

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 8: Into the Deep Freeze!

SFX: CUBANAKAN BY LECUONA CUBAN BOYS

CASPAR

So now we can hear you guys AND the song.

ZEBULON

Yes. And we can also hear it.

CASPAR

But you're not playing this song?

EFFIE

We are not.

CASPAR

So this song is coming from somewhere else?

EFFIE

It is.

CASPAR

And we don't know from where.

ZEBULON

We do not.

LEIF

And you're saying that when "Me from the future"
was here the other day he said what to you?

EFFIE

"It's all part of the plan."

AVA

And then he attached some sort of device to the
radio.

ZEBULON

And then removed it, we believe.

CASPAR

And then this song started playing and you guys
started quoting from the Egyptian Book of the Dead
for no reason.

EFFIE

That is the next thing that happened, yes.

CASPAR

And then you guys proceeded to say NOTHING AT ALL to us about this.

AVA

For a whole day.

CASPAR

One day went by.

AVA

Twenty-four hours.

CASPAR

Twenty-four hours.

AVA

Not that time exists.

CASPAR

I feel like if you guys were kindergarteners there would be a note to your parents saying "does not play well with the other children".

EFFIE

We're very sorry, Caspar.

AVA

He said "It's all part of the plan", What's the plan?

ZEBULON

We are unaware of any plan.

LEIF

I don't understand, a plan for what?

CASPAR

I don't like this at all, guys. I don't like secret plans, I don't like weird behavior.

LEIF

Where's Gloria?

AVA

I think I know what he did.

CASPAR

What?

AVA

I think he fine tuned the signal.

CASPAR

What about this seems fine tuned to you?

LEIF

Gloria?

AVA

Fine tuned isn't the right word.

CASPAR

I don't think there's a right word for this.

AVA

We're getting more information. It's like we have a satellite dish on the roof now.

CASPAR

Great, we have pay-per-view boxing?

LEIF

Guys.

CASPAR

Leif, what is it?

LEIF

The door to the deep freeze is open.

CASPAR

... What?

LEIF

The door to the deep freeze is open and I can't find Gloria.

CASPAR

Gloria?

LEIF

She's not in the kitchen, she's not anywhere. Caspar. The door. To the deep freeze. Is open.

CASPAR

... We warned her about the deep freeze, didn't we?

LEIF

Didn't we?

CASPAR

We did, right?

LEIF

Did we?

CASPAR

We warn everybody about the deep freeze, don't we?

LEIF

Do we?

CASPAR

Ava, think back. When you first got here did we warn you about the deep freeze?

AVA

Yes.

LEIF

Did we?

AVA

Um... Okay, honestly until right this minute I kinda forgot we had a deep freeze.

CASPAR

Goddamn it.

AVA

I mean, you could have. But sometimes, people talking, maybe I hear it, I tune a lot out because I get bored.

LEIF

This is bad.

CASPAR

Gloria?

AVA

I don't understand, what's the big deal about the deep freeze?

CASPAR

I would tell you, but what if you get bored?

AVA

Come on.

CASPAR

Come have a look.

LEIF

Caspar, don't.

CASPAR

Leif, I think we know where this is heading. C'mon Ava. Come look at the deep freeze.

AVA
Is there a body in there? Body parts? Just a head?
Is Hitler's brain in there?

CASPAR
Come here, dammit.

AVA
Okay.

SFX: DEEP FREEZE DOOR OPENING. HOWLING WINDS AMONG THE
MOUNTAIN TOPS. OWLS HOOTING.

AVA (CONT'D)
Holy. Shit.

CASPAR
There's a pocket dimension in the deep freeze.

AVA
Caspar.

CASPAR
Yeah.

AVA
There's a pocket dimension in the deep freeze.

CASPAR
You really do tune things out, don't you?

AVA
There is a mountain range in the deep freeze,
Caspar.

CASPAR
Also a forest. And an ocean. With glaciers.

LEIF
It's massive.

AVA
There's a frozen mountain range with a forest and
an ocean in the deep freeze, you guys.

CASPAR
We know.

AVA
Why have you not explored this?

SFX: WOLF HOWLING.

CASPAR

That's why.

AVA

There's a wolf in there?

LEIF

Wait for it.

SFX: WOLVES HOWLING.

AVA

There are wolves in there?

CASPAR

There's a mountain range, a forest, an ocean, and packs of mad, ravenous wolves in there.

AVA

Oh, no.

CASPAR

Yeah.

AVA

Gloria.

CASPAR

Yeah.

AVA

Oh, shit.

CASPAR

Leif, we need-

LEIF

(In the kitchen)

Way ahead of you. I've got a flare gun, walkie talkies, and puffy jackets for everybody.

CASPAR

Okay, bring it all out here. Whether we like it or not, we're going-

SONG: DEEP-DIVE PODCAST MUSIC.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Oh god, what is this now?

EFFIE

Most stories start with something like "It was THIS date and THIS time in THIS place." But what do you do when you're talking about a place that has no place? Or a place that has no time? We're speaking of course, of the diner at the end and somehow the beginning of the universe... Midnight Burger.

LEIF

Effie?

ZEBULON

You've heard the stories. Across space and time, no matter how distant or how close, someone will be in a jam, they won't know where to go, and then suddenly... There is a diner.

EFFIE

No one knows where Midnight Burger came from, no one knows who, if anyone, built it and no one knows why it exists. But what if I told you that inside the greatest mystery in the multi-verse there was yet another mystery?

ZEBULON

Tucked away in a corner, inside the diner at the nexus of all things, is an old, dilapidated freezer. And inside that freezer? A world that may hold the secrets to the diner itself.

AVA

What is this? They're doing a documentary now?

CASPAR

No. It's worse.

EFFIE

Join us this season as we go... Into the Deep Freeze.

CASPAR

It's a deep dive podcast.

LEIF

C'mon, we don't have time for this.

CASPAR

No one has time for them.

LEIF

We've got to get in there before Gloria gets turned into dog chow.

AVA
Why doesn't she just come back?

LEIF
It's possible she doesn't know the way out.

CASPAR
We lost a customer in there once.

AVA
What?!

LEIF
It was a busy day, they thought it was the bathroom, they never came out. Everybody put your coats on.

CASPAR
Look, Ava, maybe you should stay, I don't know what's going to happen in there.

AVA
Stay here and serve food to people? I'll take the wolves, thanks.

ZEBULON
You had to wonder what they were thinking at this point. I get nervous when I defrost my freezer, they were about to leap into one.

EFFIE
And theirs had wolves in it.

ZEBULON
At least you knew that they were always using fresh produce.

EFFIE
When frozen peas means you may lose an arm, it does keep the menu in season.

AVA
I'm also not hanging out and listening to this nonsense.

LEIF
Alright, everybody ready?

CASPAR
Let's do this.

AVA
Santa Claus, here we come!

SFX: THE WIND HOWLS AND THE DINER DISAPPEARS.

AVA (CONT'D)
Holy shit!

LEIF
Hang onto each other until we get through this part.

AVA
What if it's like this the whole time?

CASPAR
Gloria?!

AVA
Parts of me are getting cold that have never gotten cold before.

EFFIE
When Ava, Leif, and Caspar first went through the freezer door they were hit with a massive windstorm.

ZEBULON
Right, it was almost like the deep freeze didn't want them to be there.

CASPAR
How are we still hearing them?

LEIF
For Christ's sake, they're coming through the walkie talkies.

AVA
How?!

EFFIE
So, already they're thinking that this was a terrible mistake. One second they're in the diner, the next second they're surrounded by ice and mountains and forests. They're snow blind and they have no idea where Gloria is.

ZEBULON
And this is where they find the campsite.

SFX: WIND QUICKLY DIES DOWN.

CASPAR
Oh, look. A campsite.

LEIF

Gloria?

AVA

Who's camping here?

LEIF

I don't know. It's new though, someone's been using it.

CASPAR

That's got to be her. Gloria!

AVA

She's been here five minutes, she didn't have time to camp.

CASPAR

Well who else could it be? Mr. Tumnus? Look, we can't spend a lot of time here. We've got to find Gloria and then find a way out of here.

AVA

You do know for sure that there *is* a way out of here right?

LEIF

If there's a way into something there's a way out of something, right?

CASPAR

Right, isn't that a law of something?

AVA

You guys never bought a roach motel?

LEIF

Wait, shh... Do you guys hear that?

CASPAR

What?

SFX: SEVERAL WOLVES GROWLING.

LEIF

That.

CASPAR

Shit.

AVA

Ruh-roh.

CASPAR

How did they find us so fast?

LEIF

We're surrounded. Did anyone bring any treats?

AVA

We're the treats, dude.

CASPAR

So this is how it ends. Eaten by wolves in space.

LEIF

Somebody's coming.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS IN THE SNOW.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

Oh my god. You GUYS!

LEIF

Gloria?

GLORIA

Hi!

LEIF

What the hell?

GLORIA

You guys, check out my wolves!

AVA

Your wolves?

GLORIA

You guys, my friends are here!
Awoooooooooooooooooooo!

SFX: WOLVES HOWLING ALONG WITH GLORIA.

AVA

What kind of Nanook of the North bullshit is this now?

GLORIA

I knew you'd find me eventually. I kept telling my dawgs here, but I don't think they believed me.

LEIF

Are you wearing animal skins?

CASPAR

What do you mean eventually? We just noticed you were gone.

GLORIA

Oh really? Well, I've been here for I don't know how long. The moon's been full twice now, how long is that?

CASPAR

Two months?

GLORIA

Looks like there's some weird time shit going on, I don't know. Ava can probably figure it out. Hey, Leif, help me get this deer carcass into the camp.

LEIF

Deer carcass?

GLORIA

(Walking away)
Come on.

LEIF

I'll be right back.

EFFIE

So, that's crazy. Gloria had been there for two months.

ZEBULON

It's wild, I mean, it shouldn't be wild because we're talking about Midnight Burger, but still, it's wild.

EFFIE

It really makes my head spin to think about it, but luckily you were able to talk to someone who can explain this time discrepancy to us.

ZEBULON

Yeah, so as everyone knows Midnight Burger has its own resident theoretical physicist, Dr. Ava. Luckily I was able to sit down with her to talk about this issue of time.

AVA

You were?

ZEBULON

Ava, thanks for being with us today.

AVA

What?

ZEBULON

To your average person this is impossible to understand. How can five minutes in one place equal two months in another place?

AVA

Um... well it's... called gravitational time dilation.

ZEBULON

And you say that like it's no big deal. To me it's like, whoa, what is that?

AVA

It's part of relativity theory.

ZEBULON

This is Einstein's relativity theory?

AVA

Yes, that one. This is so annoying, Zebulon.

ZEBULON

Talk to the guy who doesn't know anything about physics. Explain it to that guy.

AVA

Fine, the closer you get to the center of a gravitational well, the slower time goes. So, the core of the earth, for example, is actually two and a half years younger than the surface of the earth because of the additional distance to the center.

ZEBULON

That's crazy.

AVA

So crazy.

ZEBULON

So somehow the gravity is different inside the deep freeze?

AVA

Could be. But it also applies to inertia. Time slows down the closer you are to a gravity well or the closer you are to the speed of light.

ZEBULON

Is that why, when I'm moving fast around my house, getting a lot of things done, that I feel like time slows down?

AVA

No, that's just you feeling like a superhero for doing basic housework.

LEIF

(Carrying something heavy.)
Holy shit, you guys, check out this deer.

AVA

Ew, gross.

CASPAR

Gloria, how did you kill a deer?

GLORIA

It wasn't me it was my wolf pals here. They'd take down a whole deer and then look at me like "Hey mom, can we have this?"

SFX: A WOLF YIPS AT GLORIA.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Oh, yes, I'm talking about you.

SFX: MORE YIPS.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Oh yes I'm talking about you you good boy. Oh, you're a good boy yes you are. Oh you've got a little munchkin face yes you do... Anyway, they would nab a deer and I would make it into Chocomolo, and they *really* love it.

CASPAR

Gloria, I've got to apologize, I thought we had warned you about the deep freeze.

GLORIA

Don't worry about it, Caspar, it's not like there's a new employee orientation or something. Honestly, I was freaked out at first but, I don't know, it's kind of nice in here. I'm from Arizona, I don't get to play in the snow.

CASPAR

Okay, I guess.

GLORIA

I spent a couple of weeks looking around for a way out of here but then I remembered Smokey the Bear. "Remember kids, if you're lost in the woods, hug a tree and wait for someone to find you." So I hugged a tree.

CASPAR

The problem with that is we don't know the way out either.

GLORIA

I know, but we'll figure something out. I mean, we've been through some shit, y'all. We always figure it out. OH! I forgot. Leif, check out what I found when I was looking for the exit. Hang on.

ZEBULON

See, this is what I love about Gloria.

EFFIE

She just jumps into things. No fear. She's got the least experience out of all of them but is always ready for action, right?

GLORIA

Oh God, what are they on this time?

AVA

They're doing a deep dive podcast on our trip into the deep freeze.

GLORIA

Okay, sure, whatever.

ZEBULON

See what I mean? She just rolls with it.

GLORIA

Leif, here, I found this. It's an old portable tape recorder.

LEIF

Oh wow. A Ferguson. They don't make them like this anymore.

GLORIA

AND I found this cassette tape.

LEIF

What the hell? Okay, I've got to hear what's on this.

GLORIA

Can you make it work again?

LEIF

Maybe, I brought some spare batteries for the walkie talkies, I'll try that.

EFFIE

I love this story because it checks off all my boxes. Old portable tape recorders...

ZEBULON

Check.

EFFIE

Wolves...

ZEBULON

Check.

EFFIE

Camping...

ZEBULON

Check again.

EFFIE

And a box I did not know needed checking:
Chocomolo.

ZEBULON

Chocomolo! This is the dish that Gloria was making with the deer.

EFFIE

Right. Gloria, tell us a little more about Chocomolo.

GLORIA

... Do we just... Are we talking to them?

AVA

I think we're adopting a "Just go with it" mentality.

GLORIA

Oh, okay. Yeah, Chocomolo, it's like beef stew but you can do it with venison. You cut up the fatty parts and also the kidneys and liver and tongue and you cook it for a long time over a fire.

EFFIE

It sounds amazing. And I can't find this at any restaurant, how did you know about it?

GLORIA

My grandmother, I guess?

LEIF

Okay, I think this should do it. I am putting in the mystery cassette tape.

GLORIA

Very exciting.

VOICE ON THE TAPE

(In a Russian accent.)

... Hello, yes. I believe I am recording now... I will make these recordings in English as this is my intended Audience. I am making this recording in Cordoba, Spain while attending the second International Conference of Nuclear Free Zones. It is very exciting to have this tape recorder. It is the only thing I have ever bought with the currency of the west.

Last night, my government handler became very inebriated and passed out in his room. I then attended a card game in the room of one of the scientists from American delegation. We played an American game called "Texas Hold Them". I had never played a game of American cards before. I have discovered that I am very good at cards. Since it is all numbers and probability I, as a physicist, did quite well. I left the hotel room last night with a handfull of Spanish currency and my government knew nothing about it.

I debate with myself all night. What to do with this currency? Do I report? Do I keep it secret? Then this morning as my handler was still unconscious in his room, I did the most dangerous thing I have ever done. I went shopping.

I have purchased this Ferguson tape recorder. On it I will state my intentions and document my journey.

My name is Vladimir Valentinovich Alexandrov. It is my intention to defect to the United States of America and share with them what I have found.

AVA

No fucking way!

EFFIE

Plot twist!

ZEBULON

Amazing stuff. Nobody saw this coming.

EFFIE

So at this point everybody is scratching their heads. "Who's this Russian guy on the tape recorder?" They're asking.

ZEBULON

But one person is not scratching their heads.

EFFIE

That's right. As this man, Vladimir Alexandrov, mentioned, he's a physicist. And who do we talk to about that?

ZEBULON

We're going back to Ava.

EFFIE

Ava, tell us about this guy. What's his deal?

AVA

Uh, Vladimir Alexandrov, he was a nuclear physicist. He disappeared in 1985. Didn't you guys say you lost a customer in here once?

CASPAR

Yeah.

AVA

Could it have been in Spain in 1985?

CASPAR

I don't know.

LEIF

Maybe. It was on Earth. People were speaking a lot of different languages that day, we could've been anywhere.

AVA

He disappeared during an international conference, lots of languages being spoken during an international conference.

LEIF

Yeah, sure. I guess it could've been Spain.

AVA

Keep playing it.

LEIF

Ok.

SFX: ON THE TAPE THERE ARE DINER NOISES IN THE BACKGROUND.

VLADIMIR

Of course after recording my intentions to defect I am now gripped with fear. I have found myself at a cafe. A very odd cafe.

CASPAR

(On the tape)

Hey, welcome to Midnight Burger, what can I get you?

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Oh shit, that's me.

AVA

Heck of a memory you've got there.

CASPAR

Do you have any idea how many shifts I've worked?

VLADIMIR

You are American?

CASPAR

(On the tape)

Uh, yes. Yes I am.

VLADIMIR

Wonderful. Could I get a cheeseburger?

CASPAR

(On the tape)

Cheeseburger? Sure. Fries?

VLADIMIR

Yes, french fries please.

CASPAR

(On the tape)

Coming right up.

VLADIMIR

And where is your restroom?

CASPAR

(On the tape)

Just right around the corner there.

VLADIMIR

Thank you.

AVA

And down the rabbit hole he went.

CASPAR

Who mistakes a freezer for a bathroom?

GLORIA

Hopefully just him.

LEIF

He's got to still be here somewhere, right?

GLORIA

I haven't seen a sign of anyone the whole time I've been here.

AVA

Keep going.

LEIF

Okay.

SFX: WIND HOWLING ON THE TAPE RECORDER.

VLADIMIR

Thank god, it's still working. I don't know what has happened, I am in a storm somehow-

AVA

Actually, I vote that we move past the initial shock phase and get to the good stuff.

CASPAR

I second that.

LEIF

Okay, let me fast forward.

SFX: FAST FORWARDING.

VLADIMIR

-I keep hearing wolves in the distance-

LEIF

Nope.

SFX: FAST FORWARDING.

VLADIMIR

-I am surrounded by the wolves, if these are my last moments-

LEIF

Skipping.

SFX: FAST FORWARDING.

VLADIMIR

-Much to my surprise, the wolves are quite friendly-

LEIF

Not quite.

SFX: FAST FORWARDING.

AVA

A little further and he'll start to form a plan.

VLADIMIR

... So, the wolves seem to have befriended me. Luckily as a child I did much camping outside Novgorod. They enjoy my fire and they like when I cook the deer they bring to me. I am now outside the reach of imminent death. Somehow. And when one is outside the reach of death one must then look up and begin to ask questions of the world that has not killed you.

AVA

Now you're talking, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR

This place, it is much like my home country but the constellations in the sky are not right. These are not the constellations of Earth. I am not home. Such bitter poetry, an amazing discovery and with no one to tell. No one to tell and no one to come save me, so I must take action. Here is my plan. When I look to the west as the sun sets I believe I can see something reflecting its light. It is miles away, it may take many days to get there, but it seems like the next logical step. Tomorrow my new wolf friends and I will head west. Perhaps I will find answers there. Oh, yes, there's is one more thing. The tapes I am making, in an attempt to increase the chances of my story being discovered, I will deposit these tapes along the trail in the most conspicuous place I can find. Making a trail of breadcrumbs as I go into the forest, so to speak. Until next time...

AVA

Okay, we're heading west.

CASPAR

No, we're not.

AVA

We've got to follow the trail.

CASPAR

Ava, we're trapped in the deep freeze. We've got to find a way out of here.

AVA

Okay, go ahead, find it.

CASPAR

I don't know where it is.

AVA

And neither do I. How do we know it's not at the end of Vladimir's trail?

CASPAR

I... don't.

AVA

See? We should check it out.

CASPAR

I want to be sure we're focusing on the most important thing here.

LEIF

Five minutes in the diner was two months down here for Gloria. We could stay here a year and it would still be fifteen minutes in the diner.

CASPAR

I don't want to spend a year down here.

AVA

We won't. We'll follow the trail and see what Vladimir was talking about, we've got to start somewhere.

CASPAR

Okay, fine. We'll camp here tonight and then in the morning we'll hit the trail.

GLORIA

Guys! Did you hear that? Tomorrow we're going on a road trip! Awoooooooooooooooooooo!

SFX: WOLVES HOWL.

ZEBULON

Oh yeah, and this is when all of my boxes get checked off!

EFFIE

I know.

ZEBULON

Because now we are Lord of the Rings-ing it, baby.

EFFIE

You're very excited about this part.

ZEBULON

A band of heroes crossing mountain, river, and valley to find some sort of thing out west. I love it.

EFFIE

Let's cast it. Who's who?

ZEBULON

Oooh. Good question. I think we'll go with Leif as Legolas.

LEIF

Oh HELL yeah.

EFFIE

Why?

ZEBULON

Just for alterations' sake. I think Gloria is all of the Hobbits combined.

EFFIE

Really?

ZEBULON

Yeah, I mean, when you're making stew for friendly wolves, congratulations, you're a Hobbit.

GLORIA

Checks out.

ZEBULON

Ava...

AVA

You know the answer, you know the answer goddamn it.

ZEBULON

Ava's definitely Gandalf.

AVA

FUCK yes.

ZEBULON

And Caspar is Gimli.

CASPAR

Oh, come on!

AVA

Ha ha, Gimli.

CASPAR

Why do I have to be Gimli? He's always in a bad mood and never wants to be... there... shit... alright, fine.

ZEBULON

Heroes on an epic quest. I even picked out some epic music for the transition, check it out.

SONG: EPIC MUSIC.

SFX: SEVERAL FEET TRUDGING THROUGH THE SNOW.

AVA

I didn't wear the right shoes for this.

CASPAR

I didn't wear the right anything for this.

GLORIA

Hey, I think I see it, that shiny thing he was talking about.

CASPAR

Where?

GLORIA

If you look all the way down the mountainside and then along the shore of that lake, all the way almost to the horizon. See it?

LEIF

I see it. That's really far.

GLORIA

It seems farther than it is. Maybe a day or two. What do you think it is?

LEIF

I don't know. It's big.

CASPAR

Does there happen to be a big sign on it that says "exit"?

EFFIE

So, I want to get back to the topic of "Where the heck are they right now?"

ZEBULON

Right, because like, what the hell?

EFFIE

Exactly.

ZEBULON

You had an opportunity to sit down with Leif and talk about what this place was.

EFFIE

That's right. Leif, thanks for sitting down with me today.

LEIF

My turn now?

AVA

Good luck.

LEIF

Hey. Yeah. Great to be here?

EFFIE

You and Caspar were saying that this place in the deep freeze was a pocket dimension. Tell us about that.

LEIF

Well, I'm not much of a theoretical guy, but the concept is that any given universe starts off small and slowly expands. If that's the case there will still be universes where it seems like all of existence is only, say, a few feet wide. That's the theory anyway.

EFFIE

Well you *say* it's a theory but the first time you met Gloria you were hiding in a pocket dimension, isn't that right?

LEIF

Well, I *called* it that but honestly that could've been anything. I'm one of those "anything can be anything" guys but I don't talk about that a lot because if the words "Principle of Fecundity" come out of my mouth then Ava throws things at me.

SFX: SNOWBALL HITTING LEIF'S HEAD.

LEIF (CONT'D)

OW!

AVA

No Principle of Fecundity!

LEIF

ANYWAYS. I don't think this is a pocket dimension I think this is our original universe.

EFFIE

What makes you say that?

LEIF

There would be different laws of physics in other universes. Everything seems like home here. Things go up, they come down. A Russian dude's voice is stored on a tape using the powers of electromagnetism. This is our universe, we're just somewhere else in it. Ask Ava, she'll say the same.

AVA

Yeah, I think he's right.

EFFIE

Well, Leif, you're an engineer. You make things that go whoosh, things that go boom, things like that.

LEIF

Sure.

EFFIE

So what *is* the deep freeze, then? How did it get you here?

LEIF

Honestly, that's the easy part. The tech to move a body from one place to the other is pretty common. Even on Earth, backwater as it is, there are theoretical designs, they just have one really glaring problem. A power source. The amount of energy you would need to manipulate space isn't going to come from internal combustion, you need more juice than that.

CASPAR

Why have we stopped?

GLORIA

There's something wrong with the wolves. They're all gathered around that tree.

AVA

Ooh. There's a tape up there.

GLORIA

How do you know?

AVA

Because I'm Gandalf.

LEIF

Caspar, you should climb up there and see if there's a tape.

CASPAR

Why should I climb up there?

LEIF

Because... dwarves are good at climbing.

CASPAR

I'm not a dwarf!

AVA

As Gandalf, I did my part by knowing the tape was there. You do your part. Up the tree, shorty.

CASPAR

Nowhere in the Lord of the Rings does it say Dwarves are good at climbing.

LEIF

Bro, The Hobbit, chapter six, don't make me quote it.

CASPAR

Oh for fuck's sake. Fine.

SFX: CASPAR TRUDGING OFF TOWARD THE TREE.

LEIF

I guess technically since Legolas is a wood elf I should climb the tree.

AVA

You're doing your part, your name starts with "L".

GLORIA

This doesn't look right.

AVA

Yeah, Caspar climbing a tree looks wrong for some reason.

CASPAR

Found it!

LEIF

Nice.

CASPAR

Who's got the tape recorder?

LEIF

I've got it. Give it here.

CASPAR

Look at that, I climbed a tree.

AVA

The heroism.

VLADIMIR

Well hello there, my mysterious friend. It seems you are following my trail. This is good news for your friend Vladimir. Perhaps my story will be told after all. I leave this message for you here as a warning. You are entering a very narrow part of the valley, with high mountains on either side. Because you are probably not Russian you will not recognize when a mountain is on the brink of avalanche. Be very quiet as you travel through this part of the valley, my friend. Buried in snow is a terrible way to die.

ZEBULON

Chapter three: In the Valley of the Whispers!

SONG: SPECIALLY CHOSEN IN THE VALLEY OF THE WHISPERS THEME MUSIC.

CASPAR

Anyone in favor of me ripping the batteries out of all the walkie talkies?

GLORIA

No, don't. C'mon, I know they're acting crazy but I like that they're with us.

CASPAR

Fine. Gloria, no howling at the moon until we're through this valley.

GLORIA

No problem.

CASPAR

Let's go.

SFX: SEVERAL FEET TRUDGING THROUGH THE SNOW.

EFFIE

Now, for most people, being as quiet as you can as you cross through a valley is not much of a problem. For this group however-

ZEBULON

It's a whole different story.

EFFIE

I thought it would be hilarious to take this time to interview the one person who would have the hardest time in The Valley of the Whispers.

ZEBULON

Caspar.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Goddamn it.

EFFIE

Caspar, thanks for being with us today.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
So great to be here, go fuck yourself.

EFFIE

I was curious about something, Caspar. You said yesterday "Do you have any idea how many shifts I've worked?" Which begs the question, how many shifts have you worked?

CASPAR

(Whispering)
I really have no idea.

EFFIE

I know what you mean, sometimes when we're editing the show I look up and I think "how long have we been here." But seriously, give me a ballpark. More or less than five hundred?

CASPAR

(Whispering)
I really have no idea.

EFFIE

How about this, when did you first show up at the diner?

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Give me the walkie talkies.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
No, Caspar, come on.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
I'm not going to take out the batteries, just give me the walkie talkies.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Do you promise?

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Yes. Give me the damn things.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Okay.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
You guys go ahead, I need to talk to our two hosts.

LEIF

(Whispering)
Don't yell at them.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Would you just go?

SFX: FOOTSTEPS FADE AWAY.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

(Whispering)
Okay, you two. I've put up with a lot of nonsense out of you for the past few days and I've been very patient. The mysterious songs, the random quotations, the sudden silence, not to mention the time you flew us into a supermassive black hole without any explanation. And now here we are, stuck in the deep freeze without any way out and you two have decided to suddenly become WNYC's Radiolab. And I've put up with that too. But I think all three of us are aware that the line of questioning you were on just now is crossing a line. So how about you guys go back to playing your fun theme music before I start screaming at the top of my lungs and bury us in fifteen feet of snow?

SONG: SPECIALLY CHOSEN IN THE VALLEY OF THE WHISPERS THEME MUSIC.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Thank you for being with us today...

SFX: MUSIC FADES, REPLACED BY THE SOUND OF A CAMPFIRE.

LEIF

(Whispering)
Hey, fire looks great.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Where were you?

LEIF

(Whispering)
I was getting to know your new friends. Wolves are so fun.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Aw. I love them so much. If we ever get out of here I'm going to miss the crap out of them.

LEIF

(Whispering)
So, I think I'm starting to get to know you.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Oh really? Please explain.

LEIF

(Whispering)
When we all came down here and I saw you had become Gloria the Wolf Queen I was like "Yeah, that sounds like something she would do."

GLORIA

(Whispering)
That's funny.

LEIF

(Whispering)
Effie and Zebulon are right, you do kind of just jump into things.

GLORIA

(Whispering)
You know what's weird? I wasn't always like that. I was a planner. I always had everything scheduled like I was running an army base.

LEIF

(Whispering)
What happened?

GLORIA

(Whispering)
Well, I lost everything. God literally laughed at my plans. I've seen some really weird shit since I've been here, but I have yet to wrap my mind around the fact that one day I was running a restaurant and then suddenly the next day no one could even talk to each other. It all just vanished. As horrible as that was, something good came along with it.

LEIF

(Whispering)
I can relate to that. Cruise around the starways enough and you find yourself in a constant conversation with the universe. Bad shit happens, you live through it, and then you say "Oh, that wasn't the end of the world? Okay. What is, then?"

GLORIA

(Whispering)
What do you think they're talking about over there?

LEIF

(Whispering)
I don't know. They're so weird. You know, in the rare moments that they're nice to each other they literally look over their shoulders to make sure no one is watching them be nice. It's ridiculous.

VLADIMIR

I have developed a new respect for the old masters; Galileo and Pythagoras. They had no institutes or computational devices. Only their perception and candlelight. In tribute to them, today I have used my ingenuity. Using the sunbeams through the tree branches and the straight lines they provide, I believe I have calculated the curvature of this strange new planet.

AVA

(Whispering)
Cool.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Yes, but can he climb a tree?

VLADIMIR

If my calculations are correct, this planet is massive. Three times the size of Jupiter, I believe.

AVA

(Whispering)
Whoa.

VLADIMIR

In fact, I hypothesize that this planet does not revolve around it's nearby star but rather they rotate around each other much like a binary star system, and the moons I see in the sky are in fact the other planets in this system, all of them revolving around us. Such incredible gravitational forces. If we could harness such power, think of the freedoms it would give us. We could end all human scarcity. We could transform ourselves.

AVA

(Whispering)
Cool guy.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
So, what was his deal?

AVA

(Whispering)
His deal?

CASPAR

(Whispering)
Yeah, like what was he famous for?

AVA

(Whispering)
Honestly, he was famous for disappearing, but before that: nuclear winter.

CASPAR

(Whispering)
What do you mean?

AVA

(Whispering)
He used physics to predict the outcome of a thermonuclear war. During the Cold War both sides were trying to convince themselves that they could win. He was the guy who said that, even if you win, you lose. Honestly, the world he predicted isn't much different from this planet.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

A gray sky, everything covered in snow. Except in his version the snow, and everything else, is radioactive.

CASPAR

(Whispering)

Sorry you never got to meet him.

AVA

(Whispering)

He could still be alive.

CASPAR

(Whispering)

What? No, he couldn't. The way time works on this planet it could've been hundreds of years since he first came here.

AVA

(Whispering)

But remember what I said about time and gravity? If this really is a planet and a star in binary rotation we don't know how gravity may shift. Time could actually speed up and slow down.

CASPAR

(Whispering)

That sounds like a reach to me.

AVA

(Whispering)

You sound despondent, Caspar. Remember, in times such as these it's not for us to decide our fate, we can only decide what to do with the time we've been given.

CASPAR

(Whispering)

You're doing Gandalf.

AVA

(Whispering)

I am. Would you like to do some Gimli quotes?

CASPAR

(Whispering)

I would not.

EFFIE

I have so many feelings about the moment at the campsite.

ZEBULON

Move over sister, 'cause I have them too.

EFFIE

You just really feel like they care about each other.

ZEBULON

They feel like a team, y'know? They feel like a family.

GLORIA

(Whispering)

Psst. Guys. Valley of the Whispers.

ZEBULON

(Whispering)

Sorry.

SONG: SPECIALLY CHOSEN IN THE VALLEY OF THE WHISPERS THEME MUSIC.

SFX: MUSIC FADES, REPLACED WITH THE SOUNDS OF A LAKE AND LOW HUM.

ZEBULON (CONT'D)

So many epic journeys end at the sea. The 400 Blows, The Warriors, Planet of the Apes.

EFFIE

It's a lake though.

ZEBULON

I know, but you get it.

EFFIE

Sure.

ZEBULON

As our heroes finally arrive at the mysterious structure at the shore of the lake, the news is bittersweet to say the least.

EFFIE

For sure. Because there stands the mysterious structure. It's a large, glowing semi-circle, two-stories tall that looks like the entry to a magical kingdom.

ZEBULON

And that's the sweet part. The bitter part is first discovered by Gloria's wolves.

SFX: WOLVES WIMPERING.

GLORIA

Guys, what is it?... Oh.

CASPAR

What is it, Gloria?

GLORIA

Sorry, guys. I think they found Vladimir.

EFFIE

The only thing left of Vladimir was a pile of bones. And on top of that pile of bones, one final cassette tape.

GLORIA

I think he would want us to play this tape, guys.

CASPAR

Ava, are you okay?

AVA

I'm fine. Play the tape, Leif.

LEIF

Yeah, okay.

VLADIMIR

I believe my final battery is dying. This will have to be my final message. I have yet to discover the purpose of the mysterious structure on the shores of this lake. It is beautiful. Obviously built by a great intelligence. But so far it is an intelligence beyond my own. Perhaps for communication. I do not know. Regardless, I wish to speak to you now, my mysterious friend. Know this, if you are hearing this message then together we are victorious. For my story has been told. I will live on at least in your memory. Tomorrow I will journey to my first camp and deposit the tape recorder there for you to find. Do svidaniya.

CASPAR

At least we found the tapes.

GLORIA

Yeah. That's what I would've wanted.

AVA

I would've wanted to live.

GLORIA

Yeah, just... failing that, I mean...

CASPAR

Okay, guys, look, let's just try and focus on not ending up like him, okay?

GLORIA

Yeah, I agree.

LEIF

We're not going to end up like him.

CASPAR

What do you mean?

LEIF

I'm sorry about this, it's going to add an extra sting to finding Vladimir's remains. This structure, it's an Urt Door.

CASPAR

It's a what?

LEIF

Urt Door? Anybody?

CASPAR

What is it, Leif?

LEIF

It's pretty common technology, actually. You power it up, walk through and you come out the other end at the corresponding door. Simple spatial distortion, nothing fancy. This is the way out.

GLORIA

Why didn't he use it?

LEIF

Well, it's alien technology, he didn't know how it worked. I mean, the guy was working with 1985 information I wouldn't have been able to figure it out either.

AVA

The exit was right there.

LEIF

Yeah, Ava. I'm sorry.

CASPAR

Shit. Okay. Well, fire it up, Leif.

LEIF

Sure, give me a minute.

CASPAR

I'm sorry, Ava.

AVA

Would you guys stop saying that? It's fine. I didn't know him or anything. Let's get out of here, I didn't bring my cigarettes with me.

CASPAR

Fine. Gloria, we're going to have to go.

GLORIA

Oh, man. Okay. Guys, gather round.

SONG: TEARFUL GOODBYE MUSIC.

CASPAR

What the hell is that music?

SFX: WOLVES WIMPERING.

GLORIA

V, Jungkook, Jimin, Suga, Jin, RM, J-Hope. I want you to know that I love you all very much. But I have my own pack, and I have to go run with them now.

EFFIE

(Fighting back tears)
It's... so hard to hear her say goodbye to the wolves.

ZEBULON

(Also crying)
I didn't realize she named them after the members of BTS.

EFFIE

I know that makes it so much harder.

ZEBULON

We should end the show here, I need a good cry.

EFFIE

Me too. Oh, folks. What an emotional journey. Thank you for joining us as we have journeyed... Into the... Deep Freeze.

SONG: MUSIC SWELLS THEN FADES.

SFX: SOUND OF THE GRILL.

CASPAR

Where's Leif?

GLORIA

Making Ava a grilled cheese sandwich.

CASPAR

Did she ask for a grilled cheese sandwich?

GLORIA

No.

CASPAR

Anything out of Effie and Zeb?

GLORIA

No, they've been quiet.

SFX: RADIO CRACKS AND BUZZES.

ZEBULON

-But no matter what his plan may be I'm sure it won't cause any more disruptions. Nothing but smooth sailing from here on out.

EFFIE

Don't you worry a bit y'all.

CASPAR

... Are you fucking kidding me?

ZEBULON

I'm sorry... did something happen?

CASPAR

... You know what? No. Everything's fine. I'm glad to hear there won't be anything weird coming out of the radio.

EFFIE

Us as well.

ZEBULON

You can count on us, Caspar.

CASPAR

Sure. Zebulon can you just play some music, please?

ZEBULON

Of course.

EFFIE

Glad everything's normal now.

CASPAR

Yep.

SONG: ROVIN' GAMBLER BY KELLEY HARREL.

LEIF
Hey, I made you a grilled cheese.

AVA
Why?

LEIF
Um... I don't know. Idle hands?

AVA
Thanks.

LEIF
Hey listen, I had a thought.

AVA
Okay.

LEIF
Effie and Zebulon were interviewing me and I said the big challenge of any technology is always the power source.

AVA
Okay.

LEIF
And then on the tape Valdimir was talking about how amazing it would be to harness the power of a huge planet like that.

AVA
It would be something.

LEIF
I think that planet we were on... I think it's the power source.

AVA
For what?

LEIF
For the diner. Harnessing the gravitational power of a planet three times the size of Jupiter? That's a lot of juice.

AVA
It is a lot of juice.

LEIF
Ava, I think that entire time in the deep freeze... we were in the engine room.

AVA
It's a very interesting theory, Leif.

LEIF
It is, right?

AVA
I'll add it to all of the other theories that I have in all of these notebooks.

LEIF
Cool, cool. Okay. I'll think about it some more.

AVA
Do that.

CASPAR
Want some coffee?

AVA
What I want is for everyone to get the fuck away from me.

CASPAR
Yeah, I didn't ask about that, I asked if you wanted coffee.

AVA
He died here, Caspar.

CASPAR
Valdimir?

AVA
Yes. He died here. He died here without ever figuring anything out.

CASPAR
That's true.

AVA
I don't want to die here.

CASPAR
I know.

AVA
... Yes, I'll have some coffee.

CASPAR
For what it's worth, nobody brought Vladimir coffee or made him unsolicited grilled cheese sandwiches.

AVA
You think that makes any difference?

CASPAR
I don't know, what am I? A fucking scientist?

AVA
... How long have you been here, Caspar?

CASPAR
I don't remember.

AVA
... Sit down.

CASPAR
Okay.

The End.