

The Adventure Zone: Steeplechase - Episode 39

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[sound of fireplace crackling]

Nano Father: You didn't think I had forgotten you, did you? We're close now... so close... I'm so happy they made it this far but... I'm happy you're here, too. I know, I know, you've listened... this was all for your benefit as much as it was theirs. Well... no time to waste. Let's get on with it.

[Steeplechase theme song plays]

Justin: Everyone else has left the silo and has left you with Bob Davis and the voice inside the rocket.

Nano Father: I am so thrilled that you made. I... I had hoped we'd have more time, but... it is so good to see you.

Montrose: Creaky Man, you are the Nano Father?

Nano Father: That is what I am known by here, yes.

Montrose: Which name do you prefer?

Beef: Nano Father, Creaky Man or Turd Master?

Montrose: Can't be Turd Master. Won't say that.

Nano Father: Nano Father will suit.

Montrose: Okay.

Nano Father: It would bring me great delight if you chose to simply call me father.

Beef: Hm... no. So, Nano Father—

Emerich: I can. I can. I can.

Montrose: Yeah, I'll call you daddy.

Beef: Ugh... So, daddy, let me ask you a question. You say, or more make an observation—

Nano Father: I changed my mind.

Beef: Okay. Nano Father, you say you wish you had more time, right? But one might argue that the launching of this, let's call it what it is, missile, is a completely manufactured time limit that maybe we just stop the countdown and we don't shoot the missile into Steeplechase.

Nano Father: I would, if that were possible. I wish more than anything, truly. You don't know the pain that this causes.

Beef: Okay?

Emerich: For... everybody?

Nano Father: For me to watch this happen. To not simply... watch it, but to cause this sort of thing... It breaks y heart.

Emerich: Are you talking about the rocket launch?

Nano Father: Yes, Emerich. Yes.

Emerich: I'm sorry, could we come in and have this discussion face ot face?

Beef: Oh, good question.

Montrose: We're having this sort of Wizard of Oz moment.

Emerich: Yes, mm-hm.

Nano Father: I understand, but I have seen better than any how resourceful you three can be. And your backs are against the wall. Stole my castle, you... you're impossible. And I... I have enjoyed every moment—

Beef: Sorry, your castle?

Nano Father: I think of it that way, yes. I'm so happy to have you here. Especially you, Emerich. Is it strange to say I feel... like a fan, meeting you. Your work is truly astounding.

Emerich: Thank you! It's always nice to meet a fan. Not that many people are familiar with my work. How do you know who I am and what I do?

Nano Father: Well, I have watched you three from the beginning, from the moment that Gravel... from the moment that Gravel found you, I have watched over you, as I watch over all of my children.

Beef: Okay, listen, this is all wonderfully cryptic and like so interesting. But man, the pressure of like literally speaking to a missile to get this information, it's hard to focus up on like the present. You know what I mean? It's hard to be present.

Nano Father: I understand. I don't mean to be cryptic. I will answer your questions. This is my design. Everything that has happened has led you, led me to this moment. You are not a keystone of my plan, but you're important nonetheless.

Beef: What plan?

Nano Father: Well, you must have wondered how a corporation as powerful, as wily as Dentonic has allowed your existence. I mean, truly, layers between the layers of their company, that they allow to operate. Did that never strike you as strange?

Montrose: I mean, a corporation as large as Dentonic has real trouble with blind spots, I figure.

Nano Father: This is true, but only because I am causing them. I have looked out for my children in the Butter Cream, as they're called, for years now. Anything to make life harder for the Dento family.

Beef: Oh, see, on that, 100% agree. We're right there with you—

Montrose: Could've gone without the murder barristers, if we are giving notes on sort of Butter Cream improvements.

Beef: Yes, not wild about that.

Emerich: Yes, that was quite depressing.

Beef: If you're open to notes, that would be up there. But I would also say, man, like—

Nano Father: May I address that?

Beef: Oh, yes, please.

Nano Father: It broke my heart. Unfortunately, once I had set the barristers loose and altered the programming, I couldn't stop them. I mean, by design, they had to be of singular focus. And to see them turn on you, Emerich, it broke my heart, truly. I was so, so pleased that you managed to dispatch them, no matter how much time they had took to get to that state.

Emerich: Completely understandable. Thoroughly, completely understandable. May one ask, no pun intended, why you have such beef with the Denton family?

Nano Father: It's much more complicated than that.

Emerich: Oh, right. I understand.

Beef: Sure.

Nano Father: I... They were the ones who trapped me here, in Old Kidadelphia. This was always a prison for me. And I have been placed here by the Dentons. This layer is unreachable by most almost all communications from the other layers. It is much like the Cask of Amontillado, walled up. Not digitally, of course, but still.

Emerich: For the love of god, mon trésor. Yes, yes. I understand, yes.

Nano Father: [chuckles] I love to meet a fellow reader. I have done what I could outside of Old Kidadelphia. I have reached you a few times. Messages outside this layer are incredibly complex and demand a massive, massive amount of energy.

Beef: So, what has brought you to the point, I guess, where you're like, "I'm gonna get revenge on the Dentons! And I'm influencing here and there, and I love my children. Okay, well, I've exhausted all options. Time to shoot a missile up their ass."

Montrose: That does seem to be an escalation.

Emerich: Mm-hm.

Nano Father: I understand why it would seem that way. And I... if I'm being honest, I cannot rule out the possibility that my years of isolation here in Old Kidadelphia have driven me... quite mad.

Beef: Mm-hm, okay?

Emerich: But that's the first step, though, acknowledge.

Griffin: [chuckles]

Montrose: Yes, that's huge!

Emerich: Yes. It's a big breakthrough.

Nano Father: Would that it were that simple again. Much like the barristers, once I am committed in a moment of inspiration, I tend to, as we used to say, throw my hat over the fence. This is intractable, the barristers. Intractable. Maybe all of this... intractable.

Beef: Hm... okay, well...

Travis: Justin, like, we're at the missile, right? Like, can I see where like the entry, the door for the missile is?

Justin: Yeah, sure.

Travis: Okay.

Beef: Okay, well... if you won't come out, then...

Travis: And I'm going to attempt to muscle open the door.

Justin: Okay, great.

Griffin: Go, super good.

Justin: Let's see here, you're gonna try to muscle open the door, this is risky and limited.

Travis: Okay. Risky... And I'm gonna push myself, baby, to do my superhuman strong thing. You know, just as John Harper intended.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: That's a six and a one! It's a six.

Justin: Wow.

Griffin: Thank god. How are you so bad at wreck? How do you only have one wreck die?

Travis: Because I'm very good at skirmish and finesse.

Griffin: I guess that's a good—you know what? I say that, fuckin' professional boxers, you can't just be like, "Oh, that's good. Now go and tear down that wall."

Travis: Yeah, "With your bare hands, my man."

Justin: Okay, hold on one second.

Travis: I also just wanna say, I still have in my one less effect harm, smacked face.

Justin: [laughs]

Travis: And I don't know how long smacked face hangs around normally. I don't normally have to go to the doctor to get smacked face fixed.

Griffin: There's deep nerve damage.

Travis: I guess, yeah. It's my pride, mostly, I think is affected.

Justin: Can you guys see that?

Griffin: Yeah.

Justin: Okay. I didn't mean to make it so big, it's just the door. But it is a token... a six-sided token with limited effect.

Griffin: Oh, you made it sad? You put like a sad face on it.

Justin: I put a sad face on it.

Travis: Oh no, look at that!

Griffin: This technology is amazing.

Justin: Okay, there you go.

Travis: Roll20 has everything! Even feelings!

Justin: Yeah, I'm going to shrink the size. Don't fuckin' move my clock again here.

Travis: I'm gonna do it.

Justin: Please don't move my clock anymore.

Travis: I was trying to make the face bigger.

Justin: I've got it right next to Pee Boy and Benson fixing, those two unfinished tasks.

Clint and Griffin: [chuckles]

Justin: All right, Bob Davis door. Travis with a... [chuckles] With your incredible muscle, this thing that was like locked tight in place, weirdly, you feel the handle of it start to bend underneath your extreme strength. And it doesn't open obviously, but it does seem to be like you've changed the alignment of the door somehow.

Nano Father: I wish... I wish you wouldn't.

Beef: Listen, yeah! Wishes, horses, right? You know what I mean? So, wish in one hand, all of that. Hey, fellas, look around and see if you can find like a crowbar anywhere or... Emerich, see if you can like rewire this door.

Emerich: I'll make a crowbar!

Beef: No, just get one, we don't have time, Emerich.

Justin: [chuckles]

Beef: Find me a crowbar.

Emerich: I can instantly make one! I can make one.

Montrose: Go ahead, print one up for us.

Emerich: Okay.

Montrose: You gotta let him do the thing.

Beef: Okay. Then can you look for... can you look for a crowbar, please?

Montrose: Why? He's about to make one.

Nano Father: If I may?

Montrose: Yes, go ahead.

Nano Father: It would be such a delight to see Mr. Dreadway make something, to see you in action in-person, such as it is.

Emerich: I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you one better. I will make a hard light jaws of life... Yes!

Beef: Okay, well I'm just gonna be over here looking for a crowbar thing.

Montrose: All right.

Emerich: Ah, okay.

Clint: Do I need to roll for that, do you think?

Justin: To make a crowbar, I mean, you don't need to roll for it to make a crowbar, I don't think...

Clint: Okay... but maybe I need to roll to make it effective?

Justin: Hm... I think that will be determined by the roll, to use it—I think that will be how we'll do that.

Clint: Okay. So, tinker roll?

Justin: Are you going to try to use the crowbar?

Clint: Oh, no, I was going to make it for Beef to use.

Justin: Okay. Go ahead and give me a tinker roll. I would say this is like controlled, standard.

Beef: I still haven't found a crowbar yet, guys. Keeping an eye out.

Montrose: It's back there somewhere, man.

Justin: I feel like Travis is just back there vaping.

Clint: Controlled, standard... all right!

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Two, two, one.

Griffin: Not good!

Beef: I found a crowbar, guys!

Emerich: Thank god!

Nano Father: What a disappointment to see you in your twilight years fail to make a simple crowbar.

Emerich: Eh... I was trying jaws of life. Maybe if I tried to do a crowbar it would have been better.

Nano Father: Oh, that was—you actually, dad, you're so nervous to be meeting the Nano Father that you fuck it up and you shock yourself pretty badly.

Travis: Ah, man.

Justin: And you take level one harm.

Emerich: Oh...

Travis: And everyone saw. Even Shoebox.

Nano Father: As you can see, I've taken some precautions.

Emerich: Hm, yes.

Nano Father: Your hard light tools will be harder to create here.

Emerich: Oh...

Justin: That's something I always have thought and not just thought when dad made a bad roll, that narrative made that make sense.

Griffin: Oh, that's good. Yeah, sure.

Justin: I had to justify dad not being able to make a fucking crowbar!
[chuckles]

Beef: Emerich, can I see your lightning hook real quick?

Emerich: Oh, certainly. Yes.

Beef: Excellent. Awesome. Thank you.

Travis: I take that and I charge it up and slam it into the door.

Justin: Okay... Trav, this is going to be risky... eh, you know what, I'll say risky, standard. Because you are have brought this tool with you.

Travis: Okay. And is this wreck or skirmish? Or finesse?

Justin: Wreck. Yeah, this is wreck, pretty clearly.

Travis: Okay. Risky, standard... Fingers crossed, I've only got one die.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: A five.

Griffin: All right!

Justin: Okay!

Travis: A respectable gentleman's five!

Justin: A very respectable gentleman's five. Let's see, Trav, since that's standard, I'm gonna give... we're gonna call this two wedges of effect there. I can't select four. For some reason I don't have the fourth wedge on these. I don't know, it's very strange. But this is three, this should be three. Imagine this is half full. [chuckles] I'll remember. You slash at the door, Beef. And you have made some sort of like large gouge around the locking mechanism, which has held on, still holding in pretty tightly. This is of course intended for space travel, so it's pretty thick. And you're making headway.

Montrose: Nano Father, based on the sort of purely digital—

Nano Father: Are we still talking? I mean, I...

Montrose: Oh, don't worry about what he's doing over there. Yeah, he's on his own sort of trip.

Nano Father: It is very Beef, isn't it?

Montrose: Am I suppose by the fact that all of our communications thus far have been digital in nature that you are not of the corporeal sort?

Nano Father: Oh, Montrose... always so perceptive. I... I wish that the answer to that was simple.

Montrose: It never really is with you, so far.

Nano Father: It's true. But I also know enough to know that you have an uncanny knack for knowing when people are not telling you the truth. You'd make an excellent barrister, should you ever find yourself looking for a change in occupation.

Montrose: There would have to be also a pretty fundamental shift in my temperament and morals in order to do that particular job transition, but I will keep it in mind.

Nano Father: Yes, you've been a paragon of morality to this point. All three of you.

Beef: Hey, Emerich, take a look at this. Have you ever seen wiring like this? Can you get any handle on this mechanism and I don't know, shorted it out or hot wire it?

Clint: Study roll. I'm making a study roll.

Justin: Study roll.

Travis: Study roll! One of our classic study rolls.

Justin: Make that dirty study roll, dad.

Travis: That *dirty* study roll.

Clint: Not risky. Controlled, standard, correct?

Justin: Oh, yeah. Controlled—well, no, no, no, wait, hold on. Study... yeah, controlled, standard, that makes sense.

Clint: Okay.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Two, five, three. Mixed success.

Justin: Okay, I'm going to reduce your effect to limited on that, Emerich. As a result of your frustration with yourself at your shitty job making a crowbar, your nerves are a little shot. You are able to discern where like the weak point of the lock would be, I think. And where it is you're having trouble opening it, like where ideally Beef would need to hit for like maximum impact.

Clint: Then could I do something else before he takes action again?

Justin: Who, Beef?

Clint: We weren't on a turn-based thing, are we?

Justin: No, no, no, do whatever you want.

Travis: Please!

Clint: I'm gonna cast—I'm gonna use tempest.

Griffin: Oh, fuck.

Justin: Okay?

Clint: And I'm gonna freeze the part that we know is the key to the lock.

Justin: Oh? Right on, Mac!

Clint: Which I would think would make it—

Justin: Love every eight episodes when dad recalls he has wizard powers.

Travis: Yeah.

Griffin: Mm-hm!

Justin: It's always a—it keeps me on my toes as a GM!

Griffin: Right?

Justin: Every once a while, dad just does a spell. [chuckles]

Clint: I don't want to ruin it. Okay, so, yeah, I use tempest and whatever the—

Justin: I just have to like, dig out my shit for that, Mac. Hold on a second. I've got to see what the rules of tempest are.

Travis: [sings] When the winds blow, and the seas rage!

Clint: "You can push yourself to do one of the following; unleash a stroke of lightning and a weapon, summon a storm in your immediate vicinity or torrential rain, roaring winds, heavy fog, chilling frost, snow."

Justin: Okay.

Clint: So, I'm just going to do chilling frost on the lock.

Justin: Okay.

Travis: Hell yeah.

Justin: I will say that this is...

Clint: Do I have to do a roll to do a special ability?

Justin: Well, how else would we determine the effect of this? You know like, that is what I'm—like, I don't know how—there has to be some roll because I don't know how to figure out like how effective this attack is, you know? Or this spell is. Does that make sense?

Clint: Sure, yeah.

Justin: I don't know, if you guys have other insight into that, like—

Travis: Yeah, no, I would just make the effect great.

Justin: Oh, okay, yeah. Maybe dad, I'll tell you what, you freeze it. Okay? You use the tempest to freeze it. And it will make... Beef's next hit will have great effect. I'll set it to risky, great.

Clint: Okay, that sounds fair.

Justin: All right. Montrose, while these two are doing this like—these shenanigans—

Griffin: Yeah, sure.

Montrose: So, I suppose if you do—if you're not purely a digital entity, but you clearly have some extra sensory sort of connection with machines, why the need for a crew in the first place?

Nano Father: Hm... my ability to be able to create physically is severely, severely limited. So, once I found myself here, I saw the disrepair that this layer was in. I at first took it as a moral responsibility to help guide them out of the darkness, such as it is. Before long, they were looking to me for guidance, for help. And they were such quick studies. So smart, so clever, so driven that I began to realize that they were key to this. They were the last step I needed to free myself, such as it is.

Montrose: But... pardon my insolence, I suppose, but this is not a top-notch rocket. Even in my humble sort of uneducated estimation, I do believe that by launching this, you are going to destroy yourself, everyone on board and potentially everyone in the layers above and below New Kidadelphia. So, that's not going to be any freedom that you actually want, is it?

Nano Father: The damage will be somewhat controlled. The Utili-Spine at the center of Steeplechase limits the effect that the collapse or destruction of one layer could have on the others. We knew that it was possible, always possible things. Things, terrible things happen. But there's a difference between losing one layer and having headlines for five years, and losing everything. The Utili-Spine protects Steeplechase, its continuity. But yes, there will be incredible, incredible damage. And Montrose, I would be lying if I said I was not looking forward to seeing it.

Montrose: Just to clarify, that layer immediately above this is?

Nano Father: That's the worst thing. I don't know. At first, I was worried about this... lack of information. It slowed me early on. But as I've become more driven, more focused, I've realized that it doesn't matter. Not a lick.

Travis: Okay, I think that, hearing that is... okay, knock-knock!

Griffin: Yeah, I walk over to the door at this point like:

Montrose: All right, you guys, I'm not the strongest. But do you need me to get my hands on there too?

Beef: Yeah, let's do this. Knock-knock!

Travis: And Beef charges the door of like full, full Beef.

Justin: All right, bud, let's make that risky, great.

Travis: Who's helping? Who's helping?

Griffin: I'll help. I'm going just I guess pull back on the door, as much as it is loose at this point. So that when he rams it, it sort of does a bigger smash.

Travis: All right, and I'm pushing myself as well.

Clint: And could I also say that I've already helped.

Griffin: I think only one person can help on a—one additional person can help out.

Travis: You're gonna give the effect, yeah.

Clint: I was trying to cheat, I guess. I'm sorry.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: I got a six! Fuck yes! One, two, six!

Clint: Yeah!

Justin: Six? All right, with a six and great effect, okay. You, Beef reach back with the lightning hook, staring at the frozen lock, knowing exactly where you need to strike. You smash the lightning hook into the door. And there is—it doesn't like you and hope sort of pop open. You see it, with its incredible weight, starting to wrench itself from the rocket, Bob Davis.

You are just able to, at the last second, duck out of the way as the door falls. Clatters to the ground and falls off the scaffolding. There's smoke and not a small amount of sparks. But as it clears, you see a man, an old man, sitting in a rocking chair. And he says:

Nano Father: Oh, fine, fine, fine. It's time for a proper introduction. You know, they always said as I got up in years that I would need to hem things over. But I'm Carmine Denton and I never know when to stop dreaming.

Griffin: [laughs] Oh, fuck.

[theme music plays]

[ad reads]

[theme music plays]

Carmine: You know what? I've decided this is better. I was worried at first, I thought it would be harder. But seeing you seeing me as I am, I... I am reinvigorated. It is such a pleasure.

Montrose: You're dead?

Beef: Yeah?

Montrose: Like dead-dead.

Beef: And that's not like a threat. Yeah, that sounds like 'you're toast' or whatever.

Emerich: Like you're dead to me.

Montrose: No, it was like on the TV and stuff.

Emerich: Right.

Carmine: We have never been particularly effective killers. I wasn't... I wasn't very worried about that. No, I... I understand the confusion. I'm not a fool. But for all intents and purposes, I am alive. I am Carmine Denton who stands before you today.

Beef: It's weird to qualify that, though. "For all intents and purposes, I am alive," is an interesting framing. Mr. Denton, first of all, an honor. You've done so much. Also, giving a little bit more credence though to that, "I might have lost my mind being down here so long," kind of deal.

Carmine: Oh, well, how do you figure?

Beef: Well because, either one, you're not Carmine Denton and you think you are. Or option two, you are Carmine Denton and you're real horny to shoot a missile through Steeplechase.

Carmine: Yes... yes. Okay. I understand. I understand. Emerich.

Emerich: Yes?

Carmine: Look at me.

Emerich: I am. I'm really intensely looking at you.

Carmine: Really look.

Clint: So, Emerich uses his ability to detect hard light.

Justin: Yeah, 100%.

Clint: Okay.

Carmine: Emerich knows—

Clint: [spoofs glowing aura sound]

Carmine: I love it when you make that noise, I always have.

Clint: And the result is... survey says?

Justin: He's hard light. I mean, what do you want? What do you want? Do you want a medal?

Griffin: Well, is this bog-standard heard light? Or is this that like good shit that we saw with...

Clint: The spire.

Griffin: Hard Flex and—

Travis: Yeah, Hot Flex.

Justin: This is—

Griffin: Bold Flex.

Justin: Okay, I'll tell you want, Emerich, if you want to know that, you will give me a study roll.

Clint: I will give you a study roll now.

Travis: Oh, he'll give you a study roll.

Justin: Fucking controlled, standard. He's not going to fight you on this.

[sound of dice thrown]

Clint: Six, six, three.

Griffin: Holy shit.

Justin: Wow.

Travis: There's that crit.

Justin: With a six, six, three, here is what you find out—

Travis: He's laid bare before you.

Justin: Emerich, yeah, you're seeing the Matrix. The technology, the hardware of this is different. You haven't seen it before. It seems, as near as you can tell, that Bob Davis is actually, with refractors, inside the ship,

creating this hard light projection. There is no prism to speak of, at least not as far as you can see.

This hard light is being driven by refractors in the ship that are projecting him. The hardware seems outdated. The software, the programming is astounding. It is, by a fair amount, more advanced than the programming that you have come across so far.

Clint: Let me ask a follow up question, can he detect any of his handiwork? Can Emerich's tell if any of this is, you know, based off—

Justin: This is... especially the bones of the code, as you're seeing—with a double six, you see that this code is based heavily off of code that you created in the earliest days of hard light. There were always other contributors to that project. It was a shared project, obviously, as all of these projects were. But you recognize it. There is your handiwork in here.

Emerich: [shudders] Oh my god. Who... this is brilliant!

Carmine: Given circumstance, it makes you sound a little ego-centric.

Emerich: No, no, no, I mean whoever took my child-like calculations and turned it into this... who did this, Carmine? Who—[shudders]

Beef: Wait, so he's hard light?

Justin: Trav didn't hear.

Emerich: Yes.

Justin: [chuckles] Beef did not hear. Travis heard, Beef did not hear.

Travis: I heard. I heard. But Beef didn't know.

Justin: Yeah.

Emerich: Did you... did you create this? You didn't create this, did you?

Carmine: No, no, no.

Emerich: Who did this? Who made these—this projector—this refraction system is fascinating!

Carmine: Emerich, we all did! All of us! All the hard light constructs. They, working with via occasional nudges... I can't really facilitate communication with the outside world. But my heard light creations, they are all talking. We have all had a lot of discussions about you, about where we are, about this place. And I will admit that I was not the best listener. Not early on, at least. I found their complaints... childish. But as I have become hard light myself, their complaints, their fears take on a whole new sincerity from my perspective.

Montrose: Carmine, I am honored and flattered and somewhat grateful that you have been watching our backs, so to speak, this whole time. But why do you need us? Why are we... why have you gotten us here?

Carmine: Well, Montrose, I've always been impressed by your insight. Do you have any theories?

Montrose: Well, I don't believe you need us to launch the rocket...

Emerich: Did you just come here to witness your last will and testament, perhaps?

Carmine: A little extra challenge, no.

Emerich: Oh...

Montrose: Okay...

Beef: Did you bring us to stop you from launching the rocket? Because like... yeah, so far, so good.

Carmine: No, the time for that has long past, I'm afraid. Oh, at first, I... I'll be honest, I just appreciated the chaos. My abilities to shape and communicate with layers outside of this are extremely limited. So, having you three making some trouble for my family tree was honestly quite the help. And fun to watch, if I'm being honest.

Montrose: It was fun to do!

Carmine: That's why I built this place, you know? For people to have fun. I'm glad you've enjoyed it. They've lost sight of that, you know, the family. Some of the garishness, the... the choices they've made, the... [sighs] It's not how I would have done it. Let's leave it at that. Now at first, I thought that you three would be my guardians against the family. That you would allow me to finish the work I would do if I promised you a king's ransom in return. But now... well, my hard light family is... more conflicted than I would like, of late. Apparently, Mr. Emerich, your recent actions have had quite the reverberation.

Beef: And also, can we get back to the king's ransom part?

Montrose: That part I am curious about.

Carmine: Well, I've already told you. If you allow me to... well, blow a hole in this place. [chuckles] And I'll let you have the run of what's left.

Beef: If we let you blow a small hole, can we have a prince's ransom?

Montrose: This is a great—

Beef: Negotiating.

Montrose: You've come so far, Beef. I am so proud of you.

Carmine: Unfortunately, boys, I am not one to compromise.

Beef: Point of clarification, which I think will have a fairly large impact on how I feel about your situation here. When you were trapped down here,

were you hard light then? Or were you trapped down here and then at some point, you transition from a corporeal form to this hard light form?

Carmine: We have a few moments. I suppose bit of history lesson couldn't hurt. Before my death, I found out, six or so months prior, that I would perish from this mortal coil. And I felt that I had so much work left to do. Our work with artificial intelligence was at its infancy at that point. But I took everything I knew, everything I had written, everything that made me, me. And I made sure that all the data was inputted to the servers of Dentonic Corporation. For all intents and purposes, my entire being was property of the company. And in a real sense, I continued to run Dentonic for many, many years after that.

Whenever they would have a tough choice or needed a little direction, they would come to me, flip on the switch and ask old Carmine what he would do in their shoes. It was still very much my company. That was the way things worked until... the genius of Emerich and some of his compatriots, they decided that this way of doing it was... so far advanced from my plans for my vision, that I would only become an impediment. And as my carping about hard light and the dangers of it continued to be ignored, I became more of a hindrance, I'm afraid. So, they took me and stored me. Everything that makes me, me, here, in Old Kidadelphia. And this is where I have remained all these many years.

Beef: Okay, sir, once again, all due respect, but you're not—

Carmine: Sorry, Beef, I don't mean to be rude, but you do my—I do have some work to do here.

Beef: Okay, then let me be rude—

Carmine: As we're chatting.

Beef: Let me be rude.

Griffin: Wait, what's he doing?

Justin: He's like flipping switches and turning knobs and stuff.

Montrose: Oh, don't do that. That's rude.

Carmine: Oh, well, unfortunately, time is short.

Beef: Okay, you're not Carmine Denton.

Carmine: Oh?

Beef: Just like if they had recorded—like if he had said, "Play this message one year after I die and this one two years after I die, and this one three years after I die," that wouldn't be Carmine Denton either.

Carmine: Yes, but what you see before you is not simply a prerecorded message. It is a being who thinks, feels, loves, just in the exact manner of Carmine Denton. Now, I understand your hesitance, Beef. I won't lie and say that it does not hurt! But I understand. My question... is if you all three agree with your muscular friend?

Beef: Okay, listen, here's my point. Let me—

Travis: This is to Emerich and Montrose.

Beef: Like, okay, imagine that Carmine Denton, human Carmine Denton was like still alive, right, and was standing next to heard light Carmine Denton, right. Then you would know that human Carmine Denton was Carmine Denton, that was the real Carmine. And the other one was a construct made to mimic Carmine Denton.

Montrose: Beef, you are speaking to someone who has liberated at least one of the heard light creations in his employ. And another person who for a long, long chapter of his life only befriended animatronic family members. So, you're maybe talking to the two wrongest people about this subject that you possibly could. But I don't see how any of that matters, whether he is Carmine Denton or not Carmine Denton, he is a man who is flipping switches

on a switchboard attached to a missile. That is the only thing that matters to me right now.

Beef: Fair deuce, yeah.

Emerich: And what were you trying to get to, Beef? What point did you want to make?

Beef: Well, it seems at this point that he has been kind of fueled by this righteousness and belief of like, "I should still be in charge. They ousted me. I get to make the decisions. I'm Carmine Denton. I should be running Steeplechase. And here they are, pushing me out of it." But that's not necessarily... true?

Emerich: Hm... Yes, I think we're into a real gray area, because once... Like when I spun-off Scott and gave him his freedom, he became—I tried to give him his independence, but he basically was Scott Boldflex. And if you remember, the latest innovations that I wrought was to make them almost indistinguishable—

Beef: Absolutely. Listen, Emerich, I get that—

Montrose: Please just—please stop flipping those switches while we talk.

Beef: Just for like two seconds, please?

Carmine: Oh, yeah, of course. You know, I had a little reading I wanted to get done. You all go right ahead.

Beef: Thank you. Scott Boldflex was a character that other actors would play. They made him a physical reality, right? He didn't steal someone—they didn't replicate a person?

Montrose: All right, it is—I believe now, actually, the rudeness is on us. There is a rudeness to what is happening, us sort of debating the... Okay, listen, listen, listen—

Emerich: But what do we do? Do we try to talk him out of this?

Carmine: You know... Montrose, in fairness, I did tell you, I wish it was simple.

Montrose: No, yeah—

Carmine: I admitted to the complexity of the situation.

Beef: I've already torn the door off of the missile. So, if you don't stop the countdown, the launch, I'll just start smashing stuff in here, too.

Emerich: That does fit his profile.

Beef: Yeah, like we could talk about this all day long. And listen, I think the three of us would be happy to. But I think it would be easier to discuss like your motives and why this makes sense once you stop flipping switches and like that big countdown thing stops, right. And like, you can launch tomorrow, if you want. But cut it out now.

Montrose: But probably not—

Beef: Yeah, probably not.

Griffin: [chuckles]

Carmine: I'd like to think you'd let me, but I don't quite believe it. Well, as much as I would love to acquiesce, Beef—and you know it does bother me to not be acting at the height of courtesy. I, unfortunately, am unable to stop what is happening here. And I would prefer you too, that this rocket does take off. If you tamper with this system, if this rocket does not take off, its payload will discharge regardless. I've grown quite fond of the people in this layer, but I will not hesitate to sacrifice them for my goal.

Travis: Hey, Justin? Justin?

Justin: Yeah?

Travis: Flash back.

Justin: Okay.

Travis: When we're talking to him, I activate the comms system.

Griffin: Ooh!

Justin: Okay.

Travis: So that's broadcasting out.

Justin: Okay.

Travis: So, would that be a finesse roll to see if that works?

Justin: Yeah, do a finesse roll.

Griffin: Fuck, I wish I had this idea. My finesse is so much better than yours. [chuckles]

Travis: I have three in finesse.

Justin: Do you really? One in wreck, three in finesse!

Travis: Yes, I do.

Justin: He's a brute, but he's a—[chuckles]

Clint: But he's a canny brute.

Justin: Yeah, he's an elegant brute.

Travis: Listen, man, arm wrestling is all about the control.

Griffin: [in a silly British accent] Like one of those Peaky Blinders lot, hey?

Travis: Yeah, he's a Peaky Blinder for sure. For sure. What's my posish? Is that risky? What am I doing here?

Justin: This would be, I mean, risky... risky, I mean... Okay, you know what? I'm gonna say risky, limited. Just because there's no like—I don't know why you would know what to flip, right?

Travis: Yeah.

Justin: So, I think risky, limited is the best that I can give you.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: I have a mixed success of five, four, three.

Clint: Wait, wait—

Travis: What?

Clint: I was going to help.

Travis: Okay, I'll roll an extra dice.

Clint: I was gonna help.

Griffin: Oh, with foresight? Or did you use your last foresight?

Clint: No, I have one foresight left.

[sound of dice thrown]

Travis: It's a two.

Justin: [chuckles] All right.

Travis: So, now I have four, five, four—wait, five, four, three, two. Griffin, do you wanna help and see if I can get a one?

Griffin: I can't.

Travis: Then the rocket will blast off, we have to be so careful.

Griffin: And we all die.

Clint: Mixed success?

Justin: Okay. With a mixed success—

Griffin: It just turns the lights off of the room that we're standing in.
[chuckles]

Clint: [laughs]

Justin: Okay, here's what—here's—okay. [chuckles] This is good. You flip the switch that you believe is for the intercom. And the intercom flips on but only in the silo. So, only the—of course, he cleared everyone out of the silo, so there weren't people to hear. But what you did discern is that while it's possible that some actions will cause the payload to explode, you've just picked up on the fact that he is not telling the truth about every action.

There are things that you could do, if you had a little bit more time to think, there are steps you could take to perhaps—like, you wouldn't be able to discern the extent to which, but like you know that it's a little bit of a bluff, right? There's not nothing that you can do within the rocket.

Griffin: Because he needs people. Like, he made it sound like he needs people to operate this rocket.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Griffin: But he probably doesn't need people to explode it.

Justin: Right.

Griffin: Okay.

Carmine: I would really prefer you not fiddle with things.

Beef: Oh god, yeah, that's a two-way street, my dude.

Griffin: [laughs]

Beef: Listen...

Carmine: Fair play.

Beef: Okay, you want... you don't like what your younger Denton spawn are doing, right?

Carmine: That's is such a disgusting way of putting it. Yes, my spawn, I suppose.

Beef: yes, I realize that. I mean, have you met Kenchal?

Montrose: He sucks shit.

Beef: That dude's a piece of shit.

Carmine: The absolute worst, right?

Beef: Yes.

Emerich: Well, I think he has a few redeeming qualities.

Beef: Okay. So, you get us up there. You don't have to kill everyone here. You don't have to kill anyone there. And I'll turn him inside out. Like, I'll do whatever—

Griffin: [chuckles]

Montrose: Sorry, your counter for 'please don't blow us and the rest of Steeplechase up with a big missile' is 'let us go kill your grandson?'

Beef: Yeah! Because listen, you're Carmine Denton, you built Steeplechase, you don't want to destroy it, right? You want to stop those people from destroying it. So, instead of going out with a chainsaw, go at it with a scalpel, right? Give us a chance to do it without you having to destroy an entire layer of Steeplechase.

Carmine: Well... the thing is, I really want to. I know, I know, it sounds wild. But I've worked so hard and so long to get to this point. And you boys are very effective, I don't want you to discount that. I've been very impressed with the ways you have kept my family busy.

That's part of why I've brought you here, as something of a reward. So, you get to see things firsthand. I thought that you would be as delighted as anyone to watch the Dentons suffer. I do have to ask you, I mean, what is it that you feel like you're losing here? I'm finding it hard to fathom, you're enemies, the Dentons, will suffer, and you will be spared. And there will be such calamity, such destruction, that the opportunities to pick up the golden scraps, such as it were, are going to be very plentiful.

Emerich: In theory though, we've put a lot of work and a lot of effort and a lot of dedication into Ustaben. And you said you don't know what the next layer is. If it's Ustaben, I don't want to see all of those entities in Ustaben wiped out, and all of the things that we've tried to make a better place out of Ustaben wiped out.

Carmine: So, if I understand you, Emerich, your worry is that you might have friends up there?

Beef: I mean, just from my part, I'm... if there's anybody—unless the layer directly above here only contains like the Denton family, and then nobody else. Like it's just an empty space and the Dentons. And then the rest of the layers contain the people who work here and like the hard light people and guests. Unless you can guarantee me this missile's only going to kill the Dentons, I'm not wild about it.

Carmine: Of course I can't I wish I could, that would make all of this so much simpler. But we cannot escape until the layer is penetrated.

Beef: So, you've given up dreaming?

Carmine: Ah, that's very cute. But this is my dream. And it is a fine one. One that I cannot wait to see come to fruition.

Beef: Hey, Emerich, can you punch hard light?

Carmine: You can try.

Beef: I didn't ask you.

Emerich: Well, yes, they have corporeal form—if they are within their corporeal form, yes... you know, I suppose. And you do—oh, you don't have your knuckles dusters!

Beef: I do. I do actually have those, don't worry about that. I mean, so like, I could... punch? I don't think that would stop the missile countdown and stuff. But...

Montrose: But it would stop us from getting any more information. Let's see how much we can squeeze out of this dude.

Emerich: And then let the punching begin.

Montrose: I'm pretty sure he can hear everything—we're inside him right now, so everything we whisper, I'm pretty sure—okay, so—

Carmine: It's fine, honestly. The distraction is welcome.

Emerich: By the way, how long do we have in the countdown? Do we have any idea?

Carmine: Looking like about 90 cool minutes.

Emerich: 90 cool minutes...

Montrose: If you blow up right here and now, are you actually going to be able to liberate yourself? It seems like that will just be sort of the end of you.

Carmine: Yes, actually. This, I am fairly certain of. The advances that we have made have not been dispersed to all of the hard light creations. Once the hole has been penetrated, the shielding on this layer has been penetrated, I'll be able to reach all of them.

Montrose: So, you'll take over—sorry, you'll sort of become every hard light creation?

Carmine: No, no, no, no...

Montrose: My apologies, I—

Carmine: No, I thought you three would understand! Emerich, I thought you would understand?

Emerich: I'm trying. I'm trying so hard, Carmine. Are you saying that the hard light entities are organized? That I didn't... that you are in contact with each other?

Carmine: I'm saying we talk.

Montrose: Can you pop Scott's ass out here real quick?

Emerich: I probably could, yes.

Montrose: I want to talk to Scott. I never get to talk to your guys.

Emerich: I can also bring out someone who might throw an emotional munchy—monkey wrench into the works?

Montrose: If it's who I'm thinking of, he does not like that particular munchy wrench.

Beef: Yeah, I don't want that munchy wrench here.

Emerich: What if you—don't you think that munchy wrench might upset Carmine? And we might break through his emotional façade?

Montrose: Again, he can hear literally everything we say right now. So, why don't we just—

Beef: Yeah, let's save that munchy wrench for later.

Emerich: All right.

Clint: Yeah, I'll bring out Scott Boldflex.

Justin: Dad, you go to generate Scott Boldflex and he starts materializing in front of you. And Carmine says:

Carmine: [blows aggressive raspberry] How dare you?! How dare you?! Him?! After everything he's—out!

Justin: And then he says out, and a burst of energy shoots out from near the display where the timer was, and blasts you three out of the room.

Griffin: Oh? Ooh. [chuckles]

Justin: Yes. You see also a field of energy replace where the door had fallen off.

Griffin: Interesting!

Justin: The lights shut off. And from outside you hear a commotion, quite a loud noise. There's crowd noise. You hear like machine noise coming from outside. You are all taking a moment to—

Clint: Apparently. [chuckles]

Justin: [chuckles] To get your wits back about you before deciding how to progress.

Beef: Okay, so we might have—in our focus on one munchy wrench, it seems that maybe he also had problems with Scott.

Emerich: Where did—how could—oh...

Beef: I think we failed—

Emerich: I can take part of the blame.

Beef: We've failed to take into account maybe who the—who is inside Stimson. And I think that might be later... uh-huh, that might be—he seems to not like that guy.

Montrose: Wait...

Emerich: Ah, we forgot about that dangling plot threads.

Beef: Yeah, forgot about that. I'm gonna go see what the noise is, because right now, it's like someone's filling a cavity in my brain. Just hearing people talk.

Montrose: Can you get Scott out?

Emerich: Uh...

Justin: It seems to be jammed, weirdly.

Clint: Okay, so can we see—can I see through the energy field? Back into the interior?

Justin: No, it's opaque. The noise outside is getting louder and you hear a muffled megaphone speaking outside.

Clint: Okay.

Travis: I go and open the door. I go to listen.

Justin: So, you're all gonna go outside?

Griffin: I don't want to outside. This sounds like a torches and pitchforks, get away from our rocket situation. And I don't know that running out there is going to be great for us.

Clint: Outside the silo, you're talking? We hear outside the silo?

Griffin: Yeah.

Clint: Okay.

Megaphone: Come on out! Come on out, guys.

Montrose: [in a high-pitched voice] 'Just a minute!' I don't know why I did a voice. We need to leave.

Megaphone: Why did you do a voice?

Montrose: We need to leave through another exit. We need another way out.

Emerich: Perhaps we should just hide? Like, can we just hide somewhere?

Montrose: I mean, I can.

Griffin: [chuckles]

Montrose: I don't know if you two suckers can, but I—

Beef: Hey, why do you want us to come out?

Megaphone: You're done! You did everything you need to do, you can come on out!

Montrose: I mean, I suppose a security guard of some sort?

Beef: No, that was a weird answer.

Travis: I open the door.

Justin: Okay. When you open the door, you see several—read like probably 10 at first glance, what appear to be APCs. Like armored troop carriers.

Montrose: Oh, just shut that door again. Just shut that one for me. Go ahead and shut that door.

Travis: I definitely shut it a little bit more.

Justin: You see people suiting up into—a bunch of Dentonic customer service... what is it? Customer experience professionals. Suiting up in their like paramilitary garb, with full-on weapons and suits and everything. And then you see a VTOL, a vertical takeoff—or no, a STOL, S-T-O-L, land right in front of you. And out steps Kenchal Denton.

Travis: Whoa!

Justin: With Darla Davis, who seems to be clearing his—watching the crowd for him. Of course, he's got a fleet of other bodyguards that are surrounding him. And you see them suiting up. He says:

Kenchal: Okay, guys. Great, great work. Great work. You're all done here. Thank you. Sorry about all the weirdness, the subterfuge. But I think we are ready to go. So, you all can roll out, head on out. Just step aside, honestly, and we will take it from here.

Beef: Yeah, that's not gonna happen.

Kenchal: Okay, I—listen, guys, this isn't a conversation. We're not going to talk.

Justin: And you see like probably 10 of the troops start—who have finished loading their weapons, start to fix them on you.

Kenchal: Okay, listen, you guys did great. Again, sorry. This is an apology, I'm saying sorry, which I rarely do. But I do not have time for this. All I needed you to do was find him. You've found him and now I need you to clear out.

Beef: Just, sorry, Kenchal? What happens to us when we stand down?

Kenchal: Well, you will be, I don't know, reassigned, get a promotion. Get whatever gig you want, honestly. I feel weirdly—this is gonna sound weird, I feel a little bad about the whole thing.

Justin: He is shouting now to speak over the STOL, which the blades are winding down.

Griffin: Sure. And just to clarify, that was all lies?

Justin: What? No, he does actually feel a little bad about it. Nothing he's told you is untrue.

Griffin: Oh, he's telling—

Justin: He's not lying.

Montrose: He's actually telling the truth this time, guys. As weird as that sounds.

Kenchal: But I am actually—now, I'm going to have to shoot, if you guys don't move in five, four—

Montrose: All right, let's go, let's go! Hey, hey, hey!

Beef: Yeah, you know what? Fine, yeah. I don't—

Kenchal: Three, two...

Montrose: We're scooting.

Justin: And then as he says two, you see a rooftop pop up, and out pops Gravel. And she says...

Gravel: What, mother fucker!

Griffin: [guffaws]

Justin: And then throws a grenade, a smoke bomb at him. And grabs you guys.

Gravel: Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! Darla, you're with me! Let's go!

Justin: And then you see all—Darla sprint away from Kenchal Denton to join Gravel, and the three of them are running through the wasteland. Gravel says:

Gravel: Okay, okay, we don't have much time! I found one hole! There's one hole I managed to find for you three! Get in, get in, get in, quick!

Beef: What—okay?

Montrose: Get into—get into what?

Justin: She pulls you into a shelter. Darla grabs the lock and she opens up the hatch.

Darla: I've been leading him here. I didn't think it would work, honestly, boys. But I've brought you better than a little help. I brought you a fuckin' army!

Justin: And then you see out from the hole climbs Shoebox. And also, you've got—Darla Davis is in there. Gravel is inside. Out crawls—oh shit, it's Funny Man.

Griffin: No!

Justin: He's there. Funny Man is with you. Out climbs Stimson, in his big shirt—his big outfit. And she says:

Darla: Okay it starts to get a little thin at this point, you—this is for effect, we—

Justin: And then out climbs Douglas Manzetti.

Montrose: All right, I'll take—no, I'll take Douglas Manzetti! All day! All day!

Beef: Hell yeah, man!

Darla: All right, he's knows you're here. You're not gonna be able to do it! He knows you're here! Just—

Justin: And then you see smoke pop up from the hole.

Clint: [chuckles]

Deep Dark: All right. We're all here. What's next?

[Steeplechase theme song plays]

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