

SHRUE'S APARTMENT, INT, DAY

The click of a phone dialling.

The now-familiar sound of an answering machine message.

SHRUE sounds tired, and a little quietly hysterical.

SHRUE:

(Speaking haltingly into the phone)

Hey. Me again.

I know there's been a lot of trouble with the phone lines lately. I don't know if you've been experiencing the power cuts as well, but, uh, maybe you could take a moment and call me back?

It'd put my mind at ease.

I've got no reason to worry, I know you're safe down there, it's not like any harm could have come to you, but-

-but I need that comfort from you. If you're willing to give it to me.

I'm going to be on the radio again tomorrow, if the girls want to listen.

I'm, um, I'm at this thing all day, I'm at the summit, but. You can leave me a message.

Leave me a message. Please?

So I know you're alive?

I've got no leverage, this is the only number they gave me, so you've - you've just got to call me back and tell me you're alive.

Imagination's going to start running wild otherwise.

SHRUE hangs up.

GATES OF GLOTTAGE UNIVERSITY, EXT, DAY

SHRUE pulls up in the car. The gates to the university are closed.

They wind down their window and call out to a GUARD, whose response we don't hear.

SHRUE:

Hey.

Uh, I'm with the government. I'm here for the summit. Think I'm in the right place.

Is everything OK on campus?

(Getting a reply)

Oh, sure. Patch him through.

A moment's silence.

Then we hear the voice of CARSON over the tannoy.

For the vast majority of this episode, we'll only hear CARSON over the comms.

CARSON;

(Over the comms, as cheery as ever)

Hello, there, Shrue. Welcome to the University of Greater Glottage - or as we alumnae like to call the ol' alma mater, the God-Kiln.

Glad you could make it. Ooh, I can see you on the cameras. I like your suit.

Just speak into the little box, please. Down to your right.

SHRUE:

(Speaking a little loudly, as if to a nearby receiver by the open window)

Press Secretary. There's soldiers patrolling the grounds. Gates look tightly shut. Did something happen?

CARSON:

(Over the comms)

Campus is on lockdown. Big protest last week, lot of arrests. Dean thought it was best to shutdown until everything's calmed down a little bit.

But. Just means we've got more space for the summit. No noisy games of hackey-sack to interrupt us.

Ready to make history?

SHRUE:
That's right.

CARSON:
(Over the comms)
Wonderful. They'll open the gates for you now.
(Giving instructions)
OK, so the summit's taking place in the Bowery today.

It's right across campus - take a left, then a left, then keep going straight past the playing fields and you'll see a parking spot marked with your name.

It's a walk from there into the trees, but just follow the signs, and - oh, can you scoot?

SHRUE:
I don't think so.

CARSON:
(Over the comms)
That's OK, you've still got your legs. All right, see you in a mo.

The buzzer sounds and the gates clank open.

AUTOMATED VOICE:
You are now entering the University of Greater Glottage.

Inspire. Engage. Influence.

Throughout this episode, the AUTOMATED VOICE will signal a change in location while cycling through

SHRUE puts the car in gear and begins to drive again.

THE GOD-KILN, EXT. DAY

It's peaceful out here. Birds - or the sound of birds - is being piped in across the campus.

As SHRUE slams their car door and steps out, they stand and take it all in with a breath.

LABS, INT, DAY

The automatic doors whoosh open.

AUTOMATED VOICE:
You are now entering Labs.

Innovate. Create. Inspire.

As SHRUE walks into the LABS, we hear distant screaming from the cells on either side. Dozens of prisoners are being kept here, and they're yelling out in a panic.

We hear several voices that we've heard before.

CARSON, meanwhile, continues to speak over the tannoy, startling SHRUE every time he does so. Throughout this episode, his disembodied voice will linger around the characters like an unwanted ghost.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
Just take a left.

Cells down here. Hallowing fodder.

Remind me, Shrue, you never went to GGU, correct?

SHRUE:
(Unnerved and cautious as they walk)
I did not. We had a couple of agricultural colleges out in my territory when I was growing up.

Want me to placate a meat-god or tend to injured cattle, I can do that for you.

(With maybe a twinge of guilt)
If - if I can still remember how, that is.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
Oh, that's so nice. Well, let's speak to the dean after today, see if we can't get you on the list for an honorary degree. A doctorate, even better.

You've earned it.

Don't let the yelling bother you, Shrue. Just keep on pushing forward.
Lift's on the far side of the corridor.

SHRUE keeps walking.

The yelling gets closer and closer. They're literally forced to ignore the prisoners as they walk past them.

CARSON;

Historically, the god-birthing facilities were always out in the sticks, which is great for health and safety, but did rather ramp up the transportation and administrative costs.

GGU was one of Devlin's greatest achievements, I always think. Solid public investment, your taxes going to their proper use.

(Completely unbothered)

The summit, though, is four floors up - where our geniuses get to work. Don't worry, you won't hear any of this once we get inside.

C'mon, Shrue! Don't dawdle. Lift's waiting for you. Fourth floor.

SHRUE:

(Distressed and distracted)

They're, uh-

Uh, coming. Coming.

SHRUE hurries on into the lift.

They press a button.

The lift doors close.

SHRUE:

(As a warning)

There's a power outage planned at midday.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Ah, we're off-grid out here. Only way to ensure everyone's safety. Solar power, I think.

(Imitating the sound of the lift doors opening)

Bing.

THE BOWERY, INT. DAY

We're in a huge vaulted chamber.

We hear the sound of some very large mechanical doors opening.

SHRUE's footsteps upon the floor as they enter the BOWERY.

Overhead, an automated voice booms,

AUTOMATED VOICE:

You are now entering the Bowery: Replenishment Room.

Refresh. Engage. Create.

CARSON's voice pops in on the tannoy again.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

And you've made it! Welcome. Let me give you the spiel.

(Reading aloud as if from a pamphlet)

"All of the GGU Department of Experimental Theology's acts of innovation take place in sealable units just like this one, equipped with steel shutters and blast-proof glass, as well as a wide array of snacks and drinks, to allow our students to create even under the most testing of conditions."

Just, uh, reading from the pamphlet.

Hear that, Shrue? If the Lingers parachute into Glottage mid-morning, we won't even have to put our pens down.

SHRUE:

(A little nervous chuckle)

Very helpful, Press Secretary.

CARSON:

(Brightly)

"But The GGU Department of Experimental Theology **also** believes that the best new ideas come out of nature. Which is why each unit comes with its own customisable soundtrack."

A variety of soothing nature sounds begin to play.

CARSON:

(Clicking through the options, excitedly)

Would you care to innovate in the depths of the **lush rainforest**?

Or beside the **magnificent ocean**?

Or perhaps your best ideas come to you on the **dance floor**?

Bad club music begins to play.

SHRUE:

(Politely pretending to be entertained)

Oh! Ha-ha. OK, yeah.

CARSON:

Any requests?

SHRUE:

(Politely)

Not this second, Press Secretary.

Silence for a moment.

CARSON:

Suit yourself.

(Brightly moving on)

And if you look to your left, someone you'll recognise!

Adjudicator Shrue of the North-West, Adjudicator Cross of the True Eastern. Cross there eating...what appears to be a crumpet, it looks like?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(His mouth full)

Cinnamon bun.

SHRUE looks up at ADJUDICATOR CROSS, who is eating from the buffet.

SHRUE:

Uh - hey. Good to see you, Cross.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(His mouth full)

Mm. Shrue.

Silence.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Oh, and Shrue, of course please follow Cross's lead and help yourself to the buffet; we've got raisin cookies, coffee, tea, and isotonic energy drinks.

They've got everything. Really, they do.

We also have a fridgeful of beers, and we'll crack those open from about three, which I know you reprobates will be looking forward to. Although you're off the sauce, aren't you, Cross?

I'm just going to check the cameras, make sure we're all set up in the Imagination Suite. Excuse me, both of you.

The voice clicks out over the tannoy.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS continues to eat the raisin cookie, making appreciative noises as he does so, and ignoring SHRUE.

SHRUE sidles closer to try and have a conversation.

SHRUE:

(Softly)

Hey, uh, Cross-

Not to talk shop, but is the High Adjudicator's office impossible to get through to these days, or is it just me?

I'm trying to get the H.A.'s attendance confirmed for this, this river-god legalisation announcement I'm doing next week.

It's all set in stone at this point, everything's confirmed for the ceremony, we've got the elders coming down to Glottage - and I still haven't heard anything back.

Carson just dives in front of the ball each time. Says the old man's still feeling poorly.

(Growing animated)

And, and, I've been trying to get a postal address so I can send some presents to my family down south, but again, nobody's telling me anything.

Did something happen? I mean - what aren't they telling us?

CROSS does not look up.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Rudely, still eating)

What are you doing?

SHRUE:

What?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

I don't like you, Shrue.

(Taking another bite of his food)

Do you like me?

SHRUE stares at CROSS.

SHRUE:

(Honestly)

Not at all.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Still eating)

So why are you talking to me?

SHRUE:

(Exasperated)

I don't know, man. It's really awkward here.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Still eating)

Well-

(Taking a bite)

-don't. Go and stand over there.

SHRUE hesitates, and then goes to stand over there.

Nearby, the SAINT'S EXEC and the SLAG EXEC are gossiping quietly but excitedly.

Both are senior executives - professional, arch, a little cut-throat behind the pleasantries.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

Honest to gods, it's going to happen. It's inevitable. Marketing are all over it. They think she's stale.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

But that's **ridiculous**. She's your mainstay. Everyone loves her.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

Somebody, somewhere up the chain, is afraid that people don't want that any more.

None of us know why. Maybe they saw a focus group survey that found she was 4% lower favourability than she should be, and, well, what if there's another 4% drop next year?

So the decision's been made. We're giving her a pantheon, and in time we'll phase the Saint herself out.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

Ugh, come on-

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Pitching it)

The Family Electric. So far we've announced the Meter Reader, the Soothing Flame - he's only for premium customers - and Lil Lightbulb, who's going to be the mascot.

But they're going to keep expanding it. They've got a radio serial planned, a kind of family sitcom.

And eventually, they're going to move her out of focus.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

I utterly, entirely loathe it. It's unprovoked commercial suicide.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Scathingly)

Everyone agrees with you. And yet it's happening.

No matter how high you go, there's nothing but panic.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Wryly)

So what I'm **hearing** from you, Melissa, is that the Church Electric is too busy fucking up their own business model to keep us from nationwide grid failures every other day.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Softly exasperated)

For gods' sake, don't. Just don't. I've had enough of that in the office.

A bunch of sparkies halfway across the country get angry, they decide to stage their big Woundtree moment, and suddenly that's my fault.

Suddenly that's a, a leadership failing on **my** part.

But hey - guess what? We've got no budget increase approvals. The share price is plummeting. Everyone's in a panic and nobody wants to act.

So what am I meant to do?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

I heard the offshore wind farms have taken a pounding from the polluted waters, too-

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

We'll lose them in a year, Brand. Guarantee it.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

Oh, **really**-

SHRUE tries to join the conversation. Everyone is speaking in hushed tones to avoid being overheard by CARSON.

SHRUE:

(Like a shy kid joining a playgroup)

Hey. Hey, how you both doing?

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Politely)

Adjudicator. Nice to see you.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Introducing himself)

Adjudicator, good morning to you. Julius Brand, from the Slag Court.
National VP of Sales.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

And I'm Melissa Dalton, Regional Head for North, North-Western, and
West, Church Electric.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Joking)

She's the one you need to be yelling at about all the blackouts.

SHRUE:

(Chuckling nervously)

Good to meet you both.

You know, I haven't been to anything like this before, and maybe it's just
me, but it all just feels really fucking weird so far, with Carson piping
himself in over the-

A GONG rings out. CARSON's voice rings out over the tannoy.

CARSON:

(Tannoy, grandly)

Delegates, if you wouldn't mind.

The Innovation Summit is about to begin, and the Imagination Suite is
ready.

Please; set your brains to greatness, grab an isotonic energy drink and a
biccie, and make for the mezzanine floor.

IMAGINATION SUITE, INT, DAY

A central workshopping room. More relaxing nature sounds are being piped in.

*In the corner of the room, secured to a chair, is the IDEAS CONDUIT, a hallowed human being
who faintly gurgles and gasps in pain throughout the conversation.*

As the door swings open, the workshop participants enter one by one.

*For this segment, we'd really like it to feel like an actual brainstorming session, with the
characters overlapping and interrupting each other to try and be heard, so actors should feel
free to do a little improv and add in some ums, ahs, and repetitions, etc.*

During the course of the scene, CROSS, MELISSA, and BRAND will all be unknowingly dosing themselves with a drink - we'll hear them occasionally opening the cans of it - that makes them calm and mellow.

It shouldn't be too noticeable at this point, but VAs are welcome to lose a slight edge in their voice and become more amenable even as the bickering escalates.

AUTOMATED VOICE:

You are entering the Imagination Suite.

Engage. Achieve. Inspire.

CARSON continues to speak over the tannoy.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

OK, welcome, welcome!

Please - take your egg-chairs. Choose whichever chair speaks to you. Sit however you'd like.

Everyone begins to settle.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Taking his seat)

Ahhh, very comfy.

CARSON:

(Cheerily)

Nothing but the best for our innovators.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Curiously, looking around)

Where precisely **are** you, Carson? Not that I don't enjoy the sound of your disembodied voice, of course.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, lying)

I'm back at my office in the Moridame. The government never sleeps, and these days it rarely takes a shower.

Believe me, I'd much rather be down there with all of you in person, but I'll be moderating the summit remotely instead.

(Getting to the point)

Now. Our task today is...historic, delegates.

If you want to get really grandiose about it, it could, honestly and actually, be essential to the future of our civilisation.

This summit has been charged with finding a workable solution to the problem of anti-sacrificial sentiment that's spreading rapidly across the Peninsula and beyond.

Protests. Outrage. Distrust. We've never been more divided.

And all the while, a violent cult of anti-sacrificial renegades stirs up trouble in our schools and in our workplaces.

It's a huge, huge, cross-societal challenge.

And naturally, it's a lot harder right now in wartime, when there's so much strain on all of us to maintain our current rate of economic growth and industrial output.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Not very quietly)

Good job there's not going to be a war on for much longer, isn't it?

CARSON ignores this.

CARSON:

(Still presenting)

And so the public is hungrily looking to its government, to its business leaders, to come up with some answers.

The old methods - they haven't worked.

People are tired of the same stale old stuff from us. Sustainability quotas! Humane hallowing procedures! It's no longer enough, it's a line too often repeated.

But who better to come up with something truly original, truly new, than the people in this room, mm?

Some of the finest minds, the greatest leaders, that our country has to offer.

Just look around at each other for a moment, OK? Take in those noble faces and wise, farsighted expressions.

We have Adjudicator Cross, from the True Eastern district. One of our finest politicians, one of our most respected public voices.

(Teasing)

At least until he gets a couple of bevvies in him - isn't that right, Cross?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Smarmily self-deprecating)

Guilty, Press Secretary.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

We have Brand and Melissa, our captains of industry, representing international commerce.

The SAINT'S EXEC and SLAG EXEC both make 'hi' and 'hey' sounds.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

And, of course, we have Adjudicator Shrue. Our firebrand, our ethical-sacrifice activist.

A slightly unpleasant silence.

SHRUE:

(Nervously)

Ready to do my part.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Gesturing to the IDEAS CONDUIT)

And, er - Carson, Carson. What's going on with the boy in the chair?

IDEAS CONDUIT:

(Throatily, in horrible pain)

Placebos in the drinking water.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

So, yes. Timothy here is an undergrad, kindly volunteered by the University. He's going to be our Ideas Conduit for the day.

He'll generate raw creative prompts for us, direct from the mouth of the Maw Enthusiasm - the Peninsula's finest homegrown god of inspiration.

Like I said - anything Nesh can do, we can do better.

If you'd like an additional prompt, just ask him.
(Calling out, as if the IDEAS CONDUIT is Alexa)
 PROMPT, Timothy.

The IDEAS CONDUIT screams and convulses.

IDEAS CONDUIT:
(Screaming grotesquely)
Opt-out hallowing for the over-16s.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
 He's well-secured, don't fret.
(Brightly)
 Now, delegates, today's summit has four rules. Just four. No more than that, and we're going to keep things loosey-goosey. Because after all, genius doesn't come from red tape and regulation, now, does it?

And these rules aren't anything new - as a matter of fact, I'm hoping they're all very pleasantly familiar to anyone who's innovated before.

One, no criticism of other innovators' ideas. Two, build on the ideas of other innovators.

Three, wild and exaggerated ideas are to be encouraged.

SHRUE:
(Asking it honestly)
 How - Carson, how are we supposed to know which ideas are sincere and which are exaggerated?

CARSON:
(Brightly ignoring SHRUE)
 Four. Generate as many ideas as possible. And I'll come back to that one.

Now, a few fun extra twists that might not be so familiar!

First. In the centre of the floor, you'll see the Interruption Cactus.

Because we don't want criticisms in the Imagination Suite, we want you to be careful and gentle when speaking out of turn - like you're handling a cactus!

So if you want to make an interruption, just raise your hand and ask for the Interruption Cactus.

SHRUE:

(Quietly, to CROSS)

Isn't that a fifth rule, though?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Quietly)

Stop talking to me.

CARSON continues.

CARSON:

Now. When you realise an idea, go ahead and grab one of our gorgeous illustrated postcards, write it down, and pin it to the Wall of Illumination.

We can take as many breaks as we like, we can go for a wander and a ponder, and if you give me an idea I really like, you are encouraged to grab yourself a snack or isotonic drink as a reward.

Are there any questions before we begin?

BRAND, SLAG EXEC:

(Raising a hand)

Press Secretary. What happens at the end of the summit? Who are we presenting these ideas to?

CARSON:

(Brightly)

Great question, and we'll get to that at the end. I promise you.

Now - to get your neurons firing, we're going to start with a couple of short videos.

This first one is a targeted ad campaign that Adjudicator Cross' people have been testing in True East, aimed at seniors - because we all know nothing happens without the senior vote, don't we?

Starring one of the Peninsula's finest creative talents, director Leonard Trunce.

The projector begins to roll.

Old-timey music begins to play, and we hear an old-timey voice.

LEONARD TRUNCE:

(Slow, sonorous and gentle)

You know these days, it feels like everything's a lot more complicated than it used to be?

When I was young and living out on the farm out east, my daddy taught me a few simple truths.

You kept your gods well-fed, and your gods bestowed their grace upon you in turn.

A fair and equal process. A natural cycle. A community.

We didn't need more than that.

These days, some folks want to take all of that to pieces. They say we shouldn't be feeding gods at all.

Maybe we're more high and mighty than they are. Maybe we don't need to show respect.

Maybe we don't need to make any sacrifices to make things right.

Everyone just seems angry all the time; nobody's willing to step up and do the right thing.

Military enlistment is at near an all-time low - in wartime, too! - and draft-dodging's as high as it's ever been.

Well, I don't know what my daddy would've said about all that. Think he'd have seen it as a little bit selfish.

I know I've been lucky. I've had a good, long life.

I've seen good folks give themselves up to feed our harvests and keep our oil rigs whirring, and I've been the one who's left behind to keep things ticking along.

And now things are getting harder, and our gods are going hungry - and my daddy taught me that when times are tough, all of us need to pull together.

That's why I've signed the Promise of the Unsung Heroes.

The Promise states that at a time of the government's choosing, they are entitled to my body and my spirit to be given over to a licenced god of their choosing.

Seems fair, given the luck I've had - and besides, that's a Promise I'm more than willing to make for my country.

(Chuckling lightly)

Heck, it even comes with its own medal and complimentary display case, too.

C'mon, folks. Let's pull together now, and show these kids how it's done.

The film ends.

The room considers it.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
How's it testing?

CARSON:
(Ceding the floor to CROSS)
Adjudicator?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:
We, um, we trialled it in eight retirement homes across True Eastern.

It saw a 59% approval rating and a 4% sign-up rate, which we were fairly chuffed with.

These are people who don't go out much, and they do listen to the radio a lot, so they're very invested in the outcome of the war.

Our challenge, I suppose, is - they're not top-quality product, these old folks. Lot of faiths want 'em young, after all.

And they're often less mobile, too - so, naturally, pricier to transport them across the country to places of worship.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

OK, so we have a quality problem. And maybe that's something we can build on, hm?

Can anyone build on this idea to meet the Adjudicator's challenge?

Silence.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Raising his hand)

We could create a sacrificial annex in the retirement homes.

Ground floor only. They'll have the stretchers already in the homes, so we can just roll them right on through.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Ooh. Brilliant stuff, Brand, we absolutely love it. Please go ahead and write it down on our first postcard, then grab yourself a treat. What design would you like?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

Ducks in a pond, please.

BRAND goes to pin up his postcard.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, excitedly)

Ducks in a pond! Delightful.

OK. Let's take a look at another pitch. From the old to the young. This one's more targeted towards a 20-something audience.

Another video starts to play.

This one has a young woman speaking. Uplifting music is playing. This one should remind us of punchy sports ads cynically profiting off 'inspirational' personal stories.

VIDEO:

My whole life, I was told I couldn't do things.

(In spiteful, bullying tones)

"You'll never go to university - don't even bother applying."

"You'll never learn to box - you're only a girl."

"Don't speak up; don't let your voice be heard; don't be too loud, don't take up too much space, don't be yourself."

Now they tell me,
(In spiteful, bullying tones)
 "Don't be a sacrifice."

Well - what do they know?

I'll show them just what I can do.

The VIDEO ends.

A less enthusiastic silence.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy, like he's sharing an interesting fact)
 The girl in the ad actually **was** sacrificed, too, which is important for authenticity.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
(Raising a hand)
 Carson, it's great content, but, uh-
(Trying to find the words)
 Gah! Just trying to find a way to avoid criticism!

CARSON:
(Encouraging)
 Hard, isn't it? Really makes you stop and think.

Ooh, and take the Interruption Cactus, of course.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
(Taking the cactus)
 Thanks.
(Thinking aloud)
 We...look, we can spend all the money we like on advertising, but that's not going to stop the problem at its source.

I think we should be looking for ways to defang the Woundtree.
 Repurpose it. Patent it. Redirect it to a more appropriate goal.

A weapon in our hands is out of our enemies' grasp, after all.

At the Church Electric, we've actually been studying the prayer-marks - um, I'm sharing this in confidence. We think we can find a legitimate use for it.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
Repurpose it how?

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
(Simply)
Corporate and high-end security.

The sacrifice is placed in a special cage during long periods of absence. An intruder tries to enter, trips an alarm - an electrical current instantly kills the sacrifice, which then activates via the Woundtree to kill the intruder.

Suddenly this isn't a god that makes business owners fear for their livelihoods - it's a god that helps keep all of us safe.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
OK. So, yeah - a rebranding, fresh patents, copyright enforcement. I like it. I really like it.

Grab a postcard and a snack, please, Melissa.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
So hold on. How long are you keeping the sacrifice in this, uh-

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
Oh, as long as need be. We can supply them with a drip, a suitable low-motion diet that could keep them alive and well for-

SHRUE:
(Blurring it angrily out)
That's - **that's insanely illegal**, according to Peninsulan and international law.

I know the Church Electric is already aware of that.

A sacrifice cannot be suspended in a **state of imminent sacrifice** for any longer than 48 hours-

SHRUE stops talking. The room has fallen angrily silent.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, brightly)

Would you like the Interruption Cactus, Adjudicator Shrue?

SHRUE:

(Guiltily)

What? Oh. Uh, no. I'm sorry.

Silence. Everyone is staring at SHRUE.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

No criticisms, I'll just remind everybody again.

SHRUE:

(Getting indignant again)

And that includes when someone is proposing a legitimate atrocity...?

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, unmoved)

No criticisms, period. It's a pretty simple rule.

But perhaps, Shrue, you have an idea of your own that you'd like to share.

SHRUE blanches - then takes a breath and tries to speak honestly.

SHRUE:

(At first hesitantly, but then with quiet passion)

Well, look, I, ah...

The problem we're facing is about a good deal more than just the Woundtree. That's my opinion. And it's certainly about more than throwing ad campaigns at the public until we see the opinion polls shift back in our favour.

If we keep going on as we are, we will run out of bodies. Population collapse is our inevitable end. From there, starving and angry gods. A

world that looks like the polluted lands, abandoned and wild and unlivable.

We will burn ourselves out from the bottom up.

And it's somehow become shrill and gauche to acknowledge all of that.

I, I just listen to these pitches and I feel like we're looking for angles, we're looking for sticking plasters.

It's like we don't have the answers, so instead we're making up stories. Like we always do.

Stories in which the problem's already been solved and we played the hero's part.

And that might be enough for a time, but...what happens when the stories stop working like they used to?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Chuckling with amusement)

Adjudicator Shrue is apparently new to the concept of public relations.

SHRUE:

No, but - this is more than just spin, though. It feels like we're the ones being fooled, you know?

Like we're the ones being eaten.

Like we'll still be trying to land on the most convincing lie even as the building collapses all around us.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(More supportively)

So what's the solution, Shrue?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Lightly chuckling)

I know this, I know this! Adjudicator Shrue's sole and repeated solution is to reduce sacrifices.

They want to starve the gods, wreck the economy. Bleed all of you dry. Make an example of your lot, Melissa.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(As if tutting at someone unreasonable)

We already commit to the annual sustainability pledges.

SHRUE:

(Annoyed)

But you never **meet** the pledges.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Very reasonably)

Well, come on, now, Adjudicator - live and let live here. It's not like we're a luxury product. You saw what happened when the grid went down, for gods' sake.

Do you really want your constituents to go without electricity for weeks or months at a time? How would you explain that to them?

CARSON:

(Chiming in from the tannoy)

It is **so** important to try and understand each other's perspectives. I would definitely ask you all to be mindful of that.

A nasty silence.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(With innocent relish)

I've got an idea, Press Secretary.

I propose we find ourselves a lightning-rod.

Silence.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Go on, Adjudicator Cross.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Preening)

Well, it's simple, really. It's something we've done in the past to great effect, when there was a divisive issue being stirred up by some troublemakers.

We find a spokesperson who's been rather too outspoken on the wrong side of the argument, and we shift the focus entirely onto them.

(Cheerfully picturing the headline)

"Was Adjudicator Shrue breaking impartiality laws when they spoke out in favour of anti-sacrificial reform?"

(As a reassuring aside)

I'm just using you as an example, Shrue.

(Cheerfully picturing the headline)

"Adjudicator Shrue on the defence as impartiality row escalates.."

(As the same reassuring aside)

Again, hm, **just an example.**

(Cheerfully picturing the headline)

"Adjudicator Shrue found guilty and sentenced, after Legislatures impartiality investigation and a full trial."

He does not add the reassurance this time around.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

And then we can go on the offensive with the lightning-rod's fellow travellers:

(Intimidating Paxman/political interviewer voice)

"Oh, so you're an anti-sacrificial activist, aren't you? Well, let me ask you this right off the bat: will you condemn Adjudicator Shrue's alarming and illegal acts?"

SHRUE:

(Shocked and baffled)

What?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Pressing on)

And after a while, people who might have once been swayed are getting exhausted from having to hold too many opinions at once.

(Putting on voices)

"Why is Adjudicator Shrue in the papers so much anyway?"

"Maybe Adjudicator Shrue needs to shut their mouth and then all this fuss and nonsense can go away."

Maybe the lightning-rod dies, with our intervention or without. Maybe they live on in squalor and contempt. But either way, the stink is on the movement, and the movement belongs to them.

Exorcised from the minds of the public.

Silence. Perhaps for a second we might imagine that CROSS has gone too far. Then-

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, warningly)

Adjudicator Cross.

(Impressed)

What postcard design would you like?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Getting up with a grunt to pin the postcard to the wall)

I would like to choose the pug in the birthday hat.

He pins the postcard up.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Smashing. Well, can anyone build on Adjudicator Cross' lightning-rod idea?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Supportively)

Absolutely open to additional ideas.

SHRUE:

(Furiously protesting)

Um.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

You can build on the idea, Adjudicator, but no criticisms, please.

SHRUE:

I mean, I **do** feel, Press Secretary, like the suggestion that I should be defamed and killed is at least tantamount to criticism.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Holding up his hands)

I was just using you as an example, and I said it **politely**-

SHRUE:

(Growing increasingly angry)

OK, Cross. OK. I'm glad you were polite.

But the thing is - how am I meant to respond?

What is the value of politeness when politeness is...a a big fucking boulder you're using to hide behind while you fling liquid shit at me?

Should I be grateful for receiving a decorous and well-behaved stabbing from you?

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, keeping the peace)

Delegates. Delegates.

We can always be respectful towards one another. We can always disagree without being unkind.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Sulkily)

Shrue wasn't even holding the cactus, so-

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Intervening)

I do just want to say, you know, that we've all been rather down on the Adjudicator, but I respect their take on things, and I do believe they are an important part of the multi-lineal approach we're trying to establish here.

SHRUE:

(Annoyed)

This isn't a take, Melissa. I'm not trying to be a part of anything.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Soothingly)

Well, no, because it **is** important. That's what I said.

Part of the solution is that we need to show the world that sacrifice can be soft. It can be sustainable, and humane, and it can be kind. So yes, I agree with Shrue, absolutely.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, approvingly)

"Soft sacrifice." Very good. Shrue, do you want to pick a postcard?

I think the daffodils look nice.

SHRUE:

(Protesting)

That's not - that wasn't my idea.

I never actually got a chance to share my idea before everyone talked over me.

Silence.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, with less patience than before)

OK, well...Shrue, this is your opportunity.

What proposals would you like to share with the group? How would you solve the rise in anti-sacrificial sentiment?

Everyone is watching SHRUE, who takes a breath.

SHRUE:

Like I said before. What happens when our stories stop working for us?

What happens when the words are no longer enough?

And I think the longer I sit here, with respect to my fellow delegates, the more strongly I feel the immense inadequacy of our response. The smallness of us.

We are not prepared for the moment that's already upon us. We are most certainly unprepared for what comes after.

We are drinking premium coffee and sitting in glass-paneled rooms discussing ad campaigns while the Lingers bomb us.

While outside, our people protest and riot against the scale of sacrifice, the scale of cruelty, that we have allowed to go on escalating beyond the point of no return. While the polluted lands spread from the west.

(Almost with furious wonder)

How can we even be sitting here? How can we be talking and smiling when we should be rending our clothes and ripping out our hair and screaming aloud to the sky about the doom that's upon us, the doom that we invited in upon ourselves?

That's honestly what horrifies me, more than anything else - the very real possibility that our circumstances are too dire for us to ever admit to them.

What if there is no breaking point for us?

What if we continue to distract ourselves and amuse ourselves and hunt for cynical little angles to give us the upper hand over one another, even as the shadow of our final devastation grows and darkens over us all?

So this is my proposal. And yes, it's the only solution, Cross.

(As if it's a big deal)

An immediate 30% reduction in industrial-scale sacrifice across the board for businesses, with the intention to hit 50% by the end of the year. No special exemptions, no special cases.

We show the world that we're willing to take immediate action-

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Overlapping, chuckling)

Absolute blasphemy. Heavens. Absolute blasphemy!

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(Overlapping, also chuckling in a patronising way)

That's very easy - that's very easy for someone to say from the outside.

I'd call that a glib suggestion, Adjudicator. And one that could only come from somebody who does not know our business, who does not know our margins-

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Overlapping)

And what exactly happens, I wonder, when the Church Electric, or the Slag Court, decide that they'd be better off taking their business elsewhere? What does that leave us with, precisely? I mean, really, come on.

SHRUE:

(Protesting to the teacher)

Press Secretary, I'm - I'm clearly receiving criticism, which is against the rules of the summit.

Silence for a moment.

CARSON:

(Calm but with a warning note in his voice.)

Shrue.

Is there a different idea you'd like to share with us?

SHRUE stares for a moment - and then protests.

SHRUE:

(Firmly)

No. I want to put my idea on a postcard, and I want it on the wall.

I'd like the postcard with the red footbridge, please.

Silence.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, increasingly firm and serious)

Share another idea with the group, Adjudicator Shrue. Then you can take your postcard and help yourself to an energy drink.

SHRUE:

I don't want an energy drink.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, with a menace that makes us think the sentence will end differently)

Shrue, if you refuse to share another idea with the group, you're going to regret that decision when everyone else is enjoying a cold three-o'clock beer.

SHRUE:

I can live with that. The red footbridge.

Silence. This is a tense stand-off.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, with cheerful cruelty)

Well, maybe you just need a little inspiration.

Timothy, PROMPT.

The IDEAS CONDUIT shrieks in momentary pain and chokes out,

IDEAS CONDUIT:

(In pain)

Lab-grown sacrifices, hand-reared.

SHRUE:

Stop it.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
 Prompt, Timothy.

IDEAS CONDUIT:
(In pain)
Tax - tax incentives for large families-

SHRUE:
 I said, stop it-

CARSON:
 Prompt again.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:
(Clapping cheerfully along)
 Prompt, prompt, prompt!

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
(Amused)
 Ooh, I liked that one-

IDEAS CONDUIT:
(Choking it out)
Partial sacrifice, payment per limb-

SHRUE:
(Yelling furiously)
 I said, stop, you son of a bitch! Stop! Stop! STOP!

It's loud and angry enough that everyone does, in fact, stop.

A long, hostile silence.

Then-

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy, cheerfully)
 Why don't we take a five-minute bathroom break, everybody?

BATHROOM, INT, DAY

SHRUE angrily enters the bathroom, banging the door behind them.

AUTOMATED VOICE:

(Above)

You are now entering the bathroom.

Expurge. Cleanse. Revive.

SHRUE:

(Yelling)

Oh, shut up!

SHRUE enters the stall, locks the door, and sits on the toilet.

They exhale, slowly - and then yell aloud in anger and frustration.

A moment later, we hear the bathroom door beside them crack open.

The SLAG EXECUTIVE has also entered.

He sniffs and examines himself in front of the mirror.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Calmly, casually)

Doing all right in there?

SHRUE takes a breath.

SHRUE:

(Sourly)

Having the time of my life, thank you very much.

Silence from beyond the stall door.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Calmly)

I agreed with what you were saying back there, you know.

SHRUE takes this in.

SHRUE:

(Accusatory)

You didn't say anything.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

(Just as calmly)

No, obviously not.

You want a drink?

SHRUE:

(Drily, mockingly)

Is it isotonic?

Something rolls unevenly under the stall - a hip-flask.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

Whiskey in the flask. The final consolation of ill-advised truth-tellers everywhere.

SHRUE picks it up, uncorks it, and takes a swig.

Next to them, the SLAG EXECUTIVE wanders into the next stall. If it isn't too audibly disgusting, we might hear the SLAG EXECUTIVE taking a whiz during their speech.

SHRUE:

Thanks.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:

You're welcome.

(Chattily)

You know, at my place of work - at the Slag King's court - I used to think we were the only genuine pragmatists out there, the only truly reasonable people.

We may drown a couple of poor bastards in the concrete foundations, and, yes, we all agree that their sacrifice will keep the building good and stable for centuries to come...

...but we still hire architects, don't we? We still hire engineers. We don't mistake the framework for the product.

The god is a reassurance, a comfort. It doesn't get in the way of the hard facts.

But even for us, just like you said - it's all become angles these days, it's all become ideological apparatus. Share price can't survive without it.

(Chattily)

We're about to introduce a new deluxe earthquake-safety service, did you know?

One sacrifice-in-cement for every floor, package deal for towers over ten floors.

If we were **honest** with ourselves, we might admit it; we don't know what useful purpose the damn ritual or the damned god are serving for our customers, and the more we feed it, the more harm it does...

...but we don't know how to stop.

The superstructure's swallowed up the base. The noumenon's gone walkabout.

(As an amused aside)

They're always telling me I can't be saying things like that around the office.

Today is good practice for me - learning to be a little more diplomatic, a little more mellow about the things I can't possibly change.

The board's come to see me as something of a troublemaker.

(Teasingly)

Diplomacy...not a skill you ever mastered either, mm?

SHRUE:

(Sourly, taking another swig)

I used to be better at it.

BRAND, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:

(To the mirror, lightly and absent-mindedly, as if squeezing a zit or plucking a hair)

You're right, though. We **are** running out of stories, but we don't know how to give 'em up.

We're all going to die screaming that we're not really dying, and that we're not really screaming.

I didn't even want to be here today. I think somebody at the office has it out for me.

Silence.

SHRUE:

Brand.

BRAND, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE:
Mm?

SHRUE:
What...what are your people saying about the High Adjudicator?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
(Deeply amused)
You're **joking**, Shrue. You haven't heard?

SHRUE:
Heard what?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
Any of it.

SHRUE:
I mean...rumours.

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
It's **exactly** as vulgar, obvious and stupid as the very worst of the rumours.

SHRUE:
(Fascinated despite themselves)
So it was a pleasure-god?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
(Gossiping cheerfully)
A banned and entirely illegal pleasure-god. The Come-Hither-Come-Hence, it's called. Apparently he's been worshipping it for a while in secret, got addicted to it.

He was redirecting truckloads of sacrifices away from the initial draft, and he was sending them to his country estate in South-Eastern.

He'd been attempting to hallow them, if you'll believe me, into a grand sex-saint; a mingled mass of orifices, appendages, textures, and vibrations.

Apparently the third effort was all too successful.

He's been in a coma for the past month.

SHRUE reflects on this.

SHRUE:
So who's in charge?

Who's...who's leading the war effort?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
(*Shrugging*)
Carson, maybe. Some halfwit general? Maybe no-one.

I'm sorry to say it, but that's your problem rather than ours.
(*Examining his reflection with a sigh*)
All right. Better get out back there.

Good luck, Shrue. Keep on fighting for the rest of us.

We hear the stall open up.

We hear the SLAG EXECUTIVE walk to the mirror, turn the taps on, and begin washing their hands.

And then suddenly we hear the mirror CRACK.

SHRUE:
...Brand?

BRAND, SLAG EXECUTIVE:
(*Faintly, focused on the mirror*)
Funny. There's something on my face.

Something on my face.

It looks like-

It looks like-

Silence for a moment.

And then we hear the SLAG EXEC gasp, in surprise rather than in horror,, and then a sound like their flesh being peeled away.

The MIRROR-ANGEL has burst through their reflection and swallowed them up.

SHRUE yells out in horror and shock - and freezes, breathing hard.

Then sudden, heavy, crystalline footsteps on the floor. The bathroom door pushes open at the far end of the room, and something leaves. (The AUTOMATED VOICE goes off.)

A long silence.

SHRUE slowly pushes their own stall door open.

THE BOWERY, INT, DAY

SHRUE dashes out through the lobby, frantically tries the lift.

AUTOMATED VOICE:
Lift disengaged.

Return. Revert. Circle back around.

SHRUE:
(Panicking)
Come on! Open! Open!

It doesn't open.

SHRUE runs to the other side of the lobby - with an 'ah!' gasp of panicked relief, spots a fire-extinguisher on the wall.

SHRUE:
(Muttering frantically as they read the sign)
'Break in case of emergency', yeah, I'll break in case of emergency-

SHRUE shatters the glass and grabs the fire-extinguisher.

IMAGINATION SUITE, INT, DAY

The summit is back in full flow. CROSS is telling an anecdote. Both MELISSA and CROSS are eating and drinking.

From this point onwards we will only repurpose earlier voice clips from the SLAG EXECUTIVE.

CROSS and MELISSA will also sound jovial and calm, reacting to everything with artificially-induced mellow amusement - the drink's kicked in fully.

We hear the muffled sound of running footsteps, and SHRUE shouting in the distance,

SHRUE:

(Yelling furiously)

We need to get out of here! We need to get out now!

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Animated and cheerful)

Gods, these buns are dreadful, but I just can't stop eating 'em.

So, um, I said to this woman, 'Ma'am, you're telling me **my** policy proposals are antiquated and full of holes - well, what about that cardigan you've got on?' And she blushed bright beetroot red-

(Curious, amused)

-good gods, is, is Shrue running around with a **fire-extinguisher?**

-SHRUE bursts back into the room.

SHRUE:

(Furious and frantic)

There's something in here with us. We need to get out.

(Not getting a reaction)

I'm not joking! I'm not joking!

There's a fucking angel in the Bowery, it...it must have got loose. They've sealed the exits, we're locked in here with it.

It - it took Brand, in the bathroom I-

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, interrupting)

Um. Brand's right **here**, Adjudicator. He came back right before you did.

MIRROR-BRAND:

(Reused audio)

You're right, of course.

MELISSA and CROSS both chuckle lightly.

SHRUE takes a step backwards.

SHRUE:

(Having a horrible realisation)

That - that isn't Brand.

Cross, get away from him - that isn't Brand.

Brand's dead.

MIRROR-BRAND:

(Reused audio)

But that's ridiculous.

MELISSA:

(Chuckling)

It is quite silly, actually-

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, cheerfully condescending)

OK. OK, let's calm things down. I've got a funny feeling that our friend Adjudicator Shrue might be a little bit hungry, and that's why they've been acting out.

Adjudicator, please help yourself to a raisin cookie and an isotonic drink.

Get your head right, and then we can get right back to work.

MIRROR-BRAND:

(Faintly, reused audio)

Funny.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

It **is** amusing, isn't it, Brand?

Folks, could we please take our seats again? We've got a lot to get through, and I-

SHRUE:

(Furiously)

I'm telling you, that's not Brand! It's not-

Look!

SHRUE takes a step forward, and swings the extinguisher at MIRROR-BRAND. It connects. A slow, splintering noise-

MIRROR-BRAND:
(Reused audio)
 ...there's something on my face.

-and MIRROR-BRAND explodes into a sea of glass shards, scattering across the floor.

SHRUE gasps out in horror.

Pure silence for a moment.

MELISSA:
(Lightly, calmly)
 Well, will you look at that? Brand was made out of glass.

CROSS:
(Lightly, calmly)
 Oh! How absolutely fascinating.

SHRUE:
(In shock, but also incredibly frustrated)
 What are you...what are you talking about? What's the matter with you?

And then, all around them, we hear a curious noise.

The glass walls of the Imagination Suite are shaking faintly as the MIRROR-ANGEL passes through them, circling like a shark.

It sounds like a dark electrical current, a shiver of energy and power.

SHRUE:
(Slowly realising)
 It's...gone back into the glass. It's hiding in the glass.

Everyone, we need to...we need to...

CARSON interrupts.

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy, cheerfully)
 Uh, Melissa? Sorry to interrupt. You've got a little cookie crumb on your spectacles.

MELISSA takes off her glasses.

MELISSA, SAINT'S EXECUTIVE
(Lightly curious)
 Oh, would you look at that! Looks like-
 -looks like-

SHRUE:
(Realising what's about to happen)
 No, Melissa-

Once more, we hear a horrible fleshy sound as the MIRROR-ANGEL bursts out of the glasses and drags MELISSA back in.

The glasses rattle faintly as they drop to the ground.

SHRUE cries out. CROSS just makes a 'hm!' sound.

SHRUE:
(Furiously panicking, looking about)
 Fuck! Where did - where did it go?

Cross? Damn it, Cross, it took her! Did you see it? Where did it go?

And MIRROR-MELISSA instantly reforms, appearing behind SHRUE.

MIRROR-MELISSA:
(Reused audio)
 Live and let live, Adjudicator-

SHRUE yells out, turns and swings the axe again. MIRROR-MELISSA shatters.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:
(Amiable and unbothered)
 Gods, Shrue, you're just killing everyone, aren't you?

And the sound of the circling MIRROR-ANGEL rises again in the glass.

SHRUE takes a breath - and fingers out what's happening.

SHRUE:
 Cross. Cross, look at your feet.

(Rapidly theorising)

It...it comes out of the glass, and it takes you when you look into your reflection.

That's how it hunts, so just look at your feet, OK?

CROSS looks compliantly at his feet.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Happily, vaguely)

Mm. I like your socks, Shrue.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, approvingly)

Oh, very smart, Shrue - take a postcard, take a cinnamon bun. But....ooh, what's the next move? That's what I'm wondering.

You're in a room with glass walls, in a facility that's filled with glass.

Glass ceilings and glass floors, out in the lobby, too. So that part's going to be interesting.

SHRUE ignores him, still staring at their feet as their breath stills.

SHRUE:

(Through gritted teeth)

Shut the fuck up, Carson-

(To CROSS)

Cross. Cross?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Still fixated on the socks)

Lovely lilac colour. Look very comfy, too.

SHRUE:

(Furiously)

Cross!

We need to get to the exit.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Amiable and reasonable)

Mm. I'm fully onboard with that idea, Shrue, since it appears that you were indeed correct that there's a murderous angel in here with us - it's just that I thought you said the exits were sealed.

SHRUE:
Well, they-

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy, as if giving a hint)
You know what my old mum said separates a victim from a survivor?

A lot of luck and a little inspiration.

Inspiration strikes. SHRUE calls out to the IDEA CONDUIT.

SHRUE:
A little inspiration-
(Firmly)
Timothy. Timothy. We need to find somewhere safe. We need an exit out of the Bowery. Timothy, **Prompt.**

IDEAS CONDUIT:
(Gurgles painfully)
Storage closet.

SHRUE:
What? Timothy, **prompt.**

But the IDEAS CONDUIT just repeats it.

IDEAS CONDUIT:
Storage closet.

SHRUE throws up their hands in frustration.

SHRUE:
OK. Fine. Cross, we're going to keep our eyes on the floor, and we're going to...we're going to find the storage closet.

If we have to cross the lobby to get there, we're both going to need to close our eyes.

Do you understand?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Amicably)

Sure, sure, all makes perfect sense. Should I hold your hand, Shrue?

He reaches out and tries to hold SHRUE's hand.

SHRUE:

(On their last nerve)

No, you can't hold my hand. Piss off, Cross!

Just - come on. Let's move.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Teamwork! Love to see it. Maybe next we can do the thing where you have to build your own raft.

SHRUE:

(Screaming)

Shut up!

Cross! Come on! What is wrong with you?

CROSS:

(Amiably)

All right, all right. There's no need to shout-

They begin to walk, gingerly and slowly, to the exit of the Imagination Suite.

We hear a heavy warning CLICK. The doors don't open.

AUTOMATED VOICE:

The Imagination Suite doors have been locked.

Remain. Endure. Reside.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Amiably)

Door's locked, Shrue.

SHRUE:

(On their last nerve still)

I know it's locked. CARSON, YOU FUCK!

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Problem-solving, Shrue. Can't make it too easy for you.

SHRUE:

Have it your way.

Cross. Stand back. Close your eyes, OK?

Are they closed?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Mildly)

Eyes closed, eyes closed!

SHRUE:

I'm taking down the wall.

SHRUE, their eyes closed, hefts the fire-extinguisher - and swings at the glass wall of the Imagination Suite with a grunt.

It wobbles and cracks, catching SHRUE off-balance.

SHRUE takes a breath and swings again, with a hard grunt.

-and with a great crash, the glass comes falling down.

SHRUE:

All right, come on! Carefully! Mind your step!

They begin to walk forward, eyes closed, through the glass.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Happily)

Crunch, crunch, crunch.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, cheerily)

Destruction therapy. Breaking down walls. Love it. In theory.

But if you **think** about it, Shrue, you're really just creating more reflective surfaces and more dangers, aren't you?

(As a warning)

Cross, your shoelace is untied.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:
(Instantly opening his eyes)
 Oh, is it?

Mm. Looks like it, uh-

CROSS looks down.

SHRUE grabs CROSS and drags him just out of the way in time.

SHRUE:
 No!

-and out of the scattered shards, MELISSA and BRAND reform.

Lots of horrible glass noises; we should feel the size and scale of the thing now.

Their voices - repeating previous lines - echo and reflect strangely now as they begin to stride forward towards SHRUE and CROSS, a single conjoined MIRROR-ANGEL.

SHRUE:
(Yelling)
 Cross! Cross, get back!

Come on, man! What's the matter with you?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:
(Mildly jogging after SHRUE)
 I'm coming, I'm coming, keep your hat on-

They run away down the corridor as the MIRROR-ANGEL pursues them slowly, the glass rattling in its feet as it moves.

STORAGE CLOSET, INT, DAY

The closet door slams. SHRUE, breathing hard and fast, locks it.

Silence.

SHRUE:
(Hissing)

Turn the light off!

We hear the MELISSA/BRAND MIRROR-ANGEL stomp up close to the door, try the handle - shards of glass falling off it as it does so - and then it retreats.

SHRUE waits - and then exhales.

SHRUE:

No glass in here, no mirrors. I...I don't think it can get in.

I don't know how we're going to get **out**, though.

(Realising something)

Are you bleeding, Cross?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Reacting very mildly)

Oh. So I am.

Got a bit of glass jammed in the ol' calf, it looks like.

Doesn't hurt, though. Should I take it out?

SHRUE:

No, no, for gods' sake, leave it in. Let me stabilise it.

SHRUE takes off their suit jacket, tears the sleeve, and begins to wind it around the glass shard to hold it in place.

SHRUE:

You really don't feel anything?

What's happened to you, Cross?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Mildly)

Not really sure. It's a rum do all around.

I - I wonder what's going on. Have you ever been to a summit like this before, Shrue?

SHRUE slides down to the floor. They've figured it out.

SHRUE:

(Acidly)

Well, we weren't brought here for the summit, Cross.

We weren't brought here because they want to hear our solutions.

We're here because we're disposable.

(Counting victims)

Brand, he...he said he'd made enemies at the Slag King's Court.

Melissa, she said they were blaming her for the blackouts back at the Church Electric.

We're sacrifices, Cross. You and I, we're here to be sacrificed.

This is some new war-god, some horrible fucking thing they've concocted to beat the Lingers or the Woundtree, and they've set it loose on us to...to get rid of us.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Calmly)

Mm. Makes sense.

SHRUE:

What? Why are you talking like that?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Shrugging)

I'm agreeing with you, that's all. Makes total sense.

SHRUE stares at CROSS and feels, strangely, a little pity for him.

SHRUE:

No, it doesn't.

Why would they pick you, Cross?

They hate me, but **you** - you never cause them trouble, you never disagree. You always vote the right way. You're their mouthpiece on the radio.

Why would they want you dead?

CROSS considers it.

CROSS:

(Just as mildly, but with a little sadness)

I...I really don't know, Shrue, to be perfectly honest with you.

Maybe it's because I'm pitiful, mm?

Maybe it's because I never do disagree.

Maybe that's why they think they don't need me.

CARSON interrupts.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Actually, Shrue, you're barking up the wrong tree. On more than one count.

And you're really being just a **little** bit too cynical, I think. We didn't bring you here to give you all up to some battle-saint.

('Eh' meaning 'so-so')

Now, Old Man Mirrors - the angel that's been hunting you, it's...**eh**.

A very old god of glass. Been worshipped for five hundred years in some parts of the Peninsula.

Tested for warfare in the past, but ultimately found wanting.

Terrifying for all of you, certainly, in an enclosed space like the Bowery, but of limited use from a strategic perspective.

There's nothing fresh or exciting about it.

No. The real innovation that we've been trialling here today is - well, everyone's been drinking it.

Silence for a moment.

SHRUE:

...what?

The speakers begin to play triumphant drum-roll music.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Proudly introducing a groundbreaking new formula from the Grindingleord's laboratories, and created with the help of Peninsulan government funding: Tranquili-T Seven.

Absolutely packed with antioxidants, electrolytes and essential caffeine, as well as anxiety-suppressing psychotropic supplements and pain inhibitors.

Induces a powerful sense of calm, receptiveness, and peace.

Available in orange or in matcha.

(Grandly)

"Your morning dose of Never-Mind," that's going to be the slogan.

You were the final trial before it goes to market, for commercial use and for consumption by the general population.

Fully active in Cross's bloodstream in just twenty minutes, by my watch. No fear, very little pain.

Because after all, why should a sacrifice need to suffer? Shouldn't it be a **pleasurable** experience, to give yourself up to a god?

And couldn't we all do with a bit of cheering up, at a time like this?

CROSS begins to lightly applaud.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

Oh, that's good! That's jolly good!

SHRUE:

(Shocked and horrified)

What is wrong with you? How could you do this to us?

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Well, Melissa didn't suffer, Adjudicator - and Cross is perfectly happy, aren't you, Cross?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

Peachy, thank you for asking!

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

There we are. A humane solution to the problem of sacrificial suffering. Properly marketed and distributed, I think it'll do a great deal of good.

Now, we'll be sending the footage of the summit back to the Church Electric and the Slag Court as well as the Prison Service and other potential stockists.

Brand and Melissa's people - as you know, two of our nation's biggest employers - were the ones we really needed to convince, and I'd say we've done a stellar job.

So - so no, of course you're not disposable, Shrue.

Matter of fact, today I'd say you're proving more useful than you've ever been. I told you, we're making history here.

(A little tetchily)

And - and as a matter of fact, I wouldn't call either of you sacrifices. Seeing as you've survived this far, I'd be inclined to interpret this more as an abject lesson.

Isn't it, Cross?

(Scolding CROSS)

Because Cross here, you're quite right - he does as he's told. He never speaks out, he always votes the right way.

And yet for - for some reason! - he just can't stop himself from getting blotto down at the local wine bar every night and blabbing about our security council meetings to his hook-ups.

And that's just not the level of professionalism that we expect from our Adjudicators, is it, Cross? That's going to make us all look bad, isn't it?

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Cheerfully)

Guilty as charged, Press Secretary. Very sorry.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy, chastising CROSS)

Don't apologise to me. Apologise to that poor reporter from the Herald. She's the one who really suffered from your errors of judgement, Cross.

Just imagine how she felt. And she didn't have any Tranquili-T Seven, either.

SHRUE just stares.

SHRUE:

(Weakly)

What - what about me, though?

I've...Carson, I've **behaved**. I've done everything you asked me to.

(With soft anger)

I haven't given you any trouble. I didn't deserve this.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Oh, you've been perfectly well behaved, Shrue. I really can't fault you for that.

But we want to **keep** you that way, even if we are, I'm afraid, going to be moving forward on the anti-sacrificial sentiment stuff by making one or two policy decisions that you may not privately agree with.

Decisions that you might otherwise be inclined to speak out against.

So - here's the proposal, and I hope we've shown you today why it's in your best interests to go along with it.

If you get out of here alive, you're going to be the public face of Tranquili-T Seven. Celebrity ambassador for the Grindinglord.

Official endorsements, interviews. Long and impassioned speeches about how this is the product that addresses your deeply-held concerns about ethical sacrifice. Triumph of the free market to address society's woes.

SHRUE:

Why?

CARSON:

(On the tannoy, calmly and casually)

Well, because you're an outspoken voice on a divisive topic, and therefore your support will lend a great deal of legitimacy to the product.

And because if you don't, we'll dose you up with Tranquili-T Seven and then kill your family in front of you.

And you'll feel nothing as you watch them bleed out and die, Shrue. Absolutely nothing, but a mild, chemically-induced sense of approval and the taste of orange zest.

You won't lift a finger to stop it. It won't even occur to you.

(Cheerily)

So. You've seen what we can do. You know what will happen. You've got no excuses.

You'll take the job, Shrue. Won't you?

A long silence.

SHRUE:

(With cold resolve)

Sure.

Yeah, I'll take the job.

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)

Fantastic.

All right, I'll give you a little clue. Just one little clue. And let's see if you can problem-solve your way out.

(Like reciting a riddle)

It's past midday now.

Silence.

ADJUDICATOR CROSS:

(Mildly, giving up)

Ah, I'm no good at riddles.

SHRUE:

There was a scheduled power outage at midday.

(Realising)

He never stopped talking. He **never** stops talking, godsdamn him.

He's not back in Glottage. He-

(To CARSON)

You're here with us in the Bowery, Carson. Aren't you?

CARSON:

(Over the tannoy)
Hee-hee-hee.

SHRUE:
(Thinking fast)
So. So there's another way out.

Timothy said, head to the storage closet for the exit.
(To CARSON)
Carson. Where's the door?

CARSON:
(Over the tannoy)
Opening it for you now. Very smart.

The wards are carved into the threshold, so no need to worry about Old Man Mirrors following you through.

In the back of the closet, a door clicks open-

OBSERVATION ROOM, INT, DAY

-The same door opens in a small observation room.

CARSON is seated, tapping away at a keyboard. He rolls around to face SHRUE and CROSS as they stagger out.

CARSON:
(Delightedly)
You made it out! Drop the balloons, toss the confetti! That might even be a record time-

SHRUE slugs CARSON in the face with the fire extinguisher. (CARSON 'oofs') and falls back against the panel.

SHRUE:
(Screaming into CARSON's face)
We could have died, we could have died!

CARSON:
(Just as cheerfully)
You were perfectly safe, Adjudicator.
(Cracking up as he tells a joke)

I mean, c'mon. What kind of politician can even stand to look themselves in the eye?

(Laughing)

What kind of-

SHRUE screams, and screams, and screams, in pure rage, battering CARSON again and again.

He coughs and chokes weakly as SHRUE hauls him back up.

CARSON:

(Weakly, approvingly)

Get it out of your system...

SHRUE:

(Choking him out)

A fucking **energy drink**? That's your solution? That's the best you had?

We're losing a war, we're losing our land, we're losing our people, all of it's going to shit, and a fucking isotonic, fucking energy drink-

CARSON:

(Being throttled)

Just...calm down, would you?

SHRUE:

You tried to murder us!

CARSON:

(Being throttled)

If you'd just tried the tea, Shrue, you'd be a lot less grumpy about all this-

SHRUE:

I'd be dead!

CARSON:

But less grumpy-

SHRUE hits CARSON again.

CARSON:

(Protesting)

Ow! The difference between a victim and a survivor-

SHRUE:

(Almost throttling him)

A little inspiration and a lot of luck, you told me-

CARSON:

(Feebly)

No, no. It's an escape hatch. That's the only difference.

It's having an escape hatch.

This is...it's a really good thing for both of us, Shrue.

It's the solution.

Stop and think about it.

Lingers have got us on the run. We could lose this war in a matter of weeks, and if that happens, it's the great faiths, the multinationals - **they're** the ones that'll keep us safe.

If I see this deal through, if people accept it, they'll put me on the board at the Grindlord's Temple. Non-exec status, civilian life.

You and I, we'll both be protected, and we'll be taken care of. Doesn't matter if we win or lose the war.

The Daily Grind goes on.

You're welcome.

SHRUE just takes this in for a moment - then draws CARSON close again.

SHRUE:

Who else is in charge, Carson? If the H.A.'s gone, who's left?

Who's the clown letting you get away with this shit and how **do I find them to strangle them?**

CARSON just breathes hard and chuckles softly. He's perhaps audibly missing a tooth if you can manage that, Rhys!

CARSON:

(Cheerfully, uncomprehending)

We're the ones in charge, Shrue.

You and I, maybe even Cross, too, once he sobers up.

The Church Electric, The Slag Court, the great faiths, the Legislatures.

We're the hand on the tiller. We're the ones who'll keep them safe.

What else would there be?

SHRUE lets him drop - CARSON grunts hard.

SHRUE is breathing hard and fast - but with real catharsis. They step over CARSON.

SHRUE:

(Breathless)

You coming, Cross?

CROSS:

(Just as mildly as before)

Oh, jolly good. Yes, yes, why not.

They turn and go.

After them, on the floor, CARSON cheerily calls out his farewell.

He does not feel that he's lost.

CARSON:

(Wildly, still laughing a little hysterically)

Adjudicators! Adjudicators!

Looking forward to CenSec next week! See you then!

SHRUE'S FLAT, INT, DAY

CROSS is dozing on SHRUE's sofa - sleeping off the results of a chemical hangover.

SHRUE quietly approaches him.

SHRUE:

...Cross? You doing OK?

CROSS continues to snore.

SHRUE goes over to the phone and dials again.

They are exhausted, traumatised - but almost elated.

They've decided to take action.

SHRUE:
Me again.

If you're not calling me back because you're angry at me, or because you want a divorce but you're not feeling brave enough to say it yet, then...fine. That's fine.

If you're not calling me back because something's happened to you, if they're holding you somewhere or they've harmed you or the girls, I will find out where they're holding you and I'll get you back, and if I can't get you back, I'll...

(Simply, softly)

I'll get satisfaction out of them - some kind of reckoning, a fury and a fire they won't ever forget.

I've found my breaking point, and it was you.

(The thought occurring to them)

And if you're not calling me back because you don't exist, because they made you up just so they could hold you over me, then...

(Taking a breath; tightly)

...well, then, the satisfaction? That'll be for me.

SHRUE hangs up.

END OF EPISODE.