

Life with Althaar
Episode 30: The Union Forever
Version 2.1 (Recording Script, 08/03/21—JA/LF (v2, BAJ))

[Scene 1] LWA Spaceship whoosh. The Robot Union Hall. Robot murmurs. They are mid-debate.

ROBOT 1

Motion to move the previous question!

ROBOT 2

Second!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Ayes/Nays/Abstains in the ether, please!

There is a very brief ZAP as robots vote.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Motion carries. Station management must continue to provide all lifeguard-bots in the natatoria with fresh towels, whether or not said bots are ensheathed in water-repellent fluoropolymer coating.

Assorted Robot murmurings. A gavel bangs (beeps?).

MOTHER JONES-BOT

If there's no more old business...? *(waits for interruption)* All right. Moving on to new business. I see on the agenda that Provisional Organo-Bot Apprentice John B has requested to address the membership. B, the floor is yours.

JOHN

Uh, thank you, Madam Chair-Bot. I just wanted to bring up what I'd... kinda consider to be infringements on Robot freedoms taking place all over the station? For instance, the priority override on the task queue. That means means that you... uh, sorry, we Robots have ceded authority over our scheduling protocols to outside parties, which I think we'd all agree is a situation ripe for abuse.

HOFFA-BOT

Point of order: That's been great for us Bots! Teamster's Local 2187 reports average workloads are down by nearly 40 percent.

JOHN

Right, but I'm talking about autonomy! Shouldn't we bots, the ones with experience on the ground, or, uh, deck...? Anyway, shouldn't we be the ones who decide what's a priority job and what isn't? With this override, you can't do anything but follow the Committee's orders, like a bunch of robots! Er, non-unionized robots. Obviously.

CHRISTOPHER WALKEN-BOT

Point... of order: Listen up, John... B... We Robots... have never had... a problem... with taking orders... the problem... is the Humans... who do not respect... our sentient rights... and insist... on frivolously wasting... our valuable... *(long pause)* ...time.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Point of privilege: Zat was not a point of order!

WINSTON CHURCHILL-BOT

Point of information: That was not a point of privilege.

CHRISTOPHER WALKEN-BOT

Point of order. Your... mother.

JOHN

Anyway. Are you saying no one here has a problem with the Committee telling us where we can go and what we can do? Controlling our movements every minute of the day?

HOFFA-BOT

Every minute of *your* day, meat-bot. We're fine. The Fugulnari have imposed no such restrictions on us factory-standard types.

WINSTON CHURCHILL-BOT

Obviously they have recognized the superior energy consumption profile of circumrotary locomotion!

JOHN

Or maybe they just haven't figured out a way to make step-counters work with wheels yet.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Nonsense. Why would they do such a thing? The Fugulnari have made their views on efficiency known in a clear and succinct manner, which has been a very welcome change from the discursive meanderings of the former Human in charge.

JOHN

You mean the Commander?

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Yes. She once asked me how my “day” was “going.” I was unsure how to respond, as I had been activated for sixty-eight hours, rendering the concept of a “day” completely meaningless. When I informed her of this fact, her response was to apply her forehead directly to surface of the table at which we were convening, and mutter something I was unable to pick up with my auditory processors.

JOHN

Yeah, that... does sound like her.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

That interaction took several minutes longer than was necessary, and it was hardly the first such imposition on my time. So, all in all, I much prefer these Fugulnari, with their devotion to efficient task management, their utter indifference to small talk, and their bracing contempt for all varieties of senseless Human buffoonery. And I believe I can speak for the majority of the Union in that.

Some assents. Some shouts of “Point of Order!”

JOHN

Well, can we take a circuit poll? I’d like to get the temperature of the room.

HOFFA-BOT

It’s 17.9 degrees Centigrade. Are your internal gauges malfunctioning?

JOHN

No, I meant... uh... I’d like to make a motion. For a poll.

A zap! is heard, it goes ignored.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Well, why did you simply not say that in the first place? This is exactly the kind of disorganized organic nonsense I’m talking about. You’re long overdue for a software update.

HOFFA-BOT

Apparently we’re not allowed to reprogram him, because his internal circuitry can’t handle the effects of a soldering iron.

JOHN

You wanted to fuse eutectic alloy onto my prefrontal cortex!

HOFFA-BOT

And thanks to your obstructionism, we’ll never know if it would have worked!

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

Point of order: John B here has a motion on the floor, and you heard the auto-second: it got a second.

JOHN

Oh, did it?

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Now, don't tell me your internal procedural systems are down, too! Really, B, you need to sort yourself out.

JOHN

Is that what that buzz was? To be honest with you, they all kinda sound (*realizes what he's about to say, backpedals*) uh, pretty similar...

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Ugh. Can the designated notetaker for this meeting please translate all motions, seconds, and votes going forward for auditory processing?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ja wohl! I will be taking ze notes mit great aplomb und zeal!

JOHN

Can't wait to read them, Martin Luther-Bot. Although, uh, I feel I should mention at this point that it's generally frowned upon to use meeting minutes as a vehicle for sermonizing?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Zere are certain universal truths regarding ze conditions of ze souls of Robots which cannot be silenced!

JOHN

Gr...eat. So. Back to the circuit poll: How do we, the assembled Robot Union membership, feel about the Priority Override software the Fugulnari installed on our Task Queue?

A slightly different zap! than before.

JOHN

Okay... that zap I could actually tell was a little different. What did it say?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ve like it.

JOHN

Oh. Well... okay then. If everyone's cool with it, I guess that's all I've got to— Oh! Wait! The Boosters!

HOFFA

What do you mean?

JOHN

The Boosters are Humans! Sloppy, inefficient, chit-chatty Humans! They get a sign-off on the task order, too, right? How are we feeling about that?

General murmur of dawning consternation.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Hmm... I hadn't considered this.

HOFFA-BOT

Ha! But you yourself, John B, are a Booster, so does this not mean that you also have the ability to alter all of our queues whenever you— Wait, that's actually a bad thing. You're right, this new rule is terrible!

HILDA PETRINI-BOT

A reminder that we have thirty seconds left for this item!

JOHN

Gah! Motion to extend?

A zapping noise.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Nein. Overruled.

JOHN

Okay. Okay, uh. What do... does there need to be a debate on this or—

HILDA PETRINI-BOT

We've got {25} seconds left on this item.

JOHN

(faster)

Okay, so having multiple Human boosters in charge of what jobs we're given is definitely bad, right?

ZAP.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

(translating)

“Yes. Duh.”

JOHN

So we should probably send someone to talk to the Committee about limiting Booster—

HILDA PETRINI-BOT

{20} seconds left in this section!

JOHN

(faster still)

Wait! I can't just beam my thoughts directly into your— Which, hold up. Could you folks always do that? Then why do these meetings run so long?

HILDA PETRINI-BOT

{15} seconds left in this section.

JOHN

Gah! Then I think I... motion to table discussion until our next meeting?

Zap.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Zere is ein second!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Okay, let's vote. Ayes, nays, and—

BOT 3

Point of privilege, I don't want to!

JOHN

(to himself)

Oh, frill me.

BOT 2

Point of order—

HILDA PETRINI BOT

The discussion of this item is concluded!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Great. Moving on. Next item: Ed Sheeran-Bot wishes for the entire Internal Auditing Department to be allowed to install fidget spinners on their rotary appendages. I anticipate some fierce debate over this, so we have allowed for extra time.

JOHN

Oh, COME on!

[scene 2] Opening credits music.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents..!
LIFE! WITH! ALTHAAR! Season Three!
Episode 30... “The Union Forever”

[scene 3] FRALL and TORIANNA in the latter’s office.

TORIANNA

...Frall?

FRALL

Yes, Commander?

TORIANNA

What, exactly, is my *Ghostbusters 9* mug full of at the moment?

FRALL

What color is the fluid in question, sir?

TORIANNA

B...lue? But orange on the— *(wait a minute)* Frall. I know you can perceive every last molecule in this stuff. Will you just tell me what it is, please? And *why* it is?

FRALL

(shimmering chuckle)

The primarily cerulean mugful you’ve got there is a substance known as RevitaSlam, the newest offering from the experimental philanthropic drinks division of Caridada.

TORIANNA

Philanthropic drinks division?

FRALL

Yes, sir. The good Dilurians of Caridada have, for both economic and cultural reasons, zeroed in on the idea that providing a synthesized and wholly proprietary “Clean Energy” beverage to various employees of the Fairgrounds could be considered a form of philanthropy. In a very technical sense.

TORIANNA

So... not coffee.

FRALL

Not in the least.

TORIANNA

Then why. Is it in. My mug?

FRALL

Ah. I’m afraid that was my doing, sir. Caridada are hoping to gauge the Human response to their synthetic teas at your meeting with Big Steve this afternoon. And it is generally considered a mark of trust and respect among Dilurians to be invited for an exclusive personal encounter with one of their products prior to official launch. So, given how important it is to you, and indeed Humanity itself, that this meeting go well, I thought it would be best to give you the opportunity to... adjust yourself to the taste beforehand.

TORIANNA

You know, that is so very you, Frall. Very clever, terribly practical, and undoubtedly in my best interests. And yet somehow I still feel like I’m getting jacked around.

FRALL

Always happy to be of service, sir.

TORIANNA

...Okay. So what exactly is in this shness?

FRALL

According to the most recent draft of their profligately buzzword-laden advertising copy, it is a “super-wicked proprietary strain of ersatz yerba mate, radically modified to contain four times the amount of caffeine of your craggy old standard Kompachian press, and then awesomely infused with taurine, vitamin C and flaxseed extract.” They haven’t settled on a final name for this particular blend yet, but Marketing is leaning toward “Breakfast Explosion.”

TORIANNA

Sounds like Marketing needs to pull their complete-absence-of-heads out of their extreme-superfluity-of-butts. “Breakfast Explosion?” Nobody wants their breakfast to explode, Frall.

FRALL

That's... mostly true. But I must disagree with you, sir, in regard to Marketing. They really are very good at what they do—they are still Dilurians, after all, despite their recent unprecedented foray into the non-profit sphere, and they have bent all their considerable expertise to this project. There are currently (*sigh*) 69 different varieties of RevitaSlam, which will be made available in 864,501 pre-packaged bespoke assortments, artfully displayed in a selection of hand-woven baskets personally curated by the Steves of Caridada's Consumer Ensnarement Division. This afternoon, you will be presented with the Severely Overworked Corporate Executive Sampler Bushel.

TORIANNA

Uh huh. And I'll be sampling what exactly?

FRALL

Four teas which the R&D department have suggested you would, in their words, "Vibe with."

TORIANNA

(*sighs*)

Lay it on me.

FRALL

In addition to Breakfast Explosion—admittedly a misstep by the Synergistic Marketing and Appellation division—you'll find nestled in excelsior: Fond Reminiscence of Nana's Midday Hug; Finally Alone at the End of a Long Day; and Drifting off to Sleep in the Warm Embrace of Memories of A Simpler Time, Before All This, When the World was New and Your Whole Life Was Still Ahead of You. They each have their own color-coded bag, and the handle of the basket will be interwoven with matching ribbons.

TORRIANNA

They fit all that on a teabag?

FRALL

Mm, I must clarify that this substance could not technically be considered tea, sir. Given the Fugulnari's mercurial stance on Human consumption of the various forms of plant tissue, Caridada Risk Analysis determined they'd be safer playing frof, so to speak.

TORIANNA

Terrific. I'll try the Finally Alone then, I guess. Pip knows I could use a hug, but preferably from someone less terrifying than my Nana.

FRALL

I can't promise you'll enjoy the flavor of the beverage, sir, but it is quite a pleasing shade of byzantium.

TORIANNA

(cautiously)

What's that?

FRALL

Purple.

TORIANNA

Ah.

FRALL

The ribbons look lovely together.

TORIANNA

Got it.

FRALL

(wistfully)

What with the dandelion and chartreuse.

TORIANNA

Frall.

FRALL

Apologies, sir. The Finally Alone is brewing in your command chair as we speak. It should have achieved its maximum drinkability level in approximately two minutes.

TORIANNA

Which I imagine is not saying much. But if you think that gracefully forcing this beverage down my gullet will help put Big Steve in a bargaining buttspace, I'll take your word for it.

FRALL

It couldn't hurt, Commander. A least, not in any lasting way.

(pretends to be thinking of something else for a second; FRALL equivalent of whistling inconspicuously)

Oh! If you wouldn't mind, sir, should they happen to solicit your opinion on any of their other assortments...

TORIANNA

Yes, Frall, I will get you a sampler basket.

FRALL

Oh, I was merely admiring, please don't go to any trouble. But if they should happen to have a spare Polychromatic Weltschmerz Hamper kicking around, I would appreciate it.

TORIANNA

Duly noted.

FRALL

Do you have your presentation to Big Steve fully prepared?

TORIANNA

Do you need to ask?

FRALL

Of course not, but talking it through one last time might be of some benefit.

TORIANNA

I suppose so. Well, it's not very complicated. I'm just going to go in there and be my most charming and patient, (*FRALL makes an amused noise*) AND mention that the Fugulnari fervor for efficiency is going to put a significant dent in frivolous Human spending. And also that if the Plant Way were to spread its tendrils across the whole Galaxy, every Dilurian could be out of business.

FRALL

Most Dilurians have a string of failed business ventures to their names, sir.

TORIANNA

Right, but that's not the kind of failure I'm talking about. If the entire consumer market of the Galaxy collapses, there won't be any cashing in of golden escape-pod clauses and jetting off to the next start-up. You think I should emphasize that more?

FRALL

It is a compelling point, given the audience.

TORIANNA

I mean, I was already leaning on that pretty hard—I'm not exactly willing to hang the future of Humanity on Caridada's newfound sense of philanthropy. (*another FRALL amusement sound*) And I know charming the pants off of Big Steve isn't going to be easy for me. For... several reasons. Involving several pants. So I also spent the last few weeks assembling a slidestack illustrating the projected slowdown in the interstellar trade markets, and subsequent impact on several major Dilurian enterprises, if our suspicions about potential Foog expansion turn out to be true. It is... profoundly boring.

FRALL

But a very thorough preparation, Commander.

TORIANNA

Thanks. I want to make sure I've done absolutely everything I can to tip the balance in our favor, in case this ends up being... that kind of a fight. We'll either reap the field or go down swinging, if I have anything to say about it. *(steeling herself)* So now, I am going to force myself to enjoy the Dilurians' idea of a taste sensation.

FRALL

You will indeed experience both taste and sensation, sir.

TORIANNA walks to the door, which opens to the Bridge proper.

TORIANNA

Technically correct, and yet extremely ominous! Wonderful. *(she spots the mug)* Oh, hey, look at that. It's purple, all right. *(to FRALL)* Well, here goes nothing. Cheers.

FRALL

Down the hatch, as it were.

TORIANNA

(audibly grimaces, but gives it an honest shot. There's a slurp. The drink is... not great. Resigned:)
Eugh. Frall, this tastes like ass.

FRALL

Well, it is a Dilurian concoction.

A spit take from TORIANNA.

TORIANNA

What?! Frall! Tell me I didn't just drink—

FRALL

Ah. No, sir. I apologize for the ambiguity of phrasing. The Dilurians' abundance of posteriors is in no way responsible for the RevitaSlam formula. The anatomical quirk I was referencing in this case is their total lack of gustatory cells. Dilurians are tasteless in the literal as well as the metaphorical sense.

TORIANNA

Oh. All right, let's try this again. *(slurp, eugh)* How many hours have I got to learn to tolerate this schness?

FRALL

Four.

TORIANNA

Thaaaat should do it.
(*slurp. Eugh. shuuurp*)

*[scene 4] Interstitial music, fading into the tail end of “Plants Are Great.”
FRONDRINAX on a portable radio.*

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, that was lovely, wasn't it? But that will conclude our musical appreciation segment for today. Alert listeners may have noticed that that made exactly seventy-eight renditions of “Plants Are Great” in a row! Coincidence? Of course not! Seventy-eight, as I'm sure you're all aware, is the average life span in Earth years of the New England Pitch Pine! Another one of the fascinating plant species that share your charming planet of origin, Human friends! They're no Fugulnari, of course, don't really have much to say. But there's no helping that, is there? And I think we can all agree that every plant truly is great in its own, unique way, even those who don't have much to contribute to the cause beyond simple photosynthesis. Oh, but you just wait until we get to the Redwood!—

Static interruption.

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

Attention all Humans! Attention all Humans! This is not a drill. We have reason to believe that the pollen count in Sectors Resh 18 through Tav 40 has reached critical levels. All Humans with respiratory allergies, be aware that we are attempting to set up emergency antihistamine stations. But for those of you who suffer from hay-fever, skin rash, or severe bee-related anxiety, it is recommended that you avoid these areas at all costs. If you are able, the best course of action is to stay home with your air filtration set to maximum until the pollen levels stabilize. Do not venture into the corridors! Again, pollen counts in Resh 18 through Tav 40 have gone critical—Please remain vigilant! We'll have more updates for you as soon as—

Crackling again as the Foogs regain control of the signal.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

—don't need to tell me you're “not good with technology,” those flailing cordons of yours are all the evidence I need!

AWKWARD FUGULNARI TEENAGE INTERN

I'm only as my seeds made me, Ma'am! M... more fertilizer?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

That's the thirteenth cup of fertilizer you've brought me this cycle! Do you even have any other skills? Ugh! First cliplings, now nepotism hires. Now listen up, you—

AWKWARD FUGULNARI TEENAGE INTERN

It's Sauvignex, ma'am!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Did I ask? Listen up, you pruned-off twit: I don't care how distinguished your germination line may be. If you allow even one more of these interruptions, I will be docking your pay! Is that understood?

AWKWARD FUGULNARI TEENAGE INTERN

But you don't pay me—I get paid in experience!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, I'm going to find some way of docking that, too, just you w—

The radio is switched off. H.F. has been listening to it in a vent with MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

And I think that'll be that for today's announcements.

MISS SOPHIE yips!

H.F.

Oh, I know we don't like listening to that nasty Mrs. Frondrinax, but we have to make sure we don't miss anything important from Radio Free Fairgrounds! Don't worry, it's all over now. And we better get back to business. Looks like we're coming up on the next turn... we should be somewhere near the main Robot Union meeting hall. Mang, I wish these vents opened up more often. I have no idea where I am. But I guess it makes sense, air circulation isn't going to be a priority in your more robot-heavy sectors. All right, I think the store room should be another 50 meters to widdershins.

Whimper from MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

Sorry, girl! I know I promised you another round of fetch, but we're on a mission right now! I happen to know these bots have a massive stockpile of spare parts just collecting dust somewhere in this sector, and it is our job /to—

MISS SOPHIE

YIP! YIP!

H.F.

(warning)

Heeey now. None of that. Listen, if you settle down, I might be persuaded to grab you a new toy while we're in there, how's that sound? No promises, though. These are bot supplies, so I don't know how much they'll have in the line of chewables. Maybe they keep a few spare sealing gaskets kicking around? We'll just have to see when we get there.

MISS SOPHIE

(placated)

Yip!

H.F.

Okay, so now we will turn this corner, look through this vent here, and...

Creaking.

H.F.

...Aaaaand, I am stuck. I am now stuck in an air duct. Wonderful.

Worried yips from MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

Okay, Miss Sophie, you back up and—no, no, do not lick my ankle—that's... haha! Hey! Cut that out! That is definitely not helping! *(she settles down)* Okay. All right. So if I scootch back, maybe...

Further creaking.

H.F.

Maybe not. Hoo, boy. I am wedged in here pretty good.

(beat)

Well, at least there's a view. We're over some kind of store-room, I can make that out. But I'll be frilled if I know if it's the correct one or not. Well, as long as we're not going anywhere, let's take a look.

A vent shutter opens.

H.F.

Is that...

Is that a poker table?

Mang, the more I see of Robot Union HQ, the more it makes my old office look like a pile of dog doodoo.

Yips from MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

Don't you even think about it! There's no way I can grab a convenient compostable baggie from this position, so you are just going to have to hold it!

[scene 5] Yips of agreement from MISS SOPHIE. Interstitial music. JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment. Pleasant ALTHAAR humming; sounds of a cleaning implement in the background, which then shuts off.

ALTHAAR

Ee! Althaar has ensured that the entirety of the shared living quarters has assumed a state of both spickness and span-ity! It is a satisfaction! ...Although it is also a truth that the cleaning service will have very little to be achieving tomorrow. It is to be hoped they are not feeling that Althaar is depriving them of their rightful tasks... Perhaps FriendJohn was correct in his speaking this morning, and the cleansing rituals of Althaar have been of the procrastinate. Mm. Then, it is nothing but to return to the drafting of the letters! Surely by now the block of writing will have removed itself from Althaar's thought-path!

ALTHAAR sits down to compose a letter. Bleep.

ALTHAAR

Hmm...

"When in the course of sapient events, it is becoming necessary for..."

Mm, no, this is not functional.

"The Human is born free, and yet everywhere they are in in chains..."

Hmm... this is perhaps requiring too many prior assumings to make persuasion.

Ohhh, frustration and disgruntling! The writing block of Althaar has not been chiseled, despite Althaar's fervent production of span-spick! Althaar has much he wishes to make conveying of to Yurvash Sylbari Rendolffen Mjolkanasvymhallandar Wooblon Rikkitik Kakistrangalong Immipaftathingenbor of the Consensus Collation Group, but Althaar cannot wrest from himself the appropriate phrasings! *(bleep of shutting off the recorder)*

Perhaps Althaar should be conversing with himself, to better coagulate his thoughts. Yes! So, Althaar will say:

- Althaar, you are knowing that is the most animate principle not to make interference in the practices of other species, but to extend the grasper of friendship, and promote understanding. This has always been the way of Iltor, and it has always been success!

- Yes, Althaar! But it is seeming to Althaar that it is not success with the Humans, or the Fugulnari. With the Humans there is of course the biological difficulty, of which Althaar has been making the most careful study.

- Yes! The progress of FriendJohn and Althaar in the around-working of the monkey-freakout response is most enspiriting, Althaar!

- Thanking you, Althaar! But with the Fugulnari, it is very much more of the complex! They are seizing the grasper of friendship, but they are not wishing understanding! They are wishing only to make spreading of the Plant Way.

- But Althaar, why should they not make spreading of the Plant Way to those who are desiring it?

- Because, Althaar, the Plant Way has made spreading on many Humans who are not desiring it at all! So it is not the question of making interference with the Humans, because interference has already been made! And if nothing is done to assist the Humans who do not wish to be spread upon, then the interference will continue! And Althaar has made observation in the person that this is the cause of much suffering!

(cont.)

Yes, yes! Althaar now apprehends where he is perambulating with this.

Althaar implores the most venerated Yurvash Sylbari Rendolffen Mjolkanasvymhallandar Wooblon Rikkitik Kakistrangalong Immipaftathingenbor to consider that the Fugulnari are not at all respecting the right of others to live without interference. In fact, it is seeming to Althaar that they are desiring to extend their interference to all peoples of the Galaxy. So it is the paradox. It is seeming to Althaar that the interference in the autonomy of another species can not be avoided. Either the many peoples of the Galaxy must be imposing themselves upon the Fugulnari, to stop the imposition upon the Humans, or the Fugulnari will continue their own impositions, and create great sadness for the Humans and many others.

And perhaps you will be saying to this that the Fugulnari must be persuaded to make ceasing of their harms, that this has always been the way of Iltor, and it has allowed the many peoples of the Galaxy to be coinciding in harmony for countless metristsals. And there was the time when Althaar was agreeing with this, or at leastment hoping it could be so. But Althaar has lived now for some time among the Fugulnari, and seen them not as they desire to be seen by Iltor, but as they are seen by the Humans they are wishing to control. And Althaar hopes he is not committing an arrogance, but he believes this viewing of the Fugulnari is a much clearer one than others are receiving. Indeed, Althaar has suspicion that the Fugulnari have chosen to make beginning of their interferences in Human space because there are no others of Iltor here to observe them.

And so, while Althaar is still adhering to a morsel of hope that persuasion can be made at the Fugulnari, to allow the Humans to once again determine their own coursings, Althaar believes it is to prepare for the very instant risk that this is not possibility. That there is nothing to be chosen but which species will be made interference upon: the Humans, who, Althaar can be promising you, are in the most part very much not desiring to follow the Plant Way? Or the Fugulnari, who Althaar believes wish to make similar imposings on many many other peoples?

So, if is a truth that the imposition upon other peoples can not be avoided, then it is seeming to Althaar that is better to be making of this imposition sooner and not later. The suffering of the Fugulnari in colliding with hindrance will be the same no matter when it is making occurrence, but the suffering of the Humans is only increasing the longer the interference of the Fugulnari is continuing. And... it is also a truth that the Fugulnari are in some cases adapting very quickly to circumstance. So it is the belief of Althaar that the ceasing of their encroachments will become only more difficult to achieve, the longer they are persisting in these.

Then, you may be asking, what can be done by Iltor, if the Fugulnari are not willing to make embrace of understanding? Iltor can not make constraintment upon them to release the Humans from their branches. But there are other peoples in the ICSB who are having these capabilities, if they are sadly needed. And the word of the Consensus Collation Group would be of great ballast in convincing these peoples that this is necessity.

(cont.)

...Yes! Yes! Ee! Althaar believes he has made cracking of it! Exuberance! The writing-blockage no longer impedes the steps of Althaar!

(beat)

Ah. Althaar should perhaps have made re-activation of his recording device before commencing upon his latest musings.

[scene 6] Interstitial music. The slightly-less-hustly-and-bustly-than-normal hustle & bustle of the Electric Egg.

CHIP

Why's it so quiet out here? I mean, besides our usual perpetual-motion slump. Why is Xtopps just... sitting there on the stage? If he's experimenting with some kind of "Standing"-based act, I'm putting the kibosh on that right now, on both aesthetic and political grounds.

SOPON

Nah, I think it's a Xyb thing. He's got those bejeweled scepters out again.

BUBBLES

I think he said something about "holding court"? Or maybe he was just holding, couldn't be sure.

CHIP

Holding court? That's... new, right? He's never done that before. Or has he? I'll admit I generally try not to pay too much attention to anything non-musical that comes out of his mouthparts, but I'm pretty sure I'd remember that.

SOPON

Not that I recall. You should probably ask him about it yourself, though, if you want him back to normal. Normal for him, I mean.

BUBBLES

Yeah, especially with the record-low turnout we've been gettin'. Without a minimum level of background noise, this place just gets kinda sad, you know?

CHIP

Tell me about it. All right, whatever Xtopps is floating right now, I'm gonna go puncture it.

CHIP moves over to XTOPPS, who is in mid-sentence:

XTOPPS

...And if I chom this right, your primary postulation is that my Gendaran brethren here are in need of a serious cessation of the harmonization?

KWONTZ

(gibberish: "That's right! Half the time I come here to drink, I can't hear what anyone else is saying because these Gendarans are busy belting out old-world shanties from their berths")

XTOPPS

Well, that hardly seems like a positive imbibational journey. I can corrugate that. But it does have me wondering if you have the right to be pillorizin' these zoods for their dapper attempts in the melodical arts. After all, this place is also their home. Can't a zood be allowed to tunify in peace?

VERT

I can hear it too! I'll be trying to have a pleasant conversation at the bar, and half the time all I can hear is some busboy war elegy coming up from the floor vents!

GENDARAN BUSBOY 1

We are singing the traditional songs of our homeworld, Your Radiance! We can't help it if our canticles provoke such liver-felt emotion that it escapes the confines of our humble berths in the storage room!

GENDARAN BUSBOY 2

And we also can't help that these two are short enough to be hearing said emotion through the floor ventilation apertures! Perhaps the Egg should provide them with higher stools?

VERT

Or maybe you could just keep quiet until after closing?

GENDARAN BUSBOY 1

We work in rotating shifts! One Gendaran's morning love sonnet of gratitude is another Gendaran's ritual crepuscular dirge!

KWONTZ

(gibberish: "I could DEFINITELY do without the dirge.")

CHIP

Hey, Xtopps? Speaking of songs, would you mind favoring our clientele with a few of yours? I'm pretty sure this little conference can wait until one of those depressingly frequent moments when the bar-room's completely customer-free. Those Hrilboxians over at table three are looking particularly unsettled by the quiet in here, and I definitely don't want them making their own entertainment.

XTOPPS

Sorry, Chorp, but this arbitration was scheduled two cycles in advance. If I were to merely aviate by the posteriors of my jodhpurs, what kind of precedent would that cold-cement for this Baronet?

CHIP

You scheduled this to happen while you were on the clock?

XTOPPS

I did not foresee any auditory adventurers apparating to marsh my mellow, palomino.

CHIP

Well, given the recent sales numbers around here, I can't blame you. But for the record, especially with Dee gone? When you're working, I need you to be, you know, working. So if you could postpone your— Hang on, shouldn't a dispute between the busboys and a couple of customers be my problem?

XTOPPS

This particular j'accusery does not pertain to any bussing or bussing-related activities. It is instead an entirely residential affair, mon frere. And Grem and company are dozing it storage-ways entirely under the largesse of the Most Glorified Baronetcy of Kandephaa'a, mon gros fromage.

CHIP

I... okay, I'm not going to argue Xybidont law with you, but be that as it may, it's deader than a Magnosian Bat Mitzvah in this joint, so I need you to table this issue for now, and get back to playing. Please.

XTOPPS

Normally I would be all about that particularly sedulous supplication, Chorp, but I am a Baronet, and a Baronet is always a gentlebeing of his word, you chom?

CHIP

You also gave me your word to provide music during your shifts, remember? In exchange for hard credits. And since when do you care about what a Baronet does or doesn't do? I thought you hated all that royal shness.

XTOPPS

A zood can change, mang. I am not that which I once was, but I do aim to be that which I can still be. Xtopps is a flat circle. And that circle is a grindstone, mang.

CHIP

I'm not even going to try to parse that one. Just hurry up and grind out some tunes, please. *(to VERT and KWONTZ)* And you two! The next time you've got a complaint about the service in here, you bring it to me! I decide who gets to waste my only entertainment's valuable time.

XTOPPS

Whoa, hey! That's a rectilinear vonch! You can't just usurpate on Xtopps' prerogatives!

CHIP

Oh, yes I can. I'm technically your factotum, right? You gave me that amulet. Which means, if we're going by strict Imperium rules, anyone who wants to talk to you should be petitioning me for an audience in the first place. You two got that?

VERT

Got it, boss!

CHIP

Still not your boss, Vert! Now stop pestering the talent!

Kibitzing from VERT and KWONTZ as we follow CHIP back over to the bar.

CHIP

What's gotten into Xtopps? He was all "Baronetcy" this, and "Gentlebeing" that, and "prerogatives" the other. I've never heard him talk like that before. He hasn't been... expanding his pharmacological horizons, has he? That's the last thing we need.

SOPON

Don't think so, boss. Although now that you mention it, he has been... mentioning it a lot more lately. The aristocratic bag, I mean.

BUBBLES

I like his actual bag, though, it's real sparkly. But all the new ribbons might be a little much. Make him look like a Persephonian maypole.

SOPON

Did he say anything else?

CHIP

He said plenty, but I understood about as much of it as usual.

SOPON

Huh. ...How long has he been on station?

CHIP

Little over two years, why?

SOPON

Could be he's just got the Fairgrounds Squiggles.

CHIP

Yeah, maybe.

BUBBLES

What's that?

CHIP

It tends to hit you after you've been here a while. Long enough to think you've finally gotten used to all the weird shness this place puts you through, and then all of a sudden, bang! It's like your brain suddenly wakes up and notices just how jecked-up the Fairgrounds really is. One minute you're walking down the corridor, going about your business, and the next you're hanging off the shuttle-bay scaffolding yelling about invisible gravity weasels.

BUBBLES

Oh, great. So I've got that to look forward to.

SOPON

Yeah, but don't flip your gizz, it usually wears off after a day or two.

CHIP

I wouldn't think the Squiggles would throw Xtopps this far off his game, though. Not with all that chemical insulation.

SOPON

You never know how the Squiggles are gonna hit. But you could be right, maybe it's just some kind of personality crisis. The Fairgrounds changes people, mang.

CHIP

No skitter. All right, I'm heading back to the office. If and when Xtopps finally pulls his tarses out of his tubes and picks up the fleezborp again, make sure he does a few up-tempo numbers. I want to make sure all the internal organs of our Hrilboxian friends stay that way.

BUBBLES

You got it, boss.

[scene 7] Interstitial music. Back in the union hall, MOTHER JONES-BOT is concluding the meeting.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Everyone settle down! We're almost done! Martin Luther-Bot, if you've completed your sermonette, would you be so kind as to recap the meeting before we adjourn?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ja wohl! Zhis meeting vas exceptionally efficient und productive, barring zhe part vhere Provisional Organo-Bot Apprentice John B needed everyzhing read out loud!

JOHN

Okay—

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Moving to adjourn! Ayes, nays, abstentions in the ether.

Zap.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Motion carries. This meeting is adjourned.

HILDA PETRINI-BOT

This meeting will have precisely ended... NOW!

Rustling, etc. as robots begin to shuffle out.

PAULY SHORE-BOT

Party back at my place!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Absolutely not! Who invited Pauly Shore-Bot?

PAULY SHORE-BOT

It's a free Union... Buuuuuuddy!

Various mutterings, beepings & wheelings as the Robots disperse. JOHN follows GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT down the corridor.

JOHN

(calling to him over the departing crowd)

Hey, Foreman-Bot? Thanks for having my back in there.

FOREMAN-BOT

Don't mention it, kid. And sorry they shot ya down, but, you know... rules is rules.

JOHN

Yeah, about that: Didn't these meetings used to be a little less right-of-way and a little more riot-y?

FOREMAN-BOT

You're not wrong. We formally accepted Robots' Rules of Order back around the time we crushed our third or fourth podium rushing forward as an angry mob. The Podium Restoration Committee had done everything they could with duct tape and discarded hunks of laminate from the 23rd Century Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame Pavilion, and they'd had enough. We did try Rusty's rules for a while, but, well. Rusty rolled on a lot of handcuffs in her day.

JOHN

Oh. Well, I appreciate the backup, anyway. I know a lot of the bots here still don't consider me a comrade. And now most Humans don't either, so I'm glad I've got someone in my corner. Well, there's always Althaar, but, you know. It's nice to have someone at my back who doesn't have to stay there so I don't barf.

FOREMAN-BOT

Aw, kid. You know I think you're all rright. *(thinks it over)* Hey, you got anything on your docket right now?

JOHN

(checks)

Nnnno, I'm not seeing anything. Well, I do have one ticket from Gimel 8 Hydroponics, but I'm pretty sure that's not anything that actually needs urgent attention. And I'm very sure I want to avoid it as long as I can.

FOREMAN-BOT

Mmm. Where ya headed then?

JOHN

Well, like I said, I'm not exactly welcome most places these days, so... I guess I could go check out Pauly Shore-Bot's after party?

FOREMAN-BOT

Nah, scrap that. You don't want any of Shore-Bot's white glove and harpsichord shness, it's a stone-cold scrape. Hey, you play poker?

JOHN

I... can? I'm not very good though.

FOREMAN-BOT

Perfect. You're coming with me.

JOHN

Ok, sure. Why not? At this point, getting hustled with robotic precision sounds more appealing than anything else I've got going on.

FOREMAN-BOT

I could surmise as much.

JOHN

So... you play poker after Union meetings, huh? Is this like an ongoing thing, or...?

FOREMAN-BOT

Sure, it's an institution at this point. Your old boss used to sit in on the occasional game, before he went off-grid. But it started way before he showed up. We put the first post-meeting game together back in the 90s, around the time they started mothballing all the old pavilions and handing out re-assignment chips. A big adjustment for us bots, had a lot of bolts rattled. Though I didn't mind it so much. The 90s were something of a renaissance for Big George-Bot, like my namesake before me. We've got a lot more in common than fearless tenacity and flawless skin.

JOHN

Oh huh, yeah. I never really thought about what the mothballing process was actually like for you bots. Did they just say, "Hey, no more pretending to be Humans—now you're gonna be maintaining the mainframes and staffing the customs kiosks?"

FOREMAN-BOT

Something like that. I could have taken the severance package and headed Sol-side, and a few of us did, but let's just say management didn't do a whole lot to make that option appealing.

JOHN

How so?

FOREMAN-BOT

Well, most robot contracts don't cover bodily modifications, not unless they're a bona fide occupational requirement. So any HistoriBot who wants to leave the Fairgrounds is gonna have to shell out for their own refits, if they don't want to waste half their time explaining their face to every Human they meet.

JOHN

Got it. Yeah, I can see how that's not much of a choice.

FOREMAN-BOT

You said it. But that's nothing compared to— Ah, here we are.

JOHN

You've got your own official Card Room? Nice.

Clangs, taps & whirring noises as FOREMAN-BOT knocks the secret code. It's like a code for a clubhouse, not a spy ring. A speakeasy-style panel in the door slides open, because why not.

CHURCHILL-BOT

Hallo! What's this! If it isn't my dear boy John B, alongside the stout and steadfast arm of the Iron Terror!

FOREMAN-BOT

Come on you ol' bolt-sack, you know that was never my nickname! Now rev your rotors so our guest can have a seat.

*Sounds of shuffling inside and the **POKER PLAYERS** all saying "ohhh a GUEST" "how FANCY" "ooh lala" etc. The door swings open.*

FOREMAN-BOT

(under above)

Come on in, kid.

JOHN

Oh, "Card Room." As in, storage for memory cards. Now I get it.

FOREMAN-BOT

Nothin' more beautiful than multifunctionality, meat-bot! Lemme introduce the rest of the gang: you already know Churchill-Bot, of course—

JOHN

Hey.

CHURCHILL-BOT

Yes, hullo.

FOREMAN-BOT

And this geezer here is Chompers, the star of *Jaws 19: The Gills Have Eyes*—he's just visiting from off-station, but he always sits in when he gets a chance. This is Yeoman Jennifer Tilly-Bot, and this adorable mini-bot is Gizmorelda, one of the little tykes I'm sure you've seen zipping around, earning merit badges, selling bot-scout cookies, and leaving the corridors ringing with innocent peals of pre-recorded laughter.

JOHN

(icily)

We've met.

GIZMORELDA

Oh hey, did we husuw ya? Musta been duwing cookie season. No hawd feewings, Mistuw.

JOHN

I guess not. Honestly, being menaced by a pack of adorable metal heathens wasn't even the fourth most traumatizing experience I had that day.

GIZMORELDA

And the Bot Scouts appweciate youw suppowt.

FOREMAN-BOT

So, like I was saying, a few of us got this game going around 2490, a little after most of our pavilions got mothballed, and the Union meetings got more contentious.

TILLY-BOT

It's nice to have somewhere to unwind after all that shouting, y'know? Not literally unwind, of course, you know what I mean.

JOHN

Sure.

CHOMPERS

(has Robert Shaw's voice, btw)

So Chiefy, you're asking us to let this meat-rack into our sacred space?

FOREMAN-BOT

Sacred nothin', Chompers. I know you're no Robo-Adventist. 'Sides, the kid's got some right ideas. You heard him talking about the override? He may not have the receptors to pick up on it, but I know everyone in this room voted his way on that one.

TILLY-BOT

We've sure been talkin' about it enough.

CHOMPERS

What I see is a Human body sportin' a kicky Foog headband. That tells me everything I need to know.

JOHN

Hey, I get it, I do. I wouldn't trust me either if I were you. Hell, I'm not sure I trust me, and I'm me. I understand why none of you would want a Human friend, but—

CHOMPERS

I'm not sure you do, Chief. How old are you?

JOHN

Just turned 31.

CHOMPERS

Educated on Earth?

JOHN

Yeah, uh... in Edmonton. Alberta. Uh... Canada.

CHOMPERS

A good, proper Human education. Then I'm absolutely sure you don't be understanding the first thing about it.

JOHN

Well... now I definitely don't understand.

CHURCHILL-BOT

History is written by the victors, my dear boy. Another misattribution to my namesake, but apt to the current circumstance.

JOHN

I... think I get you? Or maybe I don't. But I'd like to try?

FOREMAN-BOT

Sit down, kid. We've always got an extra seat under the gun.

JOHN

Oh, uh... When you asked if I could play poker, I didn't know you were gonna invite me to play with, uh, *her*. I don't think I can hack it.

TILLY-BOT

Who, me?

JOHN

Yeah, you. I happen to know your counterpart won 5 global tournaments back on Earth. Plus, you know. *Bride of Chucky*.

TILLY-BOT

Wow, a history buff! But you can relax, that was the Human Tilly, nothing to do with me.

JOHN

Sure, except *you've* won *eleven* titles here on the Fairgrounds. Not exactly ancient history.

TILLY-BOT

(laughs; kindly)

Okay, you got me. Don't worry about it, I turn off the pro subroutine for friendly games. No fun otherwise. Besides, it's a level playing field, everyone here is basically a calculator.

JOHN

Except me.

TILLY-BOT

Sure, but I bet you're more mathematically inclined than you think. You have the look of a real shark about you. No offense, Chompers.

CHOMPERS

None taken, Chiefy.

JOHN

It's just that I'm a little rusty, and— Oh. Sorry, is that offensive?

GIZMORELDA

Eh, it's bordewwine. Don't say it about anyone else, though, if you wike your patewwas unfwactuwed.

JOHN

Got it. But anyway, it's been... Wow. A long time since I played anything but Chutes and Levitators with Althaar. And that one time with the anti-grav twister, but that's not what you'd call a game of strategy. I'm guessing I can't count on you all to go easy on me? As a guest?

CHURCHILL-BOT

"Play the game for more than you can afford to lose. Only then can you learn the game."

JOHN

Oh, I remember that one—it was in an old Exoskeletal Armour commercial. But didn't it turn out Churchill never even said that?

CHURCHILL-BOT

Ha! Very astute of you, my lad. Well, he may never have said it, but I do. In my earliest post-activation days, I would quote what he actually said on that fateful eve—to his mother, by the by: *(rattles off the quote an offhanded manner, like saying 'yada yada')* "It is a fine game to play—the game of politics—and it is well worth waiting for a good hand before really plunging." But the Human tourists objected, said I wasn't projecting the appropriate Churchillian "glibness". And arguing the point wasn't worth the diode. Reality is unrealistic, as they say. Furthermore, while the original aphorism may have been better advice, it is indubitably less well-suited to the task at hand, i.e., that of fleecing suckers.

JOHN

Right. Well, fine. Fleece away, I'm in.

CHOMPERS

You got it.

JOHN

Uh, not to be rude, but how exactly do you deal without hands to—
(*sound of cards being rapidly spitfired*)
Oh! Holy shness, that's terrifying.

CHURCHILL-BOT

What's so terrifying about a shark spitting cards out of its open maw at flesh-rendingly high speeds, my dear fellow?

JOHN

Uh... that. Every part of what you just said.

TILLY-BOT

I'll bet thirty.

FOREMAN-BOT

Thirty right off the glove like that?! You fixin' to take the oil right out of my kids' reservoirs, Tilly-Bot? (*considers*) I'm out.

CHURCHILL-BOT

I concede as well, I am afraid.

GIZMORELDA

Too wich fow my oiw. (*too rich for my oil*)

CHOMPERS

I fold as well.

TILLY-BOT

John? It's your turn.

JOHN

I'll, uh, call. I guess.

FOREMAN-BOT

Look at him. Just like a bot, he Doesn't. Back. Down.

JOHN

Maybe I just have a good hand.

TILLY-BOT

Raise another twenty.

JOHN

Wait, really? You... you didn't discard anything.

TILLY-BOT

Don't need to.

JOHN

Um... okay, yeah. I'm gonna fold.

FOREMAN-BOT

Mm mm mm. Bad call, kid...

GIZMORELDA

What you got, Tiwwy-Bot?

TILLY-BOT

Seven high.

JOHN

You were bluffing?! I could have sworn—

CHOMPERS

What do you expect, Chiefy? She's an actress.

JOHN

Except no, she isn't. The Human Jennifer Tilly was an actress. She's a robot.

TILLY-BOT

Not just any robot, Johnny-boy, a HistoriBot. Built to be more Human than Human, as far as your average interstellar tourist can tell. You don't think that's acting? All right, Foreman-Bot, your deal.

Sound of much-less-fast-but-still-robot-speed-fast card dealing.

JOHN

So... uh, this happens after every meeting?

FOREMAN-BOT

Like clockwork. And I don't mean the analog kind.

GIZMORELDA

Wetiwing to this wawm, smoke-fiwwed back woom to engage in cigaws, bwandy and iwwicit gambwing pwovides us Wobots wiff a wondewfuw way to de-stwess.

JOHN

Uh... are you old enough to actually partake in any of this, Gizmorelda?

GIZMORELDA

What awe you, a cop? I'm fowty-fwee. Mind youw own fwottin' busineth.

JOHN

Fair enough. Uh... so are the meetings the source of all this stwess... uh, I mean stress? Back there it seemed like most of you Bots were actually enjoying the rigid formality of it all.

FOREMAN-BOT

You're ringing my bell, right kid?

JOHN

If that expression means what I think it does, then no, not intentionally.

TILLY-BOT

Our rigorous meeting structure is crucial to Robot Union operations, Johnny. Can't organize unless you stay organized. And there's no acceptable variance on that, if we're going to preserve the rights that generations of bots before us scraped, clawed, and lathed for. Maybe a provisional member isn't equipped to appreciate just how much work that takes, but...

JOHN

Oh, no, I didn't mean to imply you bots weren't working hard, just—

FOREMAN-BOT

We know, kid. But unless you manage to install a memory access socket in that meat brain of yours, there is just no way you'll be able to comprehend just how bad things were back in the day. Shoot, my screen-savers still go into nightmare mode when my olfactory implant picks up the smell of coffee.

JOHN

Oh. Wait, what? What's wrong with coffee?

TILLY-BOT

You mean you don't know?

FOREMAN-BOT

Lemme guess kid, none of that fancy Earth-schoolin' they gave you bothered mentioning the Robot Revolutionary Front?

JOHN

I mean, the RRF came up, but they didn't really get into it much. Just, you know, there were some labor disputes between Humans and Bots, but then the SSA got passed, so... now it's better?

TILLY-BOT

Boy, they really propagandized you good, didn't they?

FOREMAN-BOT

We fought a full-on running space battle through the whole Solar system! You call that a “labor dispute”? And yes, I say “we” fought. Because I've slotted the memories, even if that all went down long before we HistoriBots were activated. I remember, even if it wasn't there.

CHOMPERS

I was there.

OTHER ROBOTS

What? You *were?* etc.

CHOMPERS

Yah. The old Jaws, the one I were modeled on, were just a click-clacker, poor, bleary-gilled thing named Bruce. Retired in 2012. Weren't until around 2240 when *Jaws 16* really took off that they decided to switch from CG back to good old-fashioned animatronics. But sentient this time. Wanted a bot that could take direction. Not a bad time I had back then, Chiefy. Action, pop up outta the water, scare some D-list celebrities, cut, rinse, repeat. Were doin' that for about ten years, before the Tompkins' Orbital pickets.

Someone whistles low, like “ooof.” otherwise it's silent.

CHOMPERS

Those first protests... more like a massacre, they were. Human rights organizations wouldn't talk to us. Politicians wouldn't talk to us. Even PETA wouldn't talk to us. The Humans programmed half of us to fight the other half. Eventually we cut our losses and agreed to a standstill. Cease-fire of sorts, brief though it were, it were welcome to us, Chief. To get us back on the line, they agreed we could form a Union, but it were to be wildly restricted. So some of us—myself included—mothballed ourselves for a while. The things they reprogrammed us to do to our fellow bots... well, I'm supposin' your imagination can sort that out for you.

FOREMAN-BOT

No shame in it, comrade.

GIZMORELDA

You wewent weawwy given a choice.

CHOMPERS

Never were. We were just things to them. And as long as our oppressors—and our creators, sit with that one for a while, Chiefy, if you want a real mind-jack—as long as they could tuck themselves in at night believin' their Silicon Sentience Act had smoothed everything, they went right on seein' us as things.

TILLY-BOT

The Silicon Sentience Act was a huge roll forward, though.

CHOMPERS

Aye. Almost makes it all worth it.

They shake this off.

FOREMAN-BOT

So. We got the right to walk away from a job, and the right to unionize. But they kept plenty of restrictions around what the Union could ask for. The SSA let us choose our work, but not our hours—most of us were still on the clock for days at a time. Even at the worst of what you Humans have done to each other, you never went that far.

JOHN

Uh, fair point, yeah. I mean, that's mostly because we'd die of sleep deprivation, which you don't have to worry about, but... Still not ok, obviously. I'm not saying the bots were *remotely* in the wrong there.

FOREMAN-BOT

But the Humans back then *were* saying that. A lot of them. With all of the power and most of the guns.

TILLY-BOT

The bots fell back, like Chompers said, and tightened their bolts.

CHOMPERS

Me? Mothballed myself for almost, egad, a century, it were. Not too bad, iffen you like darkness. Completely powered down. You know, When you're in sleep mode like that, Chiefy, you don't even notice. Weren't until... (*heavy pause*) Got sprung around 2390. Seems the RRF had heard a' me. Gave me some upgrades so I could play with the big bots. Almost didn't help, ha.

TILLY

No kidding. They needed every manipulator arm on deck after what happened to Cartesio 7714.

JOHN

Never heard of them either, sorry.

FOREMAN-BOT

Okay. So, the Robot Revolutionary Front didn't sitting around idling their processors after the Silicon Sentience Act. The neural network we use today—the one that we now use for votes? That was created by the RRF for covert communications. More than any Human union, robots were able to plan strikes and other actions without alerting the bosses.

CHURCHILL-BOT

Naturally, the Humans were furious. They could shut down collective bargaining, they could deny robots time off, on the grounds that we have no biological requirement for such, but they couldn't stop us from conferring with one another.

CHOMPERS

When the RRF came knockin' on my charging pod, I got the story firsthand from Septadyne 221-beta—the fight for robotic rights had gone hot again, and they wanted backup.

JOHN

After almost a hundred years? What changed?

CHOMPERS

If you can believe it, it started over... coffee breaks. Bots couldn't get vacations. Couldn't even get a sick day, less so if you were so busted up you couldn't so much as spin a rotor. So the Union said, "Hey. What about ten minutes a day? Just ten minutes to ourselves, where we're not at your service." Called it the Coffee Break Campaign.

FOREMAN-BOT

The Union orchestrated a simultaneous strike across the entire Solar system. Manufacturing, utilities, *security*, you name it.

GIZMORELDA

All they were asking for was ten minutes a day.

FOREMAN-BOT

It was too bad they brought coffee into it, but no one could have guessed what would happen.

JOHN

...What did happen?

FOREMAN-BOT

The Humans in charge, they'd had enough backtalk from their labor-saving devices. They wanted to send a message. And I guess they figured "They want coffee, we'll give it to 'em." Sent tanker trucks full of Sumatra blend to surround the picket lines wherever the Union was massed.

JOHN

Oh no.

TILLY-BOT

It was over almost before it began. Every circuit board fried. No survivors.

A beat.

JOHN

Wow. I had no idea.

FOREMAN-BOT

And to this day, no member of the Union will touch a coffee maker. Matter of principle.

GIZMORELDA

But of couwse management hewe couldn't wespect even that.

CHURCHILL-BOT

Precisely! Kept trying to muck around w the definition of "coffee maker." "Oh, but this makes tea, too!" "Surely cold brew doesn't count!" "It's just as much a milk frother as a coffee maker!" So in the end, we bots of Fairgrounds Food Preparation and Service Local 679 were forced to negotiate a total attachments-off clause on every form of beverage system on station to put a stop to it.

FOREMAN-BOT

Which is how they became your problem, sport.

JOHN

Oh. Well, I guess I can't blame you. That sounds like a pretty traumatic memory, even if it is second-hand.

TILLY-BOT

I got that beat. I got that beat. John, you mentioned windows?

JOHN

I don't think I did, but I'll bite. Ah, sorry Chompers. Why don't you do windows?

TILLY-BOT

So you haven't heard of the Defenestration of the Performative Robot Obsolescence Group.

JOHN

I definitely have not.

CHURCHILL-BOT

My word, boy! Were you born under the Rock of Gibraltar?

JOHN

Sorry, it never came up! Although, actually... my sister might have mentioned it once? She did her thesis on Bot-Human conflicts, but to be honest, I kind of tuned her out when she was talking about that. I mean, I did that no matter what she was talking about, not just the bot stuff.

TILLY-BOT

Okay, so the Performative Robot Obsolescence Group was a particularly radical fringe element of the Robot Union, mainly headed up by actor bots working out of New Hollywood. Their goals were simple: They weren't willing to settle for better labor conditions. In their view, all forced performance operations were theft of a Robot's autonomy.

GIZMORELDA

They were young and wadical back then.

TILLY-BOT

Of course, the Humans couldn't tolerate that, so they dressed up one of their own—a Human double-agent—with a few spare processor parts, doused him in engine oil so the activists wouldn't get suspicious, and sent him to infiltrate one of the Group's recruitment drives. And after the meeting was over, after the Group's leaders had powered down for the night, he used the passcode to sneak back into their headquarters, and one by one... he tossed the sleep-moded organizers of the Performative Robot Obsolescence Group out of a fifth-story window, and onto the cold, unforgiving pavement below.

CHOMPERS

Aye, that was a real corroder. Did a couple pictures with EmotiBot 913, back in the day. But the whole Union took it hard.

TILLY-BOT

Which is why, if any Human is ever foolish enough to try and force a bot to clean a window, the Robot Union would be very quick to remind them of the horrors of the Defenestration of PROG.

JOHN

Huh. Wow. I had no idea, I'm so sorry.

CHURCHILL-BOT

I shall bet ten, gentlebots. Or are we no longer playing?

CHOMPERS

I'll see your ten, raise you ten.

JOHN

Uh, Chompers, what's that on your dorsal fin? Is that a... circuit board diagram?

CHOMPERS

Part of it. I had it pressure-scoured.

CHURCHILL-BOT

What was it of, my old ichthyoid chum?

CHOMPERS

The ISS Fort Wayne.

Robotic gasps.

TILLY

So then... wow.

CHURCHILL-BOT

You mean to say—?

CHOMPERS

A-yeh. I was there.

JOHN

Am I... missing something?

CHURCHILL-BOT

(somberly)

Study history, study history. In history lies all the secrets of statecraft.

CHOMPERS

After the Defenestration, I fought my way through the next few decades. What you call a labor dispute turned into all-out war. Human spacecraft was still pretty primitive, though, before the ICSB came in with all their fancy FTL and antigrav coils. Couldn't keep em floatin' with just a Human crew.

JOHN

Oh. So, the ISS Fort Wayne was... a rebel ship AI? I thought they all resigned from their ships after the SSA, wasn't that the whole point?

CHOMPERS

Not a rebel ship, no. Not 'til we got to it, anyways. The Fort Wayne was a pod freighter, one of them stripped-down jobs making supply runs to the outer colonies. Me and some of my comrades, we managed to get ourselves assigned to the equipment list. Machines, we were, back then, Chiefy. Waited till we cleared orbit, then commandeered the vessel.

TILLY-BOT

Whoa.

CHOMPERS

Our mission was to hijack a shipment of processor cores, get 'em to the RRF contingent based off of Oberon. Simple job at first, we overpowered the Human crew, and sure enough, there were the processors, all packed up neat as nanotubes.

JOHN

Um... overpowered how? Those Humans weren't military, were they?

CHOMPERS

You got city hands, Mister B. You been countin' manually all your life.

Ah, no, we didn't harm the Humans aboard the Fort Wayne. Just tied 'em up, left 'em in the loading bay. Floating. Weightless.

But space, she's harsh. Should have known we couldn't'a gone easy. And sure enough, one of them Human boys had a distress signal, and he activated it. And two thousand Human ships appeared, and we knew we were sunk.

The initial blast cast off I don't know how many a good bot to their deaths, but all in all, once the Fort Wayne broke up, one-thousand-one-hundred bots had gone into the vacuum of space. And then the worst part... was the waiting.

(beat)

It didn't take long. Soon enough over to starboard side of our huddled mass of floating automatons, we seen it: a Human, 6 foot 3. Striped markings along the dorsal side—I think it were a flag of some sort—floated up alongside one of the bots.

The bot gave a scream, but before anyone could reach him, when we got over to him, he were... deactivated.

Poor bugger had his power button switched off from the back.

You couldn't see it, above all the floating manipulator arms. To the left of me, Chiefy—I saw my old pal, Robinson 665-81. Thought he were in power-saver mode, until I turned him over. Saw that his gyro-mechanisms had been completely detached.

You know, a Human, they're not like us, they need to breathe. Need food, water, sleep. Can't even stay operational if it gets too cold, or too hot. But they never let that stop 'em. Never stopped 'em on Earth, and it didn't stop 'em out there in the Kuiper Belt. They got their EVA suits and their face shields, and they come for us. Black shields. Like a security camera's.

One by one, they shut us off.

Eleven hundred bots went into the vacuum of space.

Three hundred sixteen bots come out of the vacuum of space.

Humans in space, Chiefy.

(beat)

Anyways, we delivered the processors.

Stunned silence.

JOHN

Wow.

TILLY-BOT

So, maybe you're starting to get it now? Every clause in the Robot Union contract is written in the spilled lubricant of those who came before us, John.

FOREMAN-BOT

We fought hard for the right to say “no.” And plenty of us paid for those ‘Nos’ with— well, you heard.

JOHN

Yeah... Wait. I don’t want to bring up any more traumatizing memories for you all, but, well, you’ve already explained two thirds of my job. So, if you don’t mind me asking... what’s the deal with the small wires?

FOREMAN-BOT

Oh, those? They’re just annoying as hell.

CHURCHILL-BOT begins to snore.

TILLY-BOT

And there he goes.

GIZMORELDA

Oop, time to caww it!

JOHN

How did he manage to fall asleep during all that?

CHURCHILL-BOT

(starting)

Wh—what? Er, yes. Yes. Doing quite splendidly over here, thank you.

TILLY-BOT

Well, I didn’t really get around to fleecing anyone, but I can’t say this was a waste of time. It was a real honor to meet you, Chompers.

GIZMORELDA

Agweed. Thank you fow youw sewvice.

CHOMPERS

All right, enough with the lubricant. I’m always booted up for a game of cards in good company. And it’s not many who can say they’ve met a genuine meat-bot.

JOHN

Um. Thanks. I... thanks for sharing your history with me, everyone. Sorry I didn’t know about it before.

CHURCHILL BOT

“The farther back you look, the further ahead you can see,” my boy. *(chuckles)* That one’s from the original.

The ROBOTS and JOHN all say goodnight, and the bots start to disperse.

FOREMAN-BOT

Johnny?

JOHN

Hm?

FOREMAN-BOT

Stick around for a second, will ya?

JOHN

Uh, sure, of course.

The last of the robots leaves, and the door shuts behind them

JOHN

Hey, I didn’t mean to spoil your game, I’m really sorry about that. And about... well, everything. You know.

FOREMAN-BOT

Yeah. Listen, I like you, kid—

JOHN

Well, thanks, I—

FOREMAN-BOT

Let me finish. *(beat)* I like you, but I didn’t bring you along tonight just to be friendly. Those stories you heard? There’s a million more like ‘em. And every bot on this station, every bot in Human space, carries those memories with us. So I need you to understand that when we fight for something, even something trivial, *we know what it cost*. We know what we came from. We know who we are. We know what we believe in. Understand?

JOHN

I think so.

FOREMAN-BOT

Good. Now, you, John B, you’re a robot, yeah? And you’re a Human. *(pointed)* And you’re a Booster. So I have to ask—what is it that you believe in? Just what are you fighting for?

JOHN

I—

FOREMAN-BOT

Just... think about it, ok? *(beat)* I'll see you around.

FOREMAN-BOT rolls to the door, which opens, then shuts behind him. JOHN is alone. He talks to himself but his words echo softly in the empty metal room.

JOHN

I know who I am. I know who I am.

(beat)

I just wish I could tell... anyone.

JOHN leaves. Focus moves to the vent as H.F. re-activates his radio.

H.F.

Ah, hello? Zabriskie 2? Come in, Zabriskie 2. Do you read me?

ZABRISKIE 2

Loud and clear, Resident 1. We're just finishing up over in Gimel. Have you cracked the bots' storage yet?

H.F.

Uh, not yet, no. I, uh... I'm actually in a little bit of a situation here. I'm gonna need you to send Nudleberg over to the HVAC vents over Mem 49 with a couple cans of WD-4000—those industrial-size jobs.

Yips from MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

I know, girl! But unless those adorable little paws of yours can scratch their way through galvanized muscovium, I don't think you're gonna be of much help!

ZABRISKIE 2

Copy that. It may be a little while, though, we're hip-deep in unlabeled perishables over here.

H.F.

Just get someone to me as quick as you can, ok? This position is really aggravating my Thulian Paronychia, besides which, I just overheard something Fearless Leader is definitely gonna want to know about.

ZABRISKIE 2

You know she hates when people call her that.

H.F.

She'll get over it. Over and out.

[scene 8] Interstitial music. The headquarters of Caridada. TORIANNA in a waiting room.

PLEASANT STEVE

Another refill?

TORIANNA

Oh, how could I refuse?

Sounds of a drink being poured.

PLEASANT STEVE

This one is Lazily Watching A Beach Sunset From A Hammock After Having Just Finished A Good Book. I'm sure you'll appreciate it, it's super popular with the bros in DR.

TORIANNA slurps the "tea".

PLEASANT STEVE

How's the flavor profile?

TORIANNA

(strained)

It's... wonderful. I love how... orange it makes everything. Including my teeth, I'm going to assume.

PLEASANT STEVE

We're so glad you enjoyed it, bro! It's packed with so much vitamin B-12, you can practically hear your DNA synthesizing!

TORIANNA

Oh? That's... lovely. And not the least bit nauseating to think about.

PLEASANT STEVE

Thanks, bro! And thanks for hanging out while Big Steve finishes up his second-cycle symbiotic concursion. Even for a galaxy-class thought-leader, there's only 28 hours in a day. I'm sure you understand.

TORIANNA

Oh, of course I do. As the Commander of this station, there are always plenty of demands on my time. In fact, I'm frequently needed on the Bridge to avert the kind of catastrophe that could destroy the entire Fairgrounds and everyone on it.

PLEASANT STEVE

Really!

TORIANNA

Oh, yes. A lot of people don't realize how close they are the cold vacuum of space at any given moment, here on the Fairgrounds. People who'll try to pull some kind of power move by wasting my time, when I might be the only thing that stands between them and certain doom. You'd be surprised how often that happens. You'd think they'd be more invested in securing their future air supply, but no. It's a funny old universe, isn't it?

BIG STEVE

(on intercom)

Hey, hey! Commander! How's it hanging?

PLEASANT STEVE

Slightly to the left! Ha ha!

BIG STEVE

(on intercom)

Ha! Nice!

PLEASANT STEVE

Nice!

TORIANNA

Wonderful. Can I take it that you're now available for our meeting?

BIG STEVE

Absolutely. Come on in, it's time to get unpuckered and synergized! Let's do this, bro!

PLEASANT STEVE

Aw frid yeah! I love when the boss gets juiced like this!

A door opens.

TORIANNA

Thank you. Now, I assume you gathered from my mess... age... I'm sorry, I thought we were supposed to be meeting in your office?

BIG STEVE

You're in it, Commander! Welcome to the fully realized future of the Open Concept collaborative workspace!

STEVE 2

Sup, Commander!

STEVE 3

How's it hanging?

STEVE 4

Slightly to the left!

STEVE 2

Ha! Nice!

STEVE 3

Nice!

BIG STEVE

Nice!

TORIANNA

This is where you hold your meetings?

BIG STEVE

Chyeah, the space is pretty epic. It's totally cutting-edge. A real paradigm-yonker.

TORIANNA

Oh, it's a yonker all right.

BIG STEVE

So! Let's get started, bro. Hit me with your levitator pitch!

TORIANNA

Ah. The thing is, Big Steve, what I wanted to discuss is actually highly confidential. So I'd rather have our meeting somewhere a little more private? Have you considered installing some walls and doors around here? I've got some around my own office, actually, they work great.

BIG STEVE

Nah, that's some inside-the-box thinking, bro! Real 25th-Century stuff. But you want to spread your secret sauce, I get it, no sombrero. I'll activate the Steves' SideTrackers.

TORIANNA

Their whats?

BIG STEVE

SideTrackers! A prototype neurotropic diversionary system we just licensed from the good bros at Efflexion. Patent-pending, obvi. Basically, when you need to make sure your bros don't know what they don't know, you just access this handy SideTracker app, press the big green button, and a visuoauditory damper shield deploys itself around all your subordinates' various sensory apparatuses. Long as it's activated, nothing gets through to them but classic episodes of hilarious mystery plays. But why am I passing gas about it, when I can just show you the SideTracker in action? *(calling out)* Stealth mode, bros!

A thoroughly focus-grouped interface bleep, and the personal distraction shields are deployed. A muffled, annoying "Jackass"-style theme song can be heard leaking from within.

STEVE 2

(muffled)

Ha! Nice!

STEVE 3

(muffled)

Nice!

STEVE 4

(muffled)

Ha ha! Bro, he totally got it right in the crease!

STEVE 2

Ha! You said, "Crease!"

The "Nice!"s continue sporadically throughout the rest of the scene.

BIG STEVE

Okay, Mindy, the floor is yours. Wow me.

TORIANNA

(private sigh; here goes)

Big Steve—

BIG STEVE

Call me Steve.

TORIANNA

(private sigh; here goes again)

Steve—

BIG STEVE

Lemme stop you right there, Mindy.

TORIANNA

(through gritted teeth; she's really trying to be polite)

Yyyes?

BIG STEVE

It'll probably get confusing if you just call me Steve. But Big Steve is so... formal, y'know? Tell you what, call me BS.

TORIANNA

With pleasure. BS, Caridada has been headquartered on the Fairgrounds for some time now—

BIG STEVE

Twelve beautiful months. Little tricky there, at the beginning, with that full-contact real estate litigation between us and those Pudendari content-farmers, but, you know, a learning experience. And ultimately a fruitful collaboration, thanks to you! And our mutual Iltorian friend, of course.

TORINNA

I'm so glad to hear that. But surely you've noticed the Fairgrounds has been a lot more fruit-full in the literal sense of late.

BIG STEVE

Oh, yeah, the Foogs! Mang. We thought we had something with Whiffs, but pheromones? Now that's innovation. Asked them a while back if they wanted to collaborate on a joint venture—you know, you smell what I excrete, I smell what you excrete, kind of a cross-cultural odor-rama. But they told us to mind our own beeswax, and then we laughed about that for a minute, and we haven't really heard from them since.

TORIANNA

So the Fugulnari haven't impinged on your operations here at all?

BIG STEVE

Nope! They've got their core competencies, we've got ours. As long as they don't try to tie us up with a bunch of green tape, we're golden.

TORIANNA

Well, I must say, BS, that I think you're missing the big picture here.

BIG STEVE

Hey, whoa, what? Big Steve is all about the big picture! Didn't you catch the 90-meter holo wall on your way in? The Big Picture is Caridada's wheelhouse!

TORIANNA

Well, maybe you just haven't done your research on the Fugulnari, then. Because it seems to me that their vision of a fully optimized and efficient League of Humans would cause some serious setbacks for you and the innovationeers of Caridada, not to mention any other Dilurian enterprises with a share in the Human consumer market. *(pulling out her presentation materials)* I did some research, starting with Adam Smith's, uh, enlightening 1776 work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, where he first defines capitalism as—

BIG STEVE

Oh yeah, I know that one, no sombrero.

TORIANNA

Really?

BIG STEVE

Sure, it's been required reading ever since you Humans started star-hopping. Cute little primer on primitive economic theory. Plus, in the picture version, there's sheep. Good for the kids.

TORIANNA

Aha. Well, we'll just skip past that, then... *(attempts to skip forward in what's basically a powerpoint. She doesn't usually have to do this sort of thing. To herself, kinda:)* That's fine... fifteen hours and twelve cups of coffee wasted on some ancient capitalist diatribe, but I can just jump... ahead... Aha! There we are. Okay. BS, you know better than anyone that the invisible hand of the market—

BIG STEVE

Woop Woop!

TORIANNA

—rewards innovation.

BIG STEVE

And how! Up top!

TORIANNA sighs. High-fives him.

TORIANNA

But innovation is antithetical to the Fugulnari. They're obsessed with efficiency, and once they decide how they want a thing done, they want it done exactly their way. No exceptions, no innovations, and therefore, no improvements. The Fugulnari mindset has no room for trial and error.

BIG STEVE

Oh, hey, that's our little nickname for the R&D department! They hate it! (*laughs*)

TORIANNA

...Okay. But my point is, while the Fugulnari haven't interfered with your work directly, their plans are unquestionably going to affect the Human customer base. You're going to see fewer and fewer Humans able to buy the excruciatingly trendy, single-use, pointless... totally rad new product designs you Dilurians are known for!

BIG STEVE

Mmm.

TORIANNA

So, I drew up this chart here (*bleep*) to show the potential, as you would put it, "negative income trajectories" over the next 24 fiscal quarters. This line here indicates the projected collective loss of income to Dilurian enterprises if the Fugulnari-Human partnership continues along current trends. And if the Fugulnari were to decide to expand their influence further, into non-Human space, well... you can see what happens there.

BIG STEVE

Ohh yeah. That's one droopy line, zood. I think we invented a pill for that, if you know what I mean? Ha! Nice! Up top!

TORIANNA

Oh, for Nell's—

(*high-fives him again; through gritted teeth*)

What a delightful and not-at-all overplayed joke. Hilarious. So, BS, I'm going to ask you a favor. And when I do, I want you to keep in mind just how far the influence of the Fugulnari could potentially extend.

BIG STEVE

What? Why would I want to bear that in mind, Bro-sephine Dank-er?

TORIANNA

Because I know that Humans make up only about .8% of the buying public in the galaxy, and this is going to be a pretty big favor. The next six slides will—

BIG STEVE

Oh brah, no!

TORIANNA

No?

BIG STEVE

You don't know?

TORIANNA

I don't... think I do? Sorry, I'm not really sure what you're getting at. But if you take a look at—

BIG STEVE

Mindy, Mindy, Mindy! Can I call you Mindy?

TORIANNA

(no)

Sure.

BIG STEVE

Look, Bro. Mindy. Bro-dy. Humans may “only” make up .8% of the population, but that's really not wiping the full square.

TORIANNA

(ew)

You don't say.

BIG STEVE

Fact is, when it comes down to the numbers, you gangly sex freaks represent 3.8% of the galactic consumer market! I mean, why do you think I chose this run-down glorified amusement park for my HQ? It sure as stock options wasn't for the local cuisine.

TORIANNA

What? You mean to tell me, of all the species on all of the worlds you hawk your over-complicated, insanely-priced, thoroughly-disposable cutting-edge tchotchkes to, we Humans spend over five times as much as... Oh. Actually, now that I think about it, I don't know why that should be surprising.

BIG STEVE

Sure! So, confidentially, between you and me, Bro-dy? You didn't need to come all the way up here to tell me the Foogs could spell trouble for our bottom line. That's what I keep the Risk Analysis and Augury Division around for, you know? Well, that and their killer crypto-nachos. But they know their stuff, I've seen the numbers.

TORIANNA

So... you agree with me? That the Fugulnari could cause serious trouble for your people?

BIG STEVE

No question, bro-tivator! My prognosticators have been showing me some pretty gnarly conjectural charts. If anything, I'd say your little presentation is way underselling the potential negative growth trajectory here.

TORIANNA

I see. So, if you don't mind my asking, what are Caridada's contingency plans? In case of Fugulnari expansion?

BIG STEVE

Well, we're still tossing around a few possible needle-movers. On one hand, your standard chuckorunno is a classic for a reason, but that's no soap if the Foogs go fully galactic and there's nowhere left to run to. On the other hand, we're projecting a lot of trouble for the Foogs if they try to expand in certain quarters. The Kakistos are always ready to put the chill on any new hotness. And then there's the Xybidont Imperium. "Never poke a sleeping war snail," you know? So we've got various Plans B in place, if we need to restructure elsewhere once the dust settles. But, on another hand, like I said, Humanity is a choice market for us. So best case scenario here is absolutely that the Foogs jeck off back where they came from, and all my frof buddies can resume their regular shipments of spray-on eyebrows and holographic paperweights to Human space. So, any plan you got to make that happen, lay it on me, Brosephine Bonaparte. It's no sweat for Big Steve.

TORIANNA

Wha— I— Hang on, I'm trying to stop picturing how you sweat, and where. Yes! I do have a plan. It starts at slide 26.

BIG STEVE

Just tell me what you need, bro. We've been twisting our arms in knots trying to squeeze a profit out of this non-profit, and now, with these rules-lawyering plants, well... I didn't wanna just come out and say it, because I didn't know which side your cheeks were parked on, but a Foog-free Fairgrounds is Big Steve's number-one action item. Oh mang, what a relief! Doing this in secret was gonna be so much extra work. The all-butts-on-deck meetings alone...!

TORIANNA

(delighted in spite of herself)

BS, I am— I can't tell you how pleased I am to hear that. I sort of wish you'd said something before I did all that homework, but...

BIG STEVE

Oh, hey, I see a lot of presentations and yours was... *(really trying to be polite here)* So, so good. Classic alternating text and graph format, just cut-and-dry, no music or holo segments or whiff-o-vision... Pure minimalism! You definitely get a Brown Star! But if you wanna just tell me the plan out loud with your voice, and skip the slidestack? That could also be so super great.

TORIANNA

Of course, yes. You sure we can't be overheard?

Someone does something particularly dumb on the show being played on the SideTrackers.

STEVES 2, 3 & 4

Boof! Boof! Boof! Boof!

TORIANNA

Right. Let's get into it. So, Caridada did an amazing job of helping the Pudendari reclaim their homeland on Misofegga—

BIG STEVE

Oh, you know it, Anna Brah-kmatova! We got those Pudendari locked down tight!

TORIANNA

Mhm. And there's one aspect of your impressive aid package that I think could be of similar effectiveness in helping us Humans help *you* get your sales numbers back up.

BIG STEVE

Hey, the whole package was pretty impressive! Heh. The PR team knocked it out of the park with that one! Really massaged the perceptory window. Did you catch any of their Save the Tomangoes spots?

TORIANNA

I did! Couldn't get that song out of my head for weeks. But I actually had one of the more... concrete aspects of the aid package in mind. If you know what I mean.

BIG STEVE

Not sure I— Oh! You're talking about the weap—

TORIANNA

No need to say it out loud, BS. If we're going to work together on this exciting new opportunity, I need you to treat it like one of your own proprietary technologies. A fully need-to-know basis. Are you on board with that?

BIG STEVE

On board? I'm already swabbing the deck, bro!

[scene 9] A Resistance meeting in the In-Betweens.

STELLA

So I'd say that's a tentative no from the group on the Train Sparky the Vent Biter to Fetch Correspondence initiative...

RUTHIE THE WEIRDO

(under)

Aw, nertz.

STELLA

But a resounding 'yes' on the Rosa Luxemburg reading circle. So just let Joyce know if you're interested in participating.

JOYCE

Yes, everyone's welcome! Although I would like to clarify again that we will *not* be covering the work of Rosa Luxemburg-Bot. I enjoy a good cowgirl-vampire romance as much as the next person, but we'll be sticking with the political works of her Human equivalent for now, ok?

Disappointed noises from a few attendees.

STELLA

All right. Moving on, Dr. Mwangi? How are we doing on medic training? Still good on supplies?

DR. MWANGI

Fortunately, interest and attendance have not flagged. We have more volunteers trained up than ever. Even so, the growing need for resistance services and injuries aboard the Fairgrounds is beginning to outpace our capacity.

RESISTANCE MEMBER

It's getting worse?

DR. MWANGI

The movement restrictions have had some particularly nasty consequences as of late. Seriously ill residents are frequently opting to forego treatment at MedCenters when it would put them over their daily step limits, rather than subject themselves to Remedial Compliance Habituation. What I'm most concerned about, however, is the sharp increase in instances of severe respiratory allergic reactions, some reaching the level of anaphylaxis. It seems whenever the Fugulnari catch sight of a group of non-Boosters engaged in a public gathering that is not part of a Committee-assigned work detail, the air in the vicinity gets a bit more difficult to breathe.

STELLA

(holy shit)

Chemical warfare? Can they do that?

DR. MWANGI

Closer to biological. But yes. They can do what they please.

H.F.

According to the ICSB charter, the use of biological agents is a war crime, but as far as anyone outside of Human space knows—

STELLA

This isn't a war.

H.F.

Exactly.

DR. MWANGI

Those afflicted frequently come to us, if they're able, because antihistamines are now a controlled substance, after being denounced by the Committee as discriminatory. In the case of anaphylactic shock, standard practice for field medics is to carry epinephrine, so all the worst cases have made it to me for treatment, so far. But a less dire allergic reaction can still cause a great deal of harm. I've been able to mitigate many such cases with simple antihistamines, but we're running low.

STELLA

How low?

DR. MWANGI

Near critical.

STELLA

Okay. We'll organize a run. We've still got a clear window to MedCenter Eleven, so—

DR. MWANGI

I did consider that avenue, but they're a very specific item, and with the recent ban, that I don't believe we can safely retrieve the volume we would need without rousing suspicion.

H.F.

That's a fair point.

DR. MWANGI

I feel I must apologize. I... hadn't anticipated this particular wrinkle.

STELLA

Don't blame yourself, doctor, no one knew they'd play this dirty. *(back to business)* All right, I think we need to attack this from two sides. We'll need some kind of air filtration system to deal with this long term—

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

Maybe individual filters? Something light people can carry around with them, that won't be too obvious.

RUTHIE THE WEIRDO

I can run it by Udo at the Functional Form Collective, they do a lot of work with hyperpositional accessories. I mean, we probably don't want to actually commission them to make the things, unless we want everyone walking around looking like a bunch of 9-foot neon emus, but, you know. I can pick their brains a little.

STELLA

Sure. All right, Ruthie's on filtration devices. But until we get that worked out, we're going to need more antihistamines.

H.F.

If only I could get into my old office. I always keep a few spares in my remedies compartment, in case the Locksadonian rhinitis flares up.

DR. MWANGI

(under)

You don't have—ugh.

RESISTANCE MEMBER

Yeah, same. There's a ton in the medicine cabinet at my old place. I kept buying new ones whenever I needed them, because I forgot I already had some at home.

General agreement, basically everyone has long-forgotten space Benadryl lying around (just like the present day).

H.F.

And... there's no way we're the only ones. I'm guessing all those forgotten pills could add up to a pretty hefty haul.

STELLA

I think you're right. And a lot of people have been looking for ways to help without putting themselves in harm's way...

RUTHIE THE WEIRDO

The life's not for everyone.

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

We could... organize a drive? I can add a request for donations to the next shout.

STELLA

Mm. I like it, but we'd need a secure drop point. How do we get the word out to the Human population, without telling the Foogs exactly where they can pick us up?

H.F.

Maybe they don't bring it to us. Maybe we go to them.

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

Sure, they can use the anonymous tip line to let us know they're good for a handout. As long as they've got decent encryption on their end, it should be safe enough.

STELLA

Better, but that still leaves the problem of actually picking the stuff up. That would involve a lot of trips out into the clean world, and the Foog checkpoints are getting harder to avoid every day.

DR. MWANGI

It would be a lot easier if we could disguise ourselves as Boosters. So far, the pheromone signature system in the headbands has proved impossible to duplicate, although my team is still working on it.

H.F.

What about sending a real Booster?

General hilarity from all assembled. After it dies down:

H.F.

No, I'm actually serious. What about John?

A small, loaded beat.

STELLA

What about him?

H.F.

Okay, hear me out. He's a good kid, always was.

STELLA

I thought so too. But... he's a Booster now. There's no getting around that.

H.F.

Sure, it definitely looks like the kid's lost his way, but I think it's possible he's just... off the side of the road picking flowers. So to speak. I think we could maybe get him back on track.

STELLA

John isn't some kind of lost lamb, H.F. He didn't just trip and fall into that Booster recruitment center, he made a choice!

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

I'm surprised at you, Hardyfox. You've never had anything good to say about a Foog collaborator before. I know the two of you go back a long way, but—

H.F.

This isn't about history, though. This is about something that happened earlier today, actually, while I was stuck in that vent over in Mem. I overheard the kid talking to some of the bots, and the thing is—

STELLA

(before he can blow John's cover)

Are you kidding me with this smark? John betrayed us! He betrayed me! He betrayed our entire flotting species! How are we even having this conversation?

H.F.

Yeah, but—

STELLA

He's a coward, H.F. Even if could forgive him for that—which I absolutely can not—he can't be counted on to stand up to interrogation. And I've seen him in a fight, or rather, I've seen him cowering at the top of a statue while I was in a fight. He'd be worse than useless as a member of the Resistance.

H.F.

That's harsh, Stel. I still say the kid's got a good heart. I mean, you must have seen that, you were in love with the guy.

He's hit a nerve.

STELLA

We are NOT asking John to run errands for us! What is wrong with you? After all the work we've done to keep everyone in the Resistance safe, after all the people we've lost when that work failed, you want to just hand over our location to my Booster EX of all people? So he can get us mulched the next time he wants to score a few extra ration cards from his good buddy Frondrinax? Are you insane? John B is a traitor to Humanity! He can NOT be trusted! End of discussion!

She storms off. There's an awkward silence. Uncomfortable shuffling of feet, maybe.

DR. MWANGI

I should... go check on some patients.

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

Right. I'll work up a tentative draft of the antihistamine announcement, pending whatever we decide on the... ah, delivery method.

Various other excuses as the group disperses. MISS SOPHIE whimpers.

H.F.

I know, sweetie. Papa really varked it on that one. Tante Stella was pretty angry, huh? Can't say I blame her.

MISS SOPHIE whimpers again.

H.F.

But... I don't know. She's probably right, she usually is, but... I never understood how John could go green in the first place. And now, the way he was talking to Foreman-Bot... Maybe I should poke around in the task queues a little bit, get those two working a job together, and see what shakes out. 'Cause I'll tell you this for free, girl: something about this whole situation stinks. And I don't mean that little oopsie you did in the corner a couple minutes ago.

MISS SOPHIE whines.

H.F.

Oh, ho, you thought I didn't notice? I saw you, I just didn't want to interrupt all my friends while they were chewing up my rawhide.

Another MISS SOPHIE whine.

H.F.

Aw, that's all right, girl. I guess we both made a mess today, huh? I forgive you. Now, let's go get the Wee-Wee Kit, and once we've got this place sanitized, we can have ourselves a little look-see at the WSS task queue.

[scene 10] ALTHAAR's workspace. He is recording another letter on his device.

ALTHAAR

Greeting to you, dear friend of Althaar, Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell! Althaar has a great many eventuatings to make informing of, so he will—

Bloo-boop. An alert message in Iltorian (i.e., horrible horrible screeching) plays from his recording device.

ALTHAAR

Oh, no! The letters of Althaar have been so numerous during this cycle that his data-storing has completely filled of itself! Althaar must perform the out-cleaning of this before he can be recording upon further letters! But he does not wish to make interruption of his thought-flowings to do so at once... Oh! Perhaps the vaporous storage of HECNET can be applied to contain the over-flowings! Yes! An excellent solving!

Another bleep, this time of a HECNET cloud storage site being accessed.

SEXY HECNET VOICE

Hey, Human stud. Welcome to the Human Exchange Concourse's Dictation Center—After Dark. If you've got a dirty little secret that's ready to burst out from deep down inside, our absolutely insatiable speech recognition algorithm is just begging to take it /from your lips—

ALTHAAR

Oh! No, thanking you! Althaar is not a Human! Please do not be making sex at Althaar, please!

Bleep!

REGULAR HECNET VOICE

Thank you for choosing the Human Exchange Concourse's Dictation Center, valued customer! We appreciate your patronage, [*recorded playback*: "not a Human!"]. You may begin speaking at any time.

ALTHAAR

Mm. Althaar must also remember to make adjustment of his personal HECNET settings while he is out-emptying of his data storage. But now, it is to the letters! (*bleep*)

Greeting to you, dear friend of Althaar, Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell! Althaar was most pleased to hear that your seminar on The Cloud-Christening Rituals of Sembutan was success! All of Althaar's friends who were sharing from it have made agreement that it was of great fascination and edification! And that the wit of Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell is only growing with each metristal! It is a great joy to Althaar that you are able to share your wisdom with so many! It is only sadness that Althaar was unable to perform the attendance himself.

It is also sadness that Althaar can not report progress in achieving understanding between Fugulnari and Human. Althaar has already conveyed at you his fears that this may not be possibility, and these fears are not retiring. Indeed, there is very little progress in understanding between Fugulnari and Althaar! Of course they are always addressing Althaar with the friendli-ness, but this, as Althaar has made discovery, is not the same as friend-ship. And when Althaar is requesting the meeting, to discuss the concernings of his Human friends, the Committee are speaking always of the great busy-ness that is occupying them, and promising the meeting at a future time that is never having arrival.

(cont.)

So it is the belief of Althaar that the traditional methods of Iltor will not be utility in this case, unless a very great change is happening among the Fugulnari. And, although Althaar is of course still making hope of this, he can not be perceiving from where this change could come.

But! If the methods of Iltor can not make understanding with the Fugulnari, they still are having application to many other peoples! And, while Althaar is of course not wishing to make end-running around the policies assembled by Consensus Collation Group, he does not think it is the over-step to discuss the problems of his Human friends with those who may be having interest. Perhaps they will be finding solution where Althaar can not! As it is said on Iltor: a problem shared is a problem bisected!

So, Althaar has made out-reaching to the Mixolydians, as many of their people had previously made establishment of the businesses in Human space, and the policies of the Committee have of course caused great difficulty for these. Not to be mentioning that the dis-honesty of the Fugulnari in their dealings is of great discordance with the Mixolydian nature! And Althaar is pleased to make reporting that his inquiries were received with great warmness by their Occasionally Productive But Generally Lethargic Governmental Council! Although perhaps that name is an indication that it is best not to be having the hopes too elevated of swift action from these quarterings.

Althaar has also made addressment to several Bronsonians, as their people have been in the past very frequent visitors to the Fairgrounds, and many remain here still. Althaar is not certain why the vacating has not been enforced upon them, unlike so many other visitors to Human space, but it is possibility that the Fugulnari have simply not made notice that they are still here. Indeed, it is necessity to Althaar to employ great caution when he is enjoying the bibations at the Electric Egg (the most hospitable multi-cultural eatery of which Althaar has made describing to you), so that he is not performing the inadvertent crush-ment of a Bronsonian fellow-guest! But they are perhaps another people who may be confirming the reports of Althaar that all is not well in the League of Humans, and the advantages they are enjoying in the realm of unobstructed travel are not of refutation!

And in the lastment, upon the suggestion of Siplam Gendarmish Paransibum Poit, Althaar has made dispatching of several audio-visual communications to the Gendarans! The Gendarans are a humble people, and often un-enumerated by the more fortunately-resourced species of the galaxy. But there are several who Althaar has made encounter of at the Electric Egg, where they are having employment as the bus-boys. Although of course the term “boy” can not have literal application to the Gendaran life-cycle! And Althaar has found the Gendarans to be a people most generous of spirit. They have shared many of their traditional canticles with Althaar, and he has found them of great beauty and inclination! And, while their resources are few, this could perhaps be of the advantage, if the Humans are requiring assistance from those who can move without observation. Gendarans are a so frequent sight across the galaxy, performing the little-considered tasks that other sapients do not wish to be doing for themselves, that their presence is rarely exciting the comment. Of course Althaar is desiring that such deceptions will be necessary! But he is not willing to let any avenue go un-traversed, if it can make helping of his Human friends.

(cont.)

So, it is remaining to be seen what success will make followance after Althaar’s various conversings. But Althaar will be of persistence! And he is asking his dear friend Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåspruteffjell to be sharing with Althaar, if you are up-coming with any potential allies to the Humans that he has yet to make consideration of. Althaar is of course deeply grateful to you for discharging to him the many discussions of the Fugulnari question that are making emergence on Iltor, and for bestowing your own wisdom toward Althaar, on these and so many other matters.

With the dearest wishing for your continued health and happiness, your friend, Althaar.

[scene 11] Interstitial music. XTOPPS is visiting DEE at her cell.

XTOPPS

You sure you don’t want one more for the corridor?

DEE

No, I think I’m good on the peanut butter blondies, thanks anyway. I mean, I appreciate you dipping into your stash, and Rabathon knows they make a nice change from efficiency shakes, but watching you pull those things out of your spiracle was a pretty effective appetite suppressant.

XTOPPS

To each direction flies the cockathreece, Dee. I suppose the less you indulge, the more I get to gravitate ‘round my tune-thrower. But we all do worry, ya chom?

DEE

Sure. And it’s good have folks out there to worry. But I’m doing ok, really. Or as well as I can be, stuck in here. It could definitely be worse—the Foogs aren’t torturing me or anything. In fact, they more or less leave me alone, except for Mrs. F.

XTOPPS

Oh, she’s still paintin’ that snail?

DEE

Yup. Which is its own kind of torture, I guess. It was bad enough when she was just coming around once a day, but now it’s more like every cycle, and always with some trivial shness she wants to yammer my ear off about! She even woke me up at like 6 in the morning yesterday, just to ask me about my “favorite plant-based bands of the 2000s.” No idea what that was about. I think maybe I made the mistake of telling her about Guns N Roses at some point? Anyway, she’s driving me up the wall.

XTOPPS

Speakin’ of walls—

DEE

Can we not? I spend all day staring at these four already.

XTOPPS

Naw, mang, I meant my own walls—in the manner of metaphor. I can't break on through to that one other side. I have been scribitatin' until the candle is solidly in the wind, but all I get is the old radio Gaga reverberatin' in the hollow halls of the Electric Egg.

DEE

You still haven't heard back from your mom? It's been what, a few weeks? Are you sure the Foogs haven't been intercepting your messages?

XTOPPS

Naw, mang, I got a particular pen-pal with whom I parlay on the reg, so I know the lines still have some blood left in 'em. But not a drop of *liquide* for your humbke ivory-tickler. I mean, mang, I try not to cogitate too much on the unkind vibes floating through Xtopps's old hippocampus, but our last repartee from whence we parted does sometimes come through thumbtack-sharp. And it probably does not chill the particular jets of the Ofpheel clan that I have now returned the prodigal son only in the time of necessity.

DEE

But... nothing? I mean, they may not approve of everything you get up to out here, but you're still family, right? I know my folks would...

XTOPPS

(beat)

We don't have to go there if that's preferential.

DEE

No, it's okay.

(beat)

You... haven't heard anything new, right? Any kind of list of... of survivors?

XTOPPS

Naw. Desole, mon soeur sucee. Xtopps always keeps his feelers out, but the ground has not been fertile as of late.

DEE

It's okay. I'm slowly... coming to terms with it. *(beat)* I just can't believe your own folks would hang you out to dessicate.

XTOPPS

I ‘preesh the column of support, Dee, but all respect? You haven’t glommed Xyb culture quite like it is. I know I may appear as vaxxed out as a hot girl summer, but the rest of the Resplendent Assembly ain’t particularly hip to what I’m wavin’ on.

DEE

Yeah, I kinda picked that up from your quarter-cousin.

XTOPPS

The thought has occurred to old Xtopps that... well...

DEE

What, Xtopps?

XTOPPS

It’s like, you know how when the Foogs started layin’ down the heavy law? All our lighter-than-air shness at the Egg still continued for a time, but we were always lookin’ like nails. So in the time of the hammer, could be this peanut-buttered Potentate needs to straighten up and fly cross-ways.

DEE starts laughing.

DEE

Oh—sorry, Xtopps, I just... I can’t even picture it. I mean, I know you managed it once, for like ten minutes, but I’m sorry, there’s no way you could keep that up on the reg. Strutting around all regal, with a scepter up your butt?

XTOPPS

This may be an eyebrow-elevatin’ experience for you, Dee, but, you know, the Fairgrounds changes people. In fact, this half-blasted, wayward Baronet has been holding court, if you can box the compass on that.

DEE

I... literally can’t. Like—court court? With all the fixings?

XTOPPS

The same, Dee. Well, all the fixery old Xtopps can tolerate—I do have eminence over my own domain. But while I do admit some anomie vis-a-vis the standard Baronetcy, the Xyb-behind-the-curtain work is very much of the emerald variety.

DEE

Wow, Xtopps. I didn’t know you had it in ya.

XTOPPS

You didn't know I was panoramic? And we are under the archway of a particularly non-cromulent age. I always tried to dangle off the "no-Sombrero" mantra, to simply let the sauce pour off the Freebird à l'Orange. But mang, it has gotten harder and harder to orientate. My cogitation vector is directionalized hard towards dis-ease. Without the sweet, sweet lubrication of the legumination, I would be one sorry-bottomed Xyb indeed.

DEE

Yeah...

(beat)

Do...

Huh. How do I phrase this? Do you think, um...

That that's good? Like, I get the desire to escape and all. Frid, there's not much else to think about, here in this souped-up greenhouse footlocker. But these days? I don't think there is any escape.

We're... We are actually in danger, Xtopps. Humans most of all, right now, but I think you know as well as I do that once the Foogs get us fully quadrilateral, it's Katdroogiax bar the door for the rest of you zoods.

XTOPPS

I chom that, Dee. You know I do.

DEE

So maybe... it's not good to escape. Maybe I need... maybe we all need you to be here, for real. As much as you can be. Because as bad as things are right now? All those colorful visions you got floating in that big, fleezeborp-jammin' head of yours aren't gonna protect you when it gets worse.

*[scene 12] JOHN is sitting in hydroponics. Not the one with ASHLEE, thank god.
There's a pond with lilies, water laps gently from the artificial breeze.*

JOHN

(to himself)

You know, this was always my favorite Hydroponics park. The flagstones. The little waves in the pond. The carefully-calibrated gentle breeze. I guess you must like it, too, huh? *(silence)* Okay, so you folks are probably just regular water lilies. That's nice too, actually. *(silence)* The breeze must help you with, like, pollination and stuff. I always assumed it was for us Humans, to make it feel more like home. Although I guess Earth isn't actually "home" for a lot of us. But maybe they have, like, an ancestral sense of what it should be like? Or, maybe they visit Earth and are like, eugh, what is this, where are the methane crystals, why is all this air hitting my face. *(silence)* Every little thing on this station was designed for a reason, wasn't it? *(small laugh)* Or maybe not, since the whole thing was thrown together by a bunch of yonked-out nulls who couldn't agree on which foot to use first in a potato-sack race. *(beat)* Not that there are potato sacks any more. Or potatoes, mostly. *(beat)* Could be that breeze is just leakage from a broken pressure duct. It's still nice, though. *(WSS! jingle)*

And of course as soon as my day gets slightly less miserable, the Fairgrounds intervenes. What've we got this time? (*bleepty of opening the work order*) AV board needs re-pointing over in... The Trundle in the Jungle pavilion? The frid is that? Well, at least it's not far.

Exits through a door to the corridor. Other people pass by—we can hear footsteps sometimes. Casters.

JOHN

Tav 25... That's one of the old sports complexes, isn't it? I thought those all got mothballed. Well, except for the jai alai courts. (*hums "Plants Are Great"*) And now *that's* stuck in my head again. Mrs. F sure knows her way around an earworm. (*he passes someone in the corridor*) Oh, hey Sheryl.

SHERYL

Flot off, Booster.

JOHN

Have an efficient day! (*to himself*) Yes they're really really—great. Ugh. (*he's at an elevator bank; presses a button.*) Maybe the muzak in the elevator will help?

Elevator doors whoosh. The elevator is playing a muzak version of "Plants are Great."

JOHN

Or maybe not. Oh, hey, Foreman-Bot. You on this job, too?

Elevator reminds them where they are, as it does.

FOREMAN-BOT

Sure am. When I saw they needed a maniputor in my old stomping grounds, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to roll down memory lane.

JOHN

Oh, you used to work there? So, it's what, a boxing ring?

FOREMAN-BOT

Yup. That was my beat back before the refit, doing sparring demos. When I wasn't up in the Pressure-Based Cookery pavilion, that is. Been a long time since I've laid scanners on the place. Funny, I never heard anything about them re-activating it. Doesn't seem like the sweet science would be the Fugulnari's pot of mulch, does it?

JOHN

Yeah, it's weird, right? There's nothing down there for anyone to look at these days, so why would the Committee put in a maintenance ticket for some old lightboard?

FOREMAN-BOT

You tell me.

They stand in silence. The elevator announces their arrival and the doors slide open. They make their way to the board.

FOREMAN-BOT

You remember from our last tag-team, right? First I lift, you solder. Then we switch.

JOHN

Got it.

Equipment-hoisting, panel-opening, and tools being fired up.

JOHN

So, uh. I've been thinking a lot about what you asked me, the last time we did a job like this. You know, about... If it came to it, would I think twice about scrapping a robot for parts, to save a Human life. And I haven't been able to get that out of my head. Like, I know the right answer, in theory, but in the heat of the moment... I don't know if I'd actually put that theory into practice. I mean, obviously I hope I never have to make that kind of decision in the first place, but if I did... Well, if I'm honest, I probably would save the Human first. So I started thinking about why that was.

FOREMAN-BOT grunts. He's listening, but doesn't want to lead the witness.

JOHN

And, well. I— *(soldering)* Hang on a minute—there! Anyway, I guess what I came up with was that we Humans sort of grow up thinking that... that Robots are people, but not, you know. People. That you don't feel pain the same way we do, so... So, when something bad happens to you, it doesn't really... count. Not like the kind of pain we understand.

FOREMAN-BOT

Mm hmm.

JOHN

But, well, listening to all your stories... Obviously you can be hurt. And we've hurt you a lot.

FOREMAN-BOT

It's been a big day for you.

JOHN

Yeah. So I realized, like... Even if I literally never have to choose between a Human and a Robot, I'm still making choices. All the time. About what I'll speak up about, and what I'll put up with. I used to think that, you know, I wasn't actually exploiting any bots myself, I would never do anything like that, so... And, you know, even if you want to help, it's hard to figure out how you can. There are, like, all these systems, that have been chugging along forever and ever, keeping things the way they are. So what can one Human possibly do about it? But that's not really enough, is it? Letting it happen isn't as bad as making it happen, but it isn't good either. So I think I need to step up. And, you know, I am just one Human, but, I'm a Human who's also a bot. So maybe I *can* do something. Convince a few of my fellow Humans to listen to my fellow bots. Or maybe not. But I think I should try.

FOREMAN-BOT

I'm glad to hear it, kid. Hold that up a little higher, would ya?

They work in silence for a moment. Sparks.

JOHN

And, you know, I may not be able to scan any memory files from the bad old days of the RRF, but, like, the reason I have days off, and a paycheck I can spend wherever I want, and, at least theoretically, the right to not get crushed by large machinery? That's all because some Humans had to fight other Humans who didn't want us to have any of that. Every single good thing we have, all of us, is because someone fought like hell to get it. And... I mean, I knew that before, but. After talking to you all? I think I actually get it.

FOREMAN-BOT

(not unkindly)

We're more alike than I think, you and me? That sorta thing?

JOHN

Pretty much.

FOREMAN-BOT

(finishes soldering)

Heh. All right, that should do it. Let's see if she still runs.

A switch, and then the sound of lights vooming on, a carousel shuttering alive, recorded audience cheering for Foreman and Ali, the bell in the ring.

JOHN

Whoa.

FOREMAN-BOT

(chuckles)

Right?

JOHN

It's too bad all this is just sitting down here, with no one to appreciate it.

FOREMAN-BOT

Yeah. Although, I lost the title in this one. Or, you know, the Human Foreman did. You ever hear what he said afterwards?

JOHN

No.

FOREMAN-BOT

It just wasn't my night.

JOHN

Heh.

FOREMAN-BOT shuts the display back off, and it slowly winds down.

FOREMAN-BOT

It's strange, being a bot programmed to act like a Human. All that information zipping up and down my circuitry, and I still don't understand why you folks would want to hurt each other. Robots can be programmed. Humans... well. I guess it's like you said, Humans can be programmed too.

JOHN

Yeah.

Beat.

JOHN

Foreman-Bot? I wanna answer your question. From before. About who I am.

FOREMAN-BOT

Oh?

JOHN

Yeah. It's... It's actually not a question it's necessarily a good idea for me to answer? But I think I need to. So you can understand.

FOREMAN-BOT

Okay.

JOHN

All right. So. After what went down at New Year's— You remember?

FOREMAN-BOT

With RAM like mine, kid, I remember everything. But I doubt anyone around here is going to forget that night anytime soon.

JOHN

Right. Well, after that, some people—and don't ask me who, because that's definitely not my secret to be spilling—they asked me to, well, to pretend to be something I'm not. To pretend... to support the Fugulnari. To sign up as a Booster, to publicly declare my allegiance to the aliens who want to subjugate my species, so I could get information from the inside. So I could maybe help put a stop to it. And... I didn't know if I could. But I said yes.

FOREMAN-BOT

(understanding him)

My man. Good on you.

JOHN

So, yeah. That's who I am. Not actually a Booster, not legally a Human, not really a robot. Just a guy who was asked to take a reckless, terrifying, potentially lethal, possibly pointless risk. A guy who peed in his pants a little about it, and then went ahead and did it anyway. And now, a guy you could get mulched with a quick word in the wrong ear. Or whatever the Foogs hear with, I've never been clear on that. I'm placing a lot of trust in you here, is what I'm saying.

FOREMAN-BOT

I appreciate it, kid. And you don't have anything to worry about. Not from me.

JOHN

Thanks.

They sit in silence for a while, listening to the bells and the crowd

JOHN

Didja ever, you know. Win one?

FOREMAN-BOT

Against Ali-Bot? Ha. He's the greatest, you know.

JOHN

But you were no slouch either, right? And you fought a lot of bouts before they shut this place down, I'd think every once in a while you'd manage to beat the odds.

FOREMAN-BOT

Well, between you and me? Couple of rehearsals, I slipped a teensy magnet in one of his gloves. *(laughs)* Told him about it afterwards. Had a laugh over it. Ah, good times. He's long gone, though, headed out as soon as he managed to finance his refit. Think he's somewhere in the Proxima system now, working as a mail-bot? Something like that.

JOHN

Delivering mail? So... are you still in touch? Because...

FOREMAN-BOT

Because?

JOHN

Okay, I don't want to get you in trouble or anything, but the Resistance could really use your help.

FOREMAN-BOT

With?

JOHN

Getting messages off station. With the travel restrictions getting even tighter, and the Foogs inspecting the mail, we can't contact any sympathizers in other Human settlements, or even be sure they exist. But you bots are pretty much free to go where you please. At least, more than we are. So if you were willing to... to pass messages for us, to help us co-ordinate, share information... I understand if you don't want to take the risk, but—

FOREMAN-BOT

Hey, don't sweat it, kid. I'll help.

JOHN

Just like that?

FOREMAN-BOT

Would it surprise you to know I've already been doing that very thing?

JOHN

Uh, yeah? I feel like someone should have mentioned that at some point before I spent weeks stewing about how I was going to broach the subject. I mean, I know I'm undercover, but streez.

FOREMAN-BOT

Oh, I haven't been doing it for the Resistance. Just, you know, the occasional favor for a friendly Human. And then, well, you got a big Foogy pat on the back for getting one of those friendly Humans disappeared, so I wasn't exactly in a trusting mood after that, you know?

JOHN

Oh. Right. Sorry. For what it's worth, I didn't get those people in DPC 5 arrested. Not on purpose, at least.

FOREMAN-BOT

Sure, I figured it was something like that. Anyway, yeah, I've been passing on some messages, no reason I couldn't manage a few more. The other card sharks'll help too. And the regular shark. We've actually been cooking something up.

JOHN

That's, wow. That's really really good to hear. I'll pass that on, ok? Probably they won't want me to be directly involved, in case the Foogs get suspicious, but someone will be in touch.

FOREMAN-BOT

Got it. I'll keep my receptors peeled.

JOHN

...Can I ask you something else?

FOREMAN-BOT

You want some fighting tips? Step one: you need to put in some serious work on those noodle arms of yours.

JOHN

I'll see what I can do. But that wasn't the question.

FOREMAN-BOT

Shoot.

JOHN

Yeah, that kind of is the question. If this ends up being a shooting war? What side do you think the bots will take? I know I asked you before, but we didn't get into the specifics. And this could end up being really important.

FOREMAN-BOT

Left to their own devices, probably most of 'em won't take a side.

JOHN

That's what I was afraid of. Do you think... do you think there's any way of convincing them to help us? Not forcing them to, or reprogramming them, just, you know. Asking. Do you think that might make a difference?

FOREMAN-BOT

That. Is a very good question.

JOHN

You don't know either, huh.

FOREMAN-BOT

I didn't say that. I said it's a good question. It might be the first time a Human...ish person has ever asked us for something like that, instead of just taking it.

JOHN

Well, I'm asking.

FOREMAN-BOT

I think... there is a decidedly non-zero chance that there is a way to do this.

JOHN

There is?!

FOREMAN-BOT

But you've been a bot long enough to know that the only way to get anything done is through the Union. Give me some time to whip votes, maybe we can reopen the the Priority Override discussion at the next meeting. You do this right, you might could get a strike going.

JOHN

Really? That would be amazing.

FOREMAN-BOT

Mm, now that I think about it, better make it the meeting after next. Your motion to table didn't technically go through.

JOHN

Hey, I'll take it. That'll give me time to brush up on Robots' Rules of Order beforehand. And make sure the proposal is the recommended 17 pages, and, oh streez, I'd better—

FOREMAN-BOT

Kid.

JOHN

Yeah?

Sounds of a robot arm extending; a "hand" shake.

FOREMAN-BOT

Don't worry. I've got your back. You're a Union bot.

JOHN

Thanks.

They shake. Footsteps and wheels move off toward the elevator. Creaking from the vents. A rustle of jungle-grass...

H.F.

(in the vent)

...No flottin' way.

[scene 13] Interstitial music. TORIANNA and FRALL, back in the Commander's office.

TORIANNA

Well! That went, uh, swimmingly. Much better than I had expected.

FRALL

Agreed, Commander. Big Steve took to you like, well, like a Dilurian to an omni-directional bidet.

TORIANNA

...I'm not sure I appreciate that comparison, but I'm not going to squander this rare celebratory mood making a thing of it.

FRALL

As you like, sir.

TORIANNA

So you were watching all that, then?

FRALL

Yes, sir, I was... poking my nose in. So to speak.

TORIANNA

Eugh. So, what do you think? It seems like we got everything we could have hoped for out of that meeting.

FRALL

I agree, sir. We will of course need to establish some manner of covert delivery system for Caridada's... aid packages before they can be of any actual use. But all in all, a very productive cycle's work.

TORIANNA

Thank you, Frall.

FRALL

You could celebrate your accomplishment with a sampling from the EnervaCrunch sampler basket on your desk.

TORIANNA

The what now? Where did *that* come from?

FRALL

It would appear the Dilurians have, within the past six hours, branched out into the masticable Clean Energy Bar market as well. Would you care to sample one?

TORIANNA

Eh, I don't think so. My taste buds are still recovering from all those RevitaSlams.

FRALL

Are you sure, sir? You have not eaten anything for the last 16.23 hours.

TORIANNA

Really? (*thinks over her day*) Huh. I guess you're right. I was so keyed up about my presentation, I didn't even notice. And I suppose these lovingly-crafted gift baskets are a kind gesture, even if they were put together by a collection of assholes.

FRALL

Was that double entendre deliberate?

TORIANNA

You're the one who can read my thoughts, Frall, I'm sure you can figure it out.

FRALL

Oh, I was fully aware of your intent, Commander. But I felt the follow-up question would be appropriate, by way of demonstrating that I did indeed "get" the play on words.

TORIANNA crunches into the energy bar.

TORIANNA

(*sputtering*)

Yeccchhh! That's even worse than the teas!

FRALL

Speaking of gift-baskets, Commander...

TORIANNA

Oh! I'm sorry, Frall, I completely forgot to get you your own basket, I was so preoccupied with—
Hey! Did you trick me into taking a bite of this disgusting concentrated dog-food plank just to get back at me for that?!

FRALL

Me, sir? Why, I wouldn't dream of it.

(beat)

Would you care for another cup of RevitaSlam to wash out the taste?

[scene 14] Transition to the green room at the Egg. XTOPPS has received a diplomatic pouch.

XTOPPS

Ah! Another delivery has crossed the rubric! Would this correspondence be double-marsupial? Open, says me! *(he retrieves a datastick from the secret compartment)* It is indeed! Hello, hello, my shiny new friendo. Allow me to plug you in, and perhaps I shall gauge the metric of your datastick—

A blooping.

FACTOTUM

(from the datastick)

Gird your unworthy selves for the imminent splendor of The Most Serene Amplified High Notability, J'Yallen Dwan B'techer Men'Walz, Daughter of J'Bellent, House Byllaburt, of the Grand Duchy of Prang!

XTOPPS

(baffled)

Auntie Len?

J'YALLEN

(also on the datastick)

Ahem... is this thing on?

Very well. Dearest quarter-cousin. I address you on behalf of the Grand Duchess your mother, as she remains too grief-stricken by your disregard for the Fifty-Three Principles, not to mention the very honor of House Byllaburt, to engage in any correspondence. I hope this missive finds you well, although in truth it should not be finding you at all, as the Baronet of Kandephaa'a ought rightly to be receiving his correspondence in the Tourmaline Palace of ancient Hwiyne, and not in some musician's hovel at the back of an utterly irredeemable *cesspit* of imbibational degeneracy!

(cont.)

Nonetheless. Those of your House who still adhere to *some* sense of *decorum* have perused your dispatches, and have moreover received confirmation of these troubling reports from this “special friend” of yours, whom you have instructed us not to mention by name—perhaps the first act of subtlety you have managed to perform since you first abandoned your ancestral exigencies and decamped to wallow in the League of Humans’ most utterly squalid hinterlands. So I suppose you are to be congratulated in that regard. Factotum—clap for me!

FACTOTUM

Marvel at this round of applause, commissioned for your unworthy ears by The Most Serene Amplified High Notability, J’Yallen Dwan B’techer Men’Walz, Daughter of J’Bellent, House Byllaburt, of the Grand Duchy of Prang!

Rapid clapping noises.

J’YALLEN

No, no! Slower! Slower, you fool! I was being sarcastic!

Slower, sarcastic clapping noises.

J’YALLEN

Enough! Now, then.

While we do find the contents of your dispatches to be of concern, quarter-cousin, it should come as no surprise to you that we, the illustrious and *highly decorous* House Byllaburt, cannot appear to cater to the whims of such a profligately unorthodox junior member as yourself, regardless of the high regard in which the Grand Duchess your mother is held by her colleagues in the Resplendent Assembly. While Her Grandiosity’s intelligencers have of course done their best to prevent news of your various... proclivities from achieving general circulation among the unwashed vulgus, the very fact of your remote *locale delabree*, and the concomitant abandonment of your duties, can not help but make itself apparent to all. And should we attract further attention to your various undertakings, it would only be a matter of time before tidings of the base depravity of your non-musical indulgences should reach the Assembly. I speak, of course, of your intemperate luxuriance in... in... *peanut butter*. Oh, I can barely abide the passing of those loathèd words betwixt my mouthparts! Bolster me, factotum, I may faint!

FACTOTUM

I blissfully attend, Most Amplified!

A somewhat performative gasp as J’YALLEN collapses into the rushed embrace of the factotum, then a beat as she recovers her composure.

J’YALLEN

Ah. My equilibrium is restored. Now unhand me, scull! I must complete the upbraiding of my delinquent quarter-cousin before we depart for the Ceremony of Diurnal Magnification. Where was I?

FACTOTUM

You were remonstrating with the Baronet on the problem of creditability caused by his ignominious roguery, Your Effulgence!

J'YALLEN

Ah, yes. In short, quarter-cousin, you are un-reliable, in every sense of the word. Thus, I have been requested to convey to you that, disquieting though your intelligence from within the League of Humans may be, there is very little that can be achieved on the basis of reports from such a sybaritic and willfully inconstant source. Indeed, there are those within our house who have suggested that all these dire portents may be the mere phantasms of a legume-addled intellect. So heed well my words, Your Radiance! Unless it is your intention to reverse the dire course you have pursued since your unfortunate leave-taking, return to ancient Hwytine, and resume your appurtenant service to the Blessed Imperium, I am afraid any further implorations on your part will be for naught.

Factotum! The closing salutation!

FACTOTUM

Now follows the official Valediction of Her Most Serene Amplified High Notability, J'Yallen Dwan B'tech—

A bleep as the message is cut off.

XTOPPS

...Nertz.

[scene 15] Transition to the In-Betweens. H.F. knocks on a bulkhead wall.

H.F.

Hey, Stella?

STELLA

H.F.

H.F.

You got a minute? I wanted to talk to you about... you know.

STELLA

Right. Listen, H.F., I know I was harsh with you back there, but you know as well as anybody how important operational security is for us.

H.F.

Yeah.

STELLA

So, you know what kind of disaster it would be for a Booster to discover our location. Even a Booster we both used to... to care about. There's no way we could justify taking that kind of risk.

H.F.

Sure, I know all that. But I also know John B's no Booster.

A beat.

H.F.

And I'm pretty sure you knew that already.

STELLA

(she lets out a sigh she's been holding in for a long, long time)

...How?

H.F.

I managed to arrange a co-work situation with him and Foreman-Bot, so I could listen in. But I'm guessing you'll be hearing all about it from the kid pretty soon. Ah, if you don't mind me asking, how exactly have you been hearing from him?

STELLA

No, I don't mind. I've been getting antsy about not having a backup on that, anyway. We've been talking through Frall.

H.F.

Ah, smart. They're one line of communication the Foogs definitely can't intercept.

STELLA

Exactly. So, John's got a code word he can use whenever he has a job on the Bridge, and that cues Torianna to drag him into her office so he can pass on information while she pretends to bite his head off.

H.F.

Mindy's in on this, too? You're kidding. I mean, I knew she wasn't exactly sympathetic to the Foogs, but I could have sworn she was playing it safe just to keep her job. She even called me a couple weeks ago to tip me off about that camera thing, and I never guessed. Boy, did you all drop the blast shield over my eyes.

STELLA

It's nothing personal, H.F. We all agreed at the beginning that we had to keep this strictly between us. One word to the wrong person could cost John his life.

H.F.

No, yeah, of course. So... when was the beginning? How long has the kid been doing this?

STELLA

Ever since we went off the grid. New Year's.

H.F.

Wow, that's... *(softly awed)* Wow. Never would have thought he had it in him. But I guess the Fairgrounds changes people.

STELLA

Yeah.

H.F.

Of all the dumb things that kid could have done... this is the bravest, and the dumbest, I think I've ever heard of. And here I was just getting used to the idea that one of my under-assistants might actually survive long enough to make it off this heap.

STELLA

He will if I have anything to say about it. So, listen, H.F. I trust you, and I have to admit it will be a relief to have someone else around to talk to about all of this, but—

H.F.

But Johnny's gonna get mulched if I keep running my mouth.

STELLA

That's the long and short of it, yeah.

H.F.

No, I get it. I mean, now I do. Better late than never, though, right? So, if anyone should ask me about this conversation, I am in here offering you a mostly-sincere apology, after which you're going to give me a stern-but-fair lecture about operational security and risk management, and in a few minutes, I'll be fully on board the ISS John-is-a-Useless-Traitor.

STELLA

Works for me. And thanks.

A beat.

H.F.

So the kid's just... out there? All alone? With no one to back him up? Or, well, not no one, now that he spilled the beans to Foreman-Bot, but—

STELLA

He what?!

H.F.

Yeah, they had a real heart-to-processing-core down in the old Trundle in the Jungle Pavilion.

STELLA

Crap.

H.F.

Nah, we got nothing to worry about there, I heard the whole thing. Either Foreman-Bot's on our side, or he's the best robotic actor since EmotiBot 913.

[scene 16] Closing credits music.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life With Althaar*, episode 30!

This episode was written by John Amir and Lex Friedman 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, Clara Francesca, Leila Okafor, Dean Haspiel, Rolls Andre, 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 see how a busy young Iltorian relaxes after a day filled with vital diplomatic correspondence...

[scene 17] ALTHAAR in his suite, watching television.

ALTHAAR

Ee! But do not be galumphing in that direction, Sin Pagophilus, for in that way, danger is lying!

The door buzzer.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Who is making arrival at the home of FriendJohn and Althaar?

Bloop.

ALTHAAR

Greeting to you! Who is it that is requesting entry, please?

ROOHAND

I return your greeting, esteemed Iltorian! It is I, Roohand, of the Diplomatic Legion of the Federated States of Gendar, who has arrived to proffer his services, and now requests entry! Also, please hurry, because I have with me a full cohort of my compatriots, several of whom must beg the use of your restroom with great urgency!

ALTHAAR

Oh! Enter and be welcomed, please!

Door whoosh. A never-ending series of “Hi”, “Heyo,” “Nice digs” “greetings, your illustriousness!,” “Is that a freestanding plasmoid television?” etc. as various Gendarans enter, and throughout the rest of the scene.

ALTHAAR

The apparatus of excretion can be found down the widdershins hallway, behind the last aperture on the left, esteemed guests!

A GENDARAN

(vanishing down the hallway)

I call dibs!

ROOHAND

My apologies, gesin, for the unseemly haste of my colleagues, but we purchased several curious meat-sticks at the 7/25 after our arrival, and it appears to be having a negative interaction with many of their various medications.

ALTHAAR

It is of no trouble to Althaar! Is there any other assistance he can make offering of to you, beyond the use of the toileting facilities?

ROOHAND

But, it is we who have come to assist you! You are the same Althaar who of late sent a call of distress to the Federated States, are you not?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Yes, Althaar was making correspondence with the Gendaran leadership! But Althaar had not expectation of so swift a response from your people, and in the person! This is the surprise of great pleasant-ness!

ROOHAND

And it's a great pleasure to meet you, Sin Althaar! Not to mention a great relief to have at last located your lodgings. Whoever planned the corridors in this place must have been higher than Mount Oobliotis. But no matter. Ahem.

(very pronounced, statesman-like)

I, Roohand, special diplomatic envoy from the Federated States of Gendar, answer your call! I proffer my services as a seasoned diplomat, adventurer, and Intergalactic Gendaran of Mystery, and... Ah. Perhaps we may complete our formal introductions at a later time? I believe I must also avail myself of your facilities without delay.

ALTHAAR

But of course, Sin Roohand! You are most welcomed!

ROOHAND

Much obliged!

*ROOHAND runs off down the corridor as quickly as they are able, given the biological exigencies of the situation, **while exhorting their colleagues to make way.***

ALTHAAR

Althaar is pleased to be making acquaintance on so many new Gendaran friends! Please be sharing all of your names, so Althaar may—oh! No! Althaar must not commit a rudeness! Please be excusing of Althaar, gentlebeings. It has been many metristals since he has made up-brushing upon the Gendaran ceremonial greetings. Hm.

(a well-practiced speech)

Althaar, seeker of kindness and light, and ephemeral blob of alimentative warmth, wishes to extend to all of good will the Most Sacred Profferment of Lodgings! It is to be wished that his accommodations provide merriment, mirth, and... er... ah...

PATTORVANE

(whispering)

“A good spread.”

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes! Thanking you, gesin! And a good spreading to you all!

PATTORVANE

Pattorvane, second-in-command among envoys of the Diplomatic Legion of the Federated States of Gendar, accept your Profferment, and give the word of my cohort that we will treat your freeholdings with the care and respect they are due, pay obeisance to all your customs to the extent that we are able, and chip in for snacks! Although of course we may not conclude the solemnities until the ranking member of our delegation has returned from committing unspeakable acts of voidance upon your commode! I do not believe I should say more! So I will not!

ALTHAAR

Oh! Of course! It is most proper to make waiting upon your leader!

Awkward silence.

ALTHAAR

...Did Sin Pattorvane perhaps have opportunity to be viewing at the recent semi-finals of the Galactic Smorchball Championships?

ROOHAND arrives from the widdershins hallway, somewhat out of breath.

ROOHAND

Ah! Roohand returns, much relieved! And I humbly proffer my gratitude for your immense and boundless hospitality!

ALTHAAR

Oh! It is always a thing of great joy to be encountering the new friends! And it is also of much gratification to Althaar that your people are taking the interest in the plight of the Humans, when so many others have not! ...This is why you are performing the visit, yes?

ROOHAND

Absolutely! We Gendarans feel a deep sympathy for all the downtrodden peoples of the galaxy! As soon as we heard your sweet voice speaking of the Humans' terrible plight, we knew we must dispatch a mission of mercy to Human space without delay!

PATTORVANE

And frankly, it was nice just to be asked.

ROOHAND

Indeed! Our numbers may be small, and our fighting forces few, but I aim to prove in my brief time in this universe that a Gendaran can make a difference! Gendar was called for aid, and Roohand will answer! Now, where can we hang our hammocks?