Episode 1-3

This story began on an unseasonably warm December 1st in a small town called Contention. A thin mist could be seen under the streetlights on an empty country road. The inside of the Contention police department, however, was cozy, warm, and bright. At the front desk, every morning and every evening, Drew Andrews sat, determined, small teeth and big gums showing, answering the phone and taking messages. In the bullpen sat our three PCs, or protagonist cops, though neither of those words seem to factually describe these Player Characters. Clark Bishop was the oldest, a by-the-book officer dead set on doing his best in this dead-end job, still living in the house his parents left him when they died. He had never cooked, and he watched Wheel of Fortune every night. Keith Vigna was raised just outside Contention, but soon moved to The City, where he trained to become a police officer. His stint in The City was short-lived. He’s not a bad cop, he’s just a bad cop. His pants are too big. John Lee Pettimore the Fourth was one of the few Pettimores to stay on the right side of the law, or at least the Pettimore version of that. His mustache, tight pants, substance abuse issues, and inability to keep bullets in his clip aligned perfectly with both his family values and love of Smokey and the Bandit.

On this evening, Drew Andrews, top lip receding, gums akimbo, received a bevy of calls, complaints, regarding the abundance of howling coming from the dogs in The Old Neighborhood. This neighborhood west of downtown is home to John Peters, Mildred Mitchell, Tilde B Mitchell, Councilwoman Carrie Pages, and the boss of the Contention Police Department, Chief Maggie Cook. And it just so happened that December 1st, this night when everything began, is the chief’s birthday. Drew presented Chief Cook with a yellow journal, noting she already had this same notebook in both red and blue. Clark got her the same thing he got her the year before, and every year before that he’s been on the force: a box of chocolates. John pulled a bottle of cheap bourbon from his desk. It was open. And ⅓ of it was gone. But he tried. Keith panicked. He didn’t realize it was the Chief’s birthday. However, there was a mysterious package, wrapped nicely, sitting on Drew’s desk. Keith claimed it as his gift. But when Maggie Cook opened this present and saw its contents, she began weeping, walked into her office, and slammed the door, leaving Clark, Drew, and John staring in bewilderment at the new kid in town, Keith Vigna. Chief Maggie Cook, distraught and determined, left the Contention Police Station without saying a word. In the box were three items: a single red rose, a white hard hat, and a black silk bow tie. Before they could react, Drew Andrews received the phone call that set all of the proceeding events in motion: Julie Maxwell reported a dead body at the Piston Junkyard. The Chief-less CPD headed out to investigate the scene. On the way there, they spotted Julie Maxwell driving chaotically and well above the speed limit back toward town. John Lee Pettimore the Fourth peeled off to pull her over, just in time to see her near-fatal car accident. She was thrown clear of the vehicle, face smashed, crying out into the night. John called an ambulance and investigated the crash. In her car, he found an open bottle of brandy, gas cans, lighters, an unusual camera with strange glass tubes, a red light lit, a green light unlit, as well as a polaroid that shows the base of a tall building and a group crowding the entrance with fists raised. Everything in the picture was lit by torches in some of the people’s hands and the building was a slightly shiny, pitch black. Keith Vigna and Clark Bishop carried on to the Piston Junkyard, where they found a body splattered on the ground, face first, face smashed. The body was wearing thick, hand stitched clothing and leather boots, a small note in the pocket read, “We is striking when the land gets darkness. Readying torches. Hesitate not.” Most peculiar, however, was the skin on this body’s back - a fresh wound, it was branded with the words, “THIS IS A FOOL”. This corpse was determined to be a woman. The officers called in their fourth musketeer, the only other Contention Police Officer, Ray, to take the corpse over to County for testing. They also called The City Hospital to check on Julie Maxwell’s condition. She had been declared deceased. After some light discussion of smashed faces and blunt force trauma, Clark Bishop headed home to his tv dinner and Wheel of Fortune. Keith Vigna went back to his temporary home, Hotel Motel, where his golden retriever Bean waited patiently. And John Lee Pettimore IV shot some pool by himself at Clinker’s, the local watering hole and daycare.

The next day, on December 2nd, three assignments awaited the three officers. Councilwoman Carrie Pages’ dog was missing, and she was distraught. The Councilwoman suggested Tyler may have been eaten by a person, as Contention had just seen a rise in homelessness. Clark printed posters and walked the neighborhood to no avail. Jimmy Sanders, an uncle of sorts to John, called in an oil spill across a country road in the southeast sometime around 4 am. John checked it out, found no oil spill, and Jimmy admitted he was tripping on mushrooms during the incident. Mildred Mitchell, Contention’s cooky pothead grandma, wanted someone to know her neighbor’s door was open and this neighbor, this John Peters, hadn’t been around in a few days. Keith found out she saw a bright flash of light from Peters’ place a few nights previous, and he’s been missing ever since. Keith checked it out and found John’s mail overflowing, his car in the driveway, and his front door smashed into the drywall. In the house were broken pictures and clear signs that John was a heavy drinker. There was also a trunk in the living room. Burned into the top of the trunk were the words, “DO NOT OPEN IF YOU WANT TO LIVE.” The trunk was empty save some foam padding that held four specifically shaped items. One large, two medium, and one small. There were betting stubs on John’s night stand. He bet on long shots and mostly lost. John’s keychain had his house keys, a bottle opener, his car keys, a few small keys that say G10, G11, G12, and a key fob for a rewards program at Dirty Dog Grooming (a pet salon franchise in the city). However, John does not seem to have a dog. According to Drew Andrews, John Peters wasn’t very interesting, though he did have a long stay in the hospital a couple years ago.

After meeting back up, the three officers decided to look further into John Peters, starting again at his home. When they arrived, his car was no longer in the driveway and the empty trunk was missing from inside the residence. Mildred Mitchell came by to let them know two people came, packed the trunk into their white Toyota, and took off, one in their car and the other in John Peters’ maroon vehicle.

The officers headed to Chief Maggie Cook’s house next. Her cruiser wasn’t there. She wasn’t there. They hit up Clinker’s. The only information from Harry Clinker was that Keith liked cut up hot dogs on white bread when he was a kid. Continuing the tour of Contention, the cops went out to harass Leo Piston, owner of the Piston Junkyard, who had a restraining order placed against him by Julie Maxwell 15 years before after Leo was accused of killing Julie’s sister Ashley. Clark set up a meeting with Leo and George, the Piston Brothers, for the following day. Keith stayed behind to keep a hidden eye on the Piston Pig Farm. Back at the Police Station, John found the Chief’s blue notebook, full of work appointments and notes, but her red notebook and the newly gifted yellow notebook weren’t in her office. That’s about the time when Contention received a chilling phone call. The City Hospital had fucked up. They heard screaming from inside a drawer in the morgue. Julie Maxwell was alive. John Lee Pettimore took off for The City Hospital to get some answers.

Episode 4

Clark came into the office to an equally confusing message from County. Apparently, that body from the junkyard had the organs of someone who died 200 years ago but the skin and hair of someone who died yesterday. Then Charles, a drunk man and friend of the missing John Peters, came to the station to figure out what’s going on… before pulling a gun and running away upon hearing the sound of a car crash in the parking lot. At the Piston Pig Farm, Kathy Piston shot the encroaching (and trespassing) Keith Vigna in the foot. Recognizing him, she bandaged his wound and offered her apologies for the incident after Keith claimed to have a warrant. After she offered him coffee, Keith snooped around her property, failing to find anything of interest, until he eventually stowed away on Kathy Piston’s school bus full of homeless people. Afraid of being caught, he bailed out the emergency hatch in the back, further hurting his shot and bandaged foot. In the parking lot of The City Hospital, a creepy figure obscured by a black cloak and hood approached John Lee Pettimore IV. This mysterious man handed John a note written in binary and croaked, “say hello to me, will ya?” before softly cackling and disappearing into the rows of parked cars. John texted Drew a picture of the binary note to translate, and he radioed the only other Contention Police Officer, Tim, to do a search for storage facilities in Contention with G Units. John didn’t find Julie Maxwell at the hospital because she dipped, stole a black SUV, and made a B-line for Contention. This was, of course, the same black SUV that just t-boned George Piston’s truck in the parking lot of the Contention Police Station, now helmed at gunpoint by a kidnapped Leo Piston.

Episode 5

The three officers pursued Julie Maxwell and Leo Piston in the stolen, black SUV out to Splashylvania, the abandoned Vampire-themed water park Ashley Maxwell was heading to 15 years ago when her life ended. Bishop, Pettimore, and a hobbling Vigna found their targets at the top of The Two Fanged Plunge, Maxwell with a pistol to the back of the kneeling Leo Piston’s torso. She cried out into the night, “This world is not our own and little else matters except for the black shiny devil and the underground temple from which it shall rise. But if there’s a tiny chance that justice matters, then my sister deserves this fat fuck to bleed out and die.” With that, she fired a shot through Leo’s body. Clark immediately pulled his pistol and put a bullet through one of Julie Maxwell’s eyes. The two limp bodies slid slowly down the two opposing slides, wet for the first time in a decade and a half with the blood of these opposing Contention residents. But at the bottom of the ride, something incomprehensible happened. The bodies of Julie Maxwell and Leo Piston were picked up and slammed into the ground repeatedly and at an absurd rate by some unseen force. And then, as if they were never there at all, both bodies were gone. Keith saw, covering the ground where the two bodies just were, a black, shiny, viscous sludge. Seemingly inside this muck were the thrashing bodies of Julie Maxwell and Leo Piston. Their hands reached out, trying to escape this thing that has them trapped, but their limbs soon seemed to fold into this ooze, becoming one with the sentient mass of goop that began sliding across the ground toward Keith, who promptly Wile E Coyote’d the fuck out of there. Back in the Splashylvania parking lot, the strange camera’s green light was lit. John took a picture, causing a blindingly bright flash of light and he instantly saw black, viscous goo dripping from the camera all over his hands. And then it was gone. The picture was of a short, balding man with large eyes and a tiny nose. He was bent over, head and hands in stocks made of a shiny black material, and the word “FOOL” was branded into his forehead. Clark recognized this man as their missing John Peters.

Drew Andrews texted John back with the translation of the mysterious man’s binary message. It read, “I killed the Chief’s pops, John.” Before they called it a day, Keith went to the clinic and acquired a wheelchair.

That night, these three Contention Police Officers had some strange dreams.

John Lee Pettimore IV: You are reliving the moment when you saw the black sludge on your hands and dripping from the odd camera and picture. Your perception changes and you are out of your body, looking at yourself staring intently at your hands. You see there is the same viscous muck dripping from your eyes and nostrils as you wake up in bed.

Keith Vigna: You see a woman standing before you in your bedroom. She is wearing old-timey clothing and she stares angrily at you. She lunges toward you, picking you up and throwing you to the ground. You fall into the floor of your bedroom and then wake up in bed.

Clark Bishop: You see a man underneath you, struggling to breathe, as you tighten your grip around his neck. You look up after the life leaves his eyes and see an empty, dark, alleyway as you wake up on the couch with infomercials playing on your tv.

The next day was December 3rd. The officers broke into G-10, G-11, and G-12, John Peters’ storage units at A Plus Storage.

G-10 was filled with crates stacked three high. Each crate was wooden and stamped “US MILITARY” on the side. Inside these crates were guns, ammunition, and heavy weaponry. This included pistols, shotguns, rifles, a shoulder-mounted anti-aircraft weapon, an EMP rifle, a grappling gun, a small gun that shoots tracers, lots of grenades, a sniper rifle, a very tiny but very powerful gun, and a drone. There was also a pallet, on which was sitting a large cube-shaped object covered in so much plastic wrap that its contents were obfuscated. The large, cube-shaped object was bricks upon bricks of cocaine. Precisely 479 bricks of cocaine, worth around 12 million dollars. John took a brick immediately.

Inside G-11 was a burlap sack containing $50,000 in shredded, blue-dye stained banknotes, a piece of notebook paper with poorly drawn diagrams and nearly illegible writing, 2 25 pound bags of potatoes, a ziploc bag (containing five bulbs of garlic, a garlic-crusher, an empty test tube and a syringe), a small drawstring Nike bag, a three million candlepower handheld spotlight, a well-filled toolbox, a black leather backpack (containing a set of lockpicks, wire cutters, wire strippers, a crimping tool, flat- and phillips-head screwdrivers, and a lockout tool), a bottle of caffeine pills, a carton of cigarettes, three shovels, a small digital scale, a syringe labelled ‘morphine’, a handful of ski masks, walkie talkies, and a burned cd labelled “Monster Mash Mash”.

Inside G-12 was a four wheeler with dried dirt and clay caked all over the thing, as well as a couple of plastic trunks. Near the door was a small chunk of paper that had been folded into the size of a business card. Against the back wall was a small table with some papers on it.

The small chunk of paper was a Betting Guide, and inside were some more ripped up betting stubs. Someone lost $5000 on October 31st. The three names to bet on were Oz ‘Mayhem’ Wolf, Miles ‘Detonator’ Carver, and Carl “Blitzkrieg” Anderson. At the bottom, it said, “tonight: versus Planet Juggernaut”. The stubs were all losers, a 5:1 bet, then a 6:1 bet, then finally a 30:1 bet.

Inside one of the trunks was a box of assorted batteries, spools of electric wiring, three disassembled handguns, and an impossibly clean machete sitting atop three full suits including shirt, tie, and shoes all covered in dirt, clay, and black stains that look to be blood.

There was a note handwritten on a scrap piece of paper that read, “The cabin is in the woods stark west from the end of the trail about 2.5 miles. - K We took care of 9 of them as well as the leader.” There was also a sheet that seemed to be ripped out of a notebook and it was handwritten as well but in different handwriting. It said, “The work is difficult and particular, but I’ve had 12 successes. Life isn’t as complex as they believe. They are quite simple. It will be their downfall.”

And the last piece of paper was a cutout from The Contention Chronicle from 25 years ago. An ad that read, “Cole’s Orphanage: New School Under Modern Etiquette. We are here to serve the beautiful community of Contention”. None of the rogue police officers remembered the name of that orphanage, though the Cole name was familiar. Silas Cole was one of the founders of this town, and he was the owner of the mine for a couple of years. His wife, Mary Cole, did a lot of good in the town and the library in town was named after her. The school was called Silas Cole K-12 and there was Cole’s Creek as well. As the three approached the other plastic trunk in G-12 (this one with the lid fastened), the stench was nearly unbearable. It was decided they would wait to open this trunk back at the office.

After having a U-Haul delivered, Pettimore, Bishop, and Vigna packed up everything contained in these storage units and brought it all back at the police station.

The awfully pungent trunk was clear and, before opening the lid, they could only see a dried black crust which was painted on every bit of the trunks sides. When they opened it, the rancid smell of old metal hit their nostrils, and atop this pile of what looked like a messily chopped up human body sat a woman’s head, split down the middle and pulled apart, with a small, silver sphere sitting in between the two halves. Keith took a picture. John pocketed the small, silver sphere.

Before heading out to The Woods, Drew was tasked with looking into finding information about Cole’s Orphanage and also finding someone who could understand the machinery in the diagram.

Episode 6

In The Woods, the Contention Police officers found a patch of land that had been burned to the ground, realized they were being watched, freaked out, wrecked the four wheeler, ran into trees, and overall just super fucked up - topped off by Clark flying a drone into himself.

Episode 7

After their failed nature excursion, they went to Julie Maxwell’s, wore her taxidermy, and found a circled yellow pages ad for Dr. Marie Jacobs - as well as a receipt from Forgotten Treasures, a local flea market. At Forgotten Treasures, they learned that the camera Julie Maxwell purchased was from Mildred Mitchell’s booth. But Mildred was unaware of any items recently sold at her booth, she told the boys it must have been her granddaughter, Tilde B, who came downstairs at that exact moment. But the sight of cops spooked her and she bolted back upstairs and into her room. When Clark busted in, Tilde B Mitchell had a crazed look in her eyes. She slammed a large bullet into the chamber and squeezed the trigger on this odd-looking revolver. There was an almost blinding flash of light, illuminating everything and then, as if she had never been, the girl was gone. Clark just saw an odd gun fall to the floor. Confused, he checked the closet and under the bed for the missing girl, unsurprisingly, with no luck.

Episode 8

The very anti antiheroes of this story then went to Forgotten Treasures to ask more questions, and they eventually bullied the nice lady there until she put her own life in danger by telling these cops about the drunk man who threatened her. They left after they got what they wanted, and the white Toyota they had been searching for was right outside. It peeled out onto the road. After a short, dangerous pursuit, the white Toyota was bested, tireless and boxed in. Bullets were whizzing past him, so Keith Vigna attempted to fire a warning shot with his shotgun. However, this warning shot promptly killed the driver, Charles Donovan. John Lee Pettimore fired shots into the air to disperse the growing crowd, and a few stray bullets also hit Clark’s tires. Inside the white Toyota, they found two guns, a wallet with ID for Billy Harrison, a rifle, and keys with a dodge logo. On the deceased man’s person, they found ID from The City for Charles Donovan and a piece of paper with the addresses of both John Peters’ house and the Piston Pig Farm. The keys in the ignition included a key to a room at Hotel Motel and a key fob for the rewards program at Dirty Dog Grooming. The dead driver’s body had scratches all over the arms, hands, legs, and face. They were not claw marks. They were not from brush. John recognized the scratches as the pattern of human hands. In the trunk was a tied up and unconscious man who matched the picture in the ID for Billy Harrison. Additionally there was a police uniform, a set of scrubs, and a black suit. In these clothes, they found a Contention badge for Officer Kissell, an ID in the scrubs that says Dr. Zebrowski, and inside a pocket of the black suit was FBI credentials for an Agent Parks. They called an ambulance, and Keith asked the medics to look at his foot first. Still worried about his recovery, Keith took the ambulance to Tim the Contention Clinic with the unconscious bald man. Clark’s final words to Keith before the ambulance doors shut? “Keep him cuffed.”

Episode 9

Officers Bishop and Pettimore headed to the suburbs to chat with Dr. Marie Jacobs when they saw an unkempt man, James the Mill Worker, in rubber waders frantically vacuuming his lawn. From across the street, two children stared, unblinking, horrified as the unkempt James began to float up into the air. Clark and John each grabbed a leg, but the man continued to rise. John called the two kids into action, one holding desperately onto the vacuum as the other sucked up this unknown substance with the hose. Their plan seemed to work, all feet were now grounded, and this oily sludge poured itself away, down into the sewage drain. But then the vacuum exploded, engulfing the twin children in its contents, the viscous ichor. As the fourth graders folded into the writhing mass, James the Mill Worker lost his shit and wriggled free from Clark’s helping grasp turned restraint. When John pulled up next to the on-the-run unkempt man in rubber waders, James looked the mustachioed copper in the face and then broke completely. The Mill Worker sprinted back home, on this same street, leaving Clark Bishop and John Lee Pettimore IV right outside their initial destination, the home of Dr. Marie Jacobs.

At the Contention Clinic, Billy Harrison finally woke up. He had a concussion and had been unconscious for some time. Cuffed to the bed, with Officer Keith Vigna asking him a bunch of questions, Billy answered slowly. He didn’t remember some things. He was 31 years old. He remembered going to John Peters’ house. John was an old friend who hadn’t responded to his messages or answered the phone in a couple days. They played video games together. Billy remembered looking in the window when John didn’t answer the door. Billy didn’t know a Charles Donovan. Keith told Billy he was tied up in the back of this Charles person’s car.

Billy said he drove a white van to John’s house earlier that day. Billy said he’s on leave from the Army. Billy said he doesn’t know any dog groomers. Then, Billy asked to be uncuffed since he was the victim of a crime.

Do you think Keith Vigna… A) reacted rationally? Or B) escalated the situation, became hostile, and tried to handcuff Billy’s other hand? If you answered B, congratulations. That’s exactly right. And because it’s Keith Vigna, when he went to handcuff Billy’s free hand, the one-handed, concussed, probable victim of kidnapping got the drop on the officer, pulled Keith’s gun from its holster, and threatened to shoot. Keith understood in this moment that Billy was willing to pull the trigger. And so, Keith surrendered. Officer Beans unlocked Billy Harrison’s handcuff and turned around, which allowed the bald, fit man to knock Keith the fuck out.

Back in the suburbs, Clark Bishop and John Lee Pettimore IV had a rough go trying to get any information from Dr. Marie Jacobs, who did not want to open the front door. She asked if they had a warrant. Clark, remembering she bought the radio, asked about it, and she told them the radio wasn’t there anymore. Apparently a tall, drunk man came and took it. By force. With a gun. John decided they had reasonable suspicion for search and seizure, so he knocked down the door, gun obviously drawn. The Jacobs house was a wreck and there was a haze in the air. Clark and John could hear Marie talking down in the basement. In this mad scientist’s house, there was something covering every piece of counter space. Jars and beakers were sitting everywhere. It smelled absolutely terrible - kind of like shit. John found a litter box, but the fecal matter inside looked, uh, human. This was the moment John decided Dr. Jacobs was for sure a witch. Clark and John heard a man’s voice meow in the basement. Quite the sight in comparison to her usual state, Dr. Jacobs had mascara all over her face and was wearing white coveralls and neoprene gloves. After making eye contact with John for the first time, the incredulous and crazed doctor invited him to join her in the kitchen. John and Clark, having seen enough, arrested and handcuffed Dr. Marie Jacobs. But then she hollered. She hollered, “SAAAALEEEEEM!” and a galumphing sound could be heard of something, or someone, bounding up the stairs.

Episode 10

On the evening of December 3rd, Officer Keith Vigna woke up wearing a thin gown with both of his wrists handcuffed to the sides of the hospital bed where Billy Harrison was recently confined. Keith’s uniform, Keith’s gear, and Billy Harrison were nowhere to be seen. However, the door to this room was now open and a decent amount of the clinic staff was standing around just outside. Some of them were pointing their phones at Keith. All of them were laughing. A few phrases murmured loud enough to make out included, “No wonder William was so embarrassed by him.” and “Oh, isn’t that Keith Beans? What’s he calling himself now?” But when they actually noticed Keith waking up, they awkwardly shuffled away, and a young woman came into the room with bolt cutters and broke the links on the cuffs, leaving Officer Keith Vigna with a pair of nice, iron bracelets. After collecting himself, Keith checked the security footage and watched Billy Harrison walk right out the front door wearing *his* uniform.

Back in the suburbs, John had handcuffed Dr. Marie Jacobs and something was running up the stairs. That something was a bloody man, wearing only briefs and a collar, and he galloped up the stairs on all fours before tackling Clark into the ground. John kicked the man off Clark, who recognized Dr. Marie Jacobs’ husband, Doug Jacobs, from the family portraits around the house that included the couple and their black cat, Salem. After they handcuffed Doug, John asked Dr. Jacobs why her husband is a catman named Salem and Marie was like, “oh, so you know.” When asked why the officers arrived, John said it was illegal to have a cat in a man’s body. Dr. Jacobs argued there were no laws disallowing this sort of activity. And, preferring the current situation, she asked the cops to leave her be. They claimed they just wanted information, so she told them she believed the radio did it. The radio she purchased at Forgotten Treasures. The officers wanted the radio, but it was stolen. A tall, drunk man broke in, punched poor Salem in the face, and stole the radio. With coercion and a cat toy, Clark and John got Dr. Marie Jacobs and the cat Salem, in the body of Doug Jacobs, into the back of their police cruiser, took them into the station, made a human-sized catbed in one of the cells, and locked up the pair in the only cell not full of contraband from John Peters’ units at A Plus Storage.

John went to pick Keith up at the Clinic, and found him standing outside in a hospital gown, wearing handcuffs with the chain cut. Back at the station, Clark forced Drew to come to terms with Doug Jacobs being a cat-man. After everyone reconvened, Drew had a word with John, alone. Apparently Lauren, the fourth and only other member of the Contention Police Department, was confused about the amount of blood and gore at Splashylvania. Drew said he told her a deer fell off the waterslide, and then he asked if it had something to do with all the cocaine locked up in the jail cell. He continued, figuring John might be interested in unloading the whole pallet for around ten million dollars. Drew had a contact in The City called The Duke. They walked back in to talk to Clark and Keith, and John said he had good news - Drew had fixed the four wheeler.

Episode 11

Following the lead of the room key from Hotel Motel found in Charles Donovan’s possession, the three officers busted into the deceased man’s room at Hotel Motel, guns drawn and without a warrant. There, they found a woman dressed similarly to her favorite TV character, the Fonz. This woman we now know as RoseMary flinged a knife at Officer Vigna and hid on the other side of the bed. Keith ran up and engaged her in hand-to-hand combat, which resulted in a hostage situation. Knife to his throat, Officer Vigna proceeded to brag about killing her coworker. Thankfully for his throat, the level headed and highly persuasive Officer Bishop managed to keep RoseMary from killing him there on the spot by getting her talking. Clark asked if she knew Charles. They worked together. RoseMary laughed and asked if they know who they’re fucking with: because they were fucking with Marvin Glass, the mob kingpin in The City. When asked about the radio, she thought maybe the thing in the bathroom was a radio. Charles had brought it back. More importantly, Marvin sent them there to find out what happened to Jermaine Glass and Alfred Glass when they came to collect money from John Peters.

Only Alfred came back, but he came back a blubbering idiot. He wouldn’t shut up about some gun. He sounded like a lunatic.The wiry old lady made a run for it and leapt over the railing and into the Hotel Motel parking lot. All three officers unloaded their weapons from the second floor corridor, bringing her down, barely before she could get into her vehicle. The boys in blue patched her up, called an ambulance, and sent her to The City Hospital with Lauren, the fourth and only other Contention Police Officer. With that, they planned a sting operation based around a false radio call to catch Billy Harrison, the stranger running about Contention in an official police uniform. They figured he, like everyone else, wanted John Peters.

Episode 12

Unfortunately for the CPD, the FBI was watching and also wanted to talk to John Peters. Strangely, though, Agents Kennedy and McKinley (a young woman with an erratic accent and an old man with empty eyes) were in town looking for a black Nike bag with nothing in it. They thought John Peters would know where this bag was. They were correct in this line of thinking, as there was indeed a black Nike bag in unit G-11 at A Plus Storage, to which John Peters held the key. After some verbal dancing, the Federal Agents agreed to meet the Contention Squad the following morning, December 4th, at the police department.

When the officers met back up at the station to figure out what to do with their illegal seizures, Drew was uncommonly not at his desk, replaced instead by a note telling them he went to the Chief’s house. Officers Bishop and Pettimore hauled off the undocumented loot to their individual residences while Keith went to the Chief’s house to check on Drew.

In the entrance of Chief Maggie Cook’s home, Keith found two unconscious men, Drew Andrews and an unknown with ID for a Harrell Dorsey from The City. In the living room, he saw Chief Maggie Cook’s body, in full uniform, slumped against the wall. A large chef’s knife rested in her left hand. Her face had been stabbed repeatedly and her left foot was missing. That’s when he noticed the smell: gasoline and natural gas. In the kitchen, an unkempt man was at the table, hunched over with a fork in one hand and a pistol in the other. A bullet hole in his head had left him face down in a plate of meat. His left foot was also missing. Gas cans sat all over the place and the contents had clearly been poured on everything. The range had all four burners turned all the way up and a skillet sat atop - inside were the leftovers of two feet that had the meat pulled from them. Keith threw up and fell to his hands and knees. His hand hit a wire. He heard a click and saw a fire near the front door and a path of gasoline heading back toward the kitchen. With just enough time to save one person, Keith dragged Drew Andrews out the front door as the entire house exploded, knocking Keith into the front yard and rendering him unconscious.

Keith...You are standing in your childhood home. It’s your birthday and your friends are standing around this table waiting for you to blow out the candles on your cake. You look up and see your parents in the corner, talking to your little brother. You squeeze your eyes tightly as you blow out your candles and, as you do, you see that black, shiny, viscous sludge. Inside this muck are two thrashing bodies. Their hands reach out, trying to escape this thing that has trapped them, but the struggle does not last long. Their limbs seem to fold into this ooze, becoming one with the sentient mass of goop that is now sliding across the ground toward you. Opening your eyes, you see all of your peers around your childhood kitchen table laughing at you. The candles are still lit. You look up and your parents are poorly attempting to hold back laughter. You look at the cake and it is gone. You have a plate that is clean and you look around and see everyone else is eating a piece of cake. They are all laughing and begin to chant while pointing at you. “Beans! Beans! Keith Beans! His only friends are figurines! Beans! Beans! Keith Beans! We’ll blow your friends to smithereens!” (wait for response) Your parents look at you, disgusted, and turn and walk out of the room. You run to follow them, but, looking ahead, you only see that woman dressed in old-timey clothing. (wait for response) Looking down, you fall into a black hole in the ground and you’re standing in a cold, dark room. The lights begin to flicker on and you see massive tanks the size of grain silos. Standing right before you is yourself. You walk up to you. (wait for response) The face of the other you begins to age rapidly, and then, just as rapidly, ages in reverse. You walk up to one of the massive tanks in this massive, dank, dimly lit room. You press your face against it to see its contents. Something creeps toward you, and as it is about to come into focus, you wake up to the sound of sirens.

Officers Bishop and Pettimore were soon called to the Chief’s house after it had exploded, leaving behind the burned bodies of Harrell Dorsey, Chief Maggie Cook, and an unkempt man with a bullet hole in his head and his face in a pile of foot meat. That man we now know was James the Mill Worker.

The three cops decided they needed to go to Dr. Molar, the dentist in Contention, to verify and match the dental records of the three deceased folks. Clark looked in the chief’s car and it was clean. The glove box was empty. The dashcam had been unplugged. Clark checked the GPS history. Chief Maggie Cook’s cruiser had been at the Mill on the other side of The City, since the evening of December 1st.

Episode 13

That night, the strange dreams continued.

John Lee Pettimore IV: The sky is dark, but the ground begins to give light to the world. You see a man in the distance with his head and hands in stocks that sit on an inky, black stage. As you walk toward this man, the ground becomes whiter and whiter, like a screen’s brightness level being gradually turned up. You hear a holler from behind you, and when you turn around you see your mother. She looks like she did when she was about your age, and she is crying. (wait for response) She looks past you and a door appears in between you, but you can hear her say, “I’m so sorry. He’s just so beautiful...You don’t have to do this. We can leave. We can run.” (wait for response) The door floats up into the sky and sitting behind it is that trunk you locked up in the police department with the woman’s split head atop the black, putrid, hacked up anatomy. You turn around and you are face to face with the man in the stocks, John Peters, his forehead burned and peeling with the word FOOL. Desperate, his eyes widen, and he whispers, “Please. It’s coming. They cannot stop it. They are playing the roles of greater men. You have to save everyone. It is coming.”

Clark Bishop: You are walking through a parking lot and you look down and see you are carrying a piece of old parchment that is rolled up with a neat little string tied tightly around it. Looking up, you hand it to the cashier at your local grocery store. You like this guy. He’s trying to scan the scroll, but it’s not beeping. He looks at you as he chuckles, “this is going to cost you greatly” (wait for a response) As you walk out of the grocery store, you step into the sanctuary of a church during a funeral. A young boy with an enormous forehead and the darkest eyes you’ve seen is walking up to you and tears are streaming down his face as he stares into your eyes. You hear a small voice inside you that says, “please, sir” as the crying boy holds out his hands. (wait for a response) As you hand the scroll to the young boy, you begin to hear cries throughout the sanctuary you are standing in. As you look around, the congregation is trying to run away, but they are melting into the floor. You look down, and you, too, are melting into the floor. (wait for response) When you look up, the boy has been replaced by Tilde B Mitchell, who looks down at you with her finger pointed at you like a gun. She disappears and reappears over and over again as you slowly sink into the floor. As your eyes look to the ceiling of the chapel, you hear a voice inside you say, “let go” as you wake up in bed.

John awoke to a text from Drew Andrews: “Clark came by last night when no one was at the station. He warned me not to go to the chief’s house. He was limping, but he wasn’t limping later. What is going on? And where is all the cake?”

There was also a text from Keith explicitly asking John for drugs. He rolled out of bed, bagged up some coke, and headed into the police station for work - and a meeting with the FBI.

Episode 14

Without a reply from Officer Pettimore confirming he would bring some of the cocaine, Officer Vigna drove up and broke into John Lee Pettimore’s house to find it. This was cocaine they stole from a storage unit after finding the key at the home of a missing person. At the station, a news report played over the radio: a fire at The City Hospital had claimed the lives of more than 20 individuals. The names of the deceased are not yet being released. More importantly to the officers, however, was the decision of what to order for breakfast, finally deciding on Bishop’s Big Bean Breakfast from Beans on Beans. Drew remembered that two children were reported missing from the suburbs: Aiden and Alice Little. John and Clark shot each other a glace, and then John changed the subject to the matter of a second Clark Bishop. Drew explained what happened on his end: Clark came in around 1am, limping, wearing a hoodie and jeans, and told Drew not to go to Chief Maggie Cook’s house. But Clark was attempting the sting operation with John and Keith at 1am. The security footage showed Clark Bishop, limping in and out the door in street clothes. They decided, moving forward, they would use a codeword to assure each other they were each dealing with the real version of themselves: Bubblegum Tree.

As Keith Vigna pulled back into the parking lot with breakfast, a blacked out SUV parked and Agents Kennedy and McKinley hopped out from the passenger and back seats and headed in.

Keith grabbed the food and Nike bag and followed them into the police station. Agent McKinley, the old, dead-eyed man scanned the office, saw John, and started freaking out, turning and sprinting away, passing Keith as he ran back into the lot. Agent Kennedy apologized for him, saying their last mission went poorly and he’s lost it a bit. Agent Kennedy also said she’s from Minnesota. With a weird irish accent. The officers said they wanted answers. She promised to give information after she puts something in that bag. John asked if it was something strange. Yes. Agent Kennedy pulled out a small lockbox - 2 in by 2 in with a combination lock on it. Inside was a small, metal sphere with a diameter of 1 in. She dropped the sphere into the bag and immediately breathed a sigh of relief. Clark looked into the bag - nothing. He asked about the ball. She said it’s why Agent McKinley is so unintelligible now. It caused them so much trouble.

So John called Agent Kennedy to the back of the station to look at their catman. When she was more intrigued than confused, John freaked out and told the agent that there’s a weird gun, and radio, and camera and the weird radio made that guy a catman. Plus there’s oil all over the place. Agent Kennedy sighed, “I guess that means you guys are in. I’ll be right back.” She walked out of the station and walked back in with Billy Harrison, with Keith’s gun and belt atop his nicely folded uniform. Keith grabbed his shit and walked back to his desk and Billy said he hoped Keith was feeling better. Agent Kennedy dropped the bad accent and told Harrison all three officers had seen a lot of shit. She knew he wanted to get home, so maybe they should just leave the number and the bag and bail? He nodded. Kennedy turned to the three cops and Drew Andrews - “you’re completely fucked. Luckily for you all, though, I’m going to leave this bag here with you. Anything you put in it disappears. That’s all we know about it. It’s a myth, even within this community who have seen the unnatural at work. But we have seen today, all of us here, that Agent Victor’s Nike Bag is real. Guys, the world does not work the way we all grew up knowing it to be. You are all now charged with understanding that. That understanding of the world will cause your lives to crumble, but the thing that keeps us going is that daily, we are saving the human race from being wiped out of existence. I’m going to leave it here with you all, and you will be given a secure location to drop it when the job is done. Your job is to stop the incursion, minimize exposure, save lives, and cover the whole thing up to save others from being exposed. We’re going to give you the same information that all newcomers get, which is a phone number. You give them a call when the situation is taken care of or if things get completely out of hand. Or they will call in 48 hours if you don’t. Good Luck.”

John put all that in terms more easily digestible, “Guys, we’re fuckin X Files now.”

Episode 15

Let’s go back, now, to the past, to a young Clark Bishop in his childhood home. The same home he lives in now. Back then the plastic was on the couch. There were angel wings and pictures of Jesus. Clark is playing in the living room, his parents are in the kitchen cooking, and Wheel of Fortune is on, like always, in the background. Clark’s mom pulls him close to repeat her go-to motto, “Life is like the bonus round. We were already given the best letters.” And then she sends lil’ Clark off to see Mr. Gerald Fingerson at the Mary Cole Library, Contention’s public book depository, with lemon poppy seed muffins in hand.

The library smells musty, it’s rarely used by the community. Gary Daly, owner and operator of The Daly Pho, is having a loud conversation with Mr. Fingerson about occult books, and currently open in front of him is “The True and Horrifying Confessions of the St. Osyth Witches.” Clark presents the poppy seed muffins and Fingerson puts the baked goods with “the other batches” due to his gluten intolerance. The phone rings. Gerald answers. Gerald says it was for Clark. “He said you have the best letters. He sounded panicked. And then he screamed a little.”

Outside, the sky turns dark. The immediate lack of sunlight is noticed inside the Mary Cole Library. Strange forms of tall, gaunt men begin moving around outside the library. A figure in the darkness wearing a cloak is locking the doors of the library from the outside with a massive chain. He turns and runs - and out of one of the windows you see a massive flash of light. A gigantic shadow moves out of frame. It is an enormous but thin man in a black suit sprinting away from the cloaked figure.

Gerald opens a window, light comes back into the world, and everything seems as it once was.

Clark looks at Mr. Daly, who is staring at his book. Gary looks up and asks if there was a big cloud. Mr. Fingerson thinks the occult books must have something to do with this. Daly reads aloud what he had been reading when it went dark:

"And casting her eyes aside, she saw a spirit lift up a cloth lying over a pot, looking much like a Ferret. And it being asked of this examinate why the spirit did look upon her, she said it was hungry.... This examinate, being asked how she knew the names of mother Bennet’s sprites, sayth, that Tyffin, her spirit, did tell this examinate that she had two sprites, the one of them like a blacke Dogge, and the other redde like a Lyon, and that their names were Suckin and Lyerd , and sayeth that Suckin did plague Byette’s wife unto death, and the other plagued three of his Beasts whereof two of them dye...." but before he can finish, the three decide to not speak of this again.

When Clark arrives home...when he turns the corner, his mind can’t quite handle what it’s seeing - and it begins to fragment. One scene. Then another. First, he sees his house in perfect condition. His consciousness changes channels and he sees police officers everywhere. It flips again and everything is normal. It flips again and two black sedans are outside the house. It flips again and everything is normal as he walks into his house. There’s a flash and he sees his parents have been lifted off the ground and are half inside the walls of the home. Their faces are frozen and cold and white with the lack of blood, and then it flips again. Everything looks normal but he hears voices - it flips and he sees people. Someone says, “yeah, well we couldn’t find the artifact and we had to get the fuck out of there because Karen did her goddamn magic trick again.” And then everything is normal. Then he hears whispers. Then he sees a man wearing a suit - “oh shit, it’s a fucking kid, man.”

Clark is sitting in a courtroom in Contention, and he’s trying to think back on that day, but he can’t remember anything except for how normal it all was. How his house just looked normal, but empty. They just weren’t there anymore. But here there’s a woman. She’s on trial. She’s being convicted right now for the death of Clark’s parents. Her name is Anne Love. She is cold and vacant, but she is always smiling and her asymmetrical bangs cover one of her eyes. On the stand she says, “Yes, I did it. And I’d do it again.”

Back in current times, the officers went to The Daly Pho after Gary Daly called in to report information about the Chief’s disappearance. Gary Daly was the longtime partner of Harry Clinker and the owner/operator of The Daly Pho, a Contention staple that had been around for generations.

Gary Daly was an older man, he wore jeans cuffed halfway up his calves and a nice short sleeved button down with tiny, cartoon bean sprouts printed all over it.

He asked if the officers remembered when he would help watch them down at Clinkers when they were but wee little fellas, and invited them back to his office.

Some of the art hanging on the walls of The Daly Pho caught the boys’ attention. One was a circle with a star inside of it. Inside that star was another star and there were a couple triangles, curved lines, and tiny circles as well - a fun take on the chaoticness of the universe.

Another was a tree branch with three twigs growing on one side and two twigs growing on the other. It was in a bunch of old texts that Gary had seen at different museums and libraries from various cultures and eras. Another print was a black circle with six black dots surrounding it - an ancient sign for a group that might have existed called The Circle of Knowledge. They tried to keep the world together. The last was a wonky question mark with two additional lines, one curved and one straight, jutting down from the question mark’s dot - a symbol of a land unknown.

Anyway, Gary had heard Harrell Dorsey was in town and wanted a blogpost at whatsbehinddorsey.blogspot.com written about The Daly Pho - so he was kinda sorta stalking Harrell Dorsey. He followed Dorsey to the Chief’s house and saw a guy holding the Chief and James at gunpoint. The guy with the gun was overweight, wearing all black, and had a big scar over his right eye. James was wearing rubber waders. And the Chief seemed off - she didn’t stand up straight the way Chief Cook would.

In the phonebook, they found an address for James.

Keith remembered the hunched over, unkempt guy at the Chief’s house was wearing rubber waders. John remembered the unkempt man with the vacuum was wearing rubber waders. And the address for James matched, just down the street from Dr. Marie Jacobs’ house.

Episode 16

Let’s go once again into the past, to a young John Lee Pettimore IV just after the moment that ended his sprint car racing career.

John Lee Pettimore IV and Don D. Pettimore (John’s dad’s cousin) are sitting in the back of the ambulance and the EMT is checking out John. She tells the young Pettimore there’s just no way he’ll ever race again. Don grabs John’s face and tells him he’s gotta give up on this dream now. They hug. Don pushes John in a wheelchair out to the parking lot. But from the rear, Don sees two figures begin approaching. They are both extremely tall with large, gaunt frames. They begin walking faster and faster toward you. Don starts running with the wheelchair, but the two figures are catching up. There’s no one else around. They’re both wearing black suits and their skin is weirdly translucent. One of them starts screaming this banshee type yell, “(George of the Jungle yell)”. John hollers, “GIT!” at the fanciest men he’s ever seen, and the Pettimore boys make it to the parking lot, just in time to see their car now being flipped over by Large Eddie and his pit crew. John yells at Large Eddie. Large Eddie approaches the two of the Pettimores. Eddie swings. Don catches Large Eddie’s hand, and mutters under his breath. Large Eddie’s hand starts sizzling like a country fried steak on a Sunday morning, and smoke starts coming out of there. Eddie screams. Don holds on before dropping it and hitting him once more in the face. Eddie runs off hollering, and Don helps the concussed John Lee Pettimore IV into their car.

Back in the current timeline, the officers went to The First Church of Contention. On the way there, they noticed a strange occurrence - the creek, though it was a chilly December day, was filled to the brim with animals of all sorts - dogs, cats, possums, raccoons, town creatures of all sorts. The FCC was hosting a lunch for anyone who needed it, made by the Pastor’s wife and children, and served by the youth group.

Keith Vigna, impatient and rude, broke into Pastor Adam Cane’s office and stole the old motorcycle helmet from off his desk. The helmet had some tubes on either side with one green and one red light and the red light was lit.

**Episode 17**

But hey, it turns out maybe Keith is a monster to be around because his dad was a dick who clearly preferred Keith’s older brother, Ferguson.

Way back when they were children, while playing on their family’s sprawling estate, Keith and Ferguson heard the alarm sirens blaring as strange, gaunt men in suits appeared to fall from the sky. However they were promptly shot down by the Beans security personnel.

That night, William Beans sat the boys down and told them what happened is exactly why they have security, and he added the most important thing is Ferguson’s safety. William took Ferguson to his workshop, leaving Keith to hide and eavesdrop. That’s when he told Ferguson why he was so important. He said he didn’t know how much longer he’d be around. He had hoped that he would be the one to fulfill the prophecy. But it is not him. It is Ferguson. Ferguson is The Anointed. When the time is right, he must go back and save the world. With that, he handed Ferguson a watch and promised that it will fit when the time is right.

Back in whatever year it is now, the officers took the Pastor’s helmet to the police station and locked it up in the evidence room along with the other items from the booth at Forgotten Treasures, the gun, camera, and radio - all in separate lockers. They were all showing a red light except for the camera - green light lit.

Outside the station, John took a picture of Keith with this glass tube-lined camera. There was a massive flash of bright light and an inky black substance was all over John’s hands and dripping down from the camera and the picture. It was pooling on the ground, and they could swear it was moving. Then they blinked, and the substance was gone. John’s hands were clean and he was just holding this odd device and even odder picture.

The camera’s light was red again.The picture showed two men in a room made of darkness. They could barely make out the two figures in the picture thanks to the light from a small candle, also made out of a substance without color. The candle was sitting on a table made of the same unbelievably black texture. Of the two men, one was a slender, muscular man in a black t shirt, revealing tribal tattoo sleeves on both arms going down his hands to his fingertips. He was kneeling before another man who looked like a no-bullshit, actual cowboy. This man seemed to be looking into the camera, holding his hand up to block his face from the camera’s flash and sight.

On their way to the Mill on the other side of The City, the officers drove on a bridge over a creek, and there were loads of animals in the water at this part of the creek as well. John threw his lights on to get ahead of Clark, and as he passed, he saw the sky ahead begin to swirl. About thirty feet above the ground, a flat oval began to form. The sky around it spiraled like cloth, making folds as it gathered and bunched in places. The oval was black, but a technicolor energy was erupting from its darkness. And then, just as swiftly, the sky was just as it was. But something was falling. Suddenly, the windshield of John’s vehicle shattered and tiny shards of glass covered everything. Slumped across Officer Pettimore’s dashboard was the lifeless body of a grown man and blood was splattered everywhere. He lost control of the vehicle and swerved into oncoming traffic, hearing the sound of a horn blaring as it roared closer and closer before the cruiser jerked to a stop. All three officers saw the flash of a car fly by, and then they heard a deafening crash. The rumble of fire.

**Episode 18**

In the chaos, it was hard to understand what all happened. A minivan was run off the road by Officer Pettimore, a former teen sprint car racer who was banned from the circuit after an accident that left multiple bystanders hospitalized. Officer Bishop slammed into the back of Pettimore’s cruiser, there was fluid leaking everywhere. The minivan that narrowly avoided a head-on collision with John - it flipped and caught fire. Pettimore worked diligently to keep the two police cruisers from exploding, which likely would have killed Officer Vigna, who couldn’t handle the situation and fell unconscious, thrust into the memories of a particularly traumatic childhood Christmas. Officer Bishop pulled a young boy from the fiery wreckage of the minivan, but it might have already been too late. Before he could go back to save the woman trapped behind the wheel and the other passenger, the minivan combusted.

They had finally found the missing John Peters. They just hadn’t expected him to fall out of the sky and onto one of their cars. The balding man with large eyes was wearing a pair of jeans and a button down shirt. And on his forehead, recently branded into the skin, was the word, “FOOL.”

The ambulance arrived and firemen were seen pulling a woman’s charred remains from the driver’s seat of the minivan. Two others, from the back of the van, pulled out the body of a small girl.

Drew pulled up in Keith’s cruiser because he got a call from the Estate Salesman at James’ house. Apparently, he found some unsettling writing in blood and many guns after accidentally triggering some secret door trap. The salesman was wondering if he could sell the guns in the estate sale. Drew had told him the police needed to look at the scene first.

Drew and John then, very subtly, walked over to the ditch off the side of the road to speak privately. Drew said he received a message from The Duke. The deal was going down that night at 2 am. John offered Drew 5% to convince The Duke to do the deal out at the Pettimore farm.

Drew and John walked back up, and they all saw a wet, black cat running toward them from off the road. The cat, seemingly panicked, jumped up onto John’s leg and meowed like crazy.

John held the cat up and told Doug they were gonna get him the help he needs.

Episode 19

At this point, a small but vocal group of the Contention population began protesting and letting these officers know how they felt.

Drew apologized to the officers for not passing along critical information, like the calls about missing persons, animals in the ponds and creeks, as well as a voicemail from the Feds.

Doug, Dr. Marie Jacobs’ husband who was inhabiting the body of their cat Salem, conveyed to the officers that the animals were hiding in the water because the oily substance could not get them in the ponds and creeks.

And at James the Mill Worker’s house, the estate salesman, Randy Angst, dressed in a fancy, blue, three piece suit, holding a cane with a big tooth on the top, handed the cops a card when he greeted them. The cards said Mr. Angst is the dentist and the estate salesman in town. He also founded the Contention Historical Society. When asked about the picture from the odd camera John found in Julie Maxwell’s car, Angst noted that a few of the folks are dressed in clothes about a hundred years off from the rest. When questioned about Cole’s Orphanage, the dentist/estate salesman recalled an orphanage by that name opening about 25 years prior, though it closed down within a year.

In James the Mill Worker’s house, they found: a cache of guns hidden under the coffee table, writing in blood where one of the guns should be that reads STOP HER, and a large plastic tube, all revealed after touching the bowtie of a statue of a man wearing a tuxedo. There were a bunch of cleaning supplies, random materials, and a hand-written list hidden in a small enclave behind an oil painting of a rose. All the liquids had been crossed out, including the three listed types of water: tap, distilled, and boiling. And all of the materials had been crossed out…. except neoprene, a kind of synthetic rubber. When Clark tapped the white hard hat atop the suit of armor in the foyer, he found a trap door and fell into a 12 foot deep pit with two corpses, a man and a woman. In one of their pockets was a paper with a hand drawn symbol - a circle encircled by six circles. In the front room, there was a grand piano without strings, and in the kitchen, there were a few loose tiles where something heavy, metal, and buried had been dragged out.

As the place was being searched, a heavy artillery weapon began firing into the house from the front yard.

Episode 20

A looming, overweight man wearing an all black combat uniform with a large scar over his right eye blasted the door from its frame, almost cut Officer Bishop’s arm off, froze at the command of Officer Pettimore, and eventually, after a brutal combat between the Contention boys and the massive metal man, flew out of the window, bottomless, gripping the throat of Officer Vigna.

Thank Beans, he poked that Terminator Top in the eye just in time to escape, falling to the ground, before the metal fella exploded like fireworks.

Episode 21

The officers cleaned themselves up after fighting a large robot man that seemed to perhaps have feelings. Continuing the investigation of James the Mill Worker’s house, Keith Vigna found a single piece of music, called “The Rise of the End” in the bench of the stringless piano. Clark Bishop found, in the large plastic tube, blueprints for Calm Comfy Campground, a suspiciously planned out set of seven buildings, six encircling a large one in the center, on an island that sits on Lake Calm.

They all stood there, in James the Mill Worker’s house, and the officers remembered he died in Chief Maggie Cook’s house with a bullet in his head, facedown in a plate of foot-meat. They remembered the contents of the present she received from an unknown source the night she took off: a red rose, a white hard hat, and a black silk bow tie - all of which: present in this home - in a painting, on a suit of armor, and worn by a statue, respectively.

They called Florence, the fourth and only other Contention Police Officer, and it went to voicemail immediately.

After undressing the bottom half of the still-standing robot man’s legs, the gang found a logo on the smooth pelvic area - an M made of four double helices.

Episode 22

Late on the night of December 4th, after the weirdest dinner and Wheel of Fortune session Clark Bishop had ever been subject to, due to his super fuckin’ Iweird new coworker, Keith Vigna left the Bishop home, headed back to Hotel Motel, and was approached by his niece, Francis Beans. She offered her uncle, Officer Vigna, one million dollars from her inheritance to kill her father, Keith’s brother, Ferguson Beans. Upon accepting her proposal, the two began driving East, away from Contention.

John got home to find his place had been turned over. His Smokey and the Bandit DVDs had been knocked over and stepped on. Among the mess was a Burgatory Rewards card for Keith Vigna. John vowed to kill Keith. But first, he smoked a bowl and put on Smokey. Drew eventually showed up, holding a pistol, but by the top, so John showed Drew how to use the safety on his pistol, and they went out to The Shooting Tree to practice aiming and firing. With final preparations for the coke deal with The Duke in place, John made a bird call and another call replied from the woods.

At 2 am, technically the morning of December 5th, a white fifteen passenger van pulled up to the Pettimore property with the words JESUS CHRIST MINISTRIES painted on the side, filled with children, pulling a white trailer that also says JESUS CHRIST MINISTRIES. The most handsome man John had ever seen hopped out of the van. Perfect hair, perfect teeth, a perfect jawline, and he wearing the fuck out of a bright white suit with a red rose pinned perfectly to his lapel. There were two holes and John pointed out where to dig when he received half the money. Same plan for the second half. A bunch of children ran out of the van, all carrying shovels in the same way, and they lined up waiting for The Duke. On his command, the children begin digging. John asked if the kids all have the same mom. “Yeah, you could say that.”

After the children loaded the cocaine into the trailer behind the van, The Duke handed John the briefcase with five million dollars in it. The same thing happened behind the wood pile as it did beneath the big tree.

The transaction went smoothly, and John offered The Duke a thousand dollars for information about Marvin Glass. The Duke doesn’t like Marvin Glass - see, Glass is a competitor but also a customer. Marvin Glass buys in bulk. When The Duke was asked about his rose, he said he liked the smell, laughed, and admitted he has no sense of smell. When John asked again about the kids, The Duke said goodbye to Drew, got back into the van, drove down the long driveway, and out onto the country road. John whistled and eight Pettimore cousins came walking out from the woods, received their payment - ten grand and a 24 pack of keystone light, each, and they all fired their guns into the air in celebration.

Back at the Bishop abode, Clark heard Keith leave, got up and locked the front door. Walking back to bed, he looked out the window to Cole’s Creek, which flows down south from the lake at Centennial Park. The whole thing was packed with animals - a fair few people had been out there earlier, looking for their pets. But not at this late hour. Too dark. Too cold. Then he saw a humanoid figure hobbling down the frigid waterway in his direction. It was running, but it seemed to be fighting through a limp, and when it reached the point in the creek closest to Clark’s house, he leapt from the water and began screaming and waving his arms, all while looking directly toward Clark’s window. Clark’s brain had a hard time comprehending what he was seeing. But this man running toward him was...him. And then a warm pinch on the back of the neck, and Clark’s vision tunnelled to a close.

Clark came to as a black bag was being snatched off his head. He felt hungover and his chest felt weird and tight. It smelled damp and earthy, and there was a haze around the torch above, shedding partial light from the middle of this small, stone-walled room. Clark was sitting in a chair across a stone table from a man with grey hair under a white hard hat in a charcoal suit with a bolo tie. The man looked relaxed as he tossed the black bag onto the table and began to speak.

“After Richard III’s coronation, he was visited by a seer from Leicester who called himself The Overseer. The seer claimed that the now King was to hold some very important knowledge, but would need to have the restraint to not abuse this power. Richard was given this knowledge. But he couldn’t handle it. He lost his mind and killed his two nephews. The Overseer, disappointed, eventually passed this same knowledge to Henry Tudor so he could whoop Richard at Bosworth. Henry VII held this power and eventually passed it down to a reliable and trusted confidant, thankfully not his piece of shit son. This knowledge was passed down repeatedly, abused and respected, respected and abused, until it made its way over the Atlantic to the colonies, eventually landing with a high order of Masons. A select few held this information for generations. But a grand purpose was never found. Until Paul Simon. The politician, not the singer. Soon after being elected to the senate, he was walking near his home when he came across the first known Xenonematode. He sought out Robert Byrd, the Senate minority leader at the time, to share his newfound understanding of the world. Thankfully for the world, Byrd was among those carrying the knowledge of The Overseer from centuries before. Together, they formed a small circle of men to hold the weight of this realization. Today, we carry on their tradition by keeping the darkness out of this world. We are the opaque rampart delaying the destruction of life as we know it. Welcome. To the Circle of Knowledge. You have questions, I’m sure. And I know this sounds hypocritical after that lengthy oration, but - as my high school english teacher would always say - show; don’t tell.”

He reached under the table and, as he stood, he held up an unspeakable worm-like abomination with one hand, away from his body. The thing was two feet long and tube-like, covered in a squamous, black, partially translucent membrane. Its body segmented, and toxically green pulsating arteries and veins could be seen through its thin-looking exterior. It had no identifiable eyes or nose. Its cavernous, circular mouths - one sitting just inside the other - were lined with hooked teeth and it spit out a saliva that was somehow darker than black.

Episode 23

Keith Vigna sat in the car (Chrysler Sebring) of his niece, Francis Beans. She had offered him one million dollars to kill her father, his brother, Ferguson Beans. After some back roads through the woods, she pulled up to a black, iron fence. Francis hopped out and motioned for Keith to follow her as she opened a hatch in the ground and jumped inside, disappearing from view.

Keith followed down the hatch into a dark, underground tunnel, lit by red lights on the walls every 15 feet. Keith didn’t know this tunnel existed. Francis told him he’ll pop up on the estate in a sweet spot with no security and he’ll have a straight shot to the house. Keith said he thought she’d make a good officer. She laughed. Keith went up, followed her directions, and made his way into Ferguson’s house undetected. Keith searched for and found bleach, ammonia, and a towel.

But when Keith walked into Ferguson’s room: the lights were out but there were candles on either side of the bed. Lit by candlelight was a woman on top of the sheets in bed-ware, but not Stacy. This was an older woman, a generation older than Ferguson and Keith. She freaked out. Keith calmed her down, said he’s Contention PD, that he got a call someone broke in. She claimed she was there to meet Ferguson. This was Joan Robin, the mother of Ferguson’s business partner, Bruce. Joan explained that Ferguson offered her a million dollars to sleep with him so he could make ‘your mom’ jokes to his business partner.

Keith told her she had two options. She could leave, or she could shoot Ferguson when he came into the room. Joan realized with Ferguson gone, her son would take control of the company. Keith offered her half a million dollars. And she accepted. Keith found Ferguson’s revolver, handed it to Joan, and a car could be heard pulling up to the house. A white fifteen passenger van with the words JESUS CHRIST MINISTRIES painted on the side pulled into the pristine circle drive. The van pulled a white trailer that also said JESUS CHRIST MINISTRIES. A beautiful man got out of the passenger side of the van. He had perfect hair, perfect teeth, a perfect jawline, and he was wearing the fuck out of a bright white suit with a red rose pinned perfectly to his lapel. It was Keith’s brother, Ferguson Beans. He clicked a button on his keys and, as he walked toward his home, the ground around the van and trailer began to move and shift. The entire vehicular ensemble was transported below ground on some crazy futuristic elevator of sorts as the driveway closed back up with no evidence the van or trailer ever sat there.

Keith hid in the closet with the ammonia, bleach and towel. The door opened, shut, and Ferguson hollered upstairs, “Joan? The power out?” A scared Joan yelled back, “it must have been the storm!” The door to the room opened, and Keith heard a shot, then a scream, then another shot, then a different scream, then another shot, and another shot, and another shot. And then Keith heard crying. It sounded like Joan. Keith opened the door of the closet to see Ferguson on the floor in a white suit with a rose on his lapel, riddled with holes from his own gun. Joan ran to Keith and hugged him. Keith started crying. Joan was crying. Keith told Joan to calm down and lay on the bed, so he could clean up the scene. Joan sat at the end of the bed with her head in her hands. Keith grabbed the bleach, ammonia, and mixed it up on the rag. He walked over to Joan and tried to lock his arm behind her head and force the rag over her mouth, but Joan got her hand in between her mouth and the towel. Keith attacked again, violently. He held her down on the bed until she passed out. Officer Keith Vigna grabbed the revolver with his handkerchief and put it in Joan’s hand, held the gun to her head, and pulled the trigger, leaving the room to look like Joan shot Ferguson five times before turning the gun on herself.

Walking away, Keith saw the watch on Ferguson’s wrist. It was the watch their dad, William, gave Fergie when they were kids. Keith took the watch, noticing there was nothing on the face of the watch, and slipped it in his pocket when…

Keith Vigna: it feels like your consciousness is changing the channel and you begin to phase out of your reality and you seem to be somewhere else entirely. You feel wet grass and dirt on your fingers. You are looking at a door in the ground, like a sealed metal door that was mostly buried. On the door is an inscription: “here lies the Beans / Scientists Beyond Measure / Saviors of the World”.

Keith walked back through the tunnel with glazed eyes. Keith stuck the watch (in a handkerchief) into the room’s safe and laid down flat in his bed at Hotel Motel.

John Lee Pettimore had just successfully made five million dollars by selling cocaine to a random, handsome stranger named The Duke, paid him a grand to know that Marvin Glass buys from him in bulk, and paid eight cousins 10 grand and a 24 pack of keystone light to which they each took a Pettimore sky shot and headed off into the night. Drew walked up and said thank you. For making all this money. For showing him how to shoot a gun. John pointed his gun at Drew and asked for the gun back. Drew obliged, and John told him he needs to be more real about the world. So Drew asked for the gun back. John said no. But then he told Drew that he’s his best friend on the force. Drew said John is his best friend. With all the money, Drew planned on donating his house to Boys and Girls Club and then just bail. And then Drew drove off down the long driveway to the county road.

John was home alone. He wanted to kill Keith Vigna, but he opted for leaving Keith drunk voicemails, slamming three more beers, snorting another line, brushing his teeth, and sending Keith a text that just says, “I know.”

John then swept up his Smokey DVDs, put in the Director’s Cut, and fell asleep smoking a joint on his couch dreaming of his millions but also of terrible monsters.

He woke up to the sound of two gunshots.

RoseMary was holding six Pettimores and Drew hostage. Two Pettimores were facedown in the dirt. She called out for John. He came out on his porch with his hands up. She told him her boss, Marvin Glass, wants the gun. John thinks they can help each other. Glass wants his boys back right. John wants his town back right. She said she was sent to collect the gun, and John asked if he could deliver it. She agreed. First, she let the cousins all go free. Then she got John and Drew into the front of Drew’s Mini Cooper, hopped in the back and held their own guns at them while they drove back into town, to the Contention Police Department.

Clark was in the circular stone room with the stone table, lit by a torch. The man sat across from him put down the creature into a container between his legs and closed the lid and introduced himself as Leon Simpson and welcomed Clark into The Circle of Knowledge. Clark’s first task began forthwith. He pulled out a small, plastic container and slid it toward Clark.

He took a gun out of his pocket (it’s a tranquilizer) and in the plastic container were a pair of needles. Leon told Clark these darts were filled with a particular toxin to make anyone obey for some time. The job was this: an FBI Agent was on his way to Contention to take over the missing persons cases. As this would be bad for Clark, and for the Circle of Knowledge, he needed to tranq this FBI Agent and make sure he didn’t see anything funny going on. Leon Simpson asked Clark what exactly had been going on that was so funny in Contention. And Clark spilt, those, beans.

Leon was impressed by the sheer amount of strange information coming from Clark, and so reiterated his current mission: keep the FBI Agent away from any of the strangeness, any of the goo, or ooze, or whatever they’re calling it. This next part was important: Clark had 24 hours. And then Leon needed him to report back, so they could make sure that he’d be okay.

Clark asked about the creature. Leon told him it’s a xenonematode. Currently they believe these things are a vector either from another time, another place, or another reality. They’re not quite positive, however they’re the things Paul Simon found that connected the dots of the knowledge of the Overseer. These creatures are not of this place. They have certain abilities The Circle of Knowledge has found a way to exploit and they are necessary, kept around for a very specific purpose. Again, Leon decided to show and not tell.

He opened the one door in this room into another circular stone room. This one was much bigger, twenty yards across with a domed ceiling. The walls were stone and there were a handful of torches mounted to light the room. There were six, large slabs of stone (each with a couple of people laying on them) circling a single, unoccupied stone slab in the center of the space. Each person laying down had one of those giant, fucked up worm things attached to them, and many of them seemed to have dead skin covering one or multiple limbs. There was a woman in electric blue slacks and a bright yellow cardigan walking deliberately around to each slab, checking on each group and checking her watch. She smiled when she saw Clark Bishop.

Leon explained that these brave men and women (motioning to the people of the slabs who all look very down on their luck) these fine individuals have dedicated their lives to the survival of humanity. Clark questioned their willingness, and Leon argued that things around here were much better than they used to be. Anyway, Clark needed to get going. The timer had already started and Leon said he’d hate for the 24 hours to pass as they’d hate to lose Clark so soon.

As he walked Clark out of the room, the woman said goodbye to Leon. Clark turned back and looked. He recognized this woman. She was cold and vacant with a big smile on her face. Her asymmetrical hair was covering one of her eyes. Anne Love, the woman who killed Clark’s parents smiled and calmly said, “Bye Clark.”

As he rushed toward her, Officer Bishop felt a warm pinch in his neck. Anne Love began laughing as he slowly crumbled to the ground.

Clark Bishop woke up in a cab. Looking behind, he saw. He was leaving The Mill on the Other Side of The City.

Episode 24

After the murder of both his brother, Ferguson Beans, and his brother’s partner’s mother, Joan Robin, Keith Vigna, back at Hotel Motel, dreamt he stood at a bar, empty except for himself and the bartender. The bar was rundown, smelled of piss and vomit, and looked to have been vacated quickly by other customers. The man behind the bar was dressed in clothing from the late 1800’s and spoke fearfully to Keith, asking if he wanted answers? Or cocaine? Keith asked for the former, as he had enough of the latter. The saloon-style doors swung open, allowing the entrance of a woman Keith recognized. In her hands was a massive trunk, which she heaved onto the bar and opened. Inside was the camera (red light lit), the gun (also red light lit), and the radio (green light lit). Seeing this, Keith told the woman the camera won’t be ready until one and, knowing the other two take a few days, asked what he should do if *they* come for him?

As is the way with dreams, Mary was suddenly gone and the barkeep, Lloyd, pulled a corkscrew from his pocket and held it on the bar in front of Keith, pointy-side up. Lloyd slammed his head into the corkscrew and held eye contact with Keith as little bits of cocaine fell out of the hole in his head.

Keith looked down and found the cocaine had fallen in the pattern of a stick-figure family. He pulled out a one-hundred dollar bill sporting the visage of Abraham Lincoln and snorted up the family. As he did, Lloyd phased through the back of the bar and out of sight.

Keith came to in his police cruiser, pulling into the department parking lot. He had been lost in the dream and also in running over the gruesome details of the murder-suicide he had staged between Joan and Ferguson.

John Lee Pettimore IV was also dreaming, dreaming he was rolling across the ground with ease, ignoring a man in a fancy suit who mopped the floor and mouth-trumpeted along with Louis Armstrong. Outside, the sky appeared dark and stormy. John seemed to be inside a closed store but the door opened anyway, triggering the bell above.

John looked up to the figure in the doorway but was unable to identify them through the black cloak they wore. The figure dropped a massive book on the ground and stumbled back into the night.

John’s vision began to distort and he became disoriented. As it cleared, he found that he was a baby again, sitting on the floor in the back of Clinker’s. A young Gary Daly walked into the daycare at Clinker’s and pulled a large leather tome from his pack. He looked over his shoulder and, turning his attention back to The Book, winced, and ripped a page from the spine. He paused, listened, and then stowed The Book away before approaching John with the stray page.

Daly pulled a knife from his bag and began to chant, reading from the paper, the script on which seemed to spark as he spoke the words. He continued to chant as he drew blood from his thumb and let it drip onto baby John. The sparks began to engulf the paper and the flames danced around John’s head before disappearing. Daly spoke to himself as he wiped the blood from John’s head.

“Grandpa, you old cook, you ol’ wizard,” he sighed, “I hope this does him good. Well, two down, one to go.”

*“Hey- hey John! What’re ya thinking about?”*

John also came to as he pulled into the Contention Police Department parking lot, riding shotgun in Drew’s cherry red Mini Cooper. Drew, terrified, drove, while RoseMary sat in the back with both the men’s guns at the ready.

Clark dreamt that he was running- running because it was imperative that he run- running because *he was close,* because this was a chance to *stop them*. He narrowly dodged oncoming traffic upon realizing, suddenly, that he was on the highway. He made it to the bridge, jumped, and recognized he wouldn’t make the water. He braced for impact.

Clark’s shinbone pushed through his kneecap, but he continued to run, trailing a stream of blood behind him. Ahead, Clark saw his old nemesis and remembered why the animals took refuge in water. He jumped in the creek himself, ignoring the pain in his knee. The black ooze followed along the shore.

From the river, Clark saw himself in the window of his own house and mustered up the strength to climb out from the river. He called to himself from the backyard. He told himself to run, to get the fuck out of there. He told himself he could get it right this time.

Clark jolted awake in the back of the cab. He noted a tightness in his chest as the car turned into the parking lot of the Contention PD.

It was December 5th, a foggy, blustery day in Contention. An old husky made its way down the road and paused before fleeing upon hearing the three cars approach.

The officers had a moment to judge each other’s situations. John turned and finally asked RoseMary’s name, eventually explaining that if she wants *the* gun, Drew and John will need theirs back. RoseMary agreed but was quick to explain that if she happened to go missing, Marvin Glass would find and torture anyone who might be connected.

The officers noted that a stranger’s car was parked in the lot: a red 2001 Mitsubishi Eclipse. Clark admitted to the taxi driver he had no money but the cabbie explained the ride had been paid for. Upon stepping outside, the other two cops wondered why Clark was dressed in pajamas. Clark lied, saying he had been sleepwalking. John smoothed things over between RoseMary and his nervous partners while insisting they would all soon be traveling to The City to deliver the gun to Marvin Glass.

John reminded his partners of Jermaine and Alfred Glass. Marvin’s sons were trying to find the gun. Given the officers’ knowledge of the gun and the sons, John suggested they might be in a good place to do business with Marvin, essentially allying the Contention PD with the Glass Crime Family. John thought that, working together, they might be able to use the gun to bring people back from wherever they disappeared to. They planned to leave for The City as soon as the gun was in hand.

The officers circled back to a conversation about the husky- the first animal they’d seen out of the water in days. They decided to head into the station rather than follow it, when they remembered the strange sports car in their lot. Keith looked into the red 2001 Mitsubishi Eclipse and saw a massive container of creatine powder, empty Red Bull cans, and a pair of Oakleys.

John, wielding two guns, kicked in the door to the station and shouted the words: “Contention PD- freeze douchebag!”

A young man in a blue suit and red-striped tie had been pacing the floor of the department and froze, Red Bull in-hand. The man obediently dropped the beverage on the carpet and invited the officers to take the FBI badge from his jacket. This was Agent Trent Chad. As soon as Clark had the badge, he tranquilized the agent with a dart from the Circle of Knowledge and Chad became immediately suggestible.

Clark’s partners were suspicious of the dart gun, but Clark explained that his previous night’s detour had informed him the FBI would arrive. He couldn’t give specifics, but this had all been expected. As the officers decided what to do with the tranquilized agent, Drew arrived and saw that Chad had been digging through the department’s files.

When Agent Trent Chad suggested the three present officers were some of the worst in history, the crew asked if he had experience in PR. Chad had plenty of experience, it turned out, so the officers devised an impromptu press conference to calm the population. They settled on a filmed statement that confirmed everything was okay, that the Contention PD should be given room to do what they need to, and that everything done so far had been in the interest of the people. Having filmed the statement, they told Agent Chad to convey the same sentiments to his superiors.

As Clark moved to the back of the station to retrieve his spare clothes, he noticed the cells were empty. Though the cell doors were locked, Dr. Marie Jacobs and the body of Doug Jacobs had vanished. Keith suggested they review the security footage.

The footage revealed the cat running wildly about the station, jumping from spot to spot. The Jacobs’ bodies, in their cells, were picked up into the air and slammed into the ground repeatedly before they disappeared. The officers noticed the cat had been looking up when it became scared. Given the consistent patterns, they concluded this was all likely the work of the goo.

The officers considered what they knew- that animals could see or sense the goo and that they had the power to become animals themselves if they needed to. While discussing the possibilities presented by the strange evidence they’d collected, Keith said the camera might be active again at 1pm- a suspiciously specific thought. They walked to the evidence locker together and found the helmet (red light lit), the camera (red light lit), the gun (red light lit), and the radio (green light lit).

Episode 25

Doug the cat appeared in the locker room and indicated he had something to say to Keith. Clark bolted from the room as Doug jumped up onto the shelf and began to rub along the green-lit radio, fearing a body-switch. Outside, Agent Chad mopped up Red Bull and RoseMary tapped an impatient foot.

John Lee Pettimore pulled Doug away from the radio and chided him for the attempt to switch bodies. The cat became frantic but John hugged him tightly to his chest and began to consider the possibility of switching the man inside the cat back out for information. When Doug agreed to switch with the FBI agent, the officers suggested Agent Trent Chad sleep and dragged his unconscious body into the evidence room.

With everything set up for the switch, the officers listened from outside as the radio transitioned from music to a jumble of audio, culminating in a high-pitched tone that screeched in their ears. A light flashed inside and there was silence. Soon, they heard Chad’s voice from inside- it was Doug resituating himself in the body of the fit agent. Agent Chad, in the cat’s body, attempted to make a panicked escape as they opened the door, but they captured him with Doug’s help.

The officers asked Drew to go buy a cat kennel, prompting a strange look. RoseMary began to insist on the gun and the officers became condescending. She unlocked the police station door and left. The officers ran after RoseMary and found her banging on the trunk of Drew’s car as he attempted to back out. She quashed the potential conflict, saying she only wanted the briefcase in the back. With that in hand, she released Drew to his errand. Despite the tense situation, RoseMary calmly explained that the case contained five million dollars. Content, RoseMary returned to the police station. John and Clark followed.

Doug stood marveling at his new body inside. He had a very clear memory of what had happened prior to the body switch, but before he could explain he began to panic. He could see the ooze, though it was invisible to everyone else. Clark rushed to the sink and began to toss water about the station. John pulled a pipe from the break room sink, allowing water to flood onto the floor. RoseMary, unsure of what was happening, perched calmly on Drew’s desk with the briefcase.

They attempted to get more detail from Doug, but he was terrified- the water wasn’t stopping the ooze. Doug made a run for the door - Keith and Clark followed him to the parking lot. There, they found him standing frozen. Doug’s mental state continued to devolve as they led him to Keith’s car. Their attempts to calm or slap sense into him failed.

Clark confirmed that Doug, in Chad’s body, was still under the influence of the tranquilizer. He was able to explain that, in the days leading up to his becoming a cat, he had been sick. His wife Marie had brought the radio in and a dreamlike blur followed. He began to disassociate, claiming they were all a part of a dream. Keith tried to explain they were not dreaming, but Clark leaned into the idea - what was the worst that could happen to Doug if he helped in the dream?

Inside, John found a vacuum and attempted, blindly, to capture the ooze. In leaping about, he noticed Agent Chad’s briefcase on one of the desks. Assuming the coast was clear, he opened it and found several signs, a list, a map, and a small cellphone jammer that was turned on.

Keith and Clark brought Doug back inside to see if he still saw the goo. He didn’t, and he became distracted by his reflection in the breakroom mirror. Doug was unsure whether lingering animal instincts had allowed him to see the goo or if it had been an illusion. He was still certain he was in a dream.

John drew the group’s attention to the signs in Agent Chad’s briefcase. They read:

‘Attention: a chemical spill from The Unincorporated Land, once the town Perdition, just west of Contention, is heading this way. Please evacuate immediately. Don’t forget your pets.’

The list contained all the locations Agent Chad had planned to place the signs, and the map detailed all the missing persons and the dates they disappeared. All the disappearances occured on December 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. The 3rd marked an explosion in cases across town.

RoseMary stood suddenly and gave the officers five minutes to turn over the gun. They used their time to decide between visiting Perdition and The City. The officers called Drew and asked him to put Chad’s signs up in town. But Drew claimed he had seen literally no one on his errand- no customers in the store, no employees, no cars on the roads, nothing.

But then, a car arrived at the station, driven by an older woman. It was Jan Manstein, the mother of an ‘Ari’ Manstein (whose name was not immediately familiar). Jan had arrived to gather Ari’s possessions from the station. Her daughter had been killed in the hospital fire in The City.

The officers recognized that Ari’s position matched that of Ray, or was it Tim, or Lauren, or Florence, who they had sent to the hospital. As soon as they understood the name-switch, the officers were flooded with memories of this fourth Contention Police Officer, all of whom they last remembered sending to the hospital on an ambulance with RoseMary. Clark tried to console Jan as she cleaned out Ari’s desk. She invited them all to her funeral the following day at The City Cemetery where Ari was to be buried with her family.

In the backroom, RoseMary eyed the evidence locker as John interrogated her about the hospital fire. RoseMary eventually admitted to starting the fire that killed their colleague. John insisted that she play it cool while Jan was around.

As Jan finished picking up Ari’s things, she struggled to decide whether or not to tell her husband, Ari’s father, Stan Manstein, who had been in The City Asylum for 28 years. When John offered to tell him, she agreed enthusiastically. Just as Jan was leaving, they asked if she’d seen anybody about town as she came through and she told them she hadn’t.

With Jan out of the station, the officers finally let themselves feel shaken by the conflicting personas of this mysterious colleague. The memories seemed to combine into one, almost-anonymous individual, their only connection being the family name ‘Manstein.’

John pulled RoseMary aside again before they piled into the car. Out of view, he pushed his pistol to RoseMary’s head and threatened to kill her if she didn’t return Drew’s money. RoseMary surrendered the money and slowly turned so that the gun’s barrel was centered between her eyes.

“It’s hilarious that you think that *you* can kill *me*.” She chuckled before walking back out into the station.

John collected himself and stashed the briefcase in the evidence locker.

An email from Wolf the Dog revealed their PSA was about to air. The message was followed by news of the Beans-Robin murder-suicide. John and Clark looked up at Keith to gauge his reaction. Keith stared at the ground and admitted that Ferguson was his brother, but said he hadn’t seen him in a while. Keith agreed it’d be worthwhile to check in with The City PD about the crime scene, the crime scene he had orchestrated.

Episode 26

As the officers headed toward the highway on their way to The City, they confirmed the utter abandonment of Contention. Gone were the runners, the beggars, the teenagers and their pot-smoking. Gone, too, were the protests. The town would have been silent if not for the distant sound of other cars and the cries of abandoned animals from the creek.

Given that two of the cruisers had been involved in accidents, the officers told RoseMary to lead the way and they piled into a single cruiser with Doug/Chad. The crew stopped by Clark’s spotless garage to ransack the U.S. Military branded crates they had stolen from John Peters’ storage units for pistols, shotguns, rifles, a shoulder-mounted anti-aircraft weapon, an EMP rifle, a grappling gun, a small gun that shoots tracers, lots of grenades, a sniper rifle, and a very tiny but powerful gun. Each of the officers also donned body armor and packed a small bag of cocaine. They remembered, at the very last moment, to bring the strange gun and camera with the odd glass tubes.

On the ride to The City, John placed a call to Harry Clinker and immediately realized they had packed and failed to deactivate the cell phone jammer. As John waited for Harry to pick up, Keith began to receive missed call and voicemail notifications. On the phone, John asked Harry if he knew where everyone had gone but the gravel-voiced man could only guess. Harry, in turn, began to ask about the actions of the officers in light of the protests but was happy to side with his daycare alumni..

Harry was always something of a confidante for the officers and so John began spilling details of the bizarre events they had witnessed in the last few days, much to the surprise of everyone else in the car- especially Doug Jacobs. Harry expressed some worry, suggesting that a spiritualist might be useful to John. So John inquired about Harry’s partner, Gary Daly, who dabbled in acting as a medium. Harry admitted Gary hadn’t come home the night before. He did say that Gary had been meeting with his book group more regularly, a gathering of occultists that included Dr. Marie Jacobs and Mildred Mitchell. John thanked the barman and ended the call.

Keith had received a single text and four voicemails while the jammer had been active, all from John Lee Pettimore IV. John ranted about Keith breaking in, fucking with his Smokies, and admitted that he had five million dollars. The group texted Drew, asking him to keep an eye on Contention in their absence. Doug/Chad clarified that his central motivation was returning to his own body, but that he was willing to help for some cash on the side. At Doug’s suggestion, the officers called Gary Daly on speaker phone and, after several rings, they heard Gary in the middle of a conversation:

“I told you, you old witch, you’re just going crazy, you know, that’s all. That’s fine and we can deal with that. Hello?”

The group suggested Gary check in with Harry. When they asked about the ‘witch,’ Gary explained he was chatting with Mildred Mitchell, the grandmother of Tilde B Mitchell, at her house. She was suffering a breakdown of sorts. Mildred was under the impression that her histories have been split, and she has become obsessed with a picture of the founders of Contention. Silas Cole, she insisted, looked different than he did before- less attractive and, possibly, stupider. Mildred also believed she could see the reflection of Tilde B in the photo. The officers were shaken by the thought that the gun, at least, appeared to send people back in time and the split histories could explain, in part, their mysterious colleague, Ari.

John asked about Gary’s grandfather and described the recent dream in which Gary had performed a protection ritual on John. Gary admitted this had indeed occurred and went on to say his grandfather, Gingifred, had passed down a book with three pages left and instructed Gary to read those pages over the heads of the boys, spilling blood in the process. The reason for this, Gary’s grandfather had explained, was that the three men were the key to everything. They thanked the owner of The Daly Pho and prepared to enter The City.

The streets of The City were drab, gray, and littered with trash. A foul smell hung in the air and billboards covered the faces of buildings. The City residents seemed bloated and lifeless. In opposition to the industrial gloom, flowers of every shade and shape grew in the alleys and from cracks in the pavement. RoseMary led the officers downtown to a tall, granite skyscraper. In a small, surveilled parking garage, RoseMary gestured for the officers to enter a small elevator made of polished onyx. Everyone, including RoseMary, agreed that Doug’s presence as ‘FBI’ might prove valuable leverage. RoseMary remained in the garage as the doors closed.

The elevator contained no buttons or floor indicators and, for a while, it seemed as though it didn’t move at all. As John held the gun artifact up to the ceiling and called for an audience, one of the walls opened into a dark room. A spotlight in the center of the room partially lit Marvin Glass, a humanoid figure with a massive, gaunt frame - dressed in a fitted black tuxedo and a red bowtie. The lower half of Marvin’s face was visible in the light- the skin there appeared hairless and translucent. Above the sharp, see-through chin, candy red lipstick messily encircled a round hole. The orifice began to move as Marvin Glass introduced themself and asked if the crew knew why they were in this room.

The officers weren’t sure. Marvin explained that Ferguson Beans had been trying to buy cocaine from a Contention police officer, cocaine that had been stolen from Marvin Glass. RoseMary was sent to collect the money from the deal. This surprised John, who hastily suggested he knew nothing about the cocaine deal. Glass called out the lie.

The officers were confused. RoseMary had been insistent about the gun, but Marvin said he sent her specifically to recover the money. They pulled Doug/Chad aside and instructed him to say the money had been confiscated by the FBI. Marvin flew into a rage before quickly calming down. He explained that Alfred’s state was pitiable but not the current concern. John clarified it was Jermaine they were hoping to return to Marvin. John laid the situation out- it wouldn’t be long before whatever haunted Contention made its way into The City.

Marvin explained, in plain words, that they cared more for the money than for their missing son. Realizing the extent of their miscalculation, the officers began to switch blame to RoseMary. Marvin became increasingly agitated as John recalled the money had been in the woman’s hand but she let it go for the promise of the strange gun. When Keith spoke up about the lights, Marvin revealed they had orchestrated the killing of Ferguson Beans through Keith’s niece, Francis Beans. Glass congratulated him on finishing the job so effectively. Francis herself emerged from the darkness behind the desk and flipped her uncle double birds as a third figure, with spiky white hair and a long white lab coat, joined the Glass retinue. This mad scientist stood tall behind Francis Beans, and slowly tapped long, wobbly fingers against her protege’s collar bones.

John and Keith doubled down on their denial of all these events, but as the women backed into the darkness, Keith stepped forward and asked for his money. Marvin told him he would receive his winnings if he was able to prove himself worthy. Marvin offered John support if he could prove himself capable. They then apologized to Clark for having to be in the room.

The room which began to fill with a noxious gas. Clark ran to the elevator but failed to pry it open. John asked Keith point blank if he had sold them out and Keith denied it before passing out.

The officers woke in separate cages to the sounds of a jubilant crowd. The cages hung from the ceiling of a smoky, dimly-lit room. Three other cages were present, populated by a muscled stranger, a malnourished child, and Doug Jacobs in the body of Agent Trent Chad. Below, the audience indulged in vices and crowded the middle of the room on couches, cushions, and piles of blankets. The sinners eagerly watched two teenagers fight in a plexiglass cage hanging over the center of this space. The crowd cheered as one teen began to viciously beat the other, spraying those below with blood through holes in the elevated fighting box’s floor.

Keith checked his underwear to see if his tiny gun had been seized.

Episode 27

The winner of the bloody fight stumbled to his feet and tried to run back to his cage which had locked into place on the side of the hanging, plexiglass room. But he slipped on the blood of the beaten boy and panicked as the ceiling began to lower. The weakened champion boy scraped and crawled just quickly enough to slide into his cube of metal bars as the ersatz ceiling closed in on the perforated floor, eliciting a guttural moan from the deceased… crushed… juiced boy.

The blood rained down onto the gaudy and deranged crowd below, many held their mouths open and tongues out. The two cages attached to the plexiglass combat cage closed and withdrew through an exit in the wall, taking the winner of the fight with them.

The officers did some quick math and realized their turn would come soon. Keith had indeed located his tiny, powerful gun in his briefs and he called over to Doug to confirm the man was still suggestible. As a precautionary measure, they told him losing would allow him to ‘wake up’ from the nightmare he believed he was experiencing. As retribution for the current state of affairs, John attempted to urinate on the audience but slipped and fell on his own penis. A few members of the audience happily bathed in the bloody urine he emitted.

Clark Bishop scanned the crowd and noticed several important figures, including the mayor, the chief of police, and the district attorney of The City. Keith looked for a host or leader of the event and spotted, at the bar, a lone, black-clad figure who sported a mustache and medical scars on his forehead and neck. The man seemed to be watching over the event rather than partaking.

As Clark re-checked his cage, it began to move along the conveyor and toward the plexiglass room. The cage of the malnourished boy followed suit. As the cages locked onto the combat chamber, their doors opened and a buzzer sounded, eliciting a new wave of cheering from the audience.

The child, not older than 12, slowly crawled from the cage and stood. He began to beat his chest and scream. Clark called down through the plexiglass, trying to convince someone in the crowd to put an end to the fight. Clark’s failure to rally the audience saw him caught off guard when the boy flung himself across the room and kicked the officer’s head. The kick sent Clark into a rage, and he turned on the malnourished boy. The two began to grapple, but Clark easily gained an advantage on the small child, pressing him into the floor of the room. The boy’s eyes widened as he saw the ceiling of the cage begin to descend. Clark bashed the boy’s head against the plexiglass, hoping to render him unconscious. When the boy finally went under, Officer Bishop stood and began to proclaim his innocence, seeing as the boy had attacked first.

The crowd laughed as the ceiling closed in on the two. Clark grabbed the boy and dragged him across the room toward his cage. As soon as Clark crossed the threshold with the boy, the cage electrified and the officer’s skin cooked. But when Officer Bishop pushed the boy back out under the looming human garlic press, the electrical current terminated. The boy’s body was pressed through the holes in the bottom of the combat room, the pulp of which rained down on the crowd below. Clark’s cage disengaged and headed away, but seemed to jam, and stopped just short of the dark exit.

50 yards away, the two other officers noticed the word ‘Mayhem’ tattooed on the back of the muscled man who then introduced himself as Oz ‘Mayhem’ Wolf. Oz couldn’t locate Marvin in the crowd, but revealed the man in black was Kevin, Marvin’s head of security. John asked Oz if a large amount of money might persuade Marvin to free them, and Oz scoffed at the idea. People in their situation were for sport, not work. Oz explained the fights in The Den of Sin were easy- opponents were almost always children. Compared to ‘Planet Juggernaut,’ it was nothing to kill a child. Keith considered his chances against a man like Oz and began to weep. He attempted to trigger the door release just as the cage began to move. Keith’s skin burned as his cage locked against the plexiglass wall, and John Lee Pettimore’s cage locked into the other side of the room.

The two men surveyed each other across the blood-pool that once made up a child. Keith reached into his underwear, grasping his tiny but powerful gun. The men worked together- Keith blasted the floor and John stomped on the cracks. When stray shots killed denizens of The Den of Sin, others rushed in to lap up their blood.

It took three jumps to bust through the perforated circle of plexiglass floor, and the two officers landed directly on a man in a papasan, crushing him. The crowd went wild. Some attempted to flee while others basked in the violent scene. Keith fired toward the bar but missed Kevin, obliterating the barkeep instead. In a rage, John flew at the nearest attendee, a man with a curly mustache and a flowing ascot. He screamed into the throng while Clark spat from above.

The crowd quickly dissipated, leaving a small group of people obsessively drinking and snorting the blood on the ground. Kevin also remained- the man hadn’t moved from his place at the bar. Keith tried to tackle the mysterious head of security, but Kevin caught him midair and slammed Officer Vigna’s head into the bar, leaving him limp and unconscious.

As Clark shook his cage above, John rushed to Keith and grabbed the tiny gun from his hands. Looking into Kevin’s eyes, John felt as though he recognized this man, but couldn’t quite place him. Kevin’s dead stare seemed to flicker with the same acknowledgment, and John seized the moment to fire a couple rounds at the man. He missed, and Kevin broke for the door, leaving John to nurse his penis amidst the carnage.

As the last of the crowd ran from the room, Clark’s cell broke from the ceiling. The door opened as it struck the floor, but Clark was pierced by one of the cage’s bars, and his body came to rest, listless, at the bottom of the cage.

Episode 28

Q&A Episode

Episode 29

John Lee Pettimore IV found himself the sole surviving Cop from Contention here in the Den of Sin. Two creepy twins were still in the Den, trying to sneak out, but John caught them and found out they designed the security system here in Marvin’s lair. John tried to bargain with them to escort him out, with limited success, so he shot one in the knee. Fearful, the twins swore to pay John 5 million dollars in exchange for their lives.

This was interrupted by a voice near Clark Bishop’s shish kabobed corpse, John looked over and saw a hunched man wearing an old, tattered robe with a hood that covered his face. The voice was crackly and muttering something ancient and jaunty. A bright light began to form under the hood that was obfuscating this being’s face. As it reached its hands into the light, the hood was drawn back and this old man ripped an unnaturally bright light out of his familiar face. This much older Clark Bishop took his beaming hands, reached deep into the chest of the unconscious Clark Bishop, yanked the bar from his younger self’s chest, and threw his limp, former body over his cloaked shoulder. The two Clark Bishop’s, Old and Dead, then disappeared in a ball of light.

The offputting brothers, Rich and Richard Nickles, told John Lee Pettimore IV that John Peters had tried to big time it at the Den. Apparently, he had posted online about these “visions” he saw while in a coma. When he came out of the coma, he was visited by an Agent Victor, who told him about a mind probing device being used by ISIS.

John shot Richard Nickles in the other knee. And then he finished the job and put ol Dick Nickles out of his pleasurable misery.

Rich began drinking his brother’s blood before John forced him out of the Den, into a long hallway, where they found the individual rooming quarters of RoseMary, Kevin, Charles, and Francis.

RoseMary had a framed picture of Jermaine Glass hidden under her pillow. On the photo of the slender, muscular man with tribal tattoo sleeves on both arms going down to his hands and fingertips, there was a sharpie’d HEART around this man’s face, which was stoic, almost blank.

Kevin had a Spartan room, with a bed, desk, and a chest of drawers.. Under the desk he had carved, repeatedly, “Not Kevin.” In between the mattress and box spring, there was a notepad. On every page, it said: “I had the same dream again last night. She just says, ‘I’m so sorry. He’s just so beautiful...You don’t have to do this. We can leave. We can run.’” Carved repeatedly inside the chest of drawers was the phrase “Mary in the woods.” Charles was doing extensive research on Contention, including the Piston pig farm. A draft email on his computer revealed that he and RoseMary had run into Tilde B. in possession of the gun.

Francis’ room was a complete wreck, but was covered in advanced, seemingly impossible mathematical equations. There was also a small drawing of one of the small spheres. As John and Rich began to leave the dorm area, they noticed four figures in brown uniforms with fishhook scythes dragging the body of Keith Vigna down the hallway into an elevator.

Continuing the search, across the hallway, in a room lined with file cabinets, John Lee Pettimore IV found his own file. He learned that he was adopted by John Lee Pettimore III from Cole’s Orphanage. The next file he found was Kevin’s. There was a picture attached. Missing the surgical scars and looking much younger and happier than KEVIN, the hollow shell of a man working for Marvin Glass, John recognized his father, John Lee Pettimore III. The file revealed that an Unknown (alias Kyle), Ann Love (alias Karen), and John Lee Pettimore III (alias Kevin) were once a team called K-Cell. Marvin Glass caught Kevin and Kyle, but Karen was able to escape. Marvin supernaturally forced Kevin to kill Kyle. Glass was after information on how the sphere worked. John also came across a file named “Satan” with a picture of a disturbing-looking woman - with a mouth that not only took up half of her face; it showed an amount of unbridled pleasure he could barely comprehend.

Kevin, the empty vessel that was once John’s father, found the snooping pair and began emptying clips into the room. John the IV sacrificed Rich Nickles to Kevin’s withering fire, before attempting to face down his father with Keith’s small but powerful pistol. John winged Kevin, revealing mechanical components below his skin, but to no avail, as John Lee Pettimore IV was immediately mowed down by his own adopted father. And then the world was dark for John. But he still felt very much alive. He was moving. Like Gogurt busting out of a plastic tube by pressure alone, he felt himself squeeze out of a dark, constricting space onto the cold, hard floor. And he began rolling. His limbs extended from his form and slammed into the file cabinet walls on either side of him. It gave John, or whatever John now was, the leverage he needed to fling his silver, round frame at his target. As he landed down on Kevin, one of his appendages sliced into the soft tissue on the back of his prey’s neck. Another snapped Kevin’s head forward, and John could feel the fracture, as a third reached in, gripped the top of the spine, and ripped the entire spinal cord out of John Lee Pettimore III’s body in one swift motion, promptly forcing itself into the then-vacant spinal column of this human being.

Episode 30

Keith Vigna, unconscious, perhaps dead, saw himself violently holding a pillow over someone’s face when the pillow itself transformed into an oily, black ooze and it washed over the face below it, not of a person but the face of the watch his father, William, gave his brother, Ferguson, so many years ago. Looking down at his wrist, he was wearing this watch, but when he looked up, he did not recognize the world. Dust clouds settled to reveal a horse pulling a wagon through a small frontier town and the bald man Keith knew as Billy Harrison - the one who took Keith’s uniform and gun in the clinic - he was walking in Keith’s direction and he kept repeating, “I did everything that you asked me to do, Officer Vigna.” Holding up the strange looking camera Officer Pettimore found in the car of Julie Maxwell, Harrison took a picture of Vigna. The light was blinding and as it faded, Keith was standing in darkness, dank and chilly. Right in front of Keith was a massive tank filled with the now eerily-too-familiar opaque ooze. Keith pressed his face against the tank to see something creeping toward him, and as the face of Tilde B Mitchell came into focus, Keith stood in an open field, the dead grass covered in a thin freeze crunching under his feet as he approached a metal hatch. But water, gross murky water with bits of grass and sludge began spewing from the creases of this metal hatch. The water began to flood this field at an alarming pace. Keith looked down and saw his reflection in the rippling water, but something looked off.

Keith came to in a strange room on an operating table. The room was lined with jars of organs and body parts, as well as tubes that ran to vats filled with fish. The tall mad scientist with spiky white hair woke up a dude with brown hair and frosted tips, wearing frat boy clothes and a puka shell necklace. His name was Brett.

The scientist clicked a button and both Keith and the fratty Brett felt an intense pain. She clicked the button again - and the pain was gone.

Suddenly, a fish head with a small human body popped out of Brett’s pocket. The little fish fella was curious about the world. Both he and Brett had never left the room, and they were really hoping Keith could help them venture into the beyond. Keith promised the two experiments he would take them to Las Vegas if they could help him. Just then, Keith’s niece Francis came into the room. She showed Keith a mirror to reveal surgical scars across his brow, down his nose, past his lip, and on to his collarbone. There were also scars from the tip of his finger up to his elbow. She explained they had brought him back to life, with a few upgrades. He had a supply of cocaine in his forearm, which could be shot out his index finger into his new metal nose, a nose capable of handling as much cocaine as his internal organs could muster. He also lost his ability to empathize with humanity, something brand new to Keith Vigna, the now partially mechanical man. Keith named the little fishman Peter Deeter. After Francis left the room, Brett and Peter freed Keith from his restraints. Keith, only in his surgery gown, threw on Brett’s extra clothes (a too tight orange polo, teal shorts that were 3 sizes too big, and a pair Sperry’s) and put Peter Deeter up on his shoulder. They all left the room, and as they tried to find the exit, they happened upon a black marble hallway with a massive door at the end and four guards with scythes shaped like fish hooks. The guards looked like fish people. Like Peter, but fully grown human sized. As Keith, Brett, and Peter bailed, Francis intercepted the group and took them to see Marvin Glass. They walked back into that black marble hallway, through the enormous door at the end, and into a room the size of a basketball court. One wall was made entirely of glass, which looked into a murky aquarium. Marvin stood there, looking into the water, before he turned around to face the Chai Frappes.

Francis clicked a button on a small remote, and everyone in the Frappe frat was paralyzed. With the clear upper hand, Marvin offered Keith a deal, he would give the new metal Vigna the one million dollars earned by killing Ferguson if Keith will do just one more thing for Marvin. To show the former police officer, current android, how serious he was, Marvin grabbed Peter, walked back over to the unfathomably massive aquarium, and reached, unnaturally, through the glass. He placed Peter Deeter into the murky water and pulled his gaunt, spindly arm back into his dry office. Some sort of giant fish monster in the aquarium swam by and swallowed Peter Deeter as everyone in the room watched. Marvin then set his sight on Brett. He took the frat boy apart, piece by piece, until the problematic, robotic boy could no longer function. Then Marvin Glass assigned the new Keith Vigna to his next task. In order to prove Keith’s loyalty and pay his debt, Keith must go to the Manstein funeral and bring back Stan Manstein, Ari’s father, for questioning. Keith agreed.

Episode 31

A thick fog obfuscated Clark’s vision. The air, like gravity, felt stronger than normal and the whisper of a familiar voice sent a shiver down his spine. Clark sensed a sudden drop in temperature as a stainless steel door appeared and opened in front of him. Behind, a woman began to scream. When he turned around, he was greeted by the face of Tilde B. Mitchell on a television screen. In a shaky voice, she began repeating herself over and over:

“Bonus round, bonus round, b-bonus round.”

Suddenly, Clark was running down the street, the street on which he lived. He noted a familiar boy about to enter the house on the left. Clark tried to scream, but the fog veiled him once again. His screams echoed infinitely into the endlessness that engulfed him.

Then, a new voice reached him and he looked up to see the face of his once-mentor, Gerald Fingerson. It had been some time since the two had seen each other, but Gerald had aged with grace.

It was December 6th, a crisp winter morning - and Clark was dressed only in briefs and a ‘Pump n’ Dump’ branded t-shirt. Clark wore no shoes or socks and, despite the cold and the recent events, the man felt amazing - the best he’d felt in a long time. A string was wrapped around Clark’s wrist and attached to a bag of ice, from which protruded a rod. The bag of ice leaked red liquid down the driveway on which the two men stood, centered in a suburban neighborhood. Clark noted the name ‘Jim Cook’ on the mailbox nearby. He was still in The City.

Gerald didn’t know how Clark had come to be in the driveway. He’d discovered him there as the officer regained consciousness. Clark hastily recalled the events in the Den of Sin, none of which were familiar to Gerald. Opening the bag of ice, Clark recognized the bar was pulled from a cage in the Den of Sin. As he checked himself for wounds that might account for the blood, Clark pulled up his shirt to reveal a gaping hole where his heart should be, lined with skin and cartilage. He was rightfully shaken, despite feeling physically well.

Gerald declined to touch Clark’s body hole and suggested they step inside the house where he’d planned to share a dinner of cashew chicken with Jim Cook. Clark had to inform Gerald that Jim had been found dead in an alley. Gerald’s grief was interrupted by a man who approached in goggles and an 80’s-style windbreaker outfit.

The stranger pointed out that Clark was distinctly out of place and wondered what was happening, especially regarding the blood. Clark claimed he and Gerald were conducting a jello-experiment. The stranger introduced himself as Ken and took Clark’s name, typing it into his phone. Ken explained that Clark didn’t belong in the neighborhood. Gerald turned on Ken and the man was scared off. Clark and Gerald decided it would be wise to leave the street and made their way into the unlocked Cook residence.

The house was older, but cozy. Papers and binders were strewn across the living room, covering every surface, and stagnant dust hung in the light from the window. Clark made his way to the bedroom and donned a pair of Jim Cook’s pants- several sizes too small. Back downstairs, Clark noticed a picture of his parents on the fridge. They were posed in silly hats with Jim Cook who smiled begrudgingly along. His investigation further discovered a bullet-torn tarot card (the Major Arcana card, the Devil) and a taxidermied baby squirrel, bagged and placed in a chest of drawers.

Behind the couch, Clark noticed an empty holster. The words ‘Scientia Mors Est’ were tooled into the leather. Below that was a dash and a ‘K.’ In the bathroom, Clark found a smooth, silver ring with a plateau on top. Two books stood out among the papers in the living room. The leather cover of the thicker tome was embossed with a familiar symbol: a large circle surrounded by six smaller circles. The other was a thin, red notebook; it seemed vaguely familiar.

Clark opened the leather tome where a girthy wooden bookmark had been placed near the back. Written over and over on the ancient parchment was the phrase: ‘It is only through Death that He may rise again.’ Drawn over the obsessive scrawling was a hooded figure with brilliant light shining from its maw. The book closed with supernatural force as Clark tried to flip forward and an envelope fluttered out from between its pages.

Inside the envelope was a letter signed by Jim Cook. Jim seemed to be refuting something called ‘The Revelation of the Overseer,’ calling it the scratches of a broken man. The letter went on to outline a set of new guidelines, including the immediate reassignment of all members of ‘The Disposal Unit.’ The circle symbol was present at the top of the letter. It was accompanied by the creed: ‘Faith through knowledge is just called knowledge.’

The clicking hammer of a cocked gun startled Clark. He raised his hands in the air, dripping blood from the ice bag. Chief Maggie Cook spoke behind him, leveling her pistol at his back.

“Clark, what the hell are you doing in my daddy’s house?”

Tears formed in Clark’s eyes as he and Maggie lowered their arms. Gerald half-heartedly stood between the two as Clark explained that he thought Maggie was dead. The former chief also confessed an amount of confusion, and the two awkwardly sandwiched Gerald in a hug. Clark told Maggie he’d seen the charred remains of her body and he withdrew from the embrace. The woman was dressed in a dark hoodie and jeans. It marked the first time Clark had ever seen her out of uniform. She brushed by him to retrieve the red notebook.

Maggie was unsure of what to make of Clark’s presence in her father’s home. He explained he had gaps in his memory, and Maggie prodded Clark’s chest where the tunnel had formed. She gasped as Clark lifted his shirt. Immediately excited, she insisted Clark follow her, that she’d been waiting a long time for these events to occur. Gerald interjected, claiming that Maggie had always been a bitch, and Maggie asked if Clark was all right. He began to realize Maggie couldn’t see Gerald Fingerson.

Gerald’s voice became echoey as he frantically tried to convince Clark that Maggie was not to be trusted. Addressing Maggie, he insinuated that Clark knew ‘what was at the mill’ before Clark approached the old man, reaching out to his librarian mentor. As they grasped hands, Clark felt nothing but air. Gerald Fingerson dissipated.

“Clark, are you... with me? Are you here?”

Clark turned solemnly back to Maggie.

Before they got to work, Clark suggested he fill his bag with more ice, fearing it contained what had been scraped out to form the tunnel in his chest. Maggie investigated and found a heart impaled on the bottom of the metal rod. Clark emptied Jim’s ice trays before joining Maggie in her silver Camry for a ride out to The Mill on the Other Side of The City.

Clark used the silent drive to examine the canvas bag next to the human heart in the ice. The bag contained tiles with the letters ‘S, T, L, E, N, R’ and a symbol- a circle in a square. Clark quickly determined these are the letters given at the beginning of the bonus round of ‘Wheel of Fortune.’

Clark broke the silence in the car when he asked Maggie why she was still alive. She answered by explaining that the leather tome in her dad’s house contained a prophecy- ‘The Revelation of The Overseer.’ The Circle of Knowledge believed The Overseer was coming to set an order in the world, and they prepared the way and protected the world from unnatural forces. Maggie had been skeptical, but she claimed to be coming around to an understanding of the forces at play. She believed fire and fear kept the world safe, that most people couldn’t handle the knowledge of the supernatural, but that people like her and Clark and the Circle of Knowledge had been tasked with a responsibility to keep the world moving.

Clark admitted to having met Leon Simpson and broke down as he tried to explain the horrors the officers had experienced in her absence. When Clark asked Maggie why she wasn’t there, she asked, in turn, if the ant questions when it’s being moved by a boot. She alluded to the idea that much larger things were at work than what Clark had seen so far.

They lapsed into silence again as the Camry pulled onto a country road outside of town, passing through a verdant tunnel of trees on the way to the mill. A few miles later, they arrived at the massive brick building with two enormous smokestacks. The Mill on the Other Side of The City was filled with people, none of whom paid any mind to Clark’s current dress or the blood dripping from the ice bag he carried. Clark recognized no one. Maggie led them through a secure door in the back and down a spiraling stone staircase.

Clark recognized the room at the bottom- circular, with six stone slabs. Each slab held two bodies, and a xenonematode was attached to each body. The unconscious figures were covered in open sores from previous placements and their skin was rotted. Maggie led Clark to the center and chuckled grimly, asking Clark to lie down on the middle slab. Clark was reluctant, remembering that Leon had said he would need to sacrifice neither flesh nor limb. Maggie agreed, mostly, but suggested a little flesh was necessary now that the game had changed.

Clark called for Leon but Maggie told him they’d been sent away. She grabbed his shoulders and repeated the creed: ‘Faith through knowledge is just called knowledge.’ She claimed Clark needed knowledge and pressed on his chest before moving down to his left foot, still bare. Maggie twisted a circular handle at the base of the slab and pulled up a cartridge the size of a parking pylon. Inside the cartridge was a xenonematode and, with a swift motion, Maggie pulled it out and placed it on Clark’s foot.

Clark’s vision immediately darkened. Suddenly, the ground he stood on was made of light. Clark felt absolute contentment in this new world, but noted he was otherwise surrounded by absolute darkness. Twelve figures were clear in the distance, as was a giant, black mass, all dimly lit from below. The twelve appeared to be following the massive being as they walked away from Clark. When Clark moved closer he began to hear their chanting. Ahead of them stood a towering beast, its shoulders 25 feet from the ground. As Clark stared, its image seemed to change and glitch. It roared, and Clark began to weep uncontrollably.

Clark came to in The Mill on the Other Side of The City as Maggie returned the xenonematode back into the ground.

“Clark, that thing’s coming. And we keep it from coming here.”

Clark was shaken, and he stammered over questions about what he had just witnessed. He asked if there was anything Maggie could do about the heart. She lifted it from the bag by the rod. Slowly sliding the organ from the metal, Maggie held the heart in one hand as it began to sputter blood. She calmed Clark and retrieved a small wooden stick from the corner. She ran the stick through the hollow rod and caught two small pieces of metal that emerged from the other end. Maggie reminded Clark of the back-up plan from the last job and noted he had not come back in time. The Circle of Knowledge had already tried to take his heart once and yet, he still stood.

Maggie meditated on the fact that things moved stranger in the world than most thought possible. She gave Clark his first job, refusing to answer further questions. The job would take Clark to Ari’s funeral at The City Cemetery. Maggie admitted to being shaken by the woman’s death, but it presented an opportunity to be in the same place as Stan Manstein, who rarely leaves The City Asylum. Clark’s job was to assassinate Stan at his daughter’s funeral. Clark was initially horrified, but he remembered the unspeakable entity waiting to break into his world, steeled himself, and requested a firearm.

Episode 32

John Lee Pettimore IV stood in front of a storage unit with a large yellow symbol on the door. It was the logo of The Circle of Knowledge, six circles surrounding a larger circle. Inside he found a wooded territory, and he was suddenly holding one of the silver balls. It gave off a comforting warmth. Looking out, he saw a sky of endless darkness, under which two children held hands. John’s senses began to be overwhelmed by the “sounds of torment” that filled his ears.   
  
And then he woke up in the room with the filing cabinets where he had been shot repeatedly by his own father, and John was confronted with the sight of his own body, dead on the ground. Inspecting his reflection he found he was now in his father’s former frame. John decided to covertly remain Kevin for as long as he could. RoseMary called for “Kevin” to join her, and John Lee Pettimore IV followed in his new body, though he largely failed in his attempts to extract any intelligence. At the end of a black marble hallway, jumpsuited fishmen guarded Marvin’s massive, strange office door. Marvin greeted them, RoseMary and “Kevin,” and announced they were moving into the final phase of “Contention’s demolition.” A small, silver sphere sat on a tripod atop Marvin’s desk, and an intense lights show glinted out from the room behind him.   
  
Marvin ordered RoseMary and Kevin to go to the funeral of Ari Manstein, the Contention police officer, to ensure that the New Charles, Keith Vigna, was successful in his mission to apprehend Stan Manstein. As they headed out into The City, John Lee Kevinmore witnessed a rowdy band of revelers using Dirty Dog Grooming loyalty cards to enter a grate that took them underground.

Keith left the Glass Compound and headed to the funeral of Ari Manstein in his police cruiser. The strange gun and camera with glass tubes were no longer in this car.

On his phone, he found multiple missed calls from Drew and a voicemail that said the mass is growing and pleaded for the officers to stay far away from Contention. He sounded panicked and the call ended abruptly.

Keith chose to not change out of his tight orange polo and big coral shorts and boat shoes. In The City Cemetery, the smell of a crawfish boil wafted through the above ground mausoleums and directed Vigna to the funeral, where he spoke briefly to Ari’s mother and took a seat in the front row.

Clark came to on the concrete slab in the middle of the underground dungeon room below The Mill on the Other Side of The City. Maggie Cook backed away quickly as she lowered the Xenonematode back in the ground. She asked how Clark came back to life. Clark didn’t know, was hoping she knew. Maggie moved on, told Clark after he completed his mission of killing Stan Manstein at Ari Manstein’s funeral, he’s free to do whatever he pleased. She offered to house him back at the Circle of Knowledge if he wants. This job won’t be daily, at first, she said, but they would get him trained up and working more often eventually. Clark pressed her on it not being daily; he was shaken by the thing he saw in his vision and wanted to stop it immediately. She was glad to see Clark’s fire. She said that’s exactly what they need in the organization. Maggie gave Clark a burner phone, a gun, an old Contention Police uniform, and a silver Honda Accord. She’d be in contact with him the next day, December 7th.

Clark stopped for gas on the way to Ari’s funeral. While he was busy pumping, a woman stealthily dropped a phone into his car passenger seat. It was scrubbed clean, save a single text message that read: “Do you wanna know why your parents were killed?” Clark immediately texted back: “Who is this?”

Clark arrived at The City Cemetery, and followed his nose to a small clearing where a funeral service was set up for Ari Manstein. Ari’s mother, Jan, greeted visitors in the front. Sat up there by the crawfish boil was Keith Vigna, wearing Sperry boat shoes, big coral blue shorts and a tight orange polo. From Clark’s distance, Keith looked healthy. Clark, however, last remembered seeing Keith fucking die. Then again, Clark seemingly came back from the dead himself, so maybe it wasn’t that surprising.

Clark didn’t see Stan or John Lee Pettimore. Leaning casually against a mausoleum, he tried to inconspicuously hide in the back of the crowd.  
   
While RoseMary drove John Lee Pettimore IV in the body of his father, John Lee Pettimore III, whom she knew as Kevin, to the cemetery, RoseMary revealed the news of Charles’ death shook her, as she thought the enhancements made them more robust. Kevin reflected on the truth: everything dies. They made their way through the raised, New Orleans-style tombs to the funeral, where they found a large crawfish boil. John saw Keith sitting in the front row in a ridiculous outfit and Clark near the back in an old fashioned Contention PD uniform. John split away from RoseMary, approached Clark from behind, and muttered, “bubblegum tree.” Recognizing the body of Kevin, Clark was apprehensive, but tentatively responded, “bubblegum tree.” John Lee Kevinmore said nothing, and faded back into the crowd.

Episode 33

Jan Manstein settled behind the podium, thanked everyone for coming, and introduced her ex-husband - who doesn’t get out very often. Stan Manstein, dressed in all white, his hair and beard both long and tangled, his face weathered like leather, approached the microphone flanked by three heavily armed guards with various scars across their faces. And then Stan began to speak - in a fully nonsensical language. But through the noise, the three officers heard Stan in perfect English as time began to slow down.

EDIT IN STAN’S SPEECH (except the end)

As Stan spoke, Clark surveyed the crowd, slowed around him as he moved at normal speed. The guards looked slowed as well. Clark made his way to the front. John moved into a position behind Stan. Keith made eye contact with Clark, and they Bubblegum Tree’d. Clark saw Keith’s fresh scars, running from his elbow down to the tip of his finger, as well as across his forehead down his face. It didn’t seem like the crowd was able to understand Stan’s speech, but the three armed guards started to converge on Manstein, though they moved in slow motion. Following his orders, Clark drew his gun and shot Stan in the chest. Time immediately resumed back to a normal pace. John Lee Kevinmore emerged from behind the stage and began firing at one of the armed guards. The crowd dispersed, panicked. Keith joined in firing at the guards with his small powerful gun. Three gunshots rang out from an unseen location, finishing off one of the scarfaced, black tactical gear-clad guards. Another guard tried to fire off his wire-arm, like the android that attacked them at James the Mill Worker’s house, but this time, the massive man accidentally hogtied himself. John executed the other robot man, and Keith shoved his fingers in Stan’s bullet wounds to plug the leaks, which jolted Stan back to consciousness. The restrained robot guard fired at Clark, putting bullets in his chest and arm. Stan mustered the strength to continue his speech. Time began to slow once again.

EDIT IN STAN’S SPEECH (but just the end)

Upon finishing his speech, Stan’s body seems to instantly turn inside out and blip out of existence. Clark lost his shit and charged the hogtied guard who had shot him. Clark unloaded his entire clip into the man’s head while screaming. Metallic clangs and buzzes clanged and buzzed, sparks sparkled, and wires spilled out of the robot guard’s head.

The crowd had made a run for it, and the three officers stood in silence over the three massacred metal man bodies, next to the crawfish boil and the casket. Keith made sure Ari’s body was actually in the coffin. It was. Unsure of each other due to Kevin’s presence, Keith’s scars, and Clark’s dated uniform, the three men held each other at gunpoint. Bubblegum Tree. They lowered their guns. Keith admitted Kevin killed him, but he owed Kevin’s organization, the Glass Family, for his life.

Kevin asked Clark to speak to him alone for a moment, without Keith. Keith went and occupied himself with the crawfish pot. Kevin explained he used to be John Lee Pettimore IV. John Lee Pettimore was more of a state-of-mind. Turned out, John’s daddy was lobotomized and had been Marvin Glass’ head of security for a while. When John died, it seemed he was some kind of alien squid being or something. He sucked out of John’s brain and entered his dad’s body. Clark tried to clarify the squid-being part, Kevin said he didn’t really know, maybe he was mechanical, he just knew he left John’s body and entered Kevin’s body, the body of John Lee Pettimore III. John Lee Kevinmore urged Clark to ask him something only John would know. Clark asked him about the Little twins they lost to the goo in the suburbs, and John confirmed the story. As they embraced, Clark whispered into John's ear, “Maggie’s alive.” Kevin didn’t believe him, and proposed that the chief was dead, but that there were other versions of each of them. Kevin explained he saw Clark broken and shattered on the ground back in the Den of Sin, but an older Clark came by, whispered some shit over the body, and the two disappeared in a flash of light. Clark lifted his shirt and showed John the hole through his chest where his heart should have been. Clark told John about waking up with his own heart in a bag and running into Maggie. He said he was working for The Circle of Knowledge, Maggie and Jim Cook were both also involved. Clark asked if John knew how Keith survived. John had seen some figures with funny shaped scythes drag Keith’s body away. Marvin Glass told John they’d turned Keith into the new Charles. The Glass Family performed some sort of upgrade-procedure on all of their cronies. Clark asked if John was metal-y now? Through his bullet holes, they could both see metal lining in the layers of flesh.

The two looked back at Keith to see him dipping his hand straight into the boiling pot of crawfish. John walked up to Keith and whispered in his ear, “I know what you did to my Smokies,” and punched him in the gut. Keith realized Kevin was John and gave him a hug. A big smile spread across Keith’s face. John stopped him, and explained he had learned this was all some kind of business play for Marvin Glass. Marvin wanted to demolish Contention so he could have the land. They’ve got to save the town. Clark shared it may be bigger than just the town, he recounted the vision he saw, barely keeping it together. Clark explained The Circle of Knowledge is a group he worked for now that tried to keep the thing he saw in his vision from becoming a reality. Part of that mission apparently included killing Stan Manstein. That really fucked Keith over. The Glass family “rebuilt” him and tasked him with bringing Stan back alive. Kevin proposed a plan that made it look like he was still on the side of the Glass Family. Additionally, Drew had been calling Keith to tell him to get the hell away from Contention. Unfortunate, because Clark had planned on grabbing his guns and things from his house and moving shop up to The Mill on the Other Side of The City. Keith mused that he hoped the helmet and radio were still in the evidence room at the Contention Police Department. They realized the gun and the camera now likely belonged to Marvin Glass. John thought about it, put his hands up to his head, and his eyes went white, as he looked… elsewhere.

Episode 34

John, as your eyes roll backward, your vision goes dark. Images begin flashing through your mind, just snippets, moments, and you try to keep up as the speed of this sequence waxes and wanes. You see a motel safe: shiny, black, and closed. You see the sign for Bean’s Pond, the little pond behind Chief Maggie Cook’s house in Contention. You see a television: it is blinking with different letters on it - R S T L N E. You see a small clearing in the woods: the ground is scorched. In a dark room, lit by various electronics and machines, you see a massive, shiny, metal sphere, 20 feet tall, with silvery arms extending from either side. A tube connects this gargantuan ball to a machine below. The machine begins whirring and you see a small, metal sphere, roughly one inch in diameter begin moving up through the tubing, into the larger, armed version of itself. As this happens, a vast circle opens up in the ceiling, and a disorienting amount of light and sound pours into this dark room, revealing text painted on the back wall that says the same thing you hear violently chanted by an unseen crowd: PLANET JUGGERNAUT. The scene changes again and you see Marvin Glass standing at his desk in the grand room you recently stood in as Kevin, alongside RoseMary. Marvin is holding the odd camera with glass tubes, closely inspecting it, tapping its lit red luminaire. On his desk are two file folders, splayed open, entitled “Clark Bishop and Keith Vigna, Contention Police Officers''. You can see in Keith’s file are various clippings about the Beans family: the tragic, accidental deaths of William and Lina, Keith’s parents; the takeover of the family business by Ferguson. In Clark’s file, there is a newspaper article about the murderer who killed Clark Bishop’s parents, ANNE LOVE. There is a mugshot of a woman smiling a cold, vacant smile behind asymmetrical bangs covering one of her eyes. Written in sharpie underneath the mugshot, it says in all caps: KAREN.

In the midmorning sunlight, in the wake of a funeral gone horribly awry, Keith and Clark watched John’s eyes, which had rolled into the back of his head, return to normal. John believed he’d developed “The Second Sight” in his transition from John to Kevin, or perhaps he’d had it all along. He relayed everything he saw, sans the Planet Juggernaut bit. Keith recalled his brother’s watch was in his safe at Hotel Motel. When Keith had put on the watch, he felt like he was on some alternate plane, and knew he needed to take it off. Clark asked Keith if it was as though the ground were made of light? No, it was more like, in his mind, he was seeing different stuff. It was hard to decipher what was real and what wasn’t. John asked if Beans Pond meant anything to anyone. When he thought about the objects, those were the things he saw. Clark made the connection that the letters John saw flashing on the TV are the letters they give you for the final puzzle in Wheel of Fortune. When Clark woke up with the hole, he had a bag with him. In the bag was what he thought was his heart, and next to that was another bag that had those letters in it.

John informed them they are not the first group of three to try to combat this kind of stuff. Before John, Clark, and Keith, there was a group called “K Cell.” Kevin (John Lee Pettimore IV’s “adopted” father, who he now inhabits the body of), a man named Kyle, and a woman called Karen (also known as Anne Love). John told Clark he knew Anne Love killed his parents. He didn’t know why, but Marvin Glass turned the group against itself and Karen was the only one to get away. Marvin made Kevin shoot Kyle. He was looking for “the metal sphere” and he apparently already had one in his possession. Everyone wants these spheres. John had one (when he arrived at the Glass Family Compound), Marvin Glass had one, and he wanted to collect more and learn how they work. They realized the one John had was now likely in the possession of Marvin Glass. In John’s vision, he had just seen one of those spheres, but it was massive, gargantuan. It had arms and a little tube coming out of the bottom. And up that tube he saw one of the small spheres go. A huge light opened in the ceiling, like it was opening to allow this thing to come through. And the wall behind it read, “PLANET JUGGERNAUT.” Like the betting stubs they found in John Peters’ house and storage unit. Keith remembered that when he had the watch on, it clouded his thoughts and made him feel like he was going insane, but one of the feelings he had was wet dirt and grass on his fingers. And he saw a metal door slightly buried, and it read, “Here Lies the Beans. Scientists Beyond Measure. Saviors of the World.” Keith was positive somewhere along the Beans’ bloodline was something he didn't know. Clark reminded Keith it was someone related to Keith that came in and solved the town’s Silas and Mary Cole “problem” back in the day. Keith didn’t know where Cornelius Beans fit in with his family being scientists, and he didn't know where to find that metal door. But he felt the door was real, and maybe there’s something inside it they needed to find.

One of the last things Clark remembered was being in Glass’ office and it sounded an awful lot like Glass hired Keith to kill his own brother, Ferguson Beans. Keith had even asked where the money was. Since they’re all working together again, Keith didn’t see the point in hiding it from them anymore. Keith didn’t know it was Marvin Glass hiring him to do it. He was approached by his niece. Keith explained that he’d hated his brother, Fergie, since they were little boys, so when this opportunity arose he jumped at it.

The Agents, Kennedy, McKinley, and Harrison, had tasked them with “neutralizing the threat,” and they were supposed to call a phone number. It’d been about 48 hours since they’d seen the agents, and the agents had given them a 48 hour deadline, so it’d be right about now that they’d be receiving a call back at the Contention Police Department. Keith tried giving Drew a call, but it went straight to voicemail.

John pointed out the Glass family might think Keith is still one of them, and they definitely think KevinJohn is still one of them. And while Keith may have failed at his mission of bringing Stan Manstein back, he wouldn’t have to “infiltrate” the Glass building. He could return under the guise of bringing in the guy who killed Stan Manstein (that being Clark.) Then all three of them would be inside if things go awry. The plan was to Chewbacca Clark, and use that farce to get close enough to kill Marvin Glass. They decided to call the number the agents left them on the way to the Glass Family Compound.

Suddenly, with an erupting shriek, a massive creature materialized on top of a nearby mausoleum. It was a six and a half or seven foot tall creature with long limbs, wearing a black suit over its gaunt frame covered in translucent skin.

This thing looked Clark Bishop in the eyes and screeched, “Hello Subject 1522518195518. Please hand me The Book, please.”

Episode 35

The figure stared and stuck out one of its overtly long arms. Clark’s gun was immediately trained on the mysterious figure. John reached out a hand in greeting, from 20 feet away. The creature's arm was long, but not that long. Keith ran behind the closest mausoleum and hid, as he pulled out his gun. Clark felt an internal struggle, but managed to overcome it, and he continued to hold his gun steady at the creature. "Please, I would not like to ask again. Please give me The Book!" Clark didn't know what book the creature was talking about. The thing asked Kevin John Lee Pettimore the 3rth his name. Kevin John responded in truth, that his name was Kevin John and that it was a long story. He asked the creature its name. The creature said its name was 43629 and reiterated it was there for The Book. Kevin Lee Pettimore the 3rth said again that none of them knew which book it was talking about. The creature claimed it could feel The Book was nearby.

Clark looked around for Keith and noticed him behind a mausoleum, just as Keith took a shot at the creature with his small, powerful gun. The bullet blasted through the creature's arm, but as it did, the arm merely dissipated and began to slowly reform. Before Keith could smell the smoke from his gunshot, the creature was standing in front of him with a hand on Keith’s throat, holding him up against the outside of the mausoleum. It was as if they had all been standing still as the creature walked casually toward him, but it moved at an impossible speed. It was probably like what the crowd saw them doing earlier during Stan’s speech at the funeral. It asked Keith his name as it continued holding him by the neck, and Keith responded immediately with his name, without ever making the decision to do so. He answered the creature's next questions too. He was here for the funeral, and he was shooting because he was scared. The thing slowly placed Keith back on the ground and commanded that he not be scared. And with that, Keith wasn't scared.

The creature told them it was only there for one thing, and it would leave as soon as it had The Book. John told Clark to give it The Book. Clark stuttered and stammered nervously, insisting he didn't know what book it wanted, he did not have a book, and all he had were the clothes on his back and a gun. The creature looked around frantically, muttered to itself, and began freaking out, unable to understand why Clark didn’t have The Book.

Keith searched Ari's coffin for a book. All he found was Ari's corpse, and all he achieved was upsetting the already confused old lady who had been left on her own, unable to leave the funeral quickly in her wheelchair. Clark asked the creature to describe The Book, but the creature only responded that it was necessary for it to take The Book from him because Clark’s time with The Book had come to an end; They did not want him using it any further. The creature insisted The Book was there, and it needed to bring it back. Keith started shooting at the thing again; it dissipated fully into smoke and ceased to exist there.

Keith lost his shit and attacked Clark, paranoid and afraid. They eventually calmed him down with smooth words and quick slaps. When he snapped out of it, Keith wondered aloud if that thing reminded them of Marvin Glass. Conversation circled back to The Book. Clark mentioned he had previously encountered a strange book at Jim Cook's house. Jim Cook was in The Circle of Knowledge, and Clark had found a particular leather-bound book of his that was 'freaky-deaky'. He also described this book as "extremely grimoirish.” And it had the symbol of The Circle of Knowledge on the front. It was possible this was The Book the creature had wanted, but he hadn’t taken it.

Keith asked if Clark opened this book. Clark reiterated its freaky-deaky nature; he could only open it to the last page. It was held shut by some unseen force. Keith asked if he meant like magnets? to which Clark agreed. There, on the final page, Clark had seen a drawing of a hooded figure with light coming out of its mouth. Written over and over and over on top of that, covering the whole page, it read, “It is only through Death that He may rise again.”

Clark went on and explained it was some kind of sacred text within The Circle of Knowledge. Something to do with The Revelation of The Overseer. Clark thought The Overseer was maybe a good guy, who lays peace on the world or something like that. John remembered when he saw Old Clark, he was wearing robes, and he and Dead Clark disappeared into a bright light that came from his mouth.

Keith was confused about what he meant by Old Clark and Dead Clark. John unhelpfully clarified - the Clark that brought this Clark back to life. Keith defended that this was the first he was hearing about it and they seemed to already know a lot more than he did. All John saw was an older version of Clark show up, that light came out of his mouth, and then he reached into regular Clark and they both disappeared. That made total sense to Keith, and they all agreed.

John suddenly remembered he'd arrived with RoseMary. Looking around, John didn’t see RoseMary, but he did see two City police officers headed their way. He warned the others they should skidaddle, but they all kept talking, failed to escape notice, and were told to freeze.

Clark turned, still with gun in hand, and told the officers everything was fine, that they were Contention PD. The City cops said they were responding because shots were fired. Keith said it was a 21 gun salute and called the officers “motherfuckers.” The City officers brought out notebooks to take statements. KevinJohn approached, pulled out a Dirty Dog Grooming loyalty card, and suggested the officers not bother - he was with Mr. Glass. They whispered to one another and apologized. They started to ask Kevin to apologize on their behalf to Mr. Glass, but quickly changed their minds, covering the names on their badges and turning away before they hoofed it out of there. John shared that the loyalty card opened the door to The Den of Sin. Y'know, the place where they were held and forced into those cage fights. He had seen a bunch of rowdy degenerates use theirs to open an entrance in the ground of an alley.

There were still a bunch of android bodies lying around, and no one had actually put the casket in the tomb. Together, they picked up the coffin of Ari Manstein. As they entered the open mausoleum, they heard a voice. Clark recognized the voice the quickest, because it sounded so much like his own.

Little sparks of light could be seen in the darkness. They seemed to be ignited by the steady chanting which echoed throughout the room. The flickering light illuminated a piece of parchment, held by an Old Clark Bishop wearing a dark cloak which covered almost all of his face. A light began to emanate from his mouth. The words he chanted ignited, lifted from the page in front of him, and danced in a circle above them. His lifted hands were cut open and bled out onto the floor around them.

John and Clark instinctively dropped their support of the coffin, leaving Keith as the sole bearer of the weight. The coffin hit the ground. Ari's corpse plopped limply out and onto the blood soaked floor of the cold and dusty crypt.

The three of them were surrounded by this magically sacheting fire. It covered them in a warm, somewhat familiar light. The light should have been comforting, but Clark was overwhelmed with the urge to leap at the older version of himself. He lunged, grabbed two handfuls of an empty cloak, and smashed his face against the back wall of the mausoleum.

Episode 36

(Z- I know you’re in awe of my ep choice, you’re welcome -krucz)

Wolf the Dog with a hello to his babies, his babies’ babies, and his babies’ babies’ babies. Wolf shares Zach and Taylor’s apologies for a late episode, and mentions that they’re a little aroused by it. Wolf reminisces about his old flame licking up trash juice with a new love. Hold on tight and keep your arms and legs inside the vehicle, playing us in and immediately out is Kudzu with No Backbone!

Episode 37

The boys woke up with a shock through their bodies. It was dark and cold and smelled...sweet and savory. There was a pool of blood. In it rested the body of Ari Manstein, half hanging out of her broken coffin. John Lee Kevinmore was in black tactical gear, Keith wore a tight orange polo with big coral blue shorts and boat shoes, Clark donned a vintage Contention police uniform. They felt pain on their chests, on their backs, on the bottom of their left foot, and the palm of their dominant hand. Branded into each of these body parts were first names. Their chests each read, “MARVIN,” their backs, “DREW,” their left soles, “MAGGIE,” their dominant palms, “TILDE.” Under the burned name of Maggie on the bottom of Clark’s left foot, the skin had been eaten away in a very particular pattern, a circle surrounded by six smaller circles.

Clark went mad and rushed John Lee Kevinmore, screaming. John quickly drew his gun and shot Clark in the leg. They all agreed on a few things. They were scared and confused. They didn’t know what the names on their bodies meant. And they needed to see a doctor. At the clinic, the officers billed the visit to the First Church of Contention.

On the way to Jim Cook’s house, Keith called the number Agent Kennedy left behind. He identified the officers involved, disclosed the incursion had not been stopped, but that the incident had been covered up, and asked to speak to the FBI officers instead of a recording. In Jim’s house, there were papers and binders everywhere. Clark grabbed the book they had discussed. The one with the Circle of Knowledge logo on it. The only page they could open to was marked with a girthy, wooden bookmark. The page read, “It is only through Death that He may rise again” over and over and over behind the image of a hooded figure with light shining from its mouth. Clark then revealed an envelope containing a letter from Jim Cook - his letter’s intent was to “refute The Revelation of The Overseer” which it called “the scratches of a broken man.” The letter ordered the immediate reassignment of all members of “the disposal unit.” The header of the letter read, “faith through knowledge is just called knowledge.”

The other interesting items Clark had found included a ring - smooth and silver with a little plateau on top. Keith put the ring on. When slipped on his finger, the ring glowed and revealed a familiar symbol - an M made of 4 double helices. Keith made the ring into a necklace with his shoelace.

A drop of vodka hit Clark’s nose. It dripped from the ceiling above him. The boys went upstairs, but couldn't find a room where the vodka drip would have come from. Clark put his ear to the wall where that room should be. And he heard static. Unable to find the door to this hidden room, Keith kicked a hole through the wall where the room would be.

Episode 38

Keith landed on the other side of the wall, pushed through by his colleagues and covered in debris. Inside they found a small living room set-up: a chair with an end table faced a TV/VCR unit that sat atop of a pile of thick books. A desk and chair were pressed up against one wall, and a handle of vodka had tipped over on the floor nearby. Its contents soaked the carpet that barely covered a makeshift floor. Clark noted a proper door in this room that led into the upstairs hallway. Static played on the television and illuminated the titles of the tomes underneath: textbooks on physics and quantum mechanics.

On the end table sat a small vial of clear liquid, a scalpel, and a box of tissues. Keith twisted the top off the vial and wafted it into his nose but smelled nothing and suffered no ill effects. He slipped the vial into one of his spacious pockets. The TV/VCR unit had no input cable or antenna. A tape labeled ‘Bishops WOF’ was discovered inside the unit. It contained an episode of ‘Wheel of Fortune’- a special couples episode on which Clark’s parents were contestants. They had just been married and were hoping to win money for their honeymoon. On the desk were three folders and an envelope. The first folder contained a large stack of papers regarding ‘Operation Stapler.’ The double-helix ‘M’ logo appeared on the second page, above the word ‘Myriad.’ Keith flipped to the index and gleaned that it was the work of someone who had been tasked with rewriting an existing program put in place to create androids. This respec operation aimed to cut costs and sell to private companies.

John Googled Myriad and the screen briefly wobbled before returning to normal, with no clear results.

The second folder was entitled ‘Operation Hole Puncher.’ The title page included the name and symbol of The Circle of Knowledge. This folder contained a list of companies, mostly non-profits, think tanks, charities, and universities.

The third folder referred to ‘Operation Three-Ring Binder’ and was empty except for a ‘Dirty Dog Grooming’ key fob tucked into the pocket.

Clark’s parents did well on the show, eventually making it to the bonus round. As the final puzzle was displayed, Clark’s mom turned to his dad and said, ‘We were already given the best letters.’

They solved the final puzzle and won the prize: a honeymoon. Clark noticed the tape in the VCR showed a great deal of wear. Like it had been played many times.

John opened the envelope and found the symbol of the Circle of Knowledge at the top. It said:

‘Faith through knowledge is just called knowledge.

Fellow keepers-

It is with great sadness that I write to you. I fear a change is coming. I cannot be certain but I suspect there is one among us scheming with treacherous intent. I have recently grown a tail. He is not particularly skilled in going unnoticed. He is an odd little man with round glasses on a fat face with no hair and no chin. He is a journalist, fired for trying to write an expose on Marvin Glass. Stay alert. Step carefully. We are being watched.

-Jim Cook.’

Several letters were over- or underlined, and the men quickly found the name ‘Maggie Cook’ was coded into the message. They inferred Jim thought his daughter might be the traitor inside the Circle of Knowledge. The officers discussed the order of Jim’s letters, the connection between Chief Cook and Harrell Dorsey, the resurrection of Maggie, and the lurking horror she revealed to Clark through the xenonematode.

The men didn’t come to any clear conclusions but agreed Marvin Glass was the most addressable threat they had. With that, they resolved to storm the gates of the Glass Compound using Clark as a false-hostage.

On the way, John mentioned the Glass company card for ‘Large Eddie’s Gun Emporium’ in Kevin’s pocket. Large Eddie himself kicked open the door to the back where he kept all the cool guns. The renegade officers equipped themselves with a sampler of grenades and firearms and drove to the secret entrance of the Den of Sin in the heart of The City. There, as John pulled out the ‘Dirty Dog Grooming’ loyalty key fob, the grate gave way beneath the men’s feet, and they plummeted into darkness below.

Episode 39

As they fell downward into darkness, the former cops slowed to a feeling of weightlessness before being abruptly confronted by a bright light, huge words in a spray painted font, and a deafening voiceover saying the same - “WELCOME TO THE SCRAP PIT.” A video screen showed them an enormous glass arena with hundreds of screaming spectators and a shadowy form began to emerge, but before this person could even hit the lights of the arena, a giant, metal tentacle erupted into view, gripping the humanoid being and ripping it out of frame. The screen faded to black, and they found themselves in an oily obsidian room with an entrance to the Scrap Pit and a separate door guarded by two fish-men armed with scythes. On seeing the officers, the guards moved to let them through this door. Keith and John marched Clark through and into an elevator as if he were their prisoner.

The elevator door opened, and they saw five malnourished children, along with Oz “Mayhem” Wolf, passed out on the floor, attended to by grandmotherly old women in identical clothes. These women poured a liquid into the mouths of the unconscious bodies. Keith and John both saw a ghostly black dog and red lion diving in and out of the bodies. One of the women entered the elevator with our heroes inside, and it continued moving. She introduced herself as Ursula and explained her role in preparing the sacrifices.

The boys exited the elevator into a massive, foggy room that contained a network of catwalks over dark green, murky water. The fishiness was pungent. Rusty, moss-covered chains dangled large hooks between the catwalks, and some of these hooks suspended prisoners above the water. Doug Jacobs in the body of Agent Trent Chad was one of these unlucky folx. When he saw them, he freaked out at their return from the grave. This entire chamber was seemingly patrolled by one fish-man, and Francis Beans could be heard questioning Kathy and George Piston deeper into the cavernous space.

Francis asked Kathy Piston about “silver spheres” as well as the “residue” and “outbreak” in Contention while dipping a clearly distressed George Piston slowly into the water. Kevin-John got Francis’ attention and told her that they’d brought Clark as a prisoner to torture and that Marvin wanted to see her right then. She was not convinced to leave immediately so Keith resorted to his backup plan. He tried to whack her with his heavy metal hand. He missed and Francis threw him into the water. She was about to run for it, but Kevin-John persuaded her to stay for more of her beloved torturing.

At that moment, it occurred to Keith he might be swimming with the giant creature that ate his little fish friend, Peter Deeter. Keith freaked out and began to climb up George Piston. Erupting up out of the water just under Keith’s boat shoes, the massive creature swallowed both Keith and George and resubmerged into the vast, murky pool.

Episode 40

Clark, John, and Francis watched as the water began to calm in front of them. Francis Beans, unaffected by the apparent death of her uncle, prepared to hang Clark up for some torturing, which prompted a failed sneak attack from John. Francis countered by pushing the hook directly through John’s shoulder. Clark kicked her right over the edge into the water, and she clanged her head on the railing as she went. The soon-to-be corpse of Francis Beans floated face down in the water.

Keith Vigna and George Piston were inside an enormous creature. They tried to claw and push their way out as the disgusting, burning ooze inside the beast slowly digested them. Keith used George Piston as a human shield and blasted out of this fish monster’s side with a frag grenade.

While gazing down at the floating body of Francis Beans, Clark and John saw a flash of light deep under the water, followed by bubbles and a gasping Keith Vigna, skin covered in burns. They pulled him out, and Keith broke the news of George’s death to Kathy in a typically kind and sensitive manner, sparing no details.

The boys decided to leave Francis Beans to her fate and continued to question the hanging Kathy Piston about why she was supplying people to the Circle of Knowledge. Clark admitted he already knew why and told Kathy he was working with Maggie. Kathy agreed to help the team take down Marvin Glass if they explained where Leo was. They told her he disappeared from this plane of existence, and they blamed it on Marvin Glass. Even though she was awful, human-trafficking scum, her crack-shot ability was a necessary addition.

John and Keith pulled down the hanging Doug Jacobs in the body of Agent Trent Chad. Clark discreetly asked Kathy her opinion on Maggie. She said Jim’s daughter was “rougher ‘round the edges” than her dad, but Kathy had been too busy at the hospital to pay close attention. Clark told her the truth about Leo’s last hours and about how he had killed Julie.

Episode 41

On the metal catwalk above the hazy, greenish water stood Clark Bishop, John Lee Pettimore IV in the body of his father, John Lee Pettimore III aka Kevin, Keith Vigna, Kathy Piston, and Doug Jacobs in the body of Agent Trent Chad. Their goal? Leave this enormous, dank prison alive. The only exit they could see? A closed elevator door. The issue? Fishmen in brown jumpsuits with mouths full of human teeth and scythes. And those human teethed mouths? They were singing. (EDIT IN THE FISH SONG)

This song’s purpose was revealed when the catwalk was dragged down into the water by a massive version of the fishmen, an enormous creature with a huge pus-leaking wound in its side and a hunger in its eyes. The monster dug into Keith’s chest and ripped its claws through his skin, revealing metal insides. The pain was too much for Keith Vigna to bear, and he passed out on the metal walkway.

Episode 42

Keith, in the darkness, you see a woman wearing old-timey clothing. She looks very normal except for the hole in the middle of her head. Regardless of how she turns to look either way, you can see right through the middle of her head. And she is walking toward you. As she walks, her clothes change multiple times, as if she is in an unnatural fashion show that is moving forward in time, decade by decade. She pulls out a zippo lighter and as it hits the ground, you see the house of Chief Maggie Cook go up in flames. You saw this happen in the front yard but this time, right now, you see it from the backyard. The fire spreads and explodes toward you, over you, through you, and you turn around to see these flames ignite the pond, Bean’s Pond, and immediately the water evaporates. Looking down, into a dry basin, filled with fish flopping their final flops, you see your brother, Ferguson Beans, crouched over a hatch in the ground, wearing a cowboy hat and spurs and the watch your father, William, gave him. You look down on your wrist, and the watch is there. You look up and the pond is filled with water and animals and Tilde B Mitchell comes walking up out of the water, toward you. And darkness fills your vision once more.

Outside of Keith’s unconscious dreams, the fight continued. The water was still murky. The air was still heavy. The fishmen’s teeth were still unsettling. And the elevator door had still yet to open.

Bullets whizzed around the enormous prison. Flashbangs erupted and flashed. Doug Jacobs in the body of Agent Trent Chad was decapitated by the scythe of a fishy humanoid. Kathy Piston likely saved all of their lives with her nonstop firearms proficiency. Grenades destroyed entire sections of the catwalk and persuaded the enormous fish monster to dive back down below the surface. One of the human-sized, bipedal amphibians lodged its scythe into the skull of Kathy Piston.

John was swallowed whole by the Big Daddy fishmonster, but he swam out through the hole Keith had previously made. He saw another creature make an escape as well: a little toy-sized human body with the head of a fish. However, an unseen force suddenly grabbed him and dragged his body down to the bottom of the tank, up against the glass of this gargantuan aquarium. John was forced to stare directly into the unblinking eyes of Marvin Glass. And as John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth’s lungs filled with water, Marvin Glass smiled.

Episode 43

Clark stood on a wet, partially destroyed catwalk with Keith in his arms with nowhere to escape to across from the last standing fishman. The humamphibian swung wide, and Clark stabbed it to death with its own scythe. He saw bubbles in the water before the two halves of the enormous creature (as well as bits of George Piston) floated to the surface. Clark broke down in tears as a God who had failed his followers.

The elevator arrived. Clark dragged the unconscious body of Keith Vigna halfway in to block the elevator door before going to see if he could find John’s corpse. He did not. In a desperate search for closure, Clark stripped down to his tighty-whities and took the scythe down into the water with him, diving into the disgusting murk. At the bottom and side of this massive aquarium, he found John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth’s body pressed against the glass by an unseen influence. Looking for the source of the force, he saw Marvin Glass standing in his office on the other side of this glass. Marvin shook a picture at RoseMary. Clark couldn’t find a pulse, and John’s body wouldn’t budge. Then… he remembered Keith’s small but incredibly powerful gun, swam back up, fetched it from Keith’s shorts and, still in his soaking wet tighty-whities, Clark fired into the aquarium wall over and over until it broke, sending a tidal wave of murky, green wet into Marvin’s office. However, Marvin calmly lifted himself and RoseMary up atop the water and made direct eye contact with Clark. With the slightest gesture, Marvin then moved the impotently enraged Clark down from the catwalk of the adjacent room. Helpless and paralyzed, Clark was placed in front of Glass, compelled to stand motionless on top of the water.

Keith woke up in darkness, jammed halfway into an elevator door. Thankfully, his little friend Peter Deeter was there to heal his shredded chest with its weird saliva. Keith looked down and saw the scene in Marvin’s office. Marvin looked back, but Keith managed to scurry away. Unfortunately, Peter was dragged away by Marvin. The elevator doors closed and took Keith to a lab full of computers, math, and “electrical shit” with a sort of interrogation window into a side room that was completely painted in blood and viscera. The tall, awkward mad scientist was working in the main lab. Keith broke the news of Peter Deeter’s likely death, which bummed her out. He explained the scene he saw in Marvin’s aquarium-water-filled office from the elevator. Poking around this lab, Keith saw a bunch of VHS tapes labelled with names, and he asked to see one. The scientist obliged, and they watched a malnourished child in the bloody room stand behind a desk with a small metal sphere on it. The child picked up the sphere. The sphere promptly ripped out his spine and entered his body, which then began slamming itself repeatedly against the wall, much to the amusement of the scientist. She was very surprised to hear that Keith had seen someone handling a sphere. While they walked down to Marvin’s office, he told her about the black Nike bag. When they opened the large, strange, obsidian doors to Glass’s office, water erupted out and into the hallway, sweeping the two of them away, though their bodies were held by Marvin’s unnatural ability. Without effort, they moved through the water, into the office, and up to the little meeting between Marvin, RoseMary, Peter and Clark. Glass held a polaroid photo and demanded explanation. It depicted Clark Bishop and Keith Vigna… alongside Kevin in a world where everything was made out of darkness except the ground… which was made of light.

Episode 44

Clark was rendered unable to move by Marvin Glass’s unnatural grasp. In his catatonic state, he witnessed an odd discussion between Marvin and RoseMary. Marvin showed RoseMary the picture and asserted that something was wrong. “You gotta send me over there! I don’t know how, but we gotta figure out something!” Suddenly, Marvin perked up. He looked up, past the former confines of his office, where the elevator door beeped, unable to close due to its sensors and Keith Vigna’s body. Marvin held out his hand. He seemed confused when a small creature landed in his palm. Peter Deeter, with the softball-sized fish head on a human body the size of a Barbie doll, chatted and chatted with Glass, who glared at RoseMary while alluding that her job title was in jeopardy and could be available soon.

Marvin’s face shifted, like he smelled something, or experienced some other unknown sensation. He reached out again, and out of the water stood Keith Vigna and the white lab coat clad scientist, maniacal hair now dripping, and her eyes lit up with excitement to see Peter Deeter still intact. Keith and the tiny fishman creature greeted each other warmly before Marvin shut him down with a flick of the hand. Peter’s large fish eyes stared blankly past his new friend as Clark’s normal human eyes blinked back to his unbelievable reality.

Marvin Glass asked the two former police officers about the strange picture, and they felt unnaturally compelled to answer to the best of their abilities. The picture came from the camera sitting on Marvin’s desk. It shows things that aren’t there. They thought the pictures were from a different dimension or the past. Marvin asked how many pictures they took. There was the one with the torches and the old-timey clothing, one with John Peters in oily black stocks, and another of a guy with tribal tattoos kneeling before a cowboy with his hand up to hide his face from the camera. Marvin asked Clark to confirm the part about the man with tribal tattoos running down both arms to his fingertips. RoseMary dove for the gun. As she grabbed it, Marvin reached down and flung the sphere at her from off the desk. Multiple shiny limbs extended from the small sphere, slammed into the desk for leverage, and slung its silver, round frame at its target: RoseMary.

One of its appendages sliced into the soft tissue on the back of RoseMary’s neck. Another snapped her head forward. A third metal tendril reached in, gripped the top of RoseMary’s spine, and ripped her entire spinal cord out of her body in one swift motion. This ball promptly forced itself into the now-vacant spinal column of this human being. The “new” RoseMary had a crazed look in her eyes. She blew her nose into her hand, slammed the mucous into the empty chamber of the odd gun, and (without aiming) squeezed the trigger. An almost blinding flash of light illuminated the entirety of Marvin’s enormous, flooded office, and then, as if she had never been, the body of RoseMary was gone. Marvin Glass roared in anger. Where RoseMary just stood, a pool of viscous black sludge enveloped a placid body. Her limbs seemed to peacefully fold into the ooze, becoming one with the sentient mass of goop that then slid across the water. Marvin reached out a hand, grabbed the goo, and hurled it downward, into the murky water below. A strange noise filled the air, like when a tube TV is turned on. A noise that could almost be felt in your head or in the back of your throat.

Marvin pressed the two petrified men on their knowledge of this black substance. How many times had they seen it? Had it taken people? Did they know how to contain it? Was it running rampant through Contention? Next he questioned them about the small, silver spheres.

Keith explained that the Contention PD had a bag, and when they put the silver ball in the bag, it disappeared. Marvin was curious about this. Would anything in the bag disappear? Keith admitted they never tried anything other than the metal spheres. Marvin commented on the plural Keith used and asked how many silver balls they’d come into contact with? Keith said they’d only made the one disappear, but another was found embedded in the skull of a severed head they had pulled out of some storage units, adding that one of the Contention PD touched the silver ball. Marvin assumed this was their coworker who was recently gunned down and ripped apart. Keith explained that John Lee Pettimore IV, the man who held the sphere previously, was inside Kevin’s body. Marvin’s eyes widened, as did Clark's. Clark thought Marvin had something to do with the body switching. Skeptical of all of this information, Marvin extended a hand downward and pulled the body of John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth up from out of the water. With one hand holding Kevin’s body, he used the other to twist open Kevin’s head like an avocado. Sitting inside his head, like the pit of an avocado, was a small, silver sphere. Marvin ripped Kevin’s body in half, right down the middle. Where a spinal cord should have been, there was nothing.

Since Clark and Keith were now going to be a part of some “heavy” entertainment, Marvin offered to answer a few questions. Clark immediately asked what the silver balls are. Marvin has been doing research on them and has come to very few conclusions, though they are not of this realm. Marvin was working to secure their destruction. Keith asked where he found the balls. One had been brought to him a long time ago by two men he was seeking out. They, along with one other person, had stolen something from him. Clark pointed out that when Marvin threw the sphere at RoseMary, he was aware it did something. Marvin confirmed he knew the spheres tended to enter the person they touched. But RoseMary still shot the gun after being taken over by the sphere. Did it not work? Marvin admitted he didn’t suspect the entity would do anything other than try to kill itself, as it normally did. Keith asked if Marvin knew anyone with the previously described tribal tattoos. That was one of his sons, Jermaine Glass. Keith asked why Marvin wanted to destroy the spheres. Glass saw the balls as competition. If he couldn’t figure out how to utilize them, he wanted them eradicated. Glass was in search of as much power as possible in an attempt to “obtain control over this domain.” Finally, Clark asked what Marvin was. Glass said he was not one of them, rather one of many who were in control, who ran things. But he had become bored, left the bureaucracy, and had been battling Myriad ever since. Then Marvin snapped his fingers, and Keith and Clark were unconscious.

They awoke in a room with walls covered in every piece of weaponry and gadget imaginable. A cage like the ones they’d been trapped in above the Den of Sin appeared at a darkened window. Oz Mayhem Wolf climbed out, said it seemed they were going to fight together, and excitedly grabbed his preferred combat gear. A timer began counting down, water began filling the room, and a circle opened above them. A disorienting amount of light and sound hit as an unseen crowd chanted the name of their opponent: PLANET JUGGERNAUT.

In a dark room, lit by various electronics and machines, there sat a massive, shiny, metal sphere, 20 feet tall, with silvery arms extending from either side. A tube connected this gargantuan ball to a machine below. The machine began whirring and a small, metal sphere, roughly one inch in diameter began moving up through the tubing, into the larger, armed version of itself. As this happened, John Lee Pettimore IV felt… alive again. John felt his consciousness extend itself throughout his new body, this colossal monument to destruction. A vast circle opened up in the ceiling above, and a disorienting amount of light and sound poured into this dark room, which revealed text painted on the back wall that read the same thing heard violently chanted by the unseen crowd: PLANET JUGGERNAUT. John gave his new hands a tentative punch together and dug in his foot.

Episode 45

Clark Bishop, Keith Vigna, and Oz ‘Mayhem’ Wolf walked up the stairs and into the lights and sounds of the arena. This colossal room was circular and funneled downward, at least ten stories. Thousands of seats surrounded a massive, covered cage: fifty yards across with a bubble-looking, rounded top on it entirely made of a crystal clear material. Aggressively loud dubstep blared. Strobe lights made the entire experience otherworldly as green and red and blue lasers swung wildly around the room. Like a futuristic Las Vegas filled with the spirit of all of Vin Diesel’s films if they were tarred and feathered, but the tar was replaced by Red Bull and the feathers were replaced by cocaine. An enormous logo in the center of the arena floor read in all caps, “THE SCRAP PIT” and all around The Scrap Pit, in a massive circle were the repeated words, “PLANET JUGGERNAUT”. A gigantic, circular jumbotron hung above the bubble, blinked a countdown timer, and flashed the words, “Oz ‘Mayhem’ Wolf and Friends vs. Planet Juggernaut”. The exceptional voices of Mick and Nick Nickles echoed through the pandemonium and announced an evening of bloodsport the audience would never forget.

The floor opened, and Planet Juggernaut slowly rose into The Scrap Pit to an explosion of roars from the eager audience. The sight of the gigantic, shiny, metal sphere, 20 feet wide with two metallic arms extending from either side, knocked something loose in Clark. He lunged straight at Oz “Mayhem” Wolf in a frenzy and tried to rip his head off. A confused Oz Wolf ran away from his antagonistic teammate, but clumsily tripped over and fell to the ground. Planet Juggernaut sent lasers blazing from its eyes at Keith Vigna, who jumped out of the way with his cool jumping boots. Mid-air, Keith shot Planet Juggernaut with a saw launcher and embedded a circular saw in the giant ball robot’s midsection. Planet Juggernaut propelled itself into the air and landed on Oz Wolf as it slammed Clark down with its powerful, metal hand. Keith Spidermanned up the Scrap Pit wall with suction gloves and froze Planet Juggernaut’s propeller with a nitro thrower. A crushed Oz crawled out from beneath the burnished behemoth, which sat eerily still as it clearly charged up something somehow even more sinister. Keith tried to release his suction cups from the dome but his feet were stuck. He looked into the appetant audience and saw a short young woman and tall old man in suits, ties, and ill-fitting windbreakers. He recognized Agents Kennedy and McKinley as they made their way through the crowd.

Clark launched himself up onto Planet Juggernaut, which rapidly spun its exterior shell while hovering just above the battleground in order to hit the Pit rolling at a quick clip toward its slow foes. This squashed Clark, but absolutely obliterated Oz “Mayhem” Wolf into a pile of organs and teeth which sat in a dark red paste. As Nick and Mick Nickles discussed the mayhem seen and lost, a small hoover poked out of Planet Juggernaut to suck up and collect the loose teeth of Oz Wolf.

Episode 46

An artificial wind began to pick up in a corner of The Scrap Pit and headed toward Clark Bishop, who fired his high powered sniper rifle into the giant ball robot while thinking about his friend and coworker, John Lee Pettimore IV. Planet Juggernaut grabbed Clark with his extendo-arms and Mickey Mouse Gloves. It pulled Clark close and attempted to speak: “CLARK!!!! IT'S ME! IT'S JOHN! I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU! WE'VE GOTTA FIND A WAY OUT OF HERE AND INTO MARVIN GLASS' BOOTH! CAN WE KILL HIM TOGETHER?”

Mick and Nick Nickles cut to a video segment incorrectly called “Fighting Pro Tips from Alfred and Jermaine Glass”. The jumbotron showed a dark room with a single light on. A young man in the shadows of the room huddled in the fetal position and stammered about a gun, someone disappearing, it coming after him, and a missing girl before the feed was cut off and the attention turned back to inside The Scrap Pit.

In the clutches of the speaking Planet Juggernaut, Clark’s mind snapped, and he pleaded for help from Planet John-ernaut, who was focused on a young, bald, fit man with sunken, intense eyes in a black t-shirt and jeans. Agent Billy Harrison was headed toward Marvin Glass' box.

Planet John-ernaut threw himself with all its might into the dome above The Scrap Pit. The crystal clear material, considered indestructible by all who had fought inside its bubble previously, shattered, its pieces floated down into the pit like a firework. The crowd scattered for their lives. Perhaps to add fuel to the confusion fire to aid in an escape, Keith Vigna sprayed his nitro-thrower into the panicking mob.

Suddenly, a rushing cascade of murky water containing different kinds of fish and a few humanoid figures blasted out from Marvin Glass' theater box. In the deluge were four flushed folks: Agents Kennedy, McKinley, and Billy Harrison, as well as a body wearing a tuxedo, with gaunt skin stretched across long bones: Marvin Glass. All four were washed into the middle of The Scrap Pit.

Clark unloaded 3 rounds into Marvin and triggered a deafening roar. Planet John-ernaut requested that Clark jump up on him to avoid the ever-rising tide. Keith, using his nitro-thrower against the bad guy instead of the audience, completely encased the floating body of Marvin Glass in a sort of dry ice cube. Clark, from atop Planet John-ernaut yelled to Keith the wacky and wondrous news that Planet Juggernaut was John.

Planet John-ernaut sent one extendo-arm toward Keith Vigna as the other reached for a breach in the dome above. Keith threw down his riot shield, rode it like a surfboard toward John-ernaut's extended hand, and shot a saw through the middle of the newly formed ice cube and directly into the frozen Marvin Glass trapped inside. The Scrap Pit began to shake violently, and John-ernaut successfully pulled Keith and Clark up through the dome as lava moved up through the cracking and bubbling Scrap Pit. Marvin Glass, sliced by the saw and still frozen in this strange chemical compound, melted into the lava pit below.

The scene changed.

There was a road, lined on either side by trees that reached over, blending together, creating an autumnal canopy. A rabbit recklessly raced across the patchy pavement, leaving behind a trail of blood thick enough to assume the animal’s fate. A boxy black sedan drove furiously down the road, trailed closely by a four wheeler. They took a right down a gravel road, blowing past a sign that read, “The Contention Woods.”

Text at the bottom of the screen read: “25 years earlier.”

Episode 47

In a highschool classroom, the analog clock on the wall said 3:30, and the chalkboard said “Detention”. Sat at the only occupied desk in the room was a boy of 13 or 14. Jeremy Pettimore wore a denim cutoff jacket, a raggedy thin Western shirt, Wrangler jeans, some punky boots, and a perpetual scowl. There was a knock on the door, and two more boys of a similar age entered the room. The first was Ken Crinklehoff, wearing a letterman jacket bought for him by his dad. Ken was tall, fit, had great hair, and walked with his head held high. The teacher greeted Ken warmly, then happily acknowledged the second boy, Ash Hornbeam, with his black messy hair, white t-shirt, cheetah print vest, acid-washed jeans, and scuffed tennis shoes.

The teacher administering Detention was confident the new arrivals didn’t belong, but Ken said they wanted to keep their friend, Jeremy, company. The teacher was reluctant, but said these two boys are allowed to do whatever they want. Jeremy said his schoolwork necessitated his friends, so if he was supposed to get anything done, he had to go with them. The teacher was relieved to have an excuse to end Detention, and Jeremy flipped him off on the way out. The young Pettimore asked the other two if they were ready for the woods that night, and Ash opened his jacket to reveal a bunch of water dynamite. Ken seemed a bit reluctant, but agreed to go since this year was their last hurrah. Ken would have to meet them in the woods, though, since his mom would still want to drive him there herself. As they walked through the hall, an upperclassman asked them what they were up to that night. Jeremy said they were going to the woods; that’s their thing, once a year, they go into the woods to look for some folk tale legend called Ol’ Madge. They left Silas Cole K-12, slapping the banner sporting their mascot, a miner, on the way out.

That evening, Ash drove Jeremy to the woods in his older brother’s car, a 1991 Firebird painted a weird, ugly gold. They turned onto a dirt road, and a squirrel ran into the path of the car. Ash was able to quickly swerve and miss it. They pulled into the gravel parking lot for the Contention Woods, and there were two cars in the lot already. One had a notice taped on the driver’s side window; the other had a boot on the back left wheel. The notice threatened a boot if it wasn’t moved. There was also a Ford Bronco with a lift kit on it over next to the small, usually unoccupied park ranger shack at the entrance to the woods.

Ash left a note under his windshield wiper that said “Please don’t boot my car - Ash Hornbeam”. They checked if the two cars were unlocked; both were. In the first car, there was almost nothing, as if it had already been cleaned out. In the second car, there was a bunch of camping equipment and a title for the vehicle which listed a Stewart Feldman as its owner, registered in The City. Jeremy found some liquor and a pistol. Ash grabbed some of the camping equipment and headed over to the shack where he saw an elderly man wearing a state-issued uniform sitting on a stool, just waking up as Ash approached. The boys realized this wasn’t the normal forest ranger of Contention; he introduced himself as Woodrow, or Buzz for short. In addition to the normal ranger paraphernalia, there was a big thing of hand sanitizer and a board behind Buzz covered in pictures and pieces of paper thumb-tacked to it. Buzz took out a polaroid camera, took their pictures, took down their information (citing a recent string of disappearances in the woods as his reason), and placed the pictures and information up onto the board. Ash asked if they could borrow the first-aid kit, and Buzz gave it to them. Ash shot an M-80 into the distance with his slingshot, and Buzz about shat his pants. So he went to the bathroom, and Jeremy seized the opportunity to grab a fire extinguisher, 2 machetes, 3 flashlights, and hand sanitizer - and they shoved it all into their bags. They looked over the missing persons board. There were 18 missing people, several of whom the boys recognized. They saw Stewart Feldman on the board. He was an older, bald, British man in incredible shape with a thick jawline - he had claimed to be in the woods on business. Jeremy also saw the keys to both the Bronco and the shack itself and snagged them. Buzz returned, and the boys asked if they could take a picture of the missing persons board so they could have a reference if they ran into any people in the woods. Buzz agreed and gave them a polaroid picture of the board of polaroid pictures. The two boys gathered their things and headed off to their usual camping spot on foot.

As they hiked, Jeremy noticed tracks - it looked like a car and a smaller vehicle, like a four-wheeler, had driven down the trail. When they arrived at their spot, there was (unusually) no firewood waiting for them. Ash went to chop at a big log, and Jeremy started looking around, frustrated at the lack of logs. Ash heard a rustling nearby and saw a man’s head pop up from behind some bushes. The man made dead eye contact with Ash and popped back down into the thicket.

Episode 48

Ken Crinklehoff’s mom, Krista Crinklehoff, drove him to the woods in her minivan and explained she didn’t like the tradition he and his friends had of going to the woods once a year for their silly game. Ken said not to worry. She turned onto the gravel road, and a baby fox jumped out, trying to cross the road. Ken’s mom hit and crushed the fox (without remorse). They pulled into the parking lot and saw the same cars Ash and Jeremy saw, plus the ‘91 Firebird Ash had borrowed. Ken’s mom mentioned how multiple people who had gone into the woods recently were missing, and she especially wasn’t happy he was going into the woods with Ash and Jeremy. Ken grabbed his gear, said goodbye, and headed to the ranger shack. Buzz introduced himself, took Ken’s picture, asked for his information, and posted it on his board. After talking about the missing people for a few minutes, Ken headed off into the woods.

A group of three high school girls walked into the Contention Public Library. Judy Crinklehoff, a senior at Silas Cole and the older sister of Ken Crinklehoff, still wore the same clothes she bought for freshman year. She was very anxious, never said the right thing, and wanted to be in a relationship with the coolest girl at school, a rebel, who bullied Judy, named Elizabeth “Liz” Lonklin. Liz wore a leather jacket and Doc Martens, she smoked cigarettes, and she was a self-described *bitch*. The final girl, Sharon “Shadow” Berryman, formerly a popular cheerleader, was now obsessed with going to graveyards, funerals, and hospitals to engage with all forms and stages of death.

Shadow asked Steven Pages for the location of occult books related to voodoo, and he led them to a small room in the back with a small sign that read “Occult”. Inside, they found a book titled “Voodoo”. Shadow said they would find what they were looking for on page 419, and Liz revealed she wanted to torture someone named Britney for sleeping with her boyfriend, all while Judy went on about how beautiful Liz was. Page 419 described a ritual that must be performed while surrounded by trees at night. There were a few ingredients necessary for performing it: the left pinky toe of a dead squirrel, dirt scraped from the earth after it’d been stepped on by a menstruating calf, the blood from a former cheerleader gone goth who goes to Silas Cole K-12, and bird pee.

Smash cut to the group leaving the library with the book. Smash cut to them on the side of the road, bent over a dead squirrel, cutting off its pinky toe. Smash cut to them in a field, scooping up dirt under a cow bleeding from its lady butt. Smash cut to them standing in a parking lot waiting for a bird to pee/poo on them. Smash cut to Shadow scratching herself with the dead squirrel toe and dripping her blood into a vial. Smash cut to two days ago when Shadow told Liz her boyfriend was cheating on her with Britney from Spinkbonk High in the City, and Shadow and Judy agreed to help Liz get back at her boyfriend. Smash cut back to the present, and the girls were on their way to the woods with all the necessary ingredients.

Shadow turned onto a gravel road, and a possum walked out in front of the car. Shadow drove straight for it and crushed it under the car. She was happy for the possum since it was in a different place now, but Judy was worried it wasn’t going to heaven. They buried the possum real quick and then arrived at the Contention Woods parking lot. Already in the parking lot were five cars: the four we expected, plus Krista Crinklehoff’s minivan. Judy freaked out a little because she saw her mom’s minivan, and she was out past her curfew. Liz and Shadow promised to shove Judy into a ditch if they saw Krista Crinklehoff, which assuaged Judy’s worries.

An old man wearing a state forest ranger uniform jumped out and scared the girls. He introduced himself as Woodrow, or Buzz for short, and asked them to fill out some forms in the shack. Shadow whispered to the rest to not use their real names.

Episode 49

Ash Hornbeam walked over to investigate the bush after seeing the man’s face disappear back behind it, his axe in hand. He heard rustling and a chattering sound, so he ran back to find Jeremy Pettimore, who was standing at their camp site, still frustrated at the lack of pre-prepared firewood. Ash sprinted back and squawked about a man in a bush by a log making animal noises. Jeremy readied the gun he found, and Ash led him to the bush. It was still rustling with movement and the animal-like noises were still audible.

Ash picked up a long stick and poked at the bush. Stepping back from the bush was a naked human man, covered in scratches and cuts, some of which were still bleeding. He looked at the boys with huge eyes and froze. Jeremy took out the polaroid of the polaroids; they could tell this was one of the people who’d gone missing, though they couldn't quite read his name. The boys called out to him, suggested he put on pants and offered to help with a first-aid kit. The man scampered up to them hastily. Jeremy pointed the gun at him, to no effect. The man pushed his fingers together, made sad puppy-dog eyes, and mewled. Ash and Jeremy discussed what to do with the animal man as he sniffed the air and headed to their campsite. The boys tried to Red Rover him, but the situation finally sunk into Ash. He freaked out, backed away, and tripped backwards on a log. Jeremy tried to stop the man alone, but wasn’t able to. Both boys had the realization, though, that this man did not act or run like a normal human man; he was too fast, he was crouched, and he used his front legs - er, arms - to aid his movement toward their campsite.

The boys ran back to their spot, still holding their weapons. When they returned, they saw the man hunched over their bag with food, going to town on the snacks they brought. Jeremy cried out for his Lil Smokies. After a small tussle between the boys and the naked man, Ash kicked away the can of Smokies, kneed him in the face, and full-nelsoned him down into the mud, immobilizing him. Jeremy took a rope, tied him to a tree, and tried to calm him down with more Smokies. Ash used some hand sanitizer and headed back down the trail to get Buzz.

As Ash headed back to the shack, the trees around him began to warp, the trail became nearly nonexistent in front of him, and he was suddenly looking at a thicket of woods instead of the trail in front of him. The sun was going down, Ash was all by himself, and he had no fucking clue where he was.

Ken Crinklehoff walked down the trail and made it to the usual campsite. When he arrived, he saw Jeremy waving Lil Smokies in front of the face of a naked, bloody man tied up to a tree. Ken shouted as he entered the clearing, startling Jeremy Pettimore. Ken asked the man if he could hear him and if he was alright, and the man made more chattering noises. Jeremy indicated this was one of the people who’d gone missing in the woods. Ash was on his way back to the ranger station to get Buzz. In the meantime, Jeremy was trying to tame the animal man with tiny meat fellows. Ken realized that if Ash was going from the campsite to the ranger shack, they should have crossed paths… but they didn’t.

Ken called out for Ash, but stopped when he looked back at the man and no longer saw humanity, only animalistic intent behind the eyes of this bloody, muddy, tied up naked human body. Ken freaked out and backed away, claiming the man wasn’t a person. Jeremy tried to convince him the man was still a man, but Ken wasn’t convinced. He went back to calling out for Ash, his panic rising. Jeremy wasn’t sure why Ken was scared of this man, whom he named Rusty.

Shadow, Liz, and Judy were in the Contention Woods parking lot talking to Buzz. Judy worried about her mom and wondered if she’d also gone missing. Shadow and Liz calmed her down by suggesting that perhaps Krista’s car was stolen, and so it wasn’t actually her that drove it to the woods. Now back in the shack, Buzz asked the young ladies to come over to take care of business so they can be on their way.

They wondered if they should trust the man, but decided to have their pictures taken anyway. Glancing around the shack, they saw various ranger equipment and the bulletin board of missing people, as well as a massive jug of hand sanitizer on the windowsill. Buzz asked for their information and took their pictures. Judy furiously pumped hand sanitizer into her hand, so much so that it overflowed onto the floor. Liz looked at Judy appalled, and asked Buzz if they could have a machete to protect themselves from something killing people, like maybe Judy’s mom. Judy freaked out and started licking the hand sanitizer from her hands. Buzz offered the hand sanitizer to the other two girls. Shadow refused, but Liz put her hand out, and as Buzz started to pump out the sanitizer, she tried to pull her hand away - but plenty still landed on her, so she unhappily rubbed it in. As Buzz pinned all of their information and pictures on the Not Missing side of the board, the girls noticed a slight trickle of blood going down the back of his neck, staining his uniform.

Ash looked around at the ever-darkening trees surrounding him as the sun went down. He heard a noise and saw a tree emitting a bright light from a hollow point. He looked around suspiciously, saw a tripwire between him and the tree, and carefully avoided it as he walked up to the light-emanating knot. It was so bright Ash couldn’t see what was inside, but he knew something was deep in there. Ash pushed his arm into the arm-shaped hole, up to his elbow, felt around, and found nothing. When he attempted to pull his arm out, however, he felt a great pain on his skin, like he was noodling a razor sharp catfish all the way from elbow to fingertip. Ash pulled out about a centimeter, and the bit of arm revealed only raw muscle and tendons - it lacked skin completely. He realized he was trapped, and for the first time in his life, Ash Hornbeam had no idea what to do.

Episode 50

Shadow told Buzz he was bleeding from his head. She offered to trade her first aid kit for his machete, and he gladly accepted. She grabbed the kit and a vial and patched him up while discreetly taking a sample of his blood. The group then took stock of their possessions and headed to their designated camping spot to perform the ritual.

Upon arrival, there were no rocks around the designated fire pit in order to keep the fire contained. This was very concerning to Judy. Liz went to find some rocks, and Shadow swayed in the wind to attune with nature. Judy, worried about her mom and the pond water she just used to brush her teeth, suffered a bout of insanity. She saw reality warp - Shadow blended into the trees and the ground became the sky. Judy promptly ran into the woods in her footie pajamas. Shadow sighed and followed with her machete, leaping and dancing as she went.

Liz’s reality glitched, and she suddenly found herself lost in an unrecognizable part of the woods. Behind some rocks, she saw a fit-looking bald man in his forties walking in circles, waving his hands, and talking to himself - all on the other side of a thick line of white powder. A branch-like sigil was carved into all of the trees in her sight. Liz tried to get away quietly, but she stepped on a stick and he beckoned her over to his little camp with some semi-intelligible, mostly-English-accented instructions. She went over, partly because she found him attractive. He was concerned about two things: the sky turning and keeping the “lady in the wood” away. A tattoo of a stylised H was slightly hidden on the back of his neck. After a little more discussion, Liz decided she was too worried by the situation and didn’t trust him. She ran away as he shouted she was definitely going to *get got*.

Lost in the woods, Liz Lonklin stumbled upon Ash Hornby - stuck in a tree with tears streaming down his face. They were understandably surprised to see each other. Ash warned her about the trip wire just in time, but the helpless situation caused him to lose it and pull his arm out a little bit more. The loss of skin was staggering. He threw up out of sheer panic. Liz dipped out, shouting for help, leaving Ash alone with the tree once again, staring at his lacerated, dripping arm.

Judy ran haphazardly through the woods, but thankfully stopped just before a suspicious-looking pile of leaves. Shadow almost danced directly into the dubious detritus, but Judy pulled her out of the way, revealing the ten-foot-deep pit underneath the leaf pile. Shaken, but not yet broken, the two headed back to their campsite. They didn’t see Liz, but they did see a raccoon sitting there, eating just like a person would. The lil’ trash panda indicated that hand sanitiser should not be used - might be deadly. Judy looked into the raccoon’s eyes, saw the soul of a human, and decided to trust it. Shadow tottered along with T-rex arms, imitating the raccoon, as the trio headed back to the entrance to the woods.

After searching through the woods in the dwindling twilight, Liz finally found the trail, along with Jeremy Pettimore and Ken Krinklehoff at their campsite. She saw them talking to a feral man, feeding him *Lil’ Winkies*. She told them Ash was in trouble with a tree while Jeremy fed Rusty more smokies. They debated whether or not to take Rusty along for the search. Ken finally agreed to it, and Liz Lonklin lead the party.

Shadow, Judy, and the raccoon made their way back to the parking lot and were confronted by Judy’s mom’s voice coming out of the shack. Judy instinctively ran to get more hand sanitizer from her mom and succeeded in doing so despite the raccoon physically trying to stop her. Krista told the girls that Buzz had asked her to watch the shack while he went to investigate an argument. The raccoon indicated they should get the fuck out of Dodge, but Shadow wanted to go back and get Liz. She persuaded Krista to help her to find Liz - Judy could stay in the shack with the raccoon. When Shadow and Krista skipped into the forest together, Judy hit the restroom. There, she saw the limp, neatly folded body of Ranger Buzz on the floor.

Episode 51

Ken Crinklehoff, Jeremy Pettimore, Liz Lonklin, and Rusty walked through the woods, looking for Ash Hornbeam, whose arm was stuck in a tree. The sun had now gone down, and they were in total darkness. Too far off the trail, the group began to realize none of them knew where they were. They walked deeper into the woods and eventually saw, through the moonlight, a picture frame hanging on a tree.

FLASHBACK to Ken Crinklehoff a couple of years ago. He and his friends were out in the woods on their annual outing to look for Madge. He popped away to pee behind a tree, and as he looked up from his stream of urine, he saw a frame, like of a painting, hanging there in the woods. It looked like nothing was in the frame. Ken approached and noticed that somewhere along the edge of the frame, something didn’t line up, as if what was behind the frame wasn’t the same as what he could see through it. He strafed to the side to get a better look and saw that beyond the frame was a cabin. Ken walked up to the frame to put his hand through it, but at the last second noticed a tripwire he was about to step on. Ken stepped back, grabbed a rock, and threw it at the tripwire. A giant, wooden spear came flying through the canvas of the painting and stabbed directly into a tree, just missing Ken. He rushed back to the camp while convincing himself it wasn’t real.

FLASHBACKFORWARD to Jeremy, Liz, Ken, and Rusty standing in the clearing, looking at the weird frame. Ken yelled out for everyone to stop and not go any closer. He pointed at the ground, and, next to the frame, there was a tripwire. He tossed a small log onto the tripwire, and a massive spear shot through the frame, directly into a nearby tree. Ken shared his memory with the rest of the party, and, as they all looked at the frame, they could see a cabin in the woods through the spear-made hole. Ken snapped, grabbed the spear, and raced toward the cabin. As Jeremy yelled at him to stop, Ken stepped on a pile of leaves covering a hole and disappeared into the ground.

Ash Hornbeam stood in the woods alone, terrified, his arm stuck halfway into the hollow of a tree. The rest of his arm that he could see, from shoulder to elbow, had been stripped of every layer of flesh. The sun finished going down, and Ash stood alone in the moonlight. He heard the snap of a branch nearby, and out of the trees approached a man in a black suit, white shirt, and bolo tie. He was a fit man in his late 20s or early 30s with a glorious moustache and pants that were a bit too tight. He flashed an FBI badge and introduced himself as Agent Kevin. He asked Ash why he was out in the woods. Ash said he and some friends come out to the woods every year to camp and look for Madge, a woman in the woods from local legend. Kevin cursed, thanked him, and, with a trembling hand, pressed a gun to the back of Ash’s head. Acting on pure instinct, Ash reached into his pocket, pulled out a lighter and some firecrackers, lit them with one hand, and held them against Kevin’s head. Kevin lowered his gun, grabbed the fireworks, and threw them away. On closer inspection, Kevin recognized Ash as a local kid who was celebrated in the community after he defended his home from a couple burglars.

FLASHBACK to a younger Ash Hornbeam, sitting on his front porch, wrapped in a crisis blanket, talking to a Contention police officer. Ash had heard noises in his basement, and it sounded like two men’s voices, one tall and skinny, the other short and fat. Ash thought they were after his dad’s coin collection. FLASHBACK to a few hours before this to Ash home alone, watching TV. On the screen is a commercial for a CD player Ash desperately wanted but couldn’t afford. So he hatched a plan to steal some of his dad’s rare coin collection. He tried typing in birthdays into the lockbox that contained the coins, and his birthday worked. Ash took a handful, roughly $600 worth, of coins. FLASHBACK FORWARD to the officer asking Ash about the paint cans hanging from strings. Ash said he set up traps and tripwires and told an epic story of utilizing these common objects to hassle the robbers until they gave up and left. FLASH A BIT MORE FORWARD to Ash carrying his new CD player with him everywhere he went.

FLASH FULLY BACK FORWARD to Kevin returning to the trapped Ash along with a woman wearing a black suit, white shirt, and a black tie. She held a machete, and she chanted while she rubbed a hand on the blade. The woman smiled a cold, vacant smile behind asymmetrical bangs covering one of her eyes. Agent Kevin introduced her as Agent Karen, and she immediately lifted the machete above her head and brought it down through Ash’s elbow. Out of shock, Ash stepped back, looked down, and saw that his arm had been cut off. The end of it was completely cauterized, and the skin around the stump began to grow back as he watched. Agent Karen said nothing, just smiled, turned around, and walked away. Agent Kevin put his arm around Ash and led him to a black sedan sitting next to a four-wheeler in the middle of the woods. Through some brush and trees, they could see a cabin.

Shadow and Krista Crinklehoff walked down the trail, and Shadow sang a song about death. The sun finished setting, and they continued to walk, lit only by a flashlight. Krista said she saw Liz and shot off with the flashlight into the woods, followed by a giggling Shadow. But then Shadow watched the flashlight go completely dark and felt a rope tighten around her ankle. She was hoisted into the air, upside down, hanging by one foot. Krista turned on the flashlight under her chin, like it was spooky story time. She said, “my darling, it is certifiably unfortunate that your demise is seemingly necessary despite my finding your demeanor so appropriate for your kind. From your personal hymns I can assume and do hope that a lack of existence is your preference?” Shadow whispered to herself “finally…”, and she watched a long silver tendril grow from the back of Krista Crinklehoff’s neck, and then another, and another, and another. The limbs extended toward Shadow’s pinata’d body, and the camera panned down to show the long shadows play out the grisly scene: one of the shiny tentacles sliced into the soft tissue on the back of her neck, another snapped her head forward, and a third reached in, gripped her spinal cord, and ripped it out of her body, delivering Shadow to her finish line, her goal, her lack of a destination, and, finally, she felt nothing.

The sun had set, and as it began to rain outside, Judy Crinklehoff stood at the doorway to the bathroom and stared at the lifeless, folded, crumpled body of Buzz. She could tell by looking around that there had been a tussle, and she found a stick of her mom’s favorite brand of chapstick behind the toilet. The raccoon stood in the doorway, motioning to get the fuck out of there. Judy followed the raccoon into the rain, into the darkness, and a lightning bolt flashed in the distance. It was just bright enough to illuminate a blood-covered Krista Crinklehoff walking directly toward her.

Episode 52

The raccoon at Judy’s side shivered and tried to communicate, tugging at Judy’s arm, but eventually ran away when Judy went to help her mother. Judy guided her back to the shack to clean up her blood-drenched mother, but when she closed the door, Judy felt a pinch on the back of her neck. She turned and saw her mom’s body had crumpled to the ground, and standing in front of her was a small, 1 inch silver sphere with metallic arms grounding itself in the walls and ceiling of the shack. Shiny tendrils reached around, snapped Judy’s neck forward and ripped out her spine, shoving itself into her spinal column. Judy Krinklehoff was no longer Judy Krinklehoff. She was an objective-based entity, and its current objective was to collect as many bodies as possible.

After falling into the hidden hole under a pile of leaves, Ken Crinklehoff slid on his back down an earthy, viscous slide for some time, until he finally landed in a pit of cold dirt in perfect darkness. He was in a small crawl space with what looked like floor supports, though they were translucent tubes filled with a squamous black ooze that traveled down from the cabin into the ground below. Ken also saw a door above him, and he cautiously listened for any sound on the other side.

Ash Hornbeam followed Agents Kevin and Karen to the black sedan and four-wheeler hidden in the brush. There was another agent in the backseat, wearing the same black suit with a white shirt. The man, in his early 30s, had buzzed blond hair and introduced himself as Agent Kyle. As Ash looked out ahead of them, he saw the cabin in a small clearing. Next to the cabin sat a small shipping container and a large yellow excavator. A moat surrounded the clearing. Ash saw movement just outside the moat. Liz, Jeremy, and Ken stopped to talk, Ken picked up a small log, threw it, and a long wooden spear, flew in their direction and hit a tree. Ken grabbed the spear, took off running, fell into the ground, and disappeared. Kevin turned back to Ash and broke his mind with two sentences. The woods are full of traps. And “Ol’ Madge” - the local legend the boys searched for annually - was real. Ash couldn’t handle it. Something snapped, he bailed out of the car, ran, and disappeared into the night.

Jeremy and Liz stood in the dark of the woods when they saw Ken disappear into the ground, and it began to rain. They looked forward, the cabin lights turned on, and they noticed a storage container and a big yellow excavator next to the cabin, all encircled by a moat. The pair moved forward to investigate the cabin and found the moat was about 5 feet across. Jeremy threw some Smokies onto the other side and held Rusty’s feet as he lunged across to grab the small sausage boys. Liz crossed Rusty’s back without issue, but Jeremy and Rusty fell into the fish-filled moat. They crawled out near Liz, a wet mess.

The trio approached the cabin slowly. Liz stumbled up the stairs to look through a window, and she saw strange lab equipment and translucent tubes that ran down into the floorboards, filled with a squamous, black, viscous goo. Papers were scattered across tables and a desk, and in the corner sat a large wooden trunk. Jeremy edged toward the storage unit, opened the door, and saw, on one side, a closet full of clothes, and on the other side, lined up, against the wall, the bodies of roughly 15 people hung limply on hooks from a hole in the back of each neck. Jeremy turned and screamed at Liz they needed to get the fuck out of there, and the pair bolted across the moat. As they ran, Liz heard a “click” under her foot. She tried to stop in time, but a giant metal claw swung down from the branch above her and removed her head from her shoulders. Jeremy knew she was dead. He kept running.

Episode 53

Ash Hornbeam also ran through the dark, rainy night. He found the trail, and in the distance, he saw Judy Crinklehoff walking toward him. Ash grabbed her arm and kept running, pulling her with him. They arrived at his usual campsite. Ash fell to his knees, gasped for air, and told Judy her brother disappeared into a hole in the ground. Judy seemed unworried by this news and suggested finding some large rocks. Ash continued to panic and freak out, and Judy went to go find some rocks. Ash considered his options, but decided to stay with Judy for now, since he had a crush on her. Judy found a huge rock, walked up behind Ash, and crushed his head in.

Ken Crinklehoff crouched in the crawl space under the cabin, lit only by his flashlight. He gently put his ear to the door above him and heard a muffled yell in the distance. It was Jeremy screaming for Liz to *get the fuck out of here*. Ken poked his head up through the door. This was not a cabin - it was a lab. The same translucent tubes full of black ooze were all around the room, going into the floor, and Ken saw the tubes were coming from small, coffin-shaped boxes. There was a desk littered with papers, a bulletin board, and a large wooden trunk. Ken heard a guttural scream cut short and looked out the window at the exact moment Liz Lonklin was stopped dead in her tracks by the decapitation from a massive metal claw. Having convinced himself that what he just saw could not have been real, Ken turned back around and investigated the scene. Ken found Articles of Organization for a new business called “Cole’s Orphanage - New School Under Modern Etiquette”. All the other papers were blueprints for an odd-looking gun, which seemed to have been recently completed. There were also plans for small, metal spheres, 1 inch in diameter, which were being placed into small human bodies. Ken took a wary glance at the small coffins. He opened one, and a black viscous goo began pouring out of it, onto the table and floor. Inside the coffin, there sat the body of a two year old that was not quite fully human looking, as if it was being 3D printed and wasn’t yet finished - like a face with a plastic bag over it. Ken freaked out and ran for the front door of the cabin.

Jeremy Pettimore ran desperately through the woods and eventually found Judy Crinklehoff walking toward him. Judy said she didn’t know what to do since the other girls left her alone. The two decided to head back to the ranger shack. Jeremy took the lead. Judy pulled out the machete she was hiding and lunged at the Pettimore boy, but she slipped on the muddy rocks below, fell face-first onto the machete, and split her skull wide open, enough for Jeremy to see a small, 1 inch in diameter, silver sphere in the middle of her head. Black ooze began to leak onto the trail, and Jeremy ran.

Ken stumbled out of the cabin and saw three figures approaching. Through the rain and darkness, a lightning strike in the distance revealed the trio: all wearing black suits with white shirts, two with black ties and one with a bolo tie, the tall one had buzzed blond hair, the man with the bolo was shorter and sported tight pants and a thick moustache, and last was a woman smiling a cold, vacant smile behind asymmetrical bangs covering one of her eyes. They saw Ken, and the woman began chanting. Ken turned to rush back into the cabin, his arm reached out for the door, and his hand phased into and through the wood. He felt an aberrant push in the back, and his body, too, was forced *into* the door. Ken Krinklehoff was trapped, halfway in and halfway out the entrance and exit of this cabin. His mind worked just long enough to watch the suits ransack the lab. One grabbed a bucket of water filled with fish to splash and repel the ooze. The other two took some papers and the trunk, and they left. But not before the woman chanted once more and ignited the cabin in unnatural flames. Ken Crinklehoff died burning, part of the cabin in the Contention Woods.

Jeremy Pettimore, now all alone, ran back to the ranger shack in the parking lot. He got to the Bronco with the keys he had nabbed earlier, but the car wouldn’t start. He got out, and in the heavy rain and darkness of night, he ran down the road toward town. Behind Jeremy, the black sedan drove furiously into view, and behind it, the four-wheeler. As they approached, the four-wheeler overtook the sedan and pulled up next to Jeremy as he desperately sprinted. Jeremy looked over, and the man who drove this ATV was pretty fit for his early 40s, and he wore a black suit with a white shirt and a bolo tie below a face with a badass mustache. He recognized the man as John Lee Pettimore the Third, his second cousin. The two came to a stop, and Jeremy waved and tried to hop on the four-wheeler. ***“John! John! Uncle John! Uncle John!”.*** John stopped, saw Jeremy, and his heart sank. ***“U- uncle John? Thank god you’re here. What’s wrong, Uncle John?”*** John Lee Pettimore the Third lifted a pistol, and put it to his second cousin’s head. Jeremy Pettimore, 14 years old, closed his eyes tight, shaking. He felt the gun against his head, trembling. And then there was nothing.

Episode 54

Now… back to the Contention boys. Clark Bishop, Keith Vigna, and John Lee Pettimore IV in the body of John Lee Pettimore III woke up, bodies fully in shock, ears ringing, bellies weirdly satisfied, and an uncomfortably savory smell in their nostrils as their eyes adjusted to see the inside of a mausoleum splattered in blood. They remembered everything that had happened to them before, but they seemed to be back in the same physical and mental state they were in just after meeting the chanting, cloaked Old Clark. According to Clark’s watch, it was the day of the funeral at 1PM… again.

Keith ripped his shirt off and found the word “Marvin” that had been burned into his chest had been crossed out. The other names (“Tilde” on their dominant palms, “Drew” on their backs, and “Maggie” on their left feet) were still branded on each of their bodies the same as before. They wondered whether Marvin would still be dead and theorized that they’d have to work their way through the other names as well. Would they have to kill Maggie? And Drew? And how would they find Tilde?

John called RoseMary, she picked up, and he immediately hung up. John recalled the vision he’d had the last time they were at the cemetery. Keith told the others about the visions he had while wearing his father’s watch. Clark suggested calling Maggie and reporting that he’d successfully killed Stan Manstein, but first he tried to summon Old Clark. He only succeeded in driving himself into a rage and he charged John.

When they sorted themselves out, the CPD3 exited the mausoleum and again encountered the old lady, who freaked out - she’d already seen them leave the tomb earlier. The gang of risen ex-cops scared her off and discussed the implications of this news. They considered just waiting around for their next iterations to come out of the mausoleum but decided instead to call Maggie.

The vision Clark received when he tried to summon himself became instantly clear in his mind: a candlelit stone room contained a hooded figure scribbling furiously into an ornately-decorated book made of strange leather. This figure was an elderly, decrepit Clark Bishop. There was a knock on the door and a voice called, “My Lord? My Lord?” as the door opened up. CUT TO a silver Accord flying down the highway driven by a frantic Maggie Cook. He saw her call him on her phone. Clark blinked away this unnatural vision, and suddenly, the phone in his pocket began to buzz.

Clark answered, and Maggie told him to get to the parking lot immediately to meet her. John and Keith joined, even though they disagreed with Clark about trusting her. Maggie sped into the parking lot and pulled up next to them. She tasked them with “taking out” a man named Bruce Robin, as he had gone “fully insane” and was a danger to the world at large. She was shook by the appearance of John Lee Pettimore III, and they quickly explained that whole situation. She did not take it well, and they had to calm her down. Clark grabbed the burner phone from his car and saw a text that read, “Your parents owned an artifact of immense power. Too much power for them to be trusted with.” He responded, “What artifact?”

Episode 55

Maggie asked her former co-workers to murder Bruce Robin, owner of BarCorp and former business partner of Keith's brother, Ferguson Beans. John began to question Maggie on how she was still alive, but the ringing of her cell phone cut off Maggie’s reply. As Clark rejoined the group, he noted a second cell phone vibrating from within the Chief's car. On the call, Maggie berated Leon, told him to do his fucking job, he needed to knock the dust off his knuckles because he knew what needed to be done.

She hung up and explained she never died, just had to disappear. She implied the body they'd found in the remains of her house was a decoy. Maggie tossed the officers a manila envelope, reminded them she was counting on this, and drove away.

The manila envelope had a manila folder inside labeled “Operation Hole Puncher: BarCorp.” It contained information on BarCorp, including its three subsidiaries: Jesus Christ Ministries, Health and Rehabilitation Unlimited, and The Learning Center. It also showed finances for the last 5 years, and profits had been steadily rising. The previous year, they made over $850 million (and paid zero in taxes), and they were projected to make over $2 billion in the current year. It was also noted that after being declared deceased, Ferguson Beans' majority share was split between his wife Stacy, daughter Francis, and the Mill on the Other Side of The City, which secured Bruce Robin as the majority owner. John mentioned he recently sold that cocaine they'd found in the storage units to Jesus Christ Ministries, a church camp just outside the city.

Clark told John they saw Marvin Glass split his body in half to reveal a silver ball inside his head. John explained his working theory was that all the officers might be Ball. He explained that upon the death of his original body, he burst out and went into John Lee Kevinmore's body. He believed this was possible because *he* was just a little silver ball. Clark described the actions of RoseMary in her final moments inside the flooded Glass office. John asserted her turn on Marvin may have been due to her infatuation with Marvin's son Jermaine Glass, the man who disappeared when he used the odd-looking gun.

After a quick confession from Keith detailing the murder of his own brother by proxy as well as the firsthand murder of Bruce Robin’s mother, the former Contention police officers traveled to Robin’s home address downtown in The City hoping to find personal files and/or Bruce Robin himself.

However, when they arrived they found police tape across the door of Robin's brownstone. The residence was wrecked and human excrement was strewn throughout. The stench was overwhelming. Spray paint covered the walls. It repeated the same number pattern over and over. 8118189520131181119. John checked upstairs. His hair stood on end with the feeling of a heavy presence. In a room deemed to be a former office, the same set of numbers was carved into the walls again and again and again on every surface in the room. Clark investigated what he thought might once have been the master bedroom and found various sleeping pallets. It was clear as many as 20 people had been sleeping in this room at one time.

John called The City PD under the cover of having tracked a drifter to this home. He requested any information they'd uncovered at the scene. The City officer shared that Bruce Robin went missing two days ago. His neighbors spoke about how crazy Bruce had been recently. He'd had all kinds of people coming in and out at all times of the day and night. The steep decline of Bruce Robin had been a rapid transformation.

On their way out to the car, they noted again the sickly green hue of The City around them. The putrid smell, the oppressive grays, the bloated and lifeless faces of the people on the streets, and - in contrast to all this - the beautiful blooming flowers on every corner and from every crack in the sidewalk. John asked a passerby why he was so pallid and corpse-like. The man explained that work at BarCorp had been hard as of late, though they'd just been given some days off. He felt the color was actually probably better now than it had been recently. BarCorp was, surprisingly, paying all employees time and half to take two weeks off. John asked why a big corporation like that would pay its staff to take time off? The man wasn't sure, but it might have to do with the new CEO. Bruce Robin announced he would renovate every building and provide everyone a livable wage, benefits, and better working hours. Clark asked what exactly BarCorp does. Do they sell something? The man asked Clark to pull anything out of his pockets. Clark produced a pen, and the man said BarCorp made it. Sure enough, the pen read *BarCorp* there along the side.

The party hatched a plan. Keith would call Bruce Robin directly, under the guise of commiseration over the death of Ferguson Beans. But a woman named Winifred Worth answered for Bruce Robin's office. Keith explained Ferguson Beans was his brother, to which Winifred expressed condolences. Keith requested to speak to Bruce to ask him some questions. Winifred promised she would pass along the questions to Bruce for him. Keith pressed her, he'd hoped to have a conversation with his late brother’s business partner. She insisted. While Bruce was currently in the office, he was currently unavailable. Keith found out Bruce's office was on the 17th floor and hung up. He then called the number for Ferguson's office, but he was greeted again by Winifred. Keith tried to disguise his identity as Ferguson, but he was immediately shut down by Winifred. Keith, caught in the act, just hung up. The group decided since they knew where Bruce Robin was, they would head that way and barge in as officers of the law to question him.

Episode 56

On the way to BARCorp, the fellas noticed both flowers and sickness everywhere. After a diversion to acquire blue windbreakers, coveralls, and fancy hats, they pulled up to the seventeen-story building and walked through the revolving doors, into a massive foyer with marble columns. A security guard and a receptionist stood at a large marble desk, behind which hung a giant mural of *Washington Crossing the Delaware,* but all the guns were replaced by flowers. The building directory showed only 12 of the 17 floors. John fast-talked the security guard, and the group found their way into the only elevator that actually went all the way to the 17th floor.

They went directly to 17 and were met straight away by a small, older woman with a shock of white hair. Winifred Worth wore a white satin blouse with black vertical stripes on the left-hand side, high-waisted pants with horizontal stripes on the right-hand side, white platform shoes with studded soles, and interconnected silver rings across her right hand. She knew they were the disgraced police officers from Contention, and she demanded to know their business. John attempted to persuade her to let them into Bruce Robin’s office. She was not convinced. John’s solution was to push this 71-year-old lady to the ground and holler for the others to run past. John called an ambulance for her and gave Keith’s name as the caller.

Keith picked the lock to get into Bruce’s office, which was in a state of disarray. A large bookcase had been ransacked. A conference table was absolutely covered in binders, files, and papers. Behind an equally cluttered desk, a panicked Bruce Robin was paced back and forth and muttered numbers to himself. He wore a disheveled but well-tailored suit, and his hair was a disaster. Bruce greeted them, and the officers asked him about the numbers. He denied he was even saying numbers and became aggravated when pushed.

They asked if he knew who Keith was. While Bruce considered this, they noticed his bleeding knuckles and the silver ring with a flat, blank top on his middle finger, exactly like the one they found at Jim Cook’s house. Keith revealed the ring he had tied around his neck with a shoestring, and Bruce’s eyes went wide with fear and excitement. He asked if they were with Myriad. Keith said yes, and put the ring on.

Bruce stared off above their heads through a curtain of unwashed hair and began chanting, “Ta w'l aleq'l.” Clark leapt across the desk, tackle-punched him, and knocked a hidden pistol out of his hand. But Bruce kept chanting. Keith tried to stomp on his arm to take the ring, but Robin used the momentum to pull Keith to the ground. John tried and failed to gag the chanting man with his own tie. Bruce threw Clark off of him and reached the fallen gun, chanting the whole time. Keith instinctively shot the once-again-armed CEO to protect Clark but it only wounded the businessman. John demanded Bruce stop chanting and went to check on Winifred. However, Bruce Robin completed the chant and promptly shot himself in the head.

Keith took the ring off Bruce’s limp finger. When he stood back up, he noticed John was writing numbers on the desk in blood. Clark stopped him - but John, strangely, wasn't aware he’d been writing any numbers. Suddenly, the doors to the office burst open and the trio realized they no longer stood in the places they’d just been standing. They were stark-naked and drenched in Bruce Robin’s blood. The numbers “218213518152914” were scrawled in dark red fluid on every surface in the office, and the gang had no recollection of their actions.

Episode 57

When the doors to the office busted open, three police officers barged in as John, Clark, and Keith became aware of their abruptly changed surroundings. Clark recognized the officer at the back, an attractive older man with grey hair, as Leon Simpson. Leon dropped two duffle bags on the ground and expeditiously executed the other two officers from behind. He then marched back out into the hallway and fired a single additional shot. Clark told the other two this newcomer was from The Circle of Knowledge. Leon came back, donned headphones and gloves, turned up some Outlaw Country, and began to clean the scene.

Inside one of the duffle bags, Clark found cleaning supplies and three clean City PD uniforms. Clark, John, and Keith cleaned themselves and suited up. Leon pulled papers from Bruce’s desk and stamped them with a copy of Bruce’s signature. These papers signed Bruce’s share of BARCorp over to The Mill On The Other Side Of The City. Among Bruce’s things, John found a note. It read, “She broke me open and all new things have the power to escort change in the future of good in order to break the cycle and find fulfillment in an unquestioning goodness that breaks the relentless tether holding this lie of a world withstanding itself. I can smell my past, I can hear the future, I am Joy. I am Destruction. I am Pure. Death to Myriad. 8118189520131181119.” They recognized the number from Bruce’s house, and finally broke the cipher. They found the numbers spelled “Harriet Marks,” a name they hadn’t come across.

Clark received a text on the mysterious burner phone that read, “The book your parents died for is still hidden in an undisclosed location.” He texted back, “What book? Where?”

A quick search for Harriet Marks revealed she was a pro-union activist studying at City State University who commited suicide in her dorm room just four days before, on December 2nd. Leon said they would go investigate her after they cleaned up. The group heard sirens and made a run for Leon’s car. After a destructive chase and a lethal getaway, Keith noticed Clark and John zoning out, muttering the number sequence. Keith described to Leon what happened in Bruce Robin’s office and what they’d worked out about the cipher. Leon showed Keith a picture of the inside of Harriet Marks’ dorm room. Spray painted all over the walls was a third sequence: “1522518195518”, the code for “Overseer.” Leon evangelized. *Clark is more than a man. He’s a god. He’s the savior.* A prophecy maintains Clark will go back in time and found The Circle of Knowledge.

Episode 58

John and Clark came to in a parking lot on CSU campus with Leon and Keith staring at them. Keith informed them they had just been chanting Bruce Robin's numbers. Then he handed them the folder Leon had given him. Inside were pictures of a crime scene in a dorm room. Numbers were spray painted on every surface. In the cipher, it read, “Overseer.” Clark bluntly asked Leon if he believed Clark was The Overseer and was met with an equally blunt “Yes.” Leon went on. He believed Clark would eventually go back in time and found The Circle of Knowledge.

The Contention officers informed Leon that an Old Clark had been poking and prodding at their lives recently. Leon seemed curious and asked them to explain further. They recalled the time Old Clark warned Drew something terrible would happen before the Chief’s house exploded. And how Old Clark had branded names into their skin with magic.

Leon proposed the group split up. John and Keith could head to the dorm room. He and Clark would go to the administration building. Leon explained while they're not sure what “it” is, “it” seemed to transfer from person to person. Bruce Robin got “it” from Harriet Marks, and Harriet Marks got “it” from The Overseer, based on the numbers in her dorm room. They needed to know why Clark had done this. Clark reminded them it's not him they’re talking about exactly, so maybe they could call Old Clark “Clarkold” to avoid confusion. The group took a picture of Clark and ran it through an aging app to show people on campus and ask if they'd seen Clarkold around. With that, the groups split off.

Leon began to drive away with Clark in the backseat, and Clark noticed Leon reach for a gun that looked like the tranquilizer gun he'd given Clark to coerce Agent Trent Chad. Before Leon could fire, Clark kicked the back of his seat and a tranq dart stuck the ceiling of the car. After a short struggle, Clark wrestled the gun away from Leon. He held the gun to the back of Leon's head with a strong *What the fuck?*

Leon explained he had hoped to knock Clark out. He was terrified something would happen to Clark, like a stray bullet. If Clark died, that could mean the world ends. Leon felt he needed to protect Clark at all costs. But Clark argued if he really was The Overseer, and he did go back to found The Circle of Knowledge, then this must all work out. In fact, he might be bulletproof now. In a pretty threatening tone, Clark reminded Leon he might be the one needing protection, as he didn't recall an Old Leon running around as Clarkold's right hand man.

Leon replied with a sigh. He said it was time. They really needed to go to Calm Comfy Campground. But Leon had been coerced. First, they could put Clark's invincibility theory to the test and finish out the investigation at CSU. So Leon Simpson swung the car back around and headed to the administration building they'd first set out for, before the failed kidnapping attempt.

John and Keith walked through the holiday-decoration-riddled CSU campus to Giffs House, Harriet Marks’ dormitory. The lobby was dark and vacant. John hopped on the computer behind the front desk. The desktop background was a promotional flyer for *The Jingle Ball* scheduled for that evening, December 6th, at CSU. The poster read, “follow the scavenger hunt to make your way to The Jingle Ball.” On the computer, John found the directory and discovered Harriet Marks and her roommate, Amelia Locke, lived in 328, across the hall from a ‘show dorm’ for tours to prospective students. They called the elevator, and the light that emanated from the open doors revealed countless unique number sequences scribbled all over the walls and floor of this building in materials ranging from spray paint to bodily fluids. And inside the elevator, the limp corpse of a student was slumped over itself. Her face was amorphous, smashed repeatedly until she was unrecognizable.

Back in the administration building, the campus seemed absolutely empty. It looked like Christmas itself had thrown up the decorations that adorned everything in sight. The lights of the administration building were off, but down the hall stood two figures. One mumbled a sequence of letters and numbers interrupted by desperate appeals requesting physical violence. In their City PD uniforms, the pair approached under the guise of officers looking for the records office.

In the elevator, John Lee Pettimore began to mumble and pulled a Sharpie from his pocket. He put the marker to the elevator wall and wrote the familiar cipher, “Bruce Robin.” The third floor was similarly dark and silent, and the doors to both 328 Giffs House and the show dorm room across the hall were open. The show dorm room was covered in numbers, like every other surface in this building, and there was an out-of-place Casio keyboard in the middle of the room with a sheet of music on the stand. However, instead of notes on the staff, the sheet music is made of little cartoon pictures: 7 eggs, a golf ball, a cat, a demon, and another egg. Keith pushed on a few of the keys and the electronic piano was set to make the sound of jingle bells. Keith put the silly sheet music in his pocket and continued investigating the display dorm. A window looked out on the overly festive campus. In the middle of the quad was a large, old bell tower. Keith ignored that and found a flyer for The Jingle Ball and written on the back was a math equation. The solution to this problem was 330, the number of the room in which he stood. Keith ignored that and headed across the hall to Harriet Marks’ room with the mumbling John in tow. In 328 Giffs House, Keith found trophies for riddle-solving competitions on the desk of Amelia Locke - a desk which clearly lacked a laptop. The charging cord and various USB accoutrement wreathed a rectangular negative space on its surface. On scrap paper, Keith found a handwritten note from Amelia that outlined her views on the suicide of her roommate. She clearly did not believe Harriet was suicidal, and she wrote she had a plan to figure out what actually happened. Keith went through Harriet’s things and found a tucked away sticky note with a two-point to-do-list. The first: “Research most unethical corporation in The City.” The second: “Who is The Overseer?”

Episode 60

Clark and Leon approached the two figures in the hall outside the Admin office. A short and slight freshman jumped up and poked a tall, well-dressed student with perfect hair. The little one begged to be hit, and the tall one calmly declined. Defeated, the short dude ran to a wall, slammed his head against it, and yelled that doing it himself just wasn’t the same. Clark and Leon approached, and the tall student calmly asked for a moment as he stared up at a banner above the office windows that read, “At the end of the 10th day, my true love had given me BLANK Giffs.”

Leon ignored the scene entirely and entered the unlocked administration office. The crazed, small student requested pain from Clark, who asked why the kid would want to be hit so badly? The student said he would love it and then suddenly started to spout some numbers off. Clark asked about the numbers The student didn’t recall saying any numbers. Clark hit him, and he crumpled to the floor in delight before scampering off into the darkness.

Clark asked if the tall, calm student was thinking of numbers at all. He said no. Leon reiterated the question and flipped on the lights, which revealed countless numbers covering the walls of the hall. The tall student affirmed he didn't even know the numbers were there, and he introduced himself as Donovan Westhaven. Donovan West-something explained he was just trying to work out the riddle on the banner. After some debate about how to solve the gift-counting riddle, Clark and Leon agreed to investigate the office.

The single computer was password protected. On the desk sat pictures of a woman in her early 20s holding trophies for scavenger hunts. The name on the trophies? Amelia Locke. There was also a photo of a group of students holding up a banner that said “Best RA – Giffs House.” Clark suggested their best bet would be to head to Locke’s dorm. Donovan asked if he could tag along. He would, after all, need help solving the other riddles.

On the way to Giffs house, they could hear strange whoops and hollers from unseen people all over the campus. Inside Giffs house, the lights were out. Clark motioned for Leon to investigate the receptionist's computer while Clark hollered a “Hello!?” down the empty hall.

Donovan wandered into a smaller hallway, and lights suddenly came on. Numbers covered everything. From behind a door at the end of this hall came a desperate, “NO! NO! NO!” followed by a sequence of numbers. The door cracked slightly a voice, very creepily, reached out, “please turn out the lights.” Donavan obliged and slowly backed out of the hallway. A genuine “thank you” oozed from the room.

Clark warned Donovan that if he heard numbers like that, he might want to close his ears. But Clark still wasn't sure how exactly this thing spread, so he went to ask Leon, who already put on noise canceling headphones. Clark tapped him on the shoulder and Leon tapped the computer screen that showed the room number of Amelia Locke and her roommate, Harriet Marks.

When asked, Donovan said people had been shouting numbers at him constantly. Clark wondered if he'd had any blackouts or gaps in his memory, but Donovan replied no, he felt pretty good actually. Clark pondered aloud whether Donovan might be the thing they were looking for. It seemed like he could be immune. The trio headed up to Amelia and Harriet’s room on the 3rd floor.

Clark Bishop and Donovan West-erfuck approached 328 Giffs House and found John and Keith already there. John snapped out of a haze as they entered and mumbled something about being able to do anything. Keith explained they'd come across a dead body in the elevator when John went blank and started writing the Bruce Robin numbers. Clark asked John if he remembered writing the numbers, and John asked if Clark had ever felt “immense.”

Clark introduced Donovan to John and Keith and revealed there was a chance Donovan was the key to all this, that he might be immune to the numbers. John walked directly into a wall and confessed he was “still working out the kinks.”

The reconvened team put their heads together on the riddle from the banner and came up with 330 - the room across the hall where Keith already found a piece of paper that depicted illustrations of 7 eggs, a golf ball, a cat, a demon, and another egg set upon a music staff atop a Casio keyboard.

Keith then presented a to-do list from Harriet's desk. It said “1. Research the most unethical corporation in the city. 2. Who is the Overseer?” He also had a note from Amelia's desk where she wrote she didn't believe Harriet would commit suicide and she was going to get to the bottom of it.

They hit the first letters of each cartoon as notes on the Casio keyboard - it’s the melody of *Jingle Bells*. Out through the window of 330 Giffs House they watched the bell tower in the center of the CSU campus light up in all its holiday glory.

Episode 61

This not-so-subtle clue led the party to a pleasant stroll through campus, admiring the crisp white snow, festive decorations, and constant screaming on their way to the lit, old bell tower.

They climbed the spiral staircase behind Keith, who warned them to close their eyes to not look at the corpse of an almost-retired security guard. Some of them listened. The interior of the bell tower, and the corpse, were also covered in numbers. At the top of the tower, they met an attractive young woman named Chamois Chameleon, who recited the numbers for *Harriet Marks* as she desperately tried to get onto the roof of the tower. Keith saw a sleigh lit up across the way which indicated The Jingle Ball was in the Accord Student Center. John accidentally let slip to Leon that at least some of them might possibly also *be* Ball. Keith and John helped Chamois out of the bell tower and onto the roof (so she could get higher), and the group headed off across campus to go to The Jingle Ball.

On the journey, a path of colorful string lights led to a sitting area which contained a ripe corpse and a frantic dancer, who pointed to the student union. They entered the Accord Student Center on the middle floor of a three-story atrium filled with the pure chaos of wholly obsessive students and faculty. On their level, a girl shaved a team of live reindeer with a blunt knife and glued the fur to herself. On the floor below, a pair of muscular young men in Santa outfits diligently wrapped a student in wrapping paper with duct tape and force. Above, an older woman in a bathrobe and an aviator hat climbed a garland to the top floor. A huge disco ball in a Santa hat hung from the middle of the domed ceiling. On the lower level, a naked man used a mop and bucket full of paint to write out numbers. An ice-skating rink contained three people dressed as elves. They placed carrots in various locations on a life-size snowman model and laughed hysterically. A young woman in a t-shirt that identified her as a Giff’s House RA threw a laptop in the air over and over again while spinning around. A man doing squats on top of Santa’s throne suddenly stopped. He looked out, wild-eyed, and screamed, “TA W’L ALEQ’L. TA W’L ALEQ’L”.

John, with the power in his mind, commanded the chanting man to stop, unfortunately, to no avail. Keith shot the guy, and he collapsed into the Santa Claus throne. However, he was not dead and continued to chant. The gunshot grabbed the attention of the assembly in the atrium, and they changed their behaviors. The woman with the fur sharpened the reindeer’s antlers, the Santa twins wrapped each other instead of the other student, the ascending woman climbed faster, the elves took off their skates, and the girl with the laptop threw it even higher than before.

John accidentally shot two reindeer. Clark ran toward the laptop girl. Keith shot one of the Santa twins to death. Leon gave Donovan a gun and escorted him to a safe spot. Suddenly, the frenzied throng froze - and began the chant. The man in Santa’s chair impaled himself on the post of the throne. The laptop landed on the side of the spinning woman’s head and knocked her out cold. Clark grabbed the laptop and checked the unconscious RA’s vitals. As the rest of the deranged, chanting party executed their elaborate and festive suicides, Amelia Locke took her last breath in Clark’s arms.

Episode 62

The atrium of the Accord Student Center was a suddenly still, disgusting mess. The PA crossfaded out of the classic mashup of “Wonderful Christmas Time” by Sir Paul McCartney and “Grown Up” by Danny Brown, replaced by a horrifying rendition of “Santa Baby” by Tyler the Creator. John and Clark fell back into their unnatural malaise and scrawled the numbers for Bruce Robin all over whatever mess they sat in. Leon Simpson, for the first time, fell to the ground to write out a sequence of numbers. Donovan was still conscious and present, but absolutely shook. Keith solved Leon Simpson’s new cipher. The solve, Ben Smith, who Keith recognized after a quick Google search, happened to be the corpse nearest the now-dazed member of The Circle of Knowledge.

Still the only team member up and at ‘em, Keith opened Amelia Locke’s laptop. He found screenshots from the CSU Biology Department Twitter account. The first read, “A few of us who are not infected are quarantined in the lab. Please call 911. Our calls are not going through.” The second was in all caps, “Call 911. CSU campus is infected with a virus. Please help. We are trapped. Call 911.” And the final tweet pleaded, “We’re still quarantined in the lab. If you are the person or entity scrubbing this page, please have a heart. We are running low on supplies.” There were also two videos in small windows open on the desktop. One showed Harriet Marks sitting in her dorm room. The other was a dark and distorted picture with only a lit candle in frame.

Clark and John snapped back to reality, but Leon Simpson began dancing like his life depended on it. Keith showed Clark the laptop, but Clark was far more interested in the glow than the content. Leon’s phone went off, and he continued to boogie down with no concern for his surroundings. Due to his groove, the buzzing flip phone popped out of Simpson’s trousers. Clark grabbed it for the glow, but noticed 25 missed calls and an interesting text thread. Responding to, “How’s it going?” Leon sent, “The secretary is stubborn. Looking for another option.” That was the last outgoing message, but there was a barrage of words from the other side. In short stabs, they wrote, “I don’t want excuses. Pick up. Okay, I sent them. TO will be ready for extraction. Don’t forget to get the signatures. ETA? (?) Jesus Christ. What is going on? (???)” before the longer, final message, “If He doesn’t get here in time, this is all over. Everything we’ve worked for. Everything that exists. Just gone. For what? Your fucking conscience? Morality won’t save us.” They all assumed it was Maggie on the other end, so Clark responded, “Hey, it’s Clark.”

Donovan led the group to Glass Hall, which housed the biology lab. Clark received a text on his mysterious burner. He had asked, “What book? Where?” and this message read, “Your book. Calm Comfy Campground.” Leon’s phone also received a text. It said, “Fuck. What did you do?” From both phones, Clark Bishop sent the question, “Who is this?” And on both phones, he got the same response. “Destiny.”

Episode 63

The walk across campus was sountracked by a cacophony of guttural moans which danced on the cold December winds. In the quad, they saw Chamois Chameleon as she steadied herself on the Santa-fied Minion blowup atop the bell tower and screamed about getting even higher. In the far distance, the chopping of helicopter blades slowly but surely grew louder and louder. Given the option between a longer lit path and a shorter one in darkness, Clark persuaded the group to stay in the light.

Around a well-lit corner, an old man moaned and took a citrus peeler to his frail fingers. Keith saw this horror and lost it again. The group, sans Vigna, deciphered the old man’s number sequence and learned the name belonged to a coworker who hanged himself in front of this bloody, mad old-timer. They continued on to Glass Hall, Keith came to, and they found a child meticulously sticking syringes into a somehow unmoving student’s eyeballs. With that, John and Keith were lost in their numbers once again.

Inside Glass Hall, the sounds of a few deranged folk bounced and echoed through the halls. A trail of blood slowly dripped down the stairwell, which had a few bloody screwdrivers scattered about it. On their way down the wet, sticky stairs to the biology lab, Keith Vigna tripped, fell, and knocked something loose in his head. He popped up, ecstatic, and grabbed what he thought were handfuls of cash, but were, in reality, handfuls of bloody screwdrivers. He stuffed them into all of his pockets and, for good measure, pulled a few out of a woman’s corpse while he smiled and yelled they were rich.

Keith Vigna then crammed his finger deep into his nose and sniffed with all of his lungs. Eyes wide, he shoved his finger into Clark Bishop’s nose, who did not expect a heaping bump of pure cocaine. Clark immediately went blank. But instead of numbers, he chanted, “ta w’l aleq’l.”

Episode 64

In the basement of Glass Hall, the team stood just outside of the biology lab. Keith Vigna collected bloody screwdrivers he thought were cash. John Lee Pettimore talked down to everyone like a god might. Donovan West-er-something-or-other panicked. Leon Simpson boogied. And Clark Bishop chanted.

The lights went out, and the red emergency lights activated. An ominous glow illuminated the party as the entrance of Glass Hall burst open. Orders were shouted. Crazed voices were silenced. Clark grabbed one of Keith’s dripping screwdrivers. A small canister was tossed down the stairs and a thick gas came pouring out of it. Clark sharpened his screwdriver. Keith and Donovan rushed into the lab. Leon danced. Down the stairs stormed a squad in tactical gear. They shouted and tossed more gas canisters. Clark jammed the sharpened screwdriver into his eye until the handle was flush with his socket. Blood dripped down his face, and Clark Bishop crumpled to the ground, limp and lifeless. John stared at the scene, began chanting, and ran into the lab.

Inside, a man and a woman in lab coats sat, turned away, at a desk. The woman greeted the group and asked if they knew how to fix the situation. Back in the hallway, Leon started chanting and fell to the ground, surrounded by the tactical squad. John aimed his gun at the door and waited for the incursion. Barbara, the woman in the lab coat, insisted that she and Phillip were just fine, much like Donovan Whatever-haven. She asked Phillip to explain, but he, uh, didn’t move.

Donovan, worried he might be the only sane person left on Earth, looked to John for help. But John was turning his firearm on himself. So Donovan fired at John to try to disable him from committing suicide, but he missed and sent a bullet right into the CSU biology department’s prized antivirus machine. Barbara turned Phillip’s chair around so he could see this madness, but he held his own eyeballs in his hands, and dried blood covered his face below his empty eye sockets.

The raid from the tactical squad began, smoke filled the lab, John looked around the room and smiled. Finally at peace, John Lee Pettimore the Thirth shot himself in the head. Keith prepared for a showdown, and Donovan went to his knees, submitted, and asked for help. One of the infiltrating squad members placed an oxygen mask on Donovan, and he immediately fell asleep. But high on disillusion and cocaine, Keith Vigna murdered two of the troops with bloody screwdrivers before they eventually ended his life.

EDIT IN 52:00 - END.

* + The camera leaves the lab past the corpses in the hallway. Teams of tactical people are transporting bodies into prison busses. The sky is littered with unmarked black helicopters. Black SUVs heading toward a tall building in The City skyline. A massive spherical object is climbing it. We swoop down into the back of a van heading toward the pier. The broken and upgraded and dead and metal corpses of John and Vigna are jostling around in the posterior of the van. They are brought to the City Asylum. Inside the doors, 2 familiar guards, tall and overweight with prominent facial scarring.
  + We move down through the floor, we are looking through a long line of the bottoms of feet. The bodies are covered in sheets. We come to a group of 4 feet. Both right feet are blank. Both left feet have dead skin in the shape of the circle of knowledge. But one left foot has the name “Maggie” burnt on top of the seven circles.
  + A small dark room holds Donovan Westhaven. He awakens slowly. Bleeps and bloops of machines that are connected to him. Donovan is having his blood drawn. A screen comes on. It’s a freeze frame of a webcam video: it’s Harriet Marks. The video starts, she is mid chant “Towil Alicool” At the bottom of the screen, a barrel of a gun comes up. She squeezes the trigger. Donovan looks at her dorm room covered in blood. A man comes out of the darkness of the room, he has a black suit and white shirt, black tie. “I need you to tell me everything that happened.”
  + Donovan : “... Okay.”

**Episode 65**

Pledge Drive: Keith’s First Day

**Episode 66 - 72**

The tops of trees, thick enough to obscure any view of what was below, covered in a layer of kudzu, seemed to go on endlessly. Up and down, over hills and valleys, mountains and gorges, there was nothing but dense, verdant forest. A circular, calm lake found itself somewhere in the midst of this lush wilderness and, in the middle of that lake, a small island, with less than a quarter mile from shore to shore. A long wooden dock on the north side of the island led to a charming, two story boathouse with six well-kept cedar canoes tied up below the second story apartment. If the island was the face of a clock, that dock was at high noon. There were six cute, cozy little cottages evenly dispersed along the shore of the island at 1 o'clock, 3 o’ clock, 5 o’ clock, 7 o’ clock, 9 o’ clock, and 11 o’ clock. Five of the six cottages were in pristine condition. The 11 o’ clock place might have been too, but it was impossible to tell from the outside since the entire building was covered by a massive blue tarp. Truly mastercraft landscaping surrounded each of these cottages. Stunningly gorgeous flowers in every shade and shape filled varied gardens and planters that somehow both overran the terrain and complemented it perfectly. Each cottage had a cobblestone walkway, lined on either side by these lovely flowerbeds, and the walkways all made their way to the center of the island, where a large, equally cute and cozy, hexagonal building sat. There was a small welcome sign on the south side of this building, right at six o'clock. It read: Welcome to Calm Comfy Campground.

The Circle of Knowledge used this land, isolated by both geography and some sort of unnatural perimeter, to execute a brainchild of Jim Cook called OPERATION HOLE PUNCHER. This operation utilized the potent pheromone from their newly developed, experimental family of flowers named Sanferra Blom. This pheromone made the uninoculated unnaturally suggestable. The targets of this mission were so malleable, entire backstories could be prescribed in order to extract specific information.

Roger Fairfield, an archeologist with access to a new excavation site designated The Nameless City, was made to believe he was married to a woman named Angela - actually played by Anne Love. Alan Grimes, a child trafficker with government contracts, was convinced a boy from one of his warehouses was an Artificial Intelligence. Each mark had something The Circle of Knowledge wanted. Charles Digby had enough compromising evidence to blackmail every important person in The City. Martin Cupertino was in the midst of creating CUBE, the future of personal technology.

Pliable guests were duped into signing extensive contracts. The aim of OPERATION HOLE PUNCHER was to acquire as much information and access as possible. But the system didn’t always work smoothly. Groups would sometimes trigger reality for each other. They would need to be reset. With Fairfield, the Grimes, Digby, and Cupertino - even the fifth reset didn’t quite stick. And Cupertino somehow escaped before the sixth reset. He was an anomaly.

And, of course, there were some folks who refused to share their secrets regardless of their altered state. A completely random example would be Eunice and Gerry Bishop, who (at the time) possessed a rare and specifically sought-after book. No matter what Jim Cook, Leon Simpson, and Anne Love tried (friendship, torture, worse…), the Bishops never surrendered their knowledge of where The Book was hidden.

This is the kind of environment in which young Maggie Cook was raised. She quickly found her life much more interesting when the victims suspected or saw reality through their flower-induced haze. So she began to play her own games with the temporary tenants. It started innocently enough - she would talk to Circle of Knowledge members when they were undercover with a mark. Then she planted walkie talkies in the cottages to taunt the visitors. But little Maggie eventually took it upon herself to actually inoculate guests while they slept. She was bored. And some kids just like to watch the chaos they’ve created.

She watched from the roof of a cottage the night she first saw the thing that lived in the brackish waters of Lake Calm. The six of them paddled the three canoes like their lives depended on it. Jack Russell always said, “two to a canoe.” She wondered if it was the last thing he said.

An unspeakable worm-like abomination erupted above the surface of the water. The thing rose ten feet out of the water. It was tube-like, covered in a squamous, black, partially translucent membrane. Its body was segmented, and toxically green pulsating arteries and veins were visible through its thin-looking exterior. It had no identifiable eyes or nose. Its cavernous, circular mouths - one sat just inside the other - were lined with hooked teeth and it spit out a saliva that was somehow darker than black. From its maw, a sharp stylet protruded, like something between a tongue and a noodle-like needle. It plunged down, attached to the top of Jack Russell’s head, and ripped him up and out of the back of the canoe. The thing sucked the short, portly man into its round, teeth encircled mouth before it slipped quickly and quietly back into the pitch black water of Lake Calm.

She half-expected Jack Russell to be standing at six o’ clock the next day with that dumb, blank expression on his face like all the others would after the reset. She liked watching their faces change. It was impossible to tell, even for her, if it was their last time being greeted by the sign, “Welcome to Calm Comfy Campground.”

**Episode 73**

Q&A

**Episode 74**

Contention Creek Critter Coalition

**Episode 75**

Q&A and Plot Talk

**Episode 76**

John Lee Pettimore the Fourth, Clark Bishop, and Keith Vigna felt eyes on them, all over them. Outside their own bodies, floating in this vast nothingness, they saw Keith Vigna open a door and Tilde B Mitchell was there on the other side, curled up in the fetal position, and her body began deteriorating hastily like she had leprosy in timelapse, however she grew larger with each passing moment. Clark Bishop handed an old piece of parchment to a young boy with a balloon-shaped head and eyes so dark that the irises looked black and immediately the boy's feet caught fire and the fire grew and grew to consume the young black-eyed boy and three voices cried out in pain. John Lee Pettimore IV, crouched down, stared at a television - a blank white screen. He reached out and touched the screen like Vanna White, but instead of a letter popping up, Clark Bishops parents, Eunice and Gerry, the size of action figures, jumped out of the television screen and ran up John Lee Pettimore IV’s arm, climbed his shoulder and flinged themselves into John’s head. It looked like the Bishops were going to disappear right into Pettimore’s brain, but they both got stuck halfway in, their legs writhed about and flailed in this neverending dreamscape. Oily, viscous sludge began dripping and then sprayed out of John Lee Pettimore IV’s head where the Bishops had lodged themselves and the ooze began collecting on a ground below, then made of light, and the ooze dripped, dripped, dripped, and then poured until a laminar flow connected the head of John Lee Pettimore IV to a pool of this inky substance that began shaping itself into a large saucer, but as the pool grew, the walls began rising outward, creating an imposingly colossal bowl, and our view was forced to back up leagues as this shape continued to form, a mirror of what was then below, the miniscule body of John Lee Pettimore in the far distance continued to fill this thing’s final form, an incomprehensibly massive sphere. And it continued to grow and grow and then…

The three contention boys woke up in the mausoleum, for the third time, in shock, cursed with the memories of their recent trip to City State University. Their stomachs were strangely full, their ears rang, and their eyes adjusted to the dark, cold tomb. A turned-over coffin sat next to a pool of blood on the ground. John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth, in black tactical gear, Keith Vigna in his bright polo and boat shoes, and Clark Bishop in an old Contention PD uniform - all felt the searing pain where names had been burned into their skin. Marvin, on each chest, was still crossed out. Maggie, on the sole of each left foot, was now crossed out as well. The other two names, on their backs and inside their dominant hands, read respectively, Drew and Tilde.

It was 3PM on December 6th. 2 hours had passed since their last experience waking up next to Ari Manstein’s corpse. They walked out into the light, past the three downed androids near the crawfish boil, and decided to return to Contention, determined to cross Drew off their list.

As they departed from the funeral setting, the massive, gaunt creature reappeared screaming, and they took off running. At the entrance, they ran into the old woman in the wheelchair. With massive, deranged eyes she sobbed at the sight of the repeating men. John Lee Kevinmore pushed her wheelchair toward the parking lot. The creature had no hair, big red pupils, eye slits that opened from the bottom, and wore a familiar black suit. It cried out into the sky as it pursued the group from behind. John gave the old woman his gun as they approached the empty parking lot. Empty, that is, until a Red 2001 Mitsubishi Eclipse drifted across the lot, toward them. And all could see, behind the wheel sat Drew Andrews, the Baby Drewver.

Behind them, the creature spoke, and it somehow forced everyone to freeze in place. Their bodies locked and they turned to face the creature. It didn’t speak aloud, but they heard It inside their heads. It apologized, and spoke of a glitch. There could not be two Clark Bishops. The creature addressed each former officer by name and revealed Keith's full name: Ashley Keith Beans. He became flustered and pulled his gun, but could not fire. Clark's face turned red with rage, unable to move, and Kevinmore twitched helplessly. The creature thought inside their heads, implored them to not be afraid, and a calming wave overtook each upset man. The old woman, finally at peace, closed her eyes and exhaled for the last time. Drew whipped the car around, saw the creature, and screeched to a stop a few feet away.

The creature repeated itself in their minds. It sought information on the Clark glitch, and was willing to trade knowledge. It introduced itself as 43629, DC FBI, and It confirmed It was alien, better than human, from Myriad. Keith pulled out the ring they retrieved from Jim Cook’s house and claimed to be Jim trapped in Keith's body. The creature from Myriad was ecstatic to hear this news and was quick to communicate something in Its strange manner to, seemingly, no one in sight. When Clark asked how Jim and the creature knew each other, it confirmed they worked together at Myriad. John convinced 43629 to reveal more information about Its discreet coworker so they could do something nice for him on his birthday. The creature obliged. Jim's birthday was on December 1st, and he always visited Prayerie Pie in The City. The creature asked if Jim was in Keith's body to repair the relationship between Myriad and Just James in regards to Operation Sanferra Blom. He said yes, Clark told the creature what they knew about Clarkold, and the alien reached out its long arm toward the group to wipe their memories of this conversation. It didn’t work. But believing it had, 43629 turned and left.

As Drew pulled around in front of the group, he leaned out the window, a bit too cool for Drew, "Hello Contention Police officers, please, get in the car and come with me."

**Episode 77**

The gang, excited to see Drew, hopped in and took off. Drew let them know he had been unable to receive any calls or texts due to having gotten wet, which destroyed his phone. The Contention boys explain John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth’s whole situation, that they've killed or soon will kill Marvin Glass, and that Keith killed The Duke, which was actually Keith’s brother, Ferguson Beans.

Drew ran down the current state of Contention. Pastor Adam Cane (AKA "Daddy") took control of the town. The First Creek Family of Contention created a network of puddles for the survivors to hop into if they see the residue, which only animals, kids and insane people can see. They captured the ooze using fish, and Daddy Pastor Cane collected it in a central location.

They hatched a plan to grab the watch from Keith's room at Hotel Motel, but after extensive questioning, the boys smelled something fishy in Drew's attitude and speech. John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth's eyes rolled into the back of his head, and he thought real hard about whether or not they should trust Drew.

Deep in the void of John’s memories, where they reached out and met the collective unconscious, John saw a reflection of his father, John Lee Pettimore III, in a blank television screen, but he was much younger than the body John currently inhabited back in reality. The TV turned on, and the screen showed the Contention Police Station as it was last seen, an absolute wreck, with water pooled everywhere.

The channel changed. Jim Cook briefed three people, and John recognized the faces from the file in Marvin Glass' compound labeled K Cell: Kyle, Karen, and Kevin. Kyle, the unknown who died at Kevin’s forced hand. Karen, also known as Ann Love, the woman who killed Clark Bishop’s parents. And Kevin, John’s daddy, John Lee Pettimore III. On the television screen, Jim called Karen over to speak privately...and the channel changed.

Back in the mess of a police department, Drew leaned on a plastic service cart and headed to the evidence locker. He loaded up the Radio, the Helmet, and a briefcase that contained 5 million dollars, his cut from the deal with The Duke.

The channel changed again. Drew pushed the loaded cart up through the now emptied sanctuary of The First Church of Contention. The TV turned off with a click. The charcoal glass of the screen rolled down like a car window, as Karen screamed, "WHERE IS IT?!"

Clark's parents, Eustace and Jerry Bishop, at gunpoint, refused to tell Anne Love what she wanted to know. Behind the lowered screen of the television sat a book made of strange, uncured leather, with hair, and maybe a few freckles? John blinked. The television screen suddenly looked completely normal again. He stared at his father's reflection. Karen laughed maniacally as she shoved the gun into Jerry's mouth. She forced Eustace to watch. John felt a decision being made inside himself. Kevin turned to Karen, “the book isn't here.” Karen's eyes lit up as she began chanting in an alien, ancient tongue, and Clark's parents began to rise off the thick carpet on the floor of their living room.

John's vision, again, changed perspective completely. A man's left hand was outstretched, a trickle of red flowed across the soft skin. Suddenly, Drew leaned in and kissed a ring on a finger that dripped with blood.

John came to in the car and asked Drew to pull over as convincingly as he could without arousing suspicion, which amounted to pleading and saying he was about to shit his pants. After some resistance, Drew pulled off down a quiet road next to an empty corn field, and as soon as the car stopped, John pulled out his gun and aimed it at Drew. John demanded the keys, and had Clark put him in handcuffs.

John explained his vision as they gave him a pat down. Drew confessed he was tortured and forced to give the items to the church. In their search, they discovered a small, cheap piece of carpet in Drew’s pocket. Apparently, he would intentionally choke himself with it in order to see things he shouldn't be able to. Apparently, that's how he was able to find the boys at the City Cemetery. Keith shoved the carpet in Drew's mouth and said Tilde B. Mitchell. Drew choked for a few minutes. When he caught his breath, he told them she was still alive, but she was trapped somewhere she couldn't escape.

In the distance, Drew noticed a black lab bounding up to them. With reckless joy, he screamed out, "Tyler!"

**Episode 78**

Now, Tyler, a black lab that belonged to councilwoman Carrie Pages, had gone missing on December 2nd. And Drew's face brimmed with affection as he gushed that Tyler was the bestest dog that had ever existed and that he was afraid Tyler had been eaten by homeless people. Clark noticed the slip up. Drew repeated verbatim what councilwoman Carrie Pages had said several days before. Keith tricked Drew into admitting she was, in fact, Carrie Pages. Exposed, Drew Carrie spilled the details about how they switched bodies at the church with the radio, under Daddy Cane's direction.

The Contention boys struck a deal with Drew Carrie - she would be a double agent for them. They threw the handcuffed Drew Carrie into the trunk and took off. Tyler, the black lab, sat comfortably in the passenger seat. Their destination? Hotel Motel. Their goal? Acquire the watch in Keith’s room safe that he took off his dead brother’s wrist. The same watch their father, William Beans, had given Ferguson so many years before.

As they approached Contention, they reached a blockade made of church pews with a sign that pointed off to the side and indicated the path of a detour. The group pulled over, continued on foot, and left Drew Carrie in the trunk.

Unsurreptitiously, the boys traveled along the highway. In the distant skyline, a massive wall of water surrounded the property of The First Church of Contention. Clark stared. He couldn’t contain his obsession with the fish flopping around inside this enormous, unnatural water wall.

At Hotel Motel, all of the doors were open. A dunking booth sat in the middle of the parking lot. And a young, larger boy with round cheeks sat precariously atop the trapdoor style chair. He stuffed his face with cheesy ziti and surveyed the area. This om-nom-y lookout was easily fooled by Keith’s quick disguise - mud spread across his face like a beard.

The inside of Keith's room at Hotel Motel was ransacked, but, luckily, his safe, and the watch inside it, had remained hidden. He stuffed the watch in his pocket and left. But when Keith rejoined the group, he handed the watch to John, who promptly put it on.

As the watch slid on, John's consciousness phased out of reality, like a TV changed channels. He found himself in Contention, as it was in the 1800's. All the wet grass suddenly dried, the dirt turned to dust. He saw a man face down in the dust, unmoving. Suddenly, he saw a mostly buried metal door with an inscription that read: Pettimore, Forevermore. The watch slid off. John shared his experience with the others, and slapped the watch on Clark, who saw the same foreboding vision, but instead of John's door, Clark saw Chief Maggie Cook's house floating in the air, his door buried within, and the inscription read: 1522518195518, the numbers for The Overseer. Another watch swap. Keith saw the same scene in the Old West, just outside the new town of Contention. He saw a man face down in the dust, unmoving. He saw his hands tremble, and he rolled the body over. The man was dead. A tri folded piece of parchment fell out of the man's pocket. It was a job advertisement that read, "We is hiring able bodies, readying untapped site, plenty of work, hesitate not."

**Episode 79**

The watch slid off Keith's arm, and he let out a small scream. Clark tripped over the edge of sanity and pinned Keith to the ground. He ripped off the watch and threw it away, but John grabbed it and slapped it back on his own wrist.

The watch traded hands several more times, back and forth, before they found out that by joining hands, they could all share the foreboding sights.

They saw Tilde B Mitchell walk slowly backwards into Beans pond, steadily, until the water rose above her head and she disappeared from sight.

The channel changed. They sat in a tavern, their own face reflected in the mirror behind the bar, but they wore the thick, hand stitched clothes of the dead man from out on the dusty road. The barmaid refilled their glass and attempted some friendly small talk. "So, you're the new miner in town, who wrote ahead looking for a room?" The three men, each in their own vision, affirmed her query with a nod. "Well, welcome to Contention, Silas Cole!"

Another channel change. A hooded figure lurked in the shadows. Suddenly, light flooded in and illuminated a decrepit and haggard Clark Bishop. Inside this tomb, he read a strange book made from uncured leather. Blood dripped from the spine. A tall, gaunt creature entered and croaked out, in its unnatural speech, "Hello Subject 1522518195518, please give me the book!" The two figures charged each other, and a blinding light cleansed the interior of the tomb. Just then, the three Contention officers entered the empty mausoleum. They carried the casket of Ari Manstein. They sat it down gently, and closed the door behind them as they left.

After a bright flash of light, the scene changed. Three individuals, two humans and one towering translucent creature in a black suit, stood in an old, abandoned warehouse. Moonlight streamed in from the cracks and holes in the roof and reflected in puddles of stagnant water on the ground. The creature from Myriad handed a manilla envelope to the two humans, a man and a woman. Inside, there was a drawing on a small piece of paper. It was a circle, encircled by six circles. Another bright flash of light. James the Mill Worker dragged these two, now lifeless bodies. From above, they saw the two corpses at the bottom of a man-made pit. And then there was a time lapse of the bodies as they bloated and changed color - until Clark Bishop fell into the pit. A final flash of light revealed Chief Maggie Cook. She gave orders to a looming, overweight man in an all black combat uniform. He had a large scar over his right eye. Charged with his mission, the android created by Myriad headed off to James the Mill Worker’s house.

After the visions from William Beans’ watch, they returned to the real world and stepped back from each other. Clark saw the black ooze pouring out of John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth. It dripped from his eyes, ears, and mouth, all the way down to his hands. It was on Clark and Keith’s too, and a string of ooze bridged all six of their hands, drizzled down, and collected on the ground. It moved toward Clark, but he blinked and it was gone.

A truck nearby idled, and a man's voice hollered, "Alright, come on out of there, Randy! We can do this the easy way, or you can disappear! How much worse can it possibly get, you don't wanna give Daddy a shot? He can go back, and fix everything back to normal! We need more bodies, Randy!"

Keith recognized the voice of Terrance Elizabeth Licker, from Licker's Liquors, as he shouted at Randy Angst. Keith Vigna, angry, relayed that Licker had shorted him $3 and shook up his beer. They headed toward the voice, guns out, with Vigna in front.

Keith made his way to the side of the house and peeked at the idle truck. The truck bed, layered with tarps, was filled with water and fish, as well as Jimmy Sanders, the manager of Subtropolis, John Lee Pettimore's cousin, who called in the oil spill several days earlier. His eyes were wide and wild, and he muttered something about a number 4 with no tomato.

Keith ran for the keys of the truck and turned it off. John popped out to get Jimmy’s attention, and the hippy’s eyes widened. Terrified at the sight of John, he dipped down into the water.

Clark looked into the living room and watched T. Licker and another man, Luca “Fade” Fadziewicz, shove Randy Angst down onto the carpet. When the truck shut off, the two men turned their attention outside.

**Episode 80**

Inside the truck, Keith opened the glovebox and found a Mag-lite and a folded up picture of himself, Keith Vigna, with an inscription that read, “Collect Alive”. John attempted to pull Jimmy Sanders out of the water, but Jimmy dove right back in.

Fade and Luca saw John and Keith as they exited the house. Fade approached Keith, crowbar drawn, and Luca reached into his back pocket. Clark crept inside and told Randy Angst to find cover. Keith drew his gun, pointed it at his own head, and threatened to fire if they moved. John, with no grace whatsoever, shot Fade in the shoulder, yelled to drop their weapons, and used the truck as cover. Luca dropped the crowbar and left a trail of blood along the white paint as he slumped back into the garage door and then down onto the driveway. Terrance Licker pressed his gun against his own head, “Think you can play mind games with me?” Clark sprang from behind, grabbed the gun from T Licker, and wrestled him to the ground. Keith smashed Terrance in the mouth with his own mag-lite and sent teeth flying out into Randy Angst’s front yard. John zip tied Luca’s hands together, and Clark retrieved the loose gun on the driveway. Keith rolled Licker over, grabbed his wallet, removed three $1 dollar bills, and smiled.

Beat and shaken, Terrance explained they gathered bodies for Daddy Pastor Cane to sacrifice so he could go back in time and fix everything. Daddy said Keith Vigna was especially important. John shoved the piece of carpet from Drew Carrie into Terrance’s mouth and demanded: Daddy. A few seconds of choking later, he coughed it up, looked at John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth, and freaked out. “You’re one of them! It’s in you!”

John caught a brief reflection of himself in the rearview mirror. Black ooze ran out of his eyes, nose, and ears. He dove into the truck bed pool, the Teeming Puddle, with Jimmy Sanders. John felt the strangest sensation. His head vibrated and heated up. And then a sudden feeling of comfort washed through his cranial cavities. He resurfaced. There was an overpowering smell of rancid fish, and John vomited back in the water in which he and Jimmy stood. Jimmy looked over calmly, unafraid of John for the first time. In the lull, Randy stumbled out of his house.

But something was off. Randy didn’t remember the encounter with the robot man at James the Mill Worker’s house. But he did say Pastor Cane had been a real dick since he lost his family in that car accident a few days ago. Terrance blamed the crash on the three Contention police officers. Clark, Keith, and John noticed Randy’s cane was topped with a rubix cube instead of a tooth. It was clear that this wasn’t the same Randy Angst. Similar, sure. But their Angst was a dentist - and a realtor - and the head of the Contention Historical Society. This Randy Angst was the director of the Children’s Museum. The trio, disassociated with their current reality, acted a bit rashly. Clark barged into the house, knocked Randy to the ground, and screamed into his face about who he was and who he was not. Keith pulled his gun, fired wildly, and put a stray bullet directly through Fade’s head. Pushed further past the brink, he noticed the ooze that dripped down John’s face. Keith aimed the gun at John and ordered him to get back in the water.

**Episode 81**

Clark smashed Angst's head into the linoleum floor, then realized what he was doing and meekly apologized as he backed out of the house. John resurfaced, momentarily rid of the ooze that consistently dripped from his orifices if one was in a certain frame of mind.

Off in the distance, they heard the rumble of vehicles. The Contention Police posse piled into the truck and drove off, intent to grab their original car, Drew Carrie, and head to Bean's Pond. John took the driver seat, Keith called shotgun, and Clark jumped in the truck bed to play with the fish.

Suddenly, two vehicles approached - one from either end of the street - a truck with a hot tub in tow and an impala with a refrigerator on its side strapped to the top. In the Impala, John could see Asher and Avery Little, the parents of the two children that were absorbed by the goo in front of James the Mill Worker’s house, after the struggle with the vacuum. John punched it into reverse, cut through a field, and the two cars attempted to tail. One sweet handbrake 180 later, John hit the road unaccompanied, foot all the way down on the gas. They pulled alongside Agent Trent Chad’s red 2001 Mitsubishi Eclipse, where they left Drew Carrie, and Clark hopped out of the truck bed, sprinted to the trunk, and threw Drew Carrie and Tyler the black lab into the fish-filled tarp tub truck bed.

The two vehicles in pursuit were able to catch up while the unlikely protagonists collected their co-worker's body and their double agent’s dog. But a gruesome scream came from the Impala refrigerator as the Littles pulled up. Glass shattered. A body was snatched up and slammed into the side of the nearby truck. That truck’s driver climbed out the window and attempted to jump into the hot tub, but something nabbed his foot and dangled him mid-air. A blink revealed the thickest wave of ooze yet. The driver, being slowly consumed by the inky substance, desperately grabbed on to the man already in the hot tub, only to seal his fate as well. The ooze ripped the two men up into the sky and slammed them down into the concrete below repeatedly, leaving bright red smears across the cold ground.

With the whole group somehow intact, John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth peeled away. In his rearview mirror, John saw the incomprehensibly massive wave of ooze crashing forward, slowly but relentlessly, toward their vehicle. They soon reached a roadblock: a crane, loaded heavily with construction tube pipes, intentionally blocked the highway. John went to whip the truck around the obstruction, but a tire caught an edge. The truck turned over, smashed into the ground, and all five occupants were thrown clear of the vehicle. The truck continued to roll, tumbled into a billboard for Al's Tires and Tigers, and exploded.

The discombobulated set of sitting ducks saw Gary Daly emerge from a storm drain. He shrieked and hollered for them to join him in the sewers.

**Episode 82**

As they looked back, the officers saw a massive surge of ooze, bigger than any they had seen before, and it steadily flowed toward them. Clark picked up Drew’s unconscious body and “carried” him toward Gary, who had popped his head out of the storm drain. A disoriented Keith got up from on top of Jimmy Sanders, and he and John helped the cooky sandwich artist toward the sewer, with Tyler on their heels. After they confirmed Gary’s identity with a fact only he would know, the wrecked crew dove down into the drain. Gary, eyes covered by his hands, explained that the goo only chased you if you looked at it. Gary led the group through the tunnels while they discussed John’s body swap situation. Also, Gary was tripping a bit - apparently so he could see the goo when he needed to. He was especially perturbed by the goo that dripped from John’s orifices.

Gary expressed how much he’d been hoping to see them since the events of the last couple of days. He described how the Pastor put up a wall of water around his church, developed a strong following in the town, got everyone to start calling him “Daddy,” and said he would be able to go back in time to fix everything as long as they got hold of Keith Vigna.

Gary then pointed them toward a blog post from Harrell Dorsey that had been wiped from the internet. The post was entitled “Operation: Sanferra Blom and a Rogue Police Chief in Contention.” It described Dorsey’s experiences in The Scrap Pit and The Den of Sin, as well as his new investigation in Contention. Maggie had been in touch to “open people’s eyes” and talk to him about Sanfera Blom, the flowers in the city, Jim Cook, the Circle of Knowledge, Barcorps, and The Mill on the Other Side of the City. Maggie appeared spooked by the murder of her father and called off the arranged meeting, so Harrell was going to find her. The boys confirmed this was all true. Gary said he could get them wherever they needed to go through the tunnels, so they set off for Maggie’s house and Beans Pond.

On the way, they entered an underground chamber where Gary Daly, Harry Clinker and others had set up a makeshift camp site. As they approached, Mildred Mitchell ran into a tent, away from a woman who was questioning her. Casey Cristoph, a janitor at The First Church of Contention, leaned against a column and read a book. Harry was relieved to see them all safe. Gary introduced Clara Blankenship, a woman from the City. She was here visiting friends, whose cat had disappeared and who recently joined the First Creek Family of Contention to find the kitty. The FCFC collected all the animals in Contention behind the fish wall. They discussed Clara’s tattoo which portrayed a robed figure that carried a ball of light. It was inspired by a crazy dream she’d had a couple years ago of this figure pulling a ball of light out of a television. Not really paying attention to the important conversation, Keith noticed that Casey seemed to be listening in rather than reading his book.

Harry and Clark used smelling salts to rouse Drew Carrie, who was over the moon to see Tyler. She confirmed her assigned task was to bring the trio back to the FCFC so Daddy could hold them accountable for the death of his family - and also to use Keith to time travel. The officers explained the body swap situation to the others in the camp, to everyone’s astonishment.

Then they asked Gary about his experiences with magic, the spell he cast on them as children, and the book they found. They asked Gary what he did with his spellbook, and he began to weep. He gave it to Clark’s parents. He was scared that’s why Eunace and Jerry were killed. Gary’s grandfather received The Book from a figure that looked like the one on Clara’s tattoo. John reported a similar figure had given him a note in binary that confessed he had killed the Chief’s father, Jim Cook. The figure also asked John to say hi to him for him. Clark remembered an incident in the library when he was young. Gary confirmed Clark’s memory - that figure from the tattoo had locked them in the library and was chased away by the tall, gaunt creatures in suits. Clara then showed them a video from John Peters that had been scrubbed from the internet. He spoke about a strange vision he had during his coma, in which he was led to a parallel dimension by a man with a black Nike bag.

**Episode 83**

In this underground chamber Gary Daly had led them to as a temporary safe haven from Pastor Adam Cane, Carrie Pages (in the body of Drew Andrews) was cuffed and on the ground nuzzling her dog Tyler. Jimmy Sanders wandered about muttering to himself. Mildred Mitchell occupied a tent at the far end of the shelter, but hadn't popped back out since their arrival. Casey Christoph, long time janitor at The First Church of Contention, leaned against a column and acted like he was reading a book while he actively listened in on the conversations taking place between the boys, Harry, and Gary. Clara Blankenship had just shown the room a video of John Peters, wherein he talked about strange dreams he'd had during his coma.

Clara queried what a black Nike bag had to do with another world or a person who could burn folks with his hands. John explained his uncle, Don D. Pettimore, had the ability to burn things with his hands. Don called it “Devil Hands,” and it was mostly used as a party trick so John didn’t think much of it. But when Clark asked Clara if she'd seen anyone with hot-hands in her dreams of the robed figure, it jogged John’s mind. The last time he'd seen his uncle, they were being pursued by those translucent, gaunt alien things in black suits.

John needed to know more. So when Keith pulled out the watch he'd stolen from Ferguson, John snatched the timepiece and slapped it on himself.

The channel on John’s reality began to change as expected - and then it stopped and he saw the kitchen of his childhood home. His daddy, John Lee Pettimore III, younger than John ever remembered seeing him, paced back and forth anxiously. His face turned hopeful as John’s mother entered the room, but she slowly shook her head ‘no’ and tears poured down her face. Her husband rushed to embrace his shaking wife - her body convulsed rhythmically to the sobs as a negative pregnancy test fell from her grasp onto the cold, tile floor. The channel changed. John saw his daddy again, eyes completely wide and bloodshot, knuckles white as he gripped the steering wheel of his black 1977 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am. Backlit by a home completely engulfed in flames, he looked into the rearview mirror to make sure he wasn't being followed. He spoke into a large car phone, “The vector adopted by the Cane family has been eliminated. Casualties, unfortunately, include the rest of the family.” A Fincher-esque aerial shot of this entire scene slowly zoomed in on the fire, and a young boy crawled out from this completely consumed building. He had a balloon-shaped head and eyes so dark the irises looked black. Back to John’s black muscle car as he drove off into the night. The camera did that cool thing where it moved through the license plate, into the trunk, and there - a baby, swaddled in a black suit jacket, laid on top of adoption papers.

Back in the Contention sewer tunnels, the watch fell off John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth’s hand. He slumped to the ground, wide eyed, dazed, and he repeated three words over and over to himself: “Adopted the vector.”

As John dry heaved, Keith confessed he'd seen the tall, gaunt things in black suits when he was a kid. They'd invaded his family’s estate. From the sky. Alarms blared. He and Ferguson ran. Security was able to take care of the translucent intruders. That night, Keith watched their father give Ferguson the watch. William said Ferguson was going to be “the Savior,” and when the time came (edit in Jack Perlman noise), the watch would fit. Now that Ferguson was dead, Keith wondered if maybe *he* was The Savior. After all, the watch did fit him.

He proved it, and reality changed channels like before. Suddenly, Keith saw Beans' Pond. Three figures stepped over his vision, toward the pond. Clark Bishop, Keith Vigna, and John Lee Pettimore the Thirth approached the bank of Beans' Pond. John trailed the other two by a few yards. Focused on searching for something in the water, Clark and Keith failed to see their partner betray them. John raised his gun, took a deep breath, and fired two shots, one for each of them. He quickly finished the task with four more bullets, crouched down, and pulled the watch off Keith’s inert wrist. John stood, slipped The Watch over his bloody hand, and walked slowly into the frigid water of Beans' Pond.

Clark and John saw Keith's eyes readjust to their underground reality; however, unlike the other times one of them came (edit in Jack Perlman noise) out of a vision, the watch remained on his wrist. Keith and John's eyes met, and John saw a great fear. All Keith could see was the black ooze that poured from every orifice on Pettimore’s face. He stammered. He'd just seen them all die at the pond. Keith turned back to the goo-covered face of his partner, John Lee Kevinmore, and wearily asked him to please hand over his gun. John moved a hand to his holster, and everyone else in the room nervously sought cover.

Keith whispered what his vision revealed into Clark's ear. The paranoia was growing, so the trio decided to share what they had seen in order to grow some trust. John said he'd seen confirmation that he was a Child of Destiny. His daddy, Kevin Lee Pettimore, was sent to kill the Cane family. He set fire to the house, but Adam managed to escape undetected. More importantly to Kevin, the Canes had recently adopted a little baby. Pettimore stole the baby, adoption papers and all. That baby was John Lee Pettimore IV. He was meant to be Adam Cane’s brother. But he was so much more than that. In the vision, Kevin radio’d over to K Cell that he had “eliminated the vector adopted by the Canes.” He, John Lee Pettimore IV, *was* the vector.

Clark told John that Keith's vision was of Kevinmore the Thirth executing them so he could have The Watch. The three argued which of them was most likely to be The Savior. Keith, whose family possessed The Watch that recently stayed put on his wrist? John, the original vector, the ball? Or Clark, The Overseer and future founder of The Circle of Knowledge in the past?

The tension grew and grew until Keith silenced them with the thought that maybe the real deal here was the three of them needed to come together. Maybe they needed each other, like pieces of a puzzle. John agreed. They could all potentially be vectors. And Clark reminded them the spell Gary put on them as children was meant for all three. If there was only to be one “Chosen One,” why would the spell work on three? To make Keith feel better, John handed over his pistol, but immediately regretted his decision and pleaded for its return.

As the disagreement continued, the tent at the far end of the underground chamber rustled, and out popped a haggard Mildred Mitchell. She held out a piece of paper in one hand, but promptly put it in her back pocket and held up a picture with her other hand. Flustered, she sputtered that the picture had changed, just then, in the tent. She said it *was* John. And then, boom, it was Keith. Mildred shoved a picture of the founders of Contention into their faces. In the picture was Silas Cole, but she was onto something. It wasn’t the Silas Cole the officers remembered learning about in school. That Silas Cole was an extremely handsome man. This Silas Cole had a familiar face. It was Keith Vigna. Clark was the first to put it together: whoever wore the watch would become Silas Cole.

Mildred Mitchell shoved the picture in Keith’s face and pointed to a faint reflection of a figure that resembled her granddaughter, Tilde B Mitchell. Mildred blamed Clark for Tilde’s presence in the picture. Clark replied he wasn’t the one who loaded and pulled the trigger on the strange gun that sent folks to the past, Tilde had done that herself.

During this brouhaha, Keith tried to take The Watch off to see how it affected the picture of himself as Silas Cole. But it didn’t budge. The thing wouldn’t move. Frantic, his panic grew and grew until he snapped and lunged at Mildred Mitchell. Keith tackled her to the ground and viciously slammed his fists down onto the frail old woman.

Clark and John were able to pull Keith off of her, but not before he had beaten Mildred unconscious. Keith looked down at his bloody hands and puked. The sick hit a piece of paper that had fallen out of Mildred's pocket in the scuffle. On it, she had written “Iinaha fursat sayiya.”

Harry and Gary approached with guns drawn on Keith. John put himself between them and Keith as he tried to calm tensions. Keith, frightened and embarrassed, fled down the sewer tunnel that led to Beans’ Pond. Harry had a dream that if things got too heated, everyone would die. He swiftly and forcefully told the Contention officers they needed to leave. Clark asked if Harry and Gary would still be willing to keep an eye on “Drew Andrews” and they agreed. The air in the underground chamber was so thick with regret and loss, it was hard to breathe properly. And after turning their backs on the only citizens of Contention who had trusted them, John and Clark followed Keith down the sewer tunnel toward Beans’ Pond.

**Episode 84**

As they walked through the underground cylinder, Keith continued his attempt to rip The Watch away from the skin on his wrist. Tears streamed down his face, and Clark and John attempted to console their partner as they all avoided stepping in the shit sludge that slowly flowed between the walkways that ran along the sewers underneath Contention.

The trio discussed the probability of each one of them being the savior of Contention and, perhaps, the world. John made things interesting by insisting they take bets on who was actually The Chosen One.

When they arrived beneath the street across from Beans’ Pond, they looked out the drain and saw there was no water in the pond. It had been completely emptied. All that was left was a muddy concavity and a mostly buried metal door, but the three Contention Police Officers saw three different additional objects at the bottom of this barren basin. Clark saw a large aquarium filled with an absurd amount of fish, as well as one gaunt little boy. But there were so many fish that the boy couldn't make it up past them to break the surface. He was stuck, drowning. John saw Adam Cane wearing an odd motorcycle helmet with glass tubes and a red light lit. He drew his gun and ordered the pastor to remove his helmet. Keith saw that same helmet sitting in the mud next to the half-buried door, green light lit.

A gunfight broke out while the Contention police officers were still very much unaware of what was real and what was not. Their grip on reality took a toll, but they were able to eliminate their opposition, which turned out to be Asher and Avery Little, the parents of the twins, Aiden and Alice Little, that unknowingly sacrificed themselves to an ooze-filled vacuum bag in an attempt to save James the Mill Worker, who still died just two or three episodes later.

Suddenly, the trio felt their perception shift back to what they considered standard. However, that reality included a six story tall wall of water encircling Beans’ Pond. Ice formed on the water as fish broke the surface and then broke the theory of gravity as they fell, sideways, back into the vertical pool.

And across the empty pond on the opposite bank, just inside this water wall, Casey Christoph held a pistol to the back of Carrie Pages’ body’s head. Next to them, Adam Cane gripped the handlebars of the four wheeler and donned the strange motorcycle helmet, red light lit. Strapped to the back of this four wheeler was the unnatural radio, green light lit. And atop that bizarre electronic air wave communicator, an extremely determined black cat utilized his claws and held on tight.

**Episode 85**

Surrounded by the Water Wall, this standoff on either side of the muddy basin stayed still for slightly a second before Keith Vigna rushed down toward the metal door buried equally in between the two groups. However, he ate shit on his drop-in and slid face first down into the empty bowl. Pastor Adam Cane took the four wheeler tips down directly toward Keith Vigna. Guns were drawn and aimed, but Casey Christoph threatened to execute Drew Andrews in the body of Councilwoman Carrie Pages if Clark or John fired at Adam Cane, the former pastor of The First Church of Contention with unsettlingly black eyes and a balloon-shaped head.

The current Daddy of The First Creek Family of Contention whipped the backend of his four wheeler around and sprayed Keith Vigna, already face down in the stuff, with even more mud. And Agent Trent Chad in the body of Salem, Dr. Marie Jacobs’ cat, turned on the strange radio and prepared for a body swap. But Keith wasn’t going to let his consciousness get ripped out and stuffed into the body of a cat without a fight. He shoved his mechanical cocaine finger deep into his nasal cavity and sniffed like his life depended on it. With the Glass Family special powder coursing through his veins, Keith pulled himself up from the mud and smashed one of the odd glass tubes on the radio, just before Agent CatChad could initiate the switch.

Pastor Daddy Adam Cane, furious, grabbed a fish from his saddle bag, lifted it above his head, and crushed the creature over the odd motorcycle helmet, which activated the green light and suddenly the former Contention police officers were forced to face very real visions of their biggest regrets. Clark saw the Cane family burning up in their minivan. John watched Aiden and Alice Little become enveloped in the ooze. Keith relived the murder of his only brother, Ferguson.

When the party snapped back to their current existence, they realized time had passed. Agent Trent Cat had disarmed John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth, and Adam Cane was in the process of dragging Keith Beans toward the half-buried metal door, which began to slowly slide open.

**Episode 86**

The next six seconds were an absolute whirlwind. Daddy Cane dragged Keith toward the open hatch that, for some reason, existed at the bottom of Beans’ Pond. The sound of a fired gun matched up perfectly with Casey Christoph’s trigger-hand exploding and spraying blood everywhere like a water-balloon popped in slow motion. Drew Andrews took advantage and grabbed the fallen gun that had just been pointed at the head of the body he occupied. John looked down and saw that Agent Trent Cat had filled his pistol, named Seth (coincidentally the same name The Cane Family originally gave to John), with mud.

And as Keith failed in his attempt to fight off Adam Cane, the two of them crashed down into the hole in the ground, and the metal plate closed back over the top of them. In that underground room, Keith saw that Cane had been knocked unconscious by the fall, which broke the glass tubes fixed to the strange helmet on Adam’s head.

Above ground, in the muddy basin that was once Beans’ Pond, John Lee Kevinmore slammed his fists down on the closed, half-buried, metal door. With advice from John, Keith fired his pistol into both of Cane’s feet, and then continued into an elevator, his only forward path in this new and underground space. After he descended even further into the earth, Keith arrived at a blast door, which he opened by spinning a heavy metal wheel and lifting a thick, metal latch.

Beans entered an unfamiliar underground laboratory in a cave furnished with file-covered workstations, busy shelving, and massive copper vats housed under a giant, rock ceiling. And across the enormous lab, there was another blast door with a round window - a porthole where the viewer could potentially see whatever it was that was being kept on the other side.

In the files and paperwork, Keith found blueprints for three familiar looking objects: a gun, a radio, and a camera. The goal of one specific goal seemed to be eternal life, but there were myriad side effects listed. Finally, Beans found the project called “Manipulating Activator Robot.” Versions A-X were a bust. But Manipulating Activator Robot Y had been a success. That project created silver balls, 1 inch in diameter, and the acronym spelled M. A. R. Y. Mary.

Back above ground, John and Clark yelled to the now-safe Drew Andrews that his body was secure down in the sewers. But suddenly, Anne Love appeared. She revealed herself to be Casey Christoph’s hand’s executioner, and greeted her old cell-mate, Kevin, as Clark aimed his weapon at this woman who murdered his parents. She calmly explained that had been done on orders from Jim Cook. After K Cell fucked over Marvin Glass by stealing all of his cocaine, Jim initiated what was left of his team, literally just her, into The Circle of Knowledge.

But down in the previously undiscovered laboratory below Beans’ Pond, Keith Beans recited the words of the spell the documents suggested imparted eternal life. His words, however, encouraged his bones to vibrate unnaturally, and his nails began to pop off like keratin popcorn. And then, BOOM, a hearty thud came (edit in Jack Perlman noise) from something on the other side of the closed, thick, metal blast door.

**Episode 87**

Clark Bishop, John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth, Drew Andrews in the body of Councilwoman Carrie Pages, and Anne Love stood in the empty Beans’ Pond and traded information as Clark and John attempted, unsuccessfully, to open the impassable metal plate. Clark lied when Anne asked about Leon Simpson’s whereabouts. But she was practically congenial as she answered questions about Maggie Cook’s brutal takeover of The Circle of Knowledge, and the necessary death of Maggie’s own father, her and Kevin’s Handler in K Cell, Jim Cook, due to The Revelations of The Overseer. She went on about Sanferra Blom and its ability to pacify entire populations, though it didn’t work well enough on Clark’s parents. As for Myriad, Anne believed it was the shadow organization that *actually* ran the government.

Drew explained that Adam Cane performed the body switch between him and the Councilwoman after Drew was kidnapped by Fade. Clark and John explained how to find Harry and Gary, who were babysitting Drew’s body down in the sewers, and sent him off on the four wheeler with the broken radio and Agent Trent Cat.

Clark Bishop and ⅔ of the bodies from K Cell stared down at the impassable metal plate when, suddenly, the water wall came (edit in Jack Perlman noise) crashing down. The pond, no longer held back unnaturally, roared back into the muddy basin it had previously called home. Clark was able to swim through the rushing swell, but John’s new body, with the modifications The Glass Family had implanted in Kevin, sank, unable to rise up to breach the quickly ascending surface. But Anne Love wasn’t going to let her old K Cell colleague stay down. She chanted in an unfamiliar tongue, Kevinmore’s heavy metal body unnaturally moved up, and after a moment, emerged with a gasp for air from the bionic man. Anne continued her incantation, and Clark watched, in awe, from the shore as she and John stood on the surface of Beans’ Pond as if it were solid ground.

Back down below the impassable metal door, in the underground laboratory, a nail-free, impossibly curious Keith Beans peered through the porthole on the thick metal blast door. On the other side, he saw a skeletal creature with skin so thin bones protruded into the dank air. Her nail beds matched Keith’s, and bruises and lesions covered the body of this teenage girl. But even through her hideous transformation, Keith recognized Tilde B Mitchell. With pure hatred in her eyes, she shrieked and slammed her fragile frame into the door of her seemingly eternal prison cell.

Keith, startled and shaken, fell backwards onto the ground. The Watch on his wrist seemed to activate a small compartment in the ground next to where he landed. In this hidden chamber, there sat an odd revolver adorned with glass tubes and a green light lit. He searched the rest of the floor and found one more clandestine cubby which contained a silver metal sphere, about 1 inch in diameter.

Keith pulled out the crumpled picture of himself as Silas Cole, turned it over, and recited the words written by Mildred Mitchell. Again, Keith’s bones vibrated. But then, the metal that formed his upgraded Glass Family body heated up. And his skin, starting with the coke finger, unzipped and bisected the back half from the front half, as all the metal detached and fell off of his skeleton. His alloy septum hit the ground with a clank, and cocaine poured endlessly from the skinless face. Empty skin just draped over a partial skeleton, and then, with nerve endings still popping off like the finale of a fireworks show, the pain indescribable, his bones reformed and his skin sealed itself back around his natural, original physique. Ironically though, being biologically made whole again demanded the little that was left of Keith’s mental stability.

Unhinged, Keith walked over to the work station, stuffed his pockets with blueprints and notes, grabbed the strange gun (already loaded with an old, oddly large single bullet), smiled, and pulled the trigger. A blinding flash of light dissipated, and Keith Beans stood on the dirty, sandy road to Contention in the year 1880-something.

He immediately stripped nude, ran toward a man in the near distance, and called Silas Cole by name as he sucker punched this stranger whose life and name he was about to take. Keith snapped Cole’s neck before the man could speak, rolled him over, and a tri-folded piece of parchment fell out of his jacket pocket. It was a job advertisement for the Contention Mining Company. And it read, “We is hiring able bodies. Readying untapped site. Plenty of work. Hesitate not.”

**Episode 88**

Anne’s miraculous rescue of John Lee Pettimore from the Beans' Pond deluge left John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth and Clark Bishop shook. Anne cackled at their shookethness, and after they expressed desire to learn, she agreed to teach them the spell. It allowed her to do many things, even walking through doors. Or leaving folks inside walls. Clark’s heart sank. He announced he no longer wanted to learn the incantation.

Anne turned the conversation toward The Book. She needed it. The Overseer was coming, and if The Circle of Knowledge didn’t have The Book, Maggie said that would be the end of everything. John and Clark played it cool and didn’t let on that The Overseer was, likely, standing right in front of her. They asked what this Overseer was supposed to do when he came (edit in Jack Perlman noise). According to The Revelation of The Overseer, Jim would die. Maggie believed it was, as the phrase went, only through Death that he may rise again. The Overseer founded The Circle of Knowledge. It only made sense he would come back at the end of everything to save it.

Considering the door at the bottom of Beans’ Pond said Keith was the Savior of the World and he believed Clark to be this all-important Overseer, John asked Anne if, hypothetically, there was a third cool thing for a third special person. He was given the answer when his shattered sense of self betrayed the ruse that he was, indeed, Karen’s K Cell partner, Kevin, and he revealed that he was Ball.

Anne was curious about Its mindset. Did It think It was human? Anne was all too familiar with Balls, or *vectors*, as she called them. K Cells mission had been to eliminate the vectors that were implanted in babies at Cole’s Orphanage: New School Under Modern Etiquette and to wipe all records of its existence. John fumed.

Clark asked Anne to define her goals. The best case scenario, based on what Maggie told her, was to acquire The Book in order to summon The Overseer to save the world. Anne made an offer. If they showed her The Book, she would get them through the impassable metal door at the bottom of Beans’ Pond. Clark and John turned their backs in a huddle to confer and decide the best course of action.

A decision was not reached before a chanting Anne surprised them both by driving a large knife down through John’s skull. Clark speared her back down to the ground and wrapped his arms around her windpipe. John shot her in the knee, and Clark dug his fingers into the squirting, fresh wound. Anne clenched her jaw so tight, her teeth shattered, and she spit the shards into Clark’s face as she broke his grapple and resumed chanting.

This new incantation telekinetically pushed her blade deeper into John’s skull, and blood gushed down his face like a chocolate fountain. As John screamed and fell to his knees, Clark saw the knife move further down through the back of his throat. Anne jumped up and kicked down onto the butt of her knife, and John fell face first, unmoving, into the sloshing mud. She turned to Clark and demanded The Book. He was stunned. Why did she kill John? Her answer was simple. The Vector was her mission.

**Episode 89**

John Lee Kevinmore the Thirth, face down in the mud, felt his Ball reach out to the collective unconscious of the entire universe to pick out specific memories. His vision showed Gary Daly pass a book made of uncured leather, with acne and stretch marks along the binding, over to Eunice and Gerry Bishop. Reality turned and changed, and inside the Bishop home, Clark’s parents hid The Book in a safe with an alphabetical keypad entry, below their television, inside a hidden compartment within the entertainment center.

Barely clinging to life, John lifted his knife-clogged head from the muck and the mire and told Anne he knew where The Book was. Anne chanted, swiftly withdrew her blade, made a bloodletting cut on her own hand, and a stream of her blood coagulated to fill the vacant wound. Clark’s mind snapped. He ripped the knife away from Anne and mirrored her actions, step-by-step. He chanted, made a cut on his thumb, and (similarly) the blood flowed over and into John’s orifices.

This new power confirmed Clark’s suspicions. He *was* The Overseer. He screamed as he executed the woman who killed his parents. They didn’t need her anymore. Clark Bishop plunged Anne Love’s own knife into her skull, and she died.

As they walked to the Bishop house, the pair heard screams from the direction of The First Church of Contention. Clark assured John that when they found The Book, the return of The Overseer, *his* return, would fix everything.

When they arrived, John revealed a false compartment beneath the television. Inside his entertainment center, Clark found a safe with an alphabetical keypad entry. He remembered the words of his mother. “Life is like the bonus round. We were already given the best letters.” He typed in RSTLNE, and the door unlocked. Inside was a book, bound in uncured leather, with some acne scarring and stretch marks on the spine. Clark grabbed The Book, and his vision turned blank.

Suddenly, he stood in the abandoned water park Splashylvania. He looked up at The Two Fanged Plunge, and Julie Maxwell fired a bullet through Leo Piston. Clark raised his firearm and shot Julie Maxwell, whose body joined Leo's as they slumped and slid down the pair of intertwining waterslides. Then he was in the street outside of Dr. Marie Jacobs' house. He saw James The Mill Worker float off the ground as Aiden and Alice Little bravely held a vacuum up to the man’s feet. The vacuum bag burst open, and a squamous black ooze covered the twin children. Clark saw the children fight violently against the muck that encompassed them. He looked over to John; The Residue dripped from every orifice in his face. With another blink, Clark sat in a cage with a gaunt, young boy above a debaucherous crowd. Electric shocks racked their bodies, and the ceiling slowly descended. Clark didn't want to do it, but it was either one of them died, or they both died. Clark pushed the boy back into the Juice Box just as the ceiling came down and squeezed the boy-pulp all over the crowd below. Another blink and Clark saw himself all over the CSU campus in a grotesque montage - murder after murder after murder. It culminated in the moment when Clark jammed a sharpened screwdriver into his own eye until the handle was flush with his socket. Blood dripped down his face, and Clark Bishop crumpled to the ground, limp and lifeless. Blink. Clark stood in the muddy water of Beans' Pond. He knew what he was capable of - what he was. He buried the knife into Anne Love, the woman who murdered his parents. A final blink.

He was back in the living room of his parent's house. His hands were covered in blood, and the blood moved between the covers of The Book and formed new pages, a record of His actions. The Book flung open, and these new pages flitted indecisively before they settled on a page on which Clark’s blood formed the letters of a new incantation over a picture of a hooded figure that was clearly a young Clark Bishop. Compelled, Clark chanted the spell again and again. John saw a blinding flash of light, and then Clark disappeared as if he had never been there.

Clark was gone. The Book was gone. John pressed play on the VCR, laid down on the couch, and watched Wheel of Fortune.

But Clark stood in a dark alley on the night of December 1st across from a man he recognized as Jim Cook, the man who gave the orders to murder his parents, the Handler of K Cell, a member of Myriad, the former leader of The Circle of Knowledge, Maggie Cook's father. Clark remembered what happened next. He'd seen it in a dream. Before he could think, Clark pounced on him. His hands wrapped around Jim’s neck as he growled, "They didn't have to die! They didn't have to die!" His grip tightened, and Clark Bishop felt the passing as Jim Cook’s life was extinguished.

**Episodes 90-95**

Back in 1880-something, when this land was stolen, and pioneer towns began to form, Keith Beans pretended to be Silas Cole as a miner in the mine that employed the town of Contention.

While down in the mines, Keith Beans came (edit in Jack Perlman noise) upon a familiar, odd, black substance, and he became obsessed with studying it. The substance was invisible to others, but not to “Cole.” He utilized blueprints he had stolen from the hidden laboratory underneath Beans’ Pond and exploited The Residue’s unnatural qualities. “Silas Cole” became an inventor; he made so much money off of his inventions that he bought the mine. He built an office on the top floor of the tall, skinny mining company building that sat right above the mine itself. He harvested the substance and acquired a much firmer grasp on its tendencies. Keith Beans invented wild, magical things. Like ceiling fans. Each new invention brought him wealth and power, but also released more of the inky Residue into his town.

To satisfy his newfound hubris, he began working on the creation of a Manipulating Activator Robot, or Ball, as they had been called in his past life. Versions A-X were a bust. But Y was successful. The project formed a silver ball, 1 inch in diameter, and Mary Cole was spawned. Sometime thereafter, Keith Beans got a blast from the future, his past. Tilde B Mitchell appeared on his property in a blinding flash of light.

He became paranoid that townsfolk would see her and realize he was also from the future. Consumed, he decided this town wasn’t big enough for the two of them - and since Tilde B couldn’t exist, she made for an excellent test subject. But some of those tests turned her real rambunctious-like. He went to work on building a secret, subterranean workshop where he could hide her away and continue working on his inventions, some of which he was scared to share with his newly minted confidant, Mary Cole. But before it was finished, the mutated Tilde B Mitchell got out and caused some real trouble. She’d gotten loose before and took out basically the whole saloon staff, but this was trouble with a capital T, which rhymed with C, and that stood for “Covered up, barely.” Shoot, there were suddenly four good people missing. Everett Pace (a homesteader), Professor Horace Greene (a professor), Jack Perlman (edit in Jack Perlman noise)(a rancher), and, finally, Preacher Sheriff Doctor Bobby Custard. All disappeared. The heat was on.

We’ll end here with the supposed words of Roy Bean, a horrible man and judge from Texas known for hanging folks (who, actually, didn’t really hang many folks). He allegedly said, "You can't tell how good a man or a watermelon is 'til they get thumped."

Hm.