

ChannelCon '30

Francis Bass



To the extent possible under law, [Francis Bass](#) has waived all copyright and related or neighboring rights to the work *ChannelCon '30*. This work is published from: United States.

Find more information about this license here:
<https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>

Table of Contents

[ChannelCon '30](#)
[Afterword](#)

“How do I look?”

Amber diverted her eyes from the Tabula she'd been watching their channel on. Lindsey stood just outside the hotel bathroom door—blue house dress with white collar and white caplets. Light blue cloche with a cream ribbon. And of course her Glasses, which were ovular with transparent frames. “The neckline is too deep,” Amber said.

“Mmm. Maybe we could make that our catch-phrase,” Lindsey said. “Amber Linz—*The neckline is too deep*. Anyway, too deep for what? You can't even see anything.”

“They didn't go below the armpits. Not that far.”

“Well, it's artistic license. I'm an editor after all, aren't I?”

“Are you done in there?”

“Yes.”

Lindsey stepped aside to allow Amber into the bathroom. Amber looked herself up and down in the mirror. High-waisted gray trousers, white button-down with a gray vest over it and a flat cap that she'd fought into place over her curly hair—finally staying on. And her Glasses, large, square, slightly tinted.

“Amber, when are you going to just go all out at one of these cons and dress up as ... Mae West, or ... Ginger Rogers, or ...”

“Garbo?” Amber straightened her belt so the buckle was centered.

“No. There's too many Garbos. Way too many. Like remember at the first ChannelCon, when everyone was Chaplin? Now it's Garbo. No, someone cash, someone ...”

“A woman though?” Amber stepped out of the bathroom to stand beside the door.

“Yes. Ready?”

“Uh-huh.”

Lindsey opened the door and strode out into the hallway, Amber following. The map on her Glasses' HUD was pointing in the opposite way that Lindsey headed, but Amber followed Lindsey anyway. “I mean, I don't think I've ever seen you dress in women's clothes—at a con, I mean.”

“Men's fashion is easier.”

“Don't you like challenges though? Don't you like having lots of options?” Lindsey passed the elevators and shoved the door to the stairwell open. Amber darted in after her as Lindsey clacked down the stairs. “That's what you said last night, when we were talking about the Sunny deal. You'd prefer more options. You'd rather have a broader selection of films, than have the liberty to alter those movies, right?”

“I don't feel like we should talk about the Sunny deal right now.”

“We're not talking about the Sunny deal right now,” Lindsey's voice exploded in the concrete shaft as she went banging down it.

“It makes me anxious.”

“We're not talking about it, but I'm saying, why the double standard?”

“Because it's me. I don't know. I don't want to worry about my appearance. There are less wrong answers with men's fashion.”

Lindsey bashed open the ground floor door and held it open for Amber. “So you're more willing to have wrong answers with our channel's programming than you are with your clothes?”

“Yeah.”

Lindsey let the door close and headed across the lobby to the breakfast area. Dawn light spilled into the space from the floor-to-ceiling windows and glass doors on the entrance side. “I’m just saying, I think you could kill it in a 30s-era evening gown.”

“No one’s expecting me to kill anything though. You’re the star.”

Lindsey stopped when she passed the partial wall dividing the breakfast area from the lobby. The place was stuffed with little square tables and wooden chairs, and there were just a few people up this early, a couple of them with their backs turned. Lindsey’s HUD told her Andre Eli, screen name “EelEye” (a name he’d probably have changed if he’d known he was going to be one of the most successful PD station streamers when he’d chosen it) was in the room, but he could’ve been either of the men with their backs turned—or he could be someone who was facing them, though that seemed less likely. Eli was a welcoming guy, he’d wave if he could see them, right?

“Which one’s Eli?” Lindsey murmured to Amber, who hovered right behind her.

Amber pointed to the further one.

“Thanks.” Lindsey wove quickly through the vacant tables right up to Eli and yelled (too loudly for 6:00 am) “Eli!”

Eli turned around and grinned and waved them over, “Hey! Sit down, sit down.”

Incredible, his voice—“You know,” Lindsey took the seat across from him, “your voice is just as professional-sounding IRL as it is on your station.”

“Well, yes, it is *me*, I don’t have some actor doing all the talking for me,” he chuckled. “Ah, not that there’s anything wrong with that,” he frantically pawed the table like he’d lost a contact on it, “I mean, that wasn’t a dig against you guys, you know, just a joke, I didn’t—”

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” Lindsey smiled and leaned back. “We got what you meant.”

“Right, of course. Sorry, I’m just a bit on edge since ...” Eli shuffled and reshuffled his fingers together. He wasn’t wearing any costume, which made sense. He only curated audio programming—not big on visuals. “I’m just a bit on edge from all this curation vs. purat—oh god, there I go. *Purist editor*. I need to make sure I say that right. It hasn’t gotten any better since last year, and last year was the whole ...”

AMBER: I’m hungry. The message popped up in a blue bubble on Lindsey’s Glass.

“... and if editors start boycotting it, you know, then that’s ChannelCon gone, we can’t keep going if we’ve got a third of our attendants walking out.”

Lindsey pinched the air where the message was displayed, and a little AR keyboard tracked onto the table.

“... and I just found out Likis will be here, which is a whole other ...”

With much less extravagant finger movement than Eli, she discreetly typed out, *Get us both something from the buffet* and sent it.

“... so I just wanted to tell you guys, you know, you’re role models—and you’re kind of hybrid, right?”

“You could say that,” Lindsey nodded. “We mostly just stream movies as they are. Well, we do re-scores and commentary, and I’ll occasionally do abridgements.”

“Excuse me, I’m going to get us some food,” Amber said. She stood up roughly and marched off to the bank of breakfast foods.

“That’s—well, that’s hybrid,” Eli said.

“Oh. Okay. I’m not up on the whole thing,” Lindsey said. “I try and stay away from it, honestly.”

“Oh, well that’s excellent. Really. Good then. You know, I just wanted to touch base with all of the major guests.”

“We’re major guests, huh?” Lindsey cocked her head, and drummed out a text to Amber, *nothing messy. Don’t trust myself not to spill on costume.*

“Well, yes. Of course, gotta. You’re announcing—” Eli ducked under nothing and lowered his voice, “you’re announcing the Sunny deal on Friday, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan,” Lindsey threw a glance at Amber, who was staring intently at a bagel-loaded toaster.

“Well even if you weren’t. You two are big names. Bigger than me, gotta.”

“Don’t worry. We don’t piss around with the Purist versus Editor thing. ‘We’re all curators,’ right?”

Eli smiled. “That’s good to hear.”

Amber returned to the table with two plates—bagel and banana (Lindsey’s); muffin, yogurt cup, banana, unidentified pastry (Amber’s)—and placed each before their proper seats.

“Well, I’d love to—really, I’d love to stay and talk with you guys, but I’ve got about fifty things to do—prep stuff, meeting with other guests, it’s,” Eli made a choking-laughing sound, “so I’ve got to run.”

“No problem,” Lindsey said, “nice to finally meet you, I’ve been listening to your station for years.”

“Me too,” Amber said.

“Oh, thanks.” Eli stood, did a bow or maybe a nod, “bye then, see you later,” and left.

Amber sat down and started unpeeling her banana. “So he just wanted to tell us not to feed into the drama?”

“Seems like it. He didn’t need to tell me, I hate that shit. *Gotta* he didn’t have to tell you.”

“Yeah. I didn’t even know it was a thing until last ChannelCon with the Peedie award thing—I mean, until the new voting rules came out. When they said that this year we’d *have* to vote at the con, not online.”

“Yeah I remember. I was the one who had to explain it to you.” Lindsey turned her bagel over and over in her hands. “There should be a Peedie award for that—least shits given about some gross curator fan feud. We could be nominated every year.”

* * *

Just like Channel 1 was *the* website for public domain curators, ChannelCon (which was sponsored and managed by the streaming company) was *the* convention for curators. A few years ago a group of curoditors—the streamers who didn’t merely collect and organize public domain movies into a themed, accessible channel, but who actually *edited* these old movies to varying extents—tried to start up their own convention. However, it was beset with financial troubles, and cancelled a week before it was supposed to happen.

So, for better or for worse, Curoditors and purists—those curators that tried to leave the PD content as unaltered as possible, some even going so far as to never run commentary or music over it—had to play nice together at ChannelCon. Amber Smith and Lindsey Xong, each of whom essentially fell onto either side of the divide, were perplexed by the feud, and had always worked closely together to run their channel Amber Linz. Amber curated the content, sifting through the hours and hours of movies and serials that

entered the public domain each year to find some pieces that would fit with the general theming and genre of their channel, while Lindsey did lots of commentary, especially over silents, and occasionally edited down longer movies into abridgements. But the two worked together—their differences were a good thing, which allowed the channel to excel on multiple levels. (With the small exception of the Sunny deal. Lindsey wanted to negotiate for modification rights, but Amber was worried they'd have to give up the amount of films they'd have access to, sacrificing her ability to curate—but, a small exception.)

Unfortunately, this level of cooperation wasn't reflected at large, and last year a group of curoditors had gamed the Peedies, the ChannelCon awards. ChannelCon allowed attendees to vote online prior to the convention, so a bunch of curoditors had registered, voted for curoditors, and then demanded refunds for their tickets—although their votes still stuck, and curoditors swept several categories. This year, attendees were required to vote *at* the convention on the first day.

And so, Amber found herself outside Ballroom C, where all the ballot stations were. She was scarcely recognized by anyone, and then only when she was right next to Lindsey. Lindsey was recognized constantly, and she'd been held up at the door of the ballroom, chatting to a bunch of re-scorers about the new Kevin Alif scoring of *Docks of New York*. Amber managed to get by and vote for all of the awards, but there was no telling how many more fans had slowed Lindsey down to talk to her. Amber didn't want to send a text asking how much longer Lindsey would be, and she didn't want to go wandering off by herself. So she stayed glued to the wall.

Lindsey had been right. There were a lot of Garbos.

Then, *LINDSEY: just voted. over by the stairs now.*

Amber scanned the surging crowd inundating the convention center, looking for stairs, then saw that Lindsey had dropped a beacon for her. She set off into the mass of bodies, following it. The convention center was both open and claustrophobic. The halls, the theaters, were all large, with high ceilings and bright lights and pastel walls—but at the floor level, they were stuffed with attendees. Amber dodged through the drifting currents of con-goers and rounded a corner to find the stairs, and the bright yellow AR beacon right beside them. She rapidly joined Lindsey and pinched out the beacon.

"Hi," Amber said.

"Hey! Dude, you totally hung me out to dry back there."

"I did?"

"Yes! Come on, we're in Theater 12, right?"

"Yeah."

"Right, so," Lindsey tried to orient herself, couldn't, then held up her hand, palm turned toward her. Her glasses tracked a UI onto her palm, and Lindsey opened the ChannelCon app, tapping at her palm and setting the app to give her directions. She dropped her hand and a green AR arrow pointing forward appeared before her, and she started walking. "So I was talking to those guys and you just walked on past the to the voting booths. I don't know anything about the *Docks of New York* re-score, or Kevin Alif."

"You know Kevin Alif. Everyone knows Kevin Alif. He scored *Modern Times*."

"And then they tried to pull that, 'hey, why don't you come with us, little dove, we'll show you the ropes' schtick. I need you around to shut people down with a barrage of trivia when they do that."

“You didn’t *have* to talk to them.”

The arrow disappeared as they arrived at an intersection of halls, and an arrow pointing left replaced it. Lindsey pivoted sharply. “I suppose not,” she said. “But I want to be a cool curator. One that talks with her fans, in person. Even if they are condescending.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s fine. Just, if you’re not gonna stick by my side, try and engage more with people, at least.” The arrow disappeared, and was replaced by the words *You have arrived at Theater 12* and an arrow pointing right. Lindsey pinched the direction out, and headed toward the theater. There were fans lined up outside, and the ones at the front, two teenagers dressed as some couple Lindsey couldn’t quite place, shouted, “Oh my god, we love you! You guys are gotta cash!”

“Oh thanks!” Lindsey yelled, grinning enormously. She leaned over to Amber and murmured, “text me their costumes,” then approached the front of the line. “This is awesome, I love your costumes!”

“Can you tell what they are?” the one dressed as a man asked.

AMBER: Clark Gable & Claudette Colbert

“You guys are, *It Happened One Night*, right?”

“Yeah!” the Claudette Colbert said.

“I love that movie, I was watching it before it was PD, I was so excited when it finally came out. I think we’ve streamed it a few times, haven’t we Amber?”

Amber nodded.

“Alright, see you guys inside in a few minutes!” Lindsey flashed her hand in a wave, and nodded to a convention attendant standing beside the theater door. He looked them over, glancing at their credentials displayed in their AR orbits, then nodded and opened the door for them. An Orc-Jazz group was playing a sweeping finale over a gangster movie. The audience was almost unnaturally quiet for a group watching a silent, leaning forward in rapt attention.

Lindsey surveyed the space, trying to envision it during their screening. The seats were very slightly raked, as the movie was actually being projected in realspace, with the lights dimmed and everything, not streamed to everyone’s Glasses. There was a stage below the screen, where the band was playing—where they would be sitting when their time slot began in a few minutes. Lindsey’d probably sit to the right of the screen, Amber to her left—it’d be easier to look up at what was happening on the screen that way, and she’d be less visually distracting.

“Am I going to have to talk?” Amber asked.

“Huh? When we’re doing commentary? Yeah.”

“Can’t I just talk for the Q&A afterward?”

“No. It’ll look weird if you’re up there just being mute.”

“Maybe I could be out in the audience then.”

“You need to not talk *right now*. It’s distracting.”

“It’s a silent.”

“But no one else is talking, it’s the end of the movie, Amber, shut-up,” Lindsey hissed. Police officers stalked down a smoky hallway, guns drawn.

AMBER: Why don’t I just stay in the audience for the commentary?

Lindsey raised her eyebrows and tilted her head at Amber, then typed out on her hand, *People want to see and hear you. It’s in the description for the screening.*

A sweaty, floppy haired man approached the police with hands raised.

LINDSEY: I'll prompt you to talk. You won't have to talk except when I tell you to.

The police escorted the gangster down a staircase. *The End* appeared along with the Paramount logo, and the band brought their score to a long, rattly close.

"What are all the little TV symbols in everybody's orbits?" Amber asked as the fans applauded.

"What, the Channel 1 logos?"

"Yes, but they also have little symbols inside the screens."

Lindsey pushed her glasses up her nose even though she knew it didn't do anything. "Oh yeah. Lots of people with little Ys for the symbol. What is that?"

"It's a stethoscope, it's for Doctor Carlos."

"Oh. Maybe it's like a way for everyone to show what their favorite channel is."

"But not that many people like Doc. I also saw a ton for Harmony, but she doesn't have that many fans either."

"Maybe it's bugged. Convention apps are usually buggy trash." Lindsey nodded sharply. "Come on, let's get set up."

As the band members swirled around their fans, shaking hands and bursting into laughter, Lindsey and Amber helped a couple convention attendants unplug amps and wrangle audio cords off the stage. When they were done Amber stood flat against the wall like a payphone, motionless except for her eyes scanning back and forth across the room.

"It's weird," she murmured when the room was all but empty.

"The theater?" Lindsey sat in the chair she'd be seated in on the stage, testing it out, putting her left leg over her right, then her right leg over her left.

"The little icons."

"Oh. I guess. We can ask people when they come in—actually, why don't you ask them? Practice talking to people."

"Okay," Amber nodded. She stared at the door, watching as the last few fans of *Y'see!?*, the Orc-Jazz group that'd been scoring *Underworld*, exited the theater. She estimated roughly a third of them had had Doctor Carlos symbols, and a fifth had Harmony symbols. She'd also noticed one Ginger Rogers cosplayer with an Amber Linz symbol, which was neat.

Almost immediately after the door closed, it opened again, and Amber Linz fans flooded in. Lots of them had the Amber Linz symbol in their orbit, so Lindsey's theory that it was meant to show off that person's favorite channel held ground. Though there were still an unnatural number of Doc and Harmony symbols. Harmony somewhat made sense, given that Amber curated lots of musicals, and Harmony was the biggest curator of musicals—but Doc still didn't fit. He was a purist documentarian, curating newsreels and short documentaries. He wasn't obscure, but he wasn't huge, and his channel's programming didn't have any overlap with theirs.

LINDSEY: AMBER! Ask them!

"Oh," Amber said out loud. The theater was very quickly filling up, and the fans in the front rows were already seated. Amber looked to Lindsey. Was she supposed to ask them from the stage? Should she use the mic? Should she ask just one person? Lindsey nodded at her quickly then stepped down from the stage and said to the rows in the front, "Hey so Amber and I were talking about this thing, something weird that—Amber, you noticed, right?" Lindsey nodded at Amber again, and Amber stepped down from the stage.

"Yes," Amber said. "The—"

"Was it the leaked voting results?" a Chaplin asked.

And in an instant everyone was talking and shouting over one another. Amber only caught pieces of it. “Rigged.” “TITs.” “Cureditors.” “Purators.” “Likis.” Then Lindsey’s voice broke through all of it over the speakers: “*What happened exactly?*”

A flapper shouted above the rabble, “Someone leaked Peedie voting results, and people think they look suspicious.”

Amber held up her palm and called up the Glasses browser on it, searching “peedie voting results.” The top hit was an image, which she sent to Lindsey before looking at it herself—a table with votes for Best Musical Channel. The votes were a random mix of the nominees, with some appearing more than others, until halfway down—then there was a block of fifteen or twenty votes for Harmony.

“They’re rigged! The TITs are trying to rig the Peedies again!” Chaplin yelled.

“Or it could’ve been a big group of Harmony fans going to the booths together!” Amber couldn’t tell where that had come from.

“Twenty fans?” Chaplin. “Why would twenty fans just—”

“Why is it so unbelievable that there would be a bunch of Harmony fans? She’s better than everyone else on that list!” That was a gangster—maybe a specific one, maybe not.

“She’s better than—no she’s not!” It was weird to see Chaplin shouting so much.

There was a roar of indignation in response to this, and the Chaplin screamed into the roar, “You’re just saying that because she’s a cureditor, not because you’re actually looking at the merit ...” but Amber couldn’t hear the rest, as it was engulfed by shouts for and against what they were saying, and more and more fans started standing up.

“Stop! Stop stop stop stop stop stop!” Lindsey yelled. “This is—quiet! Mae West, quiet!”

Everyone fell silent except for a small group still arguing in the back.

Lindsey opened her mouth, glanced at Amber and, indicating the group in the back, mouthed, “*Metropolis?*”

Some of them weren’t dressed up, but the ones that were standing were characters from that film. Amber nodded.

“*Metropolis!* Take a cue from the movie your costumes are from and be *silent!*” Finally everyone stopped talking. Amber realized that Lindsey was back on the stage, and she rushed over to join her there. “This is a no bullshit theater. No ugly feuding between cureditors and purists and this channel and that channel—we’re not here for that. Okay. *We are not here for that,*” she repeated, and most of the crowd—people that hadn’t been standing up and shouting—cheered. “No one is here for that, all right—and if there’s any more of it in this theater, we’re going to walk.” There was an awkward, truncated round of cheers, then a moment of silence. “Alright, now who wants to watch *The Love Parade?*” There were more enthusiastic cheers then, and Lindsey sat down as the lights went down. Amber took the seat beside her, and twisted around to watch the screen.

* * *

Day two (Friday), 2:00 pm—Amber sat across from Lindsey in an access hallway they weren’t supposed to be in, but which convention staff had been letting curators use to get quickly from one panel to another, or to just escape the crowds. It was a dim, warm space (no AC), with a few cheap chairs to sit in, and thin, worn-out carpeting. Lindsey hadn’t wanted to use them the day before, but she was more willing to avail herself of the halls today. It was nice to take a break from the constant attention of fans, quoting Lindsey at

Lindsey, or wanting to get into long conversations about how such and such abridgment of such and such movie had cut out all the best parts—but truly, it was all the feuding nonsense that put Lindsey over the edge. There were more and more people utilizing the little TV icons with either Harmony’s or Doctor Carlos’s symbol, which were apparently makeshift gang colors—Harmony for the curoditors, Doc for the purists. Not to mention the people with more overt orbitals, like editor fans with the TITs logo, or purist fans with “#Revote” or “#Recount” or “#DQHarmony.”

The divide between curoditors and purists must’ve run deeper than just artistic differences, Amber thought. From bits and pieces she’d picked up, purists believed that curoditors were disrespectful of the original content, had no appreciation for history—whereas curoditors charged the purists with being overly-nostalgic, backwards-thinking declinists who harbored racists and sexists among their ranks. She’d also heard the name “Likis” a lot, which seemed to inspire all kinds of passion on both sides. As far as Amber knew, Likis was Alexa Likis, a curoditor famous for her intricate edits, recombining multiple movies into a wholly new creation with a different narrative, though Amber had no idea of what kind of figure she was in the landscape of this feud.

“Another one!” Lindsey yelled, rocking back in her white plastic chair.

“What?”

Lindsey’s chair clattered back into four points of contact, and she said, “Another channel just got copyright bombed. Jonesy’s channel. He’s not even really a purist, he does commentaries!”

“Is that the first purist one?” Amber asked. “I mean, the first one that was probably carried out by editors?”

“Yeah,” Lindsey said. “All the ones last night were takedowns of curoditor channels. I swear, they better not go anywhere near our channel. Imagine—if Sunny saw that, and they thought it was real? Like if a bunch of people falsely reported our content for copyright infringement, and Sunny thought we weren’t trustworthy or something—you want to talk about jeopardizing the deal, *that* would jeopardize the deal. Negotiating for better terms would be nothing compared to a copyright bomb.”

“I didn’t say negotiating for modification rights would jeopardize the deal. I just meant, it would jeopardize the current deal,” Amber said. She instantly regretted it. She hated talking about the deal. She wished they could just sign it already.

“Well, of course it will, that’s what negotiating is—building upon, changing the current deal so that both sides are more equal.”

“But it’s fine as it is,” Amber mumbled it. Maybe if she talked quietly enough the conversation would just end.

“I couldn’t even do commentary over their movies with the deal as is. I probably couldn’t do abridgments either, or cuts for advertising. It’s *not* fine as it is.”

“But, the movies they’re giving us—it’s just movies that’ll be public domain in a year anyway. So, you can do abridgments and commentary *then*.”

“Sure, but that’s the whole point of the deal, they’re letting us use them, exclusively, for a whole year ahead of time—you want to get the jump on being able to curate that content, fine, I want to get the jump on being able to do commentary on it, maybe even some intercuttings.”

“We’d have to give something up though, to get modification rights. I don’t want to give up the amount, or the quality of the films, or anything else. I like it the way it is.”

“I think there’s more creative ways to bargain with them that we can figure out. We can decide all that tomorrow, before the final meeting.”

“I don’t ...” Amber murmured.

“I know!” Lindsey said. “It’ll be fine, Amber, promise, we’ll work it out. Oh!”

“What is—” Amber started, then a reminder flashed on her HUD—she and Lindsey had panels to get to—curation and commentary panels, respectively.

“Alright,” Lindsey stood up, then Amber did too. “See you in an hour, or so?”

“Yeah, let’s meet up at ...”

“We’ll figure it out,” Lindsey said. “Okay. Bye! Good luck!”

“You too. Bye!”

Lindsey set off down the hallway. Amber tried to figure out how to use the convention app’s map for a moment, then decided to venture out into the crowds. She wouldn’t get recognized like Lindsey would, and the HUD map would function properly outside of the access halls, so she went to the door and pushed it open.

* * *

Lindsey had no idea where she was going. She’d gone marching off in what she felt was the right direction, but the convention map on her overlay was going haywire trying to figure out how to direct her. She heard the door open and close behind her—Amber was probably going to go travel through the regular convention space since she wouldn’t get stopped by people recognizing her. Good for Amber. When Lindsey heard the door close, she stopped walking, and held out her hand. She opened up a static map of the convention center on her palm, and tried to find ballroom F on it.

“Hey, Lindsey!”

Lindsey started and turned to see Harmony, dressed in a long red evening gown (maybe meant to replicate a specific dress in a specific movie?) “Hey!” Lindsey said. Harmony must’ve come in the door when Amber went out. “You’re going to be on the commentary panel, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, I was just heading there.”

“Me too, let’s—it’s this way, right?” Lindsey asked, pointing the direction she’d been heading.

“Yep.”

“Cash. I wasn’t quite sure, the convention app doesn’t work back here.”

“I know. I’ve only figured it out because I’ve been using these tunnels so much, since the voting results leaked.” Harmony marched briskly ahead of Lindsey, and Lindsey sped up.

“Right,” Lindsey said. She really hoped—“I really hope no one asks any questions about any of that shit at the panel.”

“Yeah. Me too. I was on a musical panel earlier, everyone kept talking over me. All the purators.”

Lindsey winced at the derisive nickname, propagated by the TITs, for purists.

“You know, there’s hardly *any* curoditors doing musicals,” Harmony said. “I understand why, it’s a lot more work to remix musicals, with all the songs and things, than it is to do westerns or silents—but, you know, everyone on this panel, except me, was a purator, and they acted like I couldn’t possibly have anything to say. One of the people asking questions even said, “This is just a question for the purists on the panel.””

“ChannelCon needs to do a better job handling the whole thing,” Lindsey said.

Harmony pivoted sharply to turn down another hallway, and Lindsey swung around after her. “They need to do a better job handling the purators. Editors haven’t done anything. Did you see, earlier, a bunch of purators got in line for an editing panel just so they could keep actual fans from getting seats. Then they just walked out, after the doors had closed.”

“Yeah. But, editors—the whole thing started with the Peedies being rigged.”

“Who knows if they were rigged. We don’t even know if I won! I certainly didn’t organize it! You don’t think *I* rigged it, do you?”

“No, gotta no. But—”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if some purists did that just to frame editors. Honestly, it’s caused more trouble for me than it has for any purator.”

“Well, unless you end up winning.”

“I don’t care! I’ve been getting, non-stop, people flooding my inbox, saying I’m a cheater, saying I should kill myself, saying I’m a cam whore—”

“I get it, really—I get ‘cam whore’ sometimes too.”

“As if a curator also being a cam girl would be such a scandal—in fact, there *is* that one curator, isn’t there, what’s her ...”

“Strawberry Smash,” Lindsey said, surprising herself by being able to actually remember a name without Amber. “Love her. What I’m saying is, you know that both sides pull shit on the other.”

“The difference is, one side isn’t a bunch of sexist gummies trying to return to the past.”

“Weeeeeell,” Lindsey said, and her overlay cut out. She pulled up short.

Harmony turned around. “Come on,” she said. “We’re almost—oh, weird. Did your Glasses—”

“Yeah,” Lindsey said. “I just lost wifi connection.”

“So did I. Probably just these back tunnels. Come on,” Harmony turned, and strode toward a beige metal door, not trembling even a little on three-inch stilettos. Lindsey followed her as she pushed open the door, and stepped into the bright cool of the convention center.

Something was weird. Lindsey stared at the convention goers—that was it. They weren’t moving. There were always at least two big, turgid currents of bodies moving in opposite directions, but now everyone was stopped. Mostly. There were a few pacers, and many people were swaying or looking around, and almost everyone was tapping on their hands or fiddling with their Glasses.

“Oh crap,” Harmony hissed. “Those gummies just took down the wifi.”

* * *

Amber had just arrived at Theater 5 when the wifi went out. She thought it was just a hiccup as she stepped up onto the stage, but then she saw everyone else—the audience, the other panelists—looking around confused. As if something was wrong with their Glasses too.

“You guys lose connection?” Miguel, a sci-fi curator, asked the other guests. He was dressed as Dr. Jekyll, presumably the 1931 version given the top hat.

Amber took a seat behind the table and instantly realized that no one else was sitting. It would be weirder to stand up now though, so she stayed sitting.

“Yeah, my convention app and every other overlay connected to the internet just crapped out,” said Sasquatch, a radio curator. She was dressed casually.

“It’s probably the Idiot Thieves,” Miguel said. “Trying to stop purists from making copyright bombs.”

It could really be anyone. There wasn’t any clear order in the retaliations and reprisals between the two sides. Amber waited for someone to say this, then realized that there were no curoditors on the panel. She was the closest to one, because she was half of Amber Linz, but she didn’t do the editing. Miguel and Sasquatch and Danny Dan just nodded in mild agreement. The people in the audience probably couldn’t hear them, though they probably would’ve agreed too.

“Hey, you guys know what’s going on?” Someone in the middle row shouted.

Miguel picked up a mic and tested it—it worked, not *everything* had been sabotaged—then said, “Looks like the wifi is down. And the convention app with it. None of us have any more idea about who did this than you all ... but, we can all take a good guess.”

A series of groans and laughter boiled out of the audience.

That seemed dismissive.

“It’s gotta be an editor,” Sasquatch said. “What Purist would even do this? No offense, but that purist would even know how to take down a wifi network?”

A convention organizer would be able to do it. And while they all didn’t explicitly pick sides, the ones of them that were curators generally fell on the purist side of the spectrum.

“Do we go on with the panel?” Danny asked. “Do we have everyone here?”

The theater door banged open, and Doctor Carlos pounded down to the stage. He wore a severe black windbreaker, gray flat cap over salt-and-pepper hair (the hat not meant to be period appropriate, just a personal effect he always wore) and large glasses (lowercase g.) “Any editors in here? No? Good!” he said with a pronounced Midwestern accent. He lunged up onto the stage, clapped a hand on Amber’s and Sasquatch’s shoulder, then motioned for the other speakers to gather up.

Was this an opportunity to stand up? Probably. Amber went for it, as everyone closed into a cramped circle between the table and the back wall of the theater. Doc shouted out to the audience, no microphone needed, “Sorry, the panel is on hold, until we figure out who decided to abridge this convention by cutting out the wifi.”

* * *

The whole thing was fucked. The convention center had almost no physical signs—everything had been AR and overlays and Tabulas, to push attendees to use the app, which also had AR ads all over the place to help fund the convention. That was fine, until it wasn’t—which was right now, when the wifi was down and the only functional Glasses apps were audio calls and text messages. Everyone appeared stranded in place.

“I bet it was Doc,” Harmony hissed. “Or his followers. He posted something like, ‘Curoditors seem to have forgotten that editing votes is called cheating’ last night, and that ugly gif of me tripping at last year’s dance.”

“Doctor Carlos? Is he really that proactive?” Lindsey asked. She could think of only one person that was really this proactive—that was volatile and energetic enough to do something like this.

“Why not? He’s got all these people using his symbol—or, he did. I guess you can’t see them now, with the app down.”

“That’s one good thing, right? No more gang colors?” Lindsey said.

Harmony was not cheered by this. “I’m going to try and find Eli and tell him about this.”

“I think he knows already.”

“I mean I’m going to tell him that it’s probably Doc.”

“Oh—”

“You should come with me!” Harmony grabbed Lindsey’s hand. “You’re a hybrid channel, he’ll believe you more than he’ll believe me.”

“Uh—I, you know, actually, I think I’m going to try and meet up with Amber,” Lindsey said. Harmony looked at her, apparently seeing right through Lindsey’s excuse.

“Well, good luck with that.” Harmony pivoted—again, steady as a rock on those heels—and strode off into the crowd. As people recognized her, various groups hissed or booed or glommed onto her and cheered. Lindsey was reminded of the effect of dropping a crumb on an anthill.

“Lindsey!”

Lindsey turned to see a Garbo approaching. Horrified for a second, did she know this person, was this a curator—no, the way they were tentatively approaching and backing away from her at the same time, like she was a dud firecracker, was definitely not the walk of a curator. Awesome job on the costume though, the extravagant *Mata Hari* outfit, complete with gold mesh leggings.

“Oh my god,” Garbo said, “I love your outfit!”

Lindsey nodded down at her dress. It was another generic, period-appropriate dress—she’d only brought one really cash costume, which she was saving for the Sunny deal announcement on Sunday. It seemed ridiculous—“Thanks, God, it hardly compares to yours, that’s probably the best Greta Garbo cosplay I’ve seen.”

“Oh my god, thanks! So, are you still going to do the panel?”

“Do you have any idea where Alexa Likis is?” Lindsey asked.

“Um ... who?”

“Alexa Likis, you know, leader of The Idiot Thieves?” That wasn’t an entirely accurate characterization, Lindsey knew, but she’d never dove into the minutiae of the radical curesitor group.

“Oh, is she? Is that who ...”

“She’s a curesitor, I’m sure you’ve seen some of her work, she did, uh ...” Lindsey racked her brain for any of Likis’s recuts. She snapped her fingers to indicate she was still working on it, although as far as she could tell she had totally stalled out. How was Amber able to rattle off credits like an NIDB page? “*Death of a Nation!*” Lindsey jabbed her finger at the fan. “She recut that, or recut other movies to make that.”

“Oh, right, I think my friend was talking about that—there’s some panel about it today.”

“Text your friend, ask them if they’ve got any clue where Alexa Likis might be.”

“Oh ... um, okay sure. So,” Garbo started texting, “are you still doing the panel?”

“No,” Lindsey said. If this sabotage was Likis’s doing, Lindsey needed to know immediately. The Sunny reps she’d been talking to were already skittish about curesitors, if this thing blew up it might spook them into only offering the no-modifications-allowed version of the deal—which would please Amber enough, sure.

* * *

“It could even be Eli, for all we know,” Carlos said. He didn’t have to keep his voice down to keep anyone in the audience from hearing him—the crowd was making enough noise that Amber could hardly hear Carlos while standing right next to him. “He would have easy access to all that stuff.”

“Eli? But he’s hybrid, isn’t he?” Sasquatch asked.

“But he has cures sympathies. They brought him on after the whole 2029 debacle, to appease cures, ” Carlos said. “It wouldn’t surprise me if he was behind the ballot-stuffing too.”

“Ballot stuffing?” Miguel asked.

“The irregular voting results,” Carlos glared at Miguel.

A green bubble appeared in front of Doc’s face then, with the text “Incoming Call: Lindsey Xong.” Amber was surprised for a moment, then remembered that the built-in messaging and audio call apps could still function using cell networks, so the wifi being down wouldn’t affect them. She fished an earbud out of her pocket and pushed it into her ear, holding her hand by her head to signal to the others she was in a call.

“Hey,” she turned away from the circle.

“Hey, where are you right now?” The quality was horrible, almost like a 1930s sound reel, but worse.

“I’m still at the panel. I mean, the panel isn’t happening. But I’m there.”

“Where is that?” Lindsey asked.

“Ballroom F.”

“Okay, stay—oh wait, so, what do you mean the panel isn’t happening?”

Amber frowned, realized the panel speakers had all turned their attention to her, then realized that it wasn’t a video call so frowning didn’t do anything. “What part of that is unclear to you?”

“Are all the panelists still there? And—and the moderator?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay. Cash. Just wanted to make sure you weren’t stranded with a bunch of fans or something. Yeah, you stay there, I’ll meet up with you.”

“Alright. I wasn’t planning on going anywhere.”

“Right, uh, yeah. Don’t. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Amber put her hand down but left the earbud in in case Lindsey called her back. She turned back to the circle.

“Was that Lindsey?” Carlos asked.

“Yeah. She just wanted to know where I am so she can meet up with me.”

“Did she say anything else?” Carlos asked. “You looked concerned at one point.”

“Well, she just asked a weird question about—it made sense though, she just misspoke.”

“Misspoke in what way?”

For once, Amber wondered if she was talking *too much*—but someone explicitly wanted her to say a specific thing, so she explained, “She asked what I meant by something, then clarified she was really just asking if I was alone here.”

“And she told you not to go anywhere?”

“Yes, so that she could meet me here.”

“Or maybe to keep you from doing anything,” Carlos said. Amber tried to make eye contact with him, but then realized that Carlos was staring off at the wall.

“What, you think *Lindsey* did this?” Sasquatch asked. “But Amber Linz is hybrid.”

“It’s hybrid because Lindsey is a curesitor, and Amber is a purist,” Carlos said. “If Amber split off and made her own channel, Lindsey would just be another girl curesitor.”

That was a mischaracterization that Amber sometimes heard. She waited for someone to correct it. No one did.

“And you two are in the middle of trying to sign some deal with Sunny?” Carlos asked.

“Yes,” Amber said. It was supposed to be a secret, but there were rumors out, and a fan had even asked Lindsey about it yesterday. Lindsey had tried to be crafty with her response, but the fan just asked her “so is there a deal or not?” again and again, until Lindsey eventually replied, no. The fan said, “Yes there is,” and left.

“Maybe Lindsey’s trying to cut a deal with them behind your back,” Carlos said, “and she doesn’t want you out looking for her.”

“She wouldn’t do that,” Amber said. “And I’m sure Sunny would want us both present.”

“You don’t sound sure,” Sasquatch put in.

“How do I sound?” How did she sound?

“Why else would she ask if you were alone?” Carlos asked. “And why would she want to come to you, rather than the two of you meeting up some place?”

“I’ll call her and ask,” Amber said.

“Don’t do that—then she’ll know you’re on to her,” Carlos said.

“I don’t think she’s doing anything though,” Amber said. “And I’m certain she didn’t take down the wifi. She doesn’t care about the feud.”

“Well, we have an audience full of people here,” Carlos said, “let’s crowd-source this investigation.” Carlos turned to face the crowd and picked up a microphone. Without him even saying anything, everyone quieted down. Perhaps they believed he was about to explain it all.

“We are all trying to figure out what is happening,” Doctor Carlos said. “While we were talking, Amber—the curator for Amber Linz—received a call from her commentator partner, Lindsey Wong. It was a strange call, and we have reason to believe that Lindsey is either taking advantage of this situation, or engineered this sabotage herself, to sign a deal—some hobbled modification license for films a year away from PD—against Amber’s wishes, behind her back.”

Amber flinched, and wondered how Carlos knew about *that* part of the Sunny deal. Everyone had heard unconfirmed reports that there would be some licensing, but no one knew anything about the argument Amber and Lindsey were having about it. Unless Lindsey had been talking about it. Complaining about it. Complaining about her?

“So if any of you know anything about the whereabouts of Lindsey Wong, or have friends you can text that might know about her,” Carlos said, “let us know.” Xong. Her last name was Xong, not Wong. Amber waited for someone to correct Carlos. But who was going to correct him, Lindsey?

Almost instantly someone in the middle row stood up and said, “She’s walking around with Alexa Likis.”

That had to be a fake. Lindsey had a strong distaste for Likis as a person. She might enjoy her work, but she’d never just be hanging out with her.

“Yeah, I got the same thing,” a teenager in the front yelled.

“Can we get a picture of that?” Amber murmured. She wasn’t sure if cell networks could transfer images, but if they could do audio, static images wouldn’t be a problem, would they?

“Can we get a picture of that?” Carlos asked into the microphone.

“Oh my god,” Danny Dan said, barely picked up by one of the mics. “What if she’s starting a new channel with Likis?”

That was probably the most far-fetched possibility of all.

“Here!” the teenager in the front row, whose attempt at 30s-era dress consisted of slacks with suspenders and a button down, hopped up and walked to the stage, taking off their Glasses and handing them over to Carlos. Carlos held the Glasses up to his eyes, and nodded, then passed them to Amber. Amber held the lenses up to hers. The image was, unmistakably, of Alexa Likis and Lindsey walking together, talking to one another—not arguing either. Lindsey was even smiling.

* * *

It was a nightmare trying to navigate around the convention center without the app. It would be bad enough trying to figure things out by vague memory of where everything was, but to make it worse some purists (or possibly just generic jackasses) had put up fake signs to mislead *glass-dependent youngsters* (as purists would characterize them.) Lindsey was still not getting involved in the feud, but if anything made her want to get involved it was realizing she’d been going in a circle because she’d followed signs made by embittered millennials. Finally they had the fortune of running into an Amber Linz fan who had just seen Likis, and gave them exact directions to get to her. Sure enough, she and a squad of goons (even bigger than the small group of fans following Lindsey around) had claimed a small lounge area near the stairs up to the conference rooms.

“Alexa!” Lindsey shouted. Alexa Likis was easy to spot amongst the cluster of blocky armchairs—she was wearing some extravagant red and purple strapless dress with yellow trim, and had a black and gold saber scabbard in a belt at her waist. She was also standing next to a skull wearing a flat straw hat with a ribbon on it—Amber would probably have known the name of that kind of hat. Whether the skull had to do with the costume or not, Lindsey had no god damn idea.

“Lindsey Xong. I bet you’re catching a bunch of shit for this, you big-boobed cam whore you,” Alexa said through a smiling-snarling mouth, which was the only kind of face Lindsey had ever seen her make.

“Did you do this?” Lindsey demanded.

“What? Why the fuck would I do this?”

“Answer me.”

“I didn’t take down the wifi, I didn’t tell anyone to take down the wifi, I don’t know of a single TIT that has ever even hinted at, or would want to, sabotage this convention in that way. We are radicals, we’re not senseless.”

Lindsey stared at Alexa. Likis was a lot of things, but she wasn’t outright deceitful. Usually if she didn’t want to tell the truth about something, she’d just remain silent on it—about the only time she was silent on anything.

“Come on, we’re on the same team. Take it up with some of your shadow’s friends,” Likis said.

Lindsey glanced around her at the six or so fans she'd picked up on her way to find Alexa.

"Not them, ugly, your *shadow*—Amber. Your silent star."

"You think purists did this?"

"They're constantly shit-talking Glasses, shit-talking people for relying on them—" Alexa whipped her glasses off and affected a parodic masculine voice, "Oh, how can you even experience the world behind those Glasses, you're just lost in your orbit you dumb *idiots*." She resumed her normal voice and put her Glasses back on. "You know purists have been putting up fake signs to try and—"

"I know," Lindsey said. "Well ..."

"I think it's Doctor Carlos. Apparently he came in two minutes late to a panel he was supposed to be the moderator for—so he was, for no reason, absent at the same time the wifi went down."

"That sounds made up," Lindsey said. "What was the panel? If it's something hosted by Doc, wouldn't it be mostly fans of his and other purists—not people that would spread the word that he was mysteriously late?"

"I didn't hear it from someone in the ballroom, it was a convention staffer that was asked to track him down because he was late for the curation panel. But he didn't have a chance to track him down, cause he showed up a minute later. From who knows where."

"The curation panel? That's where Amber is."

"Really?" Alexa's eyes flashed, and she lurched forward, way, way into Lindsey's personal space. "You should ask her if he's still there. If he is, we should go confront him. Get a confession."

"I don't—alright. It'd be good to meet up with Amber anyway—but don't think I'm taking up the curation flag against purists."

"Come on, call her," Alexa said.

"The wifi's down. Wait, calls are—"

"They use cell networks. Just audio calls. Yeah."

"Oh. Right." Lindsey took an earbud from her pocket, and pulled up her address book on her hand.

* * *

"Hey," Amber said, "is there anyone with you?"

There was silence on the other end. "What?" Lindsey finally said. "It's a con, there's hundreds of people with me."

"I mean, walking with you?"

More silence. "Why?" Lindsey asked.

Amber hadn't thought about that. Now *she* was the one asking suspicious questions. "I just want to know, because. I'd like to talk to you alone, about the Sunny deal."

"Oh! Sure, well, there's some fans with me, but when I get there, we can go off by ourselves and talk about that." A lie by omission. Lindsey and Alexa teaming up to make a channel seemed preposterous, but why was Lindsey lying about it?

"Then, well, why don't we meet up somewhere else? There's a lot of people here, maybe we could meet in the middle?"

“No, I don’t—honestly, it’s a nightmare out here, people have put up fake signs and things, but I’ve got a pretty good group of people with me, they know where we’re going—it’ll be faster this way, trust me.”

“Okay,” Amber said. She was probably supposed to press Lindsey further here, but she had no idea how. Lindsey made a good point.

“Cash. See you soon then, okay?”

“Okay. Bye,” Amber said.

“Bye.”

* * *

Lindsey hung up and let her hand drop. “Okay,” she said, “I’m certain that they know that I’m with you. And I’m pretty sure that Carlos had Amber call us. He’s probably on to us.”

“On to what?” Likis asked. “We’re not doing anything, we’re just going over to call him out.”

“I’m just meeting up with Amber.”

“And maybe threaten to copyright bomb him if he doesn’t confess.”

“What?” Lindsey asked. “Is that your plan?”

“Not my plan. It’s just a weapon that I have. Armed. Ready to use if necessary.”

“Confessions achieved under duress aren’t worth much though, right?”

“Who cares? Everyone already thinks it was me anyway, might as well get some dirt on the purators. I don’t know how you put up with them.”

“Because I’m not delusional,” Lindsey said, “that’s how.”

“I mean, working with Amber. She looks like she hates everyone.”

“What?” Lindsey turned to Likis. “She’s just quiet, she doesn’t—”

“Fuck is she doing hanging out with Doc and all them? Fuck is she doing calling you, asking questions like you’re up to some shit?”

“She’s just ... not good at speaking for herself. She’s doesn’t hate us though.”

“Please, they all do. They’re all misanthropes!”

Lindsey barked out a laugh at the irony of Alexa Likis calling other people misanthropes.

“I’m not a misanthrope,” she said, “I fucking love people. But I don’t love old dead racist sexist classist people, like purators do. They hate everyone and just wish we were all gone and we could go back to the days of D.W. Griffith,” she rattled the skull—it was a part of her costume apparently, “and minstrel shows and American exceptionalism. They think we’re all in decline and we’re all the problem and the values of dead gummy assholes are—”

“What the hell is your costume?” Lindsey asked.

“Turn here,” one of Alexa’s fans, dressed as Oscar Micheaux, pointed down a hallway connecting the two wings of the convention center, a long, relatively narrow space without any doors or windows in the walls.

“It’s *Judith of Bethulia*,” Alexa snapped. “What the hell, you don’t know *Judith of Bethulia*? This is why people say we’re idiots with no knowledge of the culture, Jesus Christ are you trying to be the poster child for anti-editors?”

“Oh, but—but that’s a pre-’23 movie, right?” Lindsey said.

“So what? How did the severed head not give it away?”

“Um ... does the person she kills have a ...”

“A boater hat? No. It’s open to interpretation. D.W. Griffith wore them a lot. Maybe it’s his head.”

“Okay—”

“Not to mention the saber!” Alexa grabbed it so roughly and suddenly, Lindsey expected her to pull it out and point it at her.

“Hey, guys!” A generic gangster walking a little bit ahead of them (probably one of Alexa’s fans, though Lindsey couldn’t be sure) turned around. “Doc and all those purators are on the move.”

“On the move where?” Lindsey asked.

“I don’t know, I just got a text saying my friend saw—”

“There!” Likis yelled, pointing. There at the end of the hallway were Doctor Carlos and a group of people that Lindsey didn’t recognize—some of them were probably curators, but Lindsey only recognized Carlos and Amber. Amber was trailing behind the group of four at the front, and there was a larger group of fifteen or twenty people behind.

“Aha!” Carlos yelled. Likis stopped, and Lindsey did too. The couple of fans that had been walking in front of them melted back behind them as Doc and his crowd approached. “It appears that you have company, Lindsey Wong.”

“Xong!” Amber shouted, louder than Lindsey had ever heard her. “Her last name is Xong!”

Doc flinched, then resumed his cool, smug attitude. “Regardless. Why did you not mention that you were walking around with Alexa Likis when Amber asked you about it?”

“Because I knew that you were the one telling her to do it,” Lindsey said. “If I didn’t think you all were pushing your agenda onto her, if I thought she was just asking out of her own curiosity, of course I would’ve told her the truth!”

“No one pushed any agenda on her,” Carlos said. “She doesn’t trust you herself, with good reason, when you look at the company you keep.”

“I don’t give a shit about your ugly feud. Amber, you tell me, what is going on?”

“Don’t let her bully you, Amber,” Carlos said. “Remember, Lindsey would be nothing without your curation. You have more val—”

“Oh Christ on a cross, shut the fuck up you old gummy piece of shit!” Alexa drew her saber and gestured with it dramatically. “*Amber* would be nothing without Lindsey. Lindsey is the only one providing any *value* to their channel. Amber’s been riding her coattails for years.”

“Shut-up cam whore!” One of the purist fans yelled.

“Fuck you sexist!” One of their fans shot back.

“Will you control your thugs?” Alexa snarled.

“Like you controlled your Idiot Thieves?” Carlos said. “Tell me, did you turn a blind eye to them sabotaging the wifi, or did you give them explicit instructions?”

“You must be high—you think an editor did this? It’s you purators that’ve been putting up fake signs.”

“And whose fault is it for relying so much on Glasses?”

“You know,” Alexa jabbed her saber into the no man’s land between the two groups, “you’re not convincing me that you didn’t do it. You were two minutes late going to your panel, what’s that all about?”

“Late, I was—I was hosting a screening that ran a bit over time, there are hundreds of witnesses of that—is that really the basis of your suspicion in me?”

“Then maybe it was one of your goons who did it!”

“Lindsey, why are you with Alexa?” Amber asked.

Lindsey stammered, caught off guard by Amber because she’d been tripped up by Carlos’s alibi, “I—I only met up with her because I thought it was *her* who took down the wifi.”

“What? If you did, why would you want to meet with her?”

“Because if this ends up being an editor-perpetrated thing, it’ll jeopardize the Sunny deal.”

“You mean it’ll jeopardize the version that *you* want,” Amber said, “because a modification license would be associated with creditors, who they’d perceive as unhinged and unreliable.”

“Yes,” Lindsey said. “Your version would be fine.”

“Maybe they did it!” Micheaux yelled. “Amber probably did this so it’d be blamed on Alexa, because everyone always blames everything on her, and—”

“You see the contortions your worshippers have to go through to justify how this isn’t your fault?” Carlos asked. “Just because your stupid plan is backfiring doesn’t mean you’re not the culprit.”

“Amber, you don’t believe any of this do you?” Lindsey asked.

“Well ...”

“What reason have you given her to believe you?” Carlos asked. “You’ve taken advantage of her skill and knowledge for years. And now you’re trying to sign a deal that will hobble her ability for the sake of your inane prattling.”

“Her prattling and abridgments are the reason she’s so popular,” Likis said, “no one’s tuning into Amber Linz for the fucking curation, like it’s so difficult to find comedies and musicals from the 30s.”

“You could replace Lindsey with any of a hundred twenty-somethings with cleavage and it wouldn’t make a difference,” Carlos said.

“You could replace Amber with an algorithm,” Likis snapped.

“Lindsey is—”

“Stop!” Amber yelled.

Carlos seemed completely at a loss, as if he’d suddenly awoken in this hall and had no idea where he was.

“Ha,” Likis said, “Even Amber—”

“Hey, did you hear her Likis?” Lindsey got up in her face. “She said stop! Stop talking about us! No one gives a single solitary shit about your feud, least of all us two. For God’s sake, it is abundantly obvious that neither of you are responsible for the wifi take down, and Amber—I don’t care about the deal. We might not have a convention to announce it at by tomorrow, and if this shit is what the story is, who knows if they’ll want to do business with us at all. Especially with you gummies acting like our spokespersons! Do you get that what you two are doing could ruin this whole thing for everyone? Do you get that?”

After a split second, “Cam whore!”

“Get out,” Doctor Carlos said.

“Yeah,” the heckler said, “fuck you bitch, get—”

“Get out!” Carlos wheeled on the fan and rushed at him as if he was about to punch him. “Get out of here! Go away!” The fan smashed into the wall backing up so rapidly,

then ran off into the wing they'd come from. Doc watched him go, and after a moment of collecting himself, turned back around.

"Well," Likis turned to Lindsey, "you can pretty much count on this being blamed on me. So if you're worried about your deal, you might be able to explain that I'm just Lunatic Likis."

Lindsey glanced around, at the two armies that were finally starting to relax around one another. "No. Fuck that. Let's get a name. We've got about fifty fans here. We've got Alexa Likis, and," she glanced at Amber with eyebrows raised, "and we've got Doctor Carlos, and we've got Amber Linz," *AMBER: Sasquatch, Danny Dan, Miguel* "and Sasquatch and Danny Dan and Miguel, and we can bring in more curators with more fans. Y'all were able to figure out where we were, we've got an intelligence network here. This wasn't sabotage perpetrated by curoditors or purists, it was done by a specific person, and we can all together figure out who it was."

* * *

They set up camp in the large space that all the ballrooms were attached to, in a lounge area full of armchairs and couches. Amber and Doc began compiling lists of alibis. Lindsey and Harmony, who joined them shortly, figured out who was a trustworthy source and who to disregard. Alexa wrangled her fans and ordered them to investigate various different questions that came up during the process. One fan ran to the hotel and brought over their own personal wifi hotspot, which they used to reach out to people who had been following the convention online—and which they used to stream the whole thing to the Amber Linz channel. Lindsey tried to call the Sunny representatives a few times when she got a spare moment, but they never answered.

After an hour of work, and a few big breakthroughs (one of which was figuring out that the wifi routers had been straight up smashed to bits, and another of which was the fact that the router room was kept locked at all times) they identified that it would have to be a convention staffer, or a rogue fan working with a convention staffer.

"Alright, let's get a list then!" Alexa shouted. Amber wasn't sure if her Judith of Bethulia cosplay detracted from, or enhanced her authority—though regardless, people paid attention to her when she was giving orders. "Let's get a list of the convention staffers!"

"We could ask one of the organizers to provide us with a list," Lindsey said. "Honestly, we've done them a favor here—this is something they should be taking care of."

"Hmm. Alright, but be wary of it," Likis said. "They're all purator sympathizers, if not purators themselves."

"That's absurd," Doc murmured.

"What about Eli?" Sasquatch asked.

"Oh yeah, Eli's cash," Lindsey said. "He'll help us."

"Guys!" Miguel, who was running the Amber Linz livestream was clicking furiously on his laptop.

"What's up?" Lindsey asked.

"The stream just got taken down."

"Oh, for fuck's sake!" Lindsey yelled. "Really? This is not a purist or editor stream, it's—"

“Wait,” Miguel said, “it’s not a copyright infringement notice. It’s ... ‘Your stream has been taken down due to a report of inappropriate content.’”

“That means someone working for Channel 1 did it,” Lindsey said.

“It does?” Doc asked. “Can’t it be done by users, just like a copyright bomb?”

“Users can report stuff for inappropriate content, but that just brings it to the attention of a human worker, who can choose whether or not to suspend the stream,” Lindsey said. “Or, a Channel 1 employee can suspend it at their own discretion, regardless of whether or not anyone’s reported it.”

“Are you sure?” Likis asked.

“It’s in the TOS, I’m sure,” Lindsey said. “Someone at the company—”

“Because we’re streaming something that has no actual movie or TV component?” Doc asked.

“But we’re allowed to do that during the Con,” Miguel said. “There’s a special ChannelCon ’30 category, that’s what I was streaming it under.”

“The con organizers—the members of the convention management board, they’re all employees of Channel 1,” Doc said. “It could have been any one of them.”

“Can we trace it?” Amber asked.

“Not without the help of someone who works for the company, a higher up,” Lindsey said. “They’re usually pretty tight-lipped about these things though. I’ll call Eli and ask him if he has any suspicions.”

“I have a suspicion of Eli,” Doc said. “He has creditor sympathies, I think it could’ve been him—the wifi shutdown and the rigged votes too.”

“Have you *met* Eli?” Lindsey asked. “The guy doesn’t have any sympathies, he doesn’t want anything to do with this feud.” Lindsey pulled up her address book on her hand, and scrolled through to find Eli.

He answered after one ring.

“Hello,” he said. “Lindsey, listen, I know who’s behind the wifi shutdown, and the voting stuff.”

“Really?” Lindsey asked. “That’s great, who?”

“Carlos Martín.” Lindsey frowned. “You know, Doctor Carlos.” Lindsey was still frowning, silent to Eli. “He, we found out—”

“Who did you get this information from?” Lindsey asked. Everyone around her had fallen silent.

“What’s he saying?” Likis shouted.

“I got it from—I’ve seen it, we have video evidence from the router room.”

“Really? The first thing we did was check the cameras, we found that all the cameras around the router room went off for a few minutes, while the shutdown was happening.”

“I knew it,” Doc said. “He’s trying to pin it on someone else, isn’t he?”

Lindsey turned away from Doc. She heard Eli exhale into his mic. “You’re right,” he said. “Listen, we don’t know who did it, but we need to pin it on someone, and if it’s someone who’s a creditor, they might all walk—boycott ChannelCon, maybe even boycott Channel 1. We can’t survive without—”

“You think pinning it on a purist wouldn’t *also* cause trouble?”

“That bastard,” Doc hissed. “He *is* trying to—”

“It’s fine,” Lindsey said. “We know who it is.”

“You ... you do?” Eli asked.

“We’ve narrowed it down anyway. It’s someone on the convention management board. Or at least, someone on the management board is involved. It could’ve been multiple people.”

“Do you have ... proof of that?”

“It’s the only logical possibility. Either an organizer did it, or an organizer helped someone who did it. So, which of the board members would have motive to do something like this?”

“Mmm, any of them!” Eli shouted. “They all wanted to stop everyone from running around!”

“They ...”

“It could have been any of them—or all of them, they were all nervous about the gang colors thing, the way people were using the app—but especially Tim Hogarth, he—”

“What, the icons? What do those have to do with this?”

“Well that’s why ... that’d be the reason for the wifi, for wanting the wifi to go out—to restrict people from forming squads and dividing into—”

“That’s what it was about?”

“Um ... yes, what ... well, no, that’s just the motive, from an organizer—I mean from an organizer’s perspective, because we—because that is one of the things, for managers, is keeping the peace between—that was—so yes, that would definitely be a motive, for any one of them, but I think Hogarth especially.”

“Okay ... well, we’ll track him down then. Thanks.”

“What the hell?” Doc said. “Are we seriously about to take the advice—”

Just after she’d hung up, Lindsey said, “No. He practically confessed to it himself. I asked if any organizers had motive, and he said they all wanted to shut down the wifi to keep people from each other’s throats, and to disable the use of the Fav Icons as gang colors.”

“He did go on and on about being nervous about that,” Miguel said. “When we talked this morning.”

“He’s been worried about the feud this whole time,” Lindsey said. “He thinks if things get too bad, creditors will boycott the con.”

“Maybe that’s why he threw the vote in Harmony’s favor,” Alexa said. “To give creditors a win.”

“You agree with me now?” Doc asked.

“No you jackass!” Likis wheeled on him. “He didn’t do it because he’s a creditor, he did it because he thinks if he doesn’t keep the peace, the con will fall apart and he’ll lose his job.”

“Six to one, half dozen to another,” Doc murmured.

“What?” Likis yelled.

“How do we prove it?” Lindsey cut the argument short. “I need a head on a platter for Sunny. Their reps still won’t call me back, like we’ve all got a disease or something.”

“Why don’t you just tell him we know it’s him,” Alexa said. “And record the conversation. If he doesn’t outright confess, he’ll probably do enough squirming to convince Channel 1 to launch an investigation into him.”

“That’s not fast enough,” Lindsey said. “We need this settled by ...” She trailed off, and Amber followed her gaze to Doc, who had ducked out of the conversation and was on a phone call—using an actual phone.

“... yes. Well, I ... he said that *I* can confirm?” Doc murmured. He glanced at Lindsey and Amber. “Oh, well, yes, I do know them.”

“Who is that?” Likis asked. “Who are you taking to, Eli? The organizers?”

Doc backed away further. “I’m actually not in a place right now where I can talk about this,” he said, almost inaudible.

“Who is that?” Likis yelled. “You’re not going off anywhere to confirm anything without telling us who you’re talking to.”

Doc stared for a while, then lowered the phone, shielding the microphone. “It’s my mother,” he hissed. “It’s personal.”

All eyes were on Doc. Amber couldn’t tell if he was lying or not.

“That’s very coincidental,” Likis said. “That you would—what the hell?” Her eyes narrowed behind her Glasses, and she pinched something, then held a hand to her ear. “Hello? Oh. Oh. Okay. Are you asking anyone else, by chance? Hmm, that’s what I thought.”

“What is going on?” Lindsey asked. “Who is calling you two?”

“I said, it’s personal,” Doc said.

“Yes, I do know them,” Likis said. Lindsey watched her and Doc’s faces, their eyes. Although they were surrounded by people staring at them, their eyes kept going back to Amber and Lindsey.

“Here,” Lindsey said, holding up her hand. “Let me pull up my address book,” she said, doing so and selecting Amber Smith, “and just make sure that your phone numbers,” she typed out a text to Amber, “don’t match with any that I have.”

A text bubble jumped up on Amber’s HUD. *LINDSEY: Argue me. About deal. Say to let likis and doc go off and make their calls.* Amber looked at Lindsey, who didn’t return the look. “Um, we should just let them go,” Amber said. She couldn’t possibly sound convincing.

“What? They’re obviously not on personal calls,” Lindsey whirled on her with an intense glare. “They’re probably talking to organizers, about to blame everything on someone other than Eli—on us, for all we know!”

“But. So what? Who would believe them?” Amber said.

“Sunny!” Lindsey yelled. “You don’t even care about this deal, do you? You’d rather just never talk to anyone!”

Amber flinched. “Well why is it so important? That’s all you’ve cared about this whole time, not our channel, not the convention.”

“God damn it, they left!” Lindsey shouted. Amber had noticed that—behind Lindsey’s back, Doc and Alexa had rushed off, out of sight.

“We can track them down,” Miguel said.

“No, it’s all fucked now,” Lindsey said. She turned her back to Amber and sat down in a chair, huffing. Amber wasn’t sure what to do now. She sat down on the ground, facing the other direction from Lindsey. Almost instantly, *LINDSEY: Good job!! You need to do more commentaries* appeared on Amber’s HUD. Then, *LINDSEY: Anyway, keep acting like you’re mad at me. text doc, ask him if he’s being asked to confirm that we’re behind the shutdown. Tell him you want to jump ship, tell him to confirm by pinning it all on Lindsey, and defending your own innocence. I’m going to do the same with likis*

Amber thought about it for a moment, then realized what Lindsey meant. The same party (or two members of the same party) were talking to Likis and Doc. Doc and Likis both believed there was some rift between Lindsey and Amber, and could be duped into

believing one of them wanted to destroy the other. Amber could get Doc to say the wife takedown was all Lindsey's fault, and Lindsey could get Likis to say it was all Amber's doing. If Likis and Carlos both reported totally contradictory stories to the third party, it would instantly prove their spuriousness.

After Amber sent her text to Doc, she texted Lindsey, *Sorry about what I said during the fake argument. I don't think that really.*

LINDSEY: Yeah, same here. I didn't mean to go personal, saying you'd rather never talk to anyone. It was just something I picked up from Likis and regurgitated in the moment. Lindsey wished she could turn around and face Amber, or give her a hug. She hated how much their argument about the deal had been pulled into the curator feud. She opened her address book, and scrolled through to the Sunny reps—there were two of them, Ana Rodriguez and Jonah Walter. They were really just supposed to talk to Ana, since Jonah was technically a supervisor, but Lindsey had been calling both of them today, and gotten responses from neither of them. She'd call Ana now, and even though she'd get no response, she could leave a voice mail, telling her she wanted to stick with the original deal. No one around them—none of Doc's or Likis's goons who could report to them that something was up—would understand what it meant, except Amber. Hopefully Amber would be paying attention, and would hear her, and understand that to Lindsey she was more important than some modification rights.

Lindsey tapped the phone icon by Ana's name on her hand, and almost instantly a single, short tone repeated in her ear—not like the dialing noises she'd heard when calling Amber—what did that mean? It sounded like an alarm or something. Amber would probably know.

It means the line is busy, Amber replied. *Someone is calling that person right now.*

"Son of a bitch," Lindsey said aloud. She called Jonah and got that same single, constant note. "Son of a bitch."

"What the hell!" Danny Dan yelled. "Doc just posted that—that this was all your doing, Lindsey! I can't believe it—you were the one doing all the talking, handling all this intelligence—you could've been lying to us the whole time!"

Lindsey stood up.

"Well Alexa just posted that it was Amber who did it!" Michineaux jabbed his finger at Dan.

Lindsey walked over to Amber and tapped her on the shoulder. "Come on." Lindsey said. Amber stood up. Lindsey lead the way away from their encampment.

"Where are you going!"

"Maybe it was both of them!"

"Amber would never do this!"

"Yes she would! She hates everyone!"

"Maybe because everyone gives all the credit to her hack commentator!"

"What about Eli?" Amber asked. "And clearing our name? For the—"

Lindsey put up a finger, and called Ana. The line wasn't busy anymore, though Ana didn't pick up. It went to voicemail, and Lindsey said, "Hi, sorry I couldn't reach you. When you do figure out everything that happened, and you call us back, I just want to tell you—forget all the modifications to the deal that we were talking about."

"Wait, Lindsey," Amber said.

"The original contract will be fine," Lindsey said. She smiled at Amber. "We don't want anything more than that."

Afterword

Science fiction fandom has never really changed, and as evidence, I'll quote Isaac Asimov's description of SF fandom in the 1930s, in his autobiography *In Memory Yet Green*:

Though science-fiction clubs were small, they were contentious. The membership tended to consist of intelligent, articulate, argumentative, short-tempered young men (plus a few women) who got into tremendous power struggles.

You might wonder how power struggles can possibly arise in small clubs devoted to something as arcane as science fiction, and I wonder, too—but it happens. ... I believe there were even arguments as to how best to “control fandom” or, on a lesser scale, the world. ...

And yet let me emphasize that, despite the contentiousness, the fans learned to love each other somehow and friendships were formed that not all the vicissitudes of the decades could break. There is, to a science-fiction fan, no stronger bond that can exist than that which is covered by the phrase “fellow fan.”

Asimov goes on to describe the Futurians, a group that split off from the Greater New York Science Fiction Club because they believed science fiction should be used to address world issues (and there was quite a lot to address in that year, 1938.) The Futurians were accused of being Communists for this (some were, others weren't), and many of them were banned from the first WorldCon in 1939.

Fast forward seventy-four years, and the Sad Puppies are trying to game the Hugo awards—the sci-fi/fantasy awards of WorldCon. For those who don't know, the Sad Puppies were a group of sci-fi fans who wanted to go back to the good ol' days of sci-fi with rocketships and blasters, not all that soft bullshit like literary technique and political messaging and basically they were just upset about the recent rise of writers from previously marginalized groups (women, queer folks, POC, etc.) These chuckleheads who were so obsessed with pulp, and returning to the past, would've been opposed to some of the biggest names of classic SF, like Isaac Asimov, Frederik Pohl, and James Blish—they would've been opposed to the Futurians for writing “heavy handed [sic] message fic,” as their ringleader put it.

Worse than the Sad Puppies were the Rabid Puppies, who fully embraced their status as white supremacist sexists, rather than trying to make some high-flung argument about the state of the genre as the Sad Puppies did. These groups both used some flaws in the Hugo Award voting system to game it and nominate books they deemed to be *real* sci-fi, or just troll nominations in the case of the Rabid Puppies.

At the time, I followed a lot of this drama, until I just got sick of it. I was disgusted by the Sad Puppies, but also disgusted by some writers who focused obsessively on criticizing them in a way I found uncomfortably us-vs.-them. There were plenty of people who opposed the Sad Puppies in constructive ways—setting up funds to help less privileged fans attend WorldCon, or pushing to change the voting rules so they couldn't be gamed—

but there were others who just put out vitriol. Shit, I did it in this very afterword—I didn't need to go off talking about how these dinguses would've been opposed to classic SF writers, but it's just so tempting. As fun as it is, I don't see such takedowns as being very productive. In fact, it seems to give such divisive groups more power, reinforcing the ideas that there are multiple opposing sides within fandom, not just one big "us."

Anyway, that was my background when I came up with, and started writing, this story in 2017, although not actually the inspiration.

The idea of curators had interested me for a while—maybe for a few years. As more and more content is produced, I speculated, and media becomes more and more decentralized, the role of curators in this landscape will grow larger and larger. Obviously this is already happening to some extent, though not to the degree that there are people who are *only* curators. So this curation idea rolled around in my head for a while, and some time in 2017 it knocked up against my deep abiding love for the public domain and creative commons. In just six months (!!!!!I'm so excited!!!!!!) works will be entering the public domain in the US (and most everywhere) for the first time in 50 years. There will be a lot of new stuff, a lot of buried stuff, and someone's gonna have to go through it all and tell us what's dope and what should stay buried. Such was my thinking, anyway.

Well, that was a fun playground—now I needed a game to play in it, a conflict. And that's where the fandom drama stuff came in, and I decided these curators would be curators of audiovisual content, mainly films. Stuff started falling into place after that—the main characters, the two sides of the division, the kind of stuff I would have to research.

For research, I read up a *ton* on early 20th century film, and did some research into failed conventions such as DashCon and Fyre Festival (the latter of which had just blown up at the time I came up with this idea.)

The biggest difficulty I ran into was the ending—I didn't know how to end this story in a way that felt like a solid resolution, while still squaring with my understanding of how these things go. My plot notes concluded with, "then the story ends. IDK, figure it out then." Although this cross-that-bridge-when-we-come-to-it approach to writing has proved disastrous for me at other times, and I've since stopped doing it, it actually worked out this time, and as I approached the final scenes I was able to find a conclusion that didn't feel unrealistic or terribly abrupt.

Coincidentally, when I finished editing "ChannelCon '30" in August of 2017 the Sad Puppies drama was going through its final death throes at DragonCon, where the Dragon Awards were gamed to create the appearance of some kind of culture war, each side using one author as a proxy (although it was most likely all *one side* just trying to perpetuate their ever-waning relevance.) I was struck by the similarity between this situation and my story. I was both disappointed that this stuff was still happening and a little thrilled at my success in depicting reality. Though as I said at the beginning of this afterword, fandom has never really changed, so I didn't take it as a sign that I was a prophet.

And conventions haven't changed either. Last year we had Fyre Festival, and this year we have TanaCon. And just this past week, the disorganized state of WorldCon76 has come to light. Fortunately, WorldCon76 has not actually *started* yet, and there is still time to rectify their problems. I wish them a much happier, more unified convention than ChannelCon '30.

Francis Bass
July 2018