

# *Life with Althaar*

## **Episode 15: A Simple Game of SuperNova**

**Version 2.2 (Recording Script), 07/05/20 - Chris (draft 2, BAJ)**

*The Electric Egg on a moderately busy night. DEE and XTOPPS are jamming out to a country western tune. DEE is sounding super Southern. Yee-haws and eeeeeewwwweeee's flying around the room. Sounds of business happening from the bar. Soda guns, shaking drinks, hustle, and of course, bustle. FRANK STUART, a two-headed alien, bellies up to the bar.*

**FRANK STUART**

*(getting SOPON's attention)*

Hey, buddy! Got a minute?

**SOPON**

*(affected accent)*

Howdy errrr... y'all. Welcome to the Ol' Watering hole. What'll it be?

**STUART**

Oh, sorry pal. We must be in the wrong place.

**FRANK**

Told ya we shoulda taken a left after the elevators! Now we're on a trip for plankton biscuits.

**STUART**

Don't try and put this on me. Those are the boss's directions. Verbatim. You know how she gets when we deviate.

**FRANK**

Yeah, but she musta steered us wrong somehow. I can't blame her, the corridors here are more tangled than a plate of Cryptidian linguini. I'd like to get a few minutes alone with the smarkheads who put this place together.

**STUART**

No fooling. Hey, maybe you can help us out here, sport. We're looking for someplace called the Electric Egg.

**SOPON**

Oh, yeah, no, this the Egg. We're just "The Watering Hole" third cycle Tuesdays for our Country-and-Western-Spiral-Arm night.

**FRANK STUART**

Oh, ok.

**STUART**

In that case, we'll have a Solaris Sunrise.

**FRANK**

Easy on the Midori.

**STUART**

Hold the cherry.

**SOPON**

Ummm... ok, so one? Solaris Sunrise? *(beat)* Coming right up.

*Drink being made: pouring, shaking, pouring.*

**FRANK**

Heeeeeeey, check out the stage! Isn't that a certain 12-armed business associate of Sticky Pete Fillmore?

**STUART**

Yeah, the yegg who got Pete zotzed with the Musicians' Union. *(listens)* Hey, he's not half bad.

**FRANK**

We'll definitely need to introduce ourselves.

**SOPON**

Annd, there you go. Anything else I can get for you tonight? Something off the grill? We've got the chicken-fried phoobsteak on special tonight, if you folk...s metabolize carbohydrates.

**STUART**

Maybe later. Here's for the drink, and your trouble.

**FRANK STUART**

Keep the change.

**SOPON**

*(impressed)* O-kay! Thank you! *(remembering the accent)* Uh, thank ya kindly pawdnuh. Pa—pawdnuhs. That's mighty generous of ya.

**STUART**

Think nothing of it. Can you do us a favor, though? We're actually looking for the owner of this fine establishment.

**SOPON**

Chip? Sure, he's around here somewhere. You want me to go get him?

**FRANK**

That'd be great. We're going to make him an offer...

**STUART**

...he can't refuse.

**SOPON**

I'll just... go see if I can rustle him up.

**FRANK**

You do that.

**STUART**

Just remember:

**FRANK STUART**

We're going to make him an offer he can't refuse.

**SOPON**

Ok then! Y'all just belly up to the bar, and I'll be back in two shakes of a Jovian lariat. ...Hey, Bubbles? You seen Chip around?

**BUBBLES**

Not since we laughed at his chaps. He's probably still sulking in his office.

**SOPON**

Ok, I gotta get him out here. Can you keep an eye on that shady two-headed character over at the other end of the bar?

**BUBBLES**

The jobbie the size of a helium freighter in the zoot suit? I already got my secondary scanners locked on 'em.

**SOPON**

Yeah? Are they packing?

**BUBBLES**

Nah, nothing more lethal than a breath mint. Why, what'd they do?

**SOPON**

Nothing yet, but they're asking for Chip. And their exact words were: "We're going to make him an offer he can't refuse."

**BUBBLES**

Yikes, that can't be good. They really said that?

**SOPON**

Twice!

**BUBBLES**

Like, once with each head, or...?

*Focus moves over to XTOPPS and DEE finish their song onstage. Applause and cheers, "yee-haw"s, etc.*

**DEE**

*(on mic)*

Thank you, thank y'all so much. I'm your number-one buckaroo Dee Mallory, and with me as always is the best slide this side of Andromeda, the one and only Baronet of Bass, the Fusion-fueled Fleezeborp... look out now, because this Xybidont is his OWN posse! The one, the only, the incomparable... Xtopps!

**FRANK**

*(in the distance)*

Wonderful!

**STUART**

*(also in the distance, obviously)*

Terrific!

**FRANK STUART**

Bravo!

**XTOPPS**

Ohhhh mang...

**DEE**

We're going to be taking a little break now, y'all, but stick around! We'll be back after we whet our whistles to keep this hootenanny goin'!

**XTOPPS**

Hey, Dee? I gotta vague.

**DEE**

All right, see you in 20.

**XTOPPS**

Don't bet on it. There's some zoods parked at the stick that are tweakin to break all my arms and they peeped my silhouette, you chom me?

**DEE**

Uh, not quite. Can you unpack that a little?

**XTOPPS**

That's a no can do, clutcher. Xtopps is packing it up!

*XTOPPS has been literally packing it up, and we are following him as he heads off-stage toward the office.*

**DEE**

Wait, what? Xtopps? I'm going to see you back here after the break, though, right? RIGHT?

**XTOPPS**

Time to make some devious sausage!

**DEE**

Oh, frill me.

**XTOPPS**

*(making his way through the crowd)* Whoa! 'Scuse me... my bad... that one has a mind of his own... excuse me... make way, zood...

*Footsteps and sound of muffled conversation behind the office door. Then XTOPPS knocks (lots of quick knocks from all his arms).*

**XTOPPS**

Chorp!

**CHIP**

*(through the door)* Just a—

*Office door opens.*

**CHIP**

—minute... Yeah, Xtopps, what's up?

**XTOPPS**

My number, mang! Something's got a hold on me, and oh, it must be karma!

**CHIP**

Relax. There's still some emergency peanut brittle left in the jar, just grab a quick bite and get back out there.

**XTOPPS**

No, mang! I am fully tiled, but the void is encroaching! On big panther teeth! So it's been a hop and a half, but it's time to bouge, bossman. Pay me, don't delay me!

**CHIP**

Look, I don't have time for this right now. I've got my own problems. Whatever's got under your carapace, if you're still seeing it at the end of your set we can talk, ok? But—

**XTOPPS**

Jeck that. At set's-end that zoot suit at the bar is going to turn me into a delicious meat paste! Xtopps is out! Check, please!

**CHIP**

What? Oh, for— Get in here.

*Door closes behind XTOPPS as CHIP drags him into the office.*

**SOPON**

Sounds like your problems are actually his problems, boss.

**CHIP**

Of course they are. Everyone's problems end up my problems! All right, Xtopps, tell me why you think this goon —these goons?— the menace in question is here for you. And scrape the varnish off the verbiage, yeah? Just this once I would love an explanation I can understand without a concordance!

**XTOPPS**

Right right, ok. So, here's the slice: I've been yonked ever since I yelped on that bookings hoarder to the Musicians' Union. He was small potatoes, but the Syndicate likes its starch, you dig? A lot of those zoods are connected. I thought maybe I was out of the toroid, though, 'cause they wouldn't put the vonch on me over such a little fish. But I was wrong, and now the sharks are circling! That suit says "Syndicate" no matter how many heads are coming out of it! And snitches end up in ditches, Chorp! They are no-shness looking to do me a violence. So Xtopps has gotta scoot. Sayonara, see ya tomorra! And by tomorra I mean never, because this club-hopper is going to hide in a black hole and pull the event horizon in after him!

**CHIP**

Ok, I actually got most of that, thanks. *(a beat as the reality sinks in)* Shit. All right, don't flip your gizz yet. We don't actually know the Syndicate sent that palooka, they could be freelance. And anyway, that business with the fake bookings was almost a year ago, and it's not like you keep a low profile. If the Syndicate was looking to spike your spiracles, they could have come for you any time they wanted.

***XTOPPS groans.***

**SOPON**

Uh, boss? If "reassuring" was what you were aiming for, you might want to adjust that a few degrees. Like a hundred eighty. Just saying.

**CHIP**

Look, I can handle this! Just don't get paranoid on me, either of you. They came here asking for *me*, right? No mention of any Xybidonts with extremely poor long-term planning skills?

**SOPON**

Sure, but—

**CHIP**

So there you go! It's probably nothing to do with you, Xtopps.

**SOPON**

Yeah, but—

**CHIP**

Listen, I've been around the sector a few times, all right? This isn't my first chisel-bob rodeo. I wouldn't have lasted this long if I didn't know how to handle some tough guy...s trying to muscle in on my business.

**SOPON**

Ok, but—

**CHIP**

It'll be fine! Come on, don't be a couple of cry-pupas. Get back out there and get to work!

**SOPON**

They said they were going to make you an offer you can't refuse!

**XTOPPS and CHIP**

*(gasp)*

**CHIP**

They said that?

**SOPON**

Twice!

**XTOPPS**

Like, once with each head, or...?

**CHIP**

Those were the exact words? An “offer I can’t refuse?”

**SOPON**

Definitely.

**CHIP**

Then it’s really happening. Shit. ...Ok. Ok, I’ve got this. Xtopps, what I need you to do right now is relax. Just foob out here in my office for a while, until I can find out for sure what this is about. But you don’t leave this room until I personally open that door, understand? If you finish the brittle, there’s a case of buckeyes in the closet I was saving for your hatching-day.

**XTOPPS**

I’m vertical. Not opening that door for nobody, no-when, no-how.

*At some point during the following we hear XTOPPS getting into the  
aforementioned brittle jar and going to town on its contents.*

**CHIP**

Sopon, I need you put in a call to John B, and then get back behind the bar. Try to allocate all the really combustible spirits into your speed rack. But be subtle about it, ok? Make like a ninja.

**SOPON**

Like, disguise myself as a gardener? I’m already wearing overalls, I guess I could get a hat or something...

**CHIP**

What? No! Just be unobtrusive! Don’t draw attention to yourself. We need to be smart about this.

**SOPON**

Gotcha. What do you want John B for? Seltzer’s working fine for once.

**CHIP**

I want him for backup.

**SOPON**

...Are we talking about the same person? The Human with the unfortunate complexion and two tiny little noodle arms?

**CHIP**

The Human with the huge buff girlfriend who's in charge of the entire Sanitation department. Hopefully we won't need any muscle, but if we do, Sanitation is who I want on our side. Hwæt, NERCA! Activate protocol: Precinct 13! Password: Napoleon.

**NERCA**

Initiating lockdown sequence. 20 seconds.

**CHIP**

All right, Sopon, let's go.

**SOPON**

Uh, boss? What exactly is happening?

**CHIP**

Something I knew would happen one day. The day every bar owner fears.

**NERCA**

15 seconds.

**SOPON**

We're out of limes?

*Office door opens, bar crowd noise. We leave behind XTOPPS' snarfing noises as we follow CHIP and SOPON back into the bar area.*

**CHIP**

Worse. This isn't just your standard shakedown. Those are real bad guys with actual bad intentions. Sopon, organized crime has finally come for the Electric Egg.

*Theme Music!*

**ANNOUNCER**

Gemini CollisionWorks presents...

Life With Althaar!

Episode 15:

A Simple Game of SuperNova

*Suite C. JOHN and ALTHAAR have been watching TV together on either side of the privacy curtain. A bit of bleeping as ALTHAAR is typing in his Human Culture Data-Base. Something to indicate they're between episodes? (Obvs can't use the real Lost theme music.)*

**JOHN**

No, what I said is, “She’s playing dumb.”

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! Althaar is not familiar with this game of “Dumb!” What are the goals and regulations, please, FriendJohn? How many players can partake?

**JOHN**

No, it’s not a game. Or, well, in a way I guess it’s a game you play by yourself.

**ALTHAAR**

Ah! Althaar *has* encountered the concept of “playing with yourself!” But— would this not have been considered inappropriate for tele-visual broadcast in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**JOHN**

Uh, no, you’ve got that right. It’s not that kind of playing, either. Playing dumb is, like, uh... like playing a part. Pretending you don’t know what’s going on.

**ALTHAAR**

Ah, deception! This kind of play seems very popular indeed among Humans. It is frequently causing the mis-understanding during the studies of Althaar. And then Althaar is not having to *play* at Dumb! His lack of comprehension is most genuine! (*a little Ittorian chuckle*) But this is all a part of the most satisfying accomplishment of cultural understanding! And this tele-visual program has been of much instruction for Althaar. The various Human methods of deception are on full display among the characters of this mysterious island!

**JOHN**

I’m glad you’re enjoying it.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh, yes, very much so! This suggestion of FriendJohn has provided much of both information and entertainment! Althaar is most appreciative! (*boop bloop*) And now that Althaar has finished logging his latest observations in his Human Culture Data-Base, he is prepared to consume the next episode! If FriendJohn is ready?

**JOHN**

Sure, let me just—

*JOHN’s phone rings.*

**JOHN**

One sec. *(answering the phone, a little weirded out that it's SOPON calling)* Hello?

**SOPON**

Hey, John! Uh, can you get down here asap? Chip needs you for... something.

**JOHN**

What, the CO<sub>2</sub> again? You need to call W.— you need to call the office, H.F.'s on duty right now.

**SOPON**

Yeah no, it's something completely else. Really, really else. I, uh, I don't want to get into it on the phone, but we could use your help. We've got a potentially lethal situation going on.

**JOHN**

More lethal than the seltzer machine?

**SOPON**

Afraid so.

**JOHN**

Wow. Ok, but why call me? I'm just a mechanic.

**SOPON**

Yeah, but you've got a gir— uh, you've got, you know... qualities. That could help, uh, defuse the situation.

**JOHN**

The situation. Which is...?

**SOPON**

Serious!

**JOHN**

Uh huh. I'm never going to find out what this is about without going up there, am I?

**SOPON**

Nope.

**JOHN**

Ok, what the frid, now you've piqued my curiosity. I'll see you in a few.

**SOPON**

You're a lifesaver, B!

*JOHN hangs up.*

**JOHN**

Sorry, Althaar, looks like we'll have to continue the *LOST* marathon later. I'm going to go see what kind of catastrophe they've got brewing at the Egg.

**ALTHAAR**

Please exercise caution, FriendJohn! The indulgence of curiosity can lead to great peril! As with Boone's investigation of the abandoned Beech-craft and subsequent fall from the cliff-side!

**JOHN**

Althaar, that's just a show. You don't have to take it so seriously. Besides, this is the Fairgrounds. You can get into plenty of peril here just minding your own business.

*Door whoosh as he exits. A station-wide announcement:*

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Good evening, Fairgrounds residents. This is your Recreation Director-bot. Sign-up sheets for the upcoming "Oceans of Earth Wave-athon" have been posted in all public baths and natatoria. For those wishing to sign up, please make sure that your mass and volume are entered accurately. Buoyancy doesn't give a good god-damn about vanity, and Archimedes wasn't just an owl. That is all.

*Transition to the bar area at the Egg.*

**CHIP**

First of all, I have no idea what you're talking about.

**FRANK STUART**

All I did was introduce myself.

**CHIP**

And I didn't listen. I don't know your name. And by the way, once you're gone, you were never here. How about a drink on the house?

**FRANK**

Calm down, pal.

**STUART**

You got nothing to worry about.

**CHIP**

Worry? Who's worried? I'm not worried. I'm just a friendly guy, I like to make people feel welcome. And I always say, nothing says "welcome" like a free drink! Right, Sapon?

**SOPON**

*(this is not a thing)*

...Right, boss.

**STUART**

Mr. Frinkel, all we want from you is a moment of your time. And I'm sure you're going to like what we have to say.

**FRANK**

Is there maybe someplace here a little more amenable to a business discussion? You see, we'd like to make you an offer.

**CHIP**

*(a bit choked)*

—an offer?

**STUART**

Yes. One you won't be able to refuse.

*CHIP gasps.*

**FRANK STUART**

If you know what's good for you.

**STUART**

And we're sure you do. You're a savvy businessman! Isn't he, Frankie?

**FRANK**

Sure thing, Stu. I could tell as soon as I walked in the place. This guy's really on the ball!

**STUART**

And that's how we know you're gonna want to listen *real carefully* to what we have to say.

**CHIP**

Uh, thanks. Ok, why don't you take a seat in that booth over in the empty corner...ish area. That'll give us a little more privacy. I'll just grab us some cocktails real quick! Bubbles, how about one of those "specialty drinks?"

**BUBBLES**

One "Napalm Nebula" coming up.

**SOPON**

*(sotto voce)*

You sure about this, boss?

**CHIP**

Hey, better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it, right? Just remember to pour gently, Bubbles. And for the love of all that's holy, don't shake it yet! If I can talk my way out of this, great. But if things go widdershins, I'm going to do a "table presentation" and hopefully those reinforced booth walls will keep the blast contained. At least enough that I'll still have something approximating a bar afterwards. Now, if John B shows up?

**SOPON**

We send him over to your table?

**CHIP**

Right. And if you see me straining this into a flaming champagne flute?

**BUBBLES**

Under the ice well!

**CHIP**

Exactly. All right, here goes nothing. *(making his way across the bar)* Excuse me... just... ahhhhh.... Whoa, watch the shaker! Going to just.... Slow it down... *(muttering)* Where are you, John?... Ah! So. Here I am, gentlefolk, let's hear it.

**FRANK**

Sincere thanks for your time. We'll only be a moment, and I really think you'll like what we have to say.

**FRANK STUART**

It's going to be an offer...

**CHIP**

That I can't refuse? I'm just itching to hear you out. Can't wait. But why don't I pour you one of our specialty cocktails before we get started? I'm sure you'll get a kick out of it.

**STUART**

Maybe later, Mr. Frinkel. We already had a pop at the bar while we were waiting for you. And you know, we like to keep a clear head while we're talking business.

**CHIP**

Sure sure, but hey, it's not like you're going to get in trouble with Corporate for drinking on the job, is it? I mean, who's going to report you to HR? Ha ha.

**FRANK**

Ha ha. Still. We'll wait until our business is concluded, if it's all the same to you.

**CHIP**

Of course, of course. But, uh, you don't mind if I have one?

*Sound of flames igniting on the glass.*

**STUART**

Ooooohhh, fancy glassware! How's it catch on fire like that?

**CHIP**

Trick of the trade. *(aside)* Well, looks like I'm going to be doing some remodeling...

*Shake shake shake.*

**JOHN**

Hey, Chip! Spon said you needed me for something?

**CHIP**

John B!

**FRANK STUART**

John B?

**CHIP**

That's right, John clutcher-flotting B! And if you think he's going to get pushed around by a couple of Syndicate hyper-gorillas then you... just don't know John B!

**FRANK**

We don't.

**STUART**

At all.

**CHIP**

Oh.

*Beat. Shake shake shake.*

**JOHN**

Chip, what's going on?

**CHIP**

Shh!

**FRANK**

What does he do?

**STUART**

Is he gonna try and toss us outta here?

**FRANK**

With those tiny little noodle arms?

**STUART**

Because I could use a laugh.

**CHIP**

Oh, yeah? Well I'll have you know that those noodle arms spend a lot of time wrapped around the head of Sanitation! Yeah, that's right! You try to put the screws on me and my close personal friend John B here, and you'll have a couple dozen Sanitation commandos crawling up your airshaft quicker than you can say "French-Canadian bean soup!"

**JOHN**

What?

*FRANK STUART laughs uproariously.*

**FRANK**

Mr. Frinkel! You've got entirely the wrong idea.

**STUART**

We want to run a legitimate business proposition by you!

**FRANK**

*(laughing, can barely get it out)*

What'd you think we were here for?

**STUART**

You think we're here to break some legs?

**FRANK**

He's got a Xybidont working here, that'd take all week! *(they both really crack up at that one)*

Mr. Frinkel, are we hiding laser pistols behind the toilet tank now?

**STUART**

You own a prize-winning pegasoid? You were maybe expecting to find its head on your pillow?

**CHIP**

*(starting to chuckle a little)*

So you're really not here to shake me down?

*Peals of laughter.*

**FRANK STUART**

Shake him down!

**FRANK**

Like there's anything to shake out of the Fairgrounds!

*CHIP is tentatively laughing with them too.*

**FRANK**

As if risk/reward ratios just got tossed out the airlock.

**STUART**

We're business-beings, Mr. Frinkel!

**FRANK**

Where's the profit in shaking down a micro-credit outfit like this? No offense.

**STUART**

Or maybe this dive is a little more macro than we thought? Maybe we should take a little look at the books while we're here?

*FRANK STUART isn't laughing all of a sudden.*

**CHIP**

*(still laughing, now somewhat forced)*

Uh, hah, nope! Strictly small change. Barely out of the red most cycles. Hospitality's a tough business, you know how it is.

**FRANK STUART**

We do.

**CHIP**

So... if this isn't a shakedown, what are you here for? Not Country Western Night.

**FRANK**

We keep telling you, it's business, Mr. Frinkel!

**FRANK STUART**

Can we call you Chip?

**CHIP**

I couldn't stop you if I wanted to, could I? Ha ha!

**STUART**

Ha ha! You could not.

**FRANK**

Chip, we've actually been expanding one of our more... officially sanctioned enterprises, and the Electric Egg has come to our attention as an ideal potential location.

**CHIP**

Uh huh. (*shake shake shake*) Location for what, exactly?

**STUART**

Billiards, Chip! The gentlebeings' game! A mainstay of drinking parlors throughout the galaxy.

**FRANK**

Well, soon to be a mainstay throughout the galaxy. We've mostly stuck to the Kakistos before now. But we're in over 3000 establishments out there, and let me tell you, the margins on this are incredible.

**STUART**

In another hundred years, who knows? Billiards could be Humanity's most famous contribution to Galactic culture!

**FRANK**

Which, let's face it, is a lot better than what you're known for now.

**STUART**

We've got the demographic research right here.

**FRANK**

If you'll just take a look at these holo-charts: (*bleep of holographic charts being pulled up*) See, billiards is a hit with almost every orphant of the entertainment-seeking public! (*bleep*) Check it out, great cross-species appeal.

**STUART**

Doesn't matter how many arms, tentacles, or pseudopods you've got, if you can hold a stick, you can play! And we can see you cater to a real interstellar crowd in here, Chip.

**FRANK**

Just take a look at these profit projections. Here, I'll project 'em. (*bleep*)

**CHIP**

Wow, that's... that is impressive. But...

**STUART**

And there's even more avenues of profit potential! League nights! Tournaments!

**FRANK STUART**

A table would look great right over there by the Algerian Ivy feature.

**CHIP**

I don't know...

**JOHN**

It doesn't sound like a bad idea to me, Chip. I'd definitely be into it, anyway. My granddad used to have a table in his basement, I loved it as a kid.

**FRANK**

See? John B agrees.

**STUART**

And he's John clutcher-flotting B!

**CHIP**

He sure is. (*beat*) And that's seriously all you want? To put in a pool table? What about Xtopps?

**FRANK STUART**

Who?

**CHIP**

The, uh, Xybidont who was up onstage earlier.

**STUART**

Oh, he's a real talent! We were just saying so, weren't we Frankie?

**FRANK**

Sure thing, Stu. There some reason we should be interested in him, Chip?

**CHIP**

Nope! No, uh, he just got it in his head he might have annoyed some friends of yours. He gets funny ideas sometimes, PB junkie, you know how it is.

**STUART**

We do, Chip. But we're not interested in your employees' personal lives. Like I said, we're simple business-beings. All we want from you is permission to install one of our pool tables. We get a percentage off the table, you get the rest. Plus an almost guaranteed increase in drink sales.

**FRANK**

And if it doesn't pan out, we can always pull the table, no problem.

**STUART**

At our expense.

**CHIP**

Well, it is tempting... Do you mind if I have my attorney look over the contract first?

**FRANK STUART**

We do.

**FRANK**

No contracts, Chip. Our word is our bond.

**STUART**

Right. We wouldn't be where we are today if we got a reputation for bunko. That's the kind of thing you don't come back from, Chip.

**CHIP**

Uh huh.

**FRANK**

Did I show you the five-year projections yet? Here, take a look.

*Bleeping as FRANK STUART pulls up some Very Impressive Charts.*

**CHIP**

Wow. ...Just what kind of a percentage are we talking, here?

**FRANK**

I knew you'd see reason, Chip.

**CHIP**

...All right, I'm in. Listen, John, thanks for coming, but it looks like I won't need you after all. Why don't you go grab yourself a drink on the house, while I hammer out the details with my new partners here. Oh, and while you're over there, could you do me one more favor? Tell Sapon we'll need some chilled shot glasses and the blast containment bucket at table 13, STAT.

## **JOHN**

I'd say this is the weirdest thing that's ever happened to me in here, but that's not even remotely close to being true.

## **CHIP**

Less talking, more walking, John. This shaker's supposed to be pretty durable but I don't know how far we can push it. (*shouting across the bar as JOHN leaves*) Oh, and if you can't find them, they're probably hiding under the ice well!

*Music transition to another station-wide announcement. By the end of it we're listening from the Bridge.*

## **WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Attention all Fairgrounds residents. The final schedule for the much anticipated Wave-athon has been posted on HECNET. As always, all events do require prior registration, so those of you who have yet to secure a place in your desired competition are up the creek. Do not come up the actual creek, as it is being used as a staging area for the Boogie Board Blowout. And remember: attendance at all Wave-athon events will require a floatation device compliant with current ICSB buoyancy standards. This will be your final reminder.

Alkalidians or other beings unwilling or unable to participate in aquatic activities may be interested in the following events: a demonstration of Meksutan barbecue techniques in the Ultra-Thermal Rumpus Room at 11:40; dynamic entropy yoga at 15:15 in the Yod 14 sports center; or for you hustlers of the Galaxy, the Electric Egg in Lamed 3 will be hosting their first Billiards League Night (*CMDR: "WHAT?!"*) tomorrow night at 23:30, and that's a rumble nobody can cool. That is all.

## **COMMANDER**

You all heard that, right? An announcement of a Nell-be-damned *billiards* event? On my station?

## **AMBER**

We heard it? But I don't see what the problem is?

## **COMMANDER**

The table must have come in with that shipment of Frinkel's that got flagged yesterday. I knew he wasn't taking delivery of 290 kilos of beer nuts. But a pool table of all things! Unbelievable!

## **STALIN-BOT**

There may be simple explanation. Perhaps "Billiards League" is merely name of newest bar band to be featured in facile entertainment spectacle for bourgeois clientele?

## **COMMANDER**

Stalin-bot, that is the stupidest possible explanation you could— Hang on, this is the Fairgrounds, the stupidest possible explanation is usually right. Frall!

*FRALL shimmers in.*

**COMMANDER**

Please tell me there's a band named "Billiards League" playing the Electric Egg.

**FRALL**

Alas not, sir.

**COMMANDER**

Dammit. I don't suppose there's an even stupider reason they'd be announcing something that sounds deceptively like a billiards night?

**FRALL**

I'm afraid the least-absurd explanation is, in this singular case, correct. Mr. Frinkel has indeed installed a pool table in the Electric Egg.

**COMMANDER**

Dammit! We had an entire conversation about this when he moved in! And he agreed with me those things are nothing but trouble! Or at least he pretended to. We drank to it! He cheers-ed me! AND he even did the knocking on the bar thing before we threw them back! Is nothing sacred to that smarkhead?

**AMBER**

Can't you just tell him to take it out?

**FRALL**

Unfortunately for the Commander's blood pressure, Amber, she has very little say over the internal operation of the Electric Egg, as it is legally considered a part of the Xybidont Imperium. As long as the rent is paid and Chip adheres to all relevant ICSB treaties governing Xybidont-Human relations, he's more or less free to do as he pleases within its demesne. Subject to the whims of the Baronet of Kandepha'aa, of course.

**AMBER**

Who?

**COMMANDER**

Xtopps!

**AMBER**

The fleezborp guy?

**STALIN-BOT**

Commander, why should you oppose this table? How much trouble can be caused by one little game?

**COMMANDER**

Spoken like someone who's never broken up a bar fight.

**AMBER**

Commander, I think Stalin-bot's right? A pool table doesn't seem really dangerous? I mean, compared to the rest of the Fairgrounds?

**COMMANDER**

Have none of you seen the havoc that can ensue from a simple 5-credit wager between two inebriated life forms? It's all fun and games until someone throws a cue ball through the antique French mirror!

**STALIN-BOT**

Ah, and now we see the truth! Like any capitalist, the Commander cares only for the decadent trappings of wealth! What is a mirror, weighed against a worker's enjoyment of a simple game of skill with their fellows after a day's honest labor?

**COMMANDER**

It was 37 hundred credits' worth of garnished pay for me, is what it was! And it was pure dumb luck it was a mirror and not someone's skull!

**STALIN-BOT**

Bah! Skulls! More diversionist Human чепуха (*"che-pu'-kha," nonsense*).

**AMBER**

Commander? I still don't understand what's so bad about pool? I mean, people can bet on anything?

**COMMANDER**

They can, Amber, and they certainly do, but there's just something about a pool table that gets a Human's blood boiling quicker than an express trip out an airlock.

**FRALL**

Strictly speaking, Commander, and I want to stress that I mention this purely in the interest of accuracy, foosball tables cause more assaults per capita galaxy-wide than any other form of gaming equipment. And the Fairgrounds does maintain its fair share of those.

**COMMANDER**

True, Frall, but I'm not in charge of the entire Galaxy, thank Rogar for small favors. I'm in charge of this wretched little corner of Human space. And Humans plus pool equals trouble.

**AMBER**

Commander, did something terrible happen to you at a pool game? Did your parents lose your house betting on pool? Or do you just hate fun things?

**COMMANDER**

Let's just say I spent the first part of my career stationed on the rough side of the Kuiper Belt, and I saw first hand what kind of element a billiards table brings in.

**FRALL**

Those were crazy times, Commander.

**COMMANDER**

What? You weren't even there!

**FRALL**

*(a soft chuckle)* Wasn't I?

**COMMANDER**

Don't you start that again! My point is, once billiards comes into a bar, trouble always follows right on its green-felted heels. Off-station Jaspers! Stuck-up spacer boys! Not to mention SuperNova sharks!

**AMBER**

But this is the Teegarden's system? We're in the middle of nowhere?

**STALIN-BOT**

It is difficult to imagine space shark desperate enough to come so far, Commander.

**AMBER**

Like, nobody wants to come out here? Ever? This is the Fairgrounds?

**COMMANDER**

Exactly! This is the Fairgrounds. Where everything that can go wrong, will. And then some things that can't!

*Transition to JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment. Door whoosh.*

**JOHN**

Althaar? I'm home! Is the curtain shut?

**ALTHAAR**

Yes, FriendJohn, Althaar is adequately concealed! And Althaar is very pleased that his dear friend is returned! Althaar is having a suggestion for the evening's activities. Would this perhaps be an appropriate occasion for the much-anticipated viewing of Episode 27 of *LOST*?

**JOHN**

Oh, not tonight, Althaar, sorry. I was actually heading right back out—I'm meeting Stella at the Egg later.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh. But Althaar is most anxious to solve the mystery of the postal-bears, FriendJohn! How did they come to exist in a biome so unsuitable? And Althaar longs also to continue his most profitable study of Human deception activities! It is clear that Benjamin Linus is not to be trusted.

**JOHN**

Well, if you really can't wait, you can always watch the next episode without me. I'll just catch up later. Or, you could come along to the Egg. Chip just put in a new pool table, so a few of us are getting together to shoot a couple games.

**ALTHAAR**

Ah! Is this table-pool one the aqueous festivities of the Wave-athon? Althaar would very much wish to observe, FriendJohn, but he regrets that he has yet to obtain an ICSB-compliant device of floatation. *(to himself)* This must be attended to with great haste! *(bloop as adds this to his to-do list)*

**JOHN**

Oh, no, you don't need to bring anything, it's not that kind of pool. There's no water involved.

**ALTHAAR**

Ah! And what is filling the pool instead, please, FriendJohn?

**JOHN**

Nothing, Althaar, it's a homonym. A "pool table" isn't filled with anything, it's a special kind of table, and the game you play on it is called "pool." Make sense?

**ALTHAAR**

Yes, FriendJohn, but *(type type type)* all HECNET search results for "pool" indicate aquatic recreation. Is there a word of greater specificity Althaar can be using?

**JOHN**

Oh, uh, sure. Try "billiards," that should work.

**ALTHAAR**

*(type type type)* Bill-i-arrrrds! *(beat)* Ah! This is the origin of the game of SuperNova!

**JOHN**

Right. "Pool" is what Humans called the original Earth version.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has observed often the tournaments of SuperNova, yet he was without knowledge of its relevance to his Human cultural studies! What a humorous oversight! Althaar has enjoyed particularly the matches of the Magnosian Mantis. Such skill and poise! It is no wonder that she is the 6-time galactic champion!

**JOHN**

Oh, yeah, she's really something. I'm nowhere near that good, but hey, you don't have to win to have fun, right? I loved spending time at my grandpa's table as a kid, just rolling the balls to each other. Didn't even know any of the rules. Oh, man, that was a beautiful table, too. Vintage. Would probably have been worth a fortune if someone had checked it out. He actually left it to me in his will, but I was still a kid, so I didn't have anywhere to keep it. We had it in the garage for a while, but—

**ALTHAAR**

*(type type type)* Please pardon the interrupting, FriendJohn, but what is the “will?” Is this a form of shipping container?

**JOHN**

Uh, no, a will is like a... declaration of what you want people to do with your stuff after you die. A legal document.

**ALTHAAR**

*(type type type)* And this “will” is required for all Humans?

**JOHN**

Not required, but if you don't have one, your family usually ends up fighting over who gets what. Although if you do have one, they usually fight over who *should* have gotten what, so... kind of a lateral move, I guess?

**ALTHAAR**

Fascinating! *(type type type)* Truly the complexities of Human culture are both numerous and abstruse!

**JOHN**

Yeah, you're not wrong. Anyway, you couldn't play SuperNova on that old analog table, but my dad liked to play a classic game called 8-ball. Or at least for about three weeks he did. Apparently that was all my Mom could take before she'd had enough of him carousing out there with his friends 'til the wee hours. So, she decided the table had to go. The plan was to demolish it by stuffing the pockets with canisters of nitro-napalm-anade, but she miscalculated a little. Blew the entire garage into smithereens.

**ALTHAAR**

Please be pardoning Althaar's geographical ignorance, FriendJohn. Where is “Smithereens”?

**JOHN**

“Smithereens” are very small pieces, Althaar. Teeny, tiny, charred little smoldering chunks. That’s all that was left of Grandpa’s pool table. And the garage. And a fair chunk of the yard. Not to mention my sister’s bicycle. Heh. But you can’t blow memories up. My dad and I would still play pool from time to time at the local arcade. Maybe it reminded him of Grandpa too.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! Is this a ritual of the “Father/son bondage?”

**JOHN**

Bond-ING, Althaar. Please— please make a note of that one. “Father/son bond-ING.”

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is doing so! (*bloop*) Can the bond-ING be achieved with duct tape, as with so many of the repairs of FriendJohn? This would seem to Althaar most inconvenient. And sticky.

**JOHN**

Yeah, no, that’s another metaphor. It’s... forming an emotional bond. When Humans spend a lot of time together, they start to trust and like each other more. That’s important for families, you know?

**ALTHAAR**

Ah! Then... did FriendJohn spend insufficient time in the company of his sister Su-san?

**JOHN**

Uh, well, some Humans are harder to bond with than others, I guess.

**ALTHAAR**

Perhaps a mucilage or epoxy would assist in the process?

**JOHN**

Ha! Pretty sure it would do the exact opposite. Listen, I’m going to head out. Do you want to come with and see a game of pool in person? I’m no Magnosian Mantis, but it should be a good time.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar would indeed wish to observe the ancestral game of FriendJohn, but... but he is also filled with a very great desire to learn what is about to occur on the island of *LOST*! The phenomenon of Richard’s eye-paint may perhaps be explained.

**JOHN**

Fair enough. You can check out the pool table another time, I’m sure it’s not going anywhere. Have fun!

*Door whoosh as he exits.*

**ALTHAAR**

It is preferable to consume the Human tele-visual programs in the company of FriendJohn, so that he may provide explanation for Althaar's many confusions. And also for the bond-ING. Hmm... Althaar could perhaps watch the next episode now, and then ask for explanation later, once FriendJohn has completed his gamings! Yes! Althaar will do so!

*Bloop of the TV turning on. Obnoxious rock music plays.*

**ALTHAAR**

...but first he must endure the advertise-ment. Chagrin.

**COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER**

Hey, Bro! Are you the type of Bro that likes to do Bro stuff with your Bros, Bro?

**BRO 1**

Sports! Woo!

**ANNOUNCER**

Then get ready for the most shocking adult beverage in the galaxy, Broseph!

*Zapping SFX.*

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

*(energetic sexy whisper)*

Shocked Seltzer!

**ANNOUNCER**

It's in a can, so it looks like a beer.

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

Shhhhhhhocked Seltzer!

**ANNOUNCER**

But it doesn't taste like beer, Bromeliad! All flavors and colors used in Shocked Seltzer are guaranteed 100% artificial! It tastes like anything we want it to!

**BRO 1**

Sweet!

**ANNOUNCER**

Prepare your mouth or equivalent organ of liquid consumption for an experience that is... electric!

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

Shocked Seltzer!

**ANNOUNCER**

Beer tastes like sad bread.

**BRO 1**

I mean... I'll drink anything, bro.

**ANNOUNCER**

Party like you're sticking your finger in a light socket! With the latest brew from the KCSG's Recreational Beverage and Industrial Lubricant Division: Shocked Seltzer!

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

Shocked Seltzer! *(switching to mile-a-minute legal disclaimer voice)* The word "brew" in no way implies any form of organic chemical process. All Shocked Seltzer flavors contain zero percent dihydrogen monoxide. No crimes against sapience have been committed during the production process. Just take our word for it.

*Fade up on the interior of the Egg in the early evening. CHIP and DEE are in the middle of a pool game.*

**CHIP**

Funny little game. Of course it requires skill, but when you get down to it, it's all about confidence. You have to step up knowing you're going to make your shot. *(clack clack)*

**DEE**

Not bad, Chip! I'm impressed.

**CHIP**

I'm starting to shake off the rust. It's been a few years. But it's just like riding a hoverboard, really. *(clack clack, clack clack, clack duff)* All right, Dee, you're up.

**DEE**

Okay. Like this?

**CHIP**

Sort of, but don't grip too tightly with the back hand. Just slide the cue as smooth as you can—imagine you're a Gelatinoid who just climbed out of the Clabbering Pits. Zero friction. Smooth... easy... confident *(clack!)* There you go! Nice shot!

*Door whoosh as the COMMANDER enters (followed by NESS & DORMER).*

**DEE**

Hey, I think I'm getting the hang of this! Maybe I'll try a real game after my set tonight.

**COMMANDER**

Then I hope you're EVA-certified, because this monument to bad decisions is going straight out the nearest airlock!

**CHIP**

Miiiiiiiiinnndy!

**COMMANDER**

Don't you Mindy me. We had an agreement. We knocked shot glasses! Did you think I wouldn't remember?

**DEE**

Oh-kay, don't mind me, I'm just going to... not be here now. Good luck, Chip!

**CHIP**

Commander, circumstances have... gotten a little more complicated since our previous discussion. Why don't you lose the Security detail, and we can—

*FRALL appears.*

**CHIP**

Frall! I should have known! Of course you'd rat me out the first chance you got!

**FRALL**

Good evening, Mr. Frinkel. Contrary to your assumption, I'm afraid I was deprived of the opportunity to observe the Commander's reaction to the news of your latest installation, as she had already been informed of its existence by the Recreation Director-bot's announcement of your upcoming League Night. Very unsporting of you.

**CHIP**

What? What announcement? *(to the room)* Okay, who told Burroughs-bot about Billiards League?

**VERT**

*(in the distance)*

Sorry, boss!

**CHIP**

Vert! For the last time, I am not your boss!

**VERT**

Right, boss!

**CHIP**

Aagh!

**NESS**

Sir, please be advised you are in violation of— Commander, what is he in violation of?

**COMMANDER**

A gentle-being's agreement!

**DORMER**

That's, uh... That's not on the books, sir.

**COMMANDER**

Oh, *now* you care about that?! Come on, Jones-dammit, there must be something you can charge him with!

**FRALL**

Commander, there are roughly 3,578 things Mr. Frinkel could be charged with, at my latest estimate—

**COMMANDER**

Ah ha!

**FRALL**

—as long as you're willing to incite a major diplomatic incident with the Xybidont Imperium.

**COMMANDER**

...how major are we talking, here?

**FRALL**

Somewhere between “punitive sanctions” and “shooting war.”

**COMMANDER**

Oh, by Simone's prickly papillae!

**CHIP**

Really, Commander, if you'd just let me explain—

**COMMANDER**

Explain what? Am I or am I not looking at a pool table? In your bar? A pool table that you smuggled onto the Fairgrounds under my very nose!

**CHIP**

I didn't smuggle anything!

**COMMANDER**

Oh, I see. This thing just happened to find its way into a shipment of beer nuts? Is that what you expect me to believe?

**CHIP**

I actually had no idea it was in there—I wasn't expecting it until tomorrow, but (*low*) they don't really stick to any schedule other than their own.

**DORMER**

Wait, the table's sentient? Then we got 'im!

*Whine of electro-cuffs booting up.*

**NESS**

Sir, you are in violation of Section 12G-theta of the Inanimate Member Species Charter of the ICSB Co-Habitation Code. Please step away from the being in question—

**CHIP**

It's not sentient! It's not sentient!

**DORMER**

Aw, nertz.

*Sad whine of electro-cuffs shutting down.*

**CHIP**

I was talking about the... (*un-subtle winking*) organization that actually owns the table. The uh... *vendors*.

**NESS**

Sir, are you currently experiencing a medical issue?

**CHIP**

Uh, no...

**DORMER**

Your left eye is twitching. Looks real uncomfortable.

**NESS**

Do you require the assistance of a MedBot?

**CHIP**

It's called winking! Sheesh!

**COMMANDER**

Feigning injury is the oldest trick in the book, Frinkel, and it's not going to change my mind. I want this thing out of here, and I want it out now. It's been a few months since we've shot anything into orbit. Let's see if there are any comets buzzing the system we can use for target practice. Ness, get the hover-sledge.

**CHIP**

Commander, you really, *really* don't want to do that. I promise. If you'll just join me in my office, I can explain everything. Really. But this requires a certain amount of discretion, so if you could lose the Security goons...

**COMMANDER**

All right, fine. But this better be good. Back to the Bridge, you two. But keep that sledge on standby.

**NESS and DORMER**

Yessir!

**CHIP**

Any chance of losing this... misbegotten miasma while we're at it?

**COMMANDER**

Not a chance. Frall isn't just my second-in-command, they're also a 27-dimensional lie detector, which means I'm definitely going to want them around for whatever cockamamie story you're about to lay on me. (*FRALL shimmers smugly*) So let's hear it.

**CHIP**

Okay, so the thing about this table? It isn't, strictly speaking, mine.

**COMMANDER**

And yet it appears to be sitting in your bar. Funny, that.

**CHIP**

Yeah, as part of a profit-sharing arrangement. With some people who can make a lot of trouble for all of us if they don't see their share of profit. In short, this table belongs to... the Syndicate.

**COMMANDER**

...*That's* your brilliant excuse? You're in bed with the mob?

**CHIP**

I didn't have a choice! See, Xtopps got frilled over by this con artist a while back, and he jettisoned *that* guy's pod to get *himself* off the hook with the Musicians' Union. That, by all rights, should've earned him a dozen or so broken legs. But, the Syndicate are apparently willing to overlook that, as long as we go along with this actually-totally-legit-and-aboveboard pool table deal. So I'm really sorry to go back on my word, but the table stays.

**COMMANDER**

...Frall?

*A fact-gathering shimmer.*

**FRALL**

I can verify that Mr. Frinkel's explanation is entirely accurate, Commander.

**CHIP**

Thank you!

**FRALL**

...with one exception. He is anticipating a sizable increase in drink sales as the result of the installation of the pool table, and is therefore not, in fact, sorry.

**CHIP**

*(through gritted teeth)*

...Thanks a lot.

**FRALL**

My pleasure.

**CHIP**

Anyway, there you have it, Commander. I'm technically one of Xtopps' factota, so I couldn't lose the table even if I wanted to. Not without his say-so. And there's no way he's going to volunteer to get his carapace caved in. He's been pretty nerved-out about the whole thing.

**COMMANDER**

So you say. I want to hear it from the Xybidont's mandibles.

**FRALL**

Commander, I don't believe the rest of this mission will require my further support, so with your permission, I'll be returning to the Bridge.

**COMMANDER**

Yes, fine.

**FRALL**

Enjoy!

*FRALL discorporates.*

**COMMANDER**

Oh, I don't like the sound of that... All right, Frinkel, where is he?

**CHIP**

Ah, I think he's in my office right now. Which, if you'll recall, is where I suggested we take this conversation in the first place. Talk to him as much as you want, no sombrero!

*They move across the bar toward the office.*

**COMMANDER**

What are you smirking about? You haven't won yet. If I get Xtopps on my side, then that table's out of here quicker than you can say "double cheeseburger."

**CHIP**

I'm just happy we're on our way to resolving this amicably, Commander! Can I get you anything to drink?

**COMMANDER**

No! I'm on duty. And mad at you.

*They enter the office.*

**COMMANDER**

Ah, Sin Xtopps. Just the sentient I wanted to see.

**XTOPPS**

Clickity Clack my zooooooooooooooooods... Clickity... Clickity... Clock!

**COMMANDER**

Oh.

**CHIP**

So, yeah. He's going to be like this for awhile.

**COMMANDER**

How much peanut butter did he have? I've never seen him this glitched—is he going to get intelligible anytime this cycle?

**CHIP**

No way. You could check back next week, maybe. But you'd be wasting your time anyway. That table is the only thing keeping his ocelli attached, which means it's here to stay. You're in the Baronetcy of Kandepha'aa and whatever the Baronet says—

**XTOPPS**

Sooooap in the waaatahhh...

**CHIP**

...goes.

**COMMANDER**

Ugh. Xtopps! Focus for a minute. Can you do that for me?

**XTOPPS**

Locked in and pinged, «chef de vaisseau».

**COMMANDER**

Were you or were you not forced to install a piece of recreational equipment by representatives of a loosely-affiliated cadre of shady “business-beings?”

**XTOPPS**

Comment ça vut you say?

**COMMANDER**

Did the Syndicate make you put in that pool table?! It's a simple yes-or-no question!

**XTOPPS**

Ohhhh. But like, it's a *yes-and-no* answer, you chom me?

**COMMANDER**

No, I don't.

**XTOPPS**

Ok.... (*whispers*) gotta be sciu-rid. Yeah?

**COMMANDER**

No.

**CHIP**

I think what he means is, they didn't exactly... force us? But they made a big point out of *not* forcing us, if you get my drift.

**XTOPPS**

*(still whispering)*

And you can't cut off the heads... because two grow back...

**CHIP**

Uh, I think you got the wrong end of the stick, there, Xtopps. Not everyone with two heads is a Hydroid. ...Why are you whispering?

**XTOPPS**

Them forked tongues. They can smell when you're squeaking!

**COMMANDER**

Sin Xtopps, there's no need for you to cave in to these gangsters' threats. I can have a Security detail lined up for you by this time tomorrow, if you'll just—

**XTOPPS**

*(suddenly shouting)*

There is no tomorrow! It's all spinning right now, mang! Stars-lights-words-vibes-it's all soap! And the the water goes *(gurgling noises)*!

**COMMANDER**

What?

**CHIP**

I think what our dodeca-dextrous friend here is trying to say is that Fairgrounds Security are a pile of clown shoes, and he wouldn't trust them to protect him from a goose-down custard. And really, can you blame him?

**COMMANDER**

That's not— ok, that's actually a pretty generous assessment, but...

**CHIP**

Honestly, Commander, I'm just as frustrated as you are. Put yourself in my grav-boots for a second: I just had to redo half the lighting out there, plus reinforce the floor panels, not to mention all the tables I lost renovating the "Gentlebeings' Parlour." With only a couple cycles' notice! This hasn't exactly been a walk in the hydroponic park.

**COMMANDER**

And you're telling me you tried to talk Xtopps out of this?

**CHIP**

Hey, if you don't believe me, ask him yourself!

**XTOPPS**

No Soap-brero.

**COMMANDER**

...Right. Listen to me, Chip. That table is bad news!

**CHIP**

You know what's worse news? Getting the attention of the Syndicate. You've been lucky so far, out here at the ass-end of Human space, but if you want my advice—

**COMMANDER**

I don't!

**CHIP**

—you should learn from our bad example and stay under their radar.

**COMMANDER**

Koko's wiggly whiskers! ...All right, fine. Fine! Keep your stupid table. But don't you dare come crying to me when this thing blows up in your face. Probably literally!

**CHIP**

You won't hear a peep out of us, Commander.

**COMMANDER**

I mean it! I don't care what planet we're technically on right now,

**XTOPPS**

Hotlanta!

**COMMANDER**

I can still hold the Baronet liable for any damages to the station, and believe me, I will. If I hear about so much as a single thrown fist, I'll—

**XTOPPS**

What about horizontal wheels Mindy-san? They don't slow... we rotate... together...

**COMMANDER**

...Right. And Chip, this should go without saying, but: no money on that table. Ever. I'm not even close to kidding about this.

**CHIP**

Money? On the— Oh! You have nothing to worry about, Commander! There's no gambling in the Electric Egg!

**COMMANDER**

That's right. There's no gambling in the Electric Egg.

**CHIP**

Aw, come on, Commander. Just what kind of clip joint do you think I'm running here?

**COMMANDER**

I'll tell you sometime when I've got a spare couple of hours and a good supply of throat lozenges.

**XTOPPS**

Mindy-san... Don't Chorp the business...man. You gotta business the Chorp!

**COMMANDER**

Oh, I'll business the Chorp all right. No... incidents, you hear me? We get a single enforcement call over this pool table, and I'll have this place crawling with Security goons 28/7! Am I understood?

**CHIP**

I promise, you'll have nothing to worry about.

**COMMANDER**

Don't make me regret this, Frinkel. I'll be checking up on you personally. Unannounced.

*The COMMANDER opens the office door, letting in bar noise.*

**CHIP**

You're always welcome at the Electric Egg, Mindy. And hey, maybe we can even get in a game or two! I could give you a few pointers.

**COMMANDER**

*(on her way out)*

Ha! I wouldn't even let you hold my cue.

*Door slams shut.*

**CHIP**

That went pretty well, all things considered.

**XTOPPS**

I remember the look on his face... it was all lips and teeth.

**CHIP**

Hey, Xtopps? I'm actually a little worried about you this time. Maybe you need to take a break from the Fast Breaks, yeah?

**XTOPPS**

Life is best medium rare, Chorp.

**CHIP**

Can't argue with that.

*Transition into the W.S.S. office. The door lurches open.*

**H.F.**

Morning, kid. Love the shades. Trying out a new look?

**JOHN**

Uh, not exactly. Trying not to lose my breakfast is more like it.

**H.F.**

Althaar's latest smorgasbord isn't sitting right, huh? What was it today?

**JOHN**

No, it's not Althaar's fault. The Eggs Callistoine with anti-gravlax were amazing as usual—I just kind of overdid it last night. Speaking of which, do you mind if I turn off the fluorescents?

**H.F.**

No problem. *(click)* But uh, as far as corporate's concerned, you've got a *cold*, right?

**JOHN**

Right, yeah, thanks.

**H.F.**

I got you covered. *(opens a capacious drawer full of bottles, ampoules, tubes, and assorted hypochondriacal paraphernalia)* I got ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and triopenine—there's some aspirin too, if you want to go old-school—and take some of these vitamin C<sub>12</sub> gummies while you're at it. Then you wanna follow it up a half hour later with a few of the riboflavin pastilles, and a bottle of Plutonian electrolyte infusion. Then forty minutes after that, you take these copper ear clamps—

**JOHN**

I'm just gonna stick with the ibuprofen and plenty of water, thanks.

**H.F.**

Have it your way. What had you partying so hard last night? Special occasion?

**JOHN**

No, there's a pool league starting up at the Electric Egg, and we were putting together a team. We ended up going pretty late. Do you play?

**H.F.**

Me? No, but I love watching the championships on ISSBN late night. That Mantis, she's really something. Never misses a shot, and can she put 'em away!

**JOHN**

Yeah, she's kind of the face of the sport. And with a Magnosian, that's a lot of face.

**H.F.**

Hang on, billiards is a sport now?

**JOHN**

When was it not? It requires coordination, mental focus, uh... performance under pressure.

**H.F.**

So does playing the bagpipes. Have you ever seen anybody break a sweat playing pool? The DT sweats don't count.

**JOHN**

So sweating is necessary for something to be considered a sport?

**H.F.**

Sporting is necessary for something to be considered a sport.

**JOHN**

Ok, what about Mimasidodgeball?

**H.F.**

Love it!

**JOHN**

And you'd call it a sport?

**H.F.**

Sure, those kids are dodging around like nobody's business!

**JOHN**

But they don't get sweaty.

**H.F.**

What are you talking about? Their heart rates are through the roof.

**JOHN**

Yeah, but the Herschel Arena is outdoors. That's why the players use breathers, because there's no atmosphere out there. Which means no moisture, which means any sweat evaporates instantly.

**H.F.**

So?

**JOHN**

So, just because you're not sweaty doesn't mean you're not playing a sport!

**H.F.**

Ok, ok, streez kid! I didn't know you were so passionate about pool.

**JOHN**

No, sorry, I'm just a little touchy, didn't get a lot of sleep.

**H.F.**

Yeah, I can tell. You've got that whole eye-bag situation going on again. I haven't seen you this worn down since that week Althaar took up morning calisthenics.

**JOHN**

Right. Maybe I will have some of those C<sub>7</sub> gummies.

**H.F.**

No problem. Have some Trochian sardine oil while you're at it, that'll sort you right out.

**JOHN**

I'll pass, thanks.

**H.F.**

You don't know what you're missing.

**JOHN**

I'm super-fine with that.

**H.F.**

I gotta say, sport or no, I do like watching the SuperNova. I never really understood the rules, though. There's so many different size balls, and the whole asteroid thing... Always wanted to learn how to play, but I've never even seen a fully-equipped table, just the old-fashioned analog kind. Which is fun, but, you know, way less explodey.

**JOHN**

Well, the Egg's got a brand-new table with all the bells and whistles.

**H.F.**

Oh, yeah, that's another thing I don't get. What are the bells and whistles for? Do they get you bonus points, or what?

**JOHN**

Kind of, but— You know what? My team's got a league game tonight. Why don't you come up to the Egg and hang out? It'll probably make a lot more sense if I explain it as we go. We should be getting started around 24:30.

**H.F.**

Ok, sure, why not? Who doesn't like relaxing with a drink and a game of pool after a hard shift? And speaking of shifts, mine was officially over eight minutes ago. The office is all yours! I'm gonna grab a nap, I'll see you tonight.

*Janky office door whooshes open.*

**JOHN**

Ok, see you then!

*Door shuts. JOHN sits down in the janky office chair.*

**JOHN**

Ugh, here's hoping I won't get any calls. I don't think I can handle anything more strenuous than a vitamin gummy.

*Door whooshes back open, jankily.*

**H.F.**

Oh, also! I forgot to mention: we got a call about 4 minutes after you were supposed to be here. Preventative maintenance on an 18-gauge wire just off the power core. Be careful on that one, I know your head's a little fuzzy this morning. You may legally be a robot, but remember what I always say:

**H.F./JOHN**

Electricity Kills Humans. Dead.

**JOHN**

Got it, thanks.

*Door shuts. Beat.*

**JOHN**

Oh, jeck it. Where's that sardine oil?

*Medicine drawer opens again. Transition into Suite C. Front door whooshes open.*

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! FriendJohn is returned already! Delight and gratification! Althaar has consumed the next episode of the *LOST* as suggested, but he is having so many questions! And he is very anxious to continue the viewings with his dear friend and room-mate!

*MRS. FRONDRINAX rustles in.*

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

No, no, it's me, sweetie. Mrs. F!

**ALTHAAR**

Ah! Please be welcomed, dear neighbor! (*opens the privacy curtain*) May Althaar be offering refreshment?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Oh, thank you, some distilled water would be lovely. But what's this about Johnny? Has he stood you up or something?

**ALTHAAR**

Oh, no! Althaar has been standing up on his own since he was a clutchling!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

That's not quite what I meant, dear. (*as ALTHAAR waters her roots*) Oh, that's nice! Yes, make sure to get some right in by the stems there, sometimes the mister doesn't quite reach. Now, what were you saying about John?

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! John is a dear friend and most helpful room-mate! But he is the last one Althaar would be asking if he were to require assistance with the standing up. A great vomiting would certainly result!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

No no, before that. It sounded like you were sitting around waiting for him. And you had some questions?

**ALTHAAR**

Oh, yes! FriendJohn and Althaar have been enjoying a shared consumption of early 21<sup>st</sup>-century tele-visual programs! It is a special interest of FriendJohn, and at first Althaar was merely participating in the interest of camaraderie. But as the viewings continue, he has found himself most intrigued! And now he can hardly be waiting for the next episode!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Why, I understand completely, dearie. That period really was a high point for Human TV. Of course, some of it can be awfully confusing, so I'd recommend you start with something simple and straightforward. Like *Legion*, or *Twin Peaks*. And I quite liked *Wild Palms*, too, even though there are barely any palms in that one at all. And none of them have speaking parts! That's Hollywood for you. Still, it's quite entertaining. And of course the Humans didn't just make dramas back then, there's comedy, too! I've particularly enjoyed the one called *V*.

**ALTHAAR**

V? Just the single letter? This is a most unusual form of title for a Human work of fiction.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

That's right, dear. I thought maybe it was the 22<sup>nd</sup> in a series or something, but no such luck. Still, I'd definitely recommend it. Absolutely hilarious.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar will make addition to his watch-list! (*bloop*) Thanking you, Mrs. Frondrinax!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

I'm sure you'll just oscillate your face off, it's utterly absurd. Not to spoil too much, but at one point, these folks are invading Earth, you know, and they just... hover their ships in the sky where everyone can see them! Like... (*giggling*) "Hello, Humans! We thought before we got on with the secret invasion we'd just let you all get a good look so you know we're coming! Wouldn't want the element of surprise on our side or anything!"

*Hilarity as both ALTHAAR and MRS. FRONDRINAX consider this.*

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is most looking forward at experiencing these Human works!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Happy to help, dearie.

**ALTHAAR**

But now Althaar is even more impatient for the return of FriendJohn, so that the shared viewings may continue! The scheduling of these has become difficult, because in addition to the work cycles of FriendJohn, and his special time with Supervisor Reyes that Althaar is pretending not to be sensing with his flixators,—

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

They do get awfully noisy, don't they?

**ALTHAAR**

—there is now the League of SuperNova in which FriendJohn is participating! And the practicing for this also. So the spared time of FriendJohn is much diminished.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

And now he's left you sitting here all alone? You poor thing.

**ALTHAAR**

But Althaar is not alone, because he is performing the visit with Mrs. Frondrinax! Oh! Would you be wishing for more distilled water? Or perhaps some kieserite pellets?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

I'm fine, dear. But I think it's awfully rude of Johnny to leave you in the lurch like this.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has been left in the room of living, mostly. Awaiting the return of FriendJohn!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Mm hm. But doesn't that get awfully dull?

**ALTHAAR**

It has been of some difficulty. The many activities of FriendJohn appear to have diminished his interest in tele-visual amusement. But Althaar's interest is only increasing!

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Well, there's one easy solution, isn't there? Just watch without him! He can't expect you to sit around here, completely un-entertained, while he gallivants all over the station, now can he?

**ALTHAAR**

It is true that Althaar's curiosity has become most merciless... And FriendJohn did already make suggestion that Althaar continue the viewings in his absence...

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

I'm sure John won't mind a bit if you get a few episodes ahead. And you can always watch them again when he finally gets back, can't you? So it's not like he's missing out on anything. Go on now, you know you want to find out *what happens next*...

**ALTHAAR**

...Perhaps Althaar will be watching just one more episode.

*Blinng of the TV system turning on.*

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

I think that's best for everyone. Why don't I just see myself out?

*Door whoosh as MRS. F exits, happily humming the theme from “V”. Transition to a busy night at the Egg.*

**SOPON**

Hey, mister, does she have ID?

**H.F.**

Uh, Miss Sophie seems to have left her ID at the last bar, but don't worry, she'll just be having water.

**SOPON**

I'm just pulling your pedal appendage, H.F., I know she's a companion animal. *(puppy voice)* And a good girl, aren't you? Aren't you!

*Happy MISS SOPHIE noises.*

**SOPON**

What about you, can I get you anything?

**H.F.**

I'd love a cold Yttrium City, thanks. Actually we're here to watch some pool. John around?

*Pop of a beer cap.*

**SOPON**

Sure, he's in the Parlor already, it's back there on the right, past the Algerian Ivy feature. It's starting to be a real scene in there. I think John's team are between games right now—they're playing a buncha Dilurians.

**H.F.**

Ugh.

**SOPON**

Yeah, they're obnoxious, but at least they're putting back the Shocked Seltzer like it's water.

**H.F.**

That stuff from the commercials? Does it really “shock your senses”?

**SOPON**

I guess, if you want to get technical about it. It's a packaging gimmick—the can stores up potential energy and gives you a little static electricity jolt every time you touch it. What's really shocking is that anybody would order that shness more than once. It tastes like a Saccharinoid's nectar-pit.

**H.F.**

Well, no one ever accused the Dilurians of having taste.

**SOPON**

Too true.

*Walking through the crowd sounds. Yips from MISS SOPHIE.*

**H.F.**

All right, settle down now, Miss Sophie. No barking, you don't want to make Uncle John miss his shot, do you?

*Whine.*

**DEE**

Hey, H.F.! Oh, hi Miss Sophie!

*A chorus of overlapping greetings\*:*

**XTOPPS**

\*Hey, zoods!

**AMBER**

\*Oh, who's a good girl? Is it you? Is it you?

**VERT**

\*They'll let anybody in this place!

**JOHN**

Hey, H.F. Glad you could make it!

**DILURIAN 1**

Hey. Hey. Bros. We're in a League match here. Can the conversation! Respect my focus.

**DILURIAN 2**

Ha ha... you said foke.

**DILURIAN 3**

Ha haha nice.

**McENROE-BOT**

I'll let the cue stick make the conversation. On your face!

**CHIP**

Easy there, John McEnroe-bot. Don't let them get in your head. This is a gentlebeing's game.

**McENROE-BOT**

My greatest strength is I have no weakness. I'm going to bury these bros. LET'S BANG 'EM UP!

**H.F.**

*(to JOHN)*

Wow, intense. Where'd you find him?

**JOHN**

Robot Union meeting. He's a hydroponics manager down in Tav 48. Gotta love that competitive fire, right? As long as he's not yelling at me, anyway.

**DEE**

Alright, McEnroe-bot, bang 'em up!

**H.F.**

I gotta say, that is a beautiful table.

**CHIP**

I know, right? This sucker's gravity field is 100% even. We busted out the quantum level earlier.

**JOHN**

Ok, so here we go. Lesson one: the Big Bang, or "break" as they used to call it back on Earth, is how the game starts. You're always shooting the Quasar or Q ball. It's super dense so it stays on its own orbit.

**McENROE-BOT**

You might not want to stand too close there, Martina Navrati-Bro-va!

*Clack zoom BOOM: sounds of balls spreading out across the "galaxy" that forms above the surface of the pool table.*

**H.F.**

Wow, look at 'em spin!

**JOHN**

That's because of the gravity field from the Red Giant.

**H.F.**

What's that fuzzy thing?

**JOHN**

That's a gas planet. It's great for defense. You want to maneuver that sucker in front of your opponent's object ball. Here we go...

*Clack zoom Thump (ball gets sucked into a pocket).*

**DILURIAN 1**

Nice shot, Bro!

**McENROE-BOT**

There's nothing about the way I play that's nice.

*Clack zoom Clack Thump*

**H.F.**

Wow, he's really good!

**JOHN**

Yeah. I mean, he's a robot, so he'll literally never miss a straight shot.

**H.F.**

Is that even fair?

**JOHN**

Well, his pattern recognition is atrocious, so it kind of balances out. He'll shoot himself into a corner sometimes, and if he needs to make a proto-planet he'll throw one hell of a temper tantrum.

*Clack zoooooom Thump. Clack zoooooom Thump.*

**H.F.**

Ok, so those two balls that keep zooming around the table nonstop—those are the asteroids, right? What's the point of those?

**JOHN**

Mostly just to keep everybody on their toes. Now, see that one ball that's always orbiting really close to the Red Giant? That's the Chthonian Planet. It's hollow, so it stays in tight.

*Clack zoom thump.*

**McENROE-BOT**

You cannot be serious!

**H.F.**

What happened?

**JOHN**

This is what I was talking about. He can't get to the next planet with a straight shot. All he'd have to do is add a little doppler effect to the Q ball, and he'd have a good chance to zoom right through that Nebula, but...

*Clack zoom clack fizz. McEnroe unintelligible grumbling.*

**JOHN**

...Yup. Now the next guy can put the Q ball anywhere he likes. That's a big momentum swing.

**DILURIAN 1**

Huh huh huh, this cluster looks like a constellation... huh huh... it's totally Cancer! This table's got crabs!

*DILURIANS laugh, douchily.*

**DILURIANS 2, 3 & 4**

Good one, Bro! / Better get outta there! / Need some ointment?

*Clack clack Thump Clack zoom fzzzzzz*

**McENROE-BOT**

Laugh it up you commie smarkhead, but you missed.

**JOHN**

Oh, this isn't good. See how the ringed planet is on the other side of the gas giant? That guy missed on purpose.

**H.F.**

And why would he do that again?

*Clack zoom fzzzzzz.*

**JOHN**

Because now he's got another ball in hand and he can—

*Clack zoom clack zooooooooom (as JOHN continues)*

**JOHN**

—combo past the neutron.

*Clack... beep... beep... beep.*

**JOHN**

So, once that's activated all he's got to do is send it close enough to pulse the Red Giant, annd:

*Beep beep beep clack zooooooooooooom beep borp shuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurp.*

**H.F.**

It'll go Super Nova! Wow... I've never seen this in person.

*Slooooshhhhhhuuuuuuuushhhhhhhh- clack clack---- slushhhh- thump thump  
thump thump thump thump! POP!*

**JOHN**

And that's game, set, match. And you know the rest: after the Supernova turns into a black hole, it sucks the entire galaxy back into it except for the Q ball, and we're ready for another game.

**McENROE-BOT**

You can't be flotting serious! You are the absolute vultures of the galaxy! Trash!

*MCENROE-BOT continues his tantrum in the background while:*

**JOHN**

McEnroe-bot got swept, three games to nothing. All because he won't play any defense.

**CHIP**

Hey John? I'm going to need you to take over as Captain for a few minutes. I've gotta get McEnroe-bot out of here before he snaps another cue in half.

**JOHN**

Uhhh, ok. What should I do?

**McENROE-BOT**

THERE'S CHALK EVERYWHERE! *(keeps yelling in the background)*

**CHIP**

Well, we're getting smoked right now. After my miserable performance to start and Robo-Racket man here getting swept, we're down 5-0. Odds are we're not catching up, so, just think of it as a scrimmage. Play anyone who's got a ghost of a chance against whoever they put up.

**VERT**

...ummm Mr. Frinkel? Do you think I could maybe finally play tonight, maybe? I brought my own cue.

**CHIP**

Vert! Not now! Can't you see McEnroe-bot's in mid-huff? He's about to do the pants on the head thing! John's captain 'til I get back, go pester him for a while!

*McENROE fades as CHIP hustles him out.*

**DEE**

That was pretty sad. All right, acting Captain, what's the plan?

**JOHN**

The plan is to relax and just have fun. It's just a stupid game anyway, right?

**DILURIAN 1**

Yo, we're going to put up our Ace in the hole.

**DILURIANS 2 & 3**

HOLE! (*rampant hilarity*)

**DILURIAN 1**

Yeah... Chad here hasn't lost yet.

**CHAD (DILURIAN 4)**

Yeah. Good luck, losers. These holes are going to be full of my balls.

*More douchey laughing from the DILURIANS.*

**DEE**

These guys really know how to suck the fun out of the room.

**DILURIAN 2**

"SUCK!" Bwaaaaa-hah hah hah!

*DILURIANS 2 & 3 lose it completely, eventually descending into wheezing with the occasional gasp of "suck!" which sets them off again. Meanwhile:*

**DILURIAN 1**

Alright WSS dude. (*"WSS!"*) Who are you going to sacrifice to the SuperNova Gods by way of Chad?

**JOHN**

Ummm... Vert!

**VERT**

Yes, John B?

**JOHN**

You're up!

**VERT**

Oh boy! (*muttering to himself*) Now, let me just assemble my cue here, and—oh, I'm going to need some rosin...

*Fade out on VERT's fussing as we transition to:*

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Attention all residents, this is your Recreation Director-bot. The Fairgrounds' ongoing Wave-athon offers a range of aqueous activities for all tastes, from "slightly damp" through "somewhat squishy" to "thoroughly sodden." This cycle's events will include: our always competitive Marco Polo tournament, hosted by Marco Polo-bot, followed by E. Phillips Fox-bot's "Fox Across the River" waterscape painting class. And be sure to pick up your tickets for Friday's thrilling closing night ceremony, featuring Henry Winkler-bot's disassembly-defying Jumping of the Shark.

*Transition to Suite C. The door whooshes open and a tipsy JOHN and STELLA enter, giggling.*

**STELLA**

Oh, hey! We got the living room to ourselves! Nice!

**JOHN**

Shh! He'll hear us!

**STELLA**

So?

**JOHN**

So, we didn't spend all those creds on anti-grav units to make out on the living room couch like a couple of teenagers.

**STELLA**

Why not? 'Sfun! The risk of getting caught! The thrill of the forbidden! The danger of... of puking your guts out ok that isn't fun. But the rest of it! It's like, the funnest thing in the galaxy.

**JOHN**

Noooo, the funnest thing in the galaxy is... is fun.

**STELLA**

He's asleep. It's late.

**JOHN**

It's not that late, and he's never that asleep.

**STELLA**

Listen. We've been out here like, almost a minute, and he hasn't offered us a single beverage or tried to whip up so much as an amuse bouche. He's gotta be asleep. So c'mere.

**JOHN**

I don't know... I was planning on taking you straight to bed...

**STELLA**

Oh yeah? You got designs on me?

**JOHN**

I might have some designs, yeah. I've got a few blueprints on file, at least. So if you'll just step into my office...

**STELLA**

Well, when you put it that way, how can I resist?

*Whoosh of JOHN's bedroom door.*

**ALTHAAR**

*(over intercom)*

FriendJohn and Stella Reyes! Please, before you are commencing your architectural meeting, Althaar must share with you most terrible news!

**JOHN**

Aagh hey Althaar! *(sotto voce to STELLA)* I told you! *(back to ALTHAAR)* Sorry to wake you, buddy. We're just heading into my room, you can go back to sleep, ok?

**ALTHAAR**

No, FriendJohn, Althaar cannot! For he has been unable to sleep at all this cycle, so deep is the pain in his heart!

**JOHN**

Oh! Do you need us to get you to a MedCenter? Do Iltorians get heart attacks?

**ALTHAAR**

No, FriendJohn, it is not the literal heart, but the emotions of Althaar that are causing pain! Is this not the correct metaphorical organ used to describe Human suffering?

**JOHN**

Oh, ok, yeah.

**STELLA**

Good job with the metaphors, Althaar!

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is thanking you, Stella Reyes! But he is having a great sadness, and must confess his misdeed to his dear friend John!

**JOHN**

Uh oh. You didn't try to make Shrinky-Dinks again, did you?

**ALTHAAR**

No, dear friend! But Althaar has acted contrary to his stated intentions. And now he has betrayed the trust of FriendJohn! (*gross crying*)

**JOHN**

Hey, hey, don't cry. Please. I'm sure it's not a big deal. Just tell me what happened.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar was... was following the suggestion of FriendJohn, and he very much enjoyed on his own the viewing of episode 27 of the American Broadcasting Company's groundbreaking tele-visual program, *LOST*. And then...

**JOHN**

What is it, Althaar? Are you worried about John Locke?

**ALTHAAR**

No, FriendJohn, it was rather the worry for Walter that compelled Althaar! It is the button that could get pushed! And thus, Althaar did not stop at episode 27. Althaar consumed another episode, and another!

**JOHN**

Yeah, sorry I was so late, tonight's match took forever.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar was not even noticing the time! For there were too many twisty surprises and hanging cliffs! The Dharma Initiative has been discovered! And poor Walt kidnapped by pirates! And the smoke monster with the late 20<sup>th</sup> century taxi-receipt voice is still seeking a translator! (*gasp*) And now Althaar is committing SPOILERS! How can FriendJohn ever forgive this treachery?

**JOHN**

It's not a problem, seriously. I'll just catch up with the episodes I've missed, and then—

**ALTHAAR**

But FriendJohn cannot be catching up! Not only because Althaar has already viewed another nine episodes, but because (*sob*) Althaar can no longer properly prioritize life functions! He must know what happens next!

**JOHN**

Hah! Don't feel bad, Althaar! You got caught up in binge-watching, it's happened to all of us.

**ALTHAAR**

...FriendJohn is not up-set?

**JOHN**

No, it's fine! I've done plenty of binge-watching in my time, it's totally normal. Look at it this way: you're having a classic Human experience! You should just relax and go with it.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! This is a great relief to Althaar! And he will be most pleased to fully experience the Human binge-watch without feelings of guilt! But Althaar is also having an ambivalence, because he does not wish to abandon the shared tele-visual experiences with FriendJohn.

**JOHN**

Well, why don't you pick another show for us to watch together? There's literally thousands of Pre-Yawn shows to choose from. And you can find plenty of reviews on HECNET if you don't know where to start.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! And Althaar has also received the recommendations from Mrs. Frondrinax! Perhaps he can make beginning with these!

**JOHN**

Uhhh, sure. Just pick one, and we'll watch a few episodes this weekend, ok? Maybe something British, that way we can get through a whole series in a few hours.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar will do so! Oh, Althaar is very pleased that his binge-watchery has caused no discord between himself and his dear friend John!

**JOHN**

Don't worry about it, really. And anyway, it's not your fault I stayed out so late.

**STELLA**

But Althaar, you should have seen John's team running those Dilurians right outta the bar!

**JOHN**

They'd gotten pretty cocky by the time Stella got there, because they were kicking our butts.

**ALTHAAR**

Oh! Althaar was not aware that the sport of SuperNova was one of full contact! Will FriendJohn require additional cushioning on the sofa until he is recovered?

**JOHN**

Ah, no, another metaphor, sorry. It means they were wiping the floor with—no, uh... they were...

**STELLA**

They were winning a lot.

**JOHN**

Right. And we were losing. A lot.

**STELLA**

But Acting Team Captain John B turned it around!

**ALTHAAR**

Then the evening of competition was ultimately victorious?

**JOHN**

It was! And the team really came together. Amber even scored us a point.

**ALTHAAR**

Congratulation to you from Althaar!

**JOHN**

Thanks, buddy.

**ALTHAAR**

And Althaar is again apologizing for spoiling this happy evening with his distress!

**STELLA**

Althaar, you're way too hard on yourself.

**JOHN**

She's right. You can watch as much *LOST* as you want, I'm 100% fine with it.

**ALTHAAR**

Then... would it be of inconvenience if Althaar were to continue his watchings immediately? Althaar's usual bed-time is long past, but still he is most ardently desiring to know more of the great conundrum that is The Island! And Althaar is having many theories he wishes to see proven or disproven! It is Althaar's conjecture that the mysterious Mr. Eko will be the one to finally effect an escape!

**JOHN**

Not a problem. In fact, you know what? You should go ahead and turn up the TV as loud as you want, right, Stella?

**STELLA**

Huh? Oh! Yeah, maximum volume. It's the only way to go.

**ALTHAAR**

Ee! Then Althaar will begin at once! Good night to you, Human friends!

*Blinng of the TV system turning on again. Whoosh of JOHN's bedroom door.*

**JOHN & STELLA**

Goodnight, Althaar.

*Door whooshes shut behind them. Transition to the Bridge:*

**COMMANDER**

You mean Security hasn't gotten any calls from the Egg this whole time? Not a single fight has been started yet over that miserable SuperNova table?

**NESS**

Affirmative, sir!

**DORMER**

Total radio silence from the Egg, Commander.

**COMMANDER**

Not a single donnybrook? Nary a melee? Not even the slightest hint of a ruckus? Impossible. They're just keeping it under wraps. Amber!

**AMBER**

Sir?

**COMMANDER**

You've been keeping an eye on the league nights, like I asked you to?

**AMBER**

I have?

**COMMANDER**

Asking or telling, Amber!

**AMBER**

Telling? It's been totally chill? There's no gambling? Everyone's having a good time?

**COMMANDER**

I don't like this. I don't like this at all.

**AMBER**

You don't like a good time?

**COMMANDER**

I don't like clandestine shenanigans! There's something's not right about this, and I'm going to figure it out one way or another. When's your next league match?

**AMBER**

Ummm...let me check? Second shift tomorrow? Oh no? That's when they're screening Jaws 47 for the Wave-athon?!

**DORMER**

Aw, bummer. That's definitely top 3 of the franchise, no question.

**NESS**

MechaJaws really kicks some Nazi ass!

**COMMANDER**

Focus, people! Mark my words: there's never been a billiards table that didn't bring ruin upon somebody.

**AMBER**

Maybe it's like, the Fairgrounds curse? But in reverse?

**COMMANDER**

What?

**DORMER**

Oh, yeah! Like, everything goes wrong here, except the stuff that's supposed to!

**COMMANDER**

That makes... a disturbing amount of sense. Hmmm. Frall?

*FRALL incorporates.*

**COMMANDER**

Can you give me a straight answer on something? Is that pool table in the Egg going to cause trouble, or not?

**FRALL**

It is, sir.

**COMMANDER**

Ah hah!

**FRALL**

But not for you.

**COMMANDER**

...Really?

**FRALL**

Really.

**COMMANDER**

Well... ok, then. If you say so. ...*Really?*

**FRALL**

Truly.

**COMMANDER**

I don't know what to think about that.

**FRALL**

Indeed. While you're contemplating, I do have a few items to report: the last of the barbecue sauce has been extricated from the vents in the Ultra-Thermal Rumpus Room;

**COMMANDER**

Oh, good.

**FRALL**

All of the vibranium boogie boards have now been confiscated, so we should see no further sudden submersion incidents;

**COMMANDER**

Great. Let me know as soon as you catch the idiot who was selling those things.

**FRALL**

Of course, sir. And finally, Dr. Lacerta reports that the casualties of the dynamic entropy yoga session have all resumed a stable molecular state.

**COMMANDER**

That's a relief. ...And you're sure, totally sure, that I don't need to do anything about that billiards table?

**FRALL**

I didn't say that, sir.

**COMMANDER**

Ah hah! I knew it! I knew there would be shenanigans! Security! Get up to Lamed 3 and be ready to move at the slightest hint of a fracas!

**NESS & DORMER**

Yessir!

**FRALL**

Commander, I don't believe Security's involvement will be necessary. It should be possible to avert any incipient shenanigans by dint of your personal intervention.

**COMMANDER**

*(suspicious)*

My personal intervention how?

**FRALL**

I would advise you to clear your schedule tonight between 25:45 and 26:30. And to oil up "Lucille."

*Transition to the Egg. Sound of a SuperNova game just ending.*

**DILURIAN 2**

Awwwww, no! You skunked us again!

**CHIP**

That's the way the Capellan crostada crumbles, my friends. Another game?

**DILURIAN 1**

Nah, bro. I think I'm a little too glitched tonight.

**DILURIAN 2**

Yeah, me too, bro.

**JOHN**

Suit yourselves.

**CHIP**

Come back anytime you want a rematch!

**DILURIAN 1**

Yeah, whatever. *(to his bro)* Let's ditch, bro-tisserie chicken.

**DILURIAN 2**

Sounds like a plan, Auguste Bro-din. Hey, let's vandalize the men's room again on the way out.

**DILURIAN 1**

Sweet!

**CHIP**

Wow, we haven't lost all night! We make a great team, John.

**JOHN**

No kidding!

**FRANK STUART**

Well, if it isn't the proprietor himself!

**CHIP**

*(nervous)*

Oh, hi! Welcome back, you g... you! The table's been working out great, as you can see. I've been wiring the credits over just like we said, but you can take a look at the table receipts if you want. No sombrero!

**FRANK**

Hey, buddy, settle down! We were just on our way back out of the quadrant and figured we'd stop by and say hello to our pals at The Electric Egg!

**STUART**

And maybe shoot a game or two while we're at it. We've got next, actually. Rack 'em up. Doubles, right?

**JOHN**

Oh, I was about to meet my girlfriend at the bar, actually.

**FRANK STUART**

Aw, you've got time for one more.

**CHIP**

C'mon, John. We're playing lights out! Stella won't be waiting long, we can smoke this... these... them in a New Baldarak minute!

**JOHN**

...Ok, just one more.

**FRANK**

Now don't laugh at us, you two! It's been who knows how long since we've played the gentlebeing's game of billiards.

*Clack zooooooooom clack zooooooooom crossfades into theme music for the SYSCO and E-BOT show "At the Boobies" (as in Boob-tube). Music runs through ALTHAAR's line at the beginning.*

**ALTHAAR**

Perhaps the opinions of Sysco and E-bot will provide guidance to Althaar in his search for a new tele-visual entertainment to be enjoying with FriendJohn!

**SYSCO**

Welcome to another edition of *At the Boobies*, where me and my animatronic friend talk about how much of our lives we've wasted in front of the boob tube.

**E-BOT**

Well, maybe your life.

**SYSCO**

Thanks for reminding me! All those hours wasted, waiting for a real fight to actually break out in *Dragon Ball Z*. That show might actually owe me a decade.

**E-BOT**

You should've known better. You know what I would've done with those Dragon Balls?

**SYSCO**

Wished for another season of *Voltron*?

**E-BOT**

Hey, we actually got that, you know!

**SYSCO**

Yeah, but I would've wished for the other *Voltron*. With all the space cars.

**E-BOT**

They knew where their bread's buttered, Sysco. On the backs of flying robot lions.

**SYSCO**

You can't beat a robot lion for entertainment value. Of course the organic variety has its charms, too. You know people used to buy them on the black market and keep them like pets?

**E-BOT**

Sounds like an elaborate, not to mention expensive, method of suicide.

**SYSCO**

I'm not endorsing it, but I binged a show last week about this meth-head who just kept collecting lions, tigers, and husbands.

**E-BOT**

Never underestimate what you can do if you just cut out sleeping for a few years.

**SYSCO**

Now, on a historical note, this was the moment in Human TV where the reality show began its inexorable takeover of the documentary genre.

**E-BOT**

It was only a hop, skip, and a SuLu jump to *Cake Wars 4: Charlotte Battle Royale*.

**SYSCO**

So much loss of life in the name of fondant.

**E-BOT**

I have to admit, those phase 2 docu-reality shows were hard to take your eyes off of, though. Like watching a transport crackup.

**SYSCO**

Right? It's like: you know it's bad, but you can't look away. Same as pre-Contact sci-fi. That stuff is just embarrassing.

**E-BOT**

Hey, you can't blame ancient Humans for not understanding modern technology. Most of it was reverse-engineered from other species, there's no way they'd be able to come up with it on their own.

**SYSCO**

Sure, but you know what I *can* blame them for? Every time on these shows, they've got a galaxy full of advanced sapient, and yet somehow, it's always the Humans who end up in charge!

**E-BOT**

Well, it's not like they had any non-Human actors around. What were they going to do, dub over a bunch of dogs and pretend they were Fidorian?

**SYSCO**

Yeah, ok, but you've gotta admit, in retrospect? It's pretty obnoxious.

**E-BOT**

And speaking of obnoxious, we're going to take a commercial break.

**ALTHAAR**

It seems to Althaar that these two hate everything. He is learning only what tele-visual programs are to be avoided!

*Obnoxious Shocked Seltzer rock music.*

**ALTHAAR**

And now there is further advertising to be contended with! Frustration!

**BRO 1**

Yo Bro, this party's strictly for driffers.

**BRO 2**

No worries Bro! I've got this.

*Sound of a can opening. Heavy metal guitar riff!*

**BRO 1**

Shocked Seltzer, bro? Yessss!

**ANNOUNCER**

Slam the can that will make your hair, cilia, or tentacular appendages stand on end!

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

*(sexy whisper)*

Shocked Seltzer!

**ANNOUNCER**

And our new flavor, Saccharinoid nectar-pit, is guaranteed to electrify your sensory apparatus!

**BRO 1**

Really, bro?

**ANNOUNCER**

Yes! Literally!

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

Shocked Seltzer!

**BRO 2**

Like, literally literally?

**ANNOUNCER**

Literally! And in no other way!

**BROS 1 & 2**

Sweet!

**ANNOUNCER**

New Shocked Seltzer. Grab the party by the can!

*Zapping noise, obnoxious guitar.*

**SEXY ROBOT VOICE**

Shocked Seltzer! (*legalese voice*) Shocked Seltzer is neither microwave-safe nor refrigerator-safe. Do not drink Shocked Seltzer if you are pregnant, might become pregnant, or have ever met someone who was pregnant. Some consumers may experience electrical burns or seizures. These are generally mild, and usually stop upon ceasing consumption of Shocked Seltzer. Do not cease consumption of Shocked Seltzer without consulting your physician.

*Rock music fades back into the main bar area at the Egg:*

**SOPON**

Hey, Reyes. Can I get you anything?

**STELLA**

Sure, a Yttrium City, and my boyfriend. Is he here yet?

**SOPON**

Yup, he's back in the parlor with Chip. Here you go!

**STELLA**

Great, thanks. Change is all you!

*Crowd noise shifts as we follow her over to the pool table.*

**STELLA**

Hey, folks!

**XTOPPS**

Heyooooo!

**DEE**

Stella! You're just in time to see John and Chip beat the Zoot Suit for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in a row.

**STELLA**

Oh, wow! John's been putting in the time, I guess the practice is paying off.

*Clack zoom beep beep zoom slurp slooooooshhh thumpthumpthumpthump pop*

**STELLA**

Way to go Nova there, champ!

**JOHN**

Oh hey, you saw that? Been having a good night. *Mwah!*

**CHIP**

John B! I'm starting to think that's short for billiards!

**STELLA**

All right, I'm here to take this one home.

**CHIP**

Just be careful with his hands, ok? We're going to need them second shift tomorrow.

**FRANK STUART**

Wow, you guys are way out of my league!

**FRANK**

That was some really good shooting. Hey, you think maybe—

**STUART**

—we could get one more game in before I go? I mean, who knows when we'll be out here again? Might be our last chance for awhile.

**JOHN**

I'd love to stay, but you know, my girlfriend can just throw me over her shoulder and carry me out of here if she gets impatient, so...

**FRANK STUART**

Sure sure.

**STUART**

I know you've got places to be—

**FRANK**

—but you’re such a good shot! You’ve been tearing it up all night. Just one more game?

**JOHN**

Thanks, but no thanks.

**STUART**

Tell you what: why don’t we put down a little something to make it worth your while?

**CHIP**

Whoa, hey now! No gambling on this table! The Commander was very specific, and loud, about that.

**FRANK**

Who’s gambling? We can call it a... tutoring session. With a cash bonus available, for a good performance.

**STUART**

And if we happen to win, well, you give us a “refund”. For the bad teaching. That’s not gambling! That’s just solid pedagogical practice!

**FRANK**

And you know, it raises the stakes a little. Metaphorically speaking. Makes it more fun.

**JOHN**

Yeah, I don’t know...

**CHIP**

*(aside, to JOHN)*

C’mon, let’s play one more. You know what’s better than beating that sorry low life on their own table? Beating them on their own table for money. And I know you could use the cash.

**JOHN**

...Yeah, I guess I can stick around a little bit. Stella, you ok with one more game? Shouldn’t take more than a couple of minutes.

**STELLA**

Sure, I’ll grab another YC. Go get ‘em!

**FRANK STUART**

Let’s go, boys!

**CHIP**

My break!

*Clack zoooooom BANG clack clack clack clack of the break transitions to the bustling customs area. Some splashing as a previous incoming passenger exits one of the saline customs tanks.*

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Please-enjoy-your-stay-at-the-Human-Exchange-Concourse-and-share-in-the-many-wonders-Humanity-has-to-offer-NEXT!

*A big splash as the SHARK enters the customs tank. A bit of sputtering from KAISER WILHELM-BOT.*

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

*(to himself)*

Ach, I hate these *beschissene* aqua-tank shifts.

*(to the SHARK)*

Is this all your luggage, gesin?

**SHARK**

Yup!

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Name?

**SHARK**

Donald. Donald Escroc.

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Are you a League citizen?

**SHARK**

Nope!

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Species?

**SHARK**

Shark!

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Purpose of travel?

**SHARK**

Business.

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

And just what is your business?

**SHARK**

I'm a, you know, entertainer. I'm booked for the Wave-athon closing event?

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

And is this a permanent position?

**SHARK**

Heh. I wish. This is more of a side gig. I'm only here through Wednesday, then it's back to the day job. I'm an accountant with—

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Your off-station activities are irrelevant to this inquiry, gesin.

**SHARK**

Sure, sure, sorry. I guess I'm an oversharer, heh. Always running late because I've got one more thing to—

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

Any restricted substances to declare?

**SHARK**

Nope! I do carry a few appetite suppressants, strictly over-the-counter stuff, just in case... well, you never know. But don't worry, I won't be taking a bite out of ya!

**KAISER WILHELM-BOT**

I have no worries on that account, gesin, as my exterior casing is composed entirely of centrifugal-cast molybdenum. (*Stamp! Stamp!*) Please-enjoy-your-stay-at-the-Human-Exchange-Concourse-and-share-in-the-many-wonders-Humanity-has-to-offer-NEXT!

*Another loud splash and more sputtering from WILHELM-BOT as the SHARK exits the tank, followed by slippery-flippery sounds as the SHARK makes his way across the customs area. Consternation from passers-by, "Oh my God!" "Shaaaaaark!" plus some reassurances from the SHARK : "Excuse me, coming through!" "Watch the fins there!" "No worries, folks, I just ate!" Transition back to the bar area of the Egg, where we can hear a distant Zoooom slurp... sloooosh thumpthumpthumpthump POP from the direction of the pool table.*

**CHIP**

*(in the distance)*

What!? That's not— I mean— what?!

**XTOPPS**

Sounds like boss-man bit it.

**DEE**

Maybe that'll be good for him.

**STELLA**

What? Why?

**DEE**

I mean, at first the SuperNova was fun, but when Chip plays? Every time he wins, he gets more full of himself. I thought nervous Chip was a pain in the palps to deal with, but cocky Chip? Is intolerable. The last couple days, he's been walking around here with a head like an Arcturan zephyr-jelly. So he could use some puncturing, if you ask me.

*FRALL appears.*

**FRALL**

I couldn't agree more, Dee.

**DEE**

Oh ho! Now I know this is going to be good. It's comeuppance-o'clock!

**FRALL**

Indeed. Shall we adjourn to the gentlebeings' parlor?

**DEE**

Let's shall. Anyone else want a front row seat for this transport-wreck?

**XTOPPS**

Abso-tivo-luciously!

**STELLA**

Yeah, I wanna be ready to throw John over my shoulder and book if this starts getting stupid.

*We move over to the gentlebeings' parlor, where another game is just ending badly for CHIP.*

**CHIP**

No! How!?

**FRANK STUART**

Wow! I can't believe it!

**FRANK**

You know what? I'm gonna have these framed!

**STUART**

The credits I won from Chip Frinkel—playing on his own table!

**FRANK STUART**

What a conversation piece!

**FRANK**

Well, it's been fun, Chip.

**STUART**

See you around sometime!

**CHIP**

Hey, hey, wait a minute! That was a lucky shot! You gotta give me a chance to break even, here!

**FRALL**

Good evening, Mr. Frinkel.

**CHIP**

Gah! Uh... and by "break even," I of course mean... something that... that has nothing to do with the wagering of credits! Obviously!

**FRALL**

Obviously. And that is?

**CHIP**

That is... uh... (*sotto voce*) Help me out here, John?

**JOHN**

I got nothing.

**CHIP**

Nertz!

**FRALL**

Please don't expend any further effort on your ham-handed attempts to conceal your improprieties, amusing though they may be. I wouldn't bust you for that even if I had the jurisdictionary right to do so. I'm simply here as an impartial observer.

**CHIP**

You? Ha! You're about as impartial as Judge Roy Bean!

**STUART**

Hey, simmer down, pal. There's no problem.

**FRANK**

Because there's nothing here to observe!

**FRANK STUART**

We were just leaving.

**CHIP**

Oh no no no no no. We're playing one more game. Come on, John. Rack 'em!

**JOHN**

Yeah, I don't know. I'm getting a bad feeling about this. Maybe you should just cut your losses?

**CHIP**

No! We just got pantsed! You can't ditch me now!

**STELLA**

Chip. If John doesn't want to play, John doesn't have to play.

**CHIP**

Uh... right. Yeah. No problem. Just me, then. We shouldn't have been playing doubles in the first place, they've only got the one set of arms.

**STUART**

All right, since you feel so strongly about it, I guess we can play just one more.

**FRANK**

Are we playing for what's on the table, or...?

**CHIP**

How about double or nothing? No, triple!

**FRANK STUART**

Fine with me!

**CHIP**

All right then. Bang 'em!

*Clack zoooooom BANG clack clack clack.... Zoom clack beep beep sloosssh  
thumpthumpthumpthump POP*

**STELLA**

That... was quick.

**JOHN**

He went Nova on the break! I've never seen that before.

**FRALL**

You'll be seeing it again.

**DEE**

This is amazing.

**CHIP**

All right, that was... that wasn't... You gotta give me another shot. Let's run 'em back.

**STUART**

If you insist.

**FRANK**

Same bet this time?

**CHIP**

Uhhhhh...*(low, to the others)* Hey can anyone spot me? That ettin just hit the lottery those last couple games. I gotta put him back in his place. My rep is on the line here!

**JOHN**

Chip, have you thought this through? I don't think that was—

**DEE**

Shh! Don't ruin this for me!

**STELLA**

I'd let it go, John. Some lessons have to be learned the hard way.

**JOHN**

Fair enough.

**XTOPPS**

Here you go, bossman. *(sounds of metal clonking onto the table)*

**CHIP**

Thanks, Xtopps. *(beat)* Are those—why are you carrying around platinum bullion?

**XTOPPS**

Mad money!

**CHIP**

You— ok fine. *(to FRANK STUART)* All right, you slimy Syndicate stooge, your number's up! I've got a stake now, and I'm about to win all my money back, with interest!

**FRANK STUART**

Ouch!

**FRANK**

No need to get personal, Mr. Frinkel.

**STUART**

But I think we've got a problem, here.

**FRANK**

See, we play for credits, not coinage.

**STUART**

We like to keep on the move, you know.

**FRANK**

Keep our assets liquid.

**STUART**

And those chunks of metal there are very, very solid.

**FRANK**

Which means you're going to have to put up something else if you want to pique our interest.

**STUART**

Otherwise, we're out of here. With our hard-won creds.

**CHIP**

Dammit! I'm all out of cash!

**FRANK**

Well, maybe you have something else you could put up?

**FRANK STUART**

To keep it interesting.

**CHIP**

Fine! I know a lucky shot when I see it. I'll put up anything in here. You name it.

**STUART**

Well, hey, here's a thought. How about you put up your glassware as collateral?

**CHIP**

You mean all the glassware at the Egg?

**FRANK STUART**

Yup.

**JOHN**

Wow, that seems labor intensive. Are they going to pack it up themselves?

**CHIP**

What do you want with my glassware?

**FRANK**

It's more the principle of the thing.

**STUART**

But I would like to get my mitts on some of those flaming champagne flutes! That was a real pip!

**CHIP**

Ok. My glassware. Against all your winnings?

**FRANK STUART**

Oh, no.

**FRANK**

If you want to win *everything* back, well...

**STUART**

You'll need to throw something more into the pot.

**CHIP**

Anything.

**FRANK**

How 'bout the tables?

**STUART**

And chairs!

**FRANK**

Right, why keep one without the other?

**FRANK STUART**

Deal?

**CHIP**

Deal. Let's go.

*Clack zoooooom BANG zoom beep thump thump thump POP!*

**CHIP**

AAGH!

**STUART**

Another Nova on the Big Bang!

**FRANK**

This really is my lucky day!

**DEE**

Look on the bright side, Chip! We needed some new highballs anyway.

**XTOPPS**

Truth! Just flip that coin and the other side is shiny!

**FRANK**

All right, Chip. Time to pay up.

**STUART**

Unless you'd like to play for something else?

**FRANK**

I dunno Stuart, he already gave us all his furniture, not to mention the glassware, and that's gonna take a long time to pack. I don't know what else he could possibly— Say! What's that over there?

**STUART**

Is that an aquarium, Chip? Waaay out here in the Teegarden's System? You got an aquarium?

**FRANK**

We'll play you for that, Chip.

**CHIP**

I mean... come on folks... that's... that's the aquarium.

**FRANK**

No problem.

**STUART**

We get it. You're from Earth, after all. Home of the chicken.

**FRANK**

We'll just get a few hover-crates for the glassware, and we'll be out of your hair.

**CHIP**

Rrrrgh... Rack 'em up!

*Clack zoooooom BANG clack thump*

**XTOPPS**

Uh, hey, anyone else getting a little nerved about the directionality here?

*Clack zoom clack thump.*

**DEE**

Nah, it'll be fine. Right, Frall?

**FRALL**

Eventually.

*Clack zoom thump.*

**CHIP**

Ha! The Frink is back!

**JOHN**

Good one, Chip!

*Clack zoooooom thump.*

**STELLA**

Looks like he may pull this off!

*Clack zooom clack pfff*

**FRANK**

Nice run there, Chip!

**STUART**

You almost had us that time.

**FRANK STUART**

Almost.

**XTOPPS**

Yeahhhhhh, I'm gonna effoe. if any of you zoods want me, I'll be in the back. Of a storage locker. Somewhere in the Forbidden Zone.

**FRALL**

Please, Sin Xtopps, have a seat. I can assure you that you'll be entirely safe. And I'd hate for anyone to miss out on the spectacle of your employer's abject humiliation.

**DEE**

C'mon, Xtopps, foob out! You know Frall's never wrong. And this is going to be a takedown for the ages!

**STUART**

Wow, if you'd made that shot, you'd've had the Neutron right where you wanted it.

*Clack zooom thump.*

**FRANK**

And I wouldna even hadda chance to shoot.

*Clack zooom thump.*

**STUART**

Back in the day they called that a Break 'N' Run.

*Clack zooom beep beep beep.*

**FRANK**

I guess because you could break 'em up, win the game, and run home!

**FRANK STUART**

But for our purposes tonight....

**STUART**

If we win this one...

*Clack beep beep slorp slosshhhhhhhh thumpthumpthump*

**FRANK**

Well, I wouldn't suggest you try to run.

*Pop!*

**FRANK STUART**

Well, wouldja look at that!

**CHIP**

Noooooo! My aquarium...

**STUART**

Well now, this has been a lot of fun, Chip.

**FRANK**

We better call someone to drain that aquarium so we can get it up to the loading dock.

**STUART**

Why not just tip it over in here?

**CHIP**

Hey, I never said you could wreck the place!

**FRANK**

But it's kinda ours to wreck, Chip.

**STUART**

There's nothing left in here we don't own.

**FRANK STUART**

Is there?

*FRANK STUART go about assessing the value of the Egg's equipment in the background while:*

**JOHN**

Uh, Chip?

**CHIP**

Yeah, John.

**JOHN**

You got hustled, Chip.

**CHIP**

I got hustled, John.

**JOHN**

What're you going to do?

**CHIP**

I don't know. I can't beat them and I've lost almost everything in this room.

**STELLA**

Can't you just cut your losses and reboot?

**DEE**

Yeah! New furniture, new glassware, new look! Call it a Grand Re-Opening.

**CHIP**

Maybe, yeah. But something tells me they're not done with me yet.

**FRANK STUART**

Hey, no hard feelings, pal.

**FRANK**

We feel real bad about all this, you know?

**STUART**

So we want to let you play one more game. Give you a shot at winning back the whole magilla.

**CHIP**

I'd love to, but you've cleaned me out. I don't have anything else you could possibly want.

**FRANK**

I don't know about that, Chip.

**STUART**

There's always some, whaddayacallem...

**FRANK STUART**

Intangibles.

**JOHN**

Uh oh.

**CHIP**

Intangibles?

**FRANK**

Services you could perform for us.

**STUART**

Actions that would be to our benefit.

**FRANK**

That you might not otherwise be willing to undertake.

**CHIP**

Uh, yeah, maybe I'll just stand pat. That aquarium was more trouble than it was worth, really.

**STUART**

You got an interesting definition of "trouble," Chip.

**FRANK**

Ours is a little different.

**STUART**

Involves a lot more compound fractures.

**CHIP**

Oh.

**FRANK**

So, this is just my opinion, but I think...

**FRANK STUART**

...you're gonna want to give us one more game.

**CHIP**

And the stakes?

**STUART**

A simple favor. It's nothing, really.

**FRANK**

Literally nothing.

**STUART**

That's right. All you would have to do for us is... nothing.

**CHIP**

This sounds like a complicated nothing.

**FRANK**

Well, you would have to keep your mouth shut.

**STUART**

And not cause any trouble.

**FRANK STUART**

While we walk the Xyb out of here.

**XTOPPS**

Aw, blech.

**DEE**

Uh, Frall?

**FRALL**

Wait for it.

**CHIP**

I thought you didn't care about Xtopps!

**FRANK**

Did we say that, Stu?

**STUART**

I don't think we said that, Frankie.

**FRANK**

What we said was, we came here for business.

**STUART**

And the billiards business... is good business.

**FRANK**

But you know what isn't?

**STUART**

Letting some PBJ get away with quincing out a member of the Syndicate.

**FRANK**

Doesn't matter how penny-ante the operator is. If people find out about it...

**FRANK STUART**

That's bad business.

**STUART**

So we're gonna play one more game.

**FRANK**

And if you happen to win, well, we walk out of here, you keep your aquarium, and your friend here keeps all his knees.

**STUART**

But if you lose...

**FRANK STUART**

We're taking the Xyb.

**CHIP**

Hey, listen, fellas, there's got to be something else we can work out, here.

**FRANK**

There is not.

**CHIP**

I can't just— there's no way I could do that even if I wanted! Xtopps literally has, like, royal privileges here. Technically, I report to him!

**STUART**

We know all that, Chip.

**FRANK**

We're pretty well informed.

**STUART**

We don't just go blundering into a situation without having all the angles covered.

**FRANK**

See, it turns out that the little stunt that made this place Xybidont territory? Didn't sit too well back in the Imperium.

**STUART**

So they're not going to make too much of a fuss if the kid who upended a 50-thousand-year-old tradition meets with an unfortunate accident.

**FRANK**

We figure the only one who might kick up a fuss? Is you.

**STUART**

So if we win, that's just what you don't do while we're walking him out of here. Those are the stakes. Now, rack 'em up.

**CHIP**

Yeah, just— just gimme a second? ...Ugh. I can't believe it's come to this. ...Frall?

**FRALL**

Yes, Chip Frinkel?

**CHIP**

Don't you have anything to say about this... this attempted Xyb-napping?

**FRALL**

Yes. It's hilarious.

**CHIP**

Frall! I am... I am begging you.

**FRALL**

I didn't hear the magic word.

**CHIP**

Aaargh. Would you... please... help me?

**FRALL**

Of course, Chip. I already have.

**CHIP**

You—what? When? How?

**FRALL**

You'll find out in 5, 4, 3, 2...

**COMMANDER**

Good evening, Mr. Frinkel! I told you I'd be coming up for an inspection.

**CHIP**

Commander! I, uh, well, the thing is... You were right. About everything. This table is trouble, and I'm in a heap of it.

**FRALL**

Honesty on tap at the Egg tonight. Is this a new drink special?

**COMMANDER**

Well, this is a pretty pass, Chip. Not only gambling, but gambling with the Syndicate. If you lost a bet with them, I'm certainly not getting you out of it. That's way above a simple station Commander's pay grade.

**CHIP**

I know, Commander. I just... they... just...

**COMMANDER**

They hustled you, smark-for-brains.

**CHIP**

They took everything. Even the aquarium!

**FRANK STUART**

You got some real nice fish, Chip!

**COMMANDER**

I don't see what the problem is here. Sure, you may have to tighten your belt a little until you can get back on your feet, but I think it's money well spent if it's taught you a valuable lesson about billiards, gambling, and always taking the Commander's advice. Don't you?

**CHIP**

Commander, they want to play one more game. And if they win... they're taking Xtopps.

**COMMANDER**

I see. Well, with his status as Baronet, I can't legally stop you from taking him.

**FRANK STUART**

We know.

**COMMANDER**

But I'll play you for him.

**FRANK**

What?

**STUART**

You?

**COMMANDER**

Why not? I've played a game or two of billiards in my day. Besides, I'm a highly trained League of Humans officer! I like my chances.

**STUART**

I don't have a problem with that, do you, Frankie?

**FRANK**

Me neither, Stu. What do you say, Chip? You good with the Commander stepping in?

**CHIP**

Uh... am I?

**FRALL**

You are.

**CHIP**

I am!

**COMMANDER**

Relax, Chip, this'll all be over before you know it. How hard can it be? Just hand me one of those, uh, stick things, and we can get started.

**CHIP**

Uh, Commander? Are you sure you're up to this?

**COMMANDER**

It's simple geometry! They were teaching this to 10 year olds on Earth 2000 years ago.

**FRANK STUART**

That's right!

**STUART**

Easy as 2000 year old geometry!

**FRANK**

We'll even let you do the big bang, just to be sporting.

**COMMANDER**

Now, what were the stakes again?

**STUART**

If we lose, Chip gets everything back.

**FRANK**

If you lose...

**FRANK STUART**

We take the Xyb.

**XTOPPS**

You drifters always have to say it with both heads at once?

**COMMANDER**

Right. Well, here goes...

*Click zzzip thlep fzzzz (bad miscue)*

**COMMANDER**

*(sotto voce)*

Nertz. *(louder)* That was just a practice shot!

**CHIP**

Hey, fellas, maybe we don't really need to do this? What do you say the Commander just gives you a free parking pass or something and we call it even?

**FRANK STUART**

No thank you.

*Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump. Clack zoom fizz.*

**CHIP**

Oh, thank Jones. Come on, Commander, you can do it! *(lower)* You can do it, right?

**COMMANDER**

Relax, Chip. I think I'm getting the hang of it now.

*Clack zoom fizz.*

**CHIP**

Oh, frill me.

**FRANK STUART**

Ooh, so close!

**FRANK**

Now let's see, here—

*Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump.*

**STUART**

Oops!

**XTOPPS**

Aw, mang, now they're just flotting with us! They could at least make it quick.

**COMMANDER**

My shot again, right? Say, Sin— I don't think I caught your name?

**FRANK**

Frank

**STUART**

Stuart.

**COMMANDER**

A pleasure. What do you say we make this really interesting?

**FRANK**

What did you have in mind?

**COMMANDER**

How about this? If you win, you not only get Xtopps, but I'll issue you a priority customs order. You'll be able to bypass inspection of any cargo moving on or off this station. A pretty useful advantage for someone in your line of work, yes?

**STUART**

That is... a very tempting offer, Commander. And if we lose?

**COMMANDER**

You give up all your winnings, call off the hit on Xtopps, and the Syndicate agrees to never again set foot on the Fairgrounds.

**FRANK STUART**

... You're on.

**COMMANDER**

Wonderful! Now, Dee? Would you mind handing me that case I left over there?

**DEE**

What, this one? Sure, here you go.

*DEE hands the COMMANDER her case, which she opens. It contains an incredibly badass and state-of-the-art pool cue. Possibly a lightsaber-like hum? The COMMANDER assembles the cue in a very impressive fashion.*

**FRANK STUART**

Uh oh.

*Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump.*

**JOHN**

Off to a good start...

*Clack zoooooom clack thump. Clack zoom thump*

**XTOPPS**

Looking spry, Commandante!

*Clack zoom crack crack thump thump*

**DEE**

I did not see this coming.

*Clack zoom crack crack thump thump*

**CHIP**

Wow! Hey, Sopon? Stand by for a round on the house!

**SOPON**

You got it, boss!

*Clack zzzooooom crick thump clack fzzzzzzzzzz beep beep beep*

**FRANK STUART**

Aww nertz.

**COMMANDER**

Frank Stuart,

*Clack zzzzzzooooom bbeeeep slloooooooshhhh thumpitythumpthumthwaappityPOP*

**COMMANDER**

Don't bring your shness to the Fairgrounds.

**ALIEN BARFLY**

You tell 'em, sister!

*Wild cheering and celebration from all assembled (except FRANK STUART).*

*Fade into an announcement:*

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Following the events of last night's screening of Jaws 47, we felt it prudent to make an announcement regarding registration for the Wave-athon's closing event. It IS safe to go back in the water. There has been a dramatic uptick in refund requests, and it is our understanding that this phenomenon is caused by the fear of being ripped asunder by the toothy maw of an oversized cartilaginous aquatic predator.

The shark in question has assured us that he has absolutely no intention of consuming Henry Winkler-bot or any other sapient. He does, however, intend to sign autographs and take photos with any un-intimidated members of the public, in the main concourse between 9:20 and 11:45 tomorrow. That is all.

*A slow day at the Egg. Pool league practice.*

**CHIP**

All right team, thanks for being here. We've got a rematch with the Dilurians next cycle, and you know they're going to be all chesty after that beatdown Vert administered last time.

**JOHN**

Great job, Vert!

**VERT**

No retreat! No surrender!

**CHIP**

But the good news is, we've got a secret weapon. I got a message from the Bridge a few minutes ago, and it seems that an "honorary team member" is going to be coming up to give us a little tutorial on adding Doppler Effect without messing up our aim. This should really give us an edge. So, why don't we warm up with a couple scrimmages while we wait?

*Overlapping responses:*

**AMBER**

Okay?

**DEE**

Works for me!

**JOHN**

You got it.

**VERT**

Okay, boss!

**McENROE-BOT**

Chalk it up!

*Clack (FRALL appearing noise) zoooooom clip spliffff.... Tssssssssss*

**FRALL**

You really should stay down when you shoot, Mr. Frinkel.

**CHIP**

Yeah, well, it's a little hard to concentrate when someone's just manifested over the middle of the table! What are you doing here, anyway?

**FRALL**

The Commander suggested I join you for practice. You told her there'd always be a spot here for a member of the officer's club, unless I'm mistaken. *(aside)* And I'm not.

**CHIP**

You've got to be kidding me.

**DEE**

You know, Frall's right, Chip. Sometimes you pop up right when you strike the ball.

**VERT**

You have to stay low and follow through.

**FRALL**

Smooth strokes, Chip. And stay down. When you shoot try saying to yourself, "Stay down for the camera. Cheese!" and then, I suppose you can imagine that a lifeform exists somewhere in the galaxy that would have an interest in photographing you of all people.

**CHIP**

This is...

**JOHN**

Why not give it a try, Chip? A coach who knows literally everything is bound to have some good advice.

**McENROE-BOT**

At least reBang the balls up so we can get a better spread.

**CHIP**

*(grumble)*

**FRALL**

Now check your stance—you corporeal types are sadly subject to the whims of gravity, after all... There you go...

**CHIP**

*(grumble)*

**FRALL**

Eye on the ball... don't grip too tightly. Smooth strokes... now say it with me...

*Clack zooooooooom BOOOOM*

**CHIP/FRALL**

Cheese!

*Closing credits music.*

**ANNOUNCER**

You've been listening to *Life with Althaar*, episode fifteen.

This episode was written by Chris Lee for Gemini CollisionWorks and starred

Berit Johnson as Althaar

John Amir as John B

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall

Eli Ganas as H.F.

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Chris Lee as Chip Frinkel

Zuri Washington as Dee

and Derrick Peterson as Xtopps

and also featured

{additional credits}.

*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.  
Theme and Interstitial Music composed and performed by Anna Stefanic  
Life With Althaar logo and illustration 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 Althaar's experiment in binge-watching is coming along...

*Whoosh of the door to Suite C.*

**JOHN**

Hey, Althaar, I'm home! Are you still up?

**ALTHAAR**

Indeed, FriendJohn! Althaar has been continuing his authentic Human binge-watching experience! He is having a great quantity of questions for you, when you are having the time to be answering!

**JOHN**

Sure, no problem. You finished *LOST*, huh? What are you onto now?

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has been attempting to make decision! Althaar had hope that his many viewings of tele-visual dramas would be sufficient to prepare him for the more advanced study of comedy, but so far every early Human sit-com he has been watching has filled him with a great sadness. Such as the story of the poor tele-visual writer with the terrible inner ear condition that is causing him to continually injure himself on his living room furnishings! But Althaar has great hopes for the one he is consuming next! It is most highly praised by every source Althaar has consulted! So it is a certainty that this sit-com could have nothing in it that will make sadness in Althaar!

**JOHN**

Sounds good! What's it called?

**ALTHAAR**

*M\*A\*S\*H!*

*Blinnng as ALTHAAR starts up the TV again.*