

Life with Althaar

Episode 29: And That's the Way It Is

Version 2.2 (Recording Script), 07/16/21 - LG (v2, BAJ)

[scene 1] The opening whoosh wobbles into the background sound of the Bridge. Numerous alarm klaxons are blaring quietly as continuous background throughout the scene—none of the “OMG we’re about to die” alarms, but lots of the small ones that a competent crew would have dealt with easily before the alarms began to blare, which is why we don’t usually hear them. ROOTY and MRS. FRONDRINAX are there.

STALIN-BOT

Do not touch that one, is only for Docking Comms personnel. Press yellow one. NOT THAT YELLOW ONE. Yellow one on right! On right!

ROOTY

But I don’t have a right! I’m all the way round!

STALIN-BOT

Other right! Move pot off of seat and let me—

ROOTY

No, Rooty knows how! I just push the... Uhhhhhh... This one!

STALIN-BOT

NYET!

Bleep. There is a distant shuddering crash. It’s a medium shuddering crash. If this were Star Trek, there would be sparks and everyone would fling themselves to one side, but no one would actually fall out of their chairs.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Impact?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I don’t know, was there?

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Impact?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

How would I know? I was asking you!

TORIANNA

Thank you, Amber. Yes, that was an impact. Minimal damage, but it will leave a mark. And I'll be submitting an itemized report of the hull repair expenses to the Committee, but for now, thrusters to compensate, please.

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON

I've got it at my station, Commander. Automated orbital maintenance system engaged, thrusters are compensating.

Thrusters compensate, distantly. Whrrrr-oosh.

TORIANNA

Thank you, Auxiliary.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Please don't speak for me, Commander. I have the honor of today's Bridge supervisory duty, after all. Ahem. Thank you, Auxiliary. Excellent work. And you'd look great in a headband, if you don't mind me saying. You have the—what are those called. Eyebrows! You have the eyebrows for it.

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON'S FRIEND

(in the background)

T00ts! Career move!

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON

(ditto)

That's what you said last time. But they still don't even know my name. Yours either.

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON'S FRIEND

(ditto ditto)

Streez, I was just trying to be supportive. You don't need to harsh my gummies.

TORIANNA

"Honor." Now, that's an interesting way of phrasing it, Frondrinax. I was under the impression you'd ended up stationed here today as a direct result of your handling of the ICSB wellness probe. I'd heard your fellow Committee members were less than satisfied with the results. Presumably, they chose to stick you with Bridge duty as a lesson in humility. Although I'm not sure why they thought that would work. Humility is a quality your species seems to be totally—

FRALL

Powder, sir. Dry.

TORIANNA

I was only remarking, Frall, that—

FRALL

Day, sir. Another, live to see.

TORIANNA

(pause, recalibrating) Right. Well. As I was about to say, Frondrinax, you've done remarkably well supervising the Bridge today, considering your relative lack of experience. Who could have imagined that a stray bit of space debris would approach the station on a pre-logged and confirmed trajectory, and would need to be dealt with, as indicated in the top-of shift log briefing that you chose not to read? Anyone would be taken by surprise under those circumstances. But we survived the incident, no doubt due to your swift intervention.

ROOTY

Rooty pushes buttons!

TORIANNA

Rooty does. And yet, somehow, we still draw breath.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, thank you, Mindy. We did rise mightily to the occasion, didn't we? Pushing those buttons, reading those inputs, making split-second battlefield decisions, spotting the pertinent facts in the deluge of data, keeping a laser-tight focus while— what *are* all those noisy things? How is anyone supposed to work here with all this bleeping and blooping and blinking?

TORIANNA

The alarms, yes. We usually anticipate those so they don't ever actually go off, but since you refused to—

FRALL makes a warble that sounds like a finger wagging.

TORIANNA

That is to say, yes, it's a wonder you can think so clearly with all this racket. A remarkable feat of concentration. But perhaps you've earned a break? You could relax in my office for a bit, if you like. I find that always clears my thoughts after a difficult day in the Chair. And if you're in need of refreshment, you can get some cool water from the tap in the, ah, there's a small room in there that—

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I am familiar with the Human "bathroom," yes. Though I've always found the design rather inscrutable.

TORIANNA

Ah. Well, there's one in there if you get thirsty, anyway. And while you're recovering from your heroic supervisory efforts, the Bridge crew can tend to those minor, inconsequential matters that a prominent member of the Committee shouldn't have to bother herself with. Such as these pesky alarms. I think that's a much more efficient use of everyone's time, don't you?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh! Well, yes, you're probably right. I'm sure you can muddle along without my supervision for a few minutes, anyway. Come along, Rooty. But before I leave you, Mindy, I'd like to set the record straight—I was not assigned to Bridge detail as a punishment for any sort of mulch-up with the ICSB delegation. On the contrary, the Committee were all very pleased with the outcome. And you'll be able to see that for yourself very soon, once our documentary on the tour is released. We were hoping to put it out last week, as a matter of fact, but we still needed to get our roots worked around a few technical glitches in stick.

TORIANNA

Stick?

ROOTY

Post.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, in post. Eliminating any trace of those wretched Poomie creatures, for one thing.

TORIANNA

Oh, but they were so cute. In fact, I think a Poomie would make a delightful addition to the Bridge crew, if only they weren't so... explode-y.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ugh. Beastly things. (*shivers*) Anyway, we'll be airing the documentary record of the fact-finding mission very soon. And distributing it Galaxy-wide as well! There's been a lot of interstellar chatter about it, that's what the FOPS—Fugulnari Outreach Pollination Service, you know—that's what our FOPS agents tell me. Can you imagine, some folks on the General Council got it into their trunks that our aid and assistance to you poor starving Humans might have some kind of ulterior motive? Ridiculous! Well, this will put all those silly rumors to rest.

TORIANNA

“Poor starving Humans?” We weren't starving.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, you are now, so it's a good thing we're here to help, isn't it?

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Shouldn't a fact-finding mission be organized by someone other than subject of the investigation? Or by actual journalists? Otherwise it's not really a fact-finding mission?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Nonsense! They found lots of facts. We Fugulnari bask in open sunshine, that we do. And you'll be hearing all about it later today. All right, everyone, carry on with your duties. I'll just be misting my lamina in the Commander's office for a bit. This has been a very trying cycle. Count yourselves lucky that I was here to bear the brunt of it on my sturdy branches! But now that the crisis seems to be over, we'll leave you to tend to less vital matters. Let's go, Rooty.

Door whoosh as they head into TORIANNA's office.

TORIANNA

Finally. All right, people, let's get these alarms settled, it shouldn't take more than a minute or two. *(Alarms shut down over the next couple of lines. Commanding:)* Pretend this is an I'm-With-Stupid drill. Stalin-Bot, post a foamer to the collision scar and seal off any active circuits. Amber, shut down any sensor notifications I don't need to look at, by which I mean all of them. Ah, much better, I can hear myself think.

Top-of-cycle announcement fanfare plays over the PA.

TORIANNA

I spoke too soon.

GLOTTULIX

Attention, residents of the Fairgrounds. This is Glottulix, a good friend of Frondrinax of the Fugulnari Committee for the Management of Human Affairs, with today's friendship bulletin. We are here to warm your ears for this, the second cycle of glorious Day 267 of the Fugulnari Ascension!

I really am a friend of Frondrinax, you know. That's not just a pile of bureaucratic fertilizer! And I know... *(off mic a bit)* Hold up, what's wrong with fertilizer? I love fertilizer. Who doesn't like a nice phosphate after a long day?

OAKENSARX

(hissing, whispering from off)

Not now! You're on a live mic. Just read it!

GLOTTULIX

Okay, but seriously. Big fan of fertilizer, here. I mean, I even buy the vintage stuff, I've got my own dirt cellar set up. I don't know who wrote this, but—

OAKENSARX

Not up for discussion! Just read it!

GLOTTULIX

Ok, but I'm just saying. (*back into the mic*)... Ahem. Hello? Hello? Is this thing on? Who was that? Ha ha, sounds like someone was trying to sneak a haustorium into our channel for a second there. Anyway, as I was saying, I know Frondrinax would love to be here talking to you herself, if she weren't so very busy with her other duties as a member of the Committee, working to make all our lives better! And now, on to the news!

We've just finished a comprehensive effectuation re-assessment on the recipe for our NutraZoom EnzyBlast Efficiency Shakes, because efficiency pairs best with happiness! And we had been considering an adjustment to the flavor profiles, to better appeal to your finicky Human tongues, but you used those tongues to speak up loud and clear. No! you said. We like this stuff best just like you made it first, from the goodness of your very own fibers! In fact, more than 80% of respondents to our recent select survey happily consume their daily quota and then some! And they overwhelmingly asked us not to change the flavors. So, while there may still be a few of you out there who are less than satisfied, you can rest assured that our nutritional labs are hard at work researching new ways to efficiently meet your dietary needs. But for now, if NutraZoom makes you make that face, just remember: your friends and neighbors dig it in the weeds, so don't vonch them up.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

"Vonch them up?"

TORIANNA

Propaganda is always a work in progress.

STALIN-BOT

I remember when I used to do this kind of thing.

TORIANNA

No, you don't.

GLOTTULIX

Now, that was good news for your mouths, but we also have good news for your eyes! And ears! Wow, you Humans sure do have a lot of organs! And that's not even counting, you know, the *famous* ones. Or should I say "notorious!"

OAKENSARX

(*in the background*)

Don't improvise!

GLOTTULIX

That is, ah... Some of you may have spotted a delegation of interstellar dignitaries visiting the Fairgrounds recently. Well, it is our pleasure to announce that those visitors were in fact a sage group of representatives from the ICSB—oh, I do love sage! Sorry. A delegation invited here by the Committee to investigate living conditions. We had been informed of some bizarre rumors circulating among our fellow ICSB member species— completely unfounded rumors, of course— about the reasoning behind Humanity’s perfectly sensible choice to incorporate Fugulnari principles into your society. So we wanted to make sure everyone across the Galaxy was able to see the truth about the incredibly fruitful coöperation between our two peoples! And the delegation of course left completely satisfied. But you won’t have to take my word for it! The observers were accompanied on their visit by a documentary holo crew, and we’re just thrilled to be able to share the result of their efforts with all of you later today! So tune in for a chance to see your friends and working companions in a document for the future, and beyond! Also featuring appearances by the nova stars of the interstellar hit series, “Dave and Zwizz’linarp!” Now, viewing is not by any means mandatory—watch if you want! Watch for unity, watch for efficiency, watch for happiness! But we do hope you’ll join us. We recorded this visit for posterity, and posterity is today!

[*additional announcement text to run under the below conversation until RFF breaks in:*]

Now, we didn’t have to invite strangers to the Fairgrounds to peek under our pest netting—but from here to Fugulnar, the Committee is dedicated to keeping you on the efficient path to prosperity. We’ve got your interests protected out in the long cold places between the stars, as well as here in the warm glow of regulation and solidarity. And we speak with one voice when we all say “Yes.” Our long and complicated handshake with the League of Humans binds us together as we plow a new furrow into the future.

Door whoosh as MRS. FRONDRINAX and ROOTY poke their stems back out of the office.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

“Posterity is today?” Absurd. I am much better at these than Glottulix.

TORIANNA

I suppose Hobson’s Choice is better than no choice at all.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? Who’s this Hobson?

TORIANNA

No one. Maybe he lived in Vav.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, I wouldn't go visiting unannounced then. He may have decided to live somewhere more convenient, like on a farm. I found out yesterday that we've had a run of Ardent Labor volunteers from the Upper Concourse Widdershins Arc. Good citizens up there! *(the Radio Free Fairgrounds signal cuts in)* Oh, what the powdery mildew is this now?!

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

Three, two—we're in? Just a partial, ok. Fairgrounds! Attention Fairgrounds!
This is Radio Free Fairgrounds with this cycle's actual news. Here are the facts.

People are missing in Sectors Dalet through Zayin. After the security sweep last month, some Fairgrounders never came back to their units, and we think they've been moved to farming and factory camps run by the Foogs. We don't know how many are missing. We're building a tracking list, and if you can put names to the missing, most of our authentication codes are still active on the blind data drop hubs. *(digital jitter, severe.)*

(to someone off-mic) Are we still—? Ok. *(back on mic)* We only have a partial signal lock, but you should know the Resistance has managed to re-appropriate several of the food shipments that had been gathering dust in Foog storage depots, and the contents are out for pickup. We can't distro right now, but we've moved supplies to stockpile centers and secure drops. Share don't sell, take what you need and pass the rest. And do your best to stay off the NutraZooms. They're like food, but they're not food. We're losing—sig—resc—drop *(digital jitter, severe.)*

(to off-mic) Then start taking it down. I'll run out the air. *(back on mic)* We'll be back later with more samizdat from Delilah Mallory, observations from her time spent as an uncharged political prisoner held in solitary confinement, in violation of both Human decency and basic sentient rights. But for now, remember: We're all in this—*(digital stutter: thisthithisthithis and then it ends with a brisk sharp "snap")*

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ugh. Typical. I told Glottulix, just hit the gain and overload the output cycles as soon as they break in! Even Rooty would have had them off the air faster than that!

ROOTY

Aw, thank you!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Shut up, Rooty. Well, apparently that's all the announcements we'll be hearing this cycle, so I'll return to your office to recuperate. After writing a strongly-worded memo about on-air protocols. But feel free to sound the alert if you should need any more guidance. All right, Rooty, break time.

ROOTY

Yes, Mama!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Rooty.

ROOTY

Oops.

Doors, definitively. MRS. FRONDRINAX and ROOTY exit to TORIANNA's office.

TORIANNA

Right. Here's hoping Rooty and Tooty will stay out of our hair for a few minutes at least. Amber, cut my office comm circuits off from the main bridge feed while they're in there. But send their audio to the monitor at my chair. You there!

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON'S FRIEND

Sir?

TORIANNA

I would have loved to send you to Tixondu's for a macchiato right about now, before Tixondu's became yet another casualty in the war on inefficiency.

HITHERTO MOSTLY UNNOTICED BRIDGE PERSON'S FRIEND

Yes, Commander, I heard. And it would have been my honor to—

TORIANNA

Yes, fine. Do you know how to work the coffeemaker in my chair?

[scene 2] Opening credits music.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents..!

LIFE! WITH! ALTHAAR! Season Three!

Episode 29... "And That's the Way It Is"

[scene 3] JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment. ALTHAAR is watching Earth nature documentaries. If we are precise about things, he's watching a David Attenborough documentary on penguins and sea lions. Indistinct TV drone in the background, with periodic squawking.

JOHN

Still working your way through Planet Earth, buddy? Or, wait, no. I don't see any beetles. This has gotta be one of the early episodes.

ALTHAAR

Yes, FriendJohn, this episode was presenting the difficulty to Althaar in his first viewing, so he is taking respite from the *Coleoptera* to make revisiting on it.

JOHN

What kind of difficulty?

ALTHAAR

The Planet Earth is supposing to be a documenting of the nature, but it is not appearing so to Althaar. The narration and the dialogue are not agreeing in the slightest!

JOHN

The dialogue? It's a nature show, Althaar, there is no dialogue. Just penguins, and David Attenborough talking about penguins.

ALTHAAR

It is to the dialogue of the penguins to which Althaar makes referment, FriendJohn!

JOHN

The—? Are you being serious, or was that a joke? You know I can't always tell when you're joking. Are you saying you know penguins? They— they're not another space-faring race that happened to crash-land on prehistoric Earth, or something...? Because I don't think I'm prepared to cope with that.

ALTHAAR

Oh, no, FriendJohn! That would be the coincidence too great to be ingested! No, Althaar has not had acquaintance of any penguins in the person, but he is most certain that the translation of Mr. Attenborough is not at all accurate! ...As just there! Were you hearing that, FriendJohn? It is absurdity!

JOHN

All I hear is penguin sounds. You can actually translate that?

ALTHAAR

Yes, FriendJohn! Not in the entirety, it is certain, but the basic poking of it, Althaar is grasping.

JOHN

Really? How? Do they actually offer classes in Penguin at Yimbastush U?

ALTHAAR

Oh, no, FriendJohn! But this is not necessity for understanding. The greatest difficulty in comprehension is presented by the languages that have been manifested to manipulate concepts complex and abstract. So these must of course be studied individually! (cont.)

But the more basal linguistic schema can be imagined as transformational matrices in geometric multi-dimensional forms. Often the precepts are clear once a few parameters are established: sizing of the speaker, nature of the environment, dietary requirements of the species, and number of tensors that will map object sets into the lingual space. These are the substrate on which the patterning skin of the language will form. So it is very simple indeed!

JOHN

Yes. What. I'm sorry, I'll try that again. You speak Penguin?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar must make apology for his use of the jargons, FriendJohn! He has not often the opportunity to talk the shopping. But he should not be getting carried off! What Althaar meant to say is that... mm. There are basic principles in common to all forms of communication, are you perceiving this? And, while a true language is adding great complication to these, which requires for comprehension the most careful study, the primal expressions of a non-sentient species are not. So these more simple expressive modes can be easily understood after brief observation, by one who has made familiarity with these basic principles. Is that sensible to you?

JOHN

I... think so. So, what's that penguin saying?

ALTHAAR

Most of them say, "Hello, a penguin is here; penguin has bad taste; penguin will play games when you are far away."

JOHN

Why do they say they have bad taste? They look like they're wearing tuxedos, I would think that's pretty stylish by bird standards.

ALTHAAR

Ah! This is a failure in the translation of Althaar, FriendJohn, please forgive. The "bad taste" is the attempt at deception. The intention of the penguins is to discourage the eating.

JOHN

Got it.

ALTHAAR

Oh! This one is saying "Hello, penguin is here; do not point that thing at penguin; also stop staring at penguin please because feathers are scruffy today." The narration is making claim that he has worry about the sea lion, but this is not true! He has concern of the Humans and does not want them to stick things in his anatomy.

JOHN

Why would he think they're going to stick things in his... where in his anatomy?

ALTHAAR

He is not specific, FriendJohn. He has only one anatomy, and he likes all of it without the things stuck in. So he is being pro-active.

JOHN

I suppose that's reasonable enough. *(watches briefly, chuckles in response to a particularly agitated squawk)* Aw. They're so cute when they fall down.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! The down-fallen penguin is now expressing great shame and agitation! Althaar must take respite from viewing, the embarrassment of the second-grasper is a too pointy distress.

Bleep as ALTHAAR pauses the program.

JOHN

Oh. Well, you could always watch... Huh. That's weird, there's only like three options listed.

ALTHAAR

Yes, FriendJohn. Perhaps you were not making attention to the latest announcing of the Committee for the Management of Human Affairs? All tele-visual programming is suspension, until the Committee has made evaluation of these. Only those promoting efficiency, calming influence, and constructive lack of motion will be permitted. But at this time, all that has been cleared are the ancient nature documentations, the reruns of "Dave and Zwizz'linarp," and some comedic sketchings of the Dilurians.

JOHN

Dilurian comedies? How could those possibly be a "calming influence?" There's literally nothing funny about them. Not to mention the disturbingly high fatality rate.

ALTHAAR

Mm. Althaar has not made sampling of them as yet, FriendJohn. But perhaps he should keep his thinking open, in the interest of greater Dilurian understanding?

ALTHAAR switches over to one of the Dilurian comedies.

REASONABLE JEFF ON TV

(compressed, playing through the TV)

Hey, Molto Jeff just ate a plate of those Elbongian Flarper-Beans, and now he's doing his Daily Jiggles right near the mouth of Unpredictable Flame Geyser Park! Do you think we should warn him?

JEFF McJEFF-O ON TV

He's a big boy! *(shouting, to the distance)* Hey Molto, if ya got it, jiggle it!

Dilurian laugh track: Whoah ho, hyuck hyuck ha ha nerk! Etc.

MOLTO JEFF ON TV

(in the distance)

I'm jigglin' it til the bouncing is done, Jeff McJeff-O! Whoah hey, lettin' some loose—

A couple of large staggered farts, overlapping. A jet of flame. A tiny terrified squeak —uh-oh!— immediately followed by a wet, slappy, pulpy explosion, with gobs of flesh raining down. A grossed-out noise from JOHN and a horrified one from ALTHAAR.

JEFF McJEFF-O ON TV

Wow, splash-back city! Now who's supposed to clean *that* up?

Dilurian laugh track: Whoah ho, ewwww, hyuck hyuck ha ha nerk! Etc. Bleep as ALTHAAR shuts it off.

JOHN

I'd say that's a rhapsodic NO on Dilurian comedy selections. I think my brain unspooled a few million years of evolution just seeing that. How long does that go on?

ALTHAAR

(fiddling with remote, beep beep)

It is a program of three hours. And Althaar is not in the emotional province for *Dave and Zwizz'linarp* today. So it is the belief of Althaar that now it is best to make hiatus from the televisual pursuings.

JOHN

Good call. Oh, hey, did I tell you I actually met Dave on that weird Fugulnari delegation thing?

ALTHAAR

Yes, FriendJohn! And Althaar was having the great fortuity to share conversing over beverages at the Electric Egg with the incandescent Ganglion Ocellus!

JOHN

Oh, so that's where he disappeared to. Yeah, I guess you could technically say Dave and I worked together. I mean, Frondrinax just stuck this script in my hand and told me to read it, but Dave was using the same script, so. I wouldn't exactly call it a nuanced performance, my lines were all like, "Plants are great, no one here has any problems ever," but we were doing scenes together, so I think that counts.

ALTHAAR

An opportunity most rare and exciting, FriendJohn! Althaar is very pleased that you were able to have experience of it!

JOHN

Thanks, buddy. The weird thing about it was, Dave? He's just like that in person. I mean, JUST like that. I assumed the character on the show was, you know, a character. But as far as I could tell, he's just... *Dave*. He never turns it off. It was kind of unsettling, a little like talking to a bot with a fried linkage processor.

TV turns itself back on with an announcement fanfare.

BOONARUX

(on the TV)

Good afternoon, Humans of the Fairgrounds. Please pardon the interruption. I am gratified throughout my stems to see so many of you at home in your living quarters, eschewing extraneous movement by watching the many captivating programs offered through our new fully-curated Streamlined Streaming services: Wholesome Human comedy, historical Earth-based nature programming, and Dilurian Mystery Play presentations, for those of you with divergent expectations.

Background instrumental of Plants Are Great introduced somewhere below.

But we'll be interrupting our standard offerings very shortly to bring you a completely non-mandatory showing of the soon-to-be-classic Fugulnari-Human artistic collaboration, *Triumph of Efficiency!* A documentary event exploring this innovative partnership between plant and mammal, for the benefit of the many curious onlookers and potential friends who share this Galaxy we all call home. It will warm the pith and cockles of circulation and inspiration. Viewing is of course completely voluntary. You are absolutely free to turn off your sets and spend this time engaged in some less constructive activity. If that's the sort of thing you'd like to go into your Compliance Auditing File.

But I think most of you will want to watch! Watch with us, and your friends and co-workers, as they join our stationary march into a proud future. From the groundbreakers who till our fertile soil, to the Humans and robots who work tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of everyone on the Fairgrounds, our very own indium-tin coated greenhouse in space! Like this plucky Booster:

Recycled recording of JOHN from the previous episode:

JOHN: Hi, everyone. It's my privilege and pleasure to be here to show you around the new and improved Fairgrounds, and by the end of your visit, I'm sure you'll agree with me when I say the Plant Way is a-okay.

JOHN

Oh, come on!

BOONARUX

That's your friend and ours, John B of WSS (*WSS! Sounds in the house*) speaking truth to flowers! Coming soon to your TV or holoscreen—today, on all the channels, for your convenience in optional viewing. And for you slackers who may be inspired by this inspirational document to re-think your disorderly ways, Booster registration will be live all day! With a free one-time waiver of today's distance and movement limits once you get a headband of your very own!

Ending of announcement. A beat.

ALTHAAR

...FriendJohn was enacting the excellent performance. It was sounding... very natural.

JOHN

I can't— I'm never going to be able to leave the house again.

[scene 4] TORIANNA's office. ROOTY is quietly singing some nonsense-song to himself—it probably goes something like “eeply eeply eeply oop.” MRS. FRONDRINAX rustles.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I'm at the end of my roots. How is Dee Mallory still smuggling those awful recordings to the Resistance? She's guarded 28 hours a day. She only gets two other visitors apart from me, and we've made absolutely certain they can't bring even a shred of technology in with them. She's under constant surveillance, and yet the cameras haven't detected a single trichome out of order!

ROOTY

Maybe they're bad cameras?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Don't strain your nodes, Rooty, you'll only dry yourself out. “Bad cameras?” They're perfectly functional cameras, I've seen the feeds. I've watched them over and over and over, trying to get this untangled!

ROOTY

Maybe the Commander's watching, too! There are lots of monitors in here! I like the Commander! She's salty.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Not all monitors are the same, Rooty. The Commander can't see into the detainment units from here; the only people authorized to access those feeds are the guards on duty, and my fellow members of the Committee. And we're certainly not passing on the audio from those feeds to any ne'er-do-wells!

ROOTY

Oh.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

And you should remember that the Commander is not really our friend, Rooty, salty though she may be. Oh, I suppose she means well, in her own shaded way, but she does not mean well for us.

ROOTY

Why not?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Because some people Just Don't Listen, dear. But with enough perseverance, we'll fix them all some day.

ROOTY

Yay!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Anyway, the problem can't possibly be the cameras. Although... what if they're intercepting the feeds *from* the cameras? How would we even begin to deal with that?

ROOTY

Turn them off?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What if—and I'm just wondering out loud, since I'm alone—what if it *is* the cameras? What if the Resistance has managed to tap the signal? They could even intercept it before it reaches the guard station—she could be doing just about anything in that cell, and their technicians could cut it out and replace it with footage of hours spent in Compliant Stillness. Of course! No Human would spend that much time just leaning against the wall! Oh Rooty, this is nefarious. This goes to the wellsprings. They are terribly clever, these Humans. And crafty, crafty Dee!

We shift during the last part of the previous line to hearing it over comms on the Bridge proper, where TORIANNA has been eavesdropping on this conversation. Bleep as she silences the audio feed.

TORIANNA

(calling across the Bridge)

Larry! I need a latte. Let's try Nuncle Panda's today. And take the local elevators on the way back, that should make sure it's cooled perfectly by the time you arrive. Got your kicky headband? Great. Now, please. Right now. Go go go. Swenson will cover your station. *(Larry leaves, objecting indistinctly.)* Amber, keep an ear on Frondrinax in there, please. Let me know if she mentions anything else I'd want to know about.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Yes, sir?

TORIANNA

Frall, could someone do that? With the cameras?

FRALL

Well, I can.

TORIANNA

Thank you, Lieutenant. Can *we* do that, those of us who are bound to three paltry dimensions and clad in flesh?

FRALL

Four dimensions usually, Commander. Occasionally a couple more, but you rarely notice them. And I do have some flesh, somewhere. I'd have to remember where I put it.

TORIANNA

I'll take that as a no, then.

FRALL

Probably not.

STALIN-BOT

I could do it. But would need to have aggregator chip placed into camera housing. Better plan would be to put chips into all camera housings from the beginning, as precaution, but does anybody ever listen to Stalin-Bot? So, too late for that now.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Even with an aggregator chip, how would the Resistance create a two-way transfer? The firewalls would block the traffic? And trace it, too?

STALIN-BOT

Not if Resistance were using secret off-band aggregation conduit for undetectable signal transfer. If they had clever system such as this in place.

TORIANNA

But they don't. There is no "secret off-band aggregation conduit," Mr. Stalin-Bot.

STALIN-BOT

Not in official station blueprints, no.

TORIANNA

And where would it be if it weren't in the official station blueprints?

STALIN-BOT

Listing secret off-band aggregation conduit in official station blueprints would defeat purpose, Commander. Probably. In theory. If there were such a thing. But Fairgrounds is big place, made by many people, over long time. So big, so many, so long—secret off-band aggregation conduit would be natural feature for interested party to add in unlisted maintenance location for extra added security and freedom. Just in case. As a secret.

TORIANNA

So you're telling me there might be one, and you might know where it is.

STALIN-BOT

Me? I never said such a thing.

TORIANNA

How could you possibly organize that? I mean, Nelly's punted water dish, you may have been designed in the image of a wire-tapping autocrat, but that doesn't automatically give you a vast network of spies and infiltrators at your disposal! ...Does it?

STALIN-BOT

(nothing to see here)

Docking Control status is nominal, Commander.

TORIANNA

Stalin-Bot, could you just for once—

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Sir? Frondrinax is making a call? On a secured line, but we'll be able to pick up her half of it from your office?

TORIANNA

Thank you, Amber. Let's hear what's on her mind.

Bleep as AMBER brings up the audio feed, and we shift back into TORIANNA's office.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Hello, yes, Frondrinax for Oakensarx. I'm alone, verify secure line, please.

ROOTY

Say hi to Oakensarx for Rooty!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Quiet, Rooty. *(back to phone)* Well, alone with Rooty, it amounts to the same thing.

(cont.)

Oakensarx, we had a thought—I've had a thought about the Dee Mallory problem. *(response)* No, not that she exists, that's not the problem. Communications are getting out, that's the problem. *(response)* Yes, the samizdat. I hate that word, don't you? It reminds me of cyanosite. So I was—
(response)

No, I don't think it's the guards. They may not be our finest crop, but they're not crazy, and they know they're being watched. It's not Althaar, she can't even look at him. It would be like serenading a Poomie, for Vim's sake. And I certainly wouldn't put it past Xtopps to try something, but I can't imagine a peanut butter junkie could manage to hide his methods from us for this long. *(response)* Yes. But no, that *doesn't* cover everything. It doesn't cover *the cameras*. What if they're intercepting the camera feed? They could even replace her singing with existing Compliant Stillness footage. Yes! It's something to— *(response)*

Well if you say so. I know we check the systems. *(response)* Yes, of course the Information Hygiene Brigade are very skilled. But the Humans can be quite clever themselves, you know. I've been here long enough to—*(response)* Yes, I'm sure you do. And of course the Humans will be much more impressive once they all accept the Plant Way! But they have this thing they do where they get stuck somehow, and there's obviously no way out, and then suddenly they *are* out, as if the outcome was never in question. It's quite irritating, but also admirable. In an abstract way, of course. *(response)*

All right. I just wanted to mention it. As a possibility. I did have one thing I thought we might try, just as a long shot. If we— *(response)* Are you sure? I could just give you a quick summary. *(response)* No? All right. We'll just water it and let you know if we get any shoots. Thanks. *(response)* No, it's fine, I'll have Rooty take care of it today. Thank you for— *(response)* Yes, very busy, I'm sure. By the way, I had a few notes for Glottulix about today's announcements, if you could— Hello? Hello? Hmph. I'm also very busy, you know. I don't just hang up on fellow Committee members like that.

ROOTY

(yawn) Nap time for Rooty?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Mm, just a quick one, dear. I'll have a mission for you soon. And we're going to test your little idea about shutting off the cameras. I don't think it will come to much, but you know what they say. Once you've eliminated every possibility, whatever's left is... indistinguishable from magic. Or something.

"Plants Are Great" instrumental plays from a monitor.

Oh, *Triumph of Efficiency* is starting! How exciting! Oh, no Rooty, don't—don't cling to my... oh, fine. I suppose we can just rest here together for a while and watch.

Shift back to hearing this last line on the Bridge. Normal activity in the background, stunned silence in the foreground.

TORIANNA

They're... turning off the prison cameras. Well, that's... a choice. Seems like the kind of thing the Resistance would be able to take advantage of, but what do I know.

There is a brief FRALL-ish warble, and a plink like a violin string breaking just before a difficult solo.

TORIANNA

What was that?

FRALL

It would appear that the faulty wire under the deck is once again on the verge of shorting out, sir. You should anticipate another critical failure cascade within the next 40 minutes.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Oh, no? Not again?

STALIN-BOT

Stupid piece of ненужный хлам! (*pointless junk, "neNOOZHny khlam"*)

TORIANNA

Oh cross Gilbert's orbs. I swear that stupid little wire is going quicker and quicker these days. Well, nothing to be done about it now. Just stand by to page that head-banded noidler of a maintenance subcontractor as soon as it gives up the ghost.

A chorus of groans—not that guy AGAIN.

[scene 5] The Electric Egg. If there were more people here, the crowd would probably be in a froth. As it is, Chip has to carry most of that weight himself. We hear a couple lines from the Triumph of Efficiency broadcast:

MRS. FRONDRINAX: And here we are, gentlebeings! The first stop on our tour: this lovely little mulch farm full of happy Human workers!

JOHN (reading): "What a darling sight to behold: Humans gladly volunteering their time and labor to assure our Fugulnari friends stay properly fertilized."

The scene from the previous episode continues in the background (with any and all embarrassing bits edited out, and possible filler to make the timing work), as:

SOPON

Wouldn't think they'd need any more fertilizer up there, thick as Johnny boy's spreading it around.

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell 'em, sister!

CHIP

Do you remember when I thought Torianna and Lieutenant Woo-Woo were the ones bringing this place down? Boy howdy, did I blunder up the blame on that one. That's it, we're closing out his tab. How much does he owe me?

SOPON

Nothing, boss, sorry. John B always settles up. And, you know, we can't really 8086 him no matter how much you like to talk about it, 'cause we need him to whang the seltzer machine back into shape every couple weeks. Otherwise, you know, deoxygenated death. Which, last I checked, is not covered in my contract.

CHIP

Yeah, yeah, I get it. Still, I hate that we had that guy in here and treated him like proper company. Didn't I buy him a drink once?

SOPON

I doubt it.

CHIP

You're probably right. I don't seem like the type.

BUBBLES

He always seemed like such a straight shooter. I can't believe I almost shared parts with him once.

SOPON

Uh, what? How? He's made of meat.

BUBBLES

Well, *obviously* we didn't go all the way after I figured that out! It's just, he scans as a robot, so that threw me off my game a little. But you know, I still thought he was a stand-up guy, right up 'til he went green. I guess I'm just a bad judge of character.

CHIP

You've been a bad judge of character since the day we met, Bubbles. You've got more inappropriate parts than a combover convention. But, what the frid, you make it work. In fact, I'd say it's part of your charm. Speaking of which, is that a new nozzle?

BUBBLES

Oh, yeah, thanks for noticing, boss! But this one's actually not a swap, it's a standard dispensing mechanism upgrade, ordered it myself! I just liked the way it's bendy. Check it out! (*appropriate nozzly bendy noise*)

CHIP

Huh. Well, it suits you. You know, if you— (*suddenly notices the musical abomination going on in the background*) What in the name of Bacchus's buyback is that?

SOPON

Looks like some kind of... elaborately-choreographed yet frugally-costumed musical number.

They watch for a beat.

CHIP

Hang on, why am I inflicting this on myself? Where's the mute button on this thing?

SOPON

I got it, one sec.

CHIP

Turn it off. Turn it off!

A bleep, and the song cuts off as SOPON mutes the screens. A beat.

SOPON

I don't know what I expected from a Foog puff piece, but it definitely wasn't... that.

BUBBLES

No skitter. What I don't get is why the Foogs would poison their own pots like that. No one's gonna believe a bunch of Humans spontaneously burst into song about their love of mulch. ...Right?

SOPON

I mean, how much did you know about Humans before you came here? But I have to agree, contrapuntal harmony is an eccentric choice for a so-called historical document.

CHIP

Oh, this has "Frondrinax" written all over it. Remember I told you about her weird slow-motion pageant thing back at Christmas?

SOPON

Oh, yeah... Shame we don't have any of that GalactiFlurries shness left. Could come in handy.

CHIP

(very very deadpan)

I have absolutely no idea what you're talking about.

Analog door as XTOPPS emerges from the back.

XTOPPS

Whoa, whence the elongated visagosity, Riders on the Storm?

CHIP

A traitor walked into my bar.

XTOPPS

Never candled that one, Chorp. Hit me with the lyrics?

CHIP

A traitor walks into a bar. He has a few drinks, makes a few friends, and then sells them all up the river for a kinky headband. And then everyone hates him because he's horrible on two legs, the end.

XTOPPS

Not much of a build to that one, funky boss. It lets a good zood down at the climax, and it's weak in the tubes. Where's the hook? Where's the killer in the road? If you're gonna make me understand, you need to tell the tell-tale tale, grab me by the hand, or by the tail, or by the telling. If you're telling me the tale of a fateful trip, and by trip we mean a fall from Grace with the sea, then I need to meet the Captain and the crew. Was it a millionaire who said "imagine no possessions?" Was there a Professor to tell all? Did Mary Ann break our man's heart? Is stage blood not enough? Was he squirming like a toad?

Chorp, I knew a man once who did his best. He was making all his nowhere plans, and then he's suddenly somewhere, and standing beside me. He don't give me orders, he don't condescend. I take a long holiday, and maybe he's my friend. I got twelve of these arms, mang, and sometimes I can't halfway hold on to myself, if you take my meaning. Six on one, half a dozen on the other. So I have to let some heartbeat slide when it comes to others.

These are tough times. Most of us? We do our best, you know. The heartbeat is a lovebeat, and if the math is right that makes it a good vibration.

I could have been a judge, but I never had the Latin for the judgin'. So I try not to swivel it back around. And—Hold the hangin' on the telephone! Is that our boy John B gettin' conditional with Dave and Zwizz'linarp???

Bleep as the screen is unmuted.

JOHN: "Well, I think that speaks for itself. Or should I say, sings for itself?"

“ "DAVE"”: I’ll say!

XTOPPS

Or perhaps your humble motivator spoke too soon. Jeck that zood, and his floral arrangements.

Various forms of agreement from everyone in the room gradually fade out as we focus on the transitional music of:

[scene 6] The Triumph of Efficiency broadcast.

FRONDRINAX: At the end of every deeply rewarding and entirely tolerable session of completely voluntary mulch-squunching, each of our Human workers tucks into their own little burrow right here in Hydroponics, until it’s time for another invigorating workday! Thus avoiding the innumerable stresses of the daily commute, and the onerous burden of skyrocketing housing expenses! Incredibly efficient, I trust you’ll agree.

THOOMBON: Burrows, you say? Like holes in the ground?

MRS. FRONDRINAX: Yes, cozy little Human holes.

GANGLION OCELLUS: Forgive me, madam, but I performed Richard The Tenth for a full season at Shamash Rep, and I don’t recall seeing any “Human holes” during my tenure.

"DAVE"

(voicing over)

Who knows their Humans best, in the end? My dear friend Zwizz’linarp, whose unflagging talent I respect every day from morning to night, but who is, after all, an artist, not a Humanologist? Or could it be the Fugulnari, who have embraced this earnest, immodest, strange, gifted, youthful, lusty race? Let’s fact-check with the experts.

PROF. DODICI GATEAUX

Hello Dave. Love your work—I’ve been a fan since the really early days. It’s delightful to meet you, even just by comm link! I’m Professor Gateaux, a doctor of Pan-Galactic Studies at the Fusion School of Sciences and Other Sciences, on Dactyl Gamma.

To answer your question, the Human race has a long history with holes. Before they evolved to manipulate their environment on a large scale, Humans spent thousands of years living in or near holes. They called them “caves”—naturally-occurring gaps in the rock formations of their world, which they surely dug out and shaped to their convenience. These “caves” were composed of both rock and soil, and were for the most part found in mountains and valleys.

(cont.)

Now, it should be obvious after a moment's thought that there are no mountains or valleys on an artificial structure like the Fairgrounds! So, to recreate an environment analogous to the original Human "cave" habitat, some improvisation is necessary. A hole in the soil of a gardening pod is the obvious closest alternative.

So, whatever your thoughts may be about inter-species cooperation on this scale, and admittedly it's quite a project, it is clear that the Fugulnari have indeed put a great deal of thought into how to best provide for your species' needs. And it is also clear that they've taken your well-being very much to root.

"DAVE"

And there's your answer! Frizz your reaction-mass thrusters, deniers: the Professor has laid those silly rumors of mistreatment to rest, in a little hole of their very own! Looks like you laid an egg with that one, Zwizz! (*game-show wrong-answer buzzer*) And now, let's take a closer look at the fascinating technology behind the Fairgrounds' state-of-the-art mulch-squunching machinery...

Musical background for a stirring montage of mulch-squunching machinery in action, à la Sesame Street or How It's Made. We move to hearing it play over a speaker in:

[scene 7] Hydroponics, a/k/a The Heart of Darkness. You can just hear how finely-tuned these sprinklers and sprayers are.

ASHLEE!

John! You got over here so fast! I thought you'd be glued to the holo-screen! Like I've been! You're fantastic! Your words about the Movement are so honest! And real! And inspiring!

JOHN

Thanks, uh, yeah. Thanks. But actually Mrs. Frondrinax wrote them, they're on those little cards I'm holding. You can tell I'm reading from the cards because I'm staring at them when I speak and my eyes move from left to right while I'm talking.

ASHLEE!

Oh! You're letting me in on the "secrets of the gig!" Is that right! I had no idea you were an artist! I thought you were just great at repairing things with your hands!

JOHN

Well, I—

ASHLEE!

Just between us! Sometimes I don't get along with artists! They are interesting! But they don't have direction! They don't know how to focus on the needs of the people! The real people I mean! You know!

JOHN

Oh, I'm not—

ASHLEE!

They don't understand that sometimes we need to make sacrifices for the common good! But you are different! You are so, so different! I'm different too! I bet I could really show you some things! That I'm really good at!

JOHN

I don't think—

ASHLEE!

We could turn off your pager for a while! It would be flush! It would be ... mountainous! Can I say that to you! I hope so! It would be mountainous! You won't get in trouble! I can certify this as a work call! No one would even question it!

JOHN

Oh, yeah, you know, I think it's just—

ASHLEE!

I know your old drampa¹ broke your heart! But that's something *I* can fix! Give me your hand! Here! Do you feel that!

JOHN

Uh, sure can. But I'm probably going to need my hand back before I— Whoahhhh!

John hits the floor. Crash. Lots of small glass things just broke, tubes and bottles, and some hosing popped loose. Water is spraying everywhere, not in gouts but in fine mists. A shelf or two of hydroponic denizens are all over the floor now, in puddles.

ASHLEE!

John! Are you all right! (*notices the damage*) Oh no! Shelf 237 is down! John, so sorry! I have to get these babies refloated right away! I don't know what happened! Are you all right!

JOHN

Ow, ow. I'm ok, really. No, don't— Ok, thanks. I'm fine, I just slipped in this puddle of—ah. Coffee. It's coffee. At least I hope it's coffee.

ASHLEE!

That's weird! I don't drink coffee! My Moms always said I was too much already and it would make me pop!

¹ Drampa = Drama Partner, like your terrorist ex-girlfriend that no one talks about because she ruined you, John, she just RUINED you.

JOHN

Sensible ladies, your Moms. Listen, Ashlee, I actually came down here on a priority call, so I should probably let you go and get to finding whatever the emergency is.

ASHLEE!

Oh! It wasn't really an emergency! I just wanted to be the first to congratulate you! On your incredible performance! And also there was— Never mind! It's broken now anyway!

JOHN

Oh, ok. I'll just go home and change, then, I got all—

ASHLEE!

Yes! And I have to work on this shelf! I'm so glad you're ok! Are you free tomorrow! We can meet up somewhere else! I have special ration cards! I can score us potatoes! Home fries from an unlisted storage facility! But you can't tell anyone!

JOHN

Oh, I don't, uh... have my schedule locked down yet. I'll get back to you, ok?

ASHLEE!

Ok!

JOHN

So, I'll let you get back to Shelf 237 then. They just might be our future leaders someday, right? Wouldn't want their roots drying out, heh.

ASHLEE!

That's so true! All right! See you soon! Wait! Before you go! I have to give you something!

A kiss from ASHLEE! that lingers a second too long, an ASHLEE! giggle, doors closing smugly.

JOHN

Well, that happened. Frall?

FRALL manifests.

FRALL

Got your back, John B. I do miss Tixondu's. Fortunately I happened to stop by there earlier this morning, before they closed two months ago.

JOHN

I'm not going to pretend I understood that, but thanks for the rescue. Like the penguins, I also appreciate my anatomy without things stuck in it.

FRALL

...It isn't often I get to say this, John, but I have no idea what you're talking about. No no, please don't explain. I'm just going to savor the ambiguity. It's a bit of a thrill, really. Something like opening your diary and finding an entry you didn't write, except appreciably less terrifying. By the by, would you happen to have any aggregator chips kicking around in your toolkit at the moment?

A FRALL-reconstituting-the-timeline noise.

JOHN

I'm pretty sure the answer to that was "no" a second ago, but probably I should check first.

FRALL

You should probably also wait until you get the Commander's call before heading to the Bridge.

[scene 8] Transition music into another section of the documentary, in which Dave interviews a table. Yes, a literal table.

"DAVE"

What could be more STABLE ... than a TABLE? If you have something close to your heart and you don't want it to fall and break, do you put it on a ladder? On a breeze? On a snowy roof? Well, I don't know about you—but I put mine on a sturdy STABLE TABLE. It's nearly the same word, isn't it? And here's a glimpse at a table of mine, where I store my Spirit Autoharp, the instrumental engine that sings the tale of our days in the gaze of Hoove the Beneficent Lifemaster. Look how safe and snug it is!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Hoove is a great one for Efficiency, Dave, isn't he?

"DAVE"

Hoove the Beneficent Lifemaster loves the universe best when it's as it is.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Of course he does! That Autoharp—

"DAVE"

Autoharp.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

—sure looks safe and secure there on that table, Dave.

"DAVE"

It *is* safe and secure. Let's find out more about that.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Take it away!

"DAVE"

Hi there, Mr. Table—can I call you T?

MR. TABLE

Sure thing, Dave. Big fan—love your work.

CONFIDENT ANNOUNCER

(In the spirit of pharmaceutical commercial disclaimers)

Artist's conception. The voice of Mr. Table is simulated by a Human actor. Tables are generally incapable of speech. If your table is engaging in speech, and you believe this to be improper or implausible, please consult with a physician or bartender.

"DAVE"

Thanks, Mr. T. I wanted to talk to you because you seem so... solid. So reliable, and so trustworthy.

MR. TABLE

These are the essential qualities of a good table, Dave.

"DAVE"

And how often would you say you go racing around the Fairgrounds, scampering every which way and banging into things, causing an unholy mess?

MR. TABLE

(chuckling a bit)

Why, never, Dave. That's just not something tables do. Why in all of wine-dark space would I go racing around knocking into things? I like to stay where I've been put, and make sure all the objects that have been entrusted to my care are perfectly safe. It's a source of great satisfaction to me.

"DAVE"

Wise words, Mr. T. If only more species could follow that simple advice! Of course you've got four legs, while some folks—Humans, for example—have only the two.

MR. TABLE

Some tables have many more than that—six, or eight, or even more! Not for running around on, of course, but to make us steadier and steadier, as we should be.

"DAVE"

So when you see a lot of Humans getting excited and running around, expending all kinds of unnecessary energy, you think we should instead... table that motion?

MR. TABLE

Ha! Good one, Dave!

"DAVE"

Now obviously, Mr. T., you're not actually sentient. You're not even alive. I'm not going to pretend to all those viewers out there that I'm actually hearing you advocate for an ideal way of living. But would you say you can profitably serve as a symbol to incite that kind of discussion?

MR. TABLE

Absolutely, Dave, and I'm glad you brought that up. Sentients could think you're just being some kind of cross-grain blockhead, when actually you're manipulating rhetoric at a pretty high level of function. You're substituting a vital fixture of Human life in place of Human life itself, in order to address fundamental truths. If you ask me, it's a valid way to consider the issue in a Deconstructionist light—a kind of dialectical metonymy, if you will. There may be some out there who just don't understand what you're trying to present here. And if I were to encounter any such fools, I would pity them. To acknowledge their petty caviling would just bring the level of discourse down.

"DAVE"

Very perceptive. So, do you think Humans could benefit from a greater focus on the kind of characteristics we've discussed here today? Stability, steadiness, simple dedication to the task at hand?

MR. TABLE

Absolutely. And I think that's true across the board. Or should I say, across the table?

*Big obnoxious laughs from "DAVE" and the TABLE as we transition to:
[scene 9] The Bridge, where the usual shorted-wire mishegas is afoot. We hear JOHN do his usual quick splice, and the resulting shutoff of the alarms. Silence. A brief blast from a fire extinguisher off in the middle distance.*

JOHN

Wire's all fixed, you're good to go! *(silence)*

But, uh, I guess you knew that already. From the way the alarms shut off. *(silence)*

Ok, so... I'll just... be on my way, then. *(silence)*

Uh, feel free to page me again if that pesky little wire acts up. *(silence)*

Seems like it's going bad quicker and quicker these days, huh? *(silence)*

But hey, that's what I'm here for! Got a tiny wire that needs a fix? And sixty seconds to spare? I'm your guy! *(silence)*

So, uh... yeah. *(silence, then bleep of AMBER activating her comm)*

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Commander? There's a superfluous civilian subcontractor on the Bridge? Wearing a stupid headband? And interfering with station operations? With his stupid small talk? Please advise?

TORIANNA

(over intercom)

What? Get in here, B! I have a few thoughts to share with you about professionalism and respect for my crew's time.

JOHN

Great. Thanks a lot, Amber.

AMBER

Why don't you go for an EVA picnic?

We follow JOHN into TORIANNA's office.

TORIANNA

If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, Mr. B, the Fairgrounds' bridge is not a social club! My crew is not here to entertain you, and you're sure as shness not doing anything for operational efficiency around here with your...

The door has closed, and FRALL activates their cone of silence.

TORIANNA

Hi John. Tough room out there.

JOHN

They've all been tough today, except for Hydroponics. Well, Hydroponics was even tougher, in its own way. Thanks again for getting me out of that, Frall.

FRALL

My pleasure.

JOHN

But yeah, I get the feeling I'm going to be catching hell for a while after appearing in the Foogs' little Hooray-for-Oppression parade.

TORIANNA

At least it should be good for your reputation in Booster circles, for what that's worth.

JOHN

Yeah, there's that. Doesn't help much when people are hucking batteries at me in the corridors, though. You'd think they'd realize none of it was my idea, based on the way I was standing there literally reading from a script. Why not pick on Dave? He was super into the whole thing!

TORIANNA

Ah, but he isn't here to be yelled at. And people apparently love him, for some reason.

FRALL

I've always preferred Zwizz'linarp.

TORIANNA

I don't watch, on general principle. I had a few friends who fell in with the Sacrosanct Chamber, and I vastly preferred the originals to the makeovers. They did lose a lot of weight, though.

JOHN

Anyway, not that I don't want to take my licks out on the floor, but I thought that wire was good for another week.

FRALL

It was easier to fail it now than to wait for the electron plaque to run its course. And isn't it precious to watch Stalin-Bot being sternly silent? It so rarely comes up on the Bridge. Besides which, we needed to speak with you right away. We have come across an unusual opportunity, and we have little time in which to take advantage of it.

TORIANNA

Right. Long story short, Frondrinax and that little sprout of hers were making a nuisance of themselves on the Bridge this morning. And while they were here, we managed to eavesdrop on their plan to test the security system in the Rehab and Detention blocks. By turning off all the cameras in Dee's section.

JOHN

By turning off—? Are you kidding?

TORIANNA

Nope. Couldn't have come up with that one on my own in a million years. But it's a perfect chance to establish a more reliable connection with Dee.

FRALL

Which our mutual friends will certainly appreciate.

JOHN

Absolutely. Have you told Stella about this?

FRALL

Unfortunately, at this time Ms. Reyes is engaged in the process of shimmying her way through a heavily-shielded vent in order to secure covert access to another Fugulnari food stockpile. This vent shielding is thick enough to block all electronic signals, and thus she will remain temporarily incommunicado for some hours. At least to those without my extradimensional advantages. She would not be able to pass on this information to her compatriots in the Resistance before it becomes irrelevant.

TORIANNA

Which is why we're sending you. We'll be planting a tiny-wire service call in the Detention monitor system in a few minutes. Now, Frall has informed me that you've got some aggregator chips in your kit there?

JOHN

Apparently.

TORIANNA

Great. So, as soon as you get the call, you'll go in to the cell block and install a chip in as many cameras as you can, before they get turned back on. Do you think you can handle that?

JOHN

Sure, no problem. But just putting those chips in the cameras isn't going to accomplish a whole lot by itself. You know that, right? You'd need to have something like an off-band aggregation conduit set up, in order to pull any data without it getting traced.

TORIANNA

So I have been reliably informed.

JOHN

And ideally you'd want to have that running before the surveillance system came back on-line, otherwise they could notice a blip in the signal and come looking for the source.

TORIANNA

Duly noted. I'll see if there's anything we can do about getting word to the Resistance from our end, but no matter what, I still want to take this shot while we've got the chance. It's definitely a gamble, but the potential payoff is too good to ignore.

FRALL

Like buying Apple options in the garage days.

TORIANNA

What?

JOHN

Apples? This isn't going to involve tangling with any apple trees, is it? Because I'm dedicated to the cause and all, but those zoods are just plain vicious.

FRALL

Merely a turn of phrase, Mr. B. And now I believe it's time for you to be on your way. Ready, Mindy?

TORIANNA

Whenever you are.

FRALL

Back to local coverage in three, two—

Cone-of-silence effect ends. The office door whooshes open as JOHN slumps out, and we follow him back out onto the Bridge proper.

TORIANNA

... and that vaporous clipling pushing buttons on our command panels. Sitting in my office, sitting in my chair, now even the coffee doesn't taste right! And then YOU, with that thing on your head, dragging the long branch of the state onto my Bridge *again* today because you can't seem to fix one little wire properly!

Appreciative giggles and murmurs from the Bridge crew.

JOHN

Yeah, thanks a lot, Commander! I'll be sure to forward all your helpful suggestions to the Committee!

Door whooshes shut behind him.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Commander?

TORIANNA

Yes, I know Amber, I don't like him on my bridge either, but he's the only one on station who's authorized to repair that Nell-forsaken wire, so we'll just have to tolerate him as best we can.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

No, sir? I mean, yes, but also? There's something playing right now? That I think you'll want to see?

TORIANNA

Isn't that stupid "documentary" still overriding every channel? I can't imagine there's anything in there I could possibly—

Bleep as AMBER brings up the feed. Instrumental version of "Plants Are Great."

TORIANNA

That's the Bridge. That's my Bridge. Why are they showing— Oh no.

"DAVE"

(under the above)

—between Humans and the Fugulnari Empire is a grand undertaking on a scale only dimly imagined by previous generations. So far, we've met friends and experts familiar with our operations. But what about the Humans in the gardens and trenches, so to speak? The ones who make all our lives on this station possible?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, that's an excellent question, Dave! Let's find out, shall we? Our crew stopped by the Fairgrounds' Command Center to meet Commander Mindy Torianna, the ranking Human officer in charge of station operations. Commander Torianna was as busy as you might expect, but we caught a few words with her along the way!

As soon as her name is first mentioned, a familiar holo is displayed on the screens:

TORIANNA

...AMBER! Where did they get that holo?!

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

I don't know, sir?! I thought I removed every copy from the system? But I must have missed a linkage?

TORIANNA

Oh, Jonesy up a drainpipe!

As the documentary continues:

TORIANNA

(on screen, chopped up from the previous episode's rant)

Daily life here on the Fairgrounds/is/getting better/every day./The Fugulnari/have/profound/ understanding of how Humans work/and/respect for what makes us unique./There is no/abuse/here./ The Fugulnari are/here to help us!/The Fugulnari/care/for us./The Fugulnari/protect us from/hunger and anger and/outrage./I don't know how/the ICSB/would/have the standing to fight off all the changes they're making./The Fugulnari/have/an advanced culture and star-faring technology./Jones and Koko,/the full reach of their master plan,/it's unprecedented./I can only imagine/what lies ahead/for/Humanity./This is the future,/the one we deserve.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

She always sounds like that when she's busy. And everyone on the Fairgrounds is so very very busy, working to create a better Galaxy for you! And me! And them! Like these ambitious workers on our celebrated Lingonberry Restoration Project!

More How It's Made-y music over loving lingonberry footage.

TORIANNA

(live)

Oh, by Petunia's patches! Get this shness off my screens!

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Should I try to get that holo scrubbed now, sir?

TORIANNA

No, Amber, I'd say at this point that ship has sailed. Sailed, foundered, suffered several catastrophic hull ruptures, spontaneously combusted for some reason, and drifted mournfully into the briny deeps.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

...Sorry?

[scene 10] The Detention Facilities. Two Fugulnari PRISON GUARDS are being vigilant at the monitors in the security station.

LAMBORGHINIX

What the—soil and roots! It's gone! The Mallory prisoner is gone! Alert! Alert!

A gnarled limb clacks down on a Big Red Button. An alarm begins to blare and is silenced just as it begins.

ASTONMARTLOX

No, no, she's right there.

LAMBORGHINIX

Where? I was watching it before, and—

ASTONMARTLOX

There. Right there, in the middle. She was on the side by the bunk for a while, and then she moved to the middle.

LAMBORGHINIX

Moved? Why would it move?

ASTONMARTLOX

I don't know why it moved. They do that.

LAMBORGHINIX

But it didn't have to move. Nobody asked it to move. I didn't—how are we supposed to keep track of it, if it *moves* all the time?

ASTONMARTLOX

You have to look on the screens. Sometimes she's here, sometimes there. A tricky business at first, but you'll get used to it after a while.

LAMBORGHINIX

It seems like a lot of work. This would be easier if it just stayed in one place.

ASTONMARTLOX

It's in their nature.

LAMBORGHINIX

Really? They have nature?

ASTONMARTLOX

Everything has nature.

LAMBORGHINIX

Not wind.

ASTONMARTLOX

Wha— of course wind has nature! It's wind's nature to blow things around and be made of air.

LAMBORGHINIX

Oh. Well, not... not rocks.

ASTONMARTLOX

It is the nature of rocks to be hard.

LAMBORGHINIX

Not all rocks. Some are soft.

ASTONMARTLOX

No rocks are soft. Some rocks are softer than others, but all rocks are hard. Harder than wind, anyway. Harder than things that aren't very hard.

LAMBORGHINIX

I guess you're right. Do you think wind is really made of air, though, or does it just happen in the air?

ASTONMARTLOX

It's the same thing.

LAMBORGHINIX

I don't think it is. I don't think you can really say that wind is *made of* air.

ASTONMARTLOX

When the air moves, that's wind. So yes, it's made of air.

LAMBORGHINIX

That's ... that doesn't seem right to me.

ASTONMARTLOX

If you fall in the forest, and there's no one there to hear you, would you still be talking?

LAMBORGHINIX

Probably. What the—look at the monitors! It's gone again! The Mallory prisoner has disappeared! It's—

A gnarled limb clacks down on another gnarled limb, which is covering the Big Red Button so the alarm isn't set off again.

ASTONMARTLOX

She's right there, in the corner by the sink.

LAMBORGHINIX

Oh. That's—yes, you're right. I saw it wasn't in the middle any more, and I thought it got away. This is making my crown spin. It moves all the time. How are we supposed to keep up with this? I'll get dizzy.

ASTONMARTLOX

I'm telling you, you'll get used to it. And please stop pushing the alarm button. That's only for emergencies.

LAMBORGHINIX

It's my nature.

One of those grating prison alarms that signals visitors coming or doors being opened, or, as in this case, both. A distant door clang.

DOOR ALERT SYSTEM

Alert. Unscheduled door access.

ASTONMARTLOX

Wonder who's coming.

LAMBORGHINIX

Someone's coming? Are you sure?

ASTONMARTLOX

Yes I'm— Are you seriously asking me that?

DOOR ALERT SYSTEM

(along with a closer clang)

Alert. Unscheduled door access.

LAMBORGHINIX

Yes I'm asking. This is how I learn, by asking questions and by doing. You know what they say, no question is too stupid.

ASTONMARTLOX

I never say that.

LAMBORGHINIX

You're just incurious.

DOOR ALERT SYSTEM

(with the guardroom door)

Alert. Unscheduled door access.

ASTONMARTLOX

(hissing quietly)

I am not incu— Hello. May we hinder you? We are prisoner security officers, and thus very much not at your service. Our brief is in fact to hinder you, repeatedly and with great force if necessary.

LAMBORGHINIX

At great length, if need be! Even though it's our brief. *(to ASTONMARTLOX)* But how we can be brief at great length? I've wondered about that, haven't you?

ASTONMARTLOX

I have not.

LAMBORGHINIX

See, this is what I'm saying. Incurious.

ASTONMARTLOX

(hissing quietly)

Shut. Up. *(out loud)* Please state your business here, gesin.

ROOTY

Hi! I'm Rooty!

[scene 11] In the In-Betweens, H.F. is tinkering with a smashed Trash Detection Unit, which is going through a VERY janky-sounding version of its “Do Not Litter” routine as H.F. cusses at it.

H.F.

Agh, stupid piece of smark. I thought I finally had it that time. What is going on here with the—

A burner phone (of a type we haven't heard before) rings. A bare-bones bleep as H.F. answers it.

H.F.

...Hello? *(response)* Who? Is that a person, or some kind of meme? *(response)* No, I don't think so. No, I just happened to be walking down the corridor, minding my own business, when I heard something ring on the ground. And I was so surprised, I just grabbed it without thinking, you know? And now I'm talking to you. So I have no idea what— *(response)* You mean like “The hardy brown fox jumps over the lazy Fidorian?” That's not— *(response)* What? And you are? Commander Who? I don't think I know anyone with a mouth like yours, thank you very—

We can't hear the words on the other side of the phone, but we can hear the tone. It sounds like TORIANNA needs either a bit more coffee, or a lot less.

H.F.

All right, fine, I get it, it's you. Hi, Mindy. You shouldn't—all due respect, but you've burned this number, and I don't have that many of them. *(response)* Yeah, we got a few minutes before this line starts to track—it'll flash a warning and then disconnect automatically on my end, no worries. *(response)* I'm actually working on a blind comms network with some of the materials I have at hand here—

TORIANNA is urgent, and brief.

H.F.

They're shutting them all off? Completely? *(response)* Holy hell. You're sure about this? Where'd you get the intel? *(response)* Right in your office? There's something just so wrong with them. *(response)* I know, right? The evil overlords we deserve. But listen, Mindy, are you sure you want to get involved here? If anyone figures out this came from you— *(response)* Well, I appreciate it. Ok, so I definitely won't have enough time to get her out, even if we could get someone through the door, but— Thrab it. If I had a little warning, I could maybe scrape together some aggregator chips or something, try to get a— *(response)* Really? Who told you that? *(response)* Ah. Dictator-bots, so reassuringly predictable. Well, yeah, if he's already got the chips in place, then all I'd need to do is set up an off-band aggregation conduit. I should be able to access the camera feeds from our side, no sombrero. And I'd definitely rest easier knowing we had a backup in place if the Foogs move her to another cell we can't—ah, that we can't access by our usual methods. Which I will not trouble you by describing.

Alert-y bloop noise.

WEIRDO PASSING BY

Hey, rubricator, the floor you're on is changing colors. Friendly! Is that an app doing that?

H.F.

Something I'm working on, placebo²!— Ok, I gotta go, it's already strobing. Any idea how long I've got to set this up before— *(response)* Gotcha. And thanks, Mindy. *(response)* All right, I'm gone, I gotta rip this chip before it pings. It was good to hear from you, but, you know, you never heard from me. I've probably left the station. You're pretty sure I'm halfway to Minelauva by now. Hardyfox out.

H.F. cracks open the phone, destroys the chip. Then kicks the TRASH DETECTION UNIT, which lets out a low & warbly "Litter..."

H.F.

I seriously need to get you drifters chopped and channeled before I run out of phones. But first things first, I gotta get over to the Brig.

[scene 12] Musical transition into another sapient-on-the-corridor interview from Triumph of Efficiency. NESS and DORMER have spent their lives waiting for exactly this moment.

NESS

I think it should be obvious, gesin, that moving from place to place is just a lot more dangerous than staying where you are. That is both undeniable and quantifiable.

DORMER

Unless where you are is already dangerous. Then it's a good idea to move.

NESS

Right. But that's in very specific circumstances. I'm talking about the general principle here.

DORMER

It still needed to be said.

NESS

Not really, because that's not what we're talking about.

² Placebo = Someone who's sweet enough, but isn't going to have any real effect on your day. Not an insult, the feeling is probably mutual.

DORMER

No, totally! It's critical. What if you're standing under a falling booster rocket? You need to, you know, move. It's imperative. It's pressing. There are some situations where immobility comes with potential dire consequences, is all I'm saying.

NESS

Wha— Why are you under a falling booster rocket? Where's it falling from? Who put it up there? This sounds like a *res ipsa loquitur*, which is not your normal situation.

DORMER

There could be reasons. Who are we to judge?

NESS

We're Security! We're the experts!

DORMER

Well, in my expert opinion, you need to move before it hits. Unless you can intercept.

NESS

Okay, but that's not— Hang on, no. If you've got the kind of ordnance with the kinetic payload to stop a falling booster rocket, then your splash damage is going to be beyond severe. How long has this rocket been falling?

DORMER

I don't know. I'm not the one standing under it.

NESS

Then why'd you bring it up?

DORMER

I just like the idea. It's very visual.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

We're here speaking with two incredibly single-minded Boosters, both members of the Fairgrounds' highly effective and efficient Human Security forces: Bill Dormer and Nevermind Ness.

NESS

Uh, it's not—

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Now, it seems to me that you're saying this Not Moving issue is a little more complicated, from a Security perspective, than it may sound to the average viewer. It's essentially a situational matter, is that it? Involving lightning reflexes and shrewd, canny assessment of nuance and portents?

DORMER

Not really. Usually it's pretty straightforward.

NESS

Look, if you want to break it down, basically it's like this. If you're in a place that's full of danger, you should move, and go where it's less dangerous.

DORMER

But if you're not in danger, you should stay where you are. Maybe check out property.

NESS

Right. It's an excellent investment. Owning changes everything.

DORMER

I'm saving up, myself.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Fascinating. Now, let's get right to the loam of it, shall we? Security comes up a lot in our planning meetings with the Fugulnari Committee for the Management of Human Affairs. "The Committee," for short. We've made quite a few changes in the everyday lives of our Human friends—some up on the surface, but some going right down to the bedrock. And we know it's been a lot to absorb, and the Committee has discussed at great length the possible types of Security response to, well, to incidents where some of these changes might lead your fellow Humans to act out in a... less than considerate fashion. What do you, as Human Security officers, believe is the *appropriate* response to these attempts to disrupt the public good?

DORMER

That's a question with a lot of fiber, Frondrinax. There's a lot to explore and unfold. I mean, some might think that we'd be entirely justified in busting heads whenever the tranquility and security of the Fairgrounds is threatened.

NESS

I agree. Some would definitely think that.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, that is certainly a view I've heard expressed around the station! But what about others? What might they think?

DORMER

About what?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

About more nuanced responses to security issues?

NESS

Oh! Well, I couldn't tell you that, gesin. I don't listen to the kind of troublemakers who espouse those kinds of anti-social ideas. But probably anyone who thinks like that already had their head busted, so their thoughts don't matter much.

DORMER

But thinking them probably hurt! (*general chortling*)

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, thank you, officers, for that fascinating perspective. But if you'll allow me to spread my leaves with you, and our audience, for just a moment: We're making this document to clarify the true essence of the groundbreaking partnership between Human and Fugulnari, as it stands today. But we are also looking to the future, to how the people we're binding together will recall these powerful moments.

And I'll be the last to say we Fugulnari are perfect. Maybe that's a risky thing to admit, in a project like this. Maybe we should appear confident and grounded, even when we are forced to stretch our roots into less than certain soil. But I think we're better than that—that we Fugulnari can acknowledge that we are growing right along with our Human partners, and that there may be the occasional miscast seed, as we are discovering the most effective approach to sharing the ultimate truth of the Plant Way.

Now, some might call that over-sharing, and of course I can't speak for every Fugulnari in the galaxy! But that's what I think. And if I've maybe gone a little too far, well, I apologize. They tell me this sort of thing can be adjusted in stick.

ROOTY

(*off*)

Post!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, in post. In any case, given that we're all learning our way here, cultivating plots in unknown glades, do you think some more varied and moderate Security protocols might perhaps be more effective? In the long term?

NESS

Uh, I'm going to stick with busting heads. It's pretty much a one-size-fits-all solution.

DORMER

Yeah, count me in on that one too.

[scene 13] Transition to the guard station in the Detention area.

ASTONMARTLOX

I want to be sure I have this right, because it sounds completely stuffed full of muffins. You want me to shut down every camera connected to this highly-advanced surveillance system, which is very specifically a thing I am not supposed to do, and then you want to visit with our most high-priority prisoner, despite not being listed on the visitation registry, which is also specifically a thing I have been posted here to stop people from doing.

ROOTY

Yes! You can write my name on the list here. It's "Rooty," with an R.

ASTONMARTLOX

And you say this has been authorized by Frondrinax and Oakensarx.

ROOTY

Yes! After the "R" there are some "O"s.

ASTONMARTLOX

Despite there being no mention of any of this in the logs.

ROOTY screams in horror, startling LAMBORGHINIX, who also lets out a small shriek.

LAMBORGHINIX *(overlapping)*

What happened? Did it escape again?

ROOTY *(overlapping)*

You have LOGS here?

ASTONMARTLOX

It hasn't escaped! Stop that!

ROOTY

Is this some kind of appetizer? How can you keep LOGS in here?

ASTONMARTLOX

Not those kind of logs! They're the "logging in" kind of logs. And they definitely don't authorize you to be visiting this— what did you call it?

ROOTY

Ap-pet-iz-er...?

ASTONMARTLOX

No.

ROOTY

Appurtenance?

ASTONMARTLOX

No idea what you're going for here.

ROOTY

Ummmm... Oh! I got it! Applesauce!

ASTONMARTLOX

None of those words are even remotely related to anything we might be— Oh, hold the phloem, are you trying to say “abbatoir?”

ROOTY

Uh... ok?

ASTONMARTLOX

Well, this isn't one of those either. Because that's for meat. Which we are not made of. The word you'd be looking for is, oh, what would it be now... Ah yes, “lumberyard!”

ROOTY and LAMBORGHINIX scream in additional horror.

ASTONMARTLOX

This is going to be the longest shift in Vim's green age.

DEE

(over surveillance monitor)

Oh my endless potato-flavored misdemeanors of days past. Can you sprouts shut down the screaming up there? Just enough already, please! I am a very captive audience, ok?

LAMBORGHINIX

Ohhhhh, it heard that! It's going to report us, we'll be in so much trouble.

ASTONMARTLOX

How can it report us? It's a prisoner. This is no spa. We're... wearing it down psychologically, that's what we're doing. This is an op. We'll have operational immunity.

LAMBORGHINIX

I don't think I'm allowed to do ops. I just started. I was a cabbage-minder before.

ASTONMARTLOX

Cabbage-minder? That's a full-time job?

LAMBORGHINIX

Yes! I was there to make sure no one played football with them.

ASTONMARTLOX

And did anyone play football with them?

LAMBORGHINIX

Just me, and only a couple times a shift! So I got promoted to here.

ASTONMARTLOX

That explains so very much.

LAMBORGHINIX

So... are we in trouble?

ASTONMARTLOX

I... well now I'm not so sure. Everything in the Detention areas is covered by these cameras. Including us. So if the prisoner were to complain, and that led someone to look at the feeds... And they were to see you two Bonchos flailing around in here...

ROOTY

But they won't, if you turn the cameras off!

LAMBORGHINIX

This Rooty, you know, he might be onto something there.

ROOTY

Yay!

ASTONMARTLOX

All right, we'll try it. But the Committee will have all our shoots if this gets out. So, not a word of this to anyone, understood?

LAMBORGHINIX

My stomata are sealed.

ASTONMARTLOX

That'll clear up when you're older, probably. All right, Rooty, you go on and have your visit, but I'll be closing the guardroom door behind you, so don't come running to us if this goes square-shaped.

LAMBORGHINIX

But what if it does? They'll know we let him in!

ASTONMARTLOX

Then I'll... I'll turn off the lights, too. That way no one can see we're here.

LAMBORGHINIX

Wow! Smart!

ASTONMARTLOX

Ready, Rooty?

ROOTY

Ready!

Powering-off switchy-clicky noises.

DEE

(over surveillance monitor)

And what's this now? *(calling out)* Hello? What's going on? Can I get a little light in here, please? ...Anyone? *(to herself)* Hey, is the door— No, still locked, thrab it.

Over the above:

LAMBORGHINIX

She knows! What do we do? *What do we do?!*

ASTONMARTLOX

Quiet, you! She doesn't know anything. Here, I'll shut off the audio feed too, if that'll settle your pith. *(one more click, and DEE's audio cuts off; then the guardroom door clangs open)* On your way, now, Rooty, there's a good sprout.

ROOTY

Okay!

We follow ROOTY as he bumbles down the corridor, and through another door into the visiting area outside DEE's cell. As the door opens, we hear DEE over the cell intercom: (At some point we shift to the cell interior and are hearing DEE live and ROOTY over the intercom.)

DEE

...seriously just going to leave me sitting here in— *(sees ROOTY)* Uh, hello? What's this now?

ROOTY

Hi! I'm Rooty.

DEE

Hi, Rooty.

A beat.

DEE

Are you... here to fix the lights, Rooty?

ROOTY

No! I'm on a mission! For Mama Frondrinax!

DEE

Oh, I should have known this was more weird Frondrinax glitchery. Is she delegating her daily mind-jeck to the intern pool, now? That's what this is about?

ROOTY

No, Rooty's on a super special super important secret mission! But I can't tell you about it!

DEE

You just did, though.

ROOTY

(small fear noise)

DEE

Although I'm pretty sure I could have figured out on my own that you weren't one of the regular guards. They're all a lot bigger than you, for starters.

ROOTY

I'm big for my age.

DEE

Are you?

ROOTY

Small for my size?

DEE

...Okay. So what happens now? You know you're not supposed to be anywhere near me, right? I'm incredibly dangerous. An enemy of the Plant Way. They locked me up for... either putting my left hand in or my right foot out, I can't remember now, but it was something along those lines.

ROOTY

The hands are the top ones, right? I'm not good at lefts and rights.

DEE

Yes, the top ones. So, yeah, some of you Foogs got your vines all twisted up, and tried to tell me what I could say and sing with my Human voice. And that went over about as well as that always does. And now I'm here.

ROOTY

In jail!

DEE

Right. And now you're here, too! Any particular reason why?

ROOTY

Ummmmm... Oh! Rooty wanted to hear a song! Could you sing something, pretty lady? Or maybe say one of those poems? They make Rooty tingly.

DEE

Now look at you. You know that's a tricky request, right? I'm in here because I *was* singing. I'm in here because they want to *stop me* from singing. They want to crush my people by muting my voice. And now you want a little private concert here in the house of silence? You can see how that might be a problem, right?

ROOTY

Oh. But Rooty has a secret secret though!

DEE

I just bet you do.

ROOTY

Yes! We turned off the cameras. And the microphones. And the guards are hiding in the office with the lights out. So no one will know!

DEE

Ha! You're going to have to do better than that if you want to slide one over on me, kid. The watching doesn't stop in here, it runs every hour 'round every kind of clock.

ROOTY

No, really! I turned them off myself! Mama said it was okay!

DEE

Did she really? ...Okay. All right. Let's say we did share a little inspirational talk, and maybe a tune or two. You'd tell your friends, right? Then I'd get in trouble.

ROOTY

Oh, no! It's just for me. Also Rooty doesn't have any friends. Just Mama.

DEE

No fooling. But let's say you got some friends, at some point. And you wanted to tell them about the time you got a command performance from the infamous Dee Mallory!

ROOTY

Ooh!

DEE

...They'd never believe you! Right? I mean, unless you recorded it or something.

ROOTY

Oh! Rooty can do that! But... no one's supposed to be recording you, though. We'd get in trouble. Shouty trouble. Go-and-sit-in-the-utility-closet-Rooty trouble.

DEE

If you did it wrong, sure. Big trouble. So you'd have to be smart about it. Are you ready to be smart, Rooty?

ROOTY

Ooh! I'm ready! This is exciting!

DEE

Isn't it, though? So what we're going to do is, you're going to record me singing, and then you're going to squirt the file to a pasta dropbin on HECNET, so you can listen to it later whenever you want! Or send the code to your friends, if you ever get any!

ROOTY

Pasta? I don't think that's allowed anymore.

DEE

Don't worry, it's not that kind of pasta, it's like a... an anonymous data storage point. I have a couple of active codes I used to use for posting demos to agents, back when I still had a hope of making it off this trash heap. So, you want to go to FileHoardlr.hec, and enter the code CPL-593H. And then I'll sing for you, and afterwards, you can access the record of it right there, forever and ever!

ROOTY

Woooooow!

DEE

You think you can handle that, Rooty?

ROOTY

Yes!

Bleepity bleepity as ROOTY follows her instructions on his device. A distant door clang.

DEE

Hang on, someone's coming, we better be quiet. But we'll do this right as soon as they leave, ok?

ROOTY

Okay!

We hear JOHN making his way down the dark hallway through the still-open anteroom door.

JOHN

Uh, hello? Is anyone back there? I've got a work order to fix some cameras? I tried to check in at the guard station, but they said no one was here and they were hiding. Hello?

ROOTY

Hi, Booster buddy!

JOHN

(approaching)

Hi, Rooty. Uh, you wouldn't happen to know why they turned off all the lights in— Oh. Uh, hi Dee.

DEE

As I live and choke. I heard you signed up and Boosted. I almost didn't believe it, but honestly I should have known better. No one ever washed up short underestimating the honor of the species, right? Maybe we deserve the Foogs. Or at least you do.

ROOTY

He does!

JOHN

Uh, thanks, Rooty. So. *(beat)* I've never actually been here before, it looks. Ordinary. Anyway, yeah. I'm just here to fix, um, I won't be long. The cameras are down.

Camera-tinkering noises under the following.

DEE

Mm, can't have that. Better get them up and staring again. Figures they'd have you down here. A real Friend of Frondrinax they can trust with their dirty little secrets. Maybe have a couple laughs with over a NutraZoom after you're done. Ha ha ha, look how long we locked her up for singing for her people. For singing for her dreams.

JOHN

I... I'm not actually turning the cameras on, I'm just here to get the board signal cleared. They'll do the system reboot back in the guardroom, when— well, whenever they're done hiding, I guess.

DEE

Wow, I can't begin to tell you how fascinated I am by this little peek into the daily life of a Foog collaborator. I'm at the edge of my spartan cot.

JOHN

Sorry. I don't know what to say. I'm really sorry you're in here.

DEE

One question, John.

JOHN

Sure, what?

DEE

How could you, John? How could you?

JOHN

Look, it's— It's not like anything I could have done would have stopped them locking you up! And it's not like I'm the only one who joined the Boosters. You can see headbands all over the Fairgrounds these days. All over the League.

ROOTY

Because so many of our good Human buddies believe in the Plant Way! Like John B!

JOHN

...Right. Like me.

DEE

Just do your little job and get out, okay? My entertainment options are rigorously limited these days, but if I have to choose between listening to your feeble excuses and staring at the bulkhead, the bulkhead wins.

ROOTY

Hooray for bulkhead!

Final clicking of JOHN closing the camera housing.

JOHN

There. All done. I'll let you and Rooty get back to your... What *are* you doing here, Rooty?

ROOTY

Secret things!

JOHN

...Ok.

Clang as JOHN leaves and shuts the anteroom door behind him.

DEE

Thought he'd never leave. All right, Rooty, ready for your command performance? Dropbin accessed, ready to record?

ROOTY

Rooty's all ready!

DEE

Perfect. Now, we're going to make this a short one, ok? Because I don't know how long we've got before John gets those eyes-in-the-sky back open. Let's see, now...

(singing, to the tune of "St. Louis Blues")

They locked me up here, tell me not to sing
But I'm Human, that don't mean a thing
Plants are laughin', they don't have a care,
But we Humans, we can't go nowhere

Got the Fugulnari Blues, just as blue as I can be
Those greens got a heart like a rock cast in the sea,
Or else they'd fade off home and let us be

Someday we'll all walk free under the sky
We can step out all over, spread our wings and fly,
And I'll keep singin' bout it, till the day I die

Leafy applause.

ROOTY

Yaaaaaaaay! Thanks, pretty lady!

DEE

My pleasure. But now I think you'd better bouge, sprout. You wouldn't want anyone to intercept your super secret mission, right?

ROOTY

Oh! Right! Okay bye!

Door clangs open and shut as ROOTY bumbles off into the hallway.

DEE

I cannot believe that worked.

Crackle from the cell intercom as H.F. taps into the feed from his hiding place amongst the conduits.

H.F.

(over intercom)

Dee! Hey, Dee!

DEE

What the—? It's like rush hour on the Central Promenade in here today. Is that you, H.F.? Where are you?

H.F.

I'm by the data conduits, I just did a quick tap into the audio channel to your cell. We should be able to talk for a second, they've shut off all the surveillance feeds.

DEE

Yeah, I know, I just had a couple of abundantly unexpected visitors.

H.F.

Really? Remind me to ask you about that later, 'cause I don't know how long we've got here. And I'm not going to pass up the chance to record you on something approximating an actual microphone. Whatever you got for Radio Free Fairgrounds, lay it on me, I'm rolling.

DEE

Oh! I already sent something out, actually. Should be on my Hoardlr, you know the code.

H.F.

What? How?

DEE

No shness, I just recorded today's message to the exterior and posted it to HECNET by way of Rooty.

H.F.

...Who?

[scene 14] Transition music to another segment of Triumph of Efficiency. Footsteps echoing in a measured pace against the silent darkness. "DAVE" enters, thoughtful.

"DAVE"

I believe that as soon as we Humans saw light, we wanted to do something with it. Some wanted to paint it. Some wanted to write about it. Some wanted to tell stories to spread that light around. And some, the masters of their lives, took it into themselves and followed its inner nature.

That turning-on-the-mains sound we know so well from movies. The audio is flooded with brilliant light, clunking on from a Master Switch.

Now, there are sapients out there who, let's face it, make terrible art. C'mon, Dilurians! You know who I'm talking about, and I know you're proud of it! Give it up for yourselves, and your inexplicable dedication to fart jokes! Although I suppose when you're supplied with that many butts, the ancient yet juvenile tradition of the fart joke can be cathartic. Or existential. Or perhaps even both.

But let's get back to Human art. There are some Humans who make art but don't share it. Some who make it but don't get it. Some who talk about it, but don't know it when they see it. Some who don't know how to start; some who don't know when to stop. And all of these are very Human.

Because Humans have always told stories of our world, and the way we see it. We met our world, in a sense, by re-creating it and making myth of it. Later, as we spread across our world and began to remake it, we told stories of journey and voyage. Strange, fertile, exciting foreign places. And now, here we are, scattered across space, meeting a future of a different kind, hand in appendage with our fellow sapients of the Galaxy. But whereas once, we raced ahead to storm the future, now we must learn to stand content, and let it catch up to us.

Our friends the Fugulnari don't travel as we do—they go just as far and farther, but always with their roots sunk deep into solid earth. And now, deep into planet Earth itself! There's a lot we can learn from them. Why should we scatter our efforts willy-nilly, when all good things pass near those who wait? To show you what I mean, let's take a look at some of the emerging static art scene that's sprouting up right here on the Fairgrounds.

This is my new friend, Definitely Catapult. Now, that's an RNG name, isn't it? Can you tell me a little about that?

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Sure, Dave. Hey, big fan, though I don't find the purity I really hope to see in your work. You have too much of an agenda. Makes it crass.

"DAVE"

Thanks, Definitely. I respect your thoughts, and acknowledge your open play for notoriety through hostility. It's a good strategy, and I wish you luck with it.

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

That's patic, Dave. Good on you for your generosity of spirit. So, the name. An RNG name is a name chosen by a Random Number Generator, which picks out words through aleatory processes—rolling dice, basically, but really complicated dice. The practice originated with an obscure species known only as Luck Navigators, who undergo the process at birth. But I had my name curated by the good bots of Timekeeping Central, who maintain a few bespoke devices along these lines that help them with the incredibly complex calculations involved in scheduling Drop Time.

A brief "Woo!" from someone in the middle distance.

"DAVE"

Wow. Incredibly pretentious.

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Right? It took me ages to find just the right balance—pretentious, yes, but there's the barest touch of cool clinging to it, like a graceful hint of misty nostalgia.

"DAVE"

Too true. I mean, I think it's incredibly stupid, but I still wish I had thought of it first.

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Thanks so much! Coming from you, that's super vertical.

"DAVE"

You're welcome. Now, Definitely, why don't you share something with us about your current work? Explain Standing for the benefit of our viewers. Is it just, you know, Standing? Like people do?

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Ha! Of course not. Well... Sort of, yes. But it needs a context. Perhaps it would be simplest just to show you an example. The most traditional Standing, the archetype, is a dance structure. Here, I'll show you.

"DAVE"

I can't wait!

Music. Something awful. Ten seconds.

"DAVE"

Amazing! You did *absolutely nothing* during that terrible sound! That was so dramatic.

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Like some of the pioneering work of John Cage, Standing is all about serendipity, and the rich flavor of happenstance.

"DAVE"

I wish we had more time to explore the nuances—but this is something you can pretty much do anywhere, isn't it?

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

I was doing it during your intro, and it turned out great. You can do Standing on stage, at the rehearsal hall, in your favorite club, at home, even at work sometimes. Here's a tip: try it out on line for the cashier at your favorite stores! It adds a gorgeous dimensionality to simple chores.

"DAVE"

Well, I must say this is all very inspiring. The first full-blown Fugulnari-Human artistic form! And now, I understand you've secured funding from the Committee to open your very own Arts Lab! Can you tell us a little about what you and your associates have uncovered?

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

Well, just at the moment I've been focused on the establishment of a Standing Cosplay company, as well as toying with some ideas for Standing Fashion.

"DAVE"

Standing Cosplay? You mean you dress up as figures from fiction and mythology, and then don't move?

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

That was where we started, but then we unearthed a powerful inversion. Right now most of us are concentrating on finding things that don't move, and then cosplaying them. For example, Jennifer here! Jennifer is being a book. Thanks Jen, you can go ahead and break now.

JEN

Thanks, Definitely. That was a good one!

"DAVE"

Uncanny. It raises so many questions. We don't have time for any of the answers right now, but thank you, Definitely, for sharing your perspective. Clearly, it's an exciting time to be staying still.

DEFINITELY CATAPULT

My pleasure. The Rule 34 stuff on Standing is going to be off the hook, by the way. Trust me on this.

[scene 15] Another audio pan, or more properly an audio pull-out, as this segment is being watched at the Egg. As the interview ends, "Plants are Great" starts up again. The bar regulars are here—CHIP, XTOPPS, SOPON, BUBBLES, KWONTZ, ALIEN BARFLY, and a few others. By now everyone really hates that song.

ALL

Nooo, make it stop, Plants are Really Not That Great, This sucks, Turn it off, etc.
(bleep as the screen is muted)

SOPON

Okay everyone, listen up! I want to be sure you all get this. If in the future you want a drink, but you see me over here doing this—like this?—then you will have to wait until I'm done expressing my essential stationary-ness, because you will be in the presence of Art.

HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

I'm preeshurr Art owes me a drink! At least. Mebbe two.

CHIP

We'll be sure to tell him. What did you say your name was?

HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

My name? My name is Questionably Trebuchet!

Hilarity by all.

SOPON

You know, it's not even that the Foogs are being weird and creepy—an alien occupation should be weird and creepy. But they've made it boring and embarrassing, and that is some seriously repellent Black Ops Psy-Ops jackpot shit. And that song. That *song*.

KWONTZ

(gibberish: Is it really possible they've stumbled on this strategy by dumb luck?)

CHIP

I mean, it has to be dumb luck, doesn't it? Because I think you're right—they did an amazing job of looking like idiot goons who are making a huge mess of this.

BUBBLES

But they're not idiot goons. They've got the entire League locked down tighter than a modulator gasket.

CHIP

Yeah, I know. But they just did an incredible impression of idiot goons. No one's going to believe the Foogs are a threat to the entire Galaxy after seeing this. And why would the ICSB bother to interfere with some weird deal between a few idiot goons and some sex-crazed bipeds? I mean, no thanks, right? Nobody's walking away clean from this one. Which could have been the whole point of inviting that fact-finding mission in the first place. ...Okay, I just heard that come out of my mouth, and I realize I sound like a total reality-surfer, so I'm gonna press pause on that until I'm drunk enough to justify a full-on paranoid rant.

OTHER HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

You know, a real reality-surfer would be slashing prices on drinks, after a bizarre shared traumatic experience like that misinformation pageant.

CHIP

Zounds! I've regained my mental composure! We are not currently in discount season, my friend. The Committee is killing me with these travel restrictions. The bar-room may feel pleasantly spacious right now, but I need to get it back up to sweaty and crowded at least once in a while if I'm gonna keep the aquarim stocked. So you're paying full-price until Humans come back around in the buy-one-get-one rota, sorry.

HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

Oh. Probably this is a bad time to mention that we ran out of money about 30 minutes ago.

CHIP

Are you flotting kidding me.

OTHER HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

Sorry.

CHIP

Sopon?

SOPON

Probably this is a good time to mention your shoes are Tite-Lokked to your barstools as of about 25 minutes ago.

OTHER HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

Hey. What the—?

SOPON

You sure you don't have an extra credit chip we can run against the tab? 'Cause I'm betting you do.

HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

Yeah, all right. It's hard times for us too. Try this one.

SOPON

No sombrero, zoods. I was pretty sure you'd be good for it.

ALTHAAR announces his imminent arrival from the corridor.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is making approach to the Electric Egg! Please to be illuminating the sign, please!

BUBBLES

Got it!

Switch, buzzzzz.

ALTHAAR

Thanking you!

OTHER HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

What the—Iltorian Warning? Oh no. Please, bartender! Please, unlock the shoes!

SOPON

First things first, sport. Lemme just run this chip—

Bleep bleep, SOPON runs the chip. There's enough of a balance.

SOPON

Huh. Your name really is Questionably Trebuchet. Didn't see that one coming.

*SOPON releases the locks on the barstools and both the HUMAN DRINKERS flip backwards. **Whoooooah!** They fall wholeheartedly, but don't take any damage.*

HUMAN DRINKER AT THE EGG

Urrghhh. Why not? I told you it was.

SOPON

Fair enough, Mx. Trebuchet.

ALTHAAR

(passing by on the way to the Blorch Hunter machine)

Human friends, while Althaar is not the boss of you, he is making suggestion to maintain closement of the eyes until he is fully ensconced in his place of hiding!

Groans from the HUMAN DRINKERS on the floor.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar must apologize for the discomforting, new Human friends! It was not necessity for you to be lying on the very sticky floor! Althaar will soon be fully concealed behind the *Big Blorch Hunter II* machine! Mr. Frinkel, Althaar would like to purchase the cock-tail for your Human guests, in recompense for the causation of up-set. Not one cock-tail for all the Humans, but one for each, please. Oh! And also for the other guests, Althaar does not wish to cause the feelings of exclusion!

KWONTZ

(enthusiastic gibberish)

ALTHAAR

Not at all, Sin Kwontz, it is the pleasure to Althaar!

XTOPPS, who has also been enjoying the dubious comforts of the floor, wakes with a start.

XTOPPS

Althaar? Hey Althaar. I woke up and I was having this dream, and you were in it. And that was weird, because I had woken up, so that shouldn't have been my dream, should it? But there you were anyway. In my dream, the owls were not what—no never mind, yes they were. It was the carrots. They were vibin' thru the peaty loam, like little Talpoidean subbaculchas. And mind my periscope, that's *(singing)* how high I ammmm.

Thud. He's out.

ALTHAAR

...Sin Xtopps? ...Are you in healthiness?

CHIP

Ah, he's out cold again. He got into something this afternoon, we're not sure what it was.

ALTHAAR

...Perhaps he is requiring the medical assistance?

CHIP

I doubt it. I mean, yeah, he's being weird, but, you know, Xtopps-weird, not weird-weird. I'm only gonna call an evac if he starts doing something I haven't seen before. Waking up in a MedCenter would definitely crack his tiles. So for right now, I figure the best thing is to just let him sleep it off.

ALTHAAR

This would be seeming unwise, but... you have had much greater experiencing than Althaar of the many mind-framings of Xtopps, so Althaar will have reliance on your judgment!

CHIP

Trust me, he'll be fine.

BUBBLES

What can I get you, sweetie? Another Tolimene and tonic?

ALTHAAR

No, Sin Bubbles, on this occasioning Althaar would prefer something of more strongness. He has made endurance of the entire so-calling documentary of the Fugulnari and it has made him very crosswards indeed! So Althaar believes the Escape Trajectory is requirement, to unjangle the nerves.

BUBBLES

Coming right up!

CHIP

Hey, Althaar, what's your professional opinion on that piece of smark? Did the Foogs come off like a bunch of Bonchos completely by accident? Or was it actually intentional? Like, they deliberately made themselves look incompetent so the rest of the Galaxy would think they were harmless?

ALTHAAR

Mm... Althaar would say rather that the appearance of the Boncho is caused by a lack of understanding among the Fugulnari. They believe that they are presenting the arguments most sensible on how life is best to be lived, by Humans and others. So they are not always grasping the differentness with which their actions can be perceived, by other sapients with their own framings of reference.

CHIP

So it wasn't a setup? They've just got no idea how they come across to other people?

ALTHAAR

This is the opinion of Althaar, yes. But this is not at all of a uniqueness to the Fugulnari. It is a most common difficulty, and one that is occupying many lessons at the Yimbastush Institute for Acquisition of Intersubjective Expertise! And of course the lack of understanding is traveling in both directions. There are very few beings who are comprehending the mind-shaping of the Fugulnari. Perhaps there are none at all! It is suspicion that they have shared honesty with no one but themselves. Althaar has made much consultation with those Iltorians who have spent time among the Fugulnari, but their advisings have not been of great usefulness.

CHIP

Well, yeah, no shness. What do these "experts" know that you don't? You've been living with the Foogs too, for almost a year now. And you've actually seen what they're like when the gloves come off. You know, if plants wore gloves.

ALTHAAR

This... this is most perceptive, Mr. Frinkel! It is true that the expertise of Althaar has not been achieved by the standard Iltorian approaching, but it is of value nonetheless! And it is of certainty that the previous theories on the Fugulnari mind-structure have been adulterated by intentional deception. So new theories must be constructed! And Althaar is best positioned to make assisting on this! Yes! Althaar must be composing new missives to Iltor at once! *(cont.)*

(as he emerges from behind the machine and heads for the exit) Human friends! Please be covering of your eyes once again as Althaar is making exit on the Electric Egg! Althaar has breakfasts to make shopping for, and friends to be comforting, and many knowledges to be shared. The Fugulnari may say it is necessity to remain still, but Althaar must be moving!

[scene 16] Closing credits music.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life With Althaar*, episode 29!

This episode was written by Linus Gelber for Gemini CollisionWorks and starred

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Zuri Washington as Dee

Berit Johnson as Althaar

John Amir as John B

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant Frall

Derrick Peterson as Xtopps

Eli Gantias as H.F.

and Chris Lee as Chip Frinkel

and also featured

David Arthur Bachrach, Ian W. Hill, Jessica Stoya, Linus Gelber, Olivia Baseman, Holly Pocket

McCaffrey, Anna Stefanic, Leila Okafor, Lex Friedman, Fred Backus, and Philip Cruise

Life With Althaar was created by Berit Johnson and Ian W. Hill

Berit is the supervising producer, showrunner, and script supervisor

Ian is the audio producer, sound designer, and technical supervisor

The writers' room consists of Berit, Ian, John, Philip, Lex, Linus, Amanda, and Chris

Theme and Interstitial Music composed and performed by Anna Stefanic

Life With Althaar logo and illustration created by Dean Haspiel

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We'll be back in two weeks with another "Tale from the Fairgrounds," but first, let's listen in as Mrs. Frondrinax conducts a post-mission debriefing with one plucky little sprout...

[scene 17]

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, that was an utter fiasco. Not to mention a complete waste of time. Shutting off those cameras didn't even slow the Resistance down for a second. Dee's latest little number came out practically the second you cut the feeds! And this time it's all over HECNET, too! With my luck, it'll somehow end up finding its way to a data courier bound for Earth!

ROOTY

It was pretty, though!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

“Pretty” is entirely beside the point, Rooty. Although I suppose I should be pleased that we at least have confirmation that the cameras are not in fact the source of our (*ugh*) “samizdat” problem.

ROOTY

Yayyyyyy!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Not that pleased, Rooty. Now, there is something I would like you to do for me, dear, the next time you have one of those little ideas of yours, all right?

ROOTY

Oo! What is it?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Shut up, and then shut up harder.

ROOTY

Eep!