

JUNO STEEL AND THE TRAIN FROM NOWHERE (PART ONE)

CONCIERGE:

Ah, good evening, traveler. Welcome to the Penumbra.

Detective Steel's been known to keep odd company, but even by his standards his guest this week is unexpected. On this job he's agreed to work with Peter Nureyev, the master thief who's betrayed him once in the past, and about whom detective Steel holds very, let us say, volatile feelings.

But our detective has no choice, I'm afraid. There's an even more dangerous criminal on the prowl, a woman with her eye on a very special train, and the ancient weapon that lies within it.

SOUND: KNOCKING. A BELL RINGING.

CONCIERGE:

What luck! It sounds like he's in. Come, traveler. Come with me into room J16: Juno Steel and the Train from Nowhere.

SOUND: ALL SOUNDS FADE.

SOUND: WINDS.

JUNO:

We don't have time for this, Nureyev.

NUREYEV:

Hm.

JUNO:

You said yourself we're under the gun. As soon as your boss finds out what we're up to, we're sunk.

NUREYEV:

Correct.

JUNO:

Mind explaining why we've been parked in the desert for half an hour, then?

NUREYEV:

We're early.

JUNO:

Early for what? Ahh, I should've known better.

NUREYEV:

Than?

JUNO:

To trust you. Walking into the same trap twice...
I wouldn't be here if I had any other options. You get me?

NUREYEV:

Oh, I get you, Juno.

JUNO:

That's what scares me. How about telling me about that thing you just put in the sand over there, then? You starting a little garden out here or something?

NUREYEV:

Well, telling you that would ruin the surprise, wouldn't it?

JUNO:

Surprise? Oh, no. Not this time. I've had all the surprises I'm willing to take from you. You think you can show up in my apartment in the middle of the goddamn night and expect me to follow along behind you like nothing happened? I don't think so. You might've gotten your hooks in me once, Nureyev, but if you're gonna pull this again you can take your "surprise" and shove it right up your--

SOUND: A TRAIN GOING BY, ECHOES FOR A TIME.

... Whoa.

NUREYEV:

Whoa indeed.

JUNO:

What the hell was that? It went by so fast.. it was like the sky just.. blinked.

NUREYEV:

That, my dear Detective, was a train; and you and I are going to catch it.

SOUND: MUSIC.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

The Martian desert is a cold, lonely place. You can look around for miles in every direction and never see a human footprint - never see a single sign that anyone has ever lived on this dusty rock.

My name's Juno Steel. I'm a Private Eye, which means people and the footprints they leave are my element. Places like this, empty for miles around... they give me the creeps.

NUREYEV:

I do apologize for the theatricality, Juno, but you have to admit, the Utgard Express delivers quite a show.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

He wasn't reassuring me any. Peter Nureyev was his name - one of them, anyway. Back when we met he'd gone by Rex Glass, and within two days he'd stolen a lot of junk from me. A key, a mask, a kiss, and...

Eh, forget it. Not this time. I wasn't gonna fall for it this time.

NUREYEV:

As I think you've guessed, the recent thefts of Ancient Martian artifacts can all be traced back to one individual. She wants what's on that train, and she's paid me to procure it for her - but I am of the opinion that we're all better off if she never receives it. We must board that train, take the artifact, and destroy it - all before she realizes I've left her employ.

JUNO:

How long do we have?

NUREYEV:

Oh, until tomorrow, at least.

JUNO:

So we plan and execute the heist of the century in one day. Sure, alright. I didn't have any plans.

NUREYEV:

The train runs on a very specific cycle. I know that it slows down once a week, and that is our only opportunity to board it... but why it slows and how we are to approach it even then, I'm uncertain.

JUNO:

So if we don't board it tomorrow, we'll have to wait a week, and by then your employer will be onto us. Got it. Who is she, anyway?

NUREYEV:

You wouldn't have heard of her.

JUNO:

Try me.

NUREYEV:

Her name is... Miasma. She has no history in crime before these thefts, and those only began four years ago. She's really an accomplished-

JUNO:

Xenoanthropologist. Taught at Olympus U for fifty years; three lifetime achievement awards for her studies on Ancient Martian culture.

NUREYEV:

I see you've done your homework.

JUNO:

Did some research on the Ancient Martians when I got into this mess. You tend to notice a name when it's on half the articles you read. Big name in a small field, it seems like. When I saw she'd stopped publishing I assumed she was dead, but I guess she picked up a few new hobbies.

NUREYEV:

I hear theft and murder are very popular these days. The new golf, they say.

JUNO:

So what's she want on the Utgard Express so badly? If this artifact is that important, wouldn't they keep it in a vault or something?

NUREYEV:

The Utgard Express is a vault -- the single most

secure vault on Mars. The honest fact is that with enough time and planning there isn't a vault in the galaxy that a master thief can't enter, which raises a challenge: how to keep the thief from ever getting to it in the first place.

JUNO:

So they put the lockbox on a train and shoot it across Mars at a thousand miles an hour.

NUREYEV:

Indeed. Inside that vault are some of the most precious items Mars has ever seen. The most dangerous, too.

JUNO:

Dangerous?

NUREYEV:

We're not contending with Martian clothing or furniture anymore, not the junk left out on the curbside of history.

A weapon, Detective. The weapon. I know very little about it other than the fact that it was the last weapon the Martians ever made... before they disappeared.

JUNO:

The weapon that killed off the Martians... and Miasma wants it. The hell could she want a thing like that for?

NUREYEV:

Weapons with that much destructive force are good for one thing only: power. It may masquerade as something else -- money or politics or ideals - but power of that scope only seems justified if it rests in your hands.

JUNO:

Power, maybe. But that doesn't answer the rest of it... the mask, the key, the throne, the pill...

NUREYEV:

(CHUCKLE)

JUNO:

What?

NUREYEV:

It's just nice to see you gathering clues again. We make an excellent team, I think.

JUNO:

(CLEARS THROAT)

That's all a fun story, Nureyev. But how do I know any of it's true?

NUREYEV:

Oh, you can't.

JUNO:

Seriously? That's it?

NUREYEV:

There's no point in dancing around it. I'm your only source; in my industry one is more likely to destroy evidence than to keep it on hand. You'll just have to trust me.

JUNO:

Trust you? That's a good one.

NUREYEV:

It's not so difficult. As far as you've seen, I act solely in my own self-interest. Your only choice is to take my word that working with you is my interest.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I couldn't tell if he was leaning in or if my tight little car had finally gotten the best of me, but that smell... suddenly I was wrapped up in the smell of his cologne all over again, a smell like the spices of some faraway planet. He had that same smirk on, too, like he'd just thought of some private joke he didn't feel the need to share.

Damn it, Steel. Not again. Not this time.

NUREYEV:

Regardless, we've bigger business to deal with at present - and not much time in which to do it. Tell me, Detective: do you like to gamble?

JUNO:

I got in the car with you, didn't I?

NUREYEV:

(LAUGH)

Well, I hope you're willing to push the stakes higher than that. We're headed to the Oasis Casino Resort - my treat.

SOUND: ALL SOUNDS FADE.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

By the time we pulled into the Oasis, Nureyev's plan had already been set in motion. He pointed me towards the parking garage and told me to stop the car.

NUREYEV:

We're pressed for time, so I'm going to ask you to park. I'll check in and start looking for Engstrom.

JUNO:

Engstrom? Like... Brock Engstrom? The jewel thief?!

NUREYEV:

Please. Retired jewel thief. These days the only crime Engstrom's guilty of is charging for his ridiculous "seminars in motivation."

JUNO:

The idea of hanging around at a pickpocket convention doesn't exactly reassure me, Nureyev.

NUREYEV:

I wouldn't even give Engstrom the honor of calling him a "pickpocket" anymore. He did all of his best work decades ago, and now that the statute of limitations has run out he's milked the story for every cred it's worth... and all while being insufferably smug about it. As though he isn't the thousandth half-rate cutpurse to think of that.

JUNO:

But--

NUREYEV:

Oh, and you'll need these.

SOUND: RUSTLING PAPERS.

JUNO:

Registration? ID? But I already have my... Hang on, the hell kind of a name is "Dahlia Rose!"

NUREYEV:

Yours, now. Oh, don't make that face. Not every name can be as pretty as "Juno." Ta, Dahlia dearest. I'll see you in room one-one-thirteen.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

The rest of it went just like Nureyev said it would. The paperwork all checked out - even the fake driver's license he gave me went through their system without complaint.

SOUND: BACKGROUND NOISES OF A CROWD.

The Oasis was gigantic, a huge green tower in the red, red sands. It took me nearly half an hour of dodging bookies and drunk tourists to find the room.

SOUND: DOOR OPENING, CLOSING. BACKGROUND NOISES FADE.

JUNO:

Hello? Nureyev? Glass? Whoever the hell you are today?

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS.

The hell is...
(SIGH)
Great. Of course.

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLING.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

There was a note by the phone. It read, "Off to find Engstrom. Will call. Miss you already. - Duke Rose."

I knew Nureyev had written it. I'd received a note from him once before which I'd read a few... hundred times. Threw it out the window one day and nearly fell out scrambling to get it back.

The vents coughed up a breeze and a shadow rustled in the corner. I jumped, reached for a gun I didn't have. Then I saw that it was just a coat.

Nureyev's coat.

SOUND: RUSTLING AND CLINKING.

I started through the pockets. A knife. Some nuts from the bar. A matchbook from the front desk. Even in the arctic air conditioning, I was sweating. Rex Glass had peeled his skin away to reveal Peter Nureyev, so how did I know Nureyev wouldn't peel his off to reveal... who?

(RUSTLING CONTINUES)

Christ, he kept a lot of junk in his pockets.

A lockpick in a hand mirror. A camera hidden in the button. Bottomless. Endless. Hints of the man, or the mask?

Then, tucked in a hidden pocket inside the left breast, I found them.

SOUND: CRUMPLING PAPER.

Notes. Dozens of them. Crumpled into tiny little balls, diagrams and a swirling script I'd never seen before. A code. From who?

His boss wanted me dead. How did I know they weren't still working together? How did I know these weren't... instructions?

SOUND: PHONE RINGING.

JUNO:

(GASP)

SOUND: PHONE BEEPS.

What?

NUREYEV:

Ah, Dahlia, so you found the room after all. Marvelous, marvelous!

JUNO:

Yeah, sure. Marvelous.

NUREYEV:

Well, dear, you can always take a few of the pills the doctor gave you if you're feeling bloated. I told you

about Mr. Engstrom? Well, he says a game has just opened up and I'll need you down here immediately.

JUNO:

You sound like you've got it under control. What makes this so important that I've got to be there?

NUREYEV:

You're my good luck charm, Dahlia. If I could do this without you, I would have left you at home.

JUNO:

(SIGH)

Fine. I'm on my way. What room?

NUREYEV:

Oh, one of Mr. Engstrom's friends will be by to help you any moment now.

SOUND: KNOCKING.

Ah, that must be her. Don't keep her waiting. Oh, and do wear that suit I love so much, will you? I hung it in the closet for you.

JUNO:

You bought me clothes?

NUREYEV:

Don't say I never get you anything. See you soon!

JUNO:

Yeah, yeah, I'm coming.

SOUND: PHONE BEEPS. ALL SOUNDS FADE.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS. MUFFLED VOICES.

VALENCIA:

Mr. Engstrom's private room is just at the end of this hall.

JUNO:

Would you mind not smoking? I got sensitive lungs.

VALENCIA:

Me too. They don't do so well if I'm not smoking. You'll learn to live with it, hon.

SOUND: DOOR OPENS.

NUREYEV:

Dahlia! There you are!

JUNO:

Hi... honey.

ENGSTROM:

Thank you, Valencia.

Dahlia Rose. Your husband's told me so much about you.
Have a seat, please.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

It looked like Engstrom could buy quite the operation. The rings on his wrinkled, shaking fingers were weighed down by gems nearly as big as paperweights and the cigar he smoked must have cost a lot of money, because the stink was awful.

The most impressive part of the ensemble, though, was Engstrom's "friend" Valencia. She was exactly the kind of bodyguard I didn't want to deal with because she didn't look like a bodyguard at all. She looked like a lounge singer, all snaky neck and eyes too far apart.

And she didn't look armed. That worried me.

ENGSTROM:

Valencia, if you would.

VALENCIA:

Yes, Mr. Engstrom.

SOUND: CARDS START SHUFFLING.

ENGSTROM:

The game your husband and I have agreed upon takes some time to prepare, so let's get to know each other a bit, shall we? Drink?

JUNO:

Heavily.

SOUND: POURING.

ENGSTROM:

Duke was just telling me, Dahlia, that you two lifted

the Coveter's Jewel during its museum tour in the Outer Rim.

JUNO:

Sounds like Duke.

NUREYEV:

I'm surprised word about the Jewel hasn't made it to Mars. It was a very big job on the Outer Rim.

ENGSTROM:

The Outer Rim is a very small pond, Rose. Your whales hardly rank for minnows here.

NUREYEV:

Well, that's just how we were feeling, Mr. Engstrom! That's why we thought we ought to sell that rock and use the cash to go after something really exciting. And that's when we stumbled upon... *you know*.

ENGSTROM:

Plans to stop the Utgard Express.
If you don't mind my asking, Mr. Rose: if you can stop that train, what are you doing here? You should be out there, looting to your heart's content.

JUNO:

I was just wondering the same thing.

NUREYEV:

Well, there's the Utgard security team, isn't there? If there's any sign the train has stopped, within sixty seconds we'd be drowning in guards - and that's not nearly enough time to get what we need. But you, Mr. Engstrom - I hear you know how to get on that train without alerting security.

ENGSTROM:

And so here we are. You can stop the train, but not board it; I can board the train, but can't leave once I've done so. Each of us has information the other needs, but cannot allow the other to learn.

This would be an impasse... were it not for our game. The most complicated game in the galaxy, they say.

JUNO:

Sounds... fun.

ENGSTROM:

A game of wagers where the stakes don't come in creds,
but rather... questions. Information. We call it...
Rangian Street Poker.

SOUND: BELL DING.

VALENCIA:

The game is ready, Mr. Engstrom.

JUNO:

That's the game? There's got to be a hundred decks on
this table!

NUREYEV:

Could we talk our way through the first hand? Dahlia
gets a little cranky when he feels left out.

ENGSTROM:

If you insist. Your Ask, Rose.

NUREYEV:

Very generous of you!
So, Dahlia, one of us asks a question to start the
round. Let's start with... Um...
How do we get aboard the Utgard Express?

ENGSTROM:

(SIGH)
The game's not ending that quickly.

NUREYEV:

Now Mr. Engstrom Counters with his own question, and
if I agree to it, we play a hand to see which of us
gets his question answered. The Counter-Asker can't
refuse the question; only the Asker can turn down the
round.

ENGSTROM:

Like so: how do I stop the Utgard Express?

NUREYEV:

I'll pass, of course.

JUNO:

So if he doesn't like your question, he has to ask
something you don't want to answer.

ENGSTROM:

Just so.

Ah, I nearly forgot. One last matter of business: in a game where each player stakes the truth, we must, of course, address the punishment for lying. And so, let us discuss your... collateral.

NUREYEV:

We're just going by Standard Variation rules, aren't we? If I lie, you kill me; if you lie, I kill you.

(LAUGHS)

That's a rule as old as human civilization, Mr. Engstrom. I think I can follow it.

ENGSTROM:

How good to know I'm playing with an honest man. Detective Steel, would you mind passing me my drink?

JUNO:

Get it yourself...What did you just call me?

ENGSTROM:

Oh, did I let something slip?

(LAUGH)

NUREYEV:

... Hm. I take it the game has changed, then.

ENGSTROM:

Not if you're as honest as you claim to be.

(CHUCKLE)

Did you really think I'd clear out my afternoon for a couple of yokels claiming they can stop the Utgard Express? These streets runneth over with people who think they've solved that train. Hobbyists and lunatics and liars, the Utgard Express draws them all... and usually to my doorstep.

NUREYEV:

Yet you've made time for me.

ENGSTROM:

Before I play with anyone I have their name and address on file - the surveillance system in the front lobby takes care of that for me. Thus, should the terms of honesty within our game be violated... I know exactly where to collect my collateral. But you, Rose... we couldn't find you anywhere. No address. No name. It's as though you don't exist. That

interests me. I fully believe you know how to stop the Utgard Express... and what's more, I believe that isn't even the most valuable secret you hold. But that does still raise the question of your collateral. If I can't find you when your lies reveal themselves, you're hardly motivated to tell the truth.

NUREYEV:

So you'll need a life you can take. Someone you can find.

SOUND: SHIFTING IN SEATS.

JUNO:

What? Why're you two looking at... me... Oh, you've got to be kidding.

NUREYEV:

If I lie you're going to kill him.

ENGSTROM:

We know where to find him. Detective Steel could not be more visible if he were aflame.

NUREYEV:

He does know how to get into trouble, doesn't he. I'll accept your terms.

JUNO:

Anyone gonna check if I'm okay with this? Like, anybody?

ENGSTROM:

(CHUCKLE)

Well. Now that that's settled... let's play. It is my turn to ask.

What planet were you born on?

JUNO:

Every time. Every goddamn time.

NUREYEV:

I'll counter: how do you have access to the Oasis's security footage?

ENGSTROM:

I accept. Let's play.

SOUND: BELL DING. CARD SHUFFLING NOISES AS JUNO SPEAKS.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I tried to follow the game. I didn't stand a chance. Their hands shot across the table, flipping cards and shuffling decks. They had a lot to say about..

ENGSTROM:

Rapids?

NUREYEV:

Concourse.

ENGSTROM:

North or South?

NUREYEV:

West.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

... but it was all gibberish to me until the dust settled, and Nureyev and Engstrom each had a hand of two cards.

ENGSTROM:

Reveal.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Engstrom had a pair of aces. Nureyev had a two of clubs and a picture of a goat.

SOUND: BELL DING.

NUREYEV:

There we are, then.

SOUND: CARDS RIPPING.

JUNO:

Didn't know you were such a sore loser, Rose.

NUREYEV:

Nothing to be sore about. The winner always tears his hand, and the Twin Wargoats is one of the best hands in the game. I won.

JUNO:

I... I give up.

ENGSTROM:

My answer: I pay the Oasis generously for these private rooms. I'm retired; this is the only sport that still entertains me; they want to keep their star customer. So as long as I bring them publicity the Casino doesn't care how I choose my opponents.

NUREYEV:

Well, ask a boring question, get a boring answer. Your Ask, Engstrom.

ENGSTROM:

My Ask... Hmm...
What is your real name?

JUNO (NARRATOR):

If Nureyev was worried, his face didn't show it. Most of the time he just looked bored, with a half-smile like he was humoring the world, waiting for it to do something worth his attention again.

NUREYEV:

How do we get on board the Utgard Express?

ENGSTROM:

Very interesting.
(CHUCKLE)
Pass, of course.

NUREYEV:

Of course. Shall we speed things up a bit, Engstrom?

ENGSTROM:

I thought you'd never ask.

SOUND: BELL DING.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Then they really started moving - cards and questions flying across the table. I tried to follow the game. The hands never made sense to me, but there was one thing I could follow well enough:

SOUND: BELL DING.

NUREYEV:

Your win. I'm Outer Rim, originally. Brahma.

SOUND: BELL DING. TEARING NOISE.

NUREYEV:

Your win. No military experience.

SOUND: TEARING NOISES, BELL DINGING SEVERAL TIMES.

NUREYEV:

(X 3)

Your win.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Nureyev was losing. Bad.

He didn't give in, though. He'd ask his questions.
He'd lose. And over and over again they'd return to
the same old battleground...

NUREYEV:

How do we get onto the Utgard Express?

ENGSTROM:

What is your name?

NUREYEV:

Pass.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

The message was clear and cold as the ice in their
drinks: as soon as either of those questions was
answered, the game would be over. But what the hell
did Engstrom expect to get out of Nureyev's name?

Valencia stood behind us. Something about her made me
nervous. Her boss was winning but her movements were
jittery, impatient: she was smoking a cigarette out of
one of those long, fancy holders, but she'd chewed the
hell out of her end of it.

NUREYEV:

I'll hit the corners.

ENGSTROM:

East to West.

SOUND: CARDS SHUFFLING.

JUNO:

It's Valencia, right? Mind getting me something to
drink?

VALENCIA:

Do I look like a waiter to you, tough guy?

JUNO:

I placed an order and you looked like you wanted me to die, so yeah. Scotch, double.

VALENCIA:

You can get your own drink. I'm watching the game.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

She was watching pretty intently, too, her eyes flicking from card to card, deck to deck. She looked like an expert - which made it funny that she didn't know the first goddamn thing about it.

SOUND: STRANGE HUM.

It took a second for that thought to sink in. I didn't know how it got there, and it barely made sense. She'd set the cards up; she was watching like a hawk. But the actual rules? She knew as much about Rangian Street Poker as I did.

I was sure of it. I just wasn't sure *how* I was sure of it.

SOUND: STRANGE HUM STOPS.

She bit her cigarette-holder hard and glared at me.

SOUND: CARDS TEARING.

VALENCIA:

A picture would last longer, you know.

JUNO:

Why don't you sit at the table, anyway? Better view.

VALENCIA:

The view is fine from back here.

JUNO:

You don't say? Maybe I'll join you.

VALENCIA:

Mr. Rose, would you mind telling your date to behave himself?

NUREYEV:

Yes.

ENGSTROM:

Then I'll do it for you. Mr. Steel, you will leave my assistant alone, or you will wait outside.

JUNO:

She started it.

NUREYEV:

(LAUGHS)

What can I say? Good luck charms come in all forms. Mine came out "petulant detective."

ENGSTROM:

(THUMPS TABLE)

He cannot stand back there!

VALENCIA:

Move.

JUNO:

You move. I like this spot. Right behind my good pal Rose - how you feeling, Rosey?

NUREYEV:

Thoroughly entertained.

JUNO:

And besides, your spot isn't even so special, Valencia. The one thing you've got a really good view on is, well... Rose's hand.

ENGSTROM:

(CLEARS THROAT, COUGHS)

NUREYEV:

(LAUGH)

JUNO:

Just saying, it'd be too bad if we found out your boss had an unfair edge.

ENGSTROM:

Just what are you trying to imply?

JUNO:

Oh, did it seem like I was implying something? Then I'll be blunt: you are cheating. For a card shark you've got a bad poker face, Engstrom. The second I stepped between Valencia and Rose here you looked like you were gonna be sick.

NUREYEV:

Very impressive, Detective. So, Engstrom? Are you cheating?

ENGSTROM:

Is...is that your question?

JUNO:

Oh, no. No, no more questions. No more cards. And definitely no more of this dumb, dumb, stupid, dumb game, either.

ENGSTROM:

You'll never know how to get on board the Utgard Express.

JUNO:

Empty threat, Engstrom. We'd never learn a thing about that train playing against a cheater anyway. Let's go, Rose.

ENGSTROM:

I am not cheating!

SOUND: THUMPS TABLE. PAPERS FLUTTERING.

Valencia! Clean this up!

VALENCIA:

Yes, sir.

NUREYEV:

Not cheating, you say.

JUNO:

You... liar! You said if Rose lies you get to track me down and kill me... and then you just come out with that?

ENGSTROM:

I will not tolerate this, do you hear me! You have no evidence!

JUNO:

Evidence!

NUREYEV:

(SIGH)

He's right, Juno. Have a seat.

JUNO:

Have you lost your goddamn mind?

NUREYEV:

No, but you appear to have misplaced yours.

JUNO:

Alright, that's it! I'm callin' a time out!

ENGSTROM:

Time out? What sort of game do you think this is?

JUNO:

Fine, halftime, seventh-inning stretch, whatever you want to call it. Rose, you're coming with me.

NUREYEV:

Excuse me, Engstrom. My Private Eye is acting up.

ENGSTROM:

Put some drops in him, then. He'd better behave himself when you come back!

JUNO:

Don't count on it!

SOUND: ALL SOUNDS FADE.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSES.

NUREYEV:

Juno, this display is entirely unprofessional, even for—

JUNO:

You want to tell me what the hell all of that was about?

NUREYEV:

Well, you see, there's a weapon on a train--

JUNO:

You know what I mean! I, I bailed you out ten times in there and you just keep digging yourself deeper!

NUREYEV:

I'm having some difficulty following this metaphor, Juno. Am I a sailor or a ditch-digger?

JUNO:

Oh, quit joking around.

NUREYEV:

(SIGH)

Fine. Engstrom has backed himself into a corner, and we are in position to take advantage of that. Or we would be, if we were in there right now.

JUNO:

He just admitted to cheating and you want to keep playing Go Fish?

NUREYEV:

There are several games being played at that table, Juno, but I'm afraid Go Fish isn't one of them. I am playing Rangian Street Poker as a distraction from the real game at hand. Your game.

JUNO:

I'm playing a game? Didn't you think I'd need to know about it?

NUREYEV:

You do know. You've already made the first move.

JUNO:

But—

NUREYEV:

Engstrom has lied to us, Juno - and after making the punishment for lying absolutely clear!

JUNO:

But you said we didn't have any... evidence...
Ooooooooooooooh. You want me to find the evidence.

NUREYEV:

Glad you've caught up. May we go back now?

JUNO:

So that's it? You play a game while I stop a con

artist and save the world?

NUREYEV:

I said I needed you.

JUNO:

To be your stooge, maybe. It's not like you've got anything on the line. Worst case scenario for you is that this game goes belly-up, and a few days from now I go belly-up, too.

NUREYEV:

You're not still whining about the collateral, are you? My God, you're a sensitive little thing.

JUNO:

You're betting my life!

NUREYEV:

I would never bet your life.

JUNO:

Come on, do you seriously think I'm that much of an idiot? If you lose, you'll make up some other name and it'll all fall on me. You're throwing me under again, just like you did with the Kanagawas.

NUREYEV:

Like the Kanagawas? Really? You have no idea how much I did to keep the Kanagawas off you, Juno. You have no idea how much I've risked already. For you. If I lose this hand, I'm telling him my name. Do you understand what that means for me?

JUNO:

Just because the name's on your birth certificate doesn't mean it's worth anything. You pick up a new name with your groceries every week.

NUREYEV:

(PAUSE) A word of advice to the crass Detective: it's not kind to tell someone their gift means nothing to you.

JUNO:

Hey, I, I didn't--

NUREYEV:

Of course my name is worth something. I cycle those

other names out, but by now I'm skilled enough not to leave a trace with them. But my birth name... links me to things it would be best if everyone forgot. That name is very nearly my only weakness. And I'm risking it all, here. On you.

JUNO:

..First off, I don't believe you.

NUREYEV:

Your denial knows no bounds.

JUNO:

I'd call it skepticism, but we'll agree to disagree. Second, if you are telling the truth, you're an idiot. Bet your life on me? You barely know me!

NUREYEV:

This isn't about knowing you. It's about trust. I trusted you, didn't I? In return for that, I only ask that you trust me. So why not? Just let go, Juno. We could do anything, in arms together.

JUNO:

Fine. Do I want to trust you? Sure. Hell, I want to trust Engstrom, too, and Valencia, and this whole sorry planet. I want to gather us all up in a big group hug and kiss and slobber and talk about how nice it is that we can all be so honest with each other. That sounds great, sure, whatever. And it also sounds like a good way to get dead.

NUREYEV:

Is it? I'm still alive, aren't I? And I trust you.

JUNO:

(SIGH)

I have no idea why you do.

NUREYEV:

Oh, I have my reasons. Your eyes-

JUNO:

My what?

NUREYEV:

Sharpshooter's eyes, of course. And I trust your mind - a master detective's. And most of all because I

trust your will: stubborn as a child in a supermarket.

JUNO:

That all sounds nice, but is it really enough reason to trust someone you barely--

NUREYEV:

And, of course, I trust you because I have researched you. Extensively.

JUNO:

What?

NUREYEV:

Just... an incredible amount of research.

JUNO:

Quit it!

NUREYEV:

(LAUGHS)

That's the cranky Detective I know and... tolerate.

SOUND: KNOCKING ON DOOR.

VALENCIA:

Mr. Engstrom wants you all to know that he's getting bored. Are you two done kissing in there, or should we call this game right now?

NUREYEV:

Thank you, Valencia! Tell Mr. Engstrom we'll be there in just a moment.

So, Detective. Are there any other insecurities I can massage before we return to the game?

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I still had the notes I'd taken from his jacket. I felt them burning in my pocket. Just one question, and I'd know. All I had to do was pull them out and ask.

JUNO:

No. I'm all set.

NUREYEV:

Good. I'm counting on you, you know.

JUNO:

If you are, you're an idiot. A real idiot.

NUREYEV:

Well, it's up to you to prove that either way, isn't it? Come along. Engstrom is waiting.

SOUND: ALL SOUNDS FADE.

ENGSTROM:

It's about time. Is everything under control?

NUREYEV:

As controlled as he'll ever be. My Detective gets restless if he isn't taken for a walk every few hours.

ENGSTROM:

While you were away I received an invitation I don't intend to decline. I can give you twenty minutes more. Enough time for a few hands - a last chance at a few big questions.

NUREYEV:

Why do I get the sense you only have one question in mind?

ENGSTROM:

Sit. Let's play. Now: what is your name?

NUREYEV:

Juno. I can only hold him off for so long. This is your only opening. Are you ready?

JUNO:

I'm looking, alright.

NUREYEV:

Good.

What is the access code to your personal bank account?

ENGSTROM:

(LAUGH)

I see! Quite a defensive maneuver, Rose!

NUREYEV:

Pass or play, Engstrom?

ENGSTROM:

Pass, of course. I wouldn't risk my retirement on you.

And besides, you know how this game has to end.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I checked Valencia for the usual tells. Nothing. No hand motions; Engstrom wasn't even looking at her. Whatever they were using, it was nothing I'd ever seen before.

NUREYEV:

How do we board the Utgard Express?

ENGSTROM:

What is your name?

NUREYEV:

Pass.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

We were running out of time, and Engstrom wasn't willing to budge anymore.

ENGSTROM:

What is your name?

NUREYEV:

Pass.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Not a single hand was played. We were going nowhere, and I couldn't find anything.

NUREYEV:

Juno.

JUNO:

I know, I know!

ENGSTROM:

What is your name?

NUREYEV:

Pass.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

The moron had staked his entire life on me. He was about to find out just how big a mistake he'd made.

ENGSTROM:

What is your name?

Your name, Rose!

What is your name!

JUNO (NARRATOR):
Until finally...

ENGSTROM:
That's enough, Rose. I was under the impression that you had either the courage to play or the decency to admit your cowardice. I was wrong on both counts.

JUNO:
Courage? You're cheating.

ENGSTROM:
If you levy these false accusations against me one more time, Mr. Steel!

NUREYEV:
I apologize for the Detective's outburst, Mr. Engstrom. Tensions run high in a game like this.

ENGSTROM:
Were the game played properly, they might. I've taken naps tenser than this travesty. I will give you one final chance, Rose. One last hand. After that, I'm afraid I have other obligations to which I must attend.

NUREYEV:
Alright, then. How do we board the Utgard Express?

JUNO:
You're joking. He's cheating! He's gonna cream you!

ENGSTROM:
What is your name?

NUREYEV:
Play.

SOUND: BELL DING.

JUNO:
You're pulling this too early! I'm not ready!

NUREYEV:

Our time has run out, I'm afraid. What do you have so far?

JUNO:

They're not communicating directly. My best guess is she's got something on her.

ENGSTROM:

Care to share your conversation with the rest of the table?

NUREYEV:

Corners!

(WHISPER)

Is it a camera?

JUNO:

No. No lenses, and both their eyes are organic. No way for the feed to get through.

NUREYEV:

I don't want to know what it *isn't*, Juno.

JUNO:

I know, but—

ENGSTROM:

And that, my friend, is the game.

NUREYEV:

Don't be ridicu...Well.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I had to look at the hands twice to shake the *déjà vu*. Nureyev had a pair of aces. Engstrom had a two of clubs and a picture of a goat.

ENGSTROM:

(CHUCKLING)

I win. A fitting end, I'd say. Now, Rose. Your name.

NUREYEV:

Last chance, Juno.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

Valencia was clearing the table. I knew she must have the key to Engstrom's method somewhere on her, but I didn't know where.

My eyes met hers. And then I saw it.

SOUND: STRANGE HUM.

It hit me all at once, a picture clearer than thought:
her cigarette.

In my head, a diagram. A cutaway of her cigarette: a
hidden button by her teeth, shortwave transmitter,
Morse Code translation drive. I knew how it was
powered, what parts it took to build it. I even heard
a few words of an argument they'd had about how
(SOUND: VALENCIA AND ANOTHER VOICE ECHO THE FOLLOWING
LINES) it needed to make smoke, about how the chips
couldn't take that kind of heat, about how they'd have
to find a way to make it work.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

I saw it all. I had no time to think about how I'd
seen it.

SOUND: STRANGE HUM STOPS.

VALENCIA:

Feeling emotional, Detective? Your nose is bleeding.

JUNO:

(SNIFFLE.)

Huh. Thanks for the tip. Mind if I bum a smoke?

VALENCIA:

For the last time, hon, I -- oof!

SOUND: PUNCH.

ENGSTROM:

What the hell do you think you're doing!

JUNO:

Something really, really satisfying.

ENGSTROM:

Put down that cigarette!

JUNO:

Gladly.

SOUND: SMASH. FEEDBACK WHINE.

ENGSTROM:

Ah! Damned feedback!

JUNO:

Well, well. Funny blend of tobacco Valencia's into - you ever hear of a cigarette with a wireless transmitter tucked away inside of it, Rose?

SOUND: FEEDBACK STOPS.

NUREYEV:

I'm going to guess that earphone you've just pulled out isn't for listening to the radio, Engstrom.

ENGSTROM:

So you caught me in a lie. So what? You still don't know how to board the Utgard Express.

NUREYEV:

No, but you were very, very clear on the consequences for lying, weren't you.

SOUND: BLADE.

Juno, turn away, please. I'm going to stab Mr. Engstrom to death now.

ENGSTROM:

Kill me? You're a fool, Rose. I told you: the Oasis rests on my notoriety. If you kill me, if you hurt their bottom line, you'll wish you died here.

NUREYEV:

Well, Juno? He raises a valid point.

JUNO:

He does. But there are worse things we can do than kill him. Said so himself.

ENGSTROM:

I've been in this business too long for empty threats to faze me.

JUNO:

Don't worry, this one's full to bursting. I'm betting the Oasis won't like it if word gets out that their big celebrity's a cheater. Bad publicity.

NUREYEV:

And bad publicity means bad business. How did you put it, Engstrom? "If you hurt their bottom line, you'll wish you died here?"

ENGSTROM:

(GROWL)

NUREYEV:

There is an out, of course.

ENGSTROM:

I've been after that train for half a century, Rose, and you're going to rob it out from under me?

NUREYEV:

That is the plan, yes.

ENGSTROM:

This new generation of thieves hasn't a scrap of honor. What has crime come to?

NUREYEV:

Bigger and better things. Now talk.

ENGSTROM:

(SIGH)

As you know, that train moves too quickly to be approached. But a lockbox is useless if one can't put anything in it or take anything out.

JUNO:

So it has to slow down to take any cargo.

ENGSTROM:

It slows down once a week to intercept shipments. There's a site out in the desert. They launch high-speed transport drones which intercept the train and drop their payloads. The next shipment is... tomorrow morning. Five o'clock.

NUREYEV:

And where is that launch site?

SOUND: WRITING.

ENGSTROM:

Here. The coordinates.

NUREYEV:

They had most certainly better be. Wouldn't want anyone to start asking where you get your cigarettes. Come along, Juno.

ENGSTROM:

You'll regret crossing me, Rose. Do you hear me? You'll remember this mistake as long as you live.

NUREYEV:

I doubt that. You've proven yourself eminently forgettable already. Ta-ta... whoever you are.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSES.

JUNO (NARRATOR):

My head was swimming after that game - a panicked little one-armed doggy-paddle, going around and around, sinking with every stroke. We won. I'd created the opening, and Nureyev delivered the killing blow. We won - and we'd even done it with style. But I didn't feel like a winner. Looking at Nureyev, thinking about those notes in his pocket, thinking about how I still had no idea who he really was... I felt like I'd just traded one con artist for another.

NUREYEV:

Why the long face, Detective? We beat him!

JUNO:

Don't remind me.

NUREYEV:

Oh, cheer up. You're alive! That's better than most people!

JUNO:

Most people who work with you?

NUREYEV:

No, just most people. What's gotten into you?

JUNO:

Sitting down to a death threat isn't exactly my idea of a nice afternoon.

NUREYEV:

I told you, Juno, that I was never going to let that happen.

JUNO:

Because a master criminal is the poster boy for honesty, right.

SOUND: DOOR NOISE.

NUREYEV:

If this working relationship is to be at all effective, Detective, you're going to need to at least make an attempt to trust me.

JUNO:

Trust you! Why the hell should I?

NUREYEV:

I've saved your life at least once today.

JUNO:

I figured out the cigarette!

NUREYEV:

Ah, yes. I've been meaning to ask, how did you do that, exactly?

JUNO:

Look, I've got no reason to trust you, alright? You lied to me. You stole Grim's Mask from me. Then you swing in out of nowhere on a beam of goddamn starlight and you expect me to just forget everything and not think that's a little convenient?

NUREYEV:

Convenient? Juno, you called me. Through Valles Vicky.

JUNO:

I...! You...!

NUREYEV:

If it was convenient for anyone, it was me. I have very few allies on Mars and had presented myself with a remarkably risky, not to mention extremely deadly, two-man job. I was running out of time rapidly. And then I get a call about a certain Detective, who - what was your phrase? Ah: "swung in on a beam of starlight." Convenient, certainly. But not all convenience is conspiracy.

JUNO:

If you honestly believed that, Nureyev, you'd be dead.

NUREYEV:

Think what you like. I have neither the time nor energy to make you believe me.

SOUND: CLINKING AND RUSTLING.

JUNO:

What are you doing?

NUREYEV:

Ah, this? An ancient maneuver, practiced by all the galaxy's most powerful men and women. It's known as "getting ready for sleep." You should try it. Immediately.

JUNO:

I'm not done with you!

NUREYEV:

I certainly hope not. Good night.

JUNO:

I'm not going to let you gut me in my sleep!

Listen to me, damn it! Let's see you try to explain these!

SOUND: PAPERS RUSTLE.

NUREYEV:

What in the world...?

SOUND: CRUMPLING PAPER.

You took these from my coat pocket, didn't you?

JUNO:

I did. What do they say?

NUREYEV:

Juno...

JUNO:

Goddammit, what the hell do they say!

NUREYEV:

These are doodles.

JUNO:
What?

NUREYEV:
Even a master criminal has slow moments where he isn't plotting to kill innocent Private Eyes in their sleep. So I doodle. Sometimes they end up in my pockets.

JUNO:
Like I buy that!

NUREYEV:
This one is a cat.

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLES.

Note the ears, the tail, the six compound eyes. And this...

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLES.

A party. Balloons, dancers, music.

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLES.

This is a star hauler... a design for a more secure safe... a zoo I once saw... a-

JUNO:
Yeah, yeah. I get it.

NUREYEV:
I put my livelihood in your hands, you know. My invisibility is the most precious thing I have, and I trusted you with it. Why? Because in our work, trust is not optional. I have done the labor of trusting you, and now I ask that you return the same professional courtesy.

JUNO:
You must go after some pretty easy marks if you think that's going to work on me, Nureyev.

SOUND: FOOSTEPS, DOOR OPENS.

NUREYEV:
Where are you going?

JUNO:

Making a damn call. What's it to you?

NUREYEV:

Goodnight, Detective Steel.

SOUND: DOOR NOISE. FOOTSTEPS. BEEPING.

JUNO:

Come on, Rita, pick up, pick up...

RITA:

Hiiiiiiiiii!!

JUNO:

Rita, I need you to—

RITA (ANSWERING MACHINE):

This is the office of the Steel Detective Agency, soon to be called Hard-as-Steel Investigations or maybe Mista Steel Investigations: The Best Ones There Is or maybe OOH, OOH, the Steel and Rita Detective Agency, NO, the Rita and Steel Detective Agency, YES, that's the one, I GOT IT!

JUNO:

Damn it, Rita.

RITA (ANSWERING MACHINE):

Aaaaaanyway, the boss ain't here right now and neither am I, so you should probably call back during our normal business hours, which are-- Uh-oh.

JUNO (ANSWERING MACHINE):

Rita! You're not messing with the answering machine again, are you?

RITA (ANSWERING MACHINE):

Nuh-uh, boss, I wasn't, I swear!

JUNO (ANSWERING MACHINE):

You better not be! I told you I liked that message the way it was!

RITA (ANSWERING MACHINE):

But Bosssss, it was sooooo boooooooring, and I just—

SOUND: BEEP.

JUNO:

Rita...

(SIGH)

Rita, this is Juno. I...I have no idea why I'm calling.

You want to know the truth, I'm not even sure how much I can tell you - or how much trouble I'm gonna get the both of us in trying to tell it.

The stakes are high this time, Rita. This isn't some argument over stream timetables or cheating wives anymore. This is... everything. Giving this to me... Jesus, what was he thinking?

A guy does that for you, Rita, do you have to trust him back? Even if you aren't sure you know who he is... even if you aren't sure you know his real face, his real name... or what he's really capable of doing to you?

And with this much on the line... do I really have a choice?

I want you to close up the office. Take a week off. Take a month, hell. And if you don't hear from me by then, there's a safe underneath my desk. I want you to take-

SOUND: BEEP.

COMPUTER VOICE:

End of message.

JUNO:

(PAUSE)

She'll figure it out.

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS. DOOR CLOSSES.

CONCIERGE:

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SOUND: FOOTSTEPS. DOOR CREAKS.

NOAH:

The way that Rex was so sort of relentlessly... Ah...

SOPHIE:

Thirsty...

SOUND: LAUGHTER.

NOAH:

Well, no, I mean, right. Well, to the exclusion of other things. You know, like...

SOPHIE:

Right. No, Nureyev was much more business.

NOAH:

Yeah, right. Nureyev has thirteen things he's thinking about, and they--

SOUND: DOOR CREAKS AND SHUTS.

CONCIERGE:

We would like to give special thanks to all who support us on Patreon, but especially to Hannah Tsim and Angel Acevedo for their incredibly generous contributions per episode. Thank you.

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This tale, Juno Steel and the Train from Nowhere, was told by the following people: Joshua Ilon as Juno Steel; Noah Simes as Peter Nureyev; Emery Westlake as Brock Engstrom; Kristie Norris as Valencia; and Kate Jones as Rita.

On staff at the Penumbra: Kevin Vibert as our lead writer and recording engineer; Sophie Kaner as our director and sound designer; Graham Turner as our

script editor; original music by Ryan Vibert.

The Penumbra is created and produced by Sophie Kaner and Kevin Vibert.

I'm so sorry you've been called away, dear traveler.
We eagerly await your return.