

Across the Universe (S5, E1)

Rev: The Critshow contains elements of horror, fantasy violence, and adult language. Content warnings can be found in the episode description.

SFX: INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Well it's been a minute since we have had a show for the main season coming out! Those words were kind of in the wrong order.

Jake: Yeah, what?

Kim: Yeah ...

Megan: Back to Coin!

Rev: It's been a long time since I've had to do this in any kind of ...

Kim: Normally it's just Rev recording all these intros alone, recently.

Rev: By himself, yeah.

Tass: But we're back!

Rev: We're back.

Tass: Oh my god.

Jake: We're back.

Rev: We're back from our ... Our summer break. Our spring fling. Our winter solstice. Our autumn harvest.

Jake: My god.

Megan: How long has it been?!

Jake: Should we leave?

Megan: Holy shit.

Tass: This really is like Critshow time.

Megan: Yeah.

All: [Laugh]

Kim: So by the time this episode comes out, I will either be actively on a plane to Indianapolis or about to get on a plane to Indianapolis. I'm very excited. I'm gonna see you all in person!

Megan: Yay!

Rev: Yeah, because not only is today the first episode of the next season, but tomorrow is Gen Con.

Tass: Ay!

Jake: [Airhorn noises]

Megan: Yay!

Rev: There's a lot going on.

Jake: It's a lot going on.

Rev: Exciting.

Jake: [Laughs]

Kim: Can we — can we say that, and have you sound a little more sincere?

Rev: [Laughs] Exciting.

Megan: Exciting!

Rev: As my ears bleed.

All: [Chuckle]

Rev: Well, we want to take this opportunity to thank all of the new patrons who joined us in the month of July. Jay Bates, Shaggy GM, K, Stanford, Alex Gattica, Fluffy Sophism, Ariel Wallace, Emily, Inclusive Investor, Robert Merkel, Tess Chappelle, Bradley, and Abigail Lalonde. Thank you to everyone who joined us this month on Patreon, and thank you to everyone who joins us every month. If you would like a ad-free feed or literally now hundreds of hours, dozens of games of bonus content, you can sign up at the \$5 level to get access to all of that. And \$1 get you access to the most aggressively welcoming Discord on the Internet.

Jake: [YouTuber impression] And don't forget to rate, review, and subscribe!

Megan: Yay!

Kim: Oh, no.

Megan: He's back!

Jake: [YouTuber impression] It's this guy again!

Megan: He's back!

Rev: Yeah. Actually, now that he's back, it's been a long time since I've asked people to, like, rate and review us on their favorite podcatcher. Could you — could you take that?

Jake: [YouTuber impression] No.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: [YouTuber impression] You don't tell me what to do. I just show up. I'm a leaf on the wind.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: [YouTuber impression] Everybody, if you could take a moment to rate and review the show on whatever your podcatcher of choice is, it's a big help for all of us here at the Critshow, and we appreciate your contributions to our future success.

Rev: [Imitating Jake] I'm nobody's errand boy.

Tass: And this is my last episode. I'm ... I'm taking a job teaching kids not to be this guy.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: [YouTuber impression] Wow. That was extremely hurtful and didn't seem totally deserved. What have I ever done to you?

Megan: Right in front of me, huh?

Rev: [Laughs]

Megan: It's been really great. Actually, we've had some new people that have joined our Patreon and have upped their tier to get the bonus content. And hearing them talk like in chat, like in the Discord, or like while we're streaming on Twitch, saying like, oh, they just started Perilous Tides.

Rev: Yeah.

Megan: Or Tales From The Omniverse, or something. Like it's — it's really great to like watch people get to unlock all that content, and watch them dive into it.

Rev: Yeah, especially stuff that is so kind of long forgotten for us, in the sense of how long ago we created it. And to hear people talk about moments, like, "Oh my God, I forgot about that."

Megan: Yeah.

Rev: Yeah. So you can find all of that over at Patreon.com/TheCritshow. Boy, I think that's all. We got stuff to do. We got Gen Con this week. Let's ... Let's get out of here.

Jake: I got plans.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: There is a series of light blue pulses in this dark corner of an unknown galaxy. The pulses become faster and faster until they become the steady glow of an open rift. What comes through the rift at first seems to be fluctuating and shifting, impossible for the eye to focus on. But when it does finally stabilize, we see a small transport ship with a wide front window, and an exterior that seems to change color as the light of the turquoise nebula reflects off of it.

SFX: STARHOLD MUSIC BEGINS

Rev: Inside, four familiar figures move forward and peer out at the approaching planet. We can see a number of displays on the console begin to flash, one of which reads, "Planet Designation HYXR-1 — Hydarnes. Another reads, "Scanning for security authorization." Somewhere deep in the ship, a klaxon begins to sound as the ship is jarred forward as it makes contact with Hydarnes's atmosphere, and begins to be pulled in by its gravitational field. Welcome to Starhold.

SFX: STARHOLD MUSIC CONTINUES

Rev: Well hey, everybody. Welcome to Season Five!

Tass: Oh my god.

Megan: Woo!

Rev: [High pitched] I gotta try to keep this energy right up here.

Tass: OK!

Jake: [High pitched] This is every new NPC we meet.

Rev: [High pitched] Someone mixed up the oxygen with helium in the ship.

Jake: [High pitched] With Disney Gas. I'm going a little Mickey.

Rev: [Laughs]

Kim: Listen, I know that this is a horror game, but I'm gonna need you to cut that out. Like, immediately.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: So yeah, I think the very first thing I want to mention is that you're all familiar with Starhold.

All: Yeah.

Rev: You and the listeners. And there are a lot of space Powered by the Apocalypse games out there, but ultimately ... Man, I didn't get to play this one, and I wanted to do it. And it really fit the story that I want to tell, so we're back again.

Megan: It's a good one.

Rev: It's a good one.

Tass: Oh, yeah.

Kim: I loved playing this game so much. It also made me really stressed, so ... [Laughs]

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: There is not — you know? I'm just gonna say it. Not another game that is better than Starhold.

Rev: Hmm.

Jake: Period. Not space.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: Not Powered by the Apocalypse.

Megan: Yeah.

Jake: Across video games, across tabletop RPGs.

Tass: Oh my.

Rev: Wow.

Jake: Across ... Like playground — like hoop and stick, or four square. No.

Rev: Cup and ball?

Jake: Yeah. Ball and cup? It's Starhold, the superior game. The game to end all games.

Megan: And as we all know, Jake is the pro gamer of the group.

Rev: That's true.

Kim: Pro gamer, yeah.

Megan: So if anyone has the authority to say this.

Jake: Yeah. I am the hashtag #100%ProGamer.

Rev: Yeah.

Megan: [Laughs]

Rev: Starhold was created by friend of the show Rem, and you can download it for free at ko-fi.com/remescient. R-E-M-E-S-C-I-E-N-T. It is 100% free, but please feel free to make a donation to them. And you can find the link for the game in the show notes.

So our character creation is a little different this season, because it's ... You know, it probably appears to you each differently, in-character in that moment. But as you go through this portal, it's like a character select screen. You all go into this world with the knowledge of what skill sets are available, and you pick the one that you feel is right for you. So this is very different compared to what we have normally experienced, where you get thrust into something or something gets created for you. But with all of the adjustments that your weird science team did, it allows you to basically select your form. Like Gozer.

Tass: [Laughs]

Rev: So let's ... Let's go around the horn and talk about what we've got.

Tass: OK. So I have taken the playbook The Muscle, and the little tag for it is, "If it needs punching, kicking, moving, or blocking, they're your person." And on top of that, I am taking the specialization, The Ex-Marine. And I think the kind of mindset going into this was any time that I've gone into outer space, it's been rough. [Laughs]

Rev: [Laughs]

Tass: So like knowing that I'm going in this time, there's this kind of jaded feeling of caution that I'm taking in. You know, with my weapons, with my approach. So that is why I have gone with this.

Rev: What did it look like for you? Was it just a bunch of playbooks laid out? Was it like a video game fighting selection? Was it ...

Tass: Oh, that's a —

Rev: Different color binders, based off of what they're good at.

Tass: [Laughs] It would be more like a ... Like a video game select screen.

Rev: Yeah.

Tass: Of like pick your — pick your avatar, you know.

Rev: [Chuckles]

Tass: And I think I am dead-ass like looking pretty Starship Troopers as we go through.

Kim: [Laughs]

Tass: Just that kind of tac gear that's fairly form fitting, but with space to just hang a bunch of guns and weapons. So for The ex-Marine specialization, that reads as, "They've seen some shit, maybe done some shit. But when shit goes down, they know how to handle it. Maybe." [Chuckles]

So the moves that come with that, one is Have Fun, That's an Order. "Once per fight, if you cause five or more harm in a single fight, mark off a Stress. If you have no Stress, add a temporary +1 ongoing to your Heart stat until you take a Stress." So that's max +3.

And then The Nod. "Sometimes violence is necessary, but you're not sure when. Ask your — quote unquote — "boss" if they think a difficult or dangerous situation warrants

extreme violence or not. If you do what they suggest, take a +1 on your next roll going forward. If you go against their suggestion, take a +1 to your next Hand roll, but your connection with that person goes down by -1 until they forgive you."

So the whole "boss" thing is attached to the sort of addition to this, which is called Subordinate. "Most people would hesitate to try and tell you what to do, and for good reason. But there's one person you trust to make decisions for you. During the first game session, when it's your turn to do your connections, pick one of the other characters to be your Ex-Marine's boss. This does not have to be The Leader playbook." It can be anybody. "It can be a romantic partner or close friend, or just someone that you trust. Make sure it's okay with the other player first. And mark +3 Connection for this character." So I picked Jake for that, I think just because of the history and the amount of time we've spent doing this. And he is very much the one that I've generally been like, "Hey, what are we doing right now?"

Rev: Well, and it checks all three boxes, too.

Kim: So would you say that this is a romantic partner, or ...

Tass: Hey, don't worry about it.

Rev: [Laughs]

Tass: I do want to say in Starhold, he does get the +1 forward smooch on the cheek every time, so ... Just make sure that we know that's there.

Kim: [Quietly] Oh, yes.

Tass: The other half to Subordinate is, "whenever they roll to influence or assist you, they get a +3 to their roll, regardless of their connection with me. So whenever they are kicking ass and you're nearby, you can ignore all reasonable obstacles between you in your attempt to help them — particularly if it means barrel rolling through fire, knocking someone out that's about to land, a blow on them, etc. Take a +3 bonus to your first roll related to helping them. Be sure to high five when you're done." [Laughs]

And so my stats for The Muscle is +1 Head, +2 Hand, 0 Heart, 0 Group, and -1 Tech.

Jake: I am playing The Scientist — just the base Scientist playbook. "An individual that retains a boundless curiosity about the natural universe, which can sometimes lead them into trouble." So the way I imagine this choice happening is like going through the portal and seeing, like, The Matrix code?

Rev: Mmhmm.

Jake: In like magic? Like magical language? That's kind of like fluttering back and forth between like magic language and scientific language. You know, like because they're both — they're both a rule set.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: You know, there are rules to both of them, but they are kind of antithetical rules. And I'm imagining it just kind of like the power flickering. And as I like reach for Wizard, I grab on to Scientists instead.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: I grab on to the wrong language.

My moves that I chose are Breakthrough. "When you're stuck on a problem you can't solve, roll + Head. On a 10+, the Speaker must answer one question to help you. On a mixed success, they give you a hint. On a miss, your problems get worse."

And Technobabble. "No one knows what you're saying, but they know it's smart. Once per crisis, you can throw together an item from any nearby scraps to help get yourself out of a sticky situation. It breaks afterwards." "

And the stats I chose are +2 Head, 0 Hand, -1 Heart, +1 Group, and +2 Tech.

Megan: I am playing The Technician, and I'm also just playing the base playbook. "If it needs repairing, taping, whacking, or fixing, this is who you call." And I imagine this as like ... As we're going through the portal and kind of the other side of it is making its way to where we are, I'm getting flashes of like outer space. And then it's just — almost like a word association of memories in my head, like things that I have seen in TV shows or books that I just associate with the things that I'm seeing. And so I think one of the first things that comes to mind is Kaylee from Firefly.

Rev: Hmm.

Megan: And thinking about like us being in this vehicle, and then it being a ship, and knowing that that's needing to be fixed. And then kind of going along with like some of the repair work that I have to do on my moped, that makes me think like, "Hmm, I'm The Technician."

So my moves are Whack It. "Sometimes things just won't work. Once per crisis when you fail an important Tech roll, you can roll again. On a 10+, this magically fixes the problem. On a 7 to 9, you barely succeed. On a miss, it's even worse than before."

Rev: [Laughs]

Megan: And Chaotician, Actually. "You thrive on chaos and somehow think better under pressure. Take a +1 bonus when attempting a Tech roll during a stressful situation, but take a -1 Tech when things are peaceful."

And my stats are +1 Head, -1 Hand, 0 Heart, 0 Group, +2 Tech.

Kim: So I think that when we went through the portal and I saw the character selection screen, I just ran out the timer and didn't choose anything, is ...

Rev: [Laughs]

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: It was like blinking red, big numbers. Like, come on! Pick one! Uh ... Uh ... Uh ...

Megan: So did it go to the default character, or did it randomly generate a character for you?

Kim: I think right as that timer was ticking down to zero, it just read my mind of the last thing I was thinking about, and then made a decision for me. So I think I was ... I was thinking about the last time I went through a portal like this, and left behind a world that no longer exists anymore. So I am playing The Stowaway playbook. And more specifically, I am playing The Survivor variant. "Something happened, and you were the only person left alive before you ended up in this place. Now you'll have to use those same wits to survive again."

So I start with two moves. The first one is Calculated Risk. "You've learned how to pick your battles, and it's helped you survive. Before you decide to Inflict Harm on someone or something, you can roll +Head. On a 10+, the Speaker will tell you exactly what could go wrong. On a 7 to 9, they'll give you a vague idea. On a miss, you read things completely wrong."

And then I have Boy Am I Bad At Math. "When you fail a roll while Acting Under Fire, you can choose to immediately change the result into a mixed success, and give the Speaker 2 hold over you to be used on any roll except Act Under Fire. The Speaker's holds can stack and can be held indefinitely."

And then because I'm playing The Survivor variant, I have a special feature, similar to Tass's Subordinate move. I have something called a Keepsake. "Whatever terrible thing happened in the past still haunts you, but it drives you to survive. You've kept a small memento from that time, and you use it to keep yourself moving forward. Pick two tags from the list below, and add your memento to your gear. As long as you have this on your person, when you take harm, you can choose to roll +Heart. On any type of success, you take one less harm. On a miss, your memento is lost until the next crisis." And crises, I think, are kind of like ... Sort of like — quote unquote — like "mysteries," I think in this.

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: Yeah. So my memento from another world is my phases of the moon necklace, which has made it through the portal relatively unchanged in Starhold. And it has the tags fragile and valuable.

And my stats are +2 Head, 0 Hand, +2 Heart, -1 Group, and -2 Tech.

Rev: All right. So I'm gonna ask all of you to tell me about your gear as well, because there is armor and weapons in this game. But before we get there, I'm gonna send a picture to the Discord.

Jake: Oh, no.

Rev: I want you all to see what you're riding in.

Megan: Oh, cool!

Rev: To me, it looks a little bit still like a PT Cruiser. It's got the shape.

Megan: [In awe] What ...

Jake: [Laughs]

Kim: I love it!

Tass: I like.

Megan: It looks like a beetle. I love it.

Rev: Yeah, it does look like a beetle.

Tass: It gives me stealth bomber vibes, but in outer space.

Rev: Yeah.

Tass: Yeah.

Megan: Oh, it looks like those caterpillars that look like snakes.

Rev: Oh, yeah.

Megan: You know what I mean? Like, to make it look like they're a snake, and so don't eat me? Oh, it's cool.

Tass: Nice. Nice, nice.

Kim: And we will — we will post this in the Discord when Season Five comes out.

Rev: Yes. Yeah, yeah. That's true. I'm gonna try to track down the artist. I could not find them for the life of me, but I was like, "Oh god, this image. I have to show it to them."

So this is what you're riding in. What kind of gear you got?

Tass: So my golden shotgun has transformed to a blast cannon that does "3-harm, midrange, and recharge." So I think it looks fairly similar. It's just sort of wider and like more squared, and still has like golden plating and such. But yeah. It shoots blasts.
[Laughs]

Rev: Hmm. Mmhmm.

Tass: I also have a thermal knife. So sweet, like, miniature light saber situation. And a tactical vest that's "2-armor, barrier." So I envision that being that kind of Starship Troopers-esque shoulder pad situation that just generates this little bit of a ... Like an energy barrier.

Rev: Yeah. And a lot of these are going to have tags that we are unfamiliar with. But I've got a whole list of them here, and we'll mention them as they come up.

Jake: I have a gamma gun, which is "1-harm, organic, burning." A dagger, "1-harm, hand, piercing." And a jacket, "1-armor, multipurpose."

Rev: Nice.

Jake: So largely the same stuff I came through with. I think my wand has turned into a gamma gun.

Rev: [Chuckles]

Jake: Which is sort of — which is still very cylindrical, I think. It's like a, um ...

Rev: The thrower on a proton pack?

Jake: I'm picturing like the party poppers that people use for gender reveal parties.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: You like point it and twist the back, and it shoots gamma.

Tass: Way cooler than a proton pack.

Jake: Yeah. And then my jacket is full on just still like a leather jacket. It's just a spicier leather jacket.

Rev: Nice.

Megan: It matches the PT Cruiser. It changes color.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: For my gear, my crossbow has turned into a bow gun. And that has the tags "1-harm, far, and quiet." I have coveralls that I think kind of manifested in my thinking of Kaylee, and like that mechanic kind of side of things. That's "1-armor and multipurpose."

Kim: [Laughs] Your overalls turned into overalls?

Megan: My overall turned into coveralls, yeah.

Rev: Yeah. Your overalls grew sleeves in the transformation. [Laughs]

Megan: Yeah. They're not denim anymore. And then this isn't, like, through the gear. But I also imagine that in that word association of thinking of like different things I'm familiar with, I also have my yellow fanny pack that I wear in real life, that has like all my little tools when I'm riding my moped just in case I break down. [Laughs]

Rev: Uh-huh.

Megan: And then I took a baton, which I have flavored as a big wrench. Because I think, with that word association, Gadget definitely made a jump in there.

Rev: Yeah.

Megan: So I've got just a large wrench that I use, and that has "1-harm, close, and multipurpose."

Kim: For me, the silver censer wrapped around my waist has turned into a garrote, which has the tags "1-harm, intimate, quick." The bag of strange coins has turned into a bag of smoke bombs, with the tags "0-harm, gas, many." And I think my dress has turned into a ... Like long sleeve, like black kind of like tunic and pants situation, which is serving as my armor, which is jacket — similar to Jake's. "1-armor, multipurpose."

Rev: So Tass brought this up earlier with one of the bonus things for his specialty class. But what are everybody's connections to one another?

Tass: So I have three with Jake because of my specialty class.

Jake: I'm the boss.

Tass: It's so true. Though the question that we assigned to this makes sense. Is, would you have my back in an unfair fight? And so we thought Jake would be good for that. It would have given me 2,, but then the specialty class actually brings that up to a 3. I have a +1 with Kim for, are you afraid of me?

Kim: A little — I would say it's more of like ... Like a healthy, like level of fear. Like that comes with being aware that someone is, like, very powerful.

Megan: It's a respectful kind of fear.

Kim: Yeah, it's a respectful fear.

Tass: And then I have a +2 with Megan for, do you appreciate my protection?

Megan: Yeah, man. I'll take what I can get.

All: [Laugh]

Tass: Simple, and I love it.

Jake: I had a +2 with Megan from asking, do you respect my methods even if they're unconventional?

Megan: Yeah. I'm always down for doing something in a weird way.

Jake: I had a +1 with Kim from asking, would you let me help you in a crisis?

Kim: Absolutely. You did many times in the future, in Chicago.

Jake: And I have a +2 with Tass from asking, are we intellectual rivals?

Tass: Not at all, and I know it. So ...

All: [Laugh]

Tass: So that's an easy one.

Megan: So I had a +3 with Tass. Do you let me geek out about tech to you? But also I think in general, do you let me geek out to you?

Tass: Yeah, we connect there for sure.

Megan: I have a +2 with Jake. Do you listen to my professional advice?

Jake: Yes. You're very tapped into the supernatural. And I guess now we are both sort of more technologically related, so I will trust your expertise there as well.

Megan: And this is ... This is interesting. Because sometimes there are connections that just make sense to go with somebody, and it's not always great. So I actually have a -2 with Kim, because the question was, have you ever broken my equipment before?

All: [Laugh]

Kim: I ... Did indeed cause your salt shaker to break. Yes, that was me.

Megan: Yeah. So since that happened, I have that -2 with Kim.

Jake: [Imitating Kim] I did indeed ... Cause ... A circumstance ... For which I was present ...

All: [Laugh]

Kim: I mean —

Jake: [Imitating Kim] In a time during the breaking ...

Kim: I didn't fail to catch the salt shaker. It's just I pushed Tass, and caused Tass to fail to catch the salt shaker. So it is indirectly my fault.

Jake: Semantics.

Tass: [Laughs]

Kim: Because this is The Stowaway playbook, a lot of these don't sound necessarily great, but ... So the first one is for Tass. Will you welcome me?

Tass: Yeah.

Kim: Yeah.

Tass: I mean, I think we've been doing that. That's [Chuckles] that's where we are.

Kim: Yeah, absolutely. I think especially with our conversation in Elnore, you did a lot to make me feel more at home. Jake, are you angry that I'm here?

Jake: No.

Kim: Yeah. Good. OK.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Are you mad at me?

Rev: Why was there a question mark?

Jake: Why would I?

Rev: Why? What did you do?

All: [Laugh]

Megan: What did you break?

Kim: So that's a +1 for Jake.

Rev: "Are you mad that I'm here?" And we realize that she pulls the curtain down, and she's in your bedroom. It's just a shambles.

Megan: [Laughs]

Jake: It just has the same energy of like a little kid being like, "Hey. Hey, mom? Would you still love me if I did this terrible thing?" And it's like, why are you asking this question?

Kim: Hypothetically. So that's a +1 for Jake. And Megan, do you think I should leave?

Megan: No.

Kim: Good. You're stuck with me.

Megan: You're living in my apartment. [Laughs]

Kim: Yeah, I am. So that's a +3 for Megan.

Rev: In this game, we also have a couple of other elements that will come up in play. Intuition, which lets you turn a roll into a full success or avoid all harm. There is also Stress and a Heart Shield, and that will come up kind of as we get into taking damage. But giving damage and taking damage causes Stress on the spacers, and they have a Heart shield that can help absorb some of that before they start taking that themselves.

The next thing we have is on everybody's playbook, you have a space that is assigned to you, and that comes into play when we make the map. And then you also get to pick one from a list, and then I will pick a couple. Normally, this game is a place that you're familiar with. But because you're all coming into this world, I feel like I'll probably make this map by myself. But what you can do is decide any of the spaces that you pick, do you want them to be in your ship, or do you want them to be part of the location you're going to? So if you pick it as something on the ship, you always know where it is. It may just be an issue of having to go back to it to get to it. If you put it in the location you're headed to, you won't know exactly where it is. But I can justify any room that you pick being at this location. So what does everybody get from their playbook?

Tass: I get a Training Area — a place to work out, move, strengthen, fight, etc.

Rev: And do you want that on the ship or in the space?

Tass: I think in the location.

Rev: OK.

Jake: I get a Lab — a place to investigate from, to hypothesize, to test, to experiment. I feel like that would also make sense to be off-ship.

Rev: OK.

Megan: I get a Workroom — a place to repair, to rebuild, to design, to destroy, to work. I think that one's gonna be on the ship, actually.

Rev: Yeah, that makes sense.

Kim: I have a Secret Room — a place to hide, to plot, to escape, to maintain, to store. I think it'd be good if we had a hiding spot in the location that we're going.

Rev: Yeah, absolutely. And so now you all just get to pick one from the list. It doesn't have to be related to your character, but it can. And the same thing — if you want it on the ship, or if you want it in the space.

Tass: I would like to add an Armory to the location.

Rev: OK.

Jake: I feel like an Infirmary is an important one to have. I feel like we should have that on the ship, so that we always know where that is and know how to access it.

Rev: OK.

Megan: I'm going with Kitchen, because I like food and I like having access to food. So

...

Rev: So on the ship?

Megan: I think off the ship, actually.

Rev: OK.

Megan: I don't think I want to risk us having to travel very far if we need sustenance. I want it to be somewhere that we can access quickly. So I'm gonna say off-ship.

Rev: Yeah. Like you want access to it, but not immediate access to it. Just in case. Because that's dangerous too. Just for me.

Megan: Yeah. I want to eat while I'm out and about. I don't want to have to go home every time.

Rev: [Laughs] Yeah.

Kim: I'm going to go with Communications room.

Rev: OK.

Kim: In the event that we get split up or separated, it would be nice to have a way to still keep in contact with each other.

Jake: Is that on or off ship?

Kim: Um ... Off the ship.

Jake: Nice.

Rev: And then the next thing we have is scarcity. This is something that is scarce in the location that you're going. You're gonna roll a d6 for this. And this would change during each crisis.

Megan: I'll roll it. One.

Rev: All right. That is oxygen.

Tass: [Laughs] OK.

Megan: Oh, no.

Kim: Oh, no.

Jake: It's non-essential.

Rev: I'm sure it'll be fine. There's enough. Maybe not as much as you want.

Kim: Rev, it's called scarcity. That implies that there's not enough.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: Little do you know that in game, every time Jake is not on camera, he is —

Megan: Holding his breath. [Laughs]

Jake: He's training with the monks to slow his breathing and heart rate and reduce his oxygen intake.

Rev: What's strange is that every time Tass is not on camera, he's just going ...
[Hyperventilates]

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Actually, I've been hyperventilating every moment the entire time we're here, so I make up for the amount that Jake saves.

SFX: CRITSHOW STINGER

Rev: Inside of the ship, the four of you feel it lurch forward as it starts to be pulled towards this small planet. And in the background, a klaxon has started to go off. What's everybody doing?

Jake: Trying to determine why there's a klaxon going off.

Kim: What's a klaxon?

Rev: It's like that [alarm sounds] "wah, wah" on a starship.

Kim: Gotcha. OK, proceed.

Jake: It's like a "Wah!" Waluigi.

Tass: It's those guys with their ridged foreheads.

Jake: [Laughs]

Tass: Just in the back, screaming.

Rev: [Laughs]

Tass: Going off about something.

Rev: How are you gonna try to figure that out?

Jake: I want to, like, look at the consoles on the ship.

Rev: So as Jake is turning around to do this, what does everyone else doing? You feel the ship starting to tilt down towards the planet. You have seen this screen that is giving some information about the planet, as well as one that reads, "Scanning for security clearance."

Tass: I think I'm just taking quick stock of myself and everybody, just understanding what this change is. And I think what catches my eye is gonna be the screen that's showing information about the planet. '

Rev: OK.

Tass: So that's what I'm gonna focus on.

Megan: I guess I'm looking out the window, like what we're headed towards. And trying to get a feeling of what literally we might be on our way to.

Kim: I think as this alarm starts going off, I am looking around our ... Well, what used to be the IPT Cruiser, and seeing if there is anything on board in this transformed vehicle that might help us. So I think I am, like, running through the ship a little bit.

Rev: OK. So Jake, roll Survey the Scene. "When things seem dangerous or uncertain, you can try to survey the scene. Be sure to let the Speaker know how you're surveying things, as how you do it will affect what you can learn. To survey the scene, roll +Head."

Jake: Eight.

Rev: All right, you get a hold 1. And your questions are: "What happened here, what can hurt me, what can help me, how can I get out of here, who's in charge here, who knows something, who's in the most danger, would I know anything that's related to this, is there something important that I'm missing?"

Jake: I think, what happened here?

Rev: So as this alarm has started to go off, you have felt that the ship has started to be pulled into Hydarnes's atmosphere. And it seems it's not coming in at a proper angle. Like, this is bad for the ship.

Jake: Oh, OK. Then yeah, I want to hop back in the seat and try and, like, get hands on the controls and smooth out our descent.

Rev: All right. Roll. Use or Repair an Advanced Item. "When you use or repair and advanced item, roll with Tech."

Jake: Eight, again.

Rev: So on a 7 to 9, you can use it successfully but there are a couple of issues, and you need to pick two from the list: either you break it after using it ...

Kim: Oh, no.

Rev: Something happens that causes 1-harm, it doesn't work for as long as you need it, it's going to need something that will cost you, there's an ongoing negative side effect, it will take a long time to work with or fix.

Jake: These are all just awful right now.

Megan: Pick two of them.

Rev: Yeah, pick two.

Jake: Yep. Uh ... There's an ongoing negative side effect.

Rev: OK.

Jake: And something happens that causes you 1-harm.

Rev: Tass, as you look down at the readout about this planet, you do get the information that it is designated HYXR-1 and the planet is called Hydarnes. And it is owned by the Alkali Corporation.

Kim: Oh, come on! Fuckin' Nash ...

Jake: Rat bastards.

Rev: You can see that it has a high level security clearance. And you also see a field about appointment dates. Kim, as you run through the ship trying to see what has formed inside of the PT Cruiser, you have the navigation area where you were all standing. And as you go back further, there is a small infirmary and a work room, as well as a couple of cots. And then Megan, why don't you also give me a Survey the Scene, as you try to get a glimpse at what is coming up on this planet? And are you ... Odd question, but are you using the instruments on the ship or just your eyes?

Megan: I think ... I think my eyes. I think we have this front window, and like Tass is looking over like the panels and stuff and trying to see what information we're getting. And I'm seeing, like, physically, what are we headed towards?

Rev: OK.

Megan: Eight.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 1.

Megan: Is there something important that I'm missing?

Rev: Yeah. So as you are looking out the window as this planet is starting to get closer and closer, you see a small jet stream that is just starting to disperse in this atmosphere. But it's not headed where your ship is currently headed. It veers off to the north. And you can see that something has gone through this atmosphere recently, and so it must have landed in some other location than the one you're currently headed. Jake, you have gotten ahold of the ship's controls and are trying to take it out of being pulled directly down into the gravitational field. You are able to get some semblance of control, so that you can steer the ship. But sparks come out of the console, and you take one point of damage as something on there breaks. You're not quite sure what it was. You hadn't had a chance to really survey all of the things on this dashboard for navigating this ship. But something on the ship currently is out. And that damage is armor-defeating. We have a list here of what is and isn't armor-defeating, and electric is one of the things that's armor-defeating.

Tass: "Oh, damn. Are you okay?"

Jake: "Yeah. Yeah, that was unpleasant."

Megan: "Whoa, whoa, whoa. What broke? What broke?"

Jake: "I do not know."

Tass: "I can still read the readout. Which ... Alkali Corporation." And I'm like kind of looking meaningfully at Jake.

Jake: "What a — what about Alkali Corporation?"

Tass: "This planet, or where we're headed, or something about it. It's all, like ... It's them. It's a — this world or universe, whatever, version of them."

Kim: "Wait, what's Alkali Corporation?"

Tass: "Uh, so when we went to another world, we were looking for information. It's part of what led us to Megan. And they're like cybersecurity type stuff, or at least that world version was, so ..."

Megan: Have we just entered this atmosphere and like, we're going towards the planet like if we're gonna land? Or are we being drawn towards like a specific place?

Rev: No. Right now, you are just kind of being pulled in by the gravity. And Jake now has a little more control over it.

Jake: "So is it safe to assume that this security scanning thing is we're being scanned by Alkali?"

Tass: "If they functionally own this whole planet? Yeah, probably."

Megan: "I wonder if we can get out of this area where they're reading us."

Kim: "I don't know. If this whole planet is Alkali, would it be like regardless of wherever we land, we're gonna get scanned by this thing?"

Megan: "I guess it depends on where they have bases set up. Like I don't know if this entire planet is populated enough for there to be that kind of outreach. But if they're somewhere that's less inhabited, maybe we can sneak our way to where we need to go."

Jake: "So should I try to put us down near a structure or away from structures?" I mean, does it even look like there's, like, somewhere on this planet that's, like, rural, for lack of a better word?

Rev: I mean, right now, you're ... Imagine coming into Earth's atmosphere.

Jake: Yeah.

Rev: Like you can't really make out it's buildings and stuff yet.

Jake: It's super clear. I can see every detail.

Rev: [Laughs] Yeah, exactly.

Jake: I see the Great Wall.

Rev: But you do have a slew of tools on the ship that would let you know about what is on the planet.

Megan: I go to one of the panels and I zoom, enhance. [Laughs]

Rev: [Laughs]

Megan: I just Google Maps click my way through until I can see my own backyard.

Jake: Yeah. I want to start looking those things over, finding out if we have options about where to land or if we're just gonna hit the ground where we're gonna hit the ground.

Rev: All right. Yeah, roll Survey the Scene again.

Jake: Woo. Snake eyes.

Tass: I could try to help out by, like, feeding him this information that's coming up on the readout.

Rev: Oh, so you're gonna try to assist him?

Tass: Yeah.

Rev: All right. So this works a little bit differently here. Tass, you are gonna roll plus your connection with Jake. And on a full success, he gets to reroll his lowest die and use the higher number.

Tass: OK.

Rev: On a 7 to 9, they just get a +1, so keep that garbage out of here.

Tass: OK. No pressure. Nine, with a +3.

Jake: Well that bumps me up to a five.

Rev: You do also have Intuition. Not you necessarily want to use it the first 5 minutes of the new season. [Laughs]

Jake: [Laughs] I'm going to mark an Intuition, here. It seems important.

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: It seems important that we successfully orient ourselves.

Rev: On this planet.

Jake: Yeah. I would hate to go just straight into this world, marching in wrong.

Rev: Yeah, that's fair. So you get a hold 2.

Jake: What can help me?

Rev: In what sense? Like help you ...

Jake: Make a safe approach, here. Like, you know, have a lay of the land of this planet so that I can put us down somewhere not in immediate danger.

Rev: Yeah. I don't think this costs you a hold for this one. You've gotten the ship under control to an extent. So as long as you pick a place that is safe to land, you'll be able to land comfortably. There are some issues with the ship that you... That you are aware of, and some unaware of. But for the moment, you will be able to land as long as you find a space.

Jake: OK. How about, is there something important that I'm missing?

Rev: So as these different readouts start to pop up, you do notice that there are a couple of locations that pop up as nav points. There is the Welcome Center, Product Testing, The Forge, and the Data Center. And all the readouts are trying to point you towards the welcome center. I think that as you turn on all of this internal navigation elements, it kind of syncs up with the stuff on the planet and it starts trying to lead you into the Welcome Center. And I think the thing that's important here that you're missing is that it shows there is a hangar at the Welcome Center that is online. There is another hangar at the Product Testing facility. It is offline, but it does exist.

Jake: What can hurt me?

Rev: As the two computers — the one in your ship and the one in the Welcome Center — continue to sync up, you do start to get readings of other machines in the distance coming online. And you get a sense that if you don't have security clearance for this planet, if you were to veer off course from what the Welcome Center is trying to guide you in for, there might be some countermeasures taken.

Kim: [Laughs nervously]

Jake: "It wants to pull us into the hangar at the Welcome Center, which is evidently online. There's another hangar at a place called Product Testing? But it seems like that whole security clearance thing means that if we go anywhere but the Welcome Center, we're gonna pay for it because we don't have the authorization to do that. Unless we hack it? Maybe? I don't know."

Megan: "I mean, I saw like a jet stream. Something recently came through the atmosphere and headed north. Is that where the Product Testing center is?" And I'm like looking at the layout.

Jake: "Yeah."

Megan: "I don't know who that was, but they definitely went there. So I guess they would have clearance. I guess it depends on what's waiting for us at the Welcome Center. Is that gonna be more dangerous than whatever countermeasures they're gonna put into place?"

Jake: "Well, it's a Welcome Center, so you'd hope it'd be safe."

Kim: "Yeah, but this is also the planet where the egg is from."

Jake: "Yeah, but they wouldn't have those at the Welcome Center."

Kim: "I don't know!"

Megan: That's in the nursery.

Jake: "Those have gotta be just in a spooky dark cave somewhere, right? The Welcome Center has got like a gift shop."

Rev: I mean, this whole planet functionally is being used by Nash in this huge spell, right? Like there's nowhere we're gonna go that's gonna be safe. Like, Alkali somehow is being used by him to do the thing. So just what spin do we want to put on where we're touching down here, to figure out what's going on?"

Jake: "I mean, I'm heading for the Welcome Center unless somebody else can somehow fudge a security clearance on our way in. Because otherwise, we're just gonna get shot down. So I'd rather be on the land and in danger than falling out of the sky."

Tass: "Seconded."

Kim: "Yeah, I'm very anti-getting shot out of the air."

Megan: "OK, then let's land."

Jake: All right, I'll take her down towards the Welcome Center, then.

Rev: It takes another few minutes before everything starts to come into focus on the planet. And what you see laid out before you is barren. The ground is gray and pockmarked. The clouds are very dark. And you can actually see in one area, something molten is falling from the sky. And that's what's causing the pockmarks in the ground. This is the only building that you see on your approach. But it is a tall, gleaming tower. It has an energy field around it. And so the spaces just outside of it are filled with green grass and trees, and there is an opening that the ship slowly lowers into. Inside of the dock, there aren't any other ships here, but there are quite a few tools and repair bays. But it's all very elegant. There is a station set up that has some dusty wine glasses on it. An area that has silver trays for or d'oeuvres, but they lay empty as well. And there is a fine carpet that runs from the place that your ship has landed to a door at the far end of the hangar.

Jake: "Well, this sure doesn't seem to get very frequent use. Maybe that means there is nobody waiting for us on the other side."

Kim: "Maybe. But then what does that mean, if the Welcome Center is abandoned?"

Jake: "I don't know. Maybe this just isn't a place for, like, guests anymore. Maybe whoever went to Product Testing ... You know, maybe it's just like an employees only type planet anymore, and this is just been left behind."

Kim: So you mentioned things like wine glasses around this place. Like looking around this hangar, does it look like a bunch of people left in a hurry? Like, left in the middle of something?

Rev: Why don't you Survey the Scene?

Kim: OK. Twelve.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 2.

Jake: There we go. Let's keep that momentum going for the rest of this game.

Rev: [Chuckles]

Kim: [Chuckles] What happened here?

Rev: So as you look over the hangar, looking at the location where there are wine glasses as well as silver platters, and this very nice carpet that runs from the ship's location to a door at the end of the hangar. You don't get a sense of urgency. There is a corner that is filled with cleaning equipment. And it really just seems like this place hasn't been used recently. But when it is used, someone would come in, straighten up from last time, and be ready for the new arrivals. Like it seems like they don't clean up after themselves. They clean up in preparation for.

Kim: Gotcha. OK. Um ... Is there something important I'm missing?

Rev: The thing that you're missing here is that while it's very easy to take a breath, the air feels a little thin. And a lot of the lights in this area, only maybe a quarter of them are on. It seems like this place is running on low power, just keeping everything functional enough. You feel like if you were to try to exert yourself in here, for example, that it would be hard to catch your breath.

Kim: I immediately tried to slow my breathing down.

Rev: But instead I panic, and —

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Immediately start hyperventilating.

Kim: Nah, I'm a voice major. I have good breath control.

Rev: [Laughs]

Megan: Oh, I'm screwed. [Laughs]

Kim: [Laughs]

Megan: I really hope there are no stairs in here, because I'll be dead before I reach the top.

Rev: You open the door at the far end of the hangar, and it's just a huge spiral staircase that goes up the gleaming tower.

Kim: "OK. Well, it doesn't look like people left in a hurry. If anything, this place sort of seems like a banquet hall, or something that only gets used very rarely. Like they haven't cleaned up since the last time whoever important was here. Another thing. I'm sure you all maybe have noticed that the air seems a little thin here."

Megan: "I guess that makes sense, if they don't use this area very often. I'm guessing outside of here, oxygen isn't readily available."

Tass: Did I see anything about that on just the planet information as we were coming in? Like just that idea that outside of here is for sure without oxygen?

Kim: Is there air? You don't know! [Laughs]

Tass: You don't know!

Rev: You think that there is, but it's not super clean.

Tass: Oh. OK, OK.

Kim: Like it would be very bad on your system to breathe it in for too long. Because like when you were coming in, you saw the pockmarked ground, and there's a lot of dust and ash just on everything.

Tass: OK. "I mean, that all kind of lines up. Like whatever they have, if this place is low power, it's probably some sort of air filter that they have to get going in full swing, more than like something pumping out oxygen. I don't know. They might have gone a different way, but we'll have to just look around and see if we come across anything for that. But otherwise I'd say, let's keep it quick in here?"

Megan: "Yeah. If nobody's here, I wonder where they might be. I mean, we know that there was a ship that landed somewhere else. I'm guessing they went to the other hangar. But who was here to begin with, if anyone?"

Tass: "All right. Well, let's ... Let's move in. Let's see what we have here, and see if we have a way to, like, get to one of the other installations or get clearance to get through whatever measures they have that wouldn't let us to get to the other ones, right?"

Jake: "Lead the way."

Tass: All right. I'll level my new wild tech gun that I'm using and move in.

Rev: You all start to walk down this carpet towards the large door at the end of the hanger. Tass reaches it and pushes it open, and inside is a very spacious room. It is the main room of this tower that you saw from outside. There are large plush chairs all over, enormous video screens, and a ceiling that goes all the way up to the top of the building where it is just glass. You can tell that when the light from the planetary nebula hits at a certain time of day that this room would be beautiful, with all the color cascading through the glass all over these white and light gray surfaces. At the far end, there is a very large desk that runs a big half circle across the room. And other than the light from outside, it's relatively dark in here.

Jake: Is there anybody at that desk?

Rev: There's not.

Megan: I'm gonna head over behind it then, and see if there's any information.

Rev: Yeah. Why don't you Survey the Scene? This is a very popular move.

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: It's our favorite move.

Jake: So much surveillance.

Megan: That's a six.

Jake: Oh, no.

Megan: Yeah.

Kim: Could I try to assist?

Rev: Yeah. How so? When we went through here, I mean, I have to imagine that my cell phone is ... Does not get reception here.

Megan: [Laughs]

Kim: But do we have like flashlights or anything on us?

Rev: Yeah. I think that like all of your cell phones have turned into those little pocket lights that you see, like, in space movies. So they don't have to, like, hold them. That it's just attached to the front of whatever you're wearing.

Jake: They're just attached to wherever they were on your person when you came through. So I've got one sticking out of my right pocket.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: It's useless.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: He just has to walk with his right hip facing forward the whole time.

Rev: Yeah. Tass has got a good ass light.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: He's like a firefly.

Jake: [Laughs]

Kim: Um ...

Tass: You guys can play Wardle on my tramp stamp.

Megan: [Laughs]

Kim: Why is it where the tramp stamp is?

Jake: How do you carry your phone there?

Tass: Well, that's just where the ... Where like the HUD pops up. You know, it's just ...

Megan: [Laughs]

Kim: OK. I would like to assist Megan by turning on my light.

Megan: This game is terrifying.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: All right. Yeah. Roll +Connection.

Kim: That's a seven.

Rev: All right, Megan, that gives you a +1. So you are at a seven, so you get a hold 1.

Megan: Is there something important that I'm missing?

Rev: As you move along this desk, you are able to find a control panel hidden underneath the first shelf that seems like it is a main power switch to this room.

Megan: "Here we go." Flip!

Rev: Megan flips the switch and a panel opens up, revealing a computer screen and keyboard. At the same time, a number of lights turn on around the room, as do the large video screens. Music fills the room, and a very handsome man in a sharp suit holding a glass of champagne appears on the screens, and below him is a logo for the Alkali Corporation. It kind of shimmers into view and then shimmers away. He grins and looks down exactly where you are all standing.

Rev: ALKALI SPOKESMAN: Welcome to Hydarnes. We want to thank you for choosing the Alkali Corporation to fill all your modern warfare needs. Whether it be stealth based recon, high priority target assassinations, or a full frontal assault. We can design exactly

what you need to get the job done. Here on Hydarnes, Immortals are what we specialize in.

Rev: He fades out, and a variety of clips begin to play on all of the screens around the room. In one, something moves from shadow to shadow too fast to see, until it blindsides the camera. On another, a man sits surrounded by guards, and the earth below him opens up and he vanishes into the hole. Blood spurts up out of the hole in a gush, and then his decapitated head is flung out of the hole, back into the room. And on a third, a small installation is being overrun by creatures that are moving low to the ground, each the size of a small car. Some of which have weapons mounted on their backs that track nearby threats, firing independently. Others spit acid or fire. But all of them share the same basic structure: pale eyes, many legs, and long scorpion tails. Just like the creature that hatched from Strohm's egg.

Megan: Oh, no.

Kim: No, no, no, no, no ...

Rev: OUTRO MUSIC

Carolyn: The Critshow is a Critshow Studios production, edited and produced by Brandon Wentz, with music by Jake Pierle. You can find more information about us at thecritshowpodcast.com. To keep up to date with upcoming live shows, contests, and other special events, follow us at The Critshow on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. For even more weekly content, join us at Patreon.com/TheCritshow.