

1.8 The Elder

Ástriðr and Kára happily made their way through the organized chaos that was the encampment. They made it a priority check in with as many soldiers as possible on their way through. *Honestly, I just want all of my soldiers to feel that I have their backs. I am not sure if I am doing a good job at all, but I do know that I certainly try.*

Ástriðr and Kara made their rounds through the winding encampment that meshed as one, but was configured such that each area was distinctive to the soldiers battalion. She made it a point to locate each battalion's respective commander as she moved through the encampment such that they could greet the Karak Elder together.

A shade had overtaken a fair amount of the encampment by the time Astrid, Kara and her three other commanders had made it to the eastern gate. A group of villagers had already amassed each exuding a nervous energy as they approached. Kára raised her hand in a friendly gesture and looked through the group, *they look worn down, dirty faces. She did not see the Elder among them. Where are they?*

She sputtered a bit noticing sand had found its way to her lips, *Skripsi, be damned. I'd rather take the tall grass if I could just get away from this sand.*

Kara tilted her head briefly, and then reached for the small drawstring pouch that was to her side obscured by her tunic. She tugged slightly at the opening and immediately pulled a small circular brass object from it. As she raised it to the sky a glow emanated from the center of a small hollow brass enclosure. After a moment she brought it down so she could look at it noting the notch that the starlight above had left on the inner surface. *As I figured,* she tucked the small piece back into her pouch and readjusted the obscured belt that hung around her waist.

Kara's sense of focus was slipping as she listened tuned in and out of her commander's chatting, but she was really trying to focus on the noise of the ever-gathering crowd. She shook her head and opened her eyes wide

trying to readjust before closing them briefly, she could tell it was getting increasingly difficult to concentrate. Kara opened her eyes to a gentle hand and her midback. A slight smile crept across her lips, and she shot Astrid a glance trying to signal her irritation, but instead caught sight of a large towering figure making their way through the parting throngs. "Finally." Kara muttered.

Kara drew in a deep breath, affixed a smile to her face and began moving towards the figure with whom she took to be the elder. Kára and her officers approached the elder the crowd's energy shifted and they began cheering as the large figure made his way through the throngs.

Kara noticed a few flower petals being thrown into the air. As the crowd parted and formed a circle around the group Kara could see few acolytes emerge slightly behind the Elder. The seven of them standing a few meters apart nothing but the red rock between them.

What an imposing figure... This guy is big, and... intimidating at first glance. His hands look like they could crush my skull.

Kára briefly gazed upon the elders long and grey beard before meeting his gaze. I really dig this dudes beard. I mean wow. It is almost to the ground. Definitely a liability in hand to hand. I wonder if they do something special to make it grow like that.

Kara felt a slight nudge on her back.

I wonder what is behind the beard. His face is moderately handsome, it would be a shame if he opened his mouth and ruined it.

Kara stretched out her arms, in preparation for the greeting ritual, hands outward, palms up, followed by leaving her arms outstretched as she bowed. She maintained the bow for some time to pay respect to the Elders status. When she arose, she saw the Elder observing the ritual intently. He showed his satisfaction with a large smile and a double slap to his chest. He then repeated the gesture to Kára who in turn smiled and slapped her chest.

It is a simple enough gesture, but to the Káarak's it was a sign of respect. It told everyone that I do not conceal anything from you. I carry no malice towards you, I place my trust in your hospitality. In turn the

response signifies a belief in honesty, and in turn that they do not conceal anything, and honor the intentions as you are welcomed into their home.

As they walked along the red colored stone walkway Kara felt a voice in her head insist that she forego some of the formalities. Huh?

"Forgive any disrespect Maester Karak, but a matter of urgency has arisen." Kara spoke but was cut off.

"And..." The Elder stretched his arms outward before bringing them together, the baggy material concealing his hand as he brought them together. She thought for a moment that he had grown in size to emphasize his formidable physicality and stature of power. As she watched him clear his throat she thought she could see his whole throat shift. The Elder continued, "What could be of such importance that we cannot celebrate victory on this day?" He brought one of his arms straight out with a stout pointed finger, that bothered her. "You, need to heed your Elders. Where you come from, a land of milk and honey..."

Kara felt her inner self recoil, in irritation, but focused on keeping a straight face.

"Here," He gestured with his hands, "we have sand. Oh sure there is the red rock. Maybe the desert potato if you can get the river to cooperate. And for obvious reasons we don't venture across the river, and for the longest time, neither did they I might add."

"Elder, no disrespect is intended, we can understand that this may come as a request of privilege, in that here you do not have the luxuries that we observe in Midgard, but our goals are aligned, we only wish to help you prosper."

The Elder looked upon Kara with amusement. Before clearing his throat to continue his thoughts unfazed by Kara's words.

"Ya see, depending on the season, we may just go without for a while. So when we have something to celebrate, we celebrate."

Kara was not expecting that. She reeled back a moment and then found her words, "Elder," she began softly, trying to disarm him, "I assure you, we would love nothing but to share in your hospitality, but right now... Right now, we have an emergency. There is something... Some sort of creature headed this this way. It is most certainly something that I have never seen before. We have to evacuate your people, we have an outpost to the

northwest, far enough away from the front where your people will be safe." By the end she felt her strength flowing from her words.

What exactly could they offer an army of this size? I would think it would put them out and that is not why we are here.

"Perhaps misjudgments have been made. But no. We will not be abandoning our ancestral home. It may not look like much, but it is ours."

He seemed to shrink in stature. Kara blinked twice.

"Well, I am not sure what you propose. We have incoming, and we cannot worry about civilians. It is one thing to march into an impending battle, but now we are afforded some time to clear your people out, and we need to use what little time we have to work together." Kara paused, straightening herself out, "I need to know that with whatever this is coming at us, that all of your people are somewhere safe."

"I hear you commander. And I thank you for your thoughtful nature and concern for my people," The Elder pointed his finger at her again before continuing, "but I remind you that these are my people, not yours."

Kara felt irritation, and conflicted.

"Hmm... We'll I do know that Octavian's company is incoming, so maybe I can have them move in... ugh..." She trailed off.

"Colonel..." The Elder paused for a moment thinking about his words. "I shall spread the word that we will seek refuge in the mine." He turned his head nodded to the acolyte on his left, who quickly disappeared into the crowd.

"Commander, now I believe if you would follow me to my abode I might open your mind to the desert allure. You might call it the Karakazan fare and flair." The Elder finished with a slight pose.

Kara was slightly amused by this. She, also, wasn't quite sure what to make of it. "I would love to, but unfortunately I am going to have to pass for now while I figure out what kind of threat I am dealing with. Please get your people to safety and we will meet you when we have verified that the danger has passed."

The elder turned around pointed towards a small child and shooed them away with a wave of his hand. The child disappeared into the crowd.

When the Elder turned around he had a smile across his face. "Of course Colonel, of course, but, first, I need you to see something. Something that has been in my family for generations. Something of a desert flower, that

imparts the protection of the desert upon all those who are worthy." He reached behind him. Kara leaned to the side to see the small child had returned with something that they passed to the elder. The Elder nodded to the child and tossed a silver piece towards them.

The elder stretched out his arm and opened his hand in front of Karas face revealing a small crystalline orb shaped as a flower. "Do you know what this is?" The crystal glowed brighter the closer it got to her face.

Kara furrowed her brow and felt compelled to look deeply into the crystal. She felt an uneasy sensation as she stared deep into its center, completely enamored.

What is...

What is this thing, this... Divine crystal... Blue, pink, white light emitted from deep within. Some sort of storm cloud.

"May I?" Kara asked, completely enthralled.

The Elder happily obliged and gestured his open hands; as Kára picked the crystal up from the Elder's hand she could instantly feel the weight of it.

Is it getting heavier? As she pulled it closer the strain in her arm was intensified and felt as if she could just barely hold on. Why is nobody helping me? She looked about to see everyone frozen in place, except the Elder... why is he smiling at me?

Kara began to cry out in agony as the crystal heat up. She could feel it searing the flesh of her hands but could not let go. She could only watch in agony as the crystal finally cracked shattering into a dusty storm cloud that dispersed itself across the palm of her hands.

After a few moments she felt as if she were being covered in mites. Small like sand, but big enough to give you bumps on the arm She felt it spread across her entire body.

"Well that is most unexpected." The Elder said, choking on the words.

Kara shook off the oddity the best she could, "Yes, yes it is." She paused, "Umm... What was that?"

"Honestly I was hoping you would know. It only began to, well act strange upon your arrival. It has been, dormant for generations."

"Generations?" Kara inquired.

"Yes, the first of my family to come here found this orb hidden in one of the many caves throughout the red mound, and it was my forbearers first recognized its significance to our peoples. I must say it was a bit befuddling to see it begin to glow upon your arrival. I immediately knew that this was for you to experience." The Elder said allowing a smirk crossing his lips.

Kára felt lightheaded and looked upon the Elder with confusion. Kara turned her head and her eye caught a runner sprinting up to them from down the path towards the encampment.

"Colonel... Come now! You have got to see this!" She could hear with vague understanding.

The soldier saluted awkwardly.

Kara saluted back, failing to fully salute as her arm would only raise part way. Her voice slurred heavily as she spoke to the soldier, "Easy, now."

With a desperate concern the soldier blurted out, "This thing is huge Colonel! It looks like it could take a..."

"You have got to be..." Kara collapsed.

Kara could feel her body but could not move. Her eyes closed involuntarily, and the strangest of voices came to her ears.

Kára found herself locked into her mind, seeing a blur of motions about her, but only flashes comprehension came to her.

Where... Where am I?

What... What happened? Ev... Everything is so quiet. Kára drew in a slow deep breath. This is... Magnificent. Is that pine? She drew in a deep breath through her nose trying to place what tingling her nose.

Kára's hair began to swirl, as she noticed that she was standing in sand, and cool breeze was flowing through her hair. This is certainly like a dream. I feel at the mercy of these visions, not in control of my own body.

Kára looked around seeing blurs of colors, but nothing more. A whisper on the wind passed by her.

Ástríðar? Words started to form at her mouth, but she could feel little control of her mouth.

Her voice crackled before she began to speak against her will, “When you first entered my life I must say I had my concerns. I was full of doubt for myself, full of doubt for you. Would I be good enough to show you the light that I see? How deeply would I fall for you? Would I be able to maintain anything like a meaningful relationship that helped you accomplish your goals, or would I try to seize control and in doing so spiral out of control myself. How would I feel if you were to leave me? Does that matter?”

What do you mean? What is happening to me? How are you controlling me? Kára’s body contorted akin to a mannequin hung by strings.

“Early on I learned that these feelings come from a place of seemingly endless love. My love for a best friend, finding a spiritual connection with someone where words could never do it justice. An investment in living life. What we do with that love transforms our lives. I have found that I am but a mere benefactor in this whole ordeal as I freely give to you what I can. In return I have seen a beauty growing within you. Day by day I hear your words of hope, and optimism juxtaposed against the harsh realities of life. Promises that you whisper to yourself that if you should keep up the hard work, you will find what it is you seek from life.”

You know nothing about me, about what I am trying to accomplish with my life. Kára slowly and awkwardly spun around in place.

“All I ask of you, all I have ever asked of you is for you to look at yourself, truly look at yourself. Conduct an honest examination of who you are, for yourself. For you must live with yourself first and foremost, the rest of us just get to experience your life from the outside. I know that for me, I am enjoying every bit of this. The queerness of it all is so magical. If your life is to be measured by anything, I think it should be measured in how you impact others, so that our expressive nature will live on through others.”

You... You can't be here. She would never look at me the same.

“That may be, but indeed I am and indeed she never will. You can try, but you have seen the haunt before. You have seen that look before. You know where this goes. She never did look at you the same, but there is something that I need you to know. Something you have done for me... I need you to

know that you have touched my spirit, and as we grow I only hope to return the favor.”

Kára fell face first into the sandy beach, sand caking her face. She listlessly blinked only seeing blurs, and after a few moments her eyes adjusted, and sensation came back to her body. She could feel herself being lifted, and as she focused her eyes a blurry figure took shape, and she vaguely recognized it of the Elder. *Why is he smiling?*

“My child, this is no time to lie down.” The Elder chuckled as he placed a firm hand on Kára’s shoulder and with the other hand took the orb she was clutching.

“I had a feeling you were the right one to receive this gift.” The Elder finished with a guttural laugh that made Kara feel uneasy.

After a few moments of muffled sounds and a sharp pain streaking across her chest, Kara could feel her body coming under control, and could just make out Astrid’s voice repeating, “Commander...” with a shake to her shoulder.

Groggily Kara replied out loud, “Astrid?”

Kara felt the feeling come back to her extremities. She cleared her throat and straightened herself out, turning to Astrid. “Now then...,” Kara coughed before finishing, “Shall we?”

“Uhhh Commander? You just had a full on conversation with the ground. One moment you were up, and the next you were kissing sand... Are you okay?”

“I am absolutely fine. Whatever it was, it is gone now.”

No I am not... Astrid... What... was that? Please... Help me...

Kara sighed and collapsed to her knees in front of the elder, her head tilting backwards and her eyes rolling into the back into her head, reaching out with her mind in a desperate tone, “Are... you still here?”

UHH... HELLO? WHO AREE... UHHHGGGGHHH

Kara cautiously opened her eyes one at a time. She could feel Astrid tugging on her shoulders and a sharp pain radiating through her head, before screaming out into the air, “Stooooop!” Her visceral response sent out a shockwave of moving air causing the dust to swirl and radiate outward from her body.

Kara could feel a swell of energy rip into her, and felt her body being pulled to pieces, a booming voice echoed through her mind, "Gather the offering." Her world had gone dark again, save for the echos within her mind.

SALVATION. SALVATION. A PITTANCE FOR SALVATION FROM THIS WRETCHED LIFE. HAVE I NOT SUFFERED ENOUGH? VALFREYJA, PLEASE... ODINN. HEAR ME.

Kara could not stop her mind... And, just what is it you need saving from?[G]

SAVE ME FROM MYSELF! PLEASE!

Can... you hear me?

WHA... BY THE HEAVENS ABOVE... DID... HELLO? HOW MUCH... HOW MUCH HAVE I HAD?

uhhh. Kára was befuddled.

VALFREYJA, THANK YOU FOR FINALLY HEARING MY PRAYERS. I AM IN DESPERATE NEED OF HELP. I AM BUT A HUMBLE MAN SEEKING OUT A LIFE OF SOLITUDE, BUT A PLAGUE IS UPON ME!

uhh. You know me. My name is Kara. Kara Eyrik Commander of the Valkryja of Midgard.

BUT YOU ARE SPEAKING TO ME IN MY HEAD... AND HOW DOES THAT NOT MAKE YOU... UHH... I AM NOT QUITE SURE WHO I AM IF I AM TO BE HONEST... The man trailed off in confusion.

I mean... Didn't we talk just a while ago? A plague? Has it swept through your area? Is there anyone I can contact?

BUT YOU ARE SPEAKING TO ME IN MY HEAD... AND HOW DOES THAT NOT MAKE YOU... The man trailed off in confusion.

MIDGARD'S MILITARY...

"OH. THAT MAKES MORE SENSE. WHAT IS A MIDGARD? AND WHY CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

What? How do you not know of Midgard? Where are you? Is this a ruse?!

THE BEST I CAN TELL... I AM SOMEWHERE DEEP IN THE SOUTHERN MOUNTAIN RANGE OF FJALLHEIM. I BELIEVE THAT I HAVE DISCOVERED ONE OF THE ANCIENT RUINS OF THE GUARDIANS... THINGS ARE A BIT UH... CONFUSING AT THE MOMENT.

MIDGARD YOU'D SAY? AREN'T THEY AT WAR WITH THE POINTY EARED BASTARDS?

Not for some sixty cycles.

SIXTY CYCLES. HOW CAN THAT BE? I LEFT THE WESTERN SHORES NOT BUT FOUR CYCLES AGO. HMMM... I NEED TO THINK ON THIS... THIS MAKES NO SENSE.

Kára's vision returned as did her other senses. Standing before her pacing back and forth is a disheveled and grizzled old man. Grumbling to himself as he paced occasionally taking a puff from his long-curved pipe. He would pucker his lips a few times sending a glow of embers that just barely illuminated his stern face.

THE BEST I CAN FIGURE IS SOME STRANGE MAGICK HAS SEEPED INTO MY BODY AND I'M EITHER DEAD... I'M PROBABLY DEAD. UHHH... WE'LL... I AM NOT DEAD... AT LEAST I DON'T THINK SO...

The man paced, occasionally stopping by the hearth that contained a small fire. He would take a few passes, and then stop, rub his hands together, point his palms out to the apex of the fire, and then in moments rubbed them together once again. He paused and grabbed a small wooden cup and took a belt.

Kára felt her hands and knees making motion towards the man, out of the wide berth of a darkened room. Slowly, and steadily creeping along the floor like a feline stalking its' prey.

THE SMELL OF A FINE FELDEHAN'S CERTAINLY FLARES THE NOSTRILS, AND REMINDS YOU THAT YOU ARE ALIVE.

Well I understood your reference of Feldehan's...

SO I DEDUCE THAT, QUITE POSSIBLY, JUST MAYBE... I DON'T THINK I'M DEAD.

Where are you?

IN MY CABIN OF COURSE. YOU SHOULD KNOW, YOU CAME ANSWERING ME REMEMBER... THE SPIRIT OF THE UNIVERSE TWISTING OUR FATES. ONE GUARDIAN TO ANOTHER.

The man grunted an amused chuckle. Kára felt a cold shiver creep along her skin. She listlessly tilted her head upwards to the cup being gesticulated wildly in front of her.

Whereabouts is this cabin of yours? Four cycles? I mean that would put us somewhere in the twenty-twenties?

PRECISELY. DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS. SOUTHERN FJALLHEIM. I DISCOVERED SOME ANCIENT RUINS HERE.

The man moved effortlessly away from the hearth and out to sit at a small desk with some writing accoutrement haphazardly placed along its' surface.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?

Not really, but...

Kára found her legs gaining mobility and within moments she was up on her knees shuffling her legs across the wooden floor. She looked down and took stock of her uniform, and the ever growing sensation along her bare legs. The occasional splinter sending a sudden shock up her body, but being unable to cease her actions.

OUR MINDS ARE LINKED TELEPATHICALLY OVER THE LONGEST DISTANCE... EVER.

NORMALLY THE FURTHEST ANYONE HAD EVER GOTTEN WAS SOMETHING LIKE...

Ten paces?

The man spun about in his stout wooden chair and stared directly into Kára's eyes. **YEAH. SOMETHING LIKE THAT.** The runes on his chair shimmered and faded into the wood.

THE ACADEMY IS GOING TO BE FLOORED TO HEAR OF THIS. THE QUESTION IS HOW DO I GET OUT OF HERE?

HOW MIGHT I CONNECT WITH YOU AGAIN, UH SHOULD I WISH?

AND, UHH... AND WHERE DID YOU SAY YOU ARE OPERATING OUT OF COMMANDER?

Southern Karakazan, and honestly I am not quite sure.

Kára could feel a tear in her leg leave behind a slight trail of blood that coated both her leg but left a smear across the wood.

Why do I not care?

BECAUSE COMMANDER, YOU CAN'NO' RESIST THE ALURE OF THE SIREN. YOU HEAR HER DON'T YOU. CALLING YOUR NAME, BUT YOU CAN'T QUITE FIGURE OUT WHAT IT'S SAYING? IT'S LIKE BLURRED SOUND, EVER CALLING YOUR NAME.

My name? I freely give that, as it is a name to be proud of. My name carries meaning to the people. Kára Eiryk. Commander of the elite Valkyrja.

YOUR REAL NAME.

My real name? That is my real name.

IS IT NAHH-TAH-LLH-EYE? IS IT REALLY? KÁRA IS WHAT YOU ARE GOING TO GO WITH?

Kára could feel a pressure building behind her eyes as images of moments within her life came flooding back.

You... You can't do this. I have worked so hard to break free of my oppressors. I have worked hard to be rid myself of the shame, and the guilt. I am not a lie! You cannot erase who I am just like that.

WANT TO BET? The man thrust the wooden mug towards her face. **GO ON. JUST ONE.**

JUST ONE... LITTLE... INDULGENCE AND WILL CONCEDE MY POINT, AND AGREE THAT KARA IS WHO SHE SAYS SHE IS. THAT SHE IS NOT A LIE, AND THAT HER WORLD IS EXACTLY AS SHE NEEDS TO SEE IT.

What? Are you fucking with me? Kára found a strength in her body to strike the mug away from her.

You cannot toy with my mind like this.

I will not succumb to whatever devilry you command. I will find you, rescue you, kick the shit out of you, and then have my soldiers rescue you from me.

BIG WORDS FROM THE BIG WOMAN. I HAVE BEEN PRACTICING THESE ARTS FOR AGES NOW. LONG BEFORE YOU WERE SUCKLING ON YOUR MOMS TIT.

YOU DESERVE ALL THAT IS COMING TO YOU. EVERY LAST BIT.

Kára's vision went black and when she came to she stared into a massive black and grey colored beard. Words became clear to her ear, and she could see the Elder speaking to her with grand gestures.

"HAhaHaHA, my companions, should we survive this day, we will help you understand the Karak way! Good luck Commander." The Elder bellowed as he stuck out his large hand to slap Kára on the shoulder.

Kara shot the Elder a cautious smile, and they all parted ways.

Kára blinked heavily as she could feel her body being pulled along by the small crowd of her and without missing a moment she launched into her orders for each batallion. A few runners saluted and took off as the captains began to peel off leaving only Kára and Ástriðr standing just outside Karas tent.

Kára turned to Astrid and tried to say something, but she couldn't find the words. The look on Ástriðr's face said enough though.

I know we know that we each have our own roles, and as difficult as it is, we are needed elsewhere, but it doesn't make this any easier.

Kára and Ástriðr gently held hands; It always seems like these moments only exist for the briefest of time. A kiss held within the mind's eye, lingering in time, but being flooded by all of our senses at once encoding our experience, our moment in time a rich and unique experience shared by two people. Two being the shortest path to the deepest feelings, but what if we reoriented ourselves? What if I were to draw strength through a larger network. I would need one over n pieces of each person that I am connected to find the kind of love that would make me whole. Each connection providing a depth to an inherently point like entity, but encoded with the timelessness of how we... I assume, felt. **Kára could feel her hand slipping through Ástriðr's fingers slowly. Kára smirked and reeled Ástriðr into her body. Kára's free hand gently found Ástriðr's cheek. She closed her eyes briefly as she could feel their lips seal the moment, sending a fire into their souls. As they parted ways with a kiss, Kára couldn't help but try to soak up every last second she could. The two parted the tent, jogging in the same direction long enough to exchange the briefest of smiles before diverging on to their assignments. Within a few moments Kára came to a stuttered stop, Tros! forgot the...**

It took longer than she liked to get to the main gate tower; having to jog back to the tent, and collect the artifact, jog back through the throngs of people who were being evacuated from their homes, all headed to the mines. So yeah a little frustrated.

When Kára finally made it to the main tower, she found the, smelly, commandants' study.

Kára readied herself as she stepped out onto the cracked stone that lined the balcony. She looked up from the indent she made earlier, to see the horror that would befall them.

That has to be at least ten thousand paces. Well past the river... whatever it is... it is big

"Well, this certainly is something new." Kára muttered to herself.

As Kára's focus was snapped by a flash of hues of pink, white, and blue as it lit up the horizon. Solace overcoming her in that she knew that she wasn't losing her mind. Plain as day there it is: A light orb befitting a creature this size, dangling from its head along some sort of fleshy cord attached... *I think to its head. I am not sure I want to know what it is for, but I can certainly say it is blinding if stared at*

The comfort of not losing her mind drained quickly as she saw a black mass swarming about the creature. "Colonel," Bófreðr, burst into the study approaching Kára with a huff. "Colonel Eiryk, Ma'am, all soldiers as ordered, Ma'am." Bófreðr reported. Kára could see the ambush that they were trying to execute, and turned back to Bófreðr, who was still saluting.

"At ease captain." Kára said while gesturing with her hand.

Bófreðr eased his stance, and asked, "Commander?"

"Make sure word gets out that no one is to make eye contact with that orb, and to take appropriate precautions." Kára saluted and spun around again pulling a set of thick dark glasses out of the pouch at her waist, and then put them on.

I am ashamed to admit I did not think of this earlier. I was so focused on everything else I forgot about the spectral angular differential emission sensor. Their dark polished glass reflects a great deal of the light coming at them, and passes on a darkened state of the world. It is marvelous tech, that is just so... Simple, yet beautiful.

bending of light to our wills rather than being at its mercy. I call 'em shades. Get it? They provide your eyes shade? Haha I so funny. And for those of you who didn't groan, I can always get worse. This monster is going to take at least a few chapters to beat. I mean, I just assume that our lives break up into neat moments, or days, or weeks, chapters, etc. Story arcs that get resolved in a timely manner.

or maybe they don't

I don't know. I figure we got twenty minutes or so.

