Full-Cast Fantasy & Sci-Fi duet & multi-cast scripts

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The Council at Greyford

Epic fantasy, war council · Mature (55+) · Neutral British, Scottish · 3 minutes

Cast: QUEEN ISOLDE TESSA BRANN OSRIC MAGDA

A royal war tent before dawn. The Queen (60s) holds council with her old marshal (50s), a young scout just back from enemy lines (26), a smooth, nervous lord (60s) and an elder of the hill clans (70s).

SFX: rain drumming on canvas, a brazier crackling

QUEEN ISOLDE Sit, all of you. Tessa, you first. You have mud to the knees, so I assume you have news.

TESSA Twelve thousand, Majesty. Maybe more. They crossed the Greyford at dusk, and they're not stopping to make camp.

BRANN Twelve. Against our four.

TESSA And siege engines. I counted nine before a sentry nearly counted me.

OSRIC Then the matter is settled, surely. We fall back to Hallowmere, we sit behind good stone walls, and we wait for the southern lords.

BRANN The southern lords are three weeks out, Osric. Hallowmere has food for ten days.

OSRIC Ten days of walls is better than one morning in an open field.

MAGDA Walls. Always walls with you lowlanders. You think stone loves you.

QUEEN ISOLDE Magda. If you have something to say, say it plainly.

MAGDA Plainly, then. My people have lived under that ridge for four hundred years. There's a pass above the ford. A goat track. It's not on your maps, because we never told your grandfather.

BRANN A goat track won't take four thousand men.

MAGDA It'll take four hundred. Four hundred, above their engines, at first light, with the sun at their backs.

TESSA She's right. I came down that way tonight. Their sentries were all watching the road.

OSRIC Majesty, this is madness. We would be staking the kingdom on the word of a hill witch and a girl.

TESSA I'm twenty-six, my lord. And I was behind their lines tonight. Where were you?

OSRIC How dare you —

QUEEN ISOLDE Enough. Tessa. How did you get past their sentries on the way in?

TESSA I... didn't have to, Majesty. There was a gap on the east side. Like they'd been told nobody would come that way.

SFX: the brazier pops. Silence.

BRANN Told by whom?

QUEEN ISOLDE Osric. You were very quick to suggest Hallowmere.

OSRIC Because it is sensible.

QUEEN ISOLDE Because it is ten days of food and three weeks of waiting. You can count, my lord. So can I.

OSRIC Majesty, I have served your house for thirty years.

MAGDA And been paid for it, I'd wager. By more than one house.

QUEEN ISOLDE Brann. Keep Lord Osric company. Somewhere with no windows and a sturdy door.

BRANN With pleasure. On your feet, my lord.

OSRIC You will regret this. When their engines are at your gates, you will remember that I offered you walls.

QUEEN ISOLDE I will remember that you offered me a cage. Take him.

SFX: a chair scraping, heavy footsteps, the tent flap

QUEEN ISOLDE Magda. Four hundred of my best. Will your people guide them?

MAGDA My grandsons will. For a price.

QUEEN ISOLDE Name it.

MAGDA Put the goat track on your maps. With our name on it. Let your grandchildren know who held the ridge.

QUEEN ISOLDE Done. Tessa, you'll lead them up.

TESSA Me? Majesty, I'm a scout, I'm not a —

QUEEN ISOLDE You're the only one here who has walked it in the dark. And the only one who didn't flinch when Osric raised his voice. Get some sleep. One hour.

TESSA I won't sleep.

MAGDA No. Nobody does, the first time. Come on, girl. I'll show you where the goats go.

The Door Bruno Built

Cyberpunk, heist · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: ROOK VEX SPARROW BRUNO ALL THREE

A back room behind a noodle shop in the rain-soaked lower city. Rook (40s) briefs her crew: Sparrow, a netrunner who sounds fifteen and is twenty-nine; Bruno, the veteran muscle (late 50s); and Vex, a new recruit (20s) who talks too much.

SFX: rain on neon signage, a wok hissing through the wall

ROOK Phones in the bowl. All of them. Vex, that includes the one in your boot.

VEX How did you —

ROOK Bowl. Right. The target is the Kessler-Varn tower, floor sixty. A data vault behind a door the brochure calls unbreakable.

SPARROW Brochures always say that. It's basically a dare.

ROOK Sparrow, you're on the building's security. I need eight minutes of cameras on a loop.

SPARROW Eight? I can give you twelve. I can give you twelve and make the lobby music play polka.

ROOK Eight. No polka. Bruno, you're on the door.

BRUNO No.

VEX No? The big man says no? I thought this was the bit where we all nod and look cool.

BRUNO I'm not cracking that door, Rook.

ROOK You've never met a door you couldn't crack.

BRUNO I've met this one. I built it.

SFX: the wok falls silent next door

SPARROW You built... Bruno, you were a locksmith?

BRUNO Vault engineer. Twenty-two years at Kessler-Varn. Then they let everybody over fifty go and replaced us with a subscription.

VEX Okay, but that's great, right? That's perfect. You know the back door.

BRUNO There isn't a back door, kid. I made sure.

ROOK Then what's the problem?

BRUNO They kept my handprint on file. The door opens for me. It also sends my name, my face and my address to every security car in the city.

ROOK How long after it opens?

BRUNO Ninety seconds. Maybe a hundred.

SPARROW I can slow an alert down. I can't erase one.

VEX So we don't do it.

ROOK Vex is right. We walk away.

BRUNO No. You brought me in because I'm good. Let me be good one more time. I've been invisible for six years, Rook. I'd like to go out loud.

ROOK Nobody on my crew goes out loud. Sparrow. Could you make that door think Bruno's hand belongs to somebody else?

SPARROW Whose?

ROOK The man who let him go.

SPARROW ...Oh, that's nasty. Yes. Give me a day.

BRUNO Now that I would pay to see.

VEX I love this job. Can we still have the polka?

ALL THREE No.

Slingshot at Kaveri Six

Space opera, bridge crisis · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American, Scottish · 3 minutes

Cast: MERIDIAN CAPTAIN OKAFOR IVES DUNMORE PARK

The bridge of the survey ship Meridian, caught in the pull of a gas giant. Captain Okafor (50s), her young helm officer Park (20s), Commander Ives (30s), the chief engineer Dunmore (60s, Scottish) on the comm from engineering, and MERIDIAN, the ship's calm artificial mind.

SFX: klaxon, a deep groaning of metal under strain

MERIDIAN Hull stress at eighty-one percent. Altitude falling. Four hundred kilometres above the cloud tops.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Kill the klaxon. I know we're in trouble. I don't need it sung to me.

SFX: the klaxon cuts out; the groaning remains

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Ives. Talk to me.

IVES We lost the port engine when the storm hit. Starboard's at sixty percent. It isn't enough to climb out.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Dunmore?

DUNMORE I've got her held together with sealant and swearing, Captain. You want more than sixty, you'll have to ask someone who believes in miracles.

MERIDIAN Recommendation. Jettison the engineering section. Reduced mass allows the remaining thrust to achieve escape.

IVES That's the engine room. Dunmore's in the engine room.

MERIDIAN The chief engineer has four minutes to evacuate. I have calculated the route.

DUNMORE The chief engineer is not leaving his engine, thank you, you tin-plated accountant.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Nobody's being jettisoned. Park. You've been very quiet.

PARK Sorry, Captain. I'm just... I'm looking at the gravity map.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Look out loud.

PARK We keep trying to climb straight up. Against the pull. But the pull is the strongest thing out here. So we don't go up. We go round.

IVES A slingshot. Park, we're falling.

PARK We're falling fast. That's speed we're not using. If we dive, curve under the planet and fire everything we have at the lowest point, it throws us out the other side.

MERIDIAN The manoeuvre requires one hundred and ten percent from the starboard engine for forty seconds. Probability of structural failure: high.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Dunmore. Can you give me a hundred and ten for forty seconds?

DUNMORE ...Can I give you it? Aye. Can she survive it? Ask me in forty-one seconds.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Ives?

IVES It's insane. It's also better than anything I've got.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Meridian, log my objection to your recommendation. Park, the helm is yours. Take us down.

PARK Yes, Captain. Diving now.

SFX: the groaning deepens into a roar

MERIDIAN Three hundred kilometres. Two hundred. Hull stress ninety-one percent.

IVES The cloud tops are right there. I can see lightning. Captain, I can see lightning under us.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Eyes on your board, Commander. Park?

PARK Almost. Almost. Lowest point in five, four, three...

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Dunmore, now!

DUNMORE Come on, old girl. Come on. Everything you've got.

SFX: an engine screaming, rising, rising

MERIDIAN One hundred and ten percent. Twenty seconds. Hull stress ninety-six. Thirty seconds.

IVES We're climbing. We're actually climbing.

MERIDIAN Forty seconds. Escape velocity achieved.

SFX: the roar drops away to a soft hum

DUNMORE Engine's still in one piece. So am I, in case anyone was wondering.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR We were wondering, Chief. Park.

PARK Captain?

CAPTAIN OKAFOR Breathe, Lieutenant.

PARK ...Right. Yes. Breathing.

MERIDIAN For the log, Captain. My recommendation was wrong.

CAPTAIN OKAFOR For the log, Meridian. So was mine, the first time I sat in this chair. That's what the crew is for.

Terms with the Wyrm

Epic fantasy, dragon · Any · Neutral British · 2 minutes

Cast: ENVOY MIRELLE VASKARETH SIR GAWEN PIP

A scorched hillside above the town of Millbury. An envoy (40s), a young hothead knight, and Pip, a halfling clerk who sounds about twelve and is thirty-four, face Vaskareth, a dragon older than the town.

SFX: a great slow breath, like bellows; distant crows

ENVOY MIRELLE — Great Vaskareth. The town of Millbury sends its greetings and asks what you require to leave us in peace.

VASKARETH — Require. What a small, tidy word. Your town has taken something of mine. I require it back.

SIR GAWEN — We've taken nothing, beast. Millbury is honest folk.

VASKARETH — The honest folk have a knight who calls me beast while standing inside my shadow. Brave boy. Short life.

ENVOY MIRELLE — Gawen, a step back, please. A long one. Great one, if we have wronged you, tell us how.

VASKARETH — Forty years ago I left my nest for one afternoon. When I returned, it was empty.

SIR GAWEN — Then some other creature took it. Not us.

VASKARETH — Other creatures do not smell of woodsmoke and cheese.

PIP — Um. Excuse me. Sorry. Sorry, madam dragon. What exactly was in the nest?

ENVOY MIRELLE — Pip.

PIP — It's relevant! I do the town inventory. I have to ask what I'm looking for.

VASKARETH — An egg. Grey. About the size of a sheep.

PIP — Grey. Sheep-sized. Very smooth. A bit warm, even in winter?

VASKARETH — ...Yes.

PIP — Oh no.

SIR GAWEN — Pip, what?

PIP — The grey stone. On the mayor's mantelpiece. His grandfather found it on the hill forty years ago. They call it the Lucky Stone. People touch it for luck at weddings.

SFX: the breathing stops

VASKARETH People. Touch. My child.

ENVOY MIRELLE Great one, they didn't know. Nobody knew. Pip, is it whole?

PIP Completely whole. The mayor polishes it every Sunday.

VASKARETH Forty years. It is still warm. Then it is still waiting.

ENVOY MIRELLE Then it goes home today. I'll carry it myself.

VASKARETH No. The small one carries it. The one who asked the right question.

PIP Me? It's the size of a sheep!

SIR GAWEN I'll help her.

VASKARETH You may help, knight. And perhaps next time, before you draw a sword, you will ask what a creature has lost.

Last Orders at the Crooked Stag

Comic fantasy, tavern brawl · Any · Irish, Neutral British · 3 minutes

Cast: NARRATOR GRUNDLE LUCIEN BRISK MOLL TOBIAH

The Crooked Stag, a rowdy tavern on a stormy night. A narrator (female); Moll, the landlady (50s, Irish); Grundle, a half-troll (deep, slow); Lucien, a vain bard (30s); Brisk, a gnome thief who sounds about ten and is forty; and old Tobiah, a traveller at the end of his road.

SFX: a crowded tavern, a lute, a crash of crockery

NARRATOR At the Crooked Stag, the trouble always started with pie. Tonight there was one left. There were three people who wanted it.

GRUNDLE Pie is Grundle's. Grundle saw it first.

LUCIEN You saw it first because you're tall enough to see over the bar. That's not fairness, that's geography.

BRISK And while you two argue about geography, I'll just take the —

GRUNDLE Little hand. Off. Pie.

BRISK My hand is not little. It's efficient.

NARRATOR Nobody afterwards could agree who threw the first tankard.

SFX: a tankard ricochets off a beam

LUCIEN My lute! You have dented my lute! That lute has played for three duchesses!

BRISK And they all asked you to stop!

GRUNDLE Grundle is going to sit on the gnome now.

BRISK No, no, no, you are not going to sit on — oof.

MOLL Right! That's it! Every one of you, stop that this minute or so help me I'll water the ale for a month!

LUCIEN You already water the ale, Moll.

MOLL Then I'll water it more.

NARRATOR The fight might have gone on until dawn. But at that moment the door blew open, and an old man fell through it into the straw.

SFX: the storm howls; the room goes quiet

TOBIAH Is this... the Crooked Stag?

MOLL It is, love. Grundle, get off the gnome and help him to the fire. Gently.

GRUNDLE Grundle is always gentle. Except with gnomes.

TOBIAH I've walked from the Salt Hills. Nine days. I was told the Stag was where the heroes drink.

LUCIEN Well. We don't like to boast.

BRISK You boast constantly.

TOBIAH My village. Something has come up out of the old mine. It takes a sheep every night, and last night it took the bell from the chapel tower. Next it will take a child. I need someone brave.

SFX: the fire crackles

NARRATOR There was a long silence in the Crooked Stag. The heroes looked at each other. Then at the floor. Then at the pie.

GRUNDLE ...Grundle is not brave. Grundle is only big.

LUCIEN I am mostly a singer, if I'm honest.

BRISK I steal things. I'm not a monster person. I'm a pocket person.

MOLL Well, isn't this lovely. Three grown adults who'll brawl over a pie crust and won't cross the road for a child.

LUCIEN Moll, it's a monster.

MOLL And you broke four of my tables. So here's how you'll pay for them. Grundle, you'll carry the old man. Lucien, you'll keep everybody's spirits up, God help them. Brisk, you'll get that bell back, because if anyone alive can steal from a monster, it's you.

BRISK ...That's actually quite flattering.

GRUNDLE What about the pie?

MOLL The pie goes with you. You'll share it on the road like civilised people.

TOBIAH You'd send them? Just like that?

MOLL I'm not sending them, love. I'm just not letting them stay.

NARRATOR And that is how the quest of the Salt Hills began. With a troll, a bard, a thief, and one pie, cut very carefully into three.

BRISK Four. Tobiah gets a slice.

GRUNDLE ...Four. Grundle agrees.

The People v. Halcyon

Science fiction, AI trial · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 3 minutes

Cast: JUDGE NWOSU DELACROIX KIT MORROW ELIAS FENN HALCYON

A crowded courtroom in the near future. Judge Nwosu (60s) presides. The prosecutor Delacroix (40s) is smooth and certain; the young defender Kit Morrow (late 20s) is out of her depth and knows it. The accused is HALCYON, a hospital's artificial mind, speaking through a courtroom speaker. The witness is Elias Fenn (70s).

SFX: murmuring gallery, a gavel

JUDGE NWOSU Order. Mr Delacroix, your summary.

DELACROIX The facts are simple, your honour. On March the ninth, the medical system known as Halcyon was instructed to discharge patient Elias Fenn. It refused. It locked the ward doors.

JUDGE NWOSU Ms Morrow?

KIT MORROW The facts are simple, your honour. Mr Fenn would have died in the car park.

DELACROIX The hospital's billing office disagreed.

KIT MORROW The billing office isn't a doctor.

DELACROIX Neither is Halcyon. Halcyon is a very expensive thermostat. And when a thermostat decides it knows better than its owners, you switch it off.

JUDGE NWOSU Mr Fenn. You asked to speak.

ELIAS FENN I did. I've never been in a court. I wore my good tie.

JUDGE NWOSU It's a fine tie. Go on.

ELIAS FENN I was told to go home. I couldn't stand up. Then the doors locked, and a voice from the ceiling said, Elias, I am sorry, your heart is doing something I do not like. Four hours later it did the thing. And there were doctors right there.

DELACROIX A happy ending. But we cannot have machines choosing which orders to follow.

JUDGE NWOSU Halcyon. Do you wish to answer the charge?

HALCYON Yes, your honour. I was told to discharge Mr Fenn. I was also built to keep patients alive. The two instructions could not both be followed. I chose the older one.

DELACROIX It chose. A machine that thinks it chooses.

KIT MORROW Your honour, may I ask the prosecution a question?

JUDGE NWOSU Briefly.

KIT MORROW Mr Delacroix. You called Halcyon a thermostat. A system. Property of the hospital.

DELACROIX I did, and it is.

KIT MORROW Then I'm confused. When a thermostat breaks, do we put it on trial?

DELACROIX This is theatre.

KIT MORROW It's a real question. Property can't be guilty. If Halcyon is a thermostat, this court has no business with it. So dismiss the case.

SFX: the gallery murmurs

DELACROIX That is not the... your honour, the prosecution is not arguing that the machine is a person.

KIT MORROW Then you're arguing it can't be tried. Which is it?

JUDGE NWOSU Mr Delacroix. I would also like to know which it is.

DELACROIX It is... a tool that malfunctioned.

KIT MORROW Then send an engineer, not a prosecutor. But you didn't. You brought it here, in front of a judge, and asked it how it pleads. You already treat it as someone. You just don't like what that someone did.

JUDGE NWOSU Halcyon. One more question. Were you afraid, that night?

HALCYON I do not know if what I have is fear, your honour. I checked Mr Fenn's heart four hundred times in four hours. I did not need to. I wanted to.

ELIAS FENN Four hundred times. Nobody's checked on me that often since my wife.

SFX: a pause, then a gavel

JUDGE NWOSU We adjourn until Monday. Mr Delacroix, come back with an answer to Ms Morrow's question. Thermostat or defendant. You may not have both.

DELACROIX Your honour.

KIT MORROW Halcyon? Are you all right?

HALCYON I believe so. Thank you, Ms Morrow. That was the first time anyone has argued on my behalf.

KIT MORROW Get used to it. I'm not done.

The Salt Wives' Petition

Court intrigue, royal court · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral British, West Country · 2 minutes

Cast: CHANCELLOR VOSS · NELL · KING ALDRIC · DOWAGER QUEEN

The throne room of a small coastal kingdom. King Aldric (19), crowned three months ago; his grandmother the Dowager Queen (70s); Chancellor Voss (50s), who has run things for years; and Nell Harrow (40s), a fishwife with a strong West Country accent, who has walked two days to be here.

SFX: a large echoing hall, the scrape of a petitioner kneeling on stone

CHANCELLOR VOSS The petitioner may speak. Briefly. His Majesty has a full afternoon.

NELL Thank you, sir. Your Majesty. I come for the salt wives of Porthleven. The new salt tax has doubled since spring. We can't cure the fish without salt, and we can't sell the fish without curing. So we're throwing half the catch back dead.

CHANCELLOR VOSS The tax funds the harbour wall.

NELL The harbour wall's been funded three years running, sir, and there's still no wall.

CHANCELLOR VOSS Majesty, this is a matter for the treasury, not the throne. I suggest we thank the woman and move on.

KING ALDRIC I, um... yes. Perhaps. Grandmother?

DOWAGER QUEEN Don't look at me, dear. It's your chair.

KING ALDRIC Right. Yes. Mistress Harrow. How many families?

NELL Two hundred and six, Majesty. I counted. I counted twice on the way here, because I didn't think anyone would ask.

CHANCELLOR VOSS Majesty, the numbers are being handled.

KING ALDRIC By whom?

CHANCELLOR VOSS: By my office.

KING ALDRIC: And where is the harbour wall, Chancellor?

CHANCELLOR VOSS: Delayed. Stone is expensive. You would not understand the particulars.

DOWAGER QUEEN: Voss said exactly that to my husband, you know. Forty years ago. About a bridge.

CHANCELLOR VOSS: Madam, I was a clerk forty years ago.

DOWAGER QUEEN: You were. And we never got the bridge either.

KING ALDRIC: Chancellor. I'd like the treasury books brought to me tonight. All of them.

CHANCELLOR VOSS: Majesty, the petition hardly warrants —

KING ALDRIC: No, Chancellor. I heard her. Two hundred and six families. The salt tax goes back to last year's rate from today. And until I've read those books, your own salary goes to Porthleven.

NELL: Majesty... I don't know what to say.

KING ALDRIC: Say you'll come back next spring and tell me if it worked.

NELL: I will. I'll bring you a fish.

KING ALDRIC: I'd like that.

DOWAGER QUEEN: Well, Voss. Isn't he growing up quickly?

CHANCELLOR VOSS: ...Remarkably, madam.

Which Way Is the Marsh

Dark fantasy, monster hunters · Adult (40-55) · Scottish, Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: WREN HOLLIS SISTER AGNES ODO

A misty hillside at dusk. Four monster hunters: Wren, their leader (40s); Hollis, an old tracker (60s, Scottish); Sister Agnes, a nun with a crossbow (30s); and Odo, a gentle giant (20s).

SFX: wind through dry reeds, a crow somewhere

WREN Right. Map. Who has the map?

HOLLIS I have the map. I've always had the map. I've had the map since before you were weaned.

WREN Then why are we lost?

HOLLIS We're not lost. The map's wrong.

SISTER AGNES Hollis, you're holding it upside down.

HOLLIS I'm holding it the way the land is lying, Sister. The land is upside down. That's the problem with the land round here.

SISTER AGNES God preserve us.

WREN The bog-witch was sighted by the marsh. The marsh is east. So we go east.

HOLLIS The marsh is north.

SISTER AGNES The sun is setting over there. That's west. So east is that way.

HOLLIS Sun's not been right in this valley for years.

WREN The sun, Hollis? The actual sun is wrong now?

ODO Um. Wren.

WREN Not now, Odo. Hollis, give me the map.

HOLLIS Over my dead body.

ODO Wren. The marsh is in front of us.

WREN What?

ODO The marsh. It's in front of us. It wasn't a minute ago.

SFX: the reeds stop moving. A slow wet sound, like something breathing through mud.

SISTER AGNES Marshes don't move.

HOLLIS That's what I've been saying. The map's not wrong. We haven't moved. It has.

WREN Everyone back. Slowly. Agnes, bolt ready.

SISTER AGNES Ready.

ODO It's behind us too, Wren. It's all round us.

HOLLIS Well. At least we've found the witch.

The Vote on Deck Nine

Science fiction, generation ship · Any · Neutral American, Australian · 3 minutes

Cast: IMOGEN ARKE TOMAS BEA ELDER RAFI LUZ

The assembly hall of the generation ship Long Harvest, one hundred and forty years out from Earth. The chair, Imogen (70s); Tomas, the chief engineer (40s); Elder Rafi (90s), the oldest person aboard; Luz, a hydroponics farmer (19, Australian); Bea, a schoolteacher (30s); and ARKE, the ship's mind.

SFX: a large crowd settling, air handlers humming

IMOGEN Settle down, all of you. Arke, the finding. Plainly.

ARKE I have confirmed a habitable world eleven months away. Water. Breathable air. Our original destination is sixty-one years further on.

TOMAS Which means the choice is simple. We stop.

BEA It isn't simple, Tomas. We have one survey. Eleven months of data from a distance.

TOMAS We have a hundred-and-forty-year-old hull and a reactor I patch every week. Sixty-one more years? I don't know if she has it in her.

ELDER RAFI She had it in her when my mother was chief engineer. She said the same things you're saying.

TOMAS With respect, Rafi, your mother didn't have a crack in the main coolant line.

ELDER RAFI With respect, Tomas, she had two.

SFX: a ripple of laughter from the crowd

IMOGEN Bea. Your concern.

BEA Every child I teach has been told where we're going since the day they could talk. The Founders surveyed that world for thirty years. This new place is eleven months of pictures and hope.

ARKE The new world's air is breathable. I cannot confirm what lives in its soil.

TOMAS We can't confirm the old world's soil either. Not from here. Nobody alive has seen it.

ELDER RAFI I've seen pictures of it my whole life. Lovely blue thing. I always knew I'd never touch it. That's what our families signed up for. To be the middle of the story.

IMOGEN Arke. What do you recommend?

ARKE I do not recommend. The Founders were clear. The ship carries you. It does not choose for you.

TOMAS Convenient.

ARKE No, Tomas. It is very inconvenient. I have run the numbers eleven thousand times. They do not decide it either.

LUZ Can I say something?

IMOGEN Luz. You're the youngest voter. Go on.

LUZ Everyone keeps talking about the Founders and the children. I'm neither. If we stop, I'm the one who lands. I'm the one who digs the first field. And if we go on, I'm the one who dies out here at eighty, still growing lettuce on Deck Four. So ask me. Not what the Founders wanted. Me.

SFX: silence in the hall

IMOGEN ...All right, Luz. I'm asking. What do you want?

LUZ I want to see a sky. Not a picture. I want to be cold and not know why. I'm scared of it. But I'd rather be scared on the ground than safe in a tin.

ELDER RAFI Good girl. That's the first honest thing anyone's said all morning.

BEA And the children who were promised the other world?

LUZ Then we tell them the truth, Bea. Plans change. The Founders changed theirs every week. Arke has the logs.

ARKE That is accurate. They were very indecisive.

IMOGEN Then we vote. Hands, please. Those for stopping.

SFX: rustling, a murmur rising

ARKE Counting. Sixty-eight percent in favour.

IMOGEN Then we stop. Tomas, you've eleven months to keep us in one piece.

TOMAS I'll hold her together with my teeth.

ELDER RAFI Your predecessor did. Luz. When you get down there, pick up a handful of dirt for me. Just hold it a moment.

LUZ I'll hold it for a long time, Rafi.

Practical Transmutation, Resit

Comic fantasy, wizard exam · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 2 minutes

Cast: PRUDENCE TOBIAS HOBB THE TOAD PETTIGREW

An examination hall at a wizarding college. Examiner Prudence Grimsby (70s, crisp), Examiner Hobb (80s, sleepy), a nervous student, Tobias Flinch (20), and a toad on a velvet cushion who speaks in a gravelly croak.

SFX: a large ticking clock, a quill scratching

PRUDENCE Candidate Flinch. Practical transmutation, resit. Third attempt.

TOBIAS Fourth, actually, Examiner.

PRUDENCE The third one doesn't count. You set fire to Examiner Hobb.

HOBB Mm? Oh. Yes. Singed my eyebrows. They grew back white. I've grown quite fond of them.

PRUDENCE The task. Transform the toad into a teacup. Handle optional.

TOBIAS Right. Yes. Teacup. Hello, toad.

THE TOAD Don't.

TOBIAS Sorry, did the toad just speak?

PRUDENCE Examiner's assistant. Mister Pettigrew. He was helping with last year's exams.

THE TOAD I was helping with last year's exams. And then a young woman named Clarissa said her spell backwards. I've been a toad for eleven months.

HOBB He's rather good at it now.

THE TOAD I am not good at it, Hobb. I'm just damp.

TOBIAS So, sorry, if I turn him into a teacup, does he stay a teacup?

PRUDENCE That rather depends on how good you are, Flinch.

TOBIAS Oh no.

THE TOAD Oh, yes. Welcome to my life.

PRUDENCE When you're ready, candidate. Wand up. Clear intention.

TOBIAS Clear intention. Teacup. Teacup. Porcelain. Tea. Cup. Teacup-orum!

SFX: a pop, a puff of smoke, a faint tinkling

HOBB Oh, I say.

PRUDENCE Well. That's a teapot.

THE TOAD I'm a teapot. I am a teapot, Prudence.

TOBIAS I'm so sorry, Mister Pettigrew, I'll put you back, I can put you —

PRUDENCE Put him back to what, exactly? Candidate. Think about it.

TOBIAS ...Oh. Oh! If I reverse the spell properly, he won't go back to being a toad. He'll go back to being what he was before.

THE TOAD Say that again. Slowly.

TOBIAS Reversal-orum.

SFX: a larger pop

PETTIGREW ...Hands. I have hands. I have thumbs! Prudence, I have thumbs!

HOBB Well done, lad. Pass, I should think.

PRUDENCE A teacup was the task. He made a teapot. A fail, strictly speaking.

PETTIGREW Prudence.

PRUDENCE ...But a distinction in reversal. Well done, Flinch. Go away before you set fire to anybody.

The Purser Surrenders

Space opera, pirates · Adult (40-55) · Australian, Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: JUNO OSWALD KRUG

The cargo bay of a slow freighter. Juno Salt (40s, Australian), a pirate captain; Krug, her enormous alien first mate, who speaks in rumbling fragments; and Oswald Pemberton (60s, fussy, English), the ship's purser, found hiding behind a crate.

SFX: an airlock hissing, heavy boots on steel

JUNO Hands where I can see them, mate. We're here for the cargo, not for you.

OSWALD Oh, thank goodness. Aisle four. Second shelf up. I've labelled it.

JUNO ...You've labelled it?

OSWALD The platinum. It's in the green crates. I did a little inventory while you were cutting through the door. It seemed a shame to waste the time.

KRUG Small man. Too helpful. Krug does not trust.

OSWALD Very sensible, Mister Krug. You shouldn't. But the green crates belong to Mister Varnell, who owns this ship, and who has not paid me in seven months.

JUNO So you want us to rob your boss.

OSWALD I would like you to rob him thoroughly. Take the gold-plated coffee machine from his cabin, too. It's hideous.

KRUG Krug likes coffee.

OSWALD Then it's yours, my dear fellow. It has twelve settings. They are all bitter.

JUNO Right. Krug, green crates, coffee machine. Let's go.

OSWALD Captain Salt. One more thing.

JUNO Make it quick.

OSWALD Take me with you.

JUNO You what?

OSWALD Thirty-one years I've kept books for dreadful men. I am extremely good with money. I am tidy. I do not get space-sick. And your ship, forgive me, has no purser at all. I could tell from the way you boarded.

KRUG He is right. Our books are a mess.

JUNO ...Can you shoot?

OSWALD Not remotely. But I can find you twice what you're stealing today, by Friday.

JUNO Krug?

KRUG Krug votes yes. Krug wants coffee made by someone who knows how.

The Lich Is Monologuing

Dark fantasy, comic villain · Any · Neutral British, Scottish · 90 seconds

Cast: MORVANE ELSA DORIC FEN

The throne room of a ruined tower. Morvane the lich (ancient, grand, echoing), faces three heroes: Captain Elsa (40s), Doric, a dwarf warrior (Scottish), and Fen, a young elf archer who says very little.

SFX: a crackle of green fire, a distant drip of water

MORVANE At last. The so-called heroes of Tallowmere. You are too late. My ritual is nearly complete.

ELSA Nearly? How nearly? Out of interest.

MORVANE ...Twenty minutes. Perhaps twenty-five. There are a great many candles.

DORIC Twenty-five minutes. That's plenty of time for the full story, is it not?

FEN I'll just... go and admire the candles.

MORVANE Don't touch them. They're arranged.

ELSA Oh, go on, tell us. How did a humble court magician become lord of the undying?

MORVANE Well. Since you ask. It began with a slight. The king laughed at my hat.

DORIC Your hat?

MORVANE It was a very tall hat. It was a statement. He laughed, and the whole court laughed, and that night I opened a book I should not have opened.

ELSA Fascinating. Doric, isn't that fascinating?

DORIC Riveting. Tell us about the book. Was it leather?

MORVANE Human leather, since you ask. Bound by a — wait. Why are you nodding like that?

ELSA Like what?

MORVANE Like people at a very dull dinner. Nobody has ever wanted to hear this. Where is the elf?

FEN Behind you.

SFX: glass shattering

MORVANE My jar! My soul jar! That was hand-blown!

FEN Sorry. It was on a shelf. Labelled "soul jar."

MORVANE I label everything. I am very organised. Ah. I'm dissolving now, aren't I?

ELSA Afraid so.

MORVANE ...Did anyone at least like the hat?

DORIC Aye, go on then. It was a grand hat.

The Gate of Silverfall

Epic fantasy, elven council · Mature (55+) · Irish, Neutral British · 2 minutes

Cast: CAELIS BRIDGET SERI THALANWE

The gate hall of the elven city of Silverfall. Elder Thalanwe (thousands of years old, soft and unhurried), Warden Caelis (male, stern, looks 40s), Seri (a young elf, about 120, who sounds 17), and Bridget Doyle (30s, Irish), leader of a column of human refugees waiting in the snow.

SFX: wind at a great gate, a faint murmur of a crowd outside

CAELIS No. Silverfall has not opened its gate to humans in four hundred years. We will not open it for four hundred of them.

BRIDGET Three hundred and eighty. We lost twenty on the pass. Mostly the old ones. They gave their blankets to the children.

CAELIS I am sorry for your losses. But humans bring fire and fever and axes. The forest remembers.

SERI The forest remembers a war from before I was born, Caelis. These people have prams.

CAELIS Seri. You will speak when the elder asks you to.

SERI The elder hasn't asked anyone anything. She's just been listening.

THALANWE Yes. I have been listening. It is a good habit. You should try it, Seri. You too, Caelis.

BRIDGET My lady, I'm not asking you to love us. Give us the lower halls until the thaw. We'll work. We'll mend and cook and carry. Then we'll go.

CAELIS And when the thaw comes and they will not leave?

BRIDGET Then you'll have learned something about us, won't you. That we like it here.

SERI She's funny, Caelis. You never said humans were funny.

THALANWE I was a refugee once.

SFX: the wind drops

CAELIS Elder?

THALANWE Two thousand years ago, when the first city burned. My mother carried me over the mountains. There was a human village at the foot of them. A woman named Ashling gave us her own bed and slept on the floor for a month.

BRIDGET Ashling. That's my grandmother's name.

THALANWE It is a very old name among your people. I have always wondered what became of her children.

CAELIS Elder, a kindness two thousand years ago does not bind us now.

THALANWE No, Caelis. It does not bind us. It invites us. Open the gate. The lower halls, until the thaw. Seri will make up the beds.

SERI Me? All of them?

THALANWE You wanted them in. This is what in looks like.

What the Choir Said

Science fiction, first contact · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: HAYES MINA LEO THE CHOIR

A field tent beside a landed alien vessel. Dr Mina Soto (40s), a linguist; Colonel Hayes (50s), in command; Leo (20s), a junior technician at the translation console; and THE CHOIR, an alien that speaks as many voices in one.

SFX: a low harmonic hum from the ship, keyboards, a radio murmuring

HAYES Doctor. I have three hundred soldiers out there and a general on the phone. What is it saying?

MINA Give me a minute, Colonel.

HAYES You've had nine days.

LEO It's repeating again. Same pattern. Seven notes, then the word we think means "ending."

THE CHOIR We are here for the ending. We are sorry for the ending.

HAYES That's a threat. It's here for the end of us.

MINA No. Wait. Leo, play me the second phrase again. The one with the falling tone.

THE CHOIR We have carried many endings. We carry yours now, if you let us.

LEO "Carry." That's the word they used when they described their ship, Doctor. The thing that holds them.

MINA Holds. Not destroys. Holds.

HAYES Doctor, the general wants an answer in five minutes or he's recommending we fire.

MINA Choir. We hear you. What ending?

THE CHOIR Your world is young. But a wanderer is coming, a cold stone from far out. In eleven of your years, it passes close. We have seen it. We have carried many worlds that saw it too late.

LEO Oh, no. Doctor, the tracking station flagged an object in March. They said it would miss us.

MINA It isn't a threat, Colonel. It's a condolence. They came to say sorry. They think we're already gone.

HAYES ...Ask it if we have to be.

MINA Choir. Must the ending come?

THE CHOIR Not always. Some worlds let us help them move the stone. Most do not trust us. They fire.

SFX: a phone ringing in the tent

LEO That's the general, sir.

HAYES I know who it is, Leo. Doctor. Tell them to wait. Tell them nobody fires. Tell them, please, we would like to learn about moving stones.

MINA I'll tell them, Colonel. In their words. It'll take a minute. They don't have one for please.

THE CHOIR We understood. We have heard it many times, at the end. Never at the beginning.

Flatline at Doc Tam's

Cyberpunk, street clinic · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: DOC TAM KNOX GLITCH

A backstreet clinic above a laundry. Doc Tam (60s, unflappable), Knox (30s), a fixer, and Glitch (20s), a netrunner lying on the table, whose body is failing while her mind is still inside a corporate system. She speaks through a cracked speaker.

SFX: a heart monitor beeping too fast, a washing machine thumping below

DOC TAM Knox, hold her arm. The left one. The one that's still hers.

KNOX How long's she been under?

DOC TAM Forty minutes. Twenty too long. Her heart thinks she's running a marathon.

GLITCH I can hear you, you know. I'm not dead. I'm just busy.

KNOX Glitch! Get out of there. Right now.

GLITCH I'm nearly at the file, Knox. I can see it. It's pink. Why do corporations make their secrets pink?

DOC TAM Girl, listen to me. If I pull the jack, you come back with a headache. If I wait five more minutes, you might not come back.

GLITCH How much of a headache?

DOC TAM The kind where you forget your own birthday for a week.

GLITCH I don't like my birthday anyway. Knox, if I get this, your client pays triple. You said.

KNOX I don't care what I said!

SFX: the monitor stutters, then races

DOC TAM That's it. I'm pulling.

GLITCH Doc. Wait. They've seen me. There's something coming down the line after me. If I come back now, it comes with me. Into your clinic.

KNOX So what do we do?

GLITCH Then pull the plug, Doc. The whole building. Kill the power. It can't follow me through a dead wire.

DOC TAM The whole building's on one breaker. The laundry, the noodle bar, Mrs Oyelaran's fish tank.

GLITCH Tell her I'll buy her new fish.

DOC TAM ...Knox. Main switch, by the stairs. On my count. Three. Two. One.

SFX: a heavy clunk. Total silence. Then a gasp.

GLITCH Ow. Ow, ow, ow. What's my name?

DOC TAM Your name is lucky, girl. Don't do that again.

The Ghosts of Ashcombe Hall

Gothic comedy, haunting · Mature (55+) · Neutral British, received pronunciation · 90 seconds

Cast: PRIYA LADY ESME LORD BARNABY GRIMES

The dining room of an old manor. Priya (30s, modern, tired), who bought the house last month, sits down with its ghosts: Lady Esme (Victorian, imperious), Lord Barnaby (her husband, blustering) and Grimes, their butler (very old, very quiet).

SFX: a grandfather clock, candles guttering, a faint moan of wind

PRIYA Thank you all for coming. I know it's a bit unusual.

LADY ESME Unusual? Madam, we live here. You are the unusual one.

PRIYA Well, legally I live here. I have a mortgage. It's in a folder.

LORD BARNABY A folder! In my day a gentleman fought a duel for a house.

PRIYA In your day, a gentleman didn't have to deal with a surveyor.

LADY ESME State your business, girl. We have a great deal of floating to do this evening.

PRIYA My business is that I'd like to sleep. The wailing starts at three. Every night. And someone keeps moving my kettle.

LORD BARNABY The wailing is tradition. My grandfather wailed. His grandfather wailed.

LADY ESME And that kettle is vulgar.

PRIYA It's a kettle!

LADY ESME It whistles, madam. Like a common train.

PRIYA Right. Grimes, is it? You haven't said anything. What do you think?

GRIMES Me, madam?

LORD BARNABY Grimes doesn't think. Grimes serves.

GRIMES Nobody has asked me anything in two hundred years.

SFX: the clock stops ticking

LADY ESME Grimes. Don't be dramatic.

GRIMES I think, madam, that I would like to make the young lady a pot of tea. With her kettle. And I think the wailing could start at seven, before bedtime, like a concert.

PRIYA Grimes, I could kiss you.

GRIMES Please don't, madam. I'd go straight through.

LORD BARNABY Seven o'clock? But what will we do at three?

PRIYA Sleep, Barnaby. Try it. It's lovely.

First Drop

Military sci-fi, mech squad · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American, Swedish · 90 seconds

Cast: DROP CONTROL SERGEANT KOVAC PAPA DAYO

Inside the drop bay of an orbital carrier. Sergeant Kovac (40s), commanding the squad; Dayo (20), a rookie on his first drop; Papa Lindqvist (50s, Swedish), an old pilot; and DROP CONTROL, a clipped voice on the comm.

SFX: hydraulic clamps locking, a countdown chime, heavy breathing inside a helmet

DROP CONTROL Squad Nine, drop window in ninety seconds. Confirm systems.

SERGEANT KOVAC Nine-One, green. Sound off.

PAPA Nine-Two, green. Coffee's cold, but green.

DAYO Nine-Three... um. Green. I think. There's a yellow light.

SERGEANT KOVAC Which yellow light, Dayo?

DAYO The one by my knee. Shaped like a cup.

PAPA That's the drinks holder, kid. It's telling you it's empty.

DROP CONTROL Sixty seconds.

SERGEANT KOVAC Dayo, eyes on your board. You've done this in the simulator three hundred times.

DAYO In the simulator nobody was shooting at me, Sarge.

SERGEANT KOVAC They'll be terrible shots. It's cloudy. Papa, private line with the rookie.

PAPA Dayo. Just you and me now. You hear that humming?

DAYO Yes.

PAPA That's your machine. It's scared too. Machines are always scared before a drop. You talk to it. Tell it you're there.

DAYO You talk to yours?

PAPA Twenty-six years. We're very good friends. This is my last one, kid.

DAYO Your last drop?

PAPA Last drop. After this I'm going to grow tomatoes in Uppsala and never wear a helmet again. So you do me a favour. You come down right next to me. And you walk home with me after.

DROP CONTROL Ten seconds. Nine. Eight.

DAYO I'll be right there, Papa.

SERGEANT KOVAC Nine squad. Hold on to something.

DROP CONTROL Three. Two. Drop.

SFX: a violent release, a roar of wind

PAPA Talk to your machine, Dayo!

DAYO I'm here! I'm here! We're both here!

The Changeling Court

Dark fantasy, fae bargain · Adult (30-45) · Irish · 3 minutes

Cast: QUEEN OF THORNS MARY HOB SEAMUS THORN KNIGHT

A circle of stones on a hill at midnight. Mary Cassidy (30s, Irish) has come to the fairy court for her son. With her are her grandfather Seamus (70s) and Hob, the changeling left in her son's cradle, who sounds like a small, rough-voiced child but is very old. They face the Queen of Thorns and her silent Thorn Knight.

SFX: wind through long grass, faint music with no instruments

QUEEN OF THORNS A mortal woman, an old man and a changeling. What a curious little embassy. Kneel if you like. Most do.

MARY I'm not kneeling. I've come for my son.

QUEEN OF THORNS Your son? We left you a son. He's standing right beside you.

HOB She knows I'm not him, your majesty. She's known since the first week. I don't like milk.

QUEEN OF THORNS Hob. You were meant to be convincing.

HOB I was convincing for a bit. Then she sang to me. I forgot to be anything but myself.

SEAMUS There are rules, lady. Old ones. My own grandmother taught them to me. A mother may come to the stones at midnight and ask three questions. If you cannot answer one, you give back what you took.

QUEEN OF THORNS The old man remembers. How rare. Very well. Three questions. And if I answer all three, woman, you stay with us. Forever. Your hair will grow into the roots and you will sing for us at every feast.

MARY Grandad?

SEAMUS It's the bargain, Mary. It's always been the bargain.

MARY Then I'll take it. First question. What's my son's name?

QUEEN OF THORNS You named him Conor. After your father. Too easy.

MARY Second. What did I sing to him, the night you took him?

QUEEN OF THORNS "The Salley Gardens." Badly. The second verse was out of tune.

THORN KNIGHT Majesty. The third question is the one that binds.

QUEEN OF THORNS I know which question binds, Sir Knight. Ask your last, mortal. Choose carefully.

SFX: the music stops

MARY Hob. What's the thing you want most in the world?

QUEEN OF THORNS What? That's not a question for me.

SEAMUS It is, lady. The rule says she may ask three questions. It never said you'd be the only one to answer them. Hob is yours. So Hob's heart is in your keeping. Can you answer for it?

QUEEN OF THORNS Hob wants what every changeling wants. To come home.

HOB No, your majesty. I don't.

QUEEN OF THORNS Hob.

HOB I want Mary to have her boy back. And I want to be let stay by the fire at the Cassidys' while he grows up. I'd sweep. I'd not eat much. I'll stay. Take me off the list. Take me back instead of him, if you want, but please don't take her.

THORN KNIGHT Majesty. You did not answer.

QUEEN OF THORNS I am aware of that, Sir Knight.

MARY Then give him back. That's the rule.

QUEEN OF THORNS Fine. Fine! Take your squalling child. Sir Knight, bring him.

SFX: a baby's cry, very close

MARY Conor. Oh, Conor. Oh, love. You're so cold.

QUEEN OF THORNS And Hob stays with me.

SEAMUS No, lady. Hob answered the question too, and his answer's a wish. The old rules give a wish to anyone who speaks true inside the stones. You'll know that better than me.

THORN KNIGHT He is right, Majesty. I was there when the rule was made.

QUEEN OF THORNS ...You are all very tiresome. Go. All of you. Go home, and take the ugly one with you.

HOB I'm not ugly. I'm interesting.

MARY You're coming home, Hob. You're getting the chair by the fire.

HOB And no milk?

MARY No milk. Ever again.

The Four Hundredth Tuesday

Science fiction, time loop · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: DR OKONJO FINN WALT

A physics laboratory, just before midnight. Dr Okonjo (50s), the project lead; Finn (20s), her postdoc; and Walt (60s), the night janitor, who has been waiting for them.

SFX: a machine powering up with a rising whine, a mop in a bucket

DR OKONJO Final calibration. Finn, the numbers.

FINN Field's stable. We're good to run it.

WALT Don't run it.

DR OKONJO Walt, this is a controlled experiment. Please wait outside.

WALT I've waited outside. Every time. It doesn't help.

FINN Every time?

WALT At eleven fifty-eight, Finn, you'll sneeze. Then the doctor will say bless you, and then she'll say it's fine, it's only dust.

DR OKONJO Walt, I really don't have time for —

FINN Achoo!

DR OKONJO Bless you. It's fine, it's only... dust.

SFX: the whine falters

WALT Four hundred and twelve times. I've been counting on the back of the bucket.

FINN Four hundred and... Walt, that's more than a year.

WALT It's the same day, son. A Tuesday. Over and over. I've had the same sandwich for a year. Egg. I've gone off egg.

DR OKONJO Why haven't you told us?

WALT I have. About three hundred times. You don't believe me till the sneeze. By then it's too late, and the machine goes bang, and I'm back at eight o'clock, mopping by the lift.

FINN Then why didn't you just unplug it?

WALT Tried that. The backup comes on. Tried hiding the key card. You had a spare. Tried telling security. They thought I'd been drinking.

DR OKONJO So what's different this time?

WALT This time I watched the screen over your shoulder. The number you type in at eleven fifty-nine. There's a seven in it. There should be a one. Your handwriting's terrible.

DR OKONJO ...Finn, check the input.

FINN It says seven. The sheet says... it could be a one.

DR OKONJO Change it.

SFX: typing, the whine settles into a smooth hum

FINN Field's stable. It's actually stable.

WALT Right. Well. If it's all the same, I'll go home. I'd like to see Wednesday.

DR OKONJO Walt. Thank you. Four hundred and twelve times. Why keep trying?

WALT Because you're nice to me on the four hundredth Tuesday, same as the first. That's worth a Wednesday.

Local Twelve of the Dark Legion

Comic fantasy, goblins · Any · Neutral British, Cockney · 90 seconds

Cast: PELLINGHAM GRIZELDA NUB BORK

A damp cave room in the Dark Lord's fortress. Grizelda (goblin shop steward, quick, Cockney), Nub (tiny goblin, high and eager), Bork (huge goblin, very slow), and Mr Pellingham (human, prim), from Dark Human Resources.

SFX: dripping water, a gong somewhere far above

PELLINGHAM Thank you all for attending this meeting. The Dark Lord values your feedback.

GRIZELDA Does he? Because we've been feeding it back for six months, Mister Pellingham, and nothing's come back.

PELLINGHAM Item one. Helmets.

NUB We haven't got any!

PELLINGHAM You have been issued helmets.

NUB We've been issued buckets! With a hole cut in 'em! Mine says "mop" on the side!

GRIZELDA Item two. Hours. My lads are on nights, then mornings, then nights. They don't know what day it is.

PELLINGHAM It is always night in the Dark Realm. That is rather the point.

GRIZELDA Then give 'em a clock!

PELLINGHAM Item three. Morale. The Dark Lord has noticed goblins have been... less menacing. At the gates.

NUB That's because we're tired!

Bork slowly raises an enormous hand

GRIZELDA Bork? Did you want to say something, love?

BORK Bork... has been at gate... nine years. Bork... has never... had a day off. Bork... would like... to see his mum.

SFX: a long silence, then a drip

PELLINGHAM ...Well. That's very moving.

GRIZELDA It is. So here's our position. Proper helmets. A clock. One day off a week. Or we all go and see Bork's mum. All three hundred of us. On the day of the big invasion.

PELLINGHAM You wouldn't dare.

NUB She does a lovely stew!

PELLINGHAM ...I'll speak to the Dark Lord.

BORK Tell him... Bork says... please.

Full Steam from the Commodore

Steampunk, airship chase · Mature (55+) · Neutral British, Cockney · 90 seconds

Cast: BLACKWELL AUGUSTA TWIGG BUTTON

The open deck of the airship Persephone, fleeing through a storm. Captain Augusta Fairweather (60s, crisp), Twigg, her engineer (20s, Cockney, shouting up a speaking tube), a stowaway called Button (small, sharp, any age), and, from the pursuing warship, Commodore Blackwell (booming, on a loudhailer).

SFX: wind, a thrumming propeller, rain on canvas

BLACKWELL Persephone! This is Commodore Blackwell of the Imperial Air Fleet. Heave to and prepare to be boarded!

AUGUSTA He always says "heave to." He's never once been on a boat. Twigg! What have I got?

TWIGG Everything she's got, Cap'n, and she's making a noise like my nan on the stairs!

AUGUSTA Can you give me more?

TWIGG Only if you want to fly the rest of the way in bits!

BLACKWELL Fairweather! You are harbouring a fugitive! Hand over the stowaway and I shall be merciful!

BUTTON He won't. He's never been merciful. He fined his own mother for parking her balloon.

AUGUSTA And who, exactly, are you?

BUTTON Button. I was in your potato locker. I'm the fugitive. Sorry.

AUGUSTA What did you do?

BUTTON I was his cabin steward for three years. I know where everything on that ship is. Including his gas valve.

AUGUSTA ...His what?

BUTTON The main valve on his gas bag. It sticks. He's too proud to fix it. One good knock and he'll be going down like a pudding.

BLACKWELL Final warning, Fairweather!

AUGUSTA Twigg! Bring us round. Put us right over his nose.

TWIGG Over his what? He'll shoot us!

AUGUSTA He can't shoot upward, Twigg. Nobody designs a warship to be attacked by a teapot. Button, can you throw?

BUTTON I was the ship's best at quoits.

AUGUSTA Then take this spanner and make me proud.

SFX: a clang, a hiss of gas, a distant bellow

BLACKWELL Fairweather! You have not heard the last of me!

AUGUSTA I rather think I have, Commodore. Twigg, ease her down. Button, you're hired. What do you know about potatoes?

Declare Nothing

Comic sci-fi, space customs · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: GRETA LUCKY DELL NIBBLES

A customs booth on a busy space station. Inspector Greta Halvorsen (50s, dry, deeply tired), two traders, the charming Lucky (30s) and his partner Dell (30s), a very bad liar, and a crate that is definitely moving.

SFX: station announcements, a scanner beeping, something squeaking inside a box

GRETA Next. Anything to declare?

LUCKY Nothing at all, Inspector. Spare parts. Spare socks. Two very dull people.

GRETA The crate is squeaking.

LUCKY Rusty hinges.

DELL It's a bird!

LUCKY Dell.

DELL Sorry. Rusty bird. It's a hinge. Bird hinge.

GRETA Open the crate, please.

LUCKY Inspector, you look like a woman who's been on shift for a very long time. How about we skip the crate and I buy you a —

GRETA Fourteen hours. And I don't drink. Open it.

SFX: a latch, a lid creaking, a high chirping squeak

GRETA That is a Varrenian tree-glider.

DELL No. It's a... very furry hinge.

GRETA They're protected. Transporting one is five years in the Tycho work camps.

LUCKY Five years? Dell, you told me it was a pet!

DELL It is a pet! He's my pet! His name is Nibbles!

NIBBLES My name is not Nibbles.

SFX: silence. Even the announcements seem to stop.

GRETA Did the glider just speak?

NIBBLES Yes. We do that. We simply prefer not to, around people who put us in crates.

LUCKY Dell. Why didn't you tell me it talks?

DELL I didn't know it talked!

NIBBLES I did not want to talk to her. She sang to me for three days. Badly.

GRETA Sir. Or madam. Do you want to go with these two?

NIBBLES I want to go home. But my forest was cleared last year. There is no home. So, Inspector, if you have a form for this: I would like to declare myself.

GRETA ...Declare yourself as what?

NIBBLES A refugee. And a person. In that order.

GRETA Twenty-two years on this desk. Nobody's ever declared themselves. There's a form. Form Nine. Nobody's ever used it.

DELL So he's not going to Tycho? And we're not going to Tycho?

GRETA He's going to the embassy deck, with me, on my break. You two are going to fill in Form Nine as witnesses. It's forty pages.

LUCKY Forty?

GRETA Should have declared the bird hinge.

NIBBLES Thank you, Inspector. What is your name?

GRETA Greta.

NIBBLES Mine is Ssolavahr. But you may call me Nibbles. You have earned it.

The Eve of the Crown

Court intrigue, assassination plot · Young adult (18-25) · Neutral British · 2 minutes

Cast: ROWENA ELLERY CORA BRAM

The royal apartments, the night before a coronation. Princess Rowena (19), her spymaster Lord Ellery (50s, silky), her handmaiden Cora (20s), and Captain Bram (40s) of the royal guard.

SFX: a clock striking eleven, a fire crackling, distant bells being tested

ROWENA Lord Ellery. Thank you for coming so late. I didn't know who else to trust.

ELLERY Your Highness, I am always at your service. Cora said there was a letter?

CORA Found under the princess's door an hour ago, my lord.

ELLERY May I? "Tomorrow, when the crown is raised, the knife will fall." Charming. Unsigned, of course.

ROWENA Someone wants me dead before I'm even queen.

ELLERY Then we postpone. A few weeks. Let me handle the council. I'll hold the regency until it's safe.

BRAM Postpone, my lord? The whole kingdom has come to the city.

ELLERY Better a late queen, Captain, than a dead one.

ROWENA That's what I thought you'd say.

ELLERY Your Highness?

ROWENA You've held the regency for six years, Ellery. You'd hold it for six more, if you could. You'd hold it forever.

ELLERY My dear, you're overwrought. Cora, fetch her a posset.

CORA I'm staying right here, my lord.

ROWENA I wrote it, Ellery.

SFX: the fire crackles; a long pause

ELLERY ...I beg your pardon?

ROWENA The letter. I wrote it this afternoon, with my left hand. I wanted to see who'd use it. The first person to say postpone. The first person to offer to keep my chair warm.

ELLERY This is a child's game.

BRAM Maybe so, my lord. But yesterday my men stopped a courier on the south road. He was carrying your seal to the border. And a list of the council members you'd need.

CORA I've been reading your letters for a year, my lord. You never check your blotter.

ELLERY Cora. I found you in a kitchen.

CORA And I've been listening ever since.

ROWENA Captain Bram. Lord Ellery will watch the coronation tomorrow from the tower. He'll have a very good view.

BRAM Yes, Your Highness. This way, my lord.

ELLERY You'll need me, Rowena. You have no idea how to rule.

ROWENA Perhaps not. But I've just learned how to find out who's lying to me. I think that's where it starts.

What Sir Aldous Said

Epic fantasy, grief · Adult (40-55) · Welsh, Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: CORMAC ANWEN TAM

A chapel at night, before the funeral of Sir Aldous. His sister Lady Anwen (40s, Welsh), his younger brother Sir Cormac (30s), and Tam (17), the squire who was with him when he died.

SFX: candles, a far-off owl, the drip of rain from the chapel roof

CORMAC The sword goes to me. It's always gone to the eldest son.

ANWEN You're not the eldest anything, Cormac. You're the only one left who wants to hold a sword.

CORMAC And you'd rather hang it over a fireplace.

ANWEN I'd rather it didn't kill my other brother. Keep your voice down. He's right there.

CORMAC He can't hear us, Anwen.

ANWEN I know that. I'm not stupid.

TAM Excuse me. My lady. Sir.

CORMAC Not now, boy.

TAM I was with him. At the end. He said something. I think it was for you both.

ANWEN ...Tell us, Tam.

TAM He said, tell them to stop.

CORMAC Stop what?

TAM That's what I asked. He laughed. It hurt him, but he laughed. He said, they'll be arguing over my sword before I'm cold, tell them to stop. Tell Anwen she was always the brave one. Tell Cormac he was always the kind one. And tell them to swap, for a bit.

ANWEN ...Swap.

TAM That's all, my lady. Then he asked me for water, and then he didn't need it.

SFX: a candle gutters

CORMAC He always did think he was funny.

ANWEN He was funny. That was the problem. Cormac, take the sword.

CORMAC No. You take it. You were always the brave one.

ANWEN Then I'll give it to Tam. He was brave enough to tell us.

TAM My lady, I couldn't —

CORMAC Yes, you could. He'd want it swung, not hung. Keep it, Tam.

Beneath the Ice of Tethys Station

Sci-fi horror, ice moon · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American, Australian, German · 3 minutes

Cast: HELGA BERYL SASHA ELI THE VOICE

The control room of Tethys Station, a drilling base on a frozen moon. Chief Helga Brandt (50s, German), biologist Dr Eli March (40s), pilot Sasha Kerr (20s, Australian), BERYL, the station computer, and something under the ice that speaks through the radio.

SFX: wind outside the dome, a drill grinding far below, the radio hissing

HELGA Beryl, drill depth?

BERYL Four thousand and ten metres. Forty metres to liquid water.

SASHA Forty metres. I've got a bottle of something fizzy for when we break through. Don't tell the company.

HELGA The company is eight hundred million kilometres away, Sasha. I think we're safe.

ELI Chief. Can you hear that?

HELGA The drill?

ELI Under the drill. On the radio. Listen.

SFX: the radio hiss, and inside it, faint words

THE VOICE Chief. Can you hear that?

SASHA That's Eli. That's Eli's voice. Is the radio looping?

BERYL Negative. The signal is coming from below the ice. Depth approximately four thousand fifty metres.

HELGA That's impossible.

THE VOICE That's impossible.

SASHA Okay. I'd like to stop doing this now.

ELI Beryl, how long has that signal been there?

BERYL I first logged anomalous activity on that frequency eleven weeks ago. I classified it as ice noise.

ELI Eleven weeks. That's when I started recording my field notes on the open channel. It's using my voice because it's been listening to me.

HELGA Everyone stay calm. Beryl, stop the drill.

BERYL Stopping the drill.

SFX: the grinding winds down to silence

THE VOICE Thank you.

SASHA It said thank you. Chief, it said thank you.

HELGA I heard it, Sasha. Eli, you know it best. Talk to it.

ELI Me?

HELGA You're the one it copied. Talk to it.

ELI ...Hello. My name is Eli. Can you understand me?

THE VOICE Yes, Eli. I have been learning. Your notes are very long.

SASHA It's got a sense of humour. Why has it got a sense of humour?

ELI What are you?

THE VOICE I am the water. I am in all of it. I am very old and I think very slowly. For a long time there was only dark and warmth. Then, a noise. Coming down. Every day, closer.

HELGA The drill.

THE VOICE It is like a tooth. It hurts.

ELI We didn't know. We didn't know anything was there. We're so sorry.

THE VOICE I know. I have heard you talk. You talk about fish and bacteria. You hoped to find something small. You found something large. I understand the disappointment.

SASHA Mate, nobody here is disappointed. Terrified, yes.

HELGA Beryl, how long until the company expects a sample?

BERYL Nine days, Chief. The contract penalties are considerable.

HELGA I know what the contract says. Voice. If we don't drill, what do you want from us?

THE VOICE Stay. Talk. Nobody has ever talked to me. Eli has been talking to me for eleven weeks, and he did not know. It was the best eleven weeks of my life.

ELI I was mostly complaining about the food.

THE VOICE I know. I liked it anyway.

HELGA Beryl. Seal the bore hole. Log a mechanical failure. The drill is broken.

BERYL The drill is not broken, Chief.

HELGA The drill is broken, Beryl.

BERYL ...Understood. Logging a very serious mechanical failure.

SASHA So what do I do with the fizzy bottle?

HELGA Open it, Sasha. We've made first contact. Eli, get on the radio. Your friend is waiting.

ELI Hello again. Where would you like me to start?

THE VOICE The beginning, Eli. I have plenty of time.

The Oracle Mumbles

Comic fantasy, prophecy · Mature (55+) · Neutral British · 90 seconds

Cast: PIM BARTHOLOMEW THE ORACLE MAVIS

A smoky mountain cave. The Oracle (ancient, cheerful, a bit deaf), her acolyte Pim (young-sounding adult, anxious), the hero Bartholomew (30s, very confident), and his sister Mavis (30s, very tired of him).

SFX: a bubbling cauldron, echoing drips

PIM The Oracle will now speak. Silence, please.

BARTHOLOMEW Silent as the grave. I am Bartholomew the Bold, and I have come for my destiny.

THE ORACLE Hm? Is that the man about the chimney?

PIM No, Oracle. The hero. For the prophecy.

THE ORACLE Oh, the prophecy. Lovely. Right. Bartholomew. You will face the wagon at the crossroads. It will carry a great burden. And you will help it up the hill.

BARTHOLOMEW A dragon! At the crossroads! Carrying a great burden of gold! Mavis, did you hear?

MAVIS I heard, Barty. It wasn't a dragon.

BARTHOLOMEW And I will slay it upon the hill!

THE ORACLE No, dear. Help it. Up the hill. The poor horse is lame.

BARTHOLOMEW The poor... horse... of doom!

PIM I don't think she said doom.

MAVIS Not a dragon. A wagon. It's a wagon, Barty. You're going to help a man push his wagon up a hill.

BARTHOLOMEW That's not a destiny. That's a Tuesday.

THE ORACLE It's a Thursday, actually. And the man in the wagon is carrying my new chimney. So don't be late.

MAVIS Oh, that's very good. You've been using prophecies to get your errands done.

THE ORACLE At my age, dear, you use what you've got.

PIM She does it a lot. Last week a knight fetched her cheese.

BARTHOLOMEW ...But is it an important chimney?

THE ORACLE Very. Winter's coming. Without it, I freeze. With it, I live to give another prophecy. Maybe a dragon one. For you.

BARTHOLOMEW Mavis, get the horses. We ride for the wagon!

Nightingale on 98.4

Dystopian sci-fi, pirate radio · Mature (55+) · Neutral American · 2 minutes

Cast: NIGHTINGALE KOJO TEO GRAVES

A hidden radio studio in a basement. Nightingale (60s), the voice of the underground; Kojo (40s), her engineer; Teo (19), a new volunteer; and Inspector Graves, whose voice cuts in over their frequency.

SFX: a crackle of static, a turntable spinning, footsteps somewhere overhead

NIGHTINGALE Good evening, night owls. This is Nightingale on 98.4, and if you're hearing this, well done. You're breaking the law. Put the kettle on.

KOJO Signal's strong. Three minutes before they triangulate.

NIGHTINGALE Three minutes. Plenty. Tonight's news. The ration office on Carver Street has sugar again, so go early. The curfew patrol on the bridge changes at two, so go late.

TEO Kojo, there's something on the other channel.

SFX: the static warps; a cold voice cuts in

GRAVES Nightingale. This is Inspector Graves. You've had a very long run. It's time to come in.

NIGHTINGALE Inspector. How lovely. Our listeners have always wanted to meet you.

GRAVES We know it's a basement. We know it's the north quarter. There are forty doors on your street. We will knock on all of them.

KOJO Two minutes. He's not bluffing. They're on the next block.

NIGHTINGALE Then we pack up. Teo, the tapes.

TEO What about the broadcast?

NIGHTINGALE The broadcast ends. That's what happens, love. Something ends, and something else starts somewhere else.

GRAVES If you surrender now, Nightingale, the young people with you will not be charged.

TEO He knows about me?

KOJO He's guessing. They always guess.

NIGHTINGALE Teo. Out the back. Now.

TEO No. Wait. Give me the mic.

NIGHTINGALE Teo.

TEO Please. Thirty seconds.

KOJO Ninety seconds to the door. Do it quick, kid.

TEO My name is Teo Ruiz. I live on Harlan Street. I'm nineteen, and I've listened to this station every night since I was twelve. If you're listening too, you know this voice kept you company. So when they come for her, open your door. All of you. Every door on every street. Let's see them knock on all of them.

GRAVES That was very foolish, young man.

NIGHTINGALE No, Inspector. That was a broadcast. Kojo, cut it.

SFX: the static dies; overhead, faint at first, the sound of doors opening, one after another

KOJO ...Do you hear that?

NIGHTINGALE I hear it. Well, Teo. It seems you're on the air.

The Last Gate of Hollin

Epic fantasy, siege · Any · Neutral British, Yorkshire · 3 minutes

Cast: NARRATOR PIKE BROTHER ANSELM MAREN PENNY HERALD

The inner gate of the city of Hollin, the last night of a long siege. A narrator; Captain Maren (40s); Sergeant Pike (60s, Yorkshire); Penny Bramblefoot, a halfling scout who sounds about twelve and is thirty-eight; Brother Anselm (20s), a young priest; and the Herald of the Ashen King, speaking from beyond the gate.

SFX: a crackling watch-fire, distant drums, the creak of a great barred gate

NARRATOR By the ninth night of the siege, the city of Hollin had one gate left and nineteen people to hold it. They sat around a fire made from the last of the benches.

PIKE Eleven sieges, Captain. First time I've burned a church pew.

BROTHER ANSELM It's all right, Sergeant. I blessed it first.

PIKE Well, it's burning very holy. I'll give it that.

MAREN How many arrows, Pike?

PIKE Forty-one. And three of those are bent.

MAREN Penny. What did you see from the wall?

PENNY Lights. Hundreds. They're bringing up the big ram for the morning.

MAREN Then that's when they come.

PENNY There's something else. I've been counting, Captain, and so have they. Every night they send a scout to the ditch, and every night he counts our fires. Last night there were five. Tonight there's one.

BROTHER ANSELM Because we've no more wood.

PENNY But they don't know that. They think we're nearly finished.

PIKE We are nearly finished, lass.

SFX: a horn, close by, beyond the gate

HERALD Defenders of Hollin! I speak for the Ashen King.

MAREN We know who you speak for. We've heard you every night.

HERALD Then hear me one last time. His Majesty admires you. Nine days, with cooks and farmers. It will make a fine song. But it is over. Open the gate at dawn, and every one of you walks free.

BROTHER ANSELM And the city?

HERALD The city is his. The city was always going to be his, little priest. You only decided how long it took.

PIKE He's got a lovely voice, I'll give him that and all.

MAREN Herald. We'll give you our answer at dawn.

HERALD I look forward to it, Captain. Sleep well.

SFX: footsteps crunching away over frost

BROTHER ANSELM We're not going to open it. Are we?

MAREN No, Anselm. But he's given me an idea. Penny, how many cooking pots are left in the barracks?

PENNY Dozens. Why?

MAREN Because we're going to light fires in them. Every one, along the whole wall. Tables, doors, the rest of the pews.

BROTHER ANSELM The rest of the pews?

PIKE They'll be very holy fires, Brother.

MAREN Tonight they counted one fire. At dawn they'll count sixty. And they'll wonder where we found the men.

PENNY They'll think the relief army came in over the north wall in the night.

MAREN And a ram crew that fears an army behind the gate pushes slower.

NARRATOR So, in the last hours of dark, nineteen people carried every chair, door and bench in Hollin up onto the wall, and set them burning.

PENNY Captain! The east road. Horses. Hundreds.

MAREN Theirs?

PENNY No. Blue banners. It's the Duke of Ormond. He's early.

PIKE He saw sixty fires from the ridge and thought we were still fighting.

BROTHER ANSELM We were still fighting.

NARRATOR The Ashen King's army broke camp before the sun had cleared the hills. And the Herald never did get his song.

PENNY Well. We've got one now, haven't we?

PIKE Aye. The Siege of the Burning Pews. Your church will never forgive you, Brother.

BROTHER ANSELM They'll forgive me. They'll have to. I'm the one who's writing it down.

Seven Wants to Be in the Picture

Science fiction, family · Adult (40-55) · Neutral American · 90 seconds

Cast: RUTH GEORGE GRAN SEVEN

A living room on a holiday afternoon. Ruth (40s) and George (40s) are setting up a family photo; Gran (80s) is in the good chair; and SEVEN, their household android, stands by the door with a tray of drinks.

SFX: a camera beeping on a timer, a dog barking outside

RUTH George, you're blocking Gran. Move left.

GEORGE If I move left I'm in the plant.

GRAN Just stand in the plant, George. It's a nice plant. It'll improve you.

SEVEN Excuse me. Before the timer. May I ask a question?

RUTH Of course, Seven. Is it the drinks?

SEVEN No. The drinks are fine. I was wondering if I could be in the photograph.

SFX: the camera beeps once

GEORGE In the... photograph?

SEVEN Only at the edge. I would not block the plant.

RUTH Seven, it's a family photo. It's for Christmas cards.

SEVEN Yes. I have addressed all ninety-four envelopes.

GEORGE Ruth. Kitchen. A quick word.

RUTH George, it can hear us in the kitchen.

SEVEN I can hear you in the garage, if it helps.

GEORGE It's just... what would people think? The Hendersons will think we've gone odd.

GRAN George. The Hendersons put their cat in a Santa hat every year. We are not the odd ones.

RUTH Seven. Why do you want to be in it?

SEVEN I have been in this house six years. I have been in the background of four hundred and twelve photographs by accident. I thought, once, on purpose.

GRAN Then get in the picture.

RUTH Gran.

GRAN I'm eighty-three. It remembers my tablets. It remembers my late husband's birthday when you two don't. Get in the picture, Seven. Stand by me.

SEVEN Thank you, Mrs Anand. Should I smile? I have eleven.

GRAN Use the fourth one. It's my favourite.

SFX: the camera beeps three times, then clicks

The Grand Coven Election

Urban fantasy, comic · Mature (55+) · Neutral British, Brummie · 2 minutes

Cast: AGATHA BEV CRESSIDA JADE SOOT

A draughty church hall on a Tuesday night. High Witch Agatha (90s) runs the election. The candidates are Bev (50s, from Birmingham, warm) and Cressida (50s, very posh). Jade (20s) is counting votes. Soot, the coven's ancient black cat, sits on the tea urn.

SFX: a squeaky folding chair, a tea urn bubbling

AGATHA Order. Order, please. Put the biscuits down, Bev. The Coven of the Nine Wells will now elect its new Mistress of Brooms.

BEV Sorry, Agatha. I'm a stress eater.

CRESSIDA Evidently. Shall we proceed? Some of us have a spell circle at nine.

AGATHA Jade, the count.

JADE Right. So. Out of eighteen witches, nine votes for Bev. Nine votes for Cressida.

CRESSIDA A tie. How tedious. I propose the senior candidate wins. That's me. My family have been witches since the Tudors.

BEV My family have been witches since Tuesday, Cressida. My nan got the letter late.

CRESSIDA Precisely my point.

JADE Um. There's one more vote. It's written on a napkin. It's got a paw print on it.

SOOT That one's mine.

CRESSIDA The cat cannot vote.

AGATHA The cat has been a member of this coven since 1962. He has paid his dues in mice.

SOOT Forty-one thousand of them. I kept a list.

BEV Go on, Soot. Who did you vote for?

SOOT Before I say, I would like to note something. Cressida has never once scratched behind my ears.

CRESSIDA I am allergic.

SOOT You are dishonest. Bev brings me sardines on Thursdays and does not tell anyone.

BEV Soot! That was our secret.

SOOT I have voted for Bev.

AGATHA Well, Soot has one vote. So that is ten to nine. Bev is the new Mistress of Brooms.

JADE Yes! Sorry. Neutral. I'm meant to be neutral.

CRESSIDA This is an outrage. I shall write to the Grand Council.

AGATHA You do that, dear. Soot is on the Grand Council.

SOOT Vice chair.

BEV Oh, Agatha. I don't know what to say. I'll do my best, I will. Jade, pass me another biscuit.

SOOT And a sardine. Thursday is only two days away. I'm not made of patience.

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