

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 24: Big Rock.

By

Joe Fisher

Midnight Burger

Chapter 24: Big Rock.

THE SOUND OF SPACE TIME FLYING BY. EVERYONE IS ON THE ROOF.

ZEBULON

"That's a shame." She said. "I'm going to have to do something about that. I'll try to not make it hurt." And then she vanished.

CASPAR

Well, way to de-escalate the situation, y'all.

EFFIE

We made her tea, we invited her into our home.

CASPAR

And let me guess, the entire time you were looking over the top of your glasses like a disapproving headmistress.

EFFIE

You mean the way I'm looking at you right now?

GLORIA

Can someone explain to me how the three of you all ended up at your old house in Arkansas?

ZEBULON

Well I did have a nice analogy about a grouse hunt.

CASPAR

I would like to opt-out of the grouse hunt analogy.

ZEBULON

Very well.

AVA

One time Effie told me that they seem to just fill up whatever container they're put in. Somehow this woman, Clementine, put them in a container that looked like their past.

CASPAR

Now opting in to the grouse hunt analogy.

ZEBULON

Welcome back.

LEIF

She said she'd "Learned a lot from the others." The others being us. What does that mean?

GLORIA

Has she been spying on us or something?

AVA

If she can travel through various timelines then she can poke around in all of our histories and we'd never know it. By meeting us in the past she just creates another timeline where we all once met a strange lady named Clementine.

LEIF

Great, so she's got all kinds of dirt on us and we know nothing about her?

ZEBULON

She was confused when she spoke. She said she began as nothing and had to remake herself into her current form. Something about waking in a parking lot with no memory. Then her memories returning somehow. She seemed to regard herself as a sort of poorly made garment; one pull at an errant thread and she could unravel completely. She seems to regard us as an errant thread that could undo her, cause her to return to nothing before she had achieved her goal.

GLORIA

And this is when she started talking about her people?

ZEBULON

Yes. "We were just wandering in the darkness." She said. "The stars had burnt out." No light to be found anywhere. Whatever plight has befallen these people of hers, she believes she has the power to undo it.

GLORIA

Why doesn't she just do that, then?

ZEBULON

I don't believe she wishes to save her people, I believe she wishes to erase their plight completely.

AVA

She's trying to remake her timeline.

GLORIA

Okay, why doesn't she just do THAT then?

CASPAR

How would you? It sounds like her entire civilization is screwed somehow, how do you undo that? It wouldn't be one thing, it'd be a million things. How do you undo them all and how do you even know what to undo?

AVA

It's impossible.

LEIF

But she doesn't know that.

CASPAR

You want to tell her?

GLORIA

Okay, here's what I need. I need someone to explain to me what the problem is. In simple terms. We don't understand Clementine, she doesn't understand us, that's an easy problem to fix. Why are we having this meeting on the roof like it's the war room? Why did you two bring us up here?

AVA

Because of something Leif just showed me.

LEIF

Let me direct your attention to this display.

CASPAR

"This display?" Isn't that a 1989 Zenith?

LEIF

I'm salvaging from multiple time periods, you take what you can get.

CASPAR

Can I watch "Who's the Boss?" Later?

LEIF

This oval is a cosmic microwave background. A remnant of the first light that could ever travel freely throughout a Universe. I did this scan from here, while we were dealing with the Mall Zombies.

CASPAR

Shopzies.

GLORIA

We're not calling them that.

LEIF

This is the furthest that light had been able to travel, this is as far as any telescope can see. This is, in a very basic way, everything.

CASPAR

Everything in the universe is now contained on this 1989 Zenith?

LEIF

It's called a Sky Scan, the Planck does it all the time. Ava's idea was to use the sky scan of every universe we go to as a sort of fingerprint. Theoretically every universe we go to would have a unique Cosmic Microwave Background. We use the sky scan as a fingerprint and keep them on file, so we could always know if we've been to a universe before.

GLORIA

That's a fantastic idea, Ava.

CASPAR

She knows.

AVA

But Leif was also working on another project and not telling me, which he promises to never do again.

LEIF

Honestly, it was a shot in the dark. I didn't think anything would come of it.

GLORIA

What'd you find?

LEIF

The first time we met Clementine, I accidentally grabbed her energy signature in the Sky Scan. So, on a whim, I decided to Scan the Universe for her energy signature. Check it out...

GLORIA

... It's everywhere.

CASPAR

It's everywhere in the universe, how could she have been everywhere in the universe?

AVA

That's not all.

LEIF

I also scanned the mall zombies back at the mall. They have the same trace energy signature as Clementine.

AVA

I kept talking about damage to the fabric of spacetime. Leif has found the energy signature that damage to the fabric of spacetime emits. The mall was covered with these energies AND so was Clementine.

CASPAR

What does that mean?

AVA

We don't know yet. But looking at this sample universe, there is damage to space time fabric everywhere in the universe. This damage can only be caused by a gravity wave. For a gravity wave to cause this amount of damage... something very, very big had to happen. Something bigger than has ever even been theorized. Something massive occurred and the wreckage of it is everywhere.

GLORIA

Why are we just now seeing this?

LEIF

We just started looking. We may have been seeing it all along, we just didn't know what to call it.

CASPAR

Could it have been caused by her?

AVA

I don't know. She is pretty powerful.

EFFIE

I'm not feeling right about it. She may have strange gifts but she's just as lost as anyone we've known. She's a piece to the puzzle, she ain't the puzzle.

GLORIA

All of this is interesting, but what do we do? I feel like we're sitting here wondering about things but there's nothing to do, I need to do things.

AVA

I don't know what's going on yet. I need more data.

LEIF

Now that I'm set up up here, we'll learn more with every place we visit.

CASPAR

Yeah, Leif, what is going on on the roof? It's like Santa's Workshop up here.

LEIF

Pretty great, right? I've got like five projects up and running.

GLORIA

Did you fix the standing mixer yet?

LEIF

I've got six projects up and running.

CASPAR

Here comes the bass drop.

THE DINER SETS DOWN. WE HEAR PULSATING DANCE MUSIC AND PARTY GOERS, ALSO GLASS SMASHING AND CARS BURNING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

... Okay, didn't mean that literally.

GLORIA

What is all this?

LEIF

Is it a party or is it a riot?

CASPAR

I think it's both? It's like Mardi Gras with violence.

AVA

We're in the UK somewhere. Look at the street signs.

GLORIA

What's that spray-painted on that building?

LEIF

"Welcome Ashley."

GLORIA

Who's Ashley?

CASPAR

Incoming.

JOSH

(Drunk.)
Hello up there.

CASPAR

Hi.

JOSH

What a delightful cafe, Is it new?

CASPAR

We just opened.

GLORIA

It's a diner.

JOSH

Really? Like the Americans?

GLORIA

Yes.

JOSH

I don't like Americans.

GLORIA

Neither do we.

JOSH

Why do you put pumpkin spice in everything?

LEIF

Who's Ashley?

JOSH

Ah yes, Ashley! She's a Death God. She drags souls into the underworld to torture them forever.

CASPAR

And she's stopping by later?

JOSH

Have you not heard of Ashley?

CASPAR

No.

JOSH

Oh dear, you're not calling it something else in America, are you?

CASPAR

Calling what something else?

JOSH
Do you have kebabs?

GLORIA
No.

JOSH
Have to make do then.

JOSH WALKS INSIDE.

AVA
Guess we have a customer.

GLORIA
Effie, vibe check?

EFFIE
I... Well Gloria it's just the strangest thing. One minute I feel tranquility, the other panic and fear. It's very confusing in this place.

GLORIA
Let's go talk to this guy.

LATER. JOSH EATS TACOS AND WON'T SHUT UP.

JOSH
This is brilliant. This is brilliant. This is what they're meant to taste like? Tacos? No surprise that they don't have them like this here. Most places here have a neon sign that involves a sombrero, which I feel is not the most culturally accurate design aesthetic for the taco. Who invented them? Was it the Spaniards?

CASPAR
18th century silver miners.

GLORIA
Oh shut up, it was the Aztecs.

JOSH
Really, the Aztecs? All those millennia ago they were eating things like this?

GLORIA
Theirs were full of fish and organs but sure.

CASPAR
Really?

GLORIA

Isn't it funny how you don't have to pass a test to call yourself a history buff?

CASPAR

Or a life coach, but who's counting?

JOSH

You know, saying they're full of fish and organs does make them sound more British doesn't it?

LEIF

So, Josh, what's going on outside? It's pretty crazy out there, did you win a football match or something?

JOSH

May I say, while the food is really divine, the atmosphere in this establishment is a bit off. You're all just here, going about your daily lives while all this is going on?

LEIF

While all what is going on?

JOSH

The arrival of Ashley, of course.

LEIF

Who is Ashley?

CASPAR

Is this a cult thing? Are they going to put us in a wicker man?

JOSH

I can't tell if you're being serious or not.

AVA

We get that a lot.

GLORIA

Do us a favor. Treat us like we've been trapped in a mine for two years. What do we need to know?

JOSH

Ah. What a fascinating game. Very well. First off, I am deeply sorry for the mining disaster you have just endured, mining accidents are far more prevalent than one expects. Secondly, while you were trapped in the aforementioned mine, the world discovered Ashley. Ashley is an asteroid. She is headed for Earth. She is 9.3 kilometers wide and she is headed for Earth. We are all doomed.

GLORIA

Oh, God.

JOSH

We've known for a few months now. Everyone took the time to sit down with their families and have a talk about being doomed and saying their last goodbyes. Then after all that we found we had many more months until Ashley arrived and wiped us out so I suppose we should get pissed and set a few things aflame. With 14 months to go we may run out of things to set fire to, so we may have to find some other irresponsible act to indulge in. Perhaps blowing things up?

CASPAR

That explains the crowd's behavior. They've managed to set fire to a Verizon kiosk now.

JOSH

Ah! They finally got it lit, good on them.

AVA

14 months?

LEIF

That's pretty far out to detect an asteroid, how'd they catch it?

JOSH

It wasn't them, it was me. I shouldn't say me. It was us. Myself and my wife.

GLORIA

You're the ones who found it?

JOSH

We're astrophysicists, my wife and myself. We work at the observatory. Now the most famous observatory in the world. Just up the hill there.

GLORIA

And you said it was 9 kilometers wide?

JOSH

Quite a large woman, Ashley. Roughly the size of the fabled dinosaur slayer. We will literally go the way of the dinosaur in a little over a year. I've been wondering if our early warning was a blessing or a curse. Perhaps just a week would've been better. People have been coming up with far too complicated bucket lists now that doom approaches AND they have the time.

(MORE)

JOSH (CONT'D)

There's a man in Surrey who is making a bobsled entirely out of butter and plans to slide all the way down Box Hill with it. Not the usual end times behaviors one would expect.

CASPAR

There is now someone trying to leap over the flaming Verizon kiosk.

JOSH

Behaviors such as that, exactly, leaping over flaming objects.

CASPAR

And now he's on fire.

AVA

Wait, are we in Greenwich?

JOSH

We are.

AVA

You work at the Big Onion?

GLORIA

Big onion?

JOSH

We do.

AVA

The Royal Observatory isn't powerful enough to pick up something that far out. 14 months?

JOSH

Apologies, have I stumbled into a cafe full of astrophysicists?

CASPAR

Kind of.

JOSH

Well, to answer your question, that is correct. The Royal Observatory didn't find our future executioner. Our algorithm did. We wanted a better way of finding objects hurtling toward us so we created an algorithm that cross-referenced all the public data from every observatory in the world. We were very proud of ourselves. We saw ourselves creating a patchwork of data across the heavens. As it turns out, all we were doing was drawing a giant pentagram on the floor and conjuring a demon named Ashley that was now going to destroy the world.

LEIF

14 months, it hasn't passed Jupiter yet, I'm guessing. Are you sure Jupiter isn't going to grab it? In fact, there's a a lot of celestial bodies for it to pass by before it would get here. What about the asteroid belt?

JOSH

We had hoped for that, but I'm afraid the path is clear. None of our celestial big brothers are coming to our rescue. Ashley is headed straight for us, and there's nothing to be done.

GLORIA

Staff meeting at the radio, please?

JOSH

Yes, yes, talk that over. Must've been an awfully deep mine you were trapped in.

GLORIA

Okay, let me start this meeting by saying I am always pretty impressed by what we're able to pull off in the course of one shift.

CASPAR

However.

GLORIA

Big rock.

LEIF

BIG rock.

AVA

Not small.

EFFIE

I'm still a little iffy on my metric system conversions y'all, how big is this rock exactly?

AVA

Imagine the Eiffel Tower.

EFFIE

Alright.

AVA

Now imagine thirty of them.

ZEBULON

Oh my.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

Falling down on their heads?

LEIF

Yes.

GLORIA

Can I get the Readers Digest version of what's going to happen exactly?

LEIF

Well, let's see. 9.3 kilometers. Impact crater alone will be about-

AVA

150, 160.

LEIF

Miles wide.

AVA

Earthquakes around the planet registering 11 on the richter scale.

LEIF

But that'll depend on how directly it hits.

AVA

Organic matter within a thousand miles of impact will be disintegrated.

LEIF

Landing in the ocean will cut you a little slack.

AVA

But then everyone gets 300 foot tsunamis.

LEIF

Impact wave, then fireball, then-

AVA

-Volcanic rock will launch into space then come back down all over the world.

LEIF

Then after all that will be creeping doom.

AVA

Ash cloud covers everything for three years. Freezing temperatures. Then after that, very high temperatures for a generation at least.

LEIF

And yes, that is the Reader's Digest version.

GLORIA

They're fucked.

LEIF

Not all of them.

AVA

There'll be some lucky ones.

LEIF

"Lucky" is not the word I would look for.

AVA

They will have to live in a total hellscape for a very long time.

GLORIA

Well, I understand why everyone's drunk now.

CASPAR

What are we supposed to do in this situation?

GLORIA

It doesn't sound like there's anything we can do.
Damn.

ZEBULON

Gloria, if I may. Tragedy is coming to this planet quite soon. It weighs heavy. And there are all sorts of readings from Noah that I could engage in but perhaps I'll just say this: What has God given them? What can be used?

LEIF

Time.

ZEBULON

Indeed. They have been given a warning, as did Noah. What can they do with this time and what can we do to help them with it?

DOOR CHIME.

MALLORY

Pardon me, I'm looking for a sloshed astrophysicist.

JOSH

Darling! There you are! I'm eating tacos!

MALLORY

I'll alert the media, Dear.

JOSH

Everyone! This is my wife Mallory Mae the most brilliant astrophysicist in the realm.

GLORIA

Hi.

MALLORY

Hello all, I hope he hasn't been too much of a burden.

GLORIA

No, it's fine. I mean, considering everything that's going on, it's not surprising.

MALLORY

Josh, can we move along please? I've brought the car and I'd like to leave before it's turned into a burning effigy by you and your friends.

JOSH

Mal, it's the strangest thing. No one who works here had heard anything about Ashley.

MALLORY

Perhaps they've heard nothing about Ashley because there's nothing to hear about Ashley.

JOSH

Don't start again.

MALLORY

I'm sorry, all. You're obviously on my side of this or you wouldn't be here. No one opens a restaurant when they think they're going to be obliterated in 14 months.

CASPAR

Your side of this?

MALLORY

Yes.

LEIF

Wait, you're saying that an asteroid isn't on a collision course with Earth?

MALLORY

It isn't.

JOSH

It is.

MALLORY

Can you stop with this?

JOSH

I've seen it, Mal. Billions of people have seen it.

MALLORY

And billions of people haven't. Don't you think I would need to see it for it to be real?

JOSH

I don't know why you can't see it I just know that I can.

GLORIA

Hang on. Is there an asteroid headed for Earth or not?

JOSH

Yes.

MALLORY

No.

GLORIA

Okay. One of you start from the beginning.

MALLORY

Have you really not heard anything about this?

CASPAR

We've been on a camping trip.

MALLORY

For eight months?

CASPAR

We got lost.

GLORIA

Your husband told us that you two created an algorithm.

MALLORY

Yes, well, that's where it started. We created a system where the data from every array on the planet coalesced into one data pool and from that pool we would be better able to identify NEOs. When we first got it up and running, he woke me up one night. "Darling, I've got one! I've named it Ashley!" Then it all went downhill from there.

JOSH

She couldn't see it. I showed her an ocean of data and it was like it wasn't even there. I thought I was losing my mind.

MALLORY

I thought I was losing my mind.

JOSH

We didn't know what to do so I sent the data to... who did I send the data to first darling?

MALLORY

Curtis Charles, Sr. at SALT.

JOSH

Yes, yes, and Curtis said the same thing. Couldn't see anything in the data. But then I sent another package to Paul A. Johnson at the GMT. He *could* see it.

MALLORY

And that began a rabid debate between every observatory in the world.

JOSH

Half of us could see it, half of us couldn't.

MALLORY

We were split down the middle.

LEIF

Weird shit alert.

AVA

Um hm.

MALLORY

We had no idea what to do about it. So we all retreated to our respective corners, scratching our heads a bit. Come to find out all those who could see Ashley were meeting secretly online and sharing data. Data that we couldn't see.

JOSH

We'd been arguing about it so much that we didn't bother to calculate the trajectory. Once we did, well...

MALLORY

They went wider with their findings and it was the same reaction. Half could see it, half couldn't.

JOSH

It all went tits up from that moment.

MALLORY

Institutions, then politicians, then world leaders. Half can see Ashley. The other half, like me, can't see her at all.

JOSH

And I may have cocked it all up a few weeks ago when I went online and told the people of the world that if you can see Ashley to come here to Greenwich so that all who see her can be together.

LEIF

Maybe not the greatest idea.

JOSH

Yes, it involved many more flaming automobiles than I had expected. In my defense I had just recently discovered alcohol.

MALLORY

The whole world's in chaos now. Half won't come in to work and the other half don't understand what on Earth they're talking about.

EFFIE

Psst.

GLORIA

Uh, hang on just one second, okay?... What is it Effie?

EFFIE

This is the feeling I was speaking on before. Half doom and destruction and the other half confusion. Nothing but crossed wires.

CASPAR

How can one half of the whole planet see it but not the other?

GLORIA

Do you think this is what we were just talking about? More gravity wave damage?

CASPAR

I mean, who's right? Are they all about to be obliterated or not?

AVA

Maybe, but I need to see more. I need to get to their observatory.

GLORIA
Ok.

LEIF
I should probably come.

GLORIA
Actually, Leif you stay here. Whatever you've got going on on the roof may be more advanced than what they have. We may need it.

LEIF
Good point.

GLORIA
Do you think they have a system you can hack into or something?

LEIF
For sure.

GLORIA
Okay, Ava and I will go to the observatory, Leif go up to the roof, Caspar'll stay here and watch the diner.

AVA
I'm fine by myself.

GLORIA
I'm coming with you

AVA
Why?

CASPAR
Come on, you'll go to the observatory and look at an asteroid, it'll be like a Kate Bush video.

AVA
Please, no.

GLORIA
Hey, stargazers. We need to take a trip up to your observatory.

MALLORY
Why is that?

AVA
I need to see your data.

MALLORY
I beg your pardon?

AVA

I need to see if you've made any mistakes.

MALLORY

I beg your pardon again.

GLORIA

Here's the thing. Ava here is a theoretical physicist who thinks that your problem may not be of the astrophysical variety, it may be more of a... something else problem. We would love to take a look at whatever data you have.

MALLORY

We've just met you, why would we let you into our observatory?

AVA

Because I'm smarter than you-

GLORIA

-Because... because let's face it. You have no solutions and you have drifted into "crazy idea territory". Crazy ideas like "let's let some strangers into the observatory".

JOSH

I think it sounds lovely darling, I think you should do it.

MALLORY

And you're the best judge of things, are you?

JOSH

Not at all but you know... stopped clock, twice a day, all that.

MALLORY

Fuck it, let's go.

JOSH

Good luck!

MALLORY

You're coming, too, Dudley Moore, pick yourself up.

JOSH

Oh no, darling I can't. I've got a very busy pre-doomsday schedule. Many things I'm excited about.

MALLORY

Josh-

JOSH

This week I'm doing all stereotypically British things. I was going to go on a fox hunt.

MALLORY

You are not going on a fox hunt.

JOSH

I'm going to change my name to Churlington Beesecoat and go on a fox hunt. Talk to stately gentlemen about how we must do something about this Gandhi fellow.

MALLORY

Josh.

JOSH

...Alright, alright, off we go.

THE SOUND OF LEIF'S COMMAND CENTER ON THE ROOF POWERING UP.
LEIF IS TYPING ON A KEYBOARD.

LEIF

God, I love a command center. I'm so glad Gloria let me set this up. I can get so much done now.

CASPAR

Do you have a long list of guys you're going to blow up?

LEIF

Still not off that huh?

CASPAR

Oh, I'm going to be on it for a while.

ZEBULON

Leif, how often do things such as this occur?

LEIF

Rocks are hitting the Earth all the time, just not on this scale. You didn't have any meteors come down in the Arkansas countryside?

ZEBULON

Hmm

EFFIE

Hmmmmmm

ZEBULON

Jon Dew.

EFFIE

Oh my, Jon Dew and his exploding chicken.

ZEBULON

Lost a whole chicken coop and multiple chickens,
Jon did.

EFFIE

He tried to pluck those chickens and sell them, do
you remember that?

ZEBULON

Yes, we were not going to eat any sort of chicken
that was murdered by the sky.

EFFIE

Absolutely not.

LEIF

It would happen on Earth a lot more but Jupiter is
always grabbing them. Earth would look a lot
different if Jupiter wasn't there.

CASPAR

Have you ever seen something like this happen?

LEIF

World killer? No. Most civilizations that are
interstellar have deflection systems.

CASPAR

You ever feel like we only exist because of a
streak of really good luck?

LEIF

That's most things, I think.

EFFIE

Of course we would call that streak of luck
something else, wouldn't we Caspar?

CASPAR

Okay, Jesus people, please thank Jesus for
deflecting the asteroids from Earth for so long.

ZEBULON

That's exactly what I shall do.

LEIF

Now I'm just picturing Jesus in orbit, deflecting
asteroids superman-style.

CASPAR

Put THAT in a stained-glass window.

LEIF

(Typing)

Okay. Up on the Royal Observatory's website...
Locating the staff login... Hello Royal Observatory
firewall and... goodbye Royal Observatory
firewall... Okay let's see what we can see... Holy
Shit.

MALLORY, ADAM, AVA, AND GLORIA ARE IN MALLORY'S CAR HEADED
FOR THE OBSERVATORY. THE NEWS IS ON THE RADIO.

NEWSCASTER

...The world continues to reel in what is now being
referred to as "The Ashley Effect". Small
communities have begun to appear all over the globe
made up of those who believe that the world is
coming to an end. The most famous of these
communities is here in Greenwich, where raucous
parties have been raging for a month now. We spoke
to the leader of the Greenwich group, Joshua
Webster...

JOSH

(On the radio.)

Many people have said that this is some sort of
outburst of irrational behavior and immaturity and
I would simply like to say to them: you are
correct. We are all terrified and we are acting
like giant children in the face imminent doom-

MALLORY TURNS OFF THE RADIO.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Not my proudest moment. Apologies.

GLORIA

So... How long have you two been married?

MALLORY

Five years.

JOSH

Five was the wood anniversary. I got you salad
bowls.

MALLORY

I remember, dear.

GLORIA

How long has he been out here drinking?

MALLORY

About three months now. He'll be out for several days then come back and we'll fight about Ashley and then he'll be off again.

AVA

Ashley is an odd name for a world-killing asteroid.

JOSH

My intentions were good.

MALLORY

We would talk about having kids one day and we said we wanted a girl and to name her Ashley. He was trying to be sweet.

GLORIA

Jesus, why are so many things on fire?

JOSH

It's interesting isn't it? When faced with encroaching doom, people get in touch with their deepest desires. Those things they suppress. Did they all decide to finally tell the people they love how they truly feel? No. Turns out their deepest desire was to incinerate their neighbor's Peugeot. Strange people, us.

AVA

So, tell me how this works. You look at the screen and see something and she looks at the screen and sees nothing?

JOSH

That is correct.

MALLORY

And it's the same globally. People either see it or they don't.

AVA

Weird. Anything you haven't tried?

MALLORY

Flying out past Jupiter and seeing it for ourselves.

JOSH

I'm sorry, did you say you were a theoretical physicist?

AVA

Yes.

JOSH
Are... Are you Dr. Ava Maddox?

AVA
I... Yes.

JOSH
Darling, it's Ava Maddox.

MALLORY
In the back seat of our car?

JOSH
Apparently. I knew I recognized your voice, we listened to your lecture on, what was it, love?

MALLORY
Magnetars. The jokes were quite funny.

AVA
Thank you.

JOSH
Where have you been? We'd heard you left Cornell for some reason.

AVA
Yes, I did.

JOSH
Whatever for?

AVA
Well, I went to New Brunswick, New Jersey and I never came back.

MALLORY
I've no idea where that is but could we disappear there and never come back?

GLORIA
Careful what you wish for.

MALLORY
I've no idea why you're here, but I'm grateful for fresh eyes on the problem. Any idea why this could be happening?

AVA
No idea.

JOSH
Were you subject to the usual shite life of academia as we were? Is that why you left?

AVA

My colleagues didn't like the idea of me disproving their theories.

JOSH

Ah! Theory assassination, how dare you? Which theories have you set your crosshairs on?

AVA

All of them.

MALLORY

Here we are.

THEY GET OUT OF THE CAR.

GLORIA

Oh, "Big Onion". Now I get it.

JOSH

We may not have the most powerful telescope in the world but we do have the most onion-like telescope in the world.

GLORIA

As a cook, I appreciate this.

MALLORY

My bloody key card isn't working again.

JOSH

Probably all the power outages. Very hard to keep the lights on when only half of everyone in the world shows up in the morning for work.

MALLORY

Oh, open, you wanker!

LEIF

(In the intercom.)

Sorry, my bad. I had to co-opt your security system nose-to-tail. Door's open now.

MALLORY

Who is that?

GLORIA

That's Leif. He's our technology guy.

MALLORY

Why does your cafe have a "technology guy"?

AVA

Deep fryers.

GLORIA

Thanks, Leif.

LEIF

Get in there. Crazy shit going on.

GLORIA

Fantastic.

THEY WALK INTO THE OBSERVATORY. LEIF HAS ALREADY STARTED UP
THEIR ENTIRE SYSTEM.

LEIF

Apologies to our new friends. I promise I didn't look at any personal info, though I did come across the mother load of Blake's 7 fan fiction from someone named "Sir Cat Dad".

JOSH

That's me. Little project of mine.

LEIF

Respect.

GLORIA

What did you find, Leif?

LEIF

I'll bring it up on the monitors.

JOSH

There it is, that's all our data.

GLORIA

What am I supposed to see here? I see a bunch of text and numbers.

LEIF

You do? Okay good.

AVA

I don't see anything.

MALLORY

Neither do I.

AVA

Wait, what are you seeing?

GLORIA

I'm seeing a bunch of data on the screen, I guess.

JOSH

As do I.

AVA
Leif, is that what you're seeing?

LEIF
Yep.

CASPAR
(In the intercom.)
I don't see anything either, I don't know what the hell Leif is talking about.

AVA
What the fuck?

GLORIA
So we've got three people seeing it and three people not seeing it.

MALLORY
Well, that's wonderful.

AVA
Leif, tell me what I can't see.

GLORIA
Also tell me what I CAN see, I don't understand any of this.

AVA
There's nothing there.

LEIF
That's coordinates, basically. Eccentricity, semi-major axis, mean motion, etcetera.

GLORIA
Anything I can see?

LEIF
The pictures are pretty low-res. It's not going to look like it does in the movies.

GLORIA
Let me see.

JOSH
There she is, that's our little mass-murderer.

MALLORY
You can't see it either?

AVA
No.

GLORIA

Okay, Leif, I need to look a problem in the eye, is there any way you can get me a better image of this thing?

CASPAR

There's nothing to get an image of, Gloria.

GLORIA

Hush, Caspar.

LEIF

Not really. There's nothing to take a picture with.

AVA

Juno's out there.

LEIF

Right. Juno. Juno's pointed at Jupiter though. If I wanted to take a picture of an asteroid from Juno I would need to somehow be out there piloting it myself.

CASPAR

To take a picture of something you don't even know is there.

LEIF

Schrödinger's fucking asteroid.

AVA

I hate this.

LEIF

Ava, any thoughts?

AVA

Yes, I hate this.

CASPAR

Half of us see nothing, half of us see something, who's right?

AVA

Goddamn it.

MALLORY

Fascinating to see you all do a speed run of our arguments for the past several months.

GLORIA

Leif, what about our uh... friends. What are they seeing?

LEIF

Mucklewains, what are you seeing right now?

CASPAR

Mucklewains?

LEIF

Effie? Zebulon?

CASPAR

Shit.

LEIF

The Mucklewains have gone dark.

GLORIA

Where the hell did they get off to?

AVA

They'll be back.

MALLORY

Who are your friends?

GLORIA

They're uh... you know what? One unexplainable thing at a time.

LEIF

What's our plan of action here?

GLORIA

We don't have one. Anyone? Come on, no bad ideas?

CASPAR

How about only bad ideas?

GLORIA

Fine, go.

CASPAR

Well, I was thinking, when we got all the zombies into the diner, after spending enough time here they were cured. Somehow the diner washed that man right out of their hair. What if I got a bunch of the rioter-slash-partiers out there to come in here for a while. What if that makes them stop seeing the asteroid?

GLORIA

How are you going to get them in there?

CASPAR

The best way to get anyone to go anywhere, free booze.

GLORIA

Okay, good luck.

MALLORY

What on Earth is he talking about?

GLORIA

We need to give him busy work, he likes to feel included.

CASPAR

I heard that.

AVA

All of this is infuriating. I need to go think somewhere. Where's your go thinking place?

MALLORY

How about the equatorial room, that's where I go.

AVA

Show me the way.

GLORIA

Caspar, don't let them destroy the place, okay?

CASPAR

We literally went through a black hole one time.

GLORIA

I've been in the food service industry my whole life, Caspar, I have cleaned up puke for the last time.

CASPAR

I'm 173 years old, Gloria, technically I've been in the food service industry longer than you.

GLORIA

Then why are you so bad at it?

CASPAR

Fair point.

JOSH

I didn't vomit in your restaurant did I?

GLORIA

You didn't.

JOSH
Oh, lovely. An interesting place I've found myself
in: not remembering if I've vomited.

GLORIA
We've all been there.

JOSH
I know it may seem ridiculous, seeing as how
there's a asteroid the size of Guam headed for
earth, but the worst part of all of this has been
her inability to see it.

GLORIA
That does seem ridiculous.

JOSH
We share everything, you see? We should share the
end as well.

GLORIA
Josh, look. I don't see any way out of this
situation right now. But do me favor. Call
something "the end" when it ends. Not before that.

JOSH
The ever present American optimism.

GLORIA
Hey. That's Mexican-American optimism.

JOSH
Apologies.

WE TRANSITION TO DEEP SPACE. HE HEAR THE RHYTHMIC BEEPING OF
A SATELLITE.

EFFIE
Uhhh, Dear?

ZEBULON
... Yes?

EFFIE
Where... we are...

ZEBULON
Yes.

EFFIE
We are in the heavens.

ZEBULON
Yes.

EFFIE

We appear to be circling a celestial body.

ZEBULON

There certainly does not seem to be another explanation for our current whereabouts.

EFFIE

It is a very large celestial body.

ZEBULON

I've never seen something so large.

EFFIE

There is just... nothing around us.

ZEBULON

Nothing save for the very large celestial body we are looking down on.

EFFIE

I look to the left of me, I look to the right and there is just... Hoo, that makes me a little dizzy.

ZEBULON

One does become accustomed to ground being under ones feet.

EFFIE

We weren't doing too much walking around but it was nice knowing that the ground was there.

ZEBULON

I am certainly missing its absence.

EFFIE

What, pray tell, are we doing here?

ZEBULON

Seems one minute we were talking with our friends and the next...

EFFIE

Did someone push the wrong button or some such?

ZEBULON

If so, that was a very wrong button for them to push.

EFFIE

... It is so quiet out here.

ZEBULON

A church mouse is a brass band compared to the brand of quietude that we are currently experiencing.

EFFIE

... What are we doing out here, Zebulon?

ZEBULON

We must assume it is part of God's plan, must we not?

EFFIE

Any time the Lord would like to send along some instructions with his plans would be just fine by me.

ZEBULON

I'm afraid two stone tablets is all we get.

EFFIE

There is nothing in those commandments that accounts for us suddenly being whipped around a big old planet out here in this inky blackness.

ZEBULON

There is not.

EFFIE

So...

ZEBULON

So... something should be done.

EFFIE

Yes.

ZEBULON

Should we try shouting for help?

WE TRANSITION BACK TO THE ROOF.

CASPAR

Okay. I'm doing tequila poppers and apps. It's going to be... honestly I don't even know what it's going to be, it's not going to be pretty. Everyone thinks they're going to die and I'm giving them MORE alcohol.

LEIF

Sorry I can't help out, Gloria's got me on asteroid duty.

CASPAR

Okay, you're saying if I plug in this monitor downstairs it will show me live info on the asteroid?

LEIF

And if they stop seeing it, that means it worked. Or something.

CASPAR

Okay. Saying a quick prayer that this does not turn into an orgy.

LEIF

Orgies are so awkward, I never know where to look.

CASPAR

Okay... man... seriously? So many things I don't want to know.

LEIF

Sorry. If it's any consolation, you do not look like the kind of guy who throws an orgy.

CASPAR

Thank you for that. But also, y'know, a little disappointed in myself.

LEIF

Good luck.

CASPAR CLIMBS DOWN THE LADDER. LEIF BEINGS TYPING CODE.

EFFIE

...Leif.

LEIF

(Still typing.)
Hey guys. Where've you been?

ZEBULON

We have...

EFFIE

We are not currently...

ZEBULON

With you.

LEIF

I mean, you two being in my life has brought up all sorts of existential dilemmas, so when you say to me that you're not really here my response is: that's true and what does that even mean?

ZEBULON

Leif, we are not there.

LEIF

I know, but also-

EFFIE

Leif, we are very certainly in another place and it is very certainly not with you.

LEIF

What do you mean? You're talking to me out of a speaker like you always do.

EFFIE

Leif, turn around. Is the radio just over yonder?

LEIF

Yes.

EFFIE

Are we speaking out of it?

LEIF

... No.

EFFIE

Why do you think that is?

LEIF

I don't know. Wait. Where is it you're saying you are?

EFFIE

... Up.

LEIF

Up. Can you be more specific?

EFFIE

Look up.

LEIF

Okay.

EFFIE

We're up there.

LEIF

Are you... you're saying you're in space?

EFFIE

Yes.

LEIF
Where?

EFFIE
Leif.

ZEBULON
There do not appear to be any road signs, Leif.

EFFIE
We appear to be inside of some sort of contraption.

ZEBULON
And we are constantly circling some sort of very,
very large celestial body.

LEIF
You're inside a probe?

EFFIE
Leif, I don't know what this thing is called, you
may as well call it a canoe.

LEIF
Um. Weird. Okay. Give me something on the planet
you're circling.

ZEBULON
It has an eye.

LEIF
An eye.

ZEBULON
And it is looking at us.

LEIF
Wait. Shit. A red one?

ZEBULON
A very large red one, Leif.

LEIF
Oh my God. Horizontal lines across the whole
planet? Huge dust storms?

ZEBULON
Yes!

LEIF
Ha! Fucking amazing. You're in Juno.

ZEBULON
What is a Juno?

LEIF

It's a probe, currently in a mission around the planet Jupiter. I was talking about it earlier and it looks like you two just sort of showed up there.

EFFIE

Well what the heck are we doing here?

LEIF

Believe it or not, you may be saving the day.

ZEBULON

Oh, well that sounds nice, though it would be nice to save the day and then also to leave this place because, it...

EFFIE

We are currently terrified, Leif. We are out here in this big old nothing with our cheeks hanging in the breeze.

LEIF

Okay, just give me a minute, I need to try and track down your frequency. Just so you know I am completely ignoring the fact that a radio signal from Jupiter takes 40 minutes to get here and we are currently talking in real time. Not even going there. That's growth for me.

EFFIE

Cheeks in the breeze, Leif!

LEIF

Okay. Oh, look at that. Look at that... I've got full control of this probe. This is great.

ZEBULON

We do not currently feel "great" about any aspect of this, Leif.

LEIF

I'm going to do something, tell me if you feel anything.

EFFIE

Like what- OH MY!

ZEBULON

Oh dear!

EFFIE

We are turning. I do not like it.

ZEBULON

We are definitely feeling something!

LEIF

Okay, that's it. It was just a test, I just adjusted your position a little bit.

EFFIE

Why did "a little bit" feel like I was getting my soul pulled up out of my body?

LEIF

That's deep space for you. Nothing like it. I remember my first time. Barnard 68. You think you're in the inky blackness right now, I should tell you about Barnard 68 some time.

EFFIE

Leif, no attempts to make small talk with us please.

LEIF

Sorry. Look, it's great, somehow you two have sent me the control protocols for the Juno probe. I need to build an interface. Gloria, are you there?

GLORIA

(In the intercom.)
Yeah, what?

LEIF

You're not going to believe this.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF A MASSIVE TELESCOPE BEING ADJUSTED.

MALLORY

This was mainly a museum for the longest time until the AMAT was properly set up. Built in the 15th century by Charles II. The Merry Monarch. He was always having a laugh, Charles II. I wonder sometimes if our dome looks like an onion because he thought it would be funny.

AVA

Are you giving me a tour?

MALLORY

Sorry. When I'm having a think I always ask Josh to distract me so I can come back to what I was thinking about with fresh eyes.

AVA

Okay... good. Keep going.

MALLORY

Oh. Right. Um... Charles II was the first king to allow women on stage. The most approachable of the monarchs, apparently. Was willing to sit and have a chat with anyone...

AVA

This is good, this is working.

MALLORY

What are you doing here, Ava?

AVA

What do you mean?

MALLORY

You know what I mean. You show up in an American style cafe in Greenwich after disappearing suddenly?

AVA

It's not disappearing if no one notices.

MALLORY

We noticed. A lot of us did. Rumor was you had revolutionary findings that the establishment rejected. But then you disappeared and never published your findings. You're a bit of a mythical beast these days. You have a nickname and everything.

AVA

Is it a good one?

MALLORY

"The Dissapearicist."

AVA

Not bad.

MALLORY

If the world wasn't ending-slash-not ending right now, I'd be telling everyone that Ava Maddox is standing in my equatorial room... What happened?

AVA

...The Big Bounce Theory. What do you know about it?

MALLORY

Nobody knows anything about it, it's a nascent theory. I think it's fascinating but we're years off from knowing anything.

AVA

I'm not.

MALLORY

... Really?

AVA

I had a friend. She was fired for basically being a big mess, and her work was a big mess but it was also brilliant. She was never going to work again so she dumped it all on me. I sifted through it, finished it, and when I got to the end I realized that people should probably stop saying the words "Big Bang", because the bang is just part of it. The picture is much bigger.

MALLORY

You confirmed the Big Bounce Theory?

AVA

As much as anyone can confirm anything in theoretics, yes.

MALLORY

And they rejected your findings.

AVA

Yes.

MALLORY

Why?

AVA

Name for me a revolutionary idea in science that wasn't initially rejected.

MALLORY

And so what? You just fucked off to, where was it, New Brunswick, New Jersey?

AVA

Not at first. The Big Bounce Theory was just the tip of the iceberg.

MALLORY

What is the rest of the iceberg?

AVA

The Big Bounce Theory, damage to the fabric of space time, and a shifting point of null entropy. That's the full picture. I'm just trying to weave them together.

MALLORY

And you thought no one would listen to that?

AVA

I didn't care if anyone listened. I needed to find out. And then I took a long strange trip to New Brunswick, New Jersey, I met two weirdos named Caspar and Leif, and here I am now. I realize that doesn't make sense to you, but it does to me. That's all that matters to me anymore.

JOSH

(On the Public Address System)

Hello Darling. Josh here on the Public Address. Don't fret, though, I am under strict orders from Gloria: she would like you both to come back to the command center, there been some new developments. Also I've begun calling our offices "The Command Center." Also I've discovered a bottle of sherry and I deeply apologize for how much of it I've drank already.

MALLORY

New developments. Maybe they're good ones?

AVA

Who knows?

MALLORY

The Big Bounce, damage to space time, and a shifting point of null entropy. That's quite a list.

AVA

That and a woman named Clementine, but that's another story.

MALLORY

Clementine?

AVA

Yes.

MALLORY

You know, it's the funniest thing.

AVA

What? Wait... A while back you met a woman named Clementine.

MALLORY

We did.

AVA
And after you met her, everything went nuts.

MALLORY
Actually. Now that you mention it.

AVA
Goddamnit.

IN THE "COMMAND CENTER." WE HEAR DANCE MUSIC IN THE
BACKGROUND.

ZEBULON
It's overwhelming to take it all in like this. The more I look, the more stars I see. Each one its own world with its own horizon. Is there someone like me on that distant star? Someone who looks up and wonders as we did for so long? To think that all this was created- but then so were we dear. To be a part of this great sweep of creation-

EFFIE
Dear, there are only so many ruminations on God's creation that I am built to take in at this moment.

GLORIA
Okay, so Effie and Zebulon somehow ended up in a satellite?

LEIF
Like that's the weirdest place we've found them.

GLORIA
Okay, but why does this help us?

LEIF
I can adjust Juno to take pictures of Ashley the Asteroid. We'll get a lot better coverage and better data this way. I can target trajectory, check for anomalies. Also, we can check if, y'know, it even exists in the first place.

GLORIA
How much time?

LEIF
I'm processing right now.

GLORIA
Let me know. Caspar, how is Operation: Idiotic going?

CASPAR

Gloria, I may have been a little over-confidant after my stupid idea worked so well with the shopzies.

GLORIA

We're not calling them that.

CASPAR

The entire inside of the diner has turned into a scene from Fellini Satyricon, I don't know how I'm going to get them out of there now.

JOSH

Forgive me but, who are Effie and Zebulon?

DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

AVA

Fucking Clementine.

GLORIA

She's here?

AVA

No, but she was. Tell them.

MALLORY

Well, I was just telling Ava about an interesting woman we encountered, do you remember Clementine dear?

JOSH

Oh yes, Clementine. I remember Clementine. It was the name that struck us, wasn't it, dear?

MALLORY

We were down at the pub and she approached us out of nowhere. American girl, very strange.

JOSH

VERY strange. Had all manner of knowledge about Weimar Berlin but didn't know what a coaster was.

MALLORY

She came up to our table and started chatting us up. As soon as we told her what we do, told her about near earth objects and how we like to hunt them down, she latched onto us like she was a barnacle and we were a humpback.

JOSH

Question after question after question. Wanted to know everything about asteroids and how we find them and especially interested in world-killers.

MALLORY

We were there for hours.

JOSH

That night when we came home was when we dreamt up the algorithm.

MALLORY

What does she have to do with any of this?

AVA

I don't know.

JOSH

There was one bit, probably nothing.

AVA

What?

JOSH

It was late at night when I discovered Ashley. I wasn't looking for a near earth object, I was actually looking for nothing. I was calibrating the system by first seeing what nothing looks like. So I observed an area of space where I knew there was nothing. Then, in that blank space in that sky, suddenly I saw Ashley.

AVA

She's doing this.

GLORIA

How?

MALLORY

What do you mean?

AVA

I don't know.

LEIF

She made a world-killing asteroid that can only be seen by half of Earth, why would she do that?

JOSH

I'm sorry, we're saying this woman has some sort of magical powers?

AVA
She wouldn't do it on purpose.

GLORIA
She did it without knowing she was doing it?

AVA
Jesus Christ.

MALLORY
I'm very confused at this moment.

AVA
Oh, Jesus Christ.

GLORIA
Ava?

AVA
Hang on... Hang on... Okay, for the first time in my life, I hope I'm wrong.

GLORIA
What's wrong?

AVA
Leif, you've been scanning every universe we go to, right?

LEIF
Yeah.

AVA
Are you done with this one?

LEIF
Yeah, it's ready.

AVA
Put it up on one of the monitors here.

LEIF
Sending it.

MALLORY
Every universe? What are you talking about?

AVA
I promise I'll answer all your questions later, okay? Right now I just need you to go with me.

JOSH
It's exciting, dear, let's go with her.

MALLORY

Go on, then.

AVA

You're both astrophysicists, you've probably looked at the cosmic microwave background a million times, right?

MALLORY

Yes.

AVA

You know what it looks like?

JOSH

It used to be my screensaver.

AVA

Okay. Leif?

LEIF

It's up.

AVA

Both of you, look at this. What do you see?

MALLORY

That's the cosmic microwave background.

JOSH

No it isn't.

MALLORY

What?

JOSH

That's not the cosmic microwave background, Dear. It's A cosmic microwave background but it's not ours. Look, there's this bit here, that's new. There's a little part here that looks like Spongebob, hello Spongebob.

MALLORY

I don't see any of that, what are you looking at?

JOSH

I'm looking at what you're looking at.

MALLORY

God, it's happening again.

AVA

Holy shit.

GLORIA

What's going on, Ava?

AVA

I showed them both a map of their universe. They're seeing two different universes.

GLORIA

But they're in the same place.

AVA

I know.

GLORIA

How is that possible?

AVA

It's not... I think Clementine... I can't believe I'm saying this... I think Clementine has taken two universes and crammed them together.

GLORIA

Crammed them together?

LEIF

That's impossible.

AVA

Yes, I know.

LEIF

She can't do that.

AVA

Yes, I know.

MALLORY

You're saying this strange woman we met has done this?

AVA

Yes, I am.

MALLORY

That's ludicrous.

AVA

Yes, it is.

JOSH

I also think that's ludicrous and I'm completely pissed.

MALLORY

How... how would she even do that?

AVA

I don't know. And I don't think she knows either.

GLORIA

This was an accident?

AVA

What logical reason would she have to do this?

GLORIA

Ava, how can two universes exist in the same place?

AVA

They can't! This is what I'm trying to tell you. She's breaking things. She's... unraveling everything.

LEIF

You're sure it's not on purpose?

EFFIE

If I may just chime in while we are dangling out here in the beyond?

GLORIA

What is it Effie?

JOSH

There's that voice again, there's mystery voices coming from somewhere, Darling.

MALLORY

At what point should I stop asking questions and just let this complete nonsense wash over me?

GLORIA

Right about now.

MALLORY

Very well.

EFFIE

Gloria, this woman was afraid and angry but she had plans she was working on. This doesn't appear to be part of any plan.

ZEBULON

Yes, and though she appears to be more powerful than anything we've encountered, everything in her compartment showed her to be human. Like us.

(MORE)

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

If any of us were given this power, would we be so adept at using it? Would we not make mistakes?

GLORIA

We're talking about a lot here, we need to stick a pin in most of it and focus on the problem.

LEIF

Big rock.

GLORIA

BIG rock.

AVA

Not small.

EFFIE

Might we add "getting Effie and Zebulon out of this contraption" to this list?

GLORIA

Sorry, that too.

JOSH

Sorry all but... are you saying there's nothing wrong with me? Nothing wrong with half of the planet?

AVA

No, there isn't. Everyone on Earth has been put in a LITERALLY impossible position. In 14 months an asteroid is going to hit the planet and cause massive destruction. But it will only happen to half of you.

MALLORY

That doesn't-

AVA

I know it doesn't make any sense.

JOSH

So Mallory and myself could be standing at ground zero for this asteroid strike and I will be completely disintegrated while she just stands there wondering where I went?

AVA

Yes.

JOSH

How are we meant to function in a world like that?

GLORIA

We don't know.

CASPAR

Okay, I'm back. The party has dispersed downstairs. Someone brought in a live sheep and threw the whole vibe off. Apparently there are some things that are even too weird for the apocalypse. In a nutshell: experiment failed. What are we talking about?

GLORIA

Turns out there is and isn't an asteroid.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

It's looking like Clementine has somehow crashed two realities together. For half the planet the asteroid is coming, for the other half it isn't coming.

CASPAR

So both things are happening-slash-not happening?

GLORIA

Yes.

CASPAR

I bet Ava loves this.

AVA

Shut up.

CASPAR

So what are we doing now? Can we do anything?

LEIF

Hang on, I've got data coming in... Okay. Nice work, Mucklewains.

EFFIE

We're just sitting here, Leif.

LEIF

I've got eyes on Ashley and you're not going to believe this.

GLORIA

Send it here.

LEIF

Check it out...

GLORIA

Wait...

LEIF

It's not one asteroid it's two smaller asteroids. They're rotating around each other in such close proximity that they look like one asteroid from far away.

JOSH

Darling, it's twins!

GLORIA

Okay, that's interesting but isn't that the same amount of destruction as one big one?

LEIF

Uh. Yes.

GLORIA

Great work, Leif.

LEIF

But... BUT now we have something to work with, don't we asteroid experts?

MALLORY

Centrifugal force?

LEIF

That's right. The Mucklewains have given me control of the Juno probe. And guess what Juno has?

JOSH

A thruster?

LEIF

That's right.

JOSH

Juno has to dip in and out of Jupiter's orbit to avoid getting singed by radiation, so it has a heavy thruster on it.

CASPAR

Hang on. Are we ramming the Mucklewains into an asteroid, because that would be funny.

LEIF

This is what I'm thinking.

EFFIE

Leif, not in one million of the Lord's years are you going to treat us like some sort of celestial cue ball to be hit with your stick!

LEIF

It'll be fine.

JOSH

I say it's a fine idea, but calculations such as those would take years.

LEIF

Don't worry about it.

GLORIA

You want to ram an asteroid with the Mucklewains?

ZEBULON

To say I have objections would be perhaps understating it a bit.

LEIF

Gloria, look, if we did this we can cut the destruction in half. It would still be an epic disaster, but if I can push one of these asteroids out of the way, that may contain the damage to one quarter of the globe.

GLORIA

Destroying one quarter of the globe is good news?

LEIF

In this scenario? Yes.

ZEBULON

We are to be turned into some sort of battering ram?

GLORIA

What's going to happen to Effie and Zebulon?

LEIF

My guess is they'll be fine.

EFFIE

Oh, your guess? You're just going to embrace wild speculation when it comes to our well-being?

LEIF

Hey, you got yourselves out there, I'm sure you can get yourselves back.

EFFIE

Don't talk to me like you know what you're talking about, Leif.

LEIF

I'm working with what I've got here.

ZEBULON

Dear, I believe what Leif is trying to tell us, is that if we do this, lives will be saved. Is that right, Leif?

LEIF

The damage can be cut in half if we give one of these asteroids a shove at the right time.

EFFIE

Aw, snails!... Alright, Leif. Load us into your cannon and fire us across the circus tent.

LEIF

Starting calculations.

GLORIA

Is this really going to work, Leif?

LEIF

Slamming a probe into a space rock? That's where I live.

CASPAR

The best part about this, is that Josh and Mallory are across the room right now and have no idea what the hell is going on.

MALLORY

Hello.

JOSH

It's true I have no idea what on Earth is happening but I am suddenly feeling strangely hopeful.

MALLORY

I'm just feeling strange.

GLORIA

So, Leif, assuming this works, what kind of destruction are we looking at now?

LEIF

If I pull this off we go from world-killing asteroid to really terrible global crisis asteroid.

GLORIA

That doesn't sound much better.

LEIF

No, trust me, it is. Planets can take a pretty big punch without losing atmosphere. If they can manage to evacuate the area of the globe the asteroid's going to hit, they might come out okay for the most part. It'll be several years of tough times, but they can get through it.

GLORIA

Okay, that's the next thing, we need to know where it's going to hit.

MALLORY

Those kind of calculations are nearly impossible-

LEIF

Got it right here.

JOSH

Who is this man?

LEIF

Western Australia.

MALLORY

Lord... There goes that trip to the outback we were going to take.

LEIF

As asteroid strikes go, it could be worse. I was hoping for the south Atlantic but, Western Australia's got a lot of open space. Not much population to evacuate.

JOSH

But the aftermath.

LEIF

Yeah. I'm guessing three years of winter for the whole planet and a whole lot of environmental repercussions.

GLORIA

But only for half of the planet?

LEIF

Yeah. In this strange new world that Clementine has created, this is only going to happen for half the population.

GLORIA

What is that even going to look like?

LEIF

No idea.

AVA

I've got some ideas. Leif should get going with the Mucklewains, we'll do the other stuff.

GLORIA

Okay. Effie, Zebulon, we love you very much. Please remember that as Leif launches you head first into a real big rock.

EFFIE

I feel at times that our Christian inclination for forgiveness is being taken advantage of.

GLORIA

It definitely is. Good luck.

LEIF

I'm going to sign off. I'll let you know when we're ready to launch.

WE MOVE BACK TO THE ROOF OF THE DINER.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Okay, team. Let play asteroid snooker.

EFFIE

Leif, I know your intentions are good but I must tell you that I have never wanted to whup someone so badly as I do now.

LEIF

I validate your feelings.

CASPAR

Petition to start calling them The Misslewains?

ZEBULON

Petition denied.

LEIF

Hang on tight, you two. I'm going to have to adjust your position a little bit. You're going to be turning away from Jupiter and into deep space. Are you ready?

EFFIE

Of course we're not ready.

ZEBULON

Take my hand, dear.

LEIF

Here we go, just a gentle turn.

WE HEAR CORRECTION THRUSTERS FIRING ON THE PROBE.

EFFIE

Lord lord lord lord lord lord lord lord.

LEIF

Okay, that's it. How does that feel?

EFFIE

Real damn bad, excuse my language!

ZEBULON

I now miss facing the planet with the large eye.

LEIF

Okay. Hang there for a few minutes, I need to check fuel levels.

CASPAR

Effie, I'm not going to lie and say I'm not enjoying this but I want you to know I am enjoying it less than you think I am.

EFFIE

Caspar I can sense that smug look on your face and HOO BOY.

LEIF

Okay. I am beginning the countdown...

BACK AT THE EQUATORIAL ROOM, MALLORY ADJUSTS THE TELESCOPE.

JOSH

There you are.

MALLORY

It's a clear night. I thought I would adjust the scope and see if I can get a look at her... I suppose now it's "them".

JOSH

You can't see them, love.

MALLORY

I know... Do you understand anything that's happening right now?

JOSH

Not at all.

MALLORY

You seem to be taking it much better than I am.

JOSH

I know I am, dear. But that's only because I'm still quite inebriated.

MALLORY

Are they really going to smash the Juno Probe into an asteroid that only half of Earth can see?

JOSH

I believe they are. The strangest part is that they appear to do this sort of thing all the time.

MALLORY

And who are they exactly?

JOSH

I've no idea. But I'm glad they're here. Do you think it's all madness?

MALLORY

It's been madness since you discovered Ashley. The world's been torn apart. Whoever these Americans are, they've told us that the madness is real. It's not in our heads. At least there's that.

JOSH

And that it all has something to do with an odd woman we met at the pub?

MALLORY

Do you understand why I'm going along with all this?

JOSH

Because we've no options.

MALLORY

Because it's been torture, Joshua. To suddenly be living in two different worlds has been torture.

JOSH

Well you don't want to be living in my world. There's a large asteroid headed for my world.

MALLORY

I'd prefer that world. Do you understand that? I'd prefer to be in a dying world with you than a thriving one without you... Not to make it an Adele song but that's truly how I feel.

JOSH

I feel they same, Mal. Truly. But even after all the nonsense that's gone on today I still don't know what to do about it.

GLORIA

Hey, you two.

AVA

Let's do a quick experiment.

JOSH

Do you need to strap me to anything?

AVA

No. Here, take this notepad and this pencil.

JOSH

Very well.

AVA

In the notepad, I want you to draw a picture of Ashley from memory, or both Ashleys I guess, since there's two of them now.

JOSH

Why am I doing this?

AVA

I'm trying to see something.

JOSH

Seeing something. Right. Luckily I have superior drawing skills. Here we go.

JOSH SKETCHES IN THE SKETCH BOOK.

JOSH (CONT'D)

One of them is quite fat in the middle while the other one has a bit of a curve to it. Big crater right in the middle of the fat one. And there are some meteoroids traveling along with them, bits a pieces... There we are.

AVA

Great. Now show it to Mallory.

JOSH

Here they are, Dear. It's our girls. Aren't they lovely?

AVA

Mallory, can you see that?

MALLORY

I can see them.

AVA

Good... Okay, great.

MALLORY

What does that mean?

AVA

There's been a firewall up between the two of you. You've been occupying the same physical space but perceiving different ones. You can't see his world, but he can show it to you. It's not completely obscured to you. He can show you what is happening, he can communicate it to you.

MALLORY

Why is that important?

AVA

Because your world can't exist like this. Eventually the universe is going to try to right itself, and what will help that is communication. Contact between two worlds. If you keep that up, I think eventually you can be living in the same world again.

GLORIA

You know, I've never been a fan of marriage. For me it's like: marriage is great. But for you. You go do it and I'll be over here. I like that it's around but it's not for me. Like skydiving. That looks like fun, *for you*. I will watch the video of you doing it and feel just fine about not doing it. But, my old sous chef Cesar is married and has a ton of kids. Him and his wife fight all the time about everything. But it's part of their relationship, like I don't know what they would do if they weren't fighting. And sometimes when they're on the opposite ends of an argument I wonder if they even live in the same world. I don't know, I don't think we're ever in the same world as someone else, no matter how close you are. There's always this big space between you. You can't be inside someone else's head, so you need to tell people what's going on in your world.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Josh is about to go through a lot. His world is going to get very dark and there's not going to be anything you can do about it, except listen to him.

AVA

After this thing hits, the sun's not coming out for three years, Josh. For years half the people on this planet will be struggling to survive while the other half looks at them like they're crazy. I wish I could describe it better than that but I honestly have no idea what it's going to look like. We're in uncharted territory.

GLORIA

So you're going to have to keep talking to each other. You're going to have to try and understand each other even though you can't understand each other, understand?

MALLORY

I think so.

JOSH

What should we do now?

GLORIA

You're going to need to get the word out. You work here so people will listen to you. You need to warn everyone that what's left of Ashley is coming down in Western Australia.

AVA

Leif is leaving you with all of the information you need to prove it. Just get it all out there and warn people. Things'll start moving pretty quickly after that.

GLORIA

But before that... Come on back to the diner. We're going to launch a couple of our friends at an asteroid.

AVA

Woo-hoo!

IN THE DINER PARKING LOT. LEIF IS FUSSING WITH SOME TECHNOLOGY.

MALLORY

... You will tell me, won't you? When the sky gets dark for you? When the world gets too cold? I won't be able to feel it but I promise I'll believe you.

JOSH

Of course I will.

MALLORY

... And do you think it's possible that we've actually hallucinated this entire encounter with an American cafe that happened to house a physicist who'd been missing for years and her strange friends?

JOSH

It certainly sounds like a hallucination. But I have enjoyed hallucinating it together.

MALLORY

I as well.

CASPAR

Folks, it's a beautiful day here at Cape Canaveral where everyone is waiting with anticipation for us to launch these two old-timey Baptists into a space rock the size Wilmington, Delaware.

EFFIE

You get a little too much pleasure launching your friends into the great beyond, you know that Caspar?

CASPAR

Too soon, Effie.

AVA

For what it's worth, my scientific opinion is that you're both going to be fine.

CASPAR

It's also my former municipal worker opinion that you're going to be fine.

EFFIE

I'll leave one and take the other, thank you very much.

JOSH

Why are we in your car park?

AVA

You'll see.

LEIF

Let's give them a countdown.

GLORIA

Good luck, you two.

LEIF
10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5-

ZEBULON
...And upon this rock...

LEIF
4, 3, 2, 1, ignition!

ZEBULON
...I shall build my chuuuuuuuuuuu-

EFFIE AND ZEBULON SUDDENLY START TALKING THROUGH THE RADIO AGAIN.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)
-uuuuurrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrch... Oh.

EFFIE
Oh.

ZEBULON
Looks like we just popped back into the radio,
didn't we dear?

EFFIE
Solid ground at last.

CASPAR
You guys don't even have feet.

MALLORY
What did I just witness?

LEIF
The Juno probe is on its way to Ashley 2. Should
rendezvous in about a month and begin pushing it
off course. The rest is up to you two.

MALLORY
We'll do everything we can.

JOSH
Why are you speaking to us as if you're about to
shove off on a boat or something?

LEIF
Almost time, Ava.

AVA
You two, come over here. Stand right here just off
the parking lot.

MALLORY

Why are we doing that?

THE DINER BEGINS TO POWER UP.

AVA

Good luck you two. It's going to be a lot but I think we left you better than we found you.

MALLORY

You definitely did but, what exactly is happening?

AVA

Mallory you were asking what happened to me. You said that people were calling me The Disappearacist. They're not wrong. I'm on a whole other level now.

WITH A LOUD CRACK, THE DINER DISAPPEARS. MALLORY AND JOSH ARE STUNNED.

JOSH

The...

MALLORY

I...

JOSH

The... Cafe has vanished. Dear, the cafe has vanished.

MALLORY

How...

JOSH

You saw it as well, yes?

MALLORY

I... did.

JOSH

So... not a hallucination, then.

MALLORY

It appears not.

JOSH

... Are you in shock, Dear?

MALLORY

I... believe so.

JOSH

...

MALLORY

...

JOSH

This may take some time to process.

MALLORY

... Agreed.

JOSH

Suggested course of action?

MALLORY

... Please take me to one of the pubs that has not been destroyed and buy me many drinks. I've you to catch up with, it may take some time.

JOSH

Course of action agreed upon. Love you, Dear.

MALLORY

And I you.

JOSH

Off we go, then.

THE SOUND OF THE DINER RUSHING THROUGH SPACE AND TIME. GLORIA IS IN THE PARKING LOT. AVA WALKS OUT.

AVA

Hi.

GLORIA

Hi.

AVA

...

GLORIA

...

AVA

I know we left on a positive note, but the chances of two astrophysicists convincing all of Western Australia to evacuate are pretty slim.

GLORIA

I know.

AVA

It's entirely possible that there wasn't an asteroid in either of their universes until she heard two people talking about an asteroid hitting the Earth.

GLORIA
I know.

AVA
...

GLORIA
We need to stop this woman.

AVA
... I know.

THE END