

JOURNALIST 2: Do you have a response for the British observatories?

MASTON: Yes, they can go-

ARDAN: *(cutting MASTON off)* He means “no comment”.

JOURNALIST 3: What’s all this about Captain Nicholl?

MASTON: Wha- No, no comment!

(The CROWD continues hurling questions, overwhelming MASTON.)

MASTON: Thank you! Enough! Press conference is adjourned!

ARDAN: You heard the man. Everyone out, rapidement!

(MASTON rushes from the dais after BARBICANE. The CROWD, with PENROSE, drifts out, confused and still chattering with questions, ushered from the tent by ARDAN. Lights shift to a small area just outside the tent, where MASTON confronts BARBICANE.)

MASTON: *(incensed)* Again, Barbicane?!

BARBICANE: *(taken aback)* Pardon?

MASTON: *(upset but blunt)* I’m sick of you doing that.

BARBICANE: *(genuinely confused)* What?

MASTON: Putting me in that position. *(almost to himself)* Phoebe was right. *(to BARBICANE)* You throw me to the wolves to defend you and the project but you don’t care enough to listen to me when I come to you begging for answers.

BARBICANE: *(with a sigh, mollifying)* I know it’s difficult, J.T.-

MASTON: You don’t know anything about “difficult”. You don’t know what I’ve sacrificed, what I’ve lost, just so you can play genius!

BARBICANE: *(getting defensive)* “Play genius”? This is for all of us, not for myself!

MASTON: *(HE shakes his head with a bitter laugh, then sighs.)* You’re brilliant, Barbicane. What you’re leading is... unprecedented. *(with growing frankness)* But there are untold numbers of brilliant minds all around the world. All of this nonsense with the press... that’s all just for your public image. That’s your choice.

BARBICANE: *(raising his voice)* And it was *your* idea! *(HE crosses back into the empty tent through its rear entrance.)*

MASTON: *(following BARBICANE)* Nicholl wasn't! *(raising his voice in turn)* You're so distracted with trying to control the story, with public perception, with these *stupid* wagers, that you're losing sight of what's really important!

BARBICANE: *(shouting)* I am doing everything I can to make sure this project doesn't fail!

MASTON: *(matching BARBICANE)* I'm not talking about the cannon, Impey! *(Beat.)* I'm talking about your friends. *Our* friendship!

(PENROSE re-enters from the opposite side, near the tent's rear entrance, looking around as though trying to find someone.)

BARBICANE: *(stricken, at a loss for words)* Maston, I-

MASTON: *(standing, decisively)* If you want to go waste your time making a spectacle with Nicholl, be my guest. But I'm done with being the one always bending over backwards for you.

BARBICANE: *(softly)* What are you suggesting?

MASTON: *(HE sighs. Then, firmly.)* I believe in what we're doing. So I'll stay on as Press Secretary for the sake of the mission... but not for you. *(HE turns to leave.)*

BARBICANE: *(as MASTON leaves the tent)* Maston!

(BARBICANE tries to gather himself, but grows frustrated, feeling the weight of all the new uncertainties HE faces. PENROSE approaches the tent. As MASTON steps out, HE spots HER and assumes SHE has been eavesdropping.)

MASTON: *(frustrated)* Great. *(indicating the tent and the argument that just transpired)* Is that enough of a story for you?

PENROSE: I'm not here for you. I just wanted to get a comment from Barbicane.

MASTON: Haven't you done enough? If it weren't for you, Nicholl wouldn't have even come.

PENROSE: You know that's not true.

MASTON: *(tersely, acerbically)* Sure. See you at the next press conference.

(MASTON crosses, beginning to leave, but PENROSE interrupts.)

PENROSE: Wait, but Nicholl-

MASTON: *(turning back to PENROSE)* Is none of my concern. Barbicane can handle his own affairs.