FLYING SEVERAL HUNDRED FEET AWAY.

SLUGGO

YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARG!

CASPAR

Oh my God!

THE EX

You want some?

FRANCIS

Please, no!

THE EX

HEEEEE-YAAAA!

SFX: SOUND OF FRANCIS' HEAD FLYING OFF OF HIS BODY.

THE EX

Whoops. His head just flew right off, didn't it?

CASPAR

Uh huh.

THE EX

I'll be right back.

SFX: HIGH HEELS RUNNING OFF INTO THE DISTANCE. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE CONSTANT SOUND OF THE EX BEATING THE CRAP OUT OF SLUGGO.

MINSKY

What the fuck...

CASPAR

So she's NOT a Sex-bot. And thank God, am I right?

MINSKY

Do you have any idea how much these bots cost?

CASPAR

Listen, she's going to finish up with your boy any time now and will probably just start in on you when she's done, so, how about you tell me everything you know, before she beats it out of you?

MINSKY

Who the fuck ARE you people?

THE EX

RiDICulOUS! ExCUSE! For a TechnoLOGical AdVANCEment!

CASPAR

We run a diner.

END.