

Life with Althaar
Episode 7: The Infinity Contagion
Draft 3.0 (recording script), 8/1/19 - Amanda (draft 3, BAJ)

The sound of JOHN's WSS pager ringing, over and over again. He eventually, groggily answers.

JOHN
(mumbled, sleepy)
Hello?

H.F.
(over the phone, perhaps with some audible chaos in the background)
John! Where the hell are you? Your shift started 40 minutes ago!

JOHN
Wha--?? No, that can't be right.

H.F.
What did you, forget to set your alarm?

JOHN
No, I don't-- I stopped setting my alarm weeks ago. Althaar always wakes me up before it can go off-- he should have been on the intercom by now, screaming about "oat-meals" or something.

H.F.
Ugh. That's weird, B, even for you. Well, get your ass down here as soon as you can. Something hinky is going on, I don't know what, but we're completely swamped. Actually, scratch that, I'll punch you in down here. Just grab some 18-gauge jumpers and head straight over to Pay 12, they've got mean leak in their thorium milkshake mixer.

JOHN
Copy that.

JOHN hangs up and starts preparing to head out (rustling of coveralls, etc.). He bleeps on the intercom.

JOHN
Althaar? Althaar, are you out there, buddy? I'm opening my door. *(door whoosh, cautious footsteps)*
Althaar? Ohhh I hope Mrs. F. didn't teach you about Human hide and seek. *(squishing sound of a Human foot encountering something incredibly gooey and disgusting)* OH JESUS XENU ROGAR WHAT IS THAT????!

ALTHAAR

(weakly)

Is FriendJohn leaving for his work cycle? Althaar must make apology for his failure to prepare the break-fast on this morning. Althaar was most looking forward to delighting FriendJohn with an avocado, toasted in the Earth tradition.

JOHN

Ok, definitely don't do that. That's not-- we'll talk avocados later, but, listen Althaar, there's a... river of slime on the floor out here. And, oh dear God, it looks like it's coming from your room. What is happening.

ALTHAAR

(gross noise of sorrow) Althaar is most repentant for soiling the shared living space, FriendJohn! Althaar finds himself below the atmospheric conditions.

JOHN

"Below the-- " You mean "under the weather"? Althaar, are you sick?

ALTHAAR

Yes, FriendJohn. Althaar is beset by sickness, and this has greatly increased his secretions. Sorrow!

JOHN

Your... secretions.

ALTHAAR

Indeed, FriendJohn. Althaar's secretions are numerous and distressing. But please do not allow them to cause inconvenience! Althaar will apply the supplies of cleaning himself, as soon as he is capable.

JOHN

Ugh, that's what I stepped in?!

ALTHAAR

It vexes Althaar greatly to be the cause of discomfort for FriendJohn! But please fear not! The secretions will otherwise bring no harm. They are similar to the Human mucus.

JOHN

Aw, I'm going to have to burn these shoes...

ALTHAAR

(continuing)

It is rare that we of Illtor are to suffer from viral or bacterial infections, but the Illtorian immune response to these is very thorough indeed! The circulatory, respiratory, digestive and integumentary systems are cleansed by a steady expulsion of secretions through every available orifice. As now, FriendJohn!

JOHN

Every... available... Aagh. *(sounds of dry heaves and suppressed vomiting)*

ALTHAAR

Oh no! Is FriendJohn below the weather also this morning? ...Or is the expulsion of fluids caused by Althaar's secretions?

JOHN

(recovering)

That last part.

ALTHAAR

Ohhh, Althaar is filled with wretchedness! To discommode his dear friend John is a greater pain even than the sickening which clogs Althaar's flixators!

JOHN

No, that's... ok, Althaar. I'll be fine. Everyone gets sick sometimes, I guess. So, uh, how long do these *(shudders)* secretions last?

ALTHAAR

Althaar is not certain. It is typical that the secretions will clear any infection within a period of six Earth hours. They are most efficient! But, Althaar has been secreting for many hours already. If the sickness is not soon eliminated, it is possible Althaar may experience secondary symptoms.

JOHN

Secondary symptoms? Like what?

As if on cue, ALTHAAR emits a low, rumbling sound not unlike a fart, though from what orifice that fart originated from is anyone's guess.

ALTHAAR

Oh, contrition! The secondary symptoms!

JOHN

Are you ok? What's-- OH KALI ISHTAR PELE WHAT IS THAT SMELL?

ALTHAAR

Althaar must again make apology, FriendJohn. The secondary symptom is the emission of defensive gases. When the time of secretions extends to an abnormal length, the gases are activated to ward off predators, until healing is completed.

JOHN

(pinching his nose)

Ittorians have natural predators?

ALTHAAR

Oh no, not for many millions of metrystals. The defensive gases are a relic of Iltorian evolution, much like the Human appendix. *(another rumbling fart)* Oh! FriendJohn and Althaar have found a commonality between Iltorian and Human! A discovery most gratifying! Althaar must... Ah. Althaar will perhaps wait to add this to his Data-Base until the secretions no longer blur Althaar's visual receptors. *(small unhappy noise)*

JOHN

Yeah, that's... that sounds like a plan. Uh, listen, I've got to get to work now, ok? *(squishing as he steps through the secretion puddle)* I hate leaving you like... *(fart noise)*...this. But, uh, I'll see if I can bring back something to help you feel *(squishfart)* better.

ALTHAAR

Oh, what kindness! *(fart)* Althaar is very touched by the concern of FriendJohn! *(faaaaart)* Was there ever an Iltorian so fortunate as Althaar? *(disgusting crying and farting)*

Door whoosh as JOHN leaves. Theme music.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents
Life With Althaar!
Episode 7:
The Infinity Contagion...

The Bridge, in low-to-mid-level crisis mode. Only the Human crew is on duty. Docking requests are being refused.

COMMANDER

While that was certainly an engaging discussion of anarchist praxis, Emma Goldman-bot, what I asked for was an update on the coronal monitor readings.

GOLDMANBOT

(over comms)

Oh, of course, Commander. I'm not sure what came over me. Uh, here we are. The quiescent coronal loop that appeared yesterday remains stable. No flares are expected in the next twenty-eight hours, and radiation levels are optimal for extravehicular activity. Teegarden's Star at the moment remains free of-- *(starts to skip like a record)* remains free of-- free of-- free-- Free love? As if love is anything but free! Man has bought brains, but all the millions in the world have failed to buy love. Man has subdued bodies, but all the power on earth has been unable to subdue love. Man has conquered whole nations, but all his armies could not conquer love. Man has chained and fettered the spirit, but he has been utterly helpless before love. High on a throne, with all the splendor and pomp his gold can command--yes! Let us whisper sweet words of pismotality and discuss the puppetutes of love!

COMMANDER

Thank you, Goldman-bot. That's... all I needed. Much more than I needed. I'll just leave you to... whatever is going on right now.

GOLDMANBOT

Don't be mad at me, Commander, if your buggy don't ride like mine! You oughta buy yourself a Buick '59!

Comms bloop off.

COMMANDER

Ok, even for one of the science bots, that was highly eccentric. I swear to Hazel, if this is their latest form of industrial action--

MWANGI

Uh, Commander?

COMMANDER

Huh? Oh, Dr. Mwangi. Good. Let's hear it.

MWANGI

It's as we suspected, sir: the as-yet-unidentified disease appears to have infected every non-Human on the Fairgrounds. The good news is that whatever it is, we've seen no sign of it jumping to the Human population, but as far as we can tell, every other sapient on station is exhibiting some symptoms. Of course, those symptoms also vary wildly between species, which is hampering our efforts at identification and treatment. It's possible that this isn't just one disease, but several different contagions that happen to be spreading simultaneously.

COMMANDER

But you do think that's what's affecting Frall?

MWANGI

Well, sir, Frall can be... abstruse at the best of times, and I'm not sure how exactly one would diagnose an incorporeal energy being as "sick." But they certainly seem, uh... different.

FRALL

(woozily)

There are 40 trillion possible alternate realities as debated by the universe's top chefs and stevedores... and in one of those realities, I might have a moustache! *(twinkly giggling)*

COMMANDER

Frall, pull yourself together at once! Both literally and figuratively! That's an order!

FRALL

I'm sorry but the grapes have turned to soap, and the soap's gone pedantic, so this year's Plutonian Appreciation Day will be ruined! Just ruined! Ah, the marmosets! *Quelle délicatesse! (they float away)*

MWANGI

Wow. Ok, I may not know what that *is*, but it's definitely getting worse.

COMMANDER

Funny, I thought they were getting better. Ok. Focus. Mwangi, in all my years on this ramshackle terrarium I don't believe I've ever encountered a disaster of quite this magnitude. And this is the Fairgrounds we're talking about. Disasters here are as regular as the itinerant prune farmers of Fiberion. Remember the Squirrmen freakout of '16?

MWANGI

When we got that bad shipment of pecans from Enzu? How could I forget?

COMMANDER

Not a single cabinet corner was spared their frenetic chew marks, and even after we finally got the antidote, it took us another 12 cycles to chase them all down so you could administer it.

MWANGI

And even then the little... (*catching themselves before they say something speciesist*) respected fellow sapients of the ICSB... refused to take it unless we gave them a lollipop first.

COMMANDER

Nitwits. But this is something else entirely. This might be the worst calamity we've ever faced. A plague! An honest-to-Jones plague! And now every non-Human sapient in this entire orbital purgatory has been affected!

MWANGI

I'd... hesitate to use the term "plague" at this point. But yes, the level of cross-species contamination we're seeing here is worrying. And we still have no idea how it could be affecting all the robots.

COMMANDER

Well, almost all the robots.

MCCARTHY-BOT

Fixed up that steam pump for you, Commander.

COMMANDER

Thank you, Andrew McCarthy-bot. I'm grateful for whatever spared you from the rest of the robot crew's current misfortunes.

MCCARTHY-BOT

Well, you know me, Andrew McCarthy-bot. No matter what teen ensemble film from the 1980s my Human counterpart was in, you could always depend on him to deliver a solid performance filled with unobtrusive amiability. I, his robot namesake and avatar, can only honor his legacy by bringing that same steadfast working attitude and non-threatening sexual appeal to my duties here on The Fairgrounds.

COMMANDER

Yes, that's fine, thank you.

MCCARTHY-BOT

Anything else I can help you with?

COMMANDER

Acutally, maybe there is. Dr. Mwangi? He seems to have some kind of immunity--could you use that to synthesize a cure?

MWANGI

I don't see how, Commander. I'm a doctor, not a software engineer. But it wouldn't hurt to have I.T. take a look at him. Organic/inorganic cross-contamination is rare, but not impossible.

COMMANDER

Good idea. McCarthy-bot, report to--

MCCARTHY-BOT

Commander, sorry to interrupt, but are you sure that would be the best use of my time? The Robot Union has a pretty long backlog of work tickets today--349,561 at last count--and I'd sure hate for any crucial jobs to go undone while I'm sitting around in I.T.! In fact, I've got three Priority Gamma calls in from Life Support already, so...

COMMANDER

Dammit. All right, McCarthy-bot, carry on with your duties. But if you do somehow manage to get through them all, I want you to report to I.T. for a full systems analysis.

MCCARTHY-BOT

Duly noted! McCarthy-bot out!

He whooshes out.

COMMANDER

May the cosmos keep that inoffensively handsome robo-citizen functional until we find a way out of this mess. Anything else to report, Mwangi? How's Lacerta doing?

MWANGI

Doctor Lacerta is still among the afflicted, I'm afraid. We've been somewhat successful in treating the weeping mouth lesions, but she's also been incapacitated by the loss of her left zygodactyle foot, which has yet to properly grow back. We've been storing her in a cool dark place to try and speed up regeneration.

COMMANDER

I'm sure you're all doing your best up there. But we need Lacerta on this, she's the best xenobiologist we've got. Get her a rolling chair and a drool cup, turn down the lights, and get her back to work. We need a cure, and fast!

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

Attention all Fairgrounds residents: listen up, because some disreputable goldbrick musta slipped me the hot shot, and I gotta get through these announcements before my RTC is DOA. Due to the ongoing omnipresent pestilence, tonight's screening of *Even The Suns See Stars* will be ZERO-ONE-ONE-ONE-ONE-ZERO-ZERO-ZERO for a full refund. The acidic gymnastics exhibition scheduled for 26:20 will be no longer be ZERO-ONE-ONE-ZERO-ONE-ONE-ONE-ONE until further notice...

Fade in on sounds of gunfire, screams of pain, the chaos of what was a terrible skirmish, just another day in the Sanitation trenches.

SAN. WORKER 1 (RUSTY)

AH GOD! AH GOD IT HURTS SO MUCH!

SAN. WORKER 2 (BRICK)

You're gonna be okay, buddy. Look at me! We're not going to lose you!

JOHN

(trying to scootch past them)

Hi, can I just-- Heyyyy, wow. That is a LOT of blood.

SAN. WORKER 3 (STELLA REYES)

Hey, you there! You with Medical?

JOHN

Oh, hey! Hi! I've been, uh, you probably don't remember me, but...

STELLA

Are. you. a doctor?

JOHN

No, sorry.

STELLA

Then I need you to back off. We've got a man down here.

JOHN

Oh, right. Sorry. What happened? Vent biters?

BRICK

You think a clogged grease trap did this? Of course vent biters!

SAN. WORKER 4 (SARGE)

Wily little bastards got us to drop our guard.

JOHN

Oh. It's too bad they're not sick.

STELLA

Oh, they're sick, alright. Sluggish, groggy, listless... we thought with the health of the brood compromised we could finally mount an assault on the main nest. If only we knew...

JOHN

Knew what?

SARGE

One of those little jeckers sneezed. And it was...adorable.

JOHN

Adorable? Seriously?

SARGE

I know how it sounds. On a normal day those toothy monstrosities take the very concept of "adorable," disembowel it, and then slurp up the entrails of adorable's corpse like *spaghetti a la carineria*. But that sneeze was... it was like when a kitten sneezes.

RUSTY

(woozily)

Nah, it was... it was more like a turtle sneeze.

BRICK

You're delirious, Rusty. There's no such thing as a turtle sneeze.

RUSTY

I had a turtle back when I was a kid on Deimos... her name was "Truffle S. Turtle"... one time I forgot to clean her tank... and she got sick...

STELLA

I'm telling you, Rusty, turtles don't sneeze.

RUSTY

ANYTHING WITH NOSTRILS CAN SNEEZE! *(groans in pain)*

BRICK

It's alright, man, you're right; turtles can sneeze, man. Turtles can sneeze...

JOHN

(over the following)

So, um, this probably isn't the best time, but, well, your job seems pretty stressful. If you ever need to step away for a moment and decompress, you know, everyone needs someone to listen to them vent sometimes. Oh. Poor choice of words. Um. But if you wanted to maybe get a cup of coffee?

RUSTY

I feel... cold... so cold...

BRICK

Aw, no! Come on, Rust! Stay with me, man! Stay with me!

SARGE

DAMNIT, WHERE THE HELL IS THAT MEDIC? Stella! We need something to cauterize the wound!

STELLA

I'm on it, Sarge!

Sound of combat boots running off down the hallway.

JOHN

Wait! I can help! I've got a hotplate in my room-- and she's gone.

RUSTY

...Truffle? ...Is that you, girl? ...I'm sorry I let your tank get dirty, Truffle. I'm so sorry...

BRICK

Stay away from the turtle, Rusty! Leave that turtle alone and stay with me!

RUSTY

Come on, girl... let's go in the backyard... and... look for... salamanders... *(death rattle)*

BRICK

NOOOOOOOOO!!!!

JOHN

Did he just-- Oh. Wow.

SARGE

(to Brick)

Let him go, Brick. We're Sanitation. He knew what he signed up for.

JOHN

I've never seen someone die before...

BRICK

I'm gonna get those sons of bitches for you, Rusty. I'm gonna frag every last one of 'em!

SARGE

Brick, don't be a fool! They're all over down there! They'll tear into you like a fresh, buttery croissant!

BRICK

FOR RUSTYYYYYYY!!! *(his scream becomes echo-y as we hear him running into the vent)*

SARGE

(calling down the vent)

BRICK, RETURN TO YOUR POST. THAT IS AN ORDER. BRICK!

BRICK

I SEE ONE, SARGE! *(gun cocking)* PREPARE TO GET FRAGGED YOU FLOTTING PIECE OF--

The vent biter sneezes. It is adorable, like a kitten sneeze. Or a turtle.

BRICK, SARGE, and JOHN

Aww.

BRICK

I... I can't do it! I know this scum killed Rusty but all I can think of is that goddamn turtle!

SARGE

Get out of there, Brick. Just hold your weapon steady and back away.

BRICK

Wait, it's looking up at me... I think it wants lettuce...

SARGE

Brick!

Sounds of flesh rending, screams of pain, arterial spray hitting ductwork.

BRICK

AUUGGGGHHH! IT DOESN'T WANT LETTUCE! IT DOESN'T WANT LETTUCE!!!

SARGE

(anguished)

BRICK! YOU POOR DUMB BASTARD! WHY DIDN'T YOU TURN BACK? WHY DOES THIS NEVER GET EASIER? WHY?!

JOHN

Well, this has been, uh. I should probably go.

The combat boots return, bearing STELLA.

STELLA

I found a first aid kit! We could use a flame thrower to heat up-- Oh, God, Rusty! I'm too late!

SARGE

There was nothing you could do, Reyes. Except get here faster with that kit. *(opens the first aid kit)* Ah. Well, there's nothing left in here but one latex glove and a space blanket, so. You did all you could.

STELLA

Where the hell is Brick?

SARGE

He lost his flotted mind! Went in alone to avenge Rusty!

STELLA

Brick! Hold your ground, I'm coming for you!

SARGE

It's too late, Reyes! They got him!

STELLA

BRICK!! RUST!! GOD, THIS NEVER GETS EASIER!!

SARGE

I KNOW, RIGHT??!

JOHN

I'm just gonna... so yeah, I'm leaving now. I really need to process everything I've just seen, and, well, you guys probably could use some, uh, grieving time, or. Yeah.

The SANIT WORKERS are wailing in macho anguish as JOHN backs away.

JOHN

But it was good talking to you, uh, Stella, was it? I'm John, by the way. John B. If you ever-- yeah, you're busy. Ok.

Such anguish! Very desolation! Fade out on this as we transition to JOHN & ALTHAAR's apartment. The grossness on the floor has not decreased. Door whoosh.

JOHN

Althaar? How you doing, buddy? Still, uh, (*squish*) still secreting, I see.

ALTHAAR

Yes, the secretions continue unabated. Althaar is very much apologizing! It brings Althaar great upset to cause the perturbation of FriendJohn!

JOHN

It's alright, Althaar. Don't worry about me, you just focus on getting better, ok? How are the, uh... "secondary symptoms"?

ALTHAAR

Ah! There Althaar is happy to have some good news! No defensive gases have emerged from Althaar for the past Standard hour! Ordinary respiratory gases only!

JOHN

That is good news. So, do you think you're starting to recover?

ALTHAAR

It is much to be hoped! But it is possible that Althaar's gaseous reserves have merely been depleted, and must replenish themselves before the expulsions can be resumed.

JOHN

Well, if we're lucky it won't come to that. Anyway, I got you some stuff that might help. At least, it's what we Humans eat to feel better when we're sick. I don't know if it'll work on an Iltorian, but I checked the is-this-poison-to-that-species-thingy and it won't kill you or anything. I figure it's worth a shot.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar's coelomatic fluids are greatly warmed by the thoughtfulness of FriendJohn! If FriendJohn would be so kind as to leave the Human sickness foods in the kitchen, Althaar will attempt to summon the strength to retrieve them. *(horrible noise of a very sick Iltorian trying to get out of bed)*

JOHN

Don't you dare, Althaar. Just stay in bed, ok? I'm going to rig up a little delivery device... *(to himself)* just loop this around the handle and... *(bedroom door whooshes open, he calls through it)* All right, Althaar, here it is. Can you reach it?

ALTHAAR

Oh, joy and wonder! FriendJohn has woven Althaar a bas-KET! Althaar is filled with gratitude and appreciation! ...FriendJohn? Althaar is not sure how to consume the bas-ket. Could FriendJohn provide instruction? Will Althaar need specialized utensils?

JOHN

No, look *in* the basket, Althaar. Take the basket off the broom handle and look inside.

ALTHAAR

Ah, now Althaar is seeing! The small pungent tub of sauce is meant to be poured on the bas-ket, yes? And thus it is rendered edible!

JOHN

No, don't! Nothing about the basket is edible. You can just ignore the basket, ok Althaar? That tub is what you're supposed to eat. Wait, no, don't eat the tub! I meant the stuff in the tub. It's not sauce, it's soup. That's what we eat when we're sick. Human-style, old-fashioned, health-restoring chicken soup.

ALTHAAR

Ahhh, sooop! Yes, this is found in the cuisines of many peoples! But this is the first time Althaar is encountering Human sooop in the person.

JOHN

Well, there you go. Back home, whenever I was sick, my mom would make me a bowl of chicken soup. I mean, she didn't make it, it came in the can, but she heated it up on the stove-top instead of the microwave, which was kind of nice.

ALTHAAR

And now FriendJohn is providing the nurturing for Althaar as the Human parent does for their young? Althaar is overcome with tenderness at the devotions of FriendJohn! (*disgusting crying noises*)

JOHN

No need to cry, Althaar, please. It's not a big deal, really. You should eat the soup before it gets cold. There's a spoon there that you can use, do you see it?

ALTHAAR

It is the biggest of deals to Althaar, FriendJohn! But Althaar will follow instruction! (*sounds of slurping....then, gagging*) OH BY THE VIRTUOUS WIMBLETHON!

JOHN

Oh, sorry! Is it too hot, or...?

ALTHAAR

Apologies, FriendJohn! Althaar perhaps did not give the soop enough time to linger on Althaar's flavor receptors. Althaar will try again! (*more slurping...more gagging*) OH SKELEBEASTS OF ENDEROT! IT IS NOT IMPROVED BY THE LINGERING!

Ominous bubbling from the secretions begins, and continues under the following.

JOHN

Is something wrong with the soup, Althaar?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar has been ungracious! Althaar would never wish to hurt the feelings of FriendJohn!

JOHN

That's ok, Althaar... Uh, listen, your secretions seem to be...

ALTHAAR

And FriendJohn worked so strenuously to make this tub of healment for Althaar!

JOHN

Is this stuff supposed to *boil* after a certain point?

ALTHAAR

Althaar will not let FriendJohn's efforts be in vanity! None of the soop of nurturing will be wasted by Althaar! (*slurping, gagging*) Althaar will... persevere!

Bubbling increases, becomes more ominous.

JOHN

Althaar, really, it's fine, you don't need to finish the soup if you don't like it! Something super weird is happening out here, ok, and I need you to tell me--

*Through the sounds of **ALTHAAR enduring the soup**, the bubbling sound reaches a fever pitch, then...multiple sounds of gelatinous popping, followed by **the infantile, near-animalistic cries of many somethings**.*

JOHN

OH MY GODS AND MONSTERS, WHAT ARE THOSE?

ALTHAAR

(still slurping, still gagging)

Althaar does not understand the question! What is FriendJohn seeing?

JOHN

I'm not sure, but I think your secretions just... hatched? There are these... things coming out. Are they... parasites? Is this a secondary symptom?

ALTHAAR

(slurp-gag)

A spawning from Althaar's protective secretions? This is a thing unheard of by Althaar! But it is true that Althaar is no expert in medicine. *(slurp-gag)* Can FriendJohn make more description, please?

More popping, more shrieking.

JOHN

They look like...like tadpoles, maybe? But with these skinny little arms and legs which they are using to CRAWL EVERYWHERE OH GODS!

ALTHAAR

Fascination! Althaar must send a report of this to the Iltorian Society of Chirurgeons, when he is well.

JOHN

Agh, we need to stop this! It didn't start until you ate the soup--I think that might be causing it? Don't eat any more until we figure this out, ok?

ALTHAAR

(slurpgag)

Oh, but FriendJohn worked so hard to create this sooop for Althaar!

JOHN

I really didn't! I promise! It's from Winklebeet's, I just heated it up. I didn't even use a stovetop.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar must honor the labors of FriendJohn! Distress!

JOHN

...SALTINES! I also brought you some saltines! Honor me by eating the saltines!

ALTHAAR

FriendJohn has also cooked the sal-teens for Althaar?

JOHN

If it will make you eat them, then yes, Althaar, I cooked the saltines. Now, for the love of the pantheon of your choice, I am begging you, please stop eating the soup!

ALTHAAR

Althaar is sorry! Althaar will follow the instruction of FriendJohn!

ALTHAAR crunches into a cracker, then lets out an ear-piercing scream. Sympathetically, the tadpole-like creatures also cry out in pain.

ALTHAAR

GREAT INFERNOS OF INCENDION! THE BURNING!

JOHN

(shouting over the sounds of mewling screams)
What happened?

ALTHAAR

THE sal-TEENS! THEY SEAR ALTHAAR'S MEMBRANES! Althaar must consume more sooop to quell the mouth-flames! *(slurp-gag)* Ugh, disgustment! No, Althaar can not endure the taste of sooop on his membranes! It must be scourged with the fires of sal-TEENS! *(crunching, screaming)* BURNATION! ALTHAAR THINKS HE PREFERS THE HORRORS OF THE SOOOP TO THIS! *(slurp-gag)* Ugh, Althaar does not! Althaar will try a smaller portion of sal-TEEN. *(crunch, scream)* NO! THE HALF SAL-TEEN IS WORSE SOMEHOW!

JOHN

STOP EATING, ALTHAAR!

ALTHAAR

But Althaar must fully experience the Human nurture-foods! Althaar will attempt the simultaneous consumption of sooop and sal-teen. Surely this will cause less mortification of the membranes! *(slurplecrunch)* THIS HAS BEEN ALTHAAR'S WORST ASSUMPTION YET! *(a fart noise)* OH, LAMENTATION AND TORMENT! THE SOOOP AND sal-TEENS HAVE RESTORED ALTHAAR'S DEFENSIVE EXPULSION RESERVES! *(another fart)*

Amidst the chaos, JOHN's WSS pager rings.

JOHN

(shouting into the phone)

H.F.? Hang on a second, I can't hear-- *(shouting to the other room as he exits)* Althaar, I can't stay, I have to get back to work! So just... just hang in there, buddy! We'll figure this out!

Door whoosh as JOHN exits. Sounds of slurping, gagging, mewling, slurping, farting and screaming from ALTHAAR and the many creatures. Transition to a pathetic smattering of applause from a sparse crowd at the Egg as DEE is finishing a number.

CHIP

Give it up one more time for Delilah Mallory and the Karaoke-O-Matic! Yeah... here at the Electric Egg the only things that are sick are these beats! Heh. So... Hey! Don't forget to tell your friends that our two-for-one Lean special will continue all plague long. That's got to be worth pulling their ailing carcasses out of bed for, right? Right? So, come on! Tell 'em to bring the whole family! Bring the kids! Here in the Baronetcy of Kandepha'aa, the drinking age is three and a half! Let 'em live a little! I mean, if there's anything we should take away from this disaster it's that life is short, yeah? Either drink up and have fun, or leave a good-looking corpse. And who wants that?

DEE grabs the mic.

DEE

Annnnd we'll be back in 15, folks! *(off the mic)* Chip! Will you foob out already? People are here to relax and forget about the crazy shness going on out there. They don't need you to vomit it all back in their faces.

CHIP

You're right, Dee. Sorry. You're right. I need to relax. Why worry about anything? Who cares if the Fairgrounds is turning into a giant floating plague pit and the tourist trade has dried up worse than the Sabaea? Aw streez... I'm gonna go broke. I'm going to end up sleeping in the stockroom with the busboys. I'll never be able to put my kids through college...

DEE

You don't have any kids!

CHIP

I know! I'm going to die alone! Oh my God, I've wasted my life!

Sound of a slap.

CHIP

...Thanks, Dee.

DEE

Sure. But next time I'm not going to be so gentle. Don't fall apart on me, Chip. Here, look. A whole crew of grief-stricken Sanitation grunts just stumbled in. You know how they put back the whiskey when they're in mourning. It's going to be fine, just get it together.

CHIP

Right. Thanks. *(to the grunts)* Hey there, folks! The Electric Egg is always here to support our heroes in Sanitation. Can I start you off with a round of Bereavement Boilermakers?

JOHN

Hey, Chip, I'm all finished, you should be getting ginger ale no problem. ...Chip? *(no response)* All righty then, I guess I'll just... Oh, hey, Dee. Is Chip ok? He hasn't caught that disease, has he?

DEE

No, but he's not exactly coping with everyone else having it. He's wound pretty tight on a good day--I don't know how long we can keep this place running with just the two of us Humans before he snaps. If he makes it through this plague in one piece, he's going to need a long zero-gravity spa day.

JOHN

I think we all will. Seems like every alien and robot on the Fairgrounds has this thing. How's Xtopps doing?

DEE

Ehh, not great.

As if on cue, XTOPPS stumbles in.

XTOPPS

(woozily)

Alright Charo... we'll start with a harpsichord intro in 7/8, and then bring it right into the spoons solo like we did in rehearsal...

DEE

Xtopps, I told you to stay in bed. You're not well.

XTOPPS

No way, Nolan Cook, I told you leave the maracas and goat noises for the coda. Do you want to vonch the integrity of the number?

JOHN

Who's he talking to?

DEE

Yeah, he's been hallucinating pretty hard. I mean, that's nothing new, but normally he can tell drug-real from real-real, no problem. This thing, though--he's been talking to thin air for a couple of cycles now. Xtopps, buddy. I told you I've got this. We'll rehearse later, ok? But--

XTOPPS

I don't need you neutering my creative legacy, mang. Do you think any of the greats let a little sniffle stop them making beautiful noise paintings? No! Tell 'er, Orlando Gibbons!

DEE

Xtopps, this isn't going to work. You need to rest. You... all of you should get back to bed. C'mon.

XTOPPS

Dee! Aw, Dee. How can you stab me in the dorsal plate like this? I gotta go out there, Dee. I gotta share these tunes with the world! I'm on fire!

DEE

Because you have a fever of a hundred and thirty! Ok, I didn't want to do this, but you leave me no choice. Come on.

A struggle, glasses breaking, tables falling over, etc.

XTOPPS

Get your hands off me, Human! You can't defeat me, I've got too many arms... Look at 'em! Oh, wow, look at 'em... Whoa... Wooful, mang... Hey! Where are you taking me? Kristin Hersh! Johnny Lunchbox! Help me! No! I gotta get on that stage! The children! I gotta educate them! What...? Hey...

...and they're gone.

JOHN

I don't know if this day can get any weirder.

FRALL manifests, perhaps with a somewhat wobblier version of their normal noise.

FRALL

AS WOLVES IN PACKS THE BRATS DO RUN!

JOHN

(startled)

Ah, Frall! ...Wait, what?

FRALL

Earth-boy-meat-bot, heed me! The cause is not *Less than Zero*, it must be *Singled Out!* Do not gad about like a *Playboy* while chaos sits *Pretty in Pink*.

JOHN

I... ok?

FRALL

This is no time for a *Weekend At Bernie's!* *Heaven Help Us*, pestilence runs like *Fresh Horses* and you stand about like a *Mannequin!*

JOHN

Frall, are you trying to tell me something?

FRALL
ANYTHING BUT LOVE!

They de-manifest abruptly. CHIP returns from the other side of the bar.

CHIP
Hey, John. I tell you, I don't like death as a concept or a practice, but I do love how the mourning process brings out the thirst in people. How bout you, need a drink?

JOHN
And how. I'm still on shift, though, so... A Virgin Node of Destiny, heavy on the pomegranate?

CHIP
No problem. Anything to go with that?

JOHN
No, thanks. Unless you've got an Iltorian medical textbook stashed back there.

CHIP
Ooh, Althaar's got it too? I am so sorry, man. That has got to be...

JOHN
An unimaginable eldritch nightmare, yup.

CHIP
Wow. Well, has he tried a restorative glass of brandy?

JOHN
Brandy? How could that possibly help?

CHIP
Well, it's like I always say: if it was good enough for Scott of the Antarctic, it's got to be good enough for the Fairgrounds.

JOHN
I have literally never heard you or anybody else say that.

CHIP
John? I'm facing bankruptcy and a nervous breakdown here. Do me a solid and buy a brandy.

JOHN
Am I allowed to carry it out of the bar?

CHIP
It's a plague, John! No one cares! BUY THE FLOTTING BRANDY!

TYPHOID MARY-BOT

(over P.A.)

Attention all organic Fairgrounds residents. This is Mary Mallon-bot speaking from the HEC Office of Food Safety. It has come to my attention that some of you grubby miscreants have been repeatedly shoving food into your mouths. And swallowing it! This is an unacceptable choking hazard. So, until the lot of you gombeens can learn how to behave like responsible food owners, all kitchens and groceries will be closed for your protec-- AAGH! *(she is audibly tackled and dragged away from the mic)* Unhand me, you filthy bog-cutters! By the boils of St. Catherine, I'll have your guts for garters!...

Cross fade to the apartment, with an occasional intermittent mewl from the phlegm creatures. The door whooshes open.

JOHN

Althaar, I'm back... How are you doing? Any better?

ALTHAAR

Alas, FriendJohn. Althaar has finally finished the sooop and the sal-TEENS, but Althaar's sickness continues without diminution. *(fart noise)* As do Althaar's secondary symptoms! Oh, tribulation!

JOHN

Sorry, buddy. But it hasn't gotten worse though, right? No new symptoms?

ALTHAAR

Oh no, FriendJohn, it is as before. All that has changed are Althaar's maxillae, which are slightly blistered from the sal-TEENS, and the secretion-lings, which have dispersed and found places of comfort throughout the living quarters.

JOHN

The "secretion-lings"? You mean those weird tadpole thingies that came out of your snot?

ALTHAAR

Correct, FriendJohn! Althaar does not know the proper name for such beings, but they are somehow the offspring of Althaar, not so? Althaar is not sure how they are to be cared for, but Althaar will manage somehow. Although Althaar had planned to postpone reproduction until his Human cultural studies had made much more of the progress. Althaar's ovipositors will not even come in for many decades!

JOHN

Well, it looks like most of the things are gone, anywayaagh! Never mind. They're still here, they're just clinging to the ceilings now. Ready to land on me. Yaaay.

ALTHAAR

Indeed, Althaar's secretion-lings are quite curious in exploring the world around them, much like their progenitor!

JOHN

Yeah, we're gonna need to burn that couch. Anyway, Althaar? I brought something else you can try-- another traditional Human remedy. It may be a long shot, but--

ALTHAAR

Such solicitude from FriendJohn! Althaar is very grateful. Althaar must now become able-bodied again not only for his own sake, but to see to the raising of his many ill-spawn.

JOHN

Right, that's... that's important. Just hang tight, I'm going to have to figure out a way to get this glass to you. I don't think the basket's going to cut it.

ALTHAAR

The patience of FriendJohn is of much inspiration to Althaar! Althaar asks FriendJohn only to have caution for Althaar's progeny as he approaches!

JOHN

No, I'm definitely not getting anywhere near them, my shoes are already-- (*squish*) Aagh! Sorry!

JOHN is cut off by horrific screams from ALTHAAR and the uncountable throng of abominations slithering around.

JOHN

What's happening?! Althaar?

ALTHAAR

Forgiveness, FriendJohn, for Althaar's inadequate explaining. Althaar has discovered that his phlegm-spring share a bond of sympathetic sensibility. Whatever Althaar feels, it seems Althaar's small ones feel also. And now Althaar has learned that the reverse is also true! (*weakly*) ...Progress...

JOHN

Oh my God, I am *so* sorry, Althaar. It, uh, it won't happen again, ok? I promise. ...All right, I made it to the door, so-- Hang on, Althaar? I probably should have asked first--have you had alcohol before? Is it safe for Iltorians?

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes. Althaar has had imbibations with many of the galaxy's various lifeforms capable of digesting recreational ethanol. From the citrine cordials of R Leonis to the traditional stalag-ales of the Trappist system, Althaar has quaffed muchly! In truth, Althaar once came close to committing a great embarrassment in front of the Taurian Grand Wazoo after a few too many Aldebaran Slammers. But of Human intoxicants, Althaar has had very little. Althaar has enjoyed very much the Fernet Branca!

JOHN

Do you think you might be able to handle a brandy?

ALTHAAR

Althaar is not certain! If it is no stronger than the magma-toddies of Mebsuta, Althaar believes it will be uninjurious.

JOHN

I'm pretty sure those can kill a Human just from being in the same room, so I think we're good. Althaar, I have here for you a genuine Earth brandy.

ALTHAAR

Oh! FriendJohn has "bought Althaar a drink!" A traditional Human gesture of comraderie! ...Althaar is so touched by this offering that Althaar thinks he may cry.

Disgusting sounds of Iltorian tears accompanied by the equally disgusting tears of countless slimy unthinkables.

JOHN

Aagh! Althaar! It's ok! It's not a big deal! Really! You can get me one next time! Please don't cry, ok? Just drink the brandy.

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes, FriendJohn! Althaar will "get the next round!" It is a promise!

Gulping noise, silence.

JOHN

So... how do you feel?

ALTHAAR

Althaar feels...fine.

JOHN

Fine? So, no worse?

ALTHAAR

Even better, FriendJohn! Althaar believes a recovery may be commencing! The brandy is success!

JOHN

That's great, Althaar! I'm so happy! For you!

Rumbling noise.

ALTHAAR

Ah. Althaar was perhaps premature in his speaking.

JOHN

Why, what's wrong? Are you--

Sound of ALTHAAR vomiting something that splats on the other side of the door.

JOHN

...Althaar?

ALTHAAR

Althaar is sorry to say that the brandy is not success. The brandy has removed itself from the interior of Althaar. It now covers the interior of the door.

JOHN

Well, at least it's the door and not me that's covered in Iltorian spew. Thanks, door. Good job!

A sizzling noise.

JOHN

And now the door is smoking! Come on, door! Stop that!

ALTHAAR

Ah! FriendJohn? Althaar must warn that the Iltorian stomach expellent is of a great acidity. It is unlikely that a door of Human construction is of a strongness to withstand it. And Althaar is too weak to make concealment of himself if the dissolvment of the door should expose Althaar to the sight of FriendJohn... Oh, woe and dejection!

The door does, in fact, dissolve, fizzing like baking soda in vinegar.

JOHN

(while fleeing to the living room)

OhhhhhnonononoNONONO!

I give up! Everything I try makes things worse and weirder and more disgusting and I don't know what to do anymore! The carpet is covered in slime! Slime that's sprouting tiny telepathic tadpole-slug-lizards! It smells like a boiled cabbage and a burning tire went on a hike through the Florida everglades! And if that wasn't enough, the last barrier of protection between me and an Iltorian on turbo-grossout-mode just melted! Melted and disappeared! I didn't even know doors could do that! Doors shouldn't do that! This has to be a bad dream! Yes, this is definitely a nightmare because there is no way reality could be this cruel, not even to me!

JOHN lets loose the primal scream one lets loose when one's last nerve has snapped.

ALTHAAR

(over the intercom)

...Althaar is sensing frustration.

JOHN

(trying to calm down)

I'm... I'm sorry, Althaar. I'm just-- this has been a hell of a day. I'm really at the end of my rope, here.

ALTHAAR

Althaar will procure more ropes for FriendJohn! Althaar can use his express shipping option! What cordage is required? Does FriendJohn prefer hemp or jute? Althaar wishes very much to repay the kindness of FriendJohn!

JOHN

Oh, Althaar. No, that won't help. I'm sorry. I just wish I knew how to get you feeling better instead of making things worse. But I guess that's just my luck, huh?

MRS. F

(wearily)

Have you tried a fungicide?

JOHN

(startled)

What? Oh, it's just you, Mrs. F. I didn't hear you come in. Wow, are you okay? You look a little...

MRS. F

A little what, dear boy? A little like a compost-heap lettuce head? Oh, I am all sorts of out of sorts, Johnny. I've got a terrible blight down here, and this awful mildew up here, and... Oh, don't even look at my rhizome; I'm so embarrassed! You know, I don't mean to be too critical of Commander Torianna. She does her best, you know. But the levels of humidity on this ship are simply unbearable, I'm surprised I hadn't gone to rot sooner. My stomata are stuffed full as a Blurgin yellow-sorrel pod at Harvesttide! But just try explaining that to someone who can't look past their own chordate privilege to walk a mile in my roots...

JOHN

I'm... sorry you're not feeling well. Did you say you had some advice for Althaar?

MRS. F

What? Oh, yes. A copper-based fungicide; that should do the trick. Now, you want to apply it every day for seven days after a heavy rain. Remember to spray at the base, my boy. Not the leaves, the base. So, yes. Seven days. And at the beginning of the next growing season, be sure to lay in some fresh mulch into your garden beds. Don't be stingy, boy. Spring for the all-natural organic kind. You only get out what you put in, as they say.

JOHN

Thanks for that, Mrs. F. Although I don't know how much it will help, since I don't have a garden bed. And it doesn't rain in here. Well, except that one time, but that was more of a sprinkler malfunction. And, also, Althaar's not a plant, so.

MRS. F

There you go again, only seeing things from a mammalian point of view.

ALTHAAR

FriendJohn, Althaar wishes to make again the apology. It is a great sorrow to Althaar that his frailty should cause the annoyance to his dear friend and room-mate!

JOHN

Oh, no, Althaar. You don't have to apologize. I'm sorry for losing my temper. I'll be fine.

ALTHAAR

But FriendJohn has worked so very hard all day to alleviate Althaar's affliction. And Althaar has caused only hardship to FriendJohn! (*disgusting weeping from ALTHAAR and ALTHAAR's slimy progeny*)

JOHN

Althaar, I said it's okay, you don't...fine, go ahead. Have yourself a cry, buddy.

MRS. F

Oh, the poor dear. Maybe a cadmium succinate would be better instead.

The door whooshes open.

JOHN

Hey, what are you doing? This is a private apartment! Oh, it's you, uh...

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Good afternoon! It is I, Andrew McCarthy-bot! Sorry for over-riding your door controls, but I was given an emergency order to summon you, John B, to the bridge. Apparently you haven't been answering your pager for the last 20 minutes? Mr. Fornes also asked me to remind you that you'll be docked 50 credits for not having your convenient-carry WSS Page-O-Matic on your person. End of message!

JOHN

What? Of course I'm wearing my pager! Look at this thing, how could you miss it? Oh, hey, look at all those messages. Crap. I guess I couldn't hear it ringing over Althaar's little bundles of... whatever. Ok, I better get down there. Thanks, Andrew McCarthy-bot.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Not a problem! It's what I, the artificial likeness of late 20th Century heartthrob Andrew McCarthy, am proud to be programed to do.

JOHN

(somewhat distracted by trying to pick his way back across the apartment without squishing anything or anyone)

Uh huh. Neat. By the way, I really am a big fan of *Mannequin*. I watched it a lot during my first month on the Fairgrounds. One might say that I watched it a little too much, but it really helped me get through those lonely days.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Oh.

*An awkward silence (apart from faint squishing and **the occasional mucus-y squeak**).*

JOHN

Yeah. *Mannequin*. You know, the movie from the Earth 1980s that your Human counterpart starred in.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Oh yes! 1987's *Mannequin*, directed by Howard Deutch, was most certainly a film that Andrew McCarthy, the originator of my likeness, starred in! Featuring Kim Cattral, James Spader, the always hilarious Estelle Getty, and a scene-stealing turn from Meshach Taylor as "Hollywood Montrose." Although not beloved by critics, the film won over the hearts of American audiences and its box office earnings nearly septupled the film's original six million dollar budget.

JOHN

That was... informative. I guess they just left all that old stuff in your memory when they reprogrammed you bots, huh?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

That's correct, John! My memory banks are still teeming with a wealth of information about the career of Andrew McCarthy, since I was originally built to share those fascinating tidbits with visitors to the Fairgrounds! Anyway, I've got a backlog of 489,772 tasks to be getting on with, but feel free to contact me in the future if you ever want to know any more about the filmography of Andrew McCarthy, as told by me, Andrew McCarthy-bot.

Door swooshing closed.

MRS. F

What a nice young bot! Why, I could see him getting off this space station and making a considerable living on New Hollywood. He's so innocuously likable!

JOHN

You may be right, Mrs. F. Although that robot doesn't really act like the Human Andrew McCarthy I remember from *Mannequin*. Or the other films I've seen him in, like *Weekend At Bernie's*, *Heaven Help Us*, *Fresh Horses* or...

FRALL abruptly manifests.

FRALL

ANYTHING BUT LOVE!

JOHN

AAGH! Why can't anyone here use a freaking doorbell?!

FRALL

Absorb the information juice with your ear-sponges, corporeals: The source of this calamity buried in *DIRTY LOVE* has to be *SINGLED OUT*. Any more idling with a *PLAYBOY*'s disinterest and all of us including *JOHN TUCKER MUST DIE!*

JOHN

Who? ...Hang on. Singled out? Playboy? Frall, are you trying to tell us--

FRALL

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND YET I MUST *SCREAM! THREE!*

And they're gone.

ALTHAAR

(over the intercom)

Does Althaar hear Lieutenant Frall in the room of living? Althaar regrets that he cannot perform the hosting duties due to sickness. Would Frall perhaps enjoy the remainder of Althaar's Earth bran-DEE?

JOHN

They're already gone, Althaar. But... I think I've finally figured out what they were talking about! I need to check HECNET to be sure, but if I'm right, then I might have found the source of this disease!

ALTHAAR

Oh! The cleverness of FriendJohn is great indeed!

MRS. F

(a bit woozily)

How exciting! I must report this to Althaar and John B! *(sound of scuttling away)*

JOHN

We're right here, Mrs. F, where are you--and she's gone. Ok.

Sound of HECNET being accessed.

HECNET VOICE

Welcome to HECNET, your full-service guide to everything in The Fairgrounds!

JOHN

Ok. The Galactic AudioVisual Data Base should have what I need... Let's see, I want to search movies and television... limit by origin: Earth, U.S.A., and... years: 1980-2015. That should do it. Now I just need one more thing...

Transition to the bridge. The skeleton Human crew can be heard in the background trying to deal with the crisis as best they can.

H.F.

No way, Mindy. WSS only does three things, you know that. You got a problem with that, you can send a letter to corporate in the next dispatch and ask to renegotiate the contract. But I can tell you what the answer's going to be.

COMMANDER

Oh, for-- You're as bad as the robots! Listen, I barely have enough healthy Human crew members to keep us stabilized. I need all hands on deck here, and WSS is at 100% staff levels.

H.F.

That's because there's only two of us! Ok, I can see you're in trouble. But we're civilians, you can't just order us around. Anyway, the bots aren't going to be out of commission forever, and you know what they'd do if they found out we'd been taking over their jobs. They'd tear us apart!

COMMANDER

That's exactly what the vacuum of space is going to do if we can't keep up the maintenance schedule on this hunk of galactic flotsam! The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, H.F.

H.F.

Yeah, but the "few" is only two of us!

JOHN

(muffled by door)

Uh, hello? The door's locked. Request permission to... board?

COMMANDER

Mr. B, good. I have a list of repairs for you--

H.F.

Don't you dare, B! You're a civilian subcontractor and you've got your rights! Mindy, don't push me, this kind of shenanigans is exactly how the War of 1812 got started!

JOHN

(still muffled)

It's ok, H.F. I actually want to talk to the Commander. I think I've stumbled on something important she should know about.

COMMANDER

I'm a little busy trying to keep us all breathing, Mr. B. What "something" could be more important than that?

JOHN

(muffled, yes still)

The cause of the disease?

COMMANDER

Great Jones! Somebody get that door open! Ensign, keep that mob away from him!

Chaotic scramble as JOHN is let onto the bridge while members of the crew try to hold back the angry group outside, then the door shuts and things calm down.

JOHN

Thanks, Commander. Things are... pretty intense out there.

MWANGI

My God, look at him! The disease has finally made the jump to Humans! We're doomed!

COMMANDER

No, Mwangi, that's the way he always looks. So, Mr. B, what have you found? And why is Andrew McCarthy-bot with you?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

He called me a few minutes ago and asked me to meet him on the bridge. I, being the robot version of Andrew McCarthy, could not help but comply with good-natured affability.

JOHN

Thank you, McCarthy-bot. I just wanted to ask you a few questions, if you don't mind.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Of course I don't mind. I am programmed to be of service no matter how mundane a task.

JOHN

Great. So, I understand that when the HistoriBots were assembled, they were programmed with all the information available about the lives of the people they were based on.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Correct! Our engineers wanted us to give as authentic an impression as technology would allow.

JOHN

So you know pretty much everything there is to know about the original Andrew McCarthy? Not just his film and tv work, but interviews, and so on? You were programmed to react the way he would to questions about his life. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?

Beat.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Of course! I, Andrew McCarthy-bot, am here to assist. But are you sure we have time for such an exercise? I'd hate for life support to fail while I was down here sharing details about the life and times of Andrew McCarthy, fascinating though they may be.

JOHN

Indulge me. (*rustling of papers*) You were in *St. Elmo's Fire*, correct?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Ah, yes! 1985's *St. Elmo's Fire*! Directed by Joel Schumacher, *St. Elmo's Fire* is a coming-of-age drama about seven friends struggling with life after college.

JOHN

That's an accurate summary. So, tell me, what was your favorite scene to film?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

The-- the fire scene. It was very exciting. I did all my own stunts on that one.

JOHN

Okay. And how did you feel about your *Pretty In Pink* co-star, Molly Ringwald?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

I thought that...that pink was a rather flattering color on her; she did indeed look quite pretty in it.

JOHN

Mm-hm, of course she did. One more question: how did you enjoy working with Barbara Walters?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Oh, you mean *Mommie Dearest*?! She was a nightmare! I've never heard a woman yell like that before! And the wild accusations I had to put up with! Not that that control freak Whoopi Goldberg was any better. I mean, would it have killed her to let someone else have the floor once in a while?

JOHN

And that, ladies and gentlemen, proves my theory.

COMMANDER

What, that Whoopi Goldberg ruled her domain with an iron fist? Everybody knows that.

Some mumbling of agreement.

JOHN

Commander Torianna, I want you to take a look at these two lists: this one is a complete summary of Andrew McCarthy's career, and this one, that of Barbara Walters. Now, Captain. May I ask you to peruse each of the sections I highlighted: the ones covering the years 1983 through 2008.

COMMANDER

We really don't have time for whatever game of Earth pop culture courtroom drama you're trying to play here, John.

JOHN

Just hold the two lists next to each other and give them a look over; I swear there's a point to all of this. *(pause while she does so)* Now, what do these two lists have in common?

COMMANDER

Well, it looks like... Absolutely nothing. Congratulations on wasting my time.

JOHN

No, don't you see? Andrew McCarthy-bot seems to believe that his Human doppelganger worked with Barbara Walters during his lifetime, yet these two lists clearly show that between the years 1983, when McCarthy began his film career, and 2014, when Walters retired from television, they never appeared in a single motion picture, television show, miniseries or commercial together!

A general gasp!

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

(nervously)

So my engineers made a programming error. What does that prove?

COMMANDER

Yes, what does that prove, John?

Throughout the following, JOHN slips deeper and deeper into the role of a folksy southern lawyer.

JOHN

Why, what does it prove? On its own, absolutely nothing. But what about...*this*?

H.F.

What's that?

JOHN

Commander Torianna, if it pleases the court--

COMMANDER

This isn't a court, John.

JOHN

I would like to submit into evidence the invoice for the initial delivery of HistoriBots to the Fairgrounds.

COMMANDER

You're just going to ride this shuttle all the way to the end of the line, aren't you? All right, what damning piece of information am I supposed to be looking for?

JOHN

Just look at the male surnames beginning with “M.”

COMMANDER

(muttering to herself as she reads)

“Matisse-bot, Henri; Mazursky-bot, Paul; McCallum-bot, David; McCartney-bot, Paul...” Huh. That’s odd.

JOHN

And just what do you find odd, Commander?

COMMANDER

Andrew McCarthy-bot isn’t listed in the inventory.

JOHN

(exploding)

ISN’T LISTED IN THE INVENTORY! According to this official document, there should be no robotic likeness of Andrew McCarthy on this station, AND YET, as I live and breathe, here stands an Andrew McCarthy-bot, nuts, bolts and all! Now how do you explain something like that?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

P-probably...probably it’s a typo! Yeah! I mean, could you create a robotic simulation of every important figure in Human history and not include Andrew McCarthy? That would be absurd!

JOHN

Perhaps so, young bot. Perhaps so. However, I would like, if it pleases the court--

COMMANDER

Still not a court.

JOHN

--to submit into evidence one more c.v. of a certain Human actor from the relevant period. Commander, if you would peruse the year 2013?

COMMANDER

(reading, then)

Ye gods...

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen, I may be just a simple maintenance subcontractor, but even I can see that something in this situation stinks worse than the garbage masher of a Persephonian family after a treinta-y-nueviera gone horribly awry. If there is supposed to be no Andrew McCarthy-bot aboard this orbital caravansary, then who, I ask you, who is this automaton supposed to be?

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

Automaton?! Are you going to let him use that kind of language, Commander? You can rest assured I'll be filing a formal complaint with the Union after this!

JOHN

Fortunately, there's a simple way to get to the bottom of this. Mr. Fornes: a T5 electric screwdriver and a set of phasing pliers, if you please.

H.F.

Sure, here ya go.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

STOP! STOP THIS! YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE!

COMMANDER

Security! Restrain that bot!

A scuffle between Security and MCCARTHY-BOT, as JOHN gets to work with the tools.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

GET YOUR MEAT MITTENS OFF OF ME! I'M ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT, I TELL YOU! HEARTTHROB FOR THE DECADE OF GREED! I WAS IN THE BRAT PACK, DAMMIT! THE BRAT PACK! *(clattering of a panel falling to the floor)* WHAT ARE YOU DOING BACK THERE, JOHN? STOP IT! WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING, STOP IT! NO! NOT THAT WIRE! NO!! NOOOOOOOOOO *(during MCCARTHY-BOT'S very extended objection, his voice warps and distorts until it settles on higher pitched, more distinctly feminine timbre)* OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!

JOHN

And that should do it.

ANDREW MCCARTHY-BOT

You stupid flesh-sack! What have you done to me?

MWANGI

That...that voice!

JOHN

Yes, that's this bot's true voice as originally programmed.

H.F.

Originally? So that means--

COMMANDER

It all adds up!

JOHN

Everyone, I would like to introduce y'all to....JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT!

GASP!

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

Eat my farts, skin-monkeys!

H.F.

But, why? And how? And also, what does this have to do with... anything?

JOHN

Why, that's as simple as fallin' off a greasy log backward! Y'see, friends, I (*coughs, returns to normal speaking voice*) See, Frall had been trying to tell me something all day but it sounded like a lot of nonsense at first.

COMMANDER

Frall?

FRALL

(*popping in*)

Brooks and Dunn?

JOHN

Sure, Frall. Brooks and Dunn. I didn't realize until later that Frall was actually giving me clues. They must have known, or sensed, that I spent a lot of my first months here watching John Hughes movies on an endless loop, and thus, I was the only one on the Fairgrounds with enough knowledge of 1980s teen pop culture ephemera to see through McCarthy-bot's disguise.

COMMANDER

And according to this document, Jenny McCarthy spent a short-lived and acrimonious stint on popular daytime talk show *The View*, where she shared hosting duties with both Barbara Walters and Whoopi Goldberg, in the year 2013!

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

Shared, ha! I barely got a word in edgewise!

COMMANDER

Ok, but why the disguise? And what does any of this have to do with our current health crisis?

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

Oh, I'll tell you why. No use trying to hide anymore. Part of the refurb process of converting us HistoriBots into maintenance workers was the installation of anti-virus software. To "protect us," they claimed, so we could connect to the station's network. That was the *official* story, anyway. But of course I knew the truth! They were going to use that software to inhibit our personality-derived-behavior replicators and turn us into docile slaves!

MWANGI

Is... any of that true?

H.F.

Of course not! It's just a myth. A cockamamie story made up by an unscrupulous developer-bot who was trying to hawk his own pricy debugging subroutines. The whole thing got busted wide open a few years later--even got him kicked out of the Robot Union! But the story just won't die.

JOHN

But, because all the HistoriBots were programmed to mimic the personalities of the real-life people they were meant to portray, Jenny McCarthy-bot believed it to be true.

COMMANDER

That's right! I read about a small but dangerous cult of pre-Contact Humans who tirelessly dedicated themselves to spreading anti-science propaganda. And Jenny McCarthy was one of their most influential members! They were called... oh, damnit, I can't remember. What were they called?

MWANGI

Idiots?

COMMANDER

Idiots! That's right, they were idiots.

JOHN

And Jenny McCarthy was queen of these idiots.

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

Oh, you call me that now! But just you wait until your programming breaks down and you start performing operations in a non-standard order! A non-standard order, I tell you! It's a fate worse than death!

JOHN

Soooo, to avoid being brought in by the refurb crews for an anti-virus update, Jenny McCarthy-bot somehow hijacked the repair systems and rebuilt her exterior.

H.F.

And she's been living as Andrew McCarthy-bot ever since?

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

Not quite. I initially disguised myself as Melissa McCarthy-bot, then Cormac McCarthy-bot, then a surprising number of Kevin McCarthy-bots. But in the end, the Andrew McCarthy-bot guise proved to best serve my purposes, since Andrew McCarthy was just bland enough to not raise any suspicions. I mean, we can all remember the movies that Andrew McCarthy was in, but can anyone remember anything he ever did or said?

Mumbling. No, no one can.

JOHN

And that's why Andrew McCarthy-bot wasn't on the invoice, and how Jenny McCarthy-bot slipped by unnoticed for years.

COMMANDER

Well, that was a gripping tale of intrigue and buffoonery, but what in the Void does Andrew or Jenny or whatever McCarthy-bot have to do with this bout of pestilence?

MWANGI

I see it now, Captain. As I mentioned, cross-contamination between organic and inorganic beings is rare, but not unknown. Particularly fast-mutating viruses can change to such extremes that they do manage to infect an organic host. And with a virus as volatile as this one, if McCarthy-bot's been carrying it around for fifty years since her original construction, well. It was only a matter of time.

JOHN

Thank you, Doctor. Yes, Jenny McCarthy-bot was a carrier of such a virus but did not suffer any of the symptoms. She was a kind of Typhoid Mary, if you will.

H.F.

Wait, Typhoid Mary-bot's in on this, too?

COMMANDER

Well! Finally we're making some progress. Security! Take this bot down to I.T. for a full system scan and debugging immediately. And have them do a persona reboot once we're sure we've got the virus eliminated, I don't want any repeats of this catastrophe the next time she gets some absurd conspiracy theory lodged in her processors.

SECURITY GOON

Let's go, ma'am.

JENNY MCCARTHY-BOT

(fading out as she's hauled away)

You think you can keep Jenny McCarthy-bot down? I've seen things you people wouldn't believe! Bacon grease on fire in the kitchens of Yod 14! I watched vent-biters scuttle in the dark near the Central Promenade! All these moments will be--

Door whooshes shut.

COMMANDER

There's one thing I don't get. This virus Jenny McCarthy-bot was carrying was so contagious, it spread to nearly every organic and mechanical being on station. Why weren't any of the Humans affected?

JOHN

My best guess is that when Humans were doing the refurb and maintenance on the robots, they must have caught an earlier, less dangerous form of the virus, and built up a resistance. Basically, Jenny McCarthy-bot inadvertently vaccinated all the Humans herself.

COMMANDER

I'll have to make sure to be there when someone tells her that. And Frall figured this all out on their own?

JOHN

Well, Frall gave me some hints, but I'm the one that--

COMMANDER

Frall, you're incredible! Even in your incapacitated state you managed to save all our lives!

MWANGI

Thanks to Frall, we'll be able to synthesize a cure!

H.F.

You've saved the Fairgrounds, you incorporeal wunderkind!

COMMANDER

You're a hero!

FRALL

I like peas!

JOHN

So, I actually was the one who figured everything out. Frall just--

COMMANDER

Let's hear it for Frall, everybody! The one true savior of the Fairgrounds!

EVERYBODY

YAAAAAYYY (*chanting*) FRALL! FRALL! FRALL! FRALL!

Cheering fades as FRALL is "carried" off

JOHN

But, but I'm the one true savior! I'm the one who figured everything out! I'm... oh, screw it.

Transition to a general announcement in a hallway or other public area:

LACERTA

All sentients, your attention please: this is Doctor Lacerta in Xenobiology. We are happy to announce that our cure rate for McCarthy's Malady is now approaching 98%. For those of you still suffering from lingering symptoms, we thank you for your patience. And on a personal note, I'd like to extend a hearty thanks to everyone in the Dalet 3 MedCenter for their support during this crisis, and for the charming porcelain drool cup that got us all through this trying time.

Transition to the apartment. Sounds of vacuuming, ALTHAAR humming. The intercom bleeps on. ALTHAAR turns off the vacuum.

JOHN

(over the intercom)
Hey, Althaar? I'm home.

ALTHAAR

Ah, FriendJohn! One moment please! Althaar is repositioning himself behind the curtain of privacy. *(a scuffling of...whatever it is Althaar has for feet, perhaps the sound of the curtain being pulled shut)* Althaar is concealed, FriendJohn. Please enter in comfort!

JOHN

Thanks. *(door whoosh)* Oh, wow, the place looks great.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is pleased that FriendJohn is content with the cleanliness of the room of living! Althaar has labored ever since FriendJohn left for his work cycle to remove the remnants of his secretions, and also to fumigate the malodor of Althaar's defensive expulsions. A full day for Althaar!

JOHN

You did a really great job, thanks. Uh... what about your, um, slime-babies?

ALTHAAR

Ah, yes. It is with some sadness that Althaar must announce the passing of Althaar's ailment-cubs. The cure eliminated them as surely as it did Althaar's other symptoms.

JOHN

Sorry about that. But, maybe it's for the best. Taking care of all of those things seems like it would be a pretty big commitment.

ALTHAAR

This is true, FriendJohn. Althaar would have been much distracted from his studies! But it is unfortunate that Althaar felt the miserable demise of each of his snot-mites as if Althaar were expiring along with them.

JOHN

Oh, no. That sounds awful, Althaar, I'm so sorry!

ALTHAAR

(cheerful)

Althaar does not dwell on it! But please, tell Althaar, how was the day of FriendJohn? Are the many peoples of the Fairgrounds well and happy again?

MRS. F

Happy? I should say not!

JOHN

Oh, hi, Mrs. F. Hey, remember how we talked about using the doorbell?

MRS. F

Oh, don't fuss at me, Johnny, I've had the most trying day! I may be sound of body now, dear boy, but my mind is another thing entirely! That robotic numb-bulb has been hassling me to no end, and I'm just about at the end of my roots!

JOHN

You mean the new Joseph McCarthy-bot?

MRS. F

The very same! First, he throws a fit unless I refer to him as "Senator." Senator of what, I ask you? He's not a Senator of any government I recognize! And on top of all that, he's constantly accusing me of being a spy! Me! A spy! Can you imagine anything more absurd?

JOHN

I really can't, Mrs. F. Maybe McCarthy-bot just needs some time to get settled in with his new persona, and then he'll calm down.

MRS. F

He'd better, or I may have to report his behavior to the Fugulnari consulate! *(rustling away)* A spy! Honestly, can you imagine such a...

ALTHAAR

It appears that the Fairgrounds has restored its normal operating, FriendJohn! Althaar is content.

JOHN

Yeah, looks like things are finally back to normal around ha-a-*achoo!* Oh, crap.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar will fetch the the sal-TEENS!

Theme music up and leading into credits.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life with Althaar*, episode seven.
This episode was written by Amanda LaPergola

featuring

John Amir as John B

Berit Johnson as Althaar

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Mindy Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frallen-Br'ar

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Eli Gantias as Hardyfox Fornes

Christopher Lee as Chip Frinkel

Zuri Washington as Delilah "Dee" Mallory

Derrick Peterson as Xtopps

Philip Cruise and Olivia Baseman as McCarthy-bot

{etc. with other parts -- Lex, Linus, Philip, Stoya}

and Ian W. Hill as your announcer, William S. Burroughs-bot, {etc.}

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, Amanda, Chris, Philip, Lex, and Linus.

This has been an audio production from Gemini CollisionWorks.

Tune in again in two weeks for our next episode, but until then, let's catch up with those bold, dashing heroes of Sanitation, as they solemnly mourn their fallen brethren at the Electric Egg...

The Electric Egg. The latest phase of the mourning process has been going on for a while and everyone involved is pretty hammered (some miscellaneous Egg patrons have gotten in on the mourning by this point because, hey, shots!).

SARGE

To Rusty!

STELLA and PATRONS

To Rusty!

Shots are tossed back and the glasses clonked on the bar.

STELLA

To Brick!

SARGE and PATRONS

To Brick!

Ditto.

CHIP

You folks need another round? Here at the Egg, we're always ready with liquid consolation for the Fairgrounds' Bravest.

Woo! from the rando aliens.

STELLA

(pretty drunk)

You know who's-- you know who's really brave? I mean like, ultra badass? There's a Human, right, there's a Human on station... who's living... with an Iltorian. Like, every day. He just... in the same apartment! With... That. Is brave.

CHIP

You mean John B?

STELLA

Maybe? Is that-- you know him?

CHIP

Sure, he's in here all the time. Works for WSS. Nice guy. Kind of a Jonah, but...

STELLA

Wait, WSS? Like... like that weirdo who was hanging around during the turtle sneeze thing?

CHIP

The what?

SARGE

Hells yeah, you didn't recognize him? John B. The Iltorian's Roommate. Bravest sonofabastard on the Fairgrounds.

STELLA

(after a beat to take this in)

...Well, shit. To John B!

ALL

To John B!

Shots, clonk.