Golden Boxes (S3, E11)

SFX: INTRO MUSIC

Rev: So we are now a week removed from having moved into our various new locations. Do you feel any more set up than you were this time last week?

Tass: Very much so. I got a whole lot done this week.

Rev: [quietly] Shit.

Tass: Oh, no! [laughs].

Rev: What about you, Jake?

Jake: Uh, it's getting better and worse. So my desk, my little office nook, all pretty much set up. It's great. I even built a little shelf that, like, my midi keyboard can slide underneath now and my monitor sits on top of, so it's like really organized. But also, I went back to our old place and did realize that everything that was on the walls was still on the walls.

Rev: [laughs]

Jake: So I took all of it down and brought it over. And there aren't as many walls in the new place, I'm pretty sure. So that's worse.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: There's a pile of that on the kitchen island.

Rev: What I'm discovering is that, like, as I go around to make things better, I make some other area much worse.

Jake: Yeah. One step forward and two steps back.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: We get together.

Rev: And do this weekly, and that's about all I can hold together.

All: [laugh]

Rev: Well, if you head over to Reddit, Andrew, one of our Reddit mods, is holding another fan art contest, which he has lovingly entitled Artpocalypse. And I have to read this, because this was the post that came with it. "He's everyone's favorite villain? Friend? Bad boy with a heart of brimstone? Whatever he is. Damien has been wreaking havoc on The Critshow universe since the very beginning, now let's immortalize this immortal character in art." So this contest is running through the end of September. Your entries are due on September 30th. You can head over to reddit.com/r/thecritshow to find all the details about the Damien O'Doyle fan art contest, including how to enter and what the prize is.

Just a reminder that this month our Patreon cycle for the swag and for the shirts is in its first step. So if you want to get onto the swag or the shirt tier, September is the month to join.

And also a reminder to go to thecritshowpodcast.com/monstermash to enter your bracket to possibly win a first edition Monster of the Week signed by Michael Sands.

And lastly, stay tuned after this episode for an interview with a very special guest. And with that, it's time the the recap roll.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC

Rev: So you know that the synths in this building are controlled by Peregrine K. And you actually see on, the left side of this room, another door. It does not have a scan bar at it. It actually has a sign kind of hanging crooked on it that says Piss Off.

Rev: GREGORY: I believe I could spread my consciousness to them and get a hold of the 25 that are active, but that would leave you vulnerable to the other ones that are not active. I could also try to spread myself out into the system more and get into all of them,

but I would not be able to stay in all of them. I could shift around between maybe 15 at a time, but I would have control over the entirety of the 49 or so.

Tass: "Gregory, do the 24 that you can get that are active. I'm gonna go through this panel and cut the power, get out, and try to get those boxes. All right. So here's my thought, just so we can make this as quick as possible. You know, you keep an eye on this. I'm going to go up, get the first one, and let you know as soon as I have it. And then pop it off, put it on that next nest, and I'll get the second one. So I don't have to go back and forth and chance getting seen a few times."

Jake: "OK."

Rev: GREGORY: Oh, no. I think there's seems to be some kind of a problem.

Tass: "What kind of problem, Gregory?"

Rev: GREGORY: I only have access to these bodies. I can't seem to access mine.

Rev: And you hear this loud thunk as something hits the ground at the bottom of the ladder. And you turn and you look, and you see Gregory's head rolling towards your feet.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC FADES

Rev: Jake, you are standing in the maintenance room, making your way across to the other power cords for the second nest that Tass needs to access. There is a loud thunk as something hits the ground at the base of the ladder, and you look down to see Gregory's head rolling towards your feet. What are you doing?

Jake: And I don't have any reason to believe that his head can just do that?

Rev: [laughs] Correct. Yeah, you're pretty sure …

Jake: He didn't send it down here to deliver a message?

Rev: Yeah, there's not like little spider legs on the bottom of it.

Jake: Do I hear or see any one or thing following that head down?

Rev: Roll Assess.

Jake: Eight.

Rev: You get a hold one.

Jake: Who or what is my biggest threat in this situation?

Rev: As you stand here, quietly listening, you do hear some pretty soft footsteps in the room above you. They don't seem to be coming towards the ladder, but they're moving around as if they are inspecting something. And you actually, after a moment, hear ...

Peregrine K: What the hell is this thing doing here? That's not good. Fuck.

Rev: And then footsteps, again, towards the door.

Jake: OK. I'm gonna plant the device, first of all.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: And then I'm gonna creep back up the ladder and survey what exactly happened in here.

Rev: Yeah. You make your way up the ladder, and when you get back into the server room, there is Gregory's body. His head has been cleanly severed, and it is laying on the ground with both of its hands out. And you can see that each of his fingers has been removed.

Jake: I want to look at his workspace and see if it's like offline or something.

Rev: It is still online, but you do see the ends of all of his fingers and his thumb still plugged in.

Tass: [uneasy] OK ...

Jake: I'm gonna shoot a text to Tass, like, fucking explaining this. Like, "Gregory has been beheaded and befingered. I think Peregrine is out there looking for what's going on."

Tass: Since Gregory just spoke to me, I'm gonna, I don't know, kind of turn to the synth. "Are you — are you there? Are you still there?"

Rev: GREGORY: Yes. What's going on?

Tass: "Oh, god. We think Peregrine found you."

Rev: GREGORY: Oh. No yes, I do. I see him. He's near one of the other bodies.

Tass: "Oh, god. OK, we gotta move quickly. Your body over there was beheaded. Can you still operate just staying in one of these, or put all of you in one of these when we need to go?"

Rev: GREGORY: I don't know.

Tass: "Oh, god! Oh, god ..."

Rev: GREGORY: I've never lost my body before.

Tass: "OK. We'll figure this out. Because obviously, you're still sentient. That's good. That's step one. I'm gonna go get the other box. That's the stuff you guys need. Unless we need to abort now. But I can go get it and we can get out."

Rev: GREGORY: It would not be my place to abort whatever mission NOEL sent you on.

Tass: "All right. Just sit tight. Keep doing what you're doing. We'll figure it out."

Rev: GREGORY: Oh, please hurry. He seems to be pulling out some kind of device, like he's going to start scanning the other body.

Tass: "Where is he?"

Rev: GREGORY: He is at the back side of the nest that you just came from.

Tass: OK, great. So as I'm walking towards the other nest, I am sending Jake a message. "It is definitely Peregrine. He's right outside of the nest where the exit to that hallway is. Is the thing planted?"

Jake: "Yeah."

Tass: "I'm gonna get the other box. We'll have to try to figure out what we can do with Gregory, if we just take one of these synths. I don't know yet, but either hide or try to find a way out of that room."

Jake: "K."

Rev: [laughs]

Jake: OK. This is gruesome, but I think I'm going to collect Gregory's head. I don't know exactly how synths are constructed, but my knee jerk guess would be that where there should be a brain, that's where the information is. And I don't want them to be able to recover it and, like, glean things from him. So ...

Rev: All right. So you go back down the ladder and you grab his head. Then where are you headed?

Jake: God. I live in the L-shaped hallway, I guess. Oh! Oh! How can I get to the guns? The big guns that were sticking through the holes?

Rev: So far, you're not sure. All you've seen are just those openings for them to be shot through.

Jake: But did they look like they would be physically manned, or do they look like they're, like, remote controlled?

Rev: It seems like they would be physically manned.

Jake: OK. I want to figure out how to get to where I could man the guns.

Rev: How are you doing this? Are you going back out into that hallway and looking? Are you trying to go through the server and find information?

Jake: No, I think I'm going back into the L-shaped hallway and trying to peek through those holes again, and see where ... Like if I know he's outside the door? You know, he's not in here, then I think I'm safe to go look.

Rev: Yeah, so you go out into this hallway and peek into the hole, and you can see that there's actually hallway that stretches further down on both sides. And on the right side, it takes a hard turn that you can't see, basically coming back in your direction. And I think you could deduce that it probably connects to the door inside of the room where all the synths were lined up.

Jake: OK. I'm going to go gingerly peek that door and see if the rest of the synths in there are online or offline still.

Rev: So you peek this door open to look into the room. Roll Assess.

Jake: Eleven.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 3.

Jake: I guess for starters, who or what is my biggest threat in this situation?

Rev: So as you look through the room, you do notice that all 35 of the synths are back in this room, but 10 of them, you see just a slight blue glow on their cheeks, with their heads looking down. And it is the 10 in the back, so there are 25 between you and them that, if activated, would become a real threat.

Jake: I'm thinking one way or another, I want through that door that we think is like Peregrine's office. So I'm gonna say, what is my best way past?

Rev: You notice that on that door, there doesn't seem to be any kind of security system. But just taking a closer look at it, you do see that one of the metal panels is slightly discolored. And at the very bottom, you can see that there is a wire that can be attached

and unattached to the bottom of the door. And so you think you need to remove that wire, or something bad is going to happen when you open the door. But other than that, it does not seem to have any kind of defense.

Jake: What do I notice, despite an effort to conceal it?

Rev: In the back right hand corner of the room, you knew that the elevator was supposedly built there. And again, you can see just a slightly off-color metal panel, about six inches off of the ground. And you feel like that that is the panel that you would need to activate to open up the elevator.

Jake: OK. I'm going to head for the regular door and do whatever — remove the wire that I think is endangering me to enter.

Rev: Roll Act Under Pressure.

Jake: Oh, dang. Four.

Rev: And that's with the hold that you get.

Jake: Five.

Rev: So Jake, you step forward and you go to pull this wire off of the door. And when you do, you notice that there is this strange catch in it. And so when you pull it just slightly, it actually tightens a knot in this small piece of string that pulls it tighter, and there's an explosion that knocks you backwards away from the door. You take three harm as you are blown backwards and half a dozen of the synths are knocked onto the ground. Roll Harm.

Jake: I rolled a nine. I subtract one, because of my armored clothing. So, eight. On a 7 to 9, the MC will choose one of these consequences off the list.

Rev: All right. So you are blown backwards and you hit the ground. Advance your harm clock by three. And your ears are ringing, and there's even a moment of your eyes being staticky. And as the static clears and you're laying on your back, looking up, there's a face looking down at you.

Peregrine K: You mind telling me what exactly you're doing in here?

Rev: Tass, you are up at the second lockbox. Roll Act Under Pressure to cut it open.

Tass: OK. Six.

Rev: All right. You are able to cut this open. And inside of it is a very small piece of machinery. And in the cutting of this open, you notice that some of the circuits on it get charred. It seems to do something to it. You're not quite sure what — because this piece does not look like anything you've seen before. But you do have it, and it's whole, but it seems somewhat damaged.

Tass: Oh, shit. I'm gonna take it.

Rev: And about the time you pocket this, you hear, very softly ... I don't know how to say you hear, softly, an explosion. But through some walls you hear a [distant explosion], and the Gregory below you in the synth body looks up.

Rev: GREGORY: There was an explosion in the synth room.

Tass: "Oh, shit. Uh ... You have any idea if this guy controls the synths, like, with his mind? Or does he have to be somewhere to control them?"

Rev: GREGORY: I'm not sure.

Tass: "Shit. Can you see anything in the room with the explosion?"

Rev: GREGORY: There are some synths that were knocked down. Jake was blown across the room, and Peregrine is now standing over him looking down.

Tass: "Oh ... OK. Oh ..."

Rev: GREGORY: Should we run?

Tass: "Yes."

Rev: GREGORY: All right. Let's go. Bye, Jake.

Jake: [laughs]

Tass: "No, no. No, no, no. Gregory, this way." I'm gonna head towards the hallway.

Rev: OK. And you're instructing him to get all the synths to follow?

Tass: Yes.

Rev: All right. Jake, you have this somewhat grizzled man dressed all in black. He has two long sparking blades protruding from his forearms, looking down at you.

Jake: "This isn't where the vending machines are."

Rev: He boots you in the side of the head.

Jake: Ow! If only my stats would allow me to lie. [laughs] I'm gonna Play Hardball.

Rev: [laughs]

Jake: I just go, [weakly] "All right, give up now and I'll let you live."

Tass: [laughs]

Jake: "I can see that we're evenly matched, but I've got an advantage you don't know about."

Rev: Uh, yeah. Roll Hardball.

Jake: No, no! I'm not being serious!

Rev: Oh, OK.

Jake: This is a bad guy, right? We know this guy is a bad guy. He's a killer.

Rev: Yes. Yeah.

Jake: Then yeah, I guess I mean it. So. OK.

Rev: All right. Roll Play Hardball.

Jake: Ten.

Tass: Oh my god.

Rev: He pauses and takes a step backwards at the look on your face. And about that time, Tass opens the door next to him and comes in with a dozen synths. And he turns over his shoulder and looks.

Peregrine K: Huh. Seems like you all got the drop on me. What's the play here?

Rev: And he's flexing his fists.

Tass: "We leave. No other harm done. That's the play."

Rev: And as you say this to him, Tass, 10 more synths from the back of the room move forward. And he looks over and sees those 10, and the 12 with you, and the five on the ground. And you see his eyes flick towards his door, as if he wants to make a bolt for it. But he doesn't. And the blades in his wrists slowly retract back into his forearms.

Peregrine K: All right. You're gonna get out of here, now. It's been a long time since I've left this place. Been a long time since I've had a reason to. But now I've got something to hunt.

Tass: "We heard you were good. It took a lot to do all of this. So somebody's gonna look forward to that hunt. It's not going to be us."

Peregrine K: Well, no. Don't look forward to it. I'm saying I'm going to kill you two.

Tass: "Yeah, no, I get it."

Peregrine K: Just get out.

Jake: I will struggle to my feet and make for the door.

Rev: Yeah. Peregrine actually gives you both a last glance, and turns and walks towards his door that is hanging off of one hinge.

Jake: I think I wanna ... Just in the habit of making friends out of enemies, I think like right before I get out the door, I just want to be like, "That was good, with the knot. I even saw it. Ooh, I saw it coming. You still got me."

Peregrine K: [laughs] You thought it was going to give you slack. Instead, it pulled taut.

Jake: "Yep. Very good." Then I'll take off.

Rev: All right.

Tass: Can I ask you an experience question? I feel like I had the stuff and could have made the getaway, as Gregory kind of suggested. But I came back for Jake. And the one that I had marked for myself was when you put your friend Jake ahead of the mission, mark experience.

Rev: Yes, absolutely. You can mark that one experience.

Tass: Awesome.

Rev: And I did fail to mention this in the moment. You both actually mark two points of experience now, because you have gotten the item from each of the lockboxes. And you get a third, because you have just neutralized Peregrine.

Tass: OK. Out in the hallway, I'm looking at the Gregorys.

Rev: GREGORY: What do we do with all of me? I don't think the car will fit all of us.

Tass: "No, I mean, can you just ... Are you just all of them now that the main body isn't connected? Or can you sort of shut down the rest and coalesce all into one? Or ... I don't understand. I don't know how it works."

Rev: Yes. I don't really know without trying.

Jake: "I have your head."

Rev: GREGORY: Oh.

Jake: "That sounds grisly. I don't know if, like, you can recongeal yourself into it? Like put your hands on it like the Space Jam basketball, or anything?"

Rev: He actually asks to see it.

Jake: Yes, I produce it.

Rev: He pulls a couple of wires out of the inside of the head and and starts fiddling with them, and reaches up on his own neck and pulls away some of the synthetic flesh.

Rev: GREGORY: Well, here goes nothing.

Rev: And he connects some wires into the ones in his neck, and the body goes limp and the eyes pulse a little bit. And one of the other Gregorys has stepped forward and catches the head before it hits the ground.

Rev: GREGORY: Ah, well, I don't sense that part of me anymore. I will hope that this blue glow indicates that it is in here now. But that could be good, in the sense of getting my body back, if I have my head. So in we all go, I suppose.

Rev: And they kind of a line up in this weird conga line ...

Jake: [laughs] And everybody in the bank is like, what the fuck is happening?

Tass: [laughs]

Rev: And it does. It takes like two minutes for all 24 of these Gregorys to get into the head, and now you have a severed head with glowing eyes.

Jake: And now we leave.

Rev: All right. The two of you with your head and your ill-gotten goods head out to Grasshopper's car and get inside.

Jake: "What's the plan with the tracker?"

Rev: GRASSHOPPER: Doing with the what now?

Jake: "Somebody planted a tracker on us while we were in there." And I want to look around and see if I see, like, another car lying in wait or anything. If it seems like somebody is out here to tail us when we leave, or like watching us right now.

Rev: You don't see anything.

Tass: Are there any other cars up here at all?

Rev: There are two others, but those can be accounted by the two people that you had seen inside that were not Pascal.

Tass: "OK. Toss it on one of those cars and let's go?"

Jake: "What if they are that stupid and they decide to blow it up? Then we're responsible for the death of the people in that car."

Tass: "Huck it over the side and let's go? By your own suggestion, if they are that stupid, then we're the ones that are gonna hit the ground real hard."

Jake: Yeah, I'm mostly trying to decide whether I throw it over the edge or just leave it on the roof. I think I'll just toss it out here on the roof. Just, away.

Rev: And as you do, Grasshopper fires up the car and head you back towards the Brick Alley Market.

And we are back inside of NOEL's hideout. We are back into the legwork phase. So who wants to roll Get Paid?

Jake: I'll do it.

Rev: All right.

Jake: What is this plus? How many?

Rev: You get a +5 for this.

Tass: Oh, my god.

Jake: 14. No, sorry, 16.

Tass: Oh, my god!

Rev: All right, choose three from the list.

Jake: The meeting doesn't attract the attention of outside parties. It's not a set up or an ambush. We don't care about experience.

Tass: Yeah.

Jake: And we've already determined that we have identified the employer. So I guess we're paid in full.

Rev: Why don't you care about experience?

Jake: Because I've got enough to level up now, but I feel like over the course of the next mission, I probably won't get enough to level up again, even if I take this experience?

Rev: Oh, OK.

Jake: And I think we're out of this world at that point. We're out of this world!

Tass: Aww yeah.

Rev: All right. So yeah. Mark your Cred. How much did you each wager on that?

Jake: I did two.

Tass: And I did one.

Rev: All right. So you get four and you get two. You hand the device over to NOEL, as well as Gregory's head.

Rev: NOEL: I see that you encountered some troubles.

Tass: "We did. I am sorry about a lot of this — the biggest one being Gregory is a head. But the device in the box got a little fried, and that is one hundred percent my fault."

Rev: NOEL: Hmm. Then I will have to see what I can still get it to do.

Rev: And she goes over and puts it into her computer, and she actually draw some cables out and connects them into Gregory's head as well. And now you both mark two experience, for returning the device to NOEL.

Tass: Outstanding. As they're doing that, I'm gonna pull Jake aside, and get the box out from the lockbox that I opened.

Rev: Yeah, you get it out and open it up. And inside is a rolled up piece of paper, about five inches high, and a salt shaker.

Tass: I'm gonna open the piece of paper.

Jake: [laughs] And it says, "Some things are destined to happen ..."

Tass: Oh my god.

Jake: And the salt shaker explodes.

Tass: Who keeps letting me open boxes?!

Jake: And unfurl scrolls?!

Rev: You unfurl this piece of paper, and it kind of looks like gibberish. But for you, Jake, it looks different. One, because of your cyber eyes. There's a strange feedback coming off of both of these items. And you actually recognize parts of the writing. It's hard to connect, but it seems like the spoken components for a spell.

Jake: Oh. "Those are spell components. I don't know what exactly it does, but like, that's magic ingredients, baby."

Tass: "OK. So obviously we roll this up and take it back with us, yeah?"

Jake: I want to pull out the capsule and see if I can even squeeze a salt shaker and the roll of paper into it.

Rev: It doesn't seem like the salt shaker would fit. But actually as you crack open the capsule, you do notice that the coins and the pills have that same strange feedback in your eyes.

Jake: "These have all got some kind of feedback. I can't — I don't know if it's just like magic feedback? Because they are I mean, they are all vaguely, vaguely magical, or Weird Science-al."

Tass: "Huh. OK."

Jake: "Or maybe it's just because they're all from, like, our world."

Tass: OK. Yeah. Like, the salt shaker. Is there anything … I don't know how to ask it. Is there just anything particular about it? Like anything odd? Or …

Rev: Yeah. You take a look over the salt shaker, and it is a white salt shaker with a red cap, and on it there is a little basket of red flowers. And it says Salt on the top. But you don't see anything out of the ordinary about it.

Tass: "Yeah, well, I don't know. I mean, that's a good thought. If they all did just come from our world, they might have that same kind of feedback, I guess."

Jake: "I mean, we can at least get the piece of paper in the capsule with everything else. And the salt shaker doesn't seem like it'll go. But if this stuff is from our world, it might just go fine. Like, we might not need to capsule it? And then I guess worst case, if we don't think there's anything significant about this salt and it doesn't make it through, that's not, like, terrible. Or we could come back through for it."

Tass: "I think we try. If that doesn't work, we know to come back through and try to figure it out. But if we can get this stuff back, I mean, this was ... Holy shit, this was some high security stuff that he did to keep this safe."

Jake: "Yeah, that's true. There's gotta be something about this salt that we don't get."

Tass: "Oh, yeah."

Jake: "This specific thing has to be important, or else it wouldn't have been part of this mission."

Tass: Is it full? Like am I shaking it and hearing something?

Rev: Yeah. Salt comes out.

Tass: OK.

Jake: Stop wasting it!

Tass: I'm like shoveling it back into the holes.

Jake: Gross. Stop polluting it. What's the matter with you?

Rev: Don't you don't have salt works?

Jake: "I guess we better at least go drop this stuff off at home. Like I know there's more stuff we kind of want to do here, but if this is the important shit, I would hate to stay here and risk losing it now that there is a killer hunting us and all."

Tass: "Yep. I ... I agree."

Jake: "Is there anything like we need to do before we go?"

Tass: "I don't know what. I think we go."

Jake: OK. I guess we should, like, package up everything we're taking back with us and head back for the clone room where the portal is.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: All right, so let's take a moment and level up.

Jake: Yeah!

Rev: So what are you both taking?

Jake: I think I actually earned one more XP here, too, because one of my directives is Vengeful — when you harm Nash or their interests, mark experience.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: So I'm going to go with another move from my playbook. The move is called Human Terrain. When you investigate a group and spend [intel], name that group as your target. You gain +1 ongoing while acting against or in pursuit of that group. You may only target one group at a time. Feel like if we come back here and we are dedicatedly, like, hunting Nash's shit? You know, that's kind of the singular purpose. I've named that group, and I'm better at it.

Tass: I am also gonna take a move from this playbook. This one is called Plan B. When shit hits the fan and you have to get out, name your escape route and roll Cool. On a 10+, sweet, you're gone. On a 7 to 9, you can go or stay, but if you go it costs you. Leave

something behind or take something with you — in either case, the MC will tell you what. And on a 6 or lower, you're caught in a vulnerable position, half in and half out. The MC will make a move.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: So we jump over, and we are back in the alley outside of the small clone facility that you both entered into this world. What are you doing?

Tass: I'm gonna go back by that little secret compartment and put the code in to crack this place open.

Rev: You enter the code, and the dumpster starts to slide open. But inside, you hear some small explosions, and you hear the crackle of fire begin. And from down the alleyway, you hear someone shout …

Rev: CONCORD: Hey, I think you and I need to have some words.

Tass: I'm gonna whip around to see who's talking.

Rev: There is someone standing in the alleyway. They have a holdout pistol at their side. And in the dim light of the alley, you can clearly make out purple skin. And they start to jog down the alley, and you see two more figures come into the mouth of the alley and start heading down as well.

Tass: Um, I'm gonna … I'm gonna shout, "I'm sorry for everything. Peregrine K is hunting you. Plan B."

All: [laugh].

Jake: I thought you're saying that to them!

Tass: I am. That is definitely …

Rev: All right. Roll it.

Tass: OK. Seven.

Rev: All right. So on a mixed success, you leave something behind. As you realize what is going on, you pivot on one foot, and you push Jake towards the hole into the building. And Jake, out of your pocket comes tumbling the capsule, and it cracks open and spills. And you reach down, you scoop up what you can and stuff it back inside as you both dive into this open hole, fire starting to fill the building. You get inside and this whole building is ablaze. But you know where the ladder is and you start to climb your way up. You run down the catwalk, as old chunks of wood and concrete start falling on this walkway. You both plant a foot on the catwalk and leap towards the portal. And Jake, you have this split second to realize that you have not put the piece of paper through the portal yet as you are sailing towards it. I think Tass's move get you guys safely out. But if you want to scramble and try to get the paper out of the capsule and throw it through, I think that's going to be an Act Under Pressure.

Jake: I don't think I can gamble that piece of paper. I mean, it's been four days here. I guess we don't know what direction the time goes, but I don't think I would risk fucking up and losing that thing and just, you know, obviously compromising everything we have to do from now on.

Tass: Oh, boy. OK. I support you.

Rev: All right. You both pass into the portal. There's that sense again of dizziness and vertigo. And you are back in your bodies, standing, looking at the portal that you just stepped into in this world.

Tass: "Whoa, OK. We made it. Uh, Rev! Rev, shut it down."

Rev: REV: What?

Tass: "Shut it down. We're back."

Rev: And he is right behind you with the carts.

Rev: REV: Oh, OK. OK.

Jake: And he goes over and turns it off.

Tass: "OK. Cool."

Jake: "Did no time pass?"

Rev: REV: No. Did you guys even go in?

Tass: "Yeah, we went in. Did you not put the paper through?"

Jake: "No I couldn't. We were fucking — we were bailing out from the fire. I figured if I tried to scramble for the paper I could drop it and burn it. So I gambled."

Tass: "OK. I mean, that answers that. I guess … I guess time moves faster there. Because if you didn't see us do anything …"

Rev: REV: Yeah. I don't know, like just a couple seconds passed. You guys said you were ready, you stepped through the portal, I walked away from the console and grabbed the two hospital beds here, and now you're back. How long were you gone?

Tass: "Something like four days, give or take."

Rev: REV: That's a pretty wicked conversion.

Tass: "Yeah, it is. In our favor. Thank god."

Rev: REV: Like just us having this conversation, like a week has passed.

Tass: "Yeah."

Rev: REV: And now another, as we sat in silence thinking about that thought,

Tass: "OK, this is — it's getting worse every time."

Jake: "And if we need to go back and, like, recover another thing, don't we need to go back fast?"

Tass: "We would have to go back literally right now, if we want to get anything without ... God. Hundreds of years passing."

Jake: "I don't know, man. Somewhere between like a hundred and one hundred thousand years. I can't ..." I'm like trying to do the math on my calculator.

Rev: REV: You guys did like a heist there?

Tass: "Yeah, kinda."

Rev: REV: At least things, like, are cooling off like six weeks, now. Probably.

Tass: "Oh please, please stop."

Rev: REV: I just — I think that's how I have to mark time now. It's just stuck in my head. Seven weeks.

Tass: Oh god ...

Rev: REV: What did you get?

Tass: "Well, let's talk about it."

Rev: REV: Eight weeks.

Jake: Is the ... What became of the saltshaker?

Rev: It is still in your hand.

Jake: Ayy! OK, that's cool. So things that came from here will just come back here. No problem.

Tass: Interesting.

Jake: "We got spell components out of Nash's bank vault."

Rev: REV: Oh.

Jake: I will show him the saltshaker and the little scroll.

Rev: And looking at it on this side, Jake, you actually recognize what this spell is. You use magic now. You understand how this works. And it's a pretty complicated spell, but it is a spell that would open up a pocket dimension. Like another just little side room off of this world.

Jake: It would create one? Or open one that exists?

Rev: Open one that exists.

Jake: "OK, this spell will basically open the door to an existing pocket dimension."

Tass: "Oh, god. So, hold on. So did he have in high security a thing to protect his high security?"

Jake: "Kind of. It seems like he put a key in a lock box, you know?"

Tass: "Huh."

Jake: "So like whatever's in this pocket dimension is probably more valuable than the things to reach this pocket dimension. And those were hard to get, anyway."

Tass: "We're gonna open it, right?"

Jake: "Are we? Right now? We have no idea what's in it. What if we open it and it's full of bees? What then, Tass?"

Tass: "You will protect me."

Jake: "You're invincible. I'm not protecting you."

Tass: "I mean, OK, I understand. There could be anything. I mean, there could be like whatever monster he's trying to turn into a chosen monster. It could be ... It could be anything."

Jake: Do I think that there is any way I could Big Magic a solution — to kind of open a window instead of a door to this pocket dimension?

Rev: I mean, you've already got see another time or place. So you could just roll that. This is technically another place.

Jake: That is a fair point. May I?

Rev: Yes.

Jake: Nine.

Rev: All right. What is your glitch?

Jake: The effect is of short duration.

Rev: So there is a brief vision in front of you of this small town. It is fall, and you see people on their way to work.

Jake: Is there any place identifier? Is there like a sign? Street signs? Town name? Anything?

Rev: Roll Investigate a Mystery.

Jake: Eight.

Rev: You get a hold 1.

Jake: I guess, what is being concealed here?

Rev: As you watch, your view of this town moves down towards the street, and there is a small green house with the street number 743. And your vision flows through the window

into the house, through a living room, and into a kitchen. And on an antique dining table sits a napkin holder and a white pepper shaker with a red cap and a painting of a basket of red flowers — the mate to the salt shaker you found in Grigori Nash's lockbox.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: Well hey, everybody. I am joined by a very special guest: Hamish Cameron, the creator of The Sprawl. Thanks so much for joining us, Hamish.

Hamish Cameron: Hi. It's great to be here. Thanks for having me.

Rev: So I think the first question I want to ask is, what was the inspiration behind The Sprawl? Like, what pushed you to create this particular Powered by the Apocalypse game?

Hamish Cameron: So I played a ton of Shadowrun when I was in high school.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: And afterwards. Although now that I think back to it, mostly it was in high school. That was like mostly 1st and 2nd Edition. I really dug the world at that time. I dug the game, and all its systems. But as an adult, you have less time that is available to play, and you want to play stories that are a bit more compact sometimes. Depends, obviously. Everybody's different. I certainly find that.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: That I want to be able to play like a complete, satisfying story in a sort of like two to four hour slot, which is usually what I have in an evening before I have to, like, go home and go to bed and get up early for work, and all that stuff, right? And you can't get together as often as you want. So if you split the story in the middle, then it's a pain in the butt. So I hadn't played in a cyberpunk type game for ages, or I hadn't hadn't played that genre very much until Apocalypse World came out. And then I started playing Apocalypse World and the sort of early prototypes for Dungeon World. I was like, "This is really cool. This would be great for a lot of other systems." And it turns out a lot of other people think that way. And now there are a ton of Powered by the Apocalypse games.

Rev: [laughs]

Hamish Cameron: But I was a Big Bad Con one year, and picked up a 1st Edition hardcover of Shadowrun, because my original copy was all like — the binding had all gone.

Rev: Oh, yeah.

Hamish Cameron: It was all held together by masking tape. And it was not like I was using it anymore anyway, but I never had a hard copy, a hardcover. So I picked it up and was reading it in the back of the car as we were driving back from San Francisco to Los Angeles. And I was like, "This is … I could make a move for this. Like, this could be a good playbook." And I just started, like, noodling on it in the back of the car. And then that was it. I started working on it. And the more I thought about it, the more I thought of, like, interesting ways to represent certain cyberpunk tropes in the game. And it just sort of came from there. And so it was really about my desire to play in that kind of cyberpunk world. And obviously I was a big fan of like William Gibson — that's pretty clear from, like, reading The Sprawl.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: And a bunch of other cyberpunk works as well, including more recent ones. And so I've always had like a soft spot in my heart for that genre, even in times when I wasn't playing it. It's one of those genres where I'm like, oh yeah, and I need to play another cyberpunk game. And so yeah, I wrote a system that would let me play the game, in the way that I wanted to play it.

Rev: So one of the things that was really interesting to me as I was learning the game to run it was the idea of the phases. Because you know, Powered by the Apocalypse games I think in general give you that ability to, "You know what? This scene's over. Let's jump somewhere else. OK, this scene's over. Let's jump somewhere else." But it's really interesting to me how you connect it to the mechanics of the game. Do you want to talk a little bit about, you know, why you attached it to moves and made such a clear jump from one stage to another?

Hamish Cameron: Yeah, well, there's one thing that often happens in heist games generally, but I found a lot in Shadowrun or other like cyberpunk games. That because the players expect the GM to be kind of adversarial, they overplan in a way that doesn't really replicate the kind of fiction that you see. Like if you watch a heist movie, they make a plan and the plan is going to go wrong at some point. And that's just a given, right? You're the viewer know that.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: But the plan seems good at the start, and the plan is good at the start. There's just gonna be something that comes in. And that something is usually not something that's bad about the plan, it's some like random coincidence that throws a spanner in the works. So part of the reason why I wanted to break that up is to make explicit that, like there is a part of this game that is about planning and information gathering, and then there is a part of this game that is about doing the thing. And you should limit the first one so that it doesn't end up that you spend all night doing the planning and then you don't have time to do the actual cool thing.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: Because you ... Yeah, I don't want the game to be ... Like, and the game shouldn't be adversarial in that way, right? Be a fan of the players. You should give the players enough information that they can do the thing. Make a plan, that's fine. It only has to be fine. And then there theoretically enough tools in the game that when something goes wrong, they can show how they get out of it using all the same tools that you'd see in a heist movie. I really do think about the game a lot, and the way that it is played, in a sort of movie frame. It's part of why ... Something that a lot of people want from it is like a downtime mechanic. And there isn't a downtime mechanic, in part because I think of it in a movie kind of way. We're in a two hour movie. There's no downtime. There's flashbacks to downtime, maybe. There is trouble from downtime that comes into the actual movie. But you don't see the people like, "Oh, OK, now we're going shopping." "You know, I'm talking to my friend." Those things can be fun. And in a more — in like a series, a TV show, maybe you'd get more of that. But I am going for a more, like, kind of condensed thing where those things come in, but you as the players and as the MC sort of say when they come in, and then we don't necessarily see them in detail.

Rev: You talked about this a little bit before, but what were some of your influences, especially with the playbooks?

Hamish Cameron: So once I decided that I was like going to do this as a thing that I would try and publish, I went back and I read through every William Gibson novel. And I read through, like, Snow Crash, and I read through, like, Transmetropolitan. And I watched all the sort of classic cyberpunk movies. And I thought about all the characters that people might want to play from these things, and thought about how they would fit into tropes. And a lot of them just sort of came out pretty quick, right? So like Molly Millions, you've got to have some sort of, like, cybernetic killer.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: You've got to have a hacker. And some of them were "OK, this is a thing that maybe Apocalypse World has. Is this something that would exist in a cyberpunk game?" Or, "This is a thing that Shadowrun had as an archetype. Is this a thing that I could put in?" And things ended up getting crunched together. So like Shadowrun has like the Rocker and the Ganger something else that sort of got pushed into the Pusher, as a kind of leader of people. And so that's generally the way I went about it. I went back to what the sources of the genre that I was trying to emulate were, and I looked at them with an eye to what is a playable character in here, and how do I replicate this thing that they're doing in the book here in the fiction of the game, and the mechanics for them.

Rev: You know, I find that a lot of times when we get a chance to talk to people, that they have something in the game — whether it's a playbook or a move ... Do you have one of those things that stands out to you, years later, as one of your favorite elements?

Hamish Cameron: It's probably ... Like The Soldier is my favorite playbook. And it's probably like I Love it When a Plan Comes Together, or one of those like planning move things.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: I like that sort of thing that gives the player like a real, like, mechanical way to engage with the fiction and manipulate it and to make those sort of like

coincidence jumps or highly skilled jumps that you see in heist movies, where all of a sudden the person turns up exactly where he needed to be because he's a planner, right? And that's what he does. I also really like The Reporter move, Live and On the Air.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: Which is from another influence that I didn't mention then, Max Headroom.

Rev: Yes.

Hamish Cameron: The TV show. And like if any other moves on The Reporter playbook don't make sense, then watch Max Headroom and then they probably will make sense. [laughs] Like that one in particular, that's how he gets out of trouble all the time. He just turns on his camera and points it at someone. And like in 2020, we know that that's not actually a viable thing that reporters can do to get out of trouble.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: But it's something about the fiction, and certainly in the fiction of the 80s that was imagined by the creators of that, anyway. Maybe I'll ask you a question in return.

Rev: OK.

Hamish Cameron: Like, what is the … What is the part of the game that you and your group have enjoyed the most or engaged with the most?

Rev: Being able to name a contact is really cool. Because, as you said before, there's the idea that we don't want to show the downtime. But there is a history. And, you know, naming that contact, coming up with the backstory for them, it might advance your clock, you know, somewhere down the road. And for us in particular too, because we are dealing with a group of players who are jumping from universe to universe, trying to deal with this bigger threat. So in the worlds that they go to, sometimes they see familiar faces or hear familiar names. Not always. But with this name a contact ability, it let them drop in people that, "Oh, you know what? I know this person from Earth. So I think they exist

here." And so mechanically, it didn't help them out at all. But I think as characters in that world, it made them feel a little safer, seeing a familiar face as they're trying to deal with this bright, dirty, chromed world around them.

Hamish Cameron: I'm a big fan of allowing spaces for the players to put their input into the game whenever they want, not just in like, oh, let's discuss what we're going to play and let's play this. And then the GM goes away and makes a thing that suits his players. But like having moments where the GM can be surprised. Because you don't know when that's coming, because it's in the players' hands. They are the one who says, "Oh, wouldn't it be cool if we meet this guy now?" You're like, yeah, that would — that's great. I love that as an MC. That's my favorite thing, when the players come up with something that I'm not expecting, and is way better than whatever I had planned.

Rev: Oh, yeah.

Hamish Cameron: "Well, I was thinking, as a possibility ..." And I can be like, yeah, let's run with that. That that's fantastic.

Rev: Yeah. And especially using those contacts to ... Because that's a big part of, I think at least for me, planning for The Sprawl was just OK, what are my mission points that they've got, and what are the things are going to have to get past? And then them using contacts to find a different way around. Because I'm a big fan of, you know, when someone gets a question, if they can ask a question, if there isn't an answer for that question, there is now. And so sometimes things that they weren't aware of or even that I wasn't aware of are generated into the fiction by those questions, so.

Hamish Cameron: Yeah, The way that contacts work in The Sprawl is definitely inspired also by the contact system in Shadowrun. Although I think at this point it's probably went through so many iterations that it doesn't bear that much resemblance to anymore? In original versions of the game, you had to choose a number of contacts. And you were allowed a certain number of contacts ... Well you're allowed as many contacts as you want, but every game before you played, you had to roll a move in which you added the number of contacts you had listed on your sheet. And that was a kind of, like, damage move. That was essentially like, does one of them cause trouble? Like, is there a problem with one of them?

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: And I ended up — that just didn't end up, like, working out that well. I folded that into the Hit the Street move. So to Hit the Street, when you roll, it generates those problems as a potential complication, rather than doing a sort of before the mission kind of move.

Rev: So knowing that a big part of your influence was Shadowrun, was there ever a draft of this game that involved that fantasy element of little bits of magic, or other types of peoples, or anything like that?

Hamish Cameron: So when I kickstarted it, a couple of people had ideas for writing magical visions. But it's sort of a hint at the idiosyncratic nature of like the way everybody engages with a set of rules, and the way that I engage with Shadowrun was hardly I don't care about magic at all. I mean, I dug that there were fantasy races in there and that they had the sort of like trappings of D&D. But I didn't really ... That whole, like, astral plane stuff and all of that extra magic stuff was not a big part of what I thought about when I thought about playing cyberpunk games, even though I was using Shadowrun as the main game. And players would sometimes bring that in. But it's like ... It's one of those games where there's a whole lot of extra subsystems, and the more subsystems, the more complicated it gets. That was just something that I didn't really care that much in. Which means like really I should have been playing Cyberpunk, maybe. But there was something about the world of Shadowrun that I really liked. And I liked that magical, like mystical conspiracy backstory stuff, even if I only wanted that to appear in the game as like color or fiction, rather than as a mechanical thing. So the answer to that question is no. I never actually — even when I was looking at it initially, I never thought, oh I could ... Let me do this as a magical fantasy thing.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: It was always from the start for me, let me take what I loved about Shadowrun and then go back to the original kind of cyberpunk authors and start there, and then build it up from there. But with this inspirational game that I used to play a lot in the background, but not as that kind of influence.

Rev: Much more about the heist.

Hamish Cameron: Yup, yup. Because that's the kind of mission that ... I mean, most of the Shadowrun games I played or ran were that sort of thing, right? It was basically a heist, which is a very common type of role playing scenario. And yeah, thinking about how that would work in Powered by the Apocalypse. I mean, that's what ... Neuromancer, right? Neuromancer is a heist.

Rev: Ah, yeah.

Hamish Cameron: The sort of origin point, right? It starts with that, so.

Rev: You know, the thing I always remember about Shadowrun was, oh, it's time for the hacker to go. Everybody else go in the other room for an hour, because it's going to be a while as they try to get their way through all of the computer system.

Hamish Cameron: Yeah, and that's something that I tried to fix a bit in The Sprawl. I'm not — it's the part of the game that I'm the least happy with, actually. And I'm sure that I will do a 2nd Edition at some point, and that will be something that gets a significant overhaul. I don't have any specific — I have a document on my computer that is 2nd Edition notes.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: And I have some things in it, but nothing really that's enough yet. But when I do it, and I'm sure I will, I will try to make the hacking stuff less idiosyncratic and bring it in line more with everything. When I run it, I feel like it it works pretty smoothly. But I think for other people to run it, sometimes I get comments that it still feels like too much of a suprasubsystem, and I see that for sure.

Rev: So where can people find you and your work?

Hamish Cameron: So my ... You can get all of The Sprawl stuff on DriveThruRPG, and also from Indie Press Revolution. I am on Twitter pretty regularly. That's probably the best place to make contact with me, @peregrinekiwi. I sometimes stream on Twitch, but I don't do it that often, also at peregrinekiwi. That's really sort of patchy, so the best thing for that is to watch out on Twitter for when I say I'm going to stream something. I'll probably

do some streaming of the Cyberpunk 2077 when it comes out, just because it's extremely in my brand. [laughs] Um, where else? Feel like those are the main places. There's also a Twitter account for The Srprawl — @TheSprawl_RPG. And you can find that on Facebook. And I have one for Ardens Ludere on Twitter as well.

Rev: And do you have any other projects coming up that you'd like to let our listeners know about?

Hamish Cameron: So the other game that I published is called Dinosaur Princesses, and my spouse and I wrote and published that. And that came out last year and won an Ennie — or it got a silver Ennie for Best Family Game. And so while I was working on that, I was also working on a game called Kratophagia, which is about cannibalism. So going from dinosaur princesses to cannibal postapocalyptic creatures, there's a bit of whiplash sometimes.

Rev: [laughs]

Hamish Cameron: I plan to release that in a sort of like ashcan format on itch.io sometime relatively soon, and get sort of feedback on that. It's mostly done, but I need to think about how the campaign structure for it works. It's very short. It's about creepy little postapocalyptic creatures who eat each other and gain powers. So if you want to eat your friends, then ...

Rev: Have I got a game for you? [laughs]

Hamish Cameron: [laughs] Yeah, right? I'm also working on a revisionist take on 60s era Bond movies, which will be Powered by the Apocalypse.

Rev: Oh, nice.

Hamish Cameron: The kind of James Bond that you might want to play in the 21st century, rather than the problematic Bond of the past.

Rev: Yeah.

Hamish Cameron: Yeah, so those are the two things that I'm sort of working on at the moment. They've been a bit on the back burner, because I just moved from the US back to New Zealand relatively recently. But now that I'm sort of a bit more settled, those will be coming more online.

Rev: Well, thank you for joining us, Hamish, and we will see you all next week.

SFX: OUTRO MUSIC

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