

Forging Monstrosities (S5, E2)

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

SFX: INTRO MUSIC

Rev: Hey, everybody. Rev here. Before we get into this week's episode, I just want to take the opportunity to say thank you to everyone who showed up at Gen Con. We had a blast — both running games for everybody, as well as the meetup and the live show. We had some technical difficulties with the speaker at the live show, but we were still able to record it. It's not the best quality, by my personal standards, but it's not any worse than some of our earlier live shows. So we will still be sharing that with you all on Friday, so you can look forward to that on your feed. As you can hear, my voice is a little rough, which is usually an indication of a great weekend at a con. They have just announced the dates, and again it is the first weekend of August. So we will start putting plans in motion soon for next year, and we hope to see more of the crew there. Enjoy the episode.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC

Rev: 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.

Jake: "So should I try to put us down near a structure, or away from structures?"

Rev: You do notice that there are a couple of locations that pop up as nav points: the Welcome Center, Product Testing, the Forge, and the Data Center.

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."

Megan: "Here we go." Flip!

Rev: Megan flips the switch, 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. 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. All of them share the same basic structure: pale eyes, many legs, and long scorpion tails.

SFX: RECAP MUSIC FADES

Rev: You're all standing inside of the lobby as this video finishes playing and the monitors all power down.

Megan: "Oh, no."

Tass: "Yeah, that sucks."

Jake: Did the man on screen look familiar or have anything identifying him?

Rev: There was like a title under him that was like ... Random name.

Megan: So, no.

Kim: Head of Scorpion Army Sales.

Rev: [Laughs]

Megan: His name's Scorpion Master.

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: [Laughs]

Tass: "So Product Testing, you said, is one of the names of the, uh ... One of the places?"

Kim: "Oh, no."

Jake: "Yeah. And Forge."

Kim: "But that guy was calling these things Immortals? I mean, Jake, you definitely killed one of them at The Vault."

Jake: "Well, it's just good branding."

Kim: "Yeah, and also, it had just hatched recently, so ... I don't know if they get immortal?"

Megan: "Well, I mean, it had just hatched, so it wasn't given, like, a weapon yet. Maybe, yeah, like Jake said, it's just ... That's the name they came up with for them? I wonder if they created these, or is that what lives on this planet?"

Jake: "I mean, judging by the fact that the facilities here are referred to as Forge and Product Testing, it doesn't seem like something naturally occurring that they co-opted."

Megan: "Well, I wonder if that's these creatures, or if that's all the weaponry."

Jake: "Oh, yeah." Yeah. So the one that we fought didn't have like add-ons?

Rev: Correct, yeah.

Jake: OK.

Rev: It just had just hatched and had its first meal.

Jake: Didn't have any widgets.

Rev: Yeah.

Megan: [Laughs]

Rev: And, you know, all the ones you saw in the video were much larger, and a lot of them had cybernetic implants.

Tass: OK.

Kim: By much larger, like how tall of a scorpion monster are we talking about, here?

Jake: How many hands high?

Kim: Is it taller than Jake?

Jake: [Laughs]

Megan: Was this man standing next to one? Do we have some sort of reference?

Rev: Yeah, he was not. You know, you saw a couple of them climb onto a tank, for example.

Kim: OK.

Rev: So like three of them covered a tank pretty well.

Tass: Oh, no.

Kim: Oh, no.

Tass: Not necessarily tall, but certainly wide.

Megan: [Laughs] They're very flat.

Rev: They're definitely long.

Megan: [Laughs]

Rev: They are scorpions. Just imagine a scorpion, and then blow it up.

Jake: Oh, I intend to.

Megan: [Laughs]

Rev: And then give it ... And then give it machine gun hands.

Tass: God. "We have some context now. What do we do about this?"

Jake: "I don't know. I mean, we know that somebody came here and went somewhere specific. So maybe we pick up the trail of those people that flew in before us, presumably to the Product Testing hangar? And, you know, the only idea I have is just, well, somebody else was here. They must have been here for something important. So let's go find out what they were about."

Megan: "Well, I mean, we didn't see anything else on our way down here. It was just this building. How far away is the Product Testing center supposed to be?"

Rev: So Jake, you having seen those readouts of where the other locations were, it seems like you should have been able to see some of the other ones upon approach. But there were no other buildings visible.

Jake: "It does seem like we should have been able to see some of those other facilities on our way in, and we couldn't. So if they've been destroyed, that might explain why the hangar is listed as offline."

Tass: "Yeah, but wouldn't you find rubble or something if they were destroyed? I mean, it's almost gotta be underground, if they're gonna have testing facilities on a planet where there's constantly molten shit hitting the surface, right?"

Jake: "Well, that's a good point. Yeah."

Kim: "I have to imagine if this is some sort of contractor for armies, or ... You saw them when they were like cybersecurity. I mean, they probably are very protective of their assets. So I think that they would go to great lengths to make sure that the buildings where they are housing their product would be hard to access."

Megan: So with there being a forcefield around this place, are we able to see like the ash and debris in the atmosphere within this dome? Like, where the grass is?

Rev: So there's not debris in the same way that you see it outside of the field. But there is still the ash in the air. It seems like this isn't a totally protective barrier, but maybe it's there to destroy things that might come into contact with it, to keep the building safe.

Megan: Mmhmm. Makes sense. It's glass.

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: "All right, so maybe now that we've landed and we're indoors. If we're assuming that the other facilities are underground, maybe our way to them is also underground."

Tass: "Could be. I mean, there's got to be at least one surface access somewhere, because that other ship or something flew off a different direction. But ... Yeah. God. You'd almost think they'd have to be connected, right?"

Kim: "I'd have to imagine if I was some sort of fancy person ready to pick up my scorpion army, I'd want to travel and get a look at them first."

Tass: "Yeah."

Kim: "You'd think that there would be a way to get from the Welcome Center to other places in this facility."

Megan: Can I start looking for information on if there would be like some sort of hatch or access door?

Rev: How are you looking?

Megan: Yeah. I think instead of looking for something like a power switch, I'm focusing more on going back to that desk and looking maybe through their computer system.

Rev: Yeah. So as you start to go through this computer, why don't you roll Survey the Scene?

Megan: Ten.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 2.

Megan: How can I get out of here?

Rev: You are able to find a couple of commands that will open up essentially what Kim described — a more lavish tram system that will go past Product Testing, before it loops back around to the Welcome Center.

Megan: Is there something important I'm missing?

Rev: You poke around inside the computer for a little bit looking for more information, and you do get a sense that there is some hidden access on this computer that you could try to get to by doing a Use or Repair an Advanced Item.

Megan: Oh yeah, definitely. I want to do that. I have a question. Does this count as a stressful situation?

Rev: I don't think so.

Megan: I'm always kind of stressed, so ...

All: [Laugh]

Rev: There's no threat, in the sense of like ...

Megan: Would you say things are peaceful?

Rev: Yeah.

Megan: Oh.

Rev: Probably as peaceful as they're gonna get.

Megan: Well, shit. [Laughs]

Kim: I'm in the corner, helping myself to some space wine.

Megan: Yeah, cool. So I take a -1 on this roll.

Rev: Oh. [Laughs]

Jake: Now, wait. Can I just stand behind her, screaming?

Megan: [Laughs] Seven.

Jake: Nice.

Kim: OK.

Rev: All right, so you can get it to work. You're gonna be able to access this information. But you're gonna have to pick two issues.

Megan: I think it doesn't work for as long as you need it, and it's going to need something that will cost you.

Rev: As you start to hack into this computer, a panel slides open on top of the counter and a hand scanner pops up. And you can see that it's flashing red, waiting for you to give an imprint. You are able to hack it in a way where it's not going to matter that you're not on file, but it is then going to have your fingerprints and your DNA on file.

Kim: Oh ...

Megan: "OK. Uh ... I gotta give up some information to make this work."

Tass: "What kind?"

Megan: "To get this to work, I'm gonna need to kind of put myself into this system, and they'll have my, like, fingerprints and DNA and stuff on file. It'll get us access to where we need to go, but ... I mean, what's the worst that could happen, right?"

Kim: "Oh, if we go down that route, we're never gonna get out of this Welcome Center."

Megan: "Yeah. OK. Uh ..." I close my eyes and I place my hand on the scanner.

Rev: You put your hand down on the scanner, and it gets very warm for a moment. And then you feel like a very quick prick on the palm of your hand. But when you pull your hand back, there's no puncture wound. And the system fires up. And inside of it, you see that you have access to opening a couple of other doors that are hidden inside of this room. One of them is a maintenance shaft, and one of them is a delivery hatch.

Megan: "OK. So seems like the tram will kind of take us what you were saying, Kim. It's like a fancy way for them to go see the Product Testing. But it doesn't actually stop there. It like loops back around this way. But there is a maintenance shaft and like a delivery hatch here as well in this room."

Kim: "Maintenance shaft, would that maybe get the oxygen back up to fully breathable levels?"

Megan: "I don't — I don't know. Possibly. We should probably check it out at the very least. I'm curious to where the delivery hatch would lead to as well. Maybe that goes to Product Testing, or the Data Center was another place you said?"

Jake: "Yeah, I guess it depends what kind of deliveries we're talking about. Is it like delivering things needed to create these monstrosities, or is it like delivering the creatures to their buyers?"

Tass: "We could go at least check it out to see if it's some big, huge thing that would warrant that kind of delivery and pickup, or whether it's something smaller."

Jake: "Sure."

Tass: "Or hell, we could take the tour. Go sit on the tram and see what we're dealing with."

Kim: "I'd love to ride the monorail."

Jake: "It seems like we can just do that whenever though. So I feel like we should save that."

Megan: "Also, we know that it doesn't stop there. If we go through like the behind the scenes routes, we might be able to have easier access to these places."

Tass: "True. True, true, true."

Jake: "All right, let's go peep that delivery hatch."

Megan: "All right."

Rev: So you activate the delivery hatch on the system, and it shorts out and shuts down.

Megan: [Gasps]

Rev: But you do hear, in the far corner of the room, some hissing. And a large portion of the floor rises up, and with it, the wall rises and leads outside. But you can tell that if you were to get into this, it would take you down underground.

Kim: Oh ...

Jake: Huh.

Megan: "OK. I did something wrong, I think. I don't think we're gonna get into the maintenance shaft anymore."

Tass: "Oof. All right. Well, we'll work with what we can, and let's just go see what we see and call something from there, I guess?"

Jake: "Yeah. I mean, at least we know it exists now. So if there's a way into it from somewhere else, you know, we know to look for it."

Megan: "Yeah."

Kim: "Definitely."

Jake: "Silver linings."

Tass: I'll head in.

Rev: OK.

Kim: Yeah.

Jake: Same.

Megan: Yeah. Let's go down.

Rev: You all climb into what is essentially a freight elevator, and it starts to lower down. It is completely dark inside of this elevator shaft. And again, the air gets worse. Everybody roll Act Under Fire. It does not seem like this place is made for living things to traverse. When you Act Under Fire, this can be any situation that requires a special kind of grit to get through. You roll with +Hand.

Jake: Seven.

Megan: Eight.

Tass: Seven.

Kim: Six. But I am invoking my move Boy Am I Bad At Math. So I am immediately changing this result into a mixed success, but you get 2 hold that you can use on me on any roll except for Act Under Fire.

Rev: It's rough for a good 60 seconds. This elevator is moving very fast. The combination of how quickly it drops with the quality of the air here, everybody takes one point of damage, armor-defeating, as you feel your lungs kind of filling it up with the debris and the dirt of this world. But ultimately, it does open up again. And you feel ... Not what I would call fresh air, but fresh compared to where you just were, rush at you. Out in front of you is just a vast darkness.

Tass: I'm gonna flash my lamp out through, and see if anything pops out.

Kim: Don't use that phrase.

Tass: I mean, visually.

Jake: Phrase it differently.

Kim: Please.

Rev: As you start to move the flashlight around in the darkness, it's mostly metal walls down here. And as you move the light down one side and then back down the other, your light lands on a figure. Their back is to you. They have a long white coat on and brown hair, and they are mid step. And they turn and look at you.

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: Oh, hello.

Tass: "Hey, how is it going?"

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: Good. How are you? I don't believe there was anyone scheduled for today.

Tass: I slowly look back at the others, and back to this guy. "Yeah, no, we wouldn't be on the schedule. That ... That makes sense."

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: Do you have a delivery?

Tass: "I don't."

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: Then I'm going to have to ask why you're here.

Kim: "Well because I'm thinking of making a purchase, and I don't go into any business dealing if I don't see the facilities first. I don't want to buy a product sight unseen."

Tass: "Don't — yeah, I don't want to buy it sight unseen."

Jake: "There was nobody up in the lobby, so ..."

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: Well, yes. Because there was no one on the schedule today.

Megan: "So whose fault is that?"

Rev: FIGURE IN WHITE COAT: It could be an error with programming. It could be a calendar issue. Do you perhaps run on a different time cycle?

Megan: "I'm sorry. What was your name?"

Rev: DION: Dion.

Kim: "Hi, Dion. It's nice to meet you. I'm Kim from the House of Strohm."

Rev: DION: Hello.

Jake: "Look, let's not get bogged down in who made mistakes where to cause this. Water, you know, over the bridge or under the dam. Whatever. We're here now, though. So would you mind just walking us through the facilities and giving us a breakdown of your product? If that's not your purview, of course, you can feel free to direct us to somebody whose job that is."

Rev: Jake, why don't you roll Influence Someone?

Kim: Hell yeah.

Tass: [Laughs]

Jake: Everybody had a hand on this ball, but I'm the one —

Kim: Well, you're the one who finished it.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: I know. Which one is it?

Tass: You asked him to do stuff.

Rev: Influence Someone. Sometimes asking nicely isn't enough. In that case, you might need to try and influence someone in order to get your way. You can't just bully your way through with a dice roll, however. You need to explain your reasoning and what kind of resources or action you're gonna use to accomplish the task. When you Influence Someone, roll +Group.

Jake: Nine. Does anybody want to lend a hand?

Kim: May I help? Since I was name dropping the House of Strohm and I started this sort of lie?

Rev: Yeah.

Kim: That's a seven.

Rev: All right. So Jake, that bumps you up to a ten. Dion pauses.

Rev: DION: Yes, I suppose I could take you through this facility. But you're really not going to see what it actually is you're getting in the end. This is mostly the area for growth and combination with cybernetics.

Megan: "Well, that's exactly what we want to see. It's nice to have a final product, but it's even better to know what's going on behind the scenes."

Jake: "Yeah. Just introduce us to your methodology. That will help us make a more informed decision about what we want out of this in the end."

Rev: DION: Very well.

Rev: And he turns and starts to walk down the hallway.

Kim: Just subtly high fiving everyone.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: Yeah.

Tass: I'm breathing so hard.

Megan: [Laughs]

Kim: [Laughs]

Jake: The oxygen is ... You can feel it dissipating.

Rev: Dion gets to the end of the hallway and opens up a set of double doors, and the amount of noise and light coming in is kind of staggering. You see a dozen people working at different stations. Some of the eggs that Strohm had, hanging in bunches from the ceiling. There are needles moving around, injecting these eggs. There are people who have some of these unconscious scorpion creatures laid out on tables, and they are connecting various implants to them.

Rev: DION: Welcome to The Forge.

Jake: This is sort of a non-sequitur, but I'm curious. Us talking about like Tass breathing heavy, and —

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: You know, it being labored. Do any of them seem to be having any issue with that? Does anybody here like have an oxygen mask or seem like they're breathing weird? I — mostly I'm asking, do these seem like real people or do these seem like androids or robots or something?

Rev: Why don't you roll Get a Feeling?

Jake: OK.

Rev: When you want to try and gain some insight on another spacer or an NPC during an important or dangerous moment, roll +Heart.

Jake: Ooh, that's a bad one for me. But that's a nine.

Kim: Nice.

Rev: All right, you get a hold 1.

Jake: What do I notice about them that's important?

Rev: You do notice that they don't seem to be affected by the quality of the air down here, and the rising and falling of their chests as they breathe and as they talk seems very well regulated. As if it's only for show.

Jake: All right. Yeah. As he's kind of leading us into this room, I want to get close enough with the squad here to, like, whisper this. Like, "I don't think these are real, like, living people. I think these are robots or something."

Rev: DION: What's that?

Kim: "Oh. We — I couldn't help but notice when we were up in the Welcome Center, the oxygen levels in this facility are lower than what I'm used to on my system."

Rev: DION: Oh yes, we keep it very low unless customers are here. We've learned to adapt to it. Takes some getting used to, and a couple of special medications. But other than that ...

Jake: [Chuckles] I'm just scrutinizing Dion. I'm like, yeah, sure it does, Dion. Yeah, it takes some getting used to. A couple special medications. Maybe those gears in your ...

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: In your heart.

Megan: He's just getting closer and closer to him, with like his finger in his face.

Jake: Yeah. I just want to — I want to resume paying good attention to Dion. As a — as a good tour ... What are you, when you're on a tour?

Tass: Tourist.

Kim: Yeah.

Jake: I guess tourist, yeah.

Kim: "These creatures are extraordinary. Are these creatures native to Hydarnes?"

Rev: DION: No. These are something that we have created in the lab. Even though we do create engines of war, we want to make sure that we are doing it in the most humane way possible. Our goal is to keep living beings out of conflicts, but we realize that conflicts are still going to happen.

Jake: "So are these still organic?"

Rev: DION: Yes.

Jake: "OK. Interesting."

Tass: "I can see that they're being ... What I have to assume are eggs being injected, and so on. I have to assume a lot of that is like conditioning them, adding things to their physiology. But what is the process to add control to the person that you're selling to?"

Rev: DION: Well that is different, depending on the buyer and what their desires are. The injections, as you said, they are genetic modifiers, flagging certain genetic areas where we want to add the innate ability to become invisible or low level telepathy,. Things that need to be put in before we start working on the cybernetic elements such as increased strength or reflexes, augmented weaponry, things of that sort. There are a number of different options in the package. If you would prefer to control them by voice, there is also pheromones ... Really at this point, they can come up with any number of ways to control, based off how the purchaser feels most comfortable. And really, how they feel like they would be able to contain the most focus.

Megan: "Mmhmm. How many of these armies have you sold?"

Rev: DION: Oh, that I don't know.

Jake: "Has there been any negative feedback from any of your buyers?"

Rev: DION: That's not something I'm really kept up to date with.

Jake: "Interesting. It seems like that would cycle back into the development process at a base level."

Rev: DION: Well, the development is so forged around what it is that you specifically are looking for. We have built a number of different armies. No two of them have even been 1/100th the same as the other.

Jake: "Understandable."

Rev: DION: The chassis is the same. As you can see there, this scorpion-like body, that is the frame that we were able to grow. It takes most of the neuron implants very well, as well as being able to handle the weight of a number of different armaments and armors.

Megan: "What has been your favorite, I guess, collection of aspects to put into a single army? Who did you do that for?"

Rev: DION: Oh, well, that I couldn't tell you. We can't be giving out the secrets of the armies that we're selling. But I could tell you my favorite one that I've done was we found a way to enhance the legs so that they could move so fast that they could traverse water. We also gave that same one an innate cloaking ability, so it could move over the water, it could dig very fast, and stay invisible the whole time. So it was used in our testing here anyway, to create burrows for other units to get to where they were trying to go.

Megan: "Wow."

Kim: "Interesting. Wouldn't you still be able to pick them up via a heat signature, or perhaps see the subtle ripples as it moves across the water?"

Rev: DION: Yes. The ripples thing, that can be taken down as wind. You know, we don't often have the effect of seeing the field. It's not like a distortion field. It is truly becoming transparent.

Kim: "Mmhmm."

Rev: DION: The first models of it didn't work quite as well because the outermost layers would become transparent, but then it just seemed like a thing of organs moving towards you.

Kim: "Ah."

Rev: DION: Which — very good for psychological warfare.

Megan: "Terrifying, yes."

Rev: DION: Yes.

Jake: "Now, these creatures being organic, do they breathe oxygen?"

Rev: DION: No.

Jake: "Oh, OK. So these are viable in any atmosphere?"

Rev: DION: Yes. Oh, yes. Again, for a price.

Kim: "Yes, of course. And what goes into maintaining this army? What do they eat? What do they require?"

Rev: DION: Ah, I see. Yes. So they themselves do not require anything. In the off chance — and it happens on a very rare occasion — but if you were to have two units that were to mate. We're not quite sure how or why this is able to happen. But there have been instances where two units have created an offspring, even though we're not creating them with those capabilities.

Megan: "Life finds a way."

Kim: I was waiting for someone to say that. [Laughs]

Megan: I got you.

Rev: DION: That is exactly what someone said to us. What does that mean exactly?

Megan: I'm just gonna start pulling quotes from Jurassic Park. [Laughs] Like, directly.

Kim: Megan starts unbuttoning her shirt and opening it up a little.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: One of my moves is called Chaotician, Actually.

Kim: Yeah.

Megan: [Laughs] "It just means you can never fully control something that is life, that is living. You can put as much into it as you want and think that you have a complete level of control, but there's no such thing."

Rev: DION: Oh, interesting. But yes, back to the original point. If there is the instance where two units were to create an offspring, it does require sustenance, and are particularly aggressive towards finding it when they are hatched. The units themselves do not require anything but to be stored in the special container each one of them is delivered in. It provides all of the nutrients and everything the body needs to heal.

Jake: "Out of curiosity, you said that you had heard somebody else say 'life finds a way to you' before. Who was that? Because I thought that was sort of a local curiosity for our world."

Rev: DION: Oh, he must have been from wherever you are.

Jake: "What was his name?"

Rev: DION: Ah, Again.

Jake: "Mmm. Yep, you're right. Ooh, I hope he's not planning to launch any great offences on our world."

Tass: I've been pretty quiet. Because every new bit of information, my jaw is setting tighter and tighter as I fix them with worried looks. Nightmare.

Jake: Is there anywhere else, looking around the room? Any other doors or anything that seems like ... Like not part of the tour? Like, he's not going — he's not gonna take us there, or he wouldn't be inclined to take us there.

Kim: I love all of us just like very nonchalantly talking about — like, it reminds me of sometimes when I like tour houses and pretend like I'm really — I'm really gonna buy this house. [Laughs]

Jake: Yo, we're good at this.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: I don't like it when they're ... Check notes. Invisible, have low level telepathy, increased strength ...

All: [Laugh]

Megan: I've been trying to write everything they could possibly have done. I didn't even get it all.

Tass: This one's so fast, it runs across water. And you want me to try to shoot at one with my little pew pew gun?

Rev: [Chuckles]

Tass: Sir, I have a question. Does this facility have a self destruct button somewhere?

Jake: [Laughs] That's why — I was like, please tell me they breathe oxygen. Please tell me they breathe oxygen. Please tell me that we can just turn this place into a vacuum.

Kim: If our only goal here was to come here and pretend to buy a scorpion army, I think we're nailing it.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: We're gonna leave here without figuring out what the hell we're supposed to get, but we're gonna have an army.

Kim: Lead a scorpion army through the gates.

Megan: We're gonna have the best one of anybody else who has them.

Jake: We're gonna have what it takes to start our own scorpion army business back home.

Megan: We're gonna get our own planet.

Jake: Corporate espionage.

Rev: I was like, "Do they remember why they're here?" I think, to buy an army. That's what I remember.

Kim: Like, 'Dion, have you heard of any magical rituals going on in one of the other rooms?'

Jake: 'Speaking of scorpions that run on water, any magic circles about?'

Kim: [Laughs]

Rev: So as you look around, there is this main work area, where you can see these people working on the clusters of eggs as well as some of the unconscious scorpions. There is a closed door on your left that you can tell that it's a lab. At the far end of this room is just a wall filled with all kinds of different weapons. And then you do see a couple

of the workers coming out of a hallway, finishing up some sandwiches, and they throw some bottles into a trash can.

Jake: I want to try to like seize an opening, while somebody else is talking to Dion and having him explain something. I want to try and kind of scooch over towards the — what looks like the break room — and get a peek inside there.

Rev: I think this is gonna be a Keep Your Head Down. When you want to try and hide during a dangerous moment or cross a space without being noticed, roll +Head.

Jake: OK. Uh, that's a six.

Tass: Can I assist, as I see him starting to move? I think I want to stop ignoring this and be like, "So what's like the science behind the ... What, android? Cyborgs? Like what — what are you — whatever you guys are. It's really interesting to me."

Rev: Tass, roll Act Under Fire.

Tass: Oh, no!

Megan: Oh, no.

Jake: Good.

Tass: I was trying to make it jovial, but apparently they won't like it.

Megan: You are gonna be able to sneak into that break room, no problem. Because every single person in here is gonna murder Tass.

Tass: Eleven.

Megan: Oh!

Rev: You feel that question rising to your lips.

All: [Laugh]

Rev: Like you start to get part of it out, and you see something in the corner of Dion's eye twitch.

Kim: [Quietly] Oh.

Rev: And you let the word, like, fall short.

Tass: OK. So I like gulp and backpedal a little with that. And I think what comes out is more like, "Like it's really ... Like you all seem like you work together really well. Like, what's the — like, you know, the work environment here, with your — how you all work together. Like you guys ... You guys like this kind of work?"

Jake: [Laughs]

Rev: And as you continue this question and kind of dig your way out of this, you see that the twitch starts to slow, but the eye rolls back and then down center towards you, and then underneath, and then out the side again, and finally focuses on you.

Tass: Did any of that count as an assist? [Laughs]

Rev: Yeah. So roll Assist.

Tass: OK.

Kim: He definitely had Dion's full attention.

Tass: I am, like, wiping sweat from my brow as I continue all of this questioning.

Rev: Yeah. And I don't think you need a roll for this. Everyone else, in this moment, when Dion has this reaction, all work in this room stops. And you get the clear sense that every person in this room is listening intently to Tass's conversation with Dion.

Kim: Hmm ...

Jake: Oh.

Tass: And I rolled a thirteen to assist.

Rev: All right. So Jake, you can reroll your lowest die.

Jake: Oh, boy. Which 2 do I want to reroll?

Tass: Be careful.

Jake: It's a fucking 2 again!

Kim: Yes! After all of that.

Megan: Wow.

Rev: So Jake, as you start to try and move your way towards the break room, one of the other workers who is throwing away a cup, they stop you.

Rev: FORGE WORKER: Oh, pardon me. Where are you going?

Jake: "I just saw some of you coming out of there with sandwiches, and I was feeling a bit peckish. I didn't know if maybe I could snag a bite."

Rev: FORGE WORKER: Oh. Well yes. Just one moment. Let me bring you one.

Jake: "Thank you."

Rev: And they turn and go back down the hallway, and they come back and they hand you a sandwich.

Megan: What is it made of?

Jake: Yeah. I want to say, "Thank you." And I will turn to head back to the group, and carefully examine the sandwich before I ingest it.

Rev: It's a fine paste in the middle.

Jake: So far, this is up my alley.

Rev: Yeah.

All: [Laugh]

Megan: It's a mush.

Rev: It is the most base form of carb and protein that's just solidified. So it looks like a sandwich, but it's almost like, uh, crackers and a lard.

Jake: Like hummus.

Rev: Yeah.

All: [Laugh]

Kim: Delicious.

Megan: Yeah, that sounds good, actually.

Kim: Yeah. That sounds yummy, actually.

Jake: I'm going to eat it.

Rev: [Laughs]

Jake: I eat it, and I walk back over to the group. And just, again, I'm like, I lean into Tass.
[Whispers] "Smooth."

Tass: [Whispers] "Kill me. Right now. Right here."

Jake: "Well Dion, is there anywhere else to take us? Anywhere else you can show us?"

Rev: DION: This is the only area that I really have any knowledge about. I did make a call.

Rev: And he doesn't flinch at that idea.

Rev: DION: I did make a call while you were all examining some things to make sure that we got one of our design liaisons, here since your appointment seems to have been missed.

Kim: "Oh! Extraordinary."

Jake: "And where will we be rendezvousing with them?"

Rev: DION: That will be back in the lobby.

Megan: "Great. Well, you seem really busy here. We could find our way back the way we came, and meet them up there?"

Rev: DION: Yes. Although do be aware that it will take them quite a few days to get here.

Megan: "Oh."

Rev: DION: I'm not sure if you would prefer to return.

Kim: "I don't see the point in wasting the fuel to go home and then come back here, if it's only a few days. Do you have any sort of guest quarters where we can stay and wait for our liaison?"

Rev: DION: We have the lobby.

Jake: "Well, we can have this conversation amongst ourselves on the ride back up."

Rev: DION: Very well.

Jake: "Thank you, Dion."

Rev: DION: Yes, my pleasure.

Kim: "I hope we'll be working with you very soon."

Rev: DION: Yes. Do be thinking about the kinds of add-ons you'd like to have.

Jake: "Oh Dion, you had me at 'runs on water.'"

Rev: And Dion moves towards the door and opens it up for you to lead back towards the elevator.

Megan: He lost me at, "They have children together, even though we don't want them to, that then need to eat immediately."

Kim: "Oh, what is the name of the design liaison that we'd be meeting with?"

Rev: DION: Ah yes, the design liaison who should be here within 3 to 4 days is Lane.

Kim: "Thank you."

Rev: DION: Yes, of course.

Jake: All right. Does Dion accompany us back to the elevator, or does he just stay in The Forge?

Rev: As you head back towards the elevator, you don't have to roll for this because you've been paying attention to Dion. He walks you down to the elevator, and then turns to head back to The Forge and stops mid-stride in the middle of the hallway where you found him as the lights turn off.

Megan: Oh, what the fuck?

Rev: And the elevator slowly brings you back up into the lobby.

Jake: "Does that mean that entire encounter was staged?"

Tass: "No, I think they're just robots. I think he's just the one that stands down there and waits for deliveries of whatever parts, pieces, things that they need to do their stuff."

Jake: "And he's just supposed to look like he's mid-action for the hell of it?"

Megan: "Like he's a person."

Jake: "OK."

Tass: "Yeah. When I started to question about stuff, he was more terrifying than any of those things in the fucking eggs."

Megan: "But I don't understand. Why the pretense? Like why would it be such a terrible thing for the people that are buying these armies to know that these are, like, androids?"

Jake: "I don't know. I mean, maybe it's just like a ... Like a customer service type thing. Maybe people are more likely to buy if they think they're talking to a living, breathing person and not a machine."

Tass: "Maybe they don't even know. Or like they know, but they don't ... God, I don't know. That was just terrifying."

Megan: "Yeah, that seems like there's a lot that has gone into making that appear human."

Kim: "OK, so what do we do now? I have to imagine we're not waiting 3 to 4 days for Lane to show up."

Tass: "No."

Megan: "We could take the tram to go see the Product Testing area? I mean, just to even get an idea of what it is. Or we can try and find a different way to break into the maintenance area. Or we could fly out of here and try to find that other hangar. I think I have clearance now, so we may not get shot down."

Jake: "I mean, I didn't see any evidence of ritual down there, although I wasn't able to sneak around like I wanted."

Tass: "Yeah. I mean, I keep thinking if he's trying to pull a lot of power ... I mean, all the rest of them are having the thing at the base, right? The most powerful version of these are gonna be in Product Testing. Right? That's when they're fully formed, and they're seeing what they can do."

Jake: "Probably. I think I'd feel better about hitting the Data Center first, just in case there's any more, you know, life saving information we could use when we actually encounter the critters."

Tass: "Sure. Yeah. I mean, I 100% agree. We should go step by step, here. But it feels to me like Product Testing is our end game?"

Jake: "Yeah, if I had to guess."

Megan: "I mean, we don't really have an access point to the Data Center yet, right? We know what general direction it's in, but we know from right here we have a way to the Product Testing. And we know we have a way in through the tram, or to go to the other hangar."

Jake: "Yeah. Now might be a good time to take the tram."

Kim: "Yeah."

Jake: "I mean, hell, maybe we can at least keep a weathered eye, and see if there's any other secret hatches in the walls that the tram goes by or something. I don't know."

Megan: "Yeah. Maybe if it's slow enough, we can just get out."

Jake: "I mean, and it brings us right back here, right? It's just a big loop?"

Megan: "Yeah. Seems that way."

Tass: "Yeah. I mean, if Alan Grant can do it, we can do it."

Megan: "Yeah. We just all have to push up with the — push on the handlebars at the same time and get off the automated ride."

Tass: "Exactly."

Megan: This is Jurassic Park, now. [Laughs] I've decided. I'm willing it into existence that just all the tricks they use in that movie, that's how we're getting out of here.

All: [Laugh]

Jake: "I am a little worried still, though, that without knowing exactly where that other ship went ... It does seem like somebody else is here. If we just swing by on a tram, are we gonna get noticed by someone we don't want to get noticed by? Maybe if we just lay really flat, they won't see us."

Megan: "Just look out the edges of the windows? Or I mean, maybe we could get to the tram and just walk the track."

Jake: "Oh, god. OK."

Kim: "Oh ..."

Jake: "I have a very scary image of this tram in my head. So, yeah. Let's go — let's see where that starts and what it looks like. I don't know why, but I am very much picturing, like, a monorail over a void."

Kim: "Me too, yeah."

Megan: "I mean, we just gotta see."

Jake: "Let's just, uh, let's just toggle that bad boy on."

Kim: "Yeah."

Jake: "See if it pops up out of the floor."

Megan: So am I still able to access all that? Since I know I've fried some stuff with this computer.

Rev: You can access that top level stuff — which is the tram, essentially. But you can't access the, um ...

Megan: The back door things.

Kim: The maintenance thing anymore.

Rev: The maintenance shaft, yeah.

Megan: OK. Yeah. I will get the tram up and running.

Rev: Yeah. You go over and you toggle on the tour. Part of the floor splits open, and out of it rises ... It almost looks like a roller coaster.

Kim: [Gasps] Yes.

Rev: It is ten seats long, two seats side by side, with very plush chairs. But you are open to the environment from the chest up.

Jake: Having seen two of these areas of the lobby, like, separate. Can I kind of like scrutinize where the delivery hatch is and where this opened up, so that like I would kind of know what I was looking for if I was really gonna get down, like in the cracks, and try and find other places that open up like this?

Rev: Yeah.

Jake: Do I need — do I need to roll anything?

Rev: Are you looking for them now, or are you just taking notes so you can do it in the future?

Jake: I'm not looking for other places right now, so ... I'm just trying to get an idea of, like, what I would be looking for.

Rev: Yeah, no problem.

Jake: OK. Cool. "All right. Should we sit together?"

Megan: "I mean, if we have to try and keep a low profile, maybe spreading out along this thing will give us a better opportunity to, like, sink down into these plush chairs or something. So we're not as noticeable."

Jake: "All right, let's just do one to a row. But let's take, like, the first four rows."

Kim: "OK."

Jake: "So we've got, like, an empty seat we can lay across if we have two."

Tass: "All right, I'm in."

Rev: Who's in the front-front? Like who's the first person into this tunnel?

Tass: It.

Rev: All right, so as you all climb into this tram, you hear audio start to play all around you, once again welcoming you here and thanking you for your purchase. And some music starts to play along with it as you are slowly moved underground. They start telling you the history of this planet and how it was acquired by the parent company, the Alkali Corporation. It gives just a bunch of history of how they create the armies, the things that they can put into the units. Really, a lot of stuff that you got from Dion. It's fairly dark as you're traveling, and you can get a sense that you have traveled a good distance. Again, it's moving at a pretty good click. But it's headed due north before it starts to swing out and around. Tass, since you're in the front, I'm gonna have you Survey the Scene.

Tass: OK. Seven.

Rev: All right. You get a hold 1.

Tass: Is there something important I'm missing?

Rev: So you all come out into Product Testing, inside of this large tube. This music is still playing around you, and the person over the speakers is still narrating the story and the journey. But they say ...

Rev: ANNOUNCER: And now enjoy a demonstration of some of our fine products.

Rev: And lights kick on all around you, and you are in an enormous chasm. There are soldier units on the ground, and it's like they wake up and they start attacking one another. A rocket gets fired off of a shoulder mounted launcher. One of the scorpions is cut in half by a saw, and both sides instantly grow a new half and start attacking the creature with the buzzsaw on its tail. It is chaotic and filled with carnage. But Tass, you notice in the very back there is a dull glow that doesn't belong to any of the spectacle being shown here. And you recognize that light as the light from the nebula, the same light that illuminates this planet. And as your vision focuses on this spot in the corner, you notice there are about a dozen large metallic pods, and a group of people in piecemeal armor with matching insignias, dragging them out and loading them into the back of a ship.

SFX: 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.