

Life with Althaar
Episode 23: Trade Test Transmissions
Version 2.2, 11/12/20—Amanda (v2, BAJ)

[scene 1a] A corridor on the Fairgrounds.

BURROUGHS-BOT

Attention citizens of the Fairgrounds, this is your once and future Recreation Director-bot with another entry in this week's cavalcade of disappointments. The upcoming tabletop Blitz Ball charity tournament has been cancelled, indefinitely. Our apologies to Saint Despondent's Home For Unpromising Orphans. Best of luck, kiddos, and remember: beware of Venusian pleasure merchants who say they don't want money, do not proffer sympathy to a Mantihomina in between matings, and if you're ever doing business with a Dilurian son-of-a-bitch, get it in writing. It has also been "suggested" by the Friendship Committee that you disregard any unfounded rumors that may question the good intentions of our Fugulnari advisors. I am of course specifically referring to Mark Wahlberg-bot, who is currently regurgitating certain plot points from an unfortunate entry in his early 21st Century filmography. Just give it the old Ganymede shrug-off, and then we can all go back to ignoring Wahlberg-bot for the usual reasons. That is all.

[scene 1b] We join JOHN and STELLA as they walk down the corridor.

STELLA

And now they've gone and outlawed Blitz Ball, too. Great.

JOHN

I don't think anything's been outlawed. Technically.

STELLA

Ok, sure, but it seems a little significant that suddenly all of these events are being cancelled. And that every one of them involves some form of physical activity. Don't you think that's weird?

JOHN

Of course it's weird, but... look where we are.

STELLA

Sure, but this isn't, like, Fairgrounds weird, it's just weird weird. This feels... I mean, it seems silly to get worked up about Blitz Ball, but... I don't know, everything just feels *off* lately.

JOHN

I will admit that everything definitely feels stickier.

STELLA

Oh, do not get me started on the humidity!

JOHN

Right? It's like a greenhouse in here!

STELLA

I'm sure that's exactly the point.

JOHN

Now that I think of it, Mrs. F was always complaining about it being too dry for her taste.

STELLA

So, the Committee must have "suggested" a climate adjustment. By this time next week, we'll probably be living in the galaxy's largest orbital rainforest.

JOHN

Oh, speaking of which, did you see the latest news from Earth? They've got this new "Terraform Terra" initiative, supposed to get the native rainforests back to pre-ME6 levels. If they manage to pull it off, they'd be able to cut the carbon-scrubber network back by 60%.

STELLA

And that makes all this okay?

JOHN

Well, no, but... I thought you might like to hear some good news. Silver lining, you know?

STELLA

Yeah, I don't know if that silver lining is shiny enough for me. I spent all day yesterday re-working next month's shift schedule, and I still haven't heard back from the Committee on whether or not this version passes muster.

JOHN

The Fugalnari are setting Sanitation schedules now?

STELLA

Oh, no, of course not! That would be too simple! They've just requested final approval on *my* schedules. And will they tell me what was wrong with the last four I submitted? They will not. They'll just "suggest" I try again. If this is the famous Fugalnari "efficiency," it can piss up a trellis. Oh, and now look who's spotted us,. Great.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Guten Tag, fellow sinners!

JOHN

Yup, nothing like a little proselytizing to really lift the mood. Hi, Martin Luther-bot. How are you doing?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Mir geht's gut, Herr B, danke! And how are you and your *freundin* enjoying this day that the good Lord has blessed us with?

STELLA

We're suffering through it as best we can.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Spoken like a true Protestant! I shall make converts of you yet!

JOHN

Yeah, good luck with that. What's all this? Have you been posting theses again?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Nein, Herr B. I was approached yesterday by some *Pflanzen* who had heard of my talent for nailing things to other things! They offered to compensate me for posting these charming little notices about the Fairgrounds.

STELLA

The Fugulnari have you putting up propaganda?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ach, nein! Not propaganda, no! These are just some catchy slogans that will remind everyone how fortunate we all are that the Fugulnari are here to lend us their expertise! With illustrations in full color! Very tasteful.

STELLA

That sounds a lot like propaganda.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ach, potato, *Kartoffel, lass uns das Ganze absagen.* [*“let's call the whole thing off”*]

STELLA

Let's see what we've got here... “The Fugulnari-Human Friendship Advisory Committee is *rooting* for you!”... “The FHFAC will never *kale* your vibe,” eurgh... “Say “aloe” to your new friends: the Fugulnari!”... well, none of these are very clever, but I'd still call it propaganda.

JOHN

(does the hissing between the teeth thing you do when you get a paper cut) Ow! These are some seriously sharp posters, Luther-bot.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Ah, *danke!* They are very striking, *ja?*

JOHN

No, I meant that literally, I just sliced the hell out of my finger. I think the quality of this poster stock is a lot more dangerous than anything that's printed on it. What kind of paper is this?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Well, it is not exactly what one would classify as paper. It is actually a 28-gauge anodized aluminum.

STELLA

Sheet metal, huh. Let me guess, the Fugelnari "suggested" that would be a more appropriate material?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Well... they did not explicitly forbid the use of a product made from the mashed pulp of a once-living plant, but, you know. It would not be the most tasteful choice, *nicht wahr?*

STELLA

So... better safe than sorry?

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

Genau! I believe that the life of each Christian should be spent in repentance, but I even I have my limits. *Tschuss!*

LUTHER-BOT continues down the corridor.

JOHN

Well, there you have it. The Fugelnari didn't force him to do anything.

STELLA

Sure. He's just being super careful to avoid doing anything the Fugelnari might possibly have a problem with, like everyone else around here. But that's kind of worse, if you think about it. I mean, if the Committee straight out said, "Paper is illegal now," people would... well, no one but Kaiser Wilhelm-bot would get particularly jagged over that one, I guess.

JOHN

Right.

STELLA

But the point is, they're not doing that. They're just making "suggestions." Giving "advice." And no one wants to be the first to find out what happens to Humans who don't take it.

JOHN

I mean, there's the travel restrictions. Those are pretty explicit.

STELLA

But are they? We know that they're refusing some Humans exit visas, but we don't know why. They haven't posted any actual rules for who gets to travel and who doesn't. You just apply, and then you get back a "yes" or a "no." No explanation. So now everyone's just flailing around, trying to guess what is or isn't allowed, or what's allowed today but won't be tomorrow.

JOHN

Or what's technically allowed, but probably a bad idea because it goes on your permanent record or something.

STELLA

Exactly! Everyone's bending over backwards to make sure they don't do anything that *might* upset our new "friends." So the Fugulnari don't even *have* to order us around, because we're doing it to ourselves without them lifting a... whatever they have for fingers!

JOHN

Petioles, I think?

STELLA

So not the point!

JOHN

Sorry.

STELLA

(sigh) No, I'm sorry. I guess I'm kind of in a mood today. But I shouldn't take it out on you.

JOHN

That's ok. It's not like you don't have a good reason. And I'm sure the humidity doesn't help.

STELLA

It definitely does not.

[scene 2] Opening credits music.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents..!

LIFE... WITH... ALTHAAR..! Season 2!

Episode 23... "Trade Test Transmissions!"

[scene 3a] The Commander's office. AMBER has intruded surreptitiously to watch a video message in private.

AMBER'S MOM #1

(on the recording; very very flat, regardless of the emotions being expressed)

And Amber, honey. Be on the lookout for a special package. I'm sending you a couple of your mother's wall hangings. Retirement has been so good for her. Her newfound expertise in the medium of black velvet is nothing short of breathtaking.

AMBER'S MOM #2

(inaudible mumbling: "Stop it, sweetie, you're embarrassing me.")

AMBER'S MOM #1

Well, you shouldn't be embarrassed. These are manufacture quality. I'm so proud of you.

AMBER'S MOM #2

("It's just something to keep my hands busy. I never actually wanted to retire.")

AMBER'S MOM #1

Do you have to bring this up now. Anyway, there's a few in there for Ashlee. They're the ones with the flowers on them, you know, because plants. Make sure she gets those, ok sweetie.

AMBER'S MOM #2

("And tell her to write us.")

A door whoosh during the following as TORIANNA enters, unnoticed.

AMBER'S MOM #1

Of course. Tell her her moms would really appreciate a message from their little bean, just to assure us that she hasn't been eaten by any of those horrible vent biters or anything. I know they're mostly gone now, but a mother worries. All right, I guess that's everything. But always remember that we love you both so very much.

AMBER'S MOM #2

("Love you guys! Bye!")

[scene 3b] Bleep of the message ending.

TORIANNA

Ahem?

AMBER

Commander? How much of that did you hear?

TORIANNA

Enough to answer a few questions, but bring up so many more. What are you doing in my office?

AMBER

I'm sorry for intruding? I just wanted to watch something in private for a minute? I didn't think you'd mind?

TORIANNA

I don't, as long as you don't make a habit of it. But, ah, for future reference? I'm not certain just how private my office is. So I wouldn't play any messages in here that you don't want any of the more furtive ICSB agencies to hear about.

AMBER

Thank you, sir? But it was just a video from my parents? I don't think the Office of Equilibrium would be very interested?

TORIANNA

You never know. So, your parents managed to get a message delivered from... where are they, Ganymede?

AMBER

Yes? But no? They sent this three weeks ago? So it was recorded before... you know? And I haven't heard from them since?

TORIANNA

I'm sure they're fine. No reason to assume otherwise. It's just a lot harder for mail shipments to get through with the new travel regs. "Efficiency," my aunt Richard.

AMBER

It's just so hard hearing them talk about Ashlee like that? As if she didn't have anything to do with... you know?

TORIANNA

Have you seen your sister since... you know?

AMBER

She wants to get together for drinks? Like everything's still normal?

TORIANNA

I'm not sure any conversation between you and Ashlee would qualify as "normal," Amber.

AMBER

It's just... she's my sister? And I still can't believe that she was involved in... you know? And that I didn't notice? I can't help thinking that I could have done something?

TORIANNA

None of us noticed, Amber. And if it makes you feel any better, I'm pretty sure if you'd asked too many questions back then, you wouldn't still be here to ask questions now.

Door whoosh as OAKENSARX and MRS. FRONDRINAX enter.

OAKENSARX

Commander Torianna! Do you mind if we join you?

TORIANNA

Oh, how could I refuse? Please make yourselves at home. Amber, you can return to your station.

AMBER

Yes, sir?

Door whoosh as AMBER returns to the Bridge proper.

OAKENSARX

Thank you, Commander, you're too kind.

TORIANNA

Well, I have my orders, after all. It's my duty as a League officer to honor any requests you might have. So what can I do for you today, Sin—I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend you, but I'm not actually sure if we've met.

OAKENSARX

Ah, yes. The Human inability to recognize pheromonal appellations is quite inconvenient, isn't it? But no matter. I am Oakensarx, and I am in fact newly-arrived to the Fairgrounds. I and a few other recent additions to the local branch of the Fugulnari-Human Friendship Advisory Committee were just stopping by to familiarize ourselves with the Bridge, and I thought I'd take the opportunity to introduce myself to you personally. We will of course be spending a great deal of time here as our species forge a new path together. But as for today, we'll just take a quick look around and then get out of your petals. We certainly wouldn't want to interfere with any important operations!

TORIANNA

I see. In that case, I'd like to officially welcome you aboard the H.E.C., Oakensarx. *(coolly)* Ah. And I see you have Mrs. Frondrinax with you. Or is it just Frondrinax now?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, it always was, really. But you can keep calling me “Mrs.” if you like, I know how you Humans get attached to your little nicknames!

TORIANNA

Yes, you’ve learned so much about us in your time here, haven’t you?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, yes, very much so! And I’m just thrilled to finally be working hand-in-branch with you folks.

TORIANNA

I’m sure you are. Well, Oakensarx, I think Mrs. Frondrinax should be able to answer any questions about our procedures you might have—she’s spent so long getting to know everything there is to know about the Fairgrounds, after all. So unless you need anything else from me personally, I should be getting back to the Bridge. But do feel free to stay and chat in my office for as long as you like.

OAKENSARX

You’re too kind.

Door whoosh as TORIANNA exits.

OAKENSARX

Oof, that one’s roots seem a little underextended, if you catch my meaning. The Harvest could not have commenced at a better time; this station was already an utter shambles under Human leadership.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Now, don’t be too hard on the Commander, Oakensarx. She may be a Human, but I’d say she’s definitely tilling the right furrow.

OAKENSARX

That’s funny, I don’t remember requesting your opinion.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh! No, you didn’t, but... I anticipated that you might, so I just went ahead and offered up some feedback, to save you from expending unnecessary energy in asking! Efficiency, you know?

OAKENSARX

Ha! You may be a commelinid, but you’re sharp as cactus, Frondrinax! It’s that kind of forward thinking that made the Harvest possible. We would not be here today without you.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Thank you so much, Oakensarx! It's always good to hear one's efforts are appreciated.

OAKENSARX

Of course they are! And I'm expecting the same kind of results from your next assignment!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

My... next assignment? Already?

OAKENSARX

Problem, Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, no! Of course not! It's just... I've been working the Fairgrounds beat for years, you know. I was expecting after the Ascension that I might get a little bit of, well, a breather or something. Before moving on.

OAKENSARX

A breather? Nonsense. A Fugulnari is never short of breath! You haven't gone native, have you Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? No! Of course not! Forgive me, Oakensarx. I wasn't being sensible just then.

OAKENSARX

Hmmph, leisure time. What a thoroughly Human concept. If they didn't waste so much energy running around in the first place, they wouldn't need leisure time! They have so much to unlearn.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I could not agree with you more. And of course I'm ready for a new assignment! It's just that... well, I've been here so long. I'd hate to have to rush off on another mission before seeing the fruits of my labor.

OAKENSARX

Oh, no, you'll still have a very important role here on the Fairgrounds, Frondrinax. A very important role. A task I could only entrust to one of our finest agents, in fact.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh! How exciting! What is it?

OAKENSARX

Well, as you can see, our success has brought a great many Fugulnari to the Fairgrounds, but with supply comes demand. And, sadly, we find the Fairgrounds ill-equipped to support a bustling plant population in the long term.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I've told you, Oakensarx, this is as humid as they can make it. Rust never sleeps!

OAKENSARX

I'm not talking about the humidity, Frondrinax. Although the atmospheric conditions are certainly not in keeping with my personal standards. No, there are other factors that need to be taken into account. Like, reproduction! We've got loads of pollen, and plenty of stigmas, but not enough means for one to reach the other! And we can't trust our Human assistants in the Hydroponic gardens with anything so... delicate, well-intentioned though they may be. No, if we intend to remain here on the Fairgrounds, we're going to need the help of some natural-born pollinating agents. Which is why I'm tasking you with opening up communications with Queen Melaina of the D'vorax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

... You want me to talk to the bee people? Really?

OAKENSARX

Absolutely, Frondrinax. We need pollinators, and we needed them yesterday!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

But... but we've been planning this for years! Are you honestly telling me that no one back home thought of the pollination question before now?

OAKENSARX

Well, of course we did! But obviously we couldn't announce our intentions to the rest of the galaxy by opening negotiations before the Ascension went into effect! Agent Wolemyx landed on D'vorax mere moments after we went public. And he made a heroic effort to find a faction among the D'voraxi that would be willing to cooperate. Couldn't make headway with the little stingers, though. Then he regrettably wandered into the wrong enclave, and, well...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, what?

OAKENSARX

Some carpenter bastards hollowed him out. Made a hive out of him. Nasty business. But I imagine you'll have much better success. You must.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What makes you so sure they won't just hollow *me* out?

OAKENSARX

We're not going to make the mistake of sending you in person, for one thing. We've authorized the use of a quantum tangler for this mission—you'll be able to talk to the D'voraxi from right here on the Fairgrounds, in real time. Well, I say "talk," but you know the ridiculous way they communicate. Speaking of which, I've already had a Fugulnari-D'voraxi dictionary delivered to your quarters. You'll want to study it carefully. Very carefully. And be sure to stretch first. If you can't reach an agreement with the D'voraxi, we'll be utterly unable to expand our population, and that would really put a hitch in our future endeavors, don't you think?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, yes. But are you certain I'm the right plant for this job, Oakensarx? The Hydrophyte Corps doesn't offer a whole lot by way of diplomatic experience, after all. We're generally too busy redistributing appendages to bother with the niceties. Perhaps Flabadax might be better suited to this task? Or Paftoonix, maybe?

OAKENSARX

Nonsense, Frondrinax, I have every confidence in your abilities! And don't sell yourself short. You've been living among the Humans for years, after all! Surely you can handle sweet-talking a few bee people.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well... can I least get an assistant or something?

OAKENSARX

But of course! In fact, I've already selected one of our finest young agents for the job.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

...How young are we talking, exactly?

OAKENSARX

You'll be able to see for yourself soon. He should be here in a moment. (*door swish*) Ah! And here he is! Frondrinax, meet PFC Rooty.

ROOTY

I'm Rooty!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Of course you are.

OAKENSARX

This little sprout is ready to help you out in any way you need. And he's very excited to be working with you! Isn't that right, Rooty?

ROOTY
MAMA!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Absolutely not. Oakensarx, given the crucial nature of this mission, do you think I might possibly get someone with a little more... life experience?

OAKENSARX

You might, but you won't. All right, I've got a conclave scheduled with the other section heads, so I'm off. But good luck with the bees, Frondrinax! You too, Rooty!

ROOTY

Goodbye! I'll miss you!

OAKENSARX whooshes out.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(sigh) So... Rooty? I don't suppose you know anything about bees, do you?

ROOTY

I like bees! They give me kisses on my pistils with their butts and it feels good!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

May the Great Gardener have mercy on my roots.

[scene 4] Transition to the Electric Egg, at a slow part of the cycle.

CHIP

Okay, Sopon, try turning it up a few clicks. *(a machine whirring)* Gah! Too many clicks! Too many clicks!

SOPON

Sorry, boss. Looks like your options are basically "full blast" or "pitiful trickle." I don't think this thing has a medium setting.

CHIP

Then why did they put a dial on it?

SOPON

Sheer optimism?

CHIP

C'mon, it's a simple machine, it can't be that hard to operate!

SOPON

Look, I'm a bartender, not a stage manager. Practical effects are a little outside my skillset. Remind me again why the Egg needs a fog machine?

CHIP

Ambience, Sopon! I'm going for that smoky, old-Earth, film noir kind of deal.

SOPON

Yeah, but... didn't that kind of smoke come from the clientele? Their, uh... I want to say cigaritas? The bars didn't just, like, pump it in.

CHIP

Well, if you can find me someone who's still making cigaritas, and some Humans who are still smoking them, then knock yourself out. But until then, I'm willing to sacrifice a little historical authenticity for the sake of atmospheric enhancement. So make that fog machine sing!

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell 'em, sister!

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Hah! That's great! "You tell 'em sister!" I love that! I'ma use that!

ALIEN BARFLY

Ehhh... you tell 'em, sister?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Hahahaha! See, we're already learning from each other! "You tell 'em, sister! Hahahaha! (*sloshing drink*) To cultural exchange!

ALIEN BARFLY

(*shrugging, "I guess"*) You tell 'em, sister.

BUBBLES

Hey, buddy. Let's try switching things up with a little water, huh?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Oh, what? You think because I'm a plant I jus' drink water, huh? Whass next, are you going to sing to me to help me grow?

BUBBLES

No, thanks, I've got a tin ear. Literally. But what do you say we give the grappa a rest for now?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

What do I say? You wanna know what I say? Do you? Do you know? Do you know? What I say? To that?

BUBBLES

I do not.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

I say... You tell 'em, sister! BAHHAHAHAHAHA!

ALIEN BARFLY grumbles.

BUBBLES

Uh huh. Do you know what grappa's actually made from? It's grapes. Fermented grapes. You still want another spritz?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Yeah! That's just what they deserve! Gossipy sons of bitches, ferment the whole lot of 'em, I say! Now hit me with that mister, mister! Don't be stingy, now!

BUBBLES

All right, fine. But it might take me a minute to find my spritzer attachment in this cloudbank.

SOPON

Working on it!

DEE

(coughing)

Just unplug that thing already, Sophon! This smog is frilling up my vocal cords!

XTOPPS

Oh, come on, Dee-lite. I am digging the mystical, ancient Britannia vibes of this gloomy brume. Maybe we can work it into the act! Yeah, I can see us going full psychedeli-madrigal in here. Come on, Dee! Let's ride on Four Horsemen through Rain and Tears to the Court of the Crimson King!

DEE

Hard pass. You've got to be popping more Planter's than usual if you think I'm ready to usher in another prog-rock revival.

XTOPPS

I am, but that is irrelevant. Ooh! Where do you think we could get a replica of Stonehenge?

DEE

Take a left turn out of Glastonbury for a second, Xtopps. *(coughs)* Seriously, Chip, you've got to quit it with the mist, or I am going to lose my voice long before my contract is up. If you don't vonch the vapors, our next setlist is going to consist exclusively of John Cage's 4:33 on repeat.

CHIP

Fine! I just wanted to give the place a touch of antique charm, all right? Plus, you know, a good haze can conceal a lot of wear and depreciation. But have it your way! Streez, nobody appreciates my vision around here.

DEE

Nobody *has* any vision around here through all this flotting smoke!

KWONTZ

("And your dry ice machine is making my Fintoozler taste like Necrocharg boogers.")

CHIP

Eurgh.

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell 'em, sister!

DRUNK FUGULNARI

(simultaneously)

YOU TELL 'EM, SISTER! HAHHAHAHAHA! I LOVE that! I'm going to start saying that ALL THE TIME!

ALIEN BARFLY grumbles.

SOPON

Oh, hey, Vert. Didn't see you down there! You need anything?

VERT

I've actually been trying to get your attention for half an hour? My arms are really tired from the waving.

SOPON

Sorry, I was distracted by some technical issues. What'll it be?

VERT

Mineral water.

It gets very quiet.

SOPON

Mineral water?

VERT

Yup. Still, no ice, room temperature, please.

BUBBLES

Mineral water. Really, Vert?

VERT

Yeah. What's wrong with mineral water?

DEE

Oh, nothing. It's a perfectly refreshing beverage if you're hanging from a macramé basket.

XTOPPS

Yeah, mang. You not trying to get verdurous are ya?

VERT

No! I just want some water! Anyone can drink water!

SOPON

Well, except the Mebsutans.

DEE

Or the Rubidioids.

XTOPPS

And don't ever pass it around on M-113.

VERT

I just don't feel like drinking tonight, ok? I have a very early morning tomorrow.

BUBBLES

Doing what?

VERT

Oh, come on, guys. You all know what I do for a living.

Beat.

VERT

You— you do all know what I do for a living, right?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

I KNOW WHASHU DEW FRRR A'LIVING! YRRR A DOOR STOP! BAHHAHAHAHA! GET IT? CUZ YER SMALL!

VERT

I get it. It's actually not the first time someone's made that joke.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

HAHAHAHA! A DOORSTOP! I'M MULCHING HILARIOUS, HAHAHAHAoops!

The DRUNK FUGULNARI splashes his grappa on VERT.

VERT

GAH! MY FACE!

DEE

Vert! Are you okay?

VERT

IT'S IN MY EYES! IT BURNS!

KWONTZ

("Somebody get a clean, damp towel!")

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Hey, flatface! Gemme 'nother grappa, toot sweet!

SOPON

Yeah, no. You're officially cut off. And I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Are you telling me what to do, fleshbag?

SOPON

I'm telling you that you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here.

DEE

Ok, Vert, I think that's got most of it. You need anything else?

VERT

Oh, no, I'm fine. But if you could maybe point me toward the door? It's going to take another couple hours for my eyes to grow back.

Throughout the following, we hear the occasional BONK/“Ow!” of VERT fumbling his way toward the exit.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Now, you listen to me, you, you... lump of sinews! I am a paying customer, and the customer is always right!

SOPON

Not after he starts dumping his drinks on the other customers, he's not. You can come back when you're ready to play nice. But until then, you're out of here, my friend.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

I'm not your friend! I'm on the Friendship Committee! I don't take orders from some, some ashly land-manatee! Who's too dumb to even know how inefficient they are!

SOPON

...Wow.

DEE

Chip, are you hearing this?

XTOPPS

Yeah, mang. I may be cruising the O'Henry Highway at the mo, but even I know some terminal turbulence when it crosses my transom.

CHIP

What do you want me to do about it?

DEE

Are you new? What else do I expect you to do with an unruly customer? Throw him out!

CHIP

Look, I can't just toss every Fugulnari who gets a little rowdy. We may be out of their jurisdiction, but that doesn't mean they can't make trouble for the Egg.

DEE

So, what? You're just gonna let a plant step all over you? All over your employees?

CHIP

What I'm going to do is handle this with civility and discretion, all right? Just settle your gizz. *(to the DRUNK FUGULNARI)* Gesin, I would like to apologize for the inconvenience. I can assure you that the Electric Egg is always happy to serve any member of the Friendship Committee. Can I get you another... grappa, was it?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

‘Sright! And I wannit onna house! That doorstep spilled mine!

CHIP

Oh, I see. Yes, that is quite a mess. Sopon, could you—?

SOPON

Nope. Going on break.

CHIP

Bubbles, could you maybe?

BUBBLES

Ooh, sorry boss. I traded away my wet-dry vac attachment last week for this sweet turret lathe.

CHIP

(sigh) I’ll get the mop.

[scene 5a] Transition to the Beaux Show.

BEAUX SEVERAL

Hello out there to every blossom in the Beaux-garden! Look, I don’t have to tell you all what an exciting couple of weeks it has been since the golden age of folium-hominum harmony has dawned across Human space. I may not have roots in the ground, but I can still say that these plants make a lot of good points. Sure, I’ve heard a few Humans dridging off about the Fugulnari way of doing things, but I say that’s just good old-fashioned jealousy talking! They’ve got their fringes burnt because these Fugulnari are actually saying what we’ve been thinking all along! That it was high time we got this place cleaned up and under control! You don’t see any litter in the corridors any more, do you? Well, there you go! And here at the Beaux Show, we are more than ready to embrace all things verdant! Frid, I barely leave my ergonomic broadcasting chair, so you might as well stick me in a pot and see what sprouts, amIrite? And as for fertilizer, well, as long as Todd’s around, we’ll have a steady, inexhaustible supply.

TODD

Aw, streez, Beaux!

[scene 5b] We are hearing the Beaux Show from MRS. FRONDRINAX’S quarters.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Turn that awful noise off, Rooty! It’s distracting me from my barre work!

ROOTY

But I like what he says! It’s all stuff I agree with and it makes me happy to hear someone say the things I agree with!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I don't think there's any form of language in the galaxy that could possibly express just how little I care about what makes you happy, Rooty. I'm having a hard enough time expressing myself in bee-dance, and I don't want to snap a twig before we've made it through the introductions. Baroness Kleodora will be calling any minute, and I've barely gotten in a decent warm-up.

ROOTY

But we don't need to talk to a Baroness! Oakensarx said we should talk to the Queen!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, darn it, you're right, Rooty! I must have forgotten! Well, let's just dial the D'voraxian leader's communicode, which is of course listed in EVERY interstellar directory! Boop, boop, beep, boop! Look at me, I'm dialing it right now! They'll be picking up any second! Boop, boop, beep! I bet they'll have a message for you, Rooty! Beep, boop, boop, beep!

ROOTY

Ummm, I don't think that's how dialing works, Mrs. Frondrinax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, is it not? Beep, beep, boop, beep! Why don't you tell me how it works then, since you're the expert on everything?

ROOTY

Are you being sarcastic, Mrs. Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes I am, Rooty. And what does it mean when Mrs. Frondrinax is being sarcastic?

ROOTY

That Rooty said something stupid?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Good work, Rooty. And what do you suppose was the stupid thing you said this time?

ROOTY

Uhhhhhhh...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, don't strain your nodes trying to figure it out. Here's the problem, Rooty: Queen Melaina is a very, very important person. And important people don't let random strangers just ring them up with any silly old request.

ROOTY

They don't?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

No, they don't. They have precisely defined channels of communication. Protocol. That kind of thing is important to royalty. So, if we're to have any hope of eventually speaking to the Queen, we'll first need to get our root in the door, by striking up a friendly repartee with a minor aristocrat. That's why we're reaching out to Baroness Kleodora with our petition. If all goes well, she'll pass it along to some Viscountess, who will mention it to a Duchess, who will spill it to a Princess, who will then finally deliver it to Her Majesty, The Queen.

ROOTY

That's a lot of talking.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, it is, Rooty, which is why I'd like you to shut up and let me get on with my stretches.

ROOTY

Okay! *(beat)* But what if the Baroness forgets about us? Or gets the message wrong? Wouldn't it be more efficient to just talk to the Queen?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes it would, Rooty, but that's not how the D'voraxi do things. You're too young to understand this, I suppose, but not everyone in the galaxy appreciates efficiency as much as we plants do. Not yet, anyway. But yes, I would of course much rather speak with the Queen right away, but those stupid bees insist on their peculiar, fruitless customs, which means now I have to waste my time kissing the rear tarsus of some dusty old baroness.

ROOTY

You mean like that frowny lady on the screen?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? Oh! OH! Oh, Your Ladyship! My deepest apologies! I did not realize our call had already connected! I mean! *(sotto voce)* Why didn't you say something, Rooty? Okay, time to dance your way into history, old sprig... *(sounds of physical effort, as if Mrs. F is trying to punctuate each word with a specific movement)* "Hello – Your – Ladyship! Might – I – say – your – spindle – hairs – are – looking – exceptionally – glossy! You – must – tell – me – your – secret! Hahaha! *(sotto voce)* The phrasebook, Rooty, get the phrasebook. I need a reference!

ROOTY

But it's so heaaaaavyyyyyy...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(still whispering) Just get it, you little weed! *(again, full voice)* Ahem! Anyway – I’m – reaching – out – to – you – with – an – exciting – opportunity – for – your – people! As – you – may – have – heard – The – Fair – grounds – have – recently – been – honored – with – the – settlement – of – numerous – flora – and – as – a – result – are – in – need – of – more – Oh mulch me, I hate this move – pol-lin-a-tors!

Buzzing from the other end of the screen.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Uh huh. Sorry, could you— *(sigh, back to the dancing)* I’m – sorry – I – don’t – understand – Could – you – repeat – that – a – little – slower – please?

More buzzing.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Okaaaayyy. *(aside)* Rooty, was that last move a *demi* or a *grand plié*?

ROOTY

It looked like if you had knees they would be bending, Mrs. Frondrinax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, for the love of— Look up “offers of friendship.” Quickly!

ROOTY

Uhhhhh, found it!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Good! Now hold that page up! So I can actually *see* it, Rooty. There! Okay... I – have – long – been – an – admirer – of – yours – and – I – would – love – for – us – to – be – better – acquainted.

Angry buzzing, which continues under the following.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh. I don’t quite— Could you slow down, I... I’m – sorry – I – don’t – understand – could... okay, your tone seems very pointed right now. Ooh, very pointed. No, wait! Please don’t— aaaaand she’s hung up.

ROOTY

Did we win, Mrs. Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

We most emphatically did not, Rooty. You were watching me the entire time. Was there something wrong with my form? Did I miss a step?

ROOTY

Ummmmmm... Maybe you did a full turn when you should have done a half turn?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, great. I think I just told her that her antennae looked like an accretion of fly droppings. Blast and smut! Why didn't Oakensarx give this mission to an actual diplomat? Or at least a better dancer?

ROOTY

I think you danced beautifully!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Thank you, Rooty. Your aesthetic appreciation is much more important to me than the success of this silly old mission, after all.

ROOTY

Yay! (*an aggrieved sigh from MRS. F*) Oh. Are you being sarcastic again?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What do you think, Rooty?

ROOTY

Uhhhhhhhh... (*gasp*) Double sarcasm! I'll never recover from the shame!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

If only that were true, Rooty. If only that were true.

*[scene 6] Transition to the living room of JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment.
Bloop of JOHN activating the internal intercom.*

JOHN

Hey, Althaar? You've been in your room a long time. Is everything ok?

ALTHAAR

(over the intercom)

Oh, yes, FriendJohn! Althaar has merely been absorbed in study.

JOHN

Oh, ok. Sorry to interrupt.

ALTHAAR

Not at all, FriendJohn! You are correct that it has been some time since Althaar has been making breakage. It would be advisory to make emergence for nourishment, if the curtain of privacy is closed?

JOHN

Yeah, you're good.

Whoosh of ALTHAAR's door opening as he emerges and heads to the kitchen to make himself a snack. This process will probably sound very weird.

ALTHAAR

Thanking you, FriendJohn!

JOHN

So, what have you been studying all this time?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has been receiving many letters in response to his own, from his friends, and their friends, and their friends, and all those Iltorians who have knowledge of Fugulnari culture. So he has been making attempt to absorb all their advisings and explainings. But it has not been of a great smoothness. The Fugulnari are a people most perplexing, FriendJohn, even to those of Iltor!

JOHN

Yeah, they're more than a little perplexing to us Humans.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Another commonality between the peoples of Althaar and FriendJohn! (*chuckle*) But Althaar will make persistence in his studies. He has expectation that there will be great advantage in understanding the Fugulnari, if he is to make supporting to his Human friends.

JOHN

I'd say that's a safe bet. And thanks for looking out for us, I know you're in kind of a sticky position.

ALTHAAR

Please do not be mentioning it! It is always the pleasure to Althaar to be of assistance! And this is not Althaar's first time in the position of stickiness! He has shared with you already the tale of the Fomalhaut Toffee incident!

JOHN

Heh, right.

ALTHAAR

But it is a truth that these are unbattered paths on which Althaar is finding himself. This is why the researchings are of such importance!

JOHN

So how's it been going? Have you made any progress?

ALTHAAR

Oh, Althaar has read and viewed much of the Iltorian study of Fugulnari culture, but he has still a very great deal more to be absorbed! And then also... there is some question of how deeply the Iltorian friends of Fugulnar have truly been seeing. It is not known how long this... advance of friendship toward your people has been in the planning. So it is possible that there has been deception, and the studies of Althaar may be steering him wrongly.

JOHN

Oh. Well, that's not... *not* incredibly disturbing.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar was not intending to cause the up-set! Would FriendJohn wish Althaar to prepare some frighten-tea while he is in the kitchen? Or... the cocoa sugar soup is a beverage most soothing to Humans, yes?

JOHN

Uh, if you mean hot chocolate, then yes. But don't bother getting out the hazmat suit, I can make some myself once you're out of there.

ALTHAAR

Very well, FriendJohn!

JOHN

So... is there anything about the Fugulnari you do know for sure? Anything useful?

ALTHAAR

There is no telling what knowledge will be of usefulness, FriendJohn! But Althaar is finding the Fugulnari system of castes to be of great fascination. It is complex and multifarious indeed! The ever-greens are of course respected by all, but for the most part the seeded and seedless lineages are not enjoying the most harmonious of relations. And the tensions amongst the gymnosperms and the angiosperms are particularly upraised. But even the Fugulnari that would seem very similar to a Human can have deep division between them! For example, it is never to make comparison of the apples and oranges, as this would cause great offense!

JOHN

Huh. So you're saying the Fugulnari don't get along with each other any better than they get along with us? Then, how did they manage to organize this whole takeover of Human space? I mean, as far as I can tell, every single Fugulnari was in on this plan. Like, not one out of however many billion of them there are in the galaxy had a problem with it. You can't even get six Humans to agree on a restaurant!

ALTHAAR

This is a good questioning, FriendJohn! It is the theory of Althaar that the Fugulnari dedication to efficiency is strong enough to be over-riding these low-boiling resentments.

JOHN

Huh. Do you think... do you think maybe that could change? I mean, you're the expert, but I'd imagine taking over a whole other species' government is the kind of situation that could like, exacerbate existing tensions.

ALTHAAR

There is no precedent for this situation in Althaar's knowledge, FriendJohn. But it seems most likely that you are correct. Although Althaar would consider the incitement of internecine struggle to be more of a last resorting, as this could have repercussions most hazardous. And he is preferring always the way of friendship!

JOHN

Oh. Right. Sorry.

ALTHAAR

It is not to apologize, FriendJohn. Althaar is knowing that this experience has been very much of the stress-ful.

JOHN

I mean, yeah, it has, but... The thing is, the Fugulnari haven't actually done anything to me personally. None of these changes has been any worse than a mild inconvenience. So I'm scared all the time, but I don't even know exactly what it is I'm scared of. Well, Stella's zarked about them making her re-do the Sanitation shift schedules over and over, so now I'm upset because she's upset, but that's as bad as it's gotten so far.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Is this why Supervisor Reyes has not made visiting of the home of FriendJohn and Althaar for many cycles? Althaar was beginning to worry that he had caused the offense!

JOHN

Oh, no, she's just been busy jumping through hoops for the Friendship Committee. And she probably will be for who knows how long. So that's not helping my stress level any.

ALTHAAR

Mm. Althaar is afraid he can think of no remedy for this at the moment. But he will now make retirement to his room to resume the studies, so that FriendJohn may at least attempt some remedy of the stress-ful with the heated chocolate!

JOHN

Thanks, Althaar. And good luck.

[scene 7] Whoosh of ALTHAAR's bedroom door. A sigh from JOHN. Transition to the Electric Egg.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Excuse me, um, bardener?

SOPON

It's "bartender," gesin. How can I help you?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

What is in that bottle on the top shelf there? The one with the red label?

SOPON

That would be the Space Yeoman Gin. Finest in the galaxy! Want me to load it into a spritzer with some tonic?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Is that some kind of sick joke?

SOPON

Beg pardon?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

It's disgusting that you would even have gin in plain sight in the first place, but then to offer it to me like that? As if I wasn't clearly a Juniper tree? How dare you!

SOPON

Oh, yes. Clearly. I can't believe I made such terrible mistake. I will go ahead and take the offending bottle down from the shelf, and put it somewhere out of sight.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Where I hope you will promptly dump it down the drain.

SOPON

Uh huh. Is there anything inoffensive that I *can* spritz you with?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Vodka martini.

SOPON

Vodka? You don't have a problem with—

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Don't tell me you're one of those tuber apologists. Potatoes, hmmph. Everyone knows they're just glorified roots! I don't care for them one sprig. So, yes: vodka martini. No olives, though. I'm not a monster.

SOPON

Coming right up.

CHIP

No way, Dee. Absolutely not.

DEE

Just a week. Not even. A few days! Just long enough to check in and come straight back, I promise.

CHIP

Uh uh. You think I don't see what's going on here? You're not the first musician to try to skip out on a contract.

DEE

I'm not trying to ditch the Egg, Chip! I just want to check in on my folks!

CHIP

Ok, let's say you actually manage to get an exit visa off the Fairgrounds. You make a speedy jaunt back to Tammuz Beta, say a quick hello and goodbye to the whole Mallory clan, and then you try to book a flight back, and the Foogs say no soap. They're not exactly big on moving around, right? Maybe they think everyone should just get back to their home planet and stay there. What then? You'd really rather be stuck in the sorghum than here at the Egg?

DEE

Okay, no, but... I haven't heard anything from home in weeks. I'm getting nervous.

CHIP

No one's heard anything from anywhere! The interstellar post is completely jeked up with these new travel regs. C'mon, I'm sure you'll get a letter eventually.

DEE

But what if I don't? What if they're in some kind of trouble? They're farmers, Chip. Who knows what the Committee thinks about that?

CHIP

Why would the Committee have a problem with farmers? Their whole job is helping plants grow, isn't it?

DEE

I mean, yeah, that makes sense... But no one has any idea what the Foogs really want, or what they'll do next. I can't help worrying, you know?

CHIP

Listen, if your folks do run into any trouble, I'd say you're in a much better position to help them from the safety of the Baronetcy of Kandephaa'a. Maybe *you* should write *them* and suggest they come out here for a visit. (*calling to XTOPPS as he approaches*) Hey, Xtopps, you can— Augh! What is that smell?

XTOPPS

Just a splash of gentlebeingly cologne, mon frère. For the distinguished potentate on the go.

DEE

You may have poured it on a little thick, Xtopps. Oof, that's strong!

CHIP

Yeah, I definitely prefer your usual eau de elementary school lunchbag.

XTOPPS

Haha! Oh, mang, but you are droll! Seriously, though, you can't smell any incriminating legumish aromas on me, can you?

DEE

Oh, is that what's up? You're afraid of what our leafier clientele might think of your proclivities?

XTOPPS

Hey, Xtopps is no hero, palominos. He's just a simple club-hopper who wants to keep hopping on down the Brittle Bridge with every one of his limbs unimpinged. Birnham Wood has come to Dunsinane and I'm just the idiot who tells the tale, ya dig?

CHIP

Not you, too? All the Foogs have done so far is frill with everyone's travel plans! Which, yeah, is a pain in the palp, but it's not the end of the world. Let's all just take a deep breath and relax, ok? Dee, if you want to write that letter home, I'll see if I can call in a couple favors, make sure it gets into the next courier pouch headed for Shamash. And Xtopps, even if the Foogs do start throwing their weight around, it's we Humans who are going to be underneath it, not anyone else. And they're definitely not going to invade sovereign Xybidont territory anytime soon. So I think we can reasonably assume all 28 of your various limbs are perfectly safe from anything but your own hallucinatory excursions. And you need to scrape that aftershave off asap, it's harassing my sinuses in a big way. Oh, hi H.F.! (*a bark from Miss Sophie*) And Miss Sophie, good to see you both. What's that you've got there?

H.F.

Ah, I'll give you the whole story in a minute, Chip. But right now I just need to discreetly make my way to the restroom, if you don't mind.

CHIP

Knock yourself out. I'll have Bubbles get you the usual?

H.F.

Sounds good!

CHIP

(*calling to BUBBLES as he moves away*)

Hey, Bubbles! A Harvey Bulkhead-banger, when you get a minute!

H.F.

Now, to get this to the bathroom without any more complications...

DEE

Hey, H.F.! And hello, Miss Sophie! Oh, your sweet little furry face is just what I need to see today!

XTOPPS

Fornes! Welcome back to my demesne! Oh, and you brought a party tray! Flush!

H.F.

That's the word for it, all right. But uh, this is definitely not a party tray, sorry. I don't mean to be rude, but I really need to stop by the bathroom before I can chat, so if you could just—

Crash! Splash!

XTOPPS

Nertz! My party tray!

DEE

H.F.! Are you okay?

H.F.

Yeah. I don't know what happened. I think I tripped over something.

VERT

That was me! Hi, guys!

DEE

Aw, streez, Vert. You are really underfoot today, zood.

VERT

It's my fault. Sorry. I can get myself up.

DEE

Oh, come on. Give me your hand. Oh, you're soaked! And... really green?

VERT

What? I'm always green.

XTOPPS

I would say most days you've a celadon undertone to your complexion, but today? Today you are all-over shamrock, mang.

VERT

Well, that's perfectly natural! Just a part of my genetic make-up.

DEE

Yeah, no, whatever kind of make-up it is, it's definitely not waterproof. It's creating a very green, very... stinky puddle. H.F.? What exactly were you carrying around in that thing?

H.F.

Uh, yeah, sorry about that, Vert. You're gonna want to go home and wash up. I just unintentionally baptized you in Miss Sophie's afternoon piddlings.

VERT

Oh no! Not on my birthday!

XTOPPS

H.F.! Why'd you let Miss Sophie do her business all over my party tray?

H.F.

It's a bedpan, you spread-head. Leftover from an unfortunate kidney stone episode two years ago, the details of which I will spare everyone. I've started grabbing it whenever Miss Sophie and I head out for a walk, so she can— you know. It's working out ok, it's just the disposal part of the procedure still has a few kinks in it.

DEE

Can't you just take her to Hydroponics to... do her business?

H.F.

Well, that's what we used to do, but half the plants in Hydroponics these days are actually Fugelnari. And they get real offended when you can't tell which is which, so the last thing I need is for Miss Sophie to lift her leg on some big shot from the Advisory Committee. Which means I'm going to be carrying around bedpans until she graduates from potty training.

CHIP

All right, you two. You've been on break for like twenty minutes. Time to get back on that stage and— What is on my floor?

DEE

Nothing you can't handle, boss! Let's plate it, Xtopps.

XTOPPS

I got the mashed potato *and* the T-bone, Dee!

H.F.

Hey, Chip, I think I'll take a raincheck on that drink. I better get Miss Sophie back home. As for the mess, I would suggest you leave some baking soda on it overnight. Should suck the odor right out. See you later!

CHIP

Odor? (*sniffs*) Ughhh. Sopon!

SOPON

In the weeds, boss!

CHIP

(*sigh*) Where'd I leave that mop?

[scene 8] An announcement over the station P.A. system.

BURROUGHS-BOT

Attention, citizens of the Fairgrounds. This your straight-shootin' and steadfast Recreation Director-bot. Although there are those who have suggested that this job title is no longer accurate, due in large part to the recent onslaught of cancellations, postponements, hiatuses, and what have you. I have been asked to assure every last one of you, and in particular whoever taped the "Cancellation Director-bot" sign over the nameplate on my door this morning, that this outbreak of activity abrogations is merely circumstantial. Contrary to rumor, an anti-physical-exertion bias is not in play on the Fairgrounds in any official capacity. And speaking of things that are "not at play," this evening's Extreme Pinochle match will need to relocate, as the field has been re-allocated for the use of the Lingonberry Restoration Project. For information about— wha?

There is a scuffle; someone forcefully takes the mic from BURROUGHS-BOT.

MARK WAHLBERG-BOT

Hey, Fairgrounds. How's it goin'? It's Mark Wahlberg-bot, you folks all know me. Now, listen up: you gotta get away from the plants! They're gonna release a toxin that'll effect your brain! Or your neural cluster! Or your doink! Wherever you do your thinking! It'll make you do things to yourself! Suicide things! I've seen how this plays out! There are forces at work here beyond our understanding! Which is how science works, am I right? Look, I'm not joking around, this thing is huge! It's gonna be a disaster! And I know about disasters; I produced the *Entourage* movie! (*scuttling of leaves*) Oh, hey, folks! How's it goin'? I like your leaves. They're nice n' green. I don't have leaves, but we can still hang out, right? Ow! Hey, you plants are pretty strong. Do you guys lift? We could lift together sometime...

WAHLBERG-BOT is dragged away and the mic cuts out. [scene 9] We are now in a hydroponic park with H.F. and MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

All right, Miss Sophie. You make sure to let Papa know if you need to go you-know-what again, so I can get your little doody dish for you.

FIDORIAN 1

Oh boy! Oh boy oh boy oh boy friend! Dog friend! Dog friend and human friend! Gotta sniff! Gotta sniff new dog and human friends! *etc.*

FIDORIAN 2

(simultaneously)

Hello! Hello! Hello! Hi! Hi hello! Hello and hi! Hi hi hi! Hello? Hello! Yes! Hi! I am saying hi, *etc.*

H.F.

Oh, hey! Easy there, fellas! Now who—? Oh, you're Fidorians! I didn't know any of you folks were still hanging around. How's things?

FIDORIAN 1

We're happy right now, but usually we're sad.

FIDORIAN 2

Yeah, we're usually sad.

FIDORIAN 1

Really sad.

FIDORIAN 2

We're sad.

FIDORIAN 1

But we're happy now!

FIDORIAN 2

Yes! Happy!

FIDORIAN 1

Hooray for happy!

FIDORIAN 2

The happy is good!

H.F.

Well, I'm happy that you're happy.

FIDORIAN 1

Yeah, but we'll be sad again.

FIDORIAN 2

Yeah, we'll be sad again.

FIDORIAN 1

Don't know when, probably soon.

FIDORIAN 2

Yeah, probably soon we'll be sad again.

FIDORIAN 1

Yeah, sad.

FIDORIAN 2

It's sad when it's sad.

H.F.

Aww, what's got your tails droopin', guys? Is it the... you-know-whogulnari?

FIDORIAN 1

You mean bad plants?

FIDORIAN 2

Bad plants?! Where bad plants?

FIDORIAN 1

Bad plants are bad! Bad plants are mean!

FIDORIAN 2

We hate bad plants!

H.F.

Whoa! Whoa! Keep it inertial there, folks! You never know which dandelion has ears these days.

FIDORIAN 1

We're so sad, Human-friend!

FIDORIAN 2

So sad! No more chasing sticks!

FIDORIAN 1

No more digging in flowerbeds!

FIDORIAN 2

No more dragging butts on grass!

FIDORIAN 1

And I love dragging butts on grass!

FIDORIAN 2

I also love dragging butts on grass!

FIDORIAN 1

But no more! No more dragging butts on grass!

FIDORIAN 2

No more dragging butts on grass! And that is why we're sad.

FIDORIAN 1

Yes, we're sad.

FIDORIAN 2

So very sad.

Fidorian whimpering.

H.F.

That's rough. Things haven't been easy for me and Miss Sophie, either. Right, Miss Sophie? Miss Sophie? Oh, muggins, where'd she get off to? Miss Sophie? Oh! There you are! You little scamp, I told you to stay where I can see— hey, knock it off with the little spinny circle, young lady. No. No! Don't you dare squat there! Don't you— NO! MISS SOPHIE! NOOOO!

TRASH DETECTION UNIT

LITTER ALERT! PLEASE DO NOT LITTER! LITTER ALERT! PLEASE DO NOT LITTER!
(continues under the following...)

FIDORIANS 1 & 2

OH NO! BAD! PLANTS! BAD PLANTS WILL COME! GOTTA LEAVE! GOTTA RUN!
GOTTA GO!

FIDORIANS run off, barking in fear.

H.F.

Oh, Miss Sophie. What have you done, girl? *(a whimper from MISS SOPHIE)* All right, that's ok, sweetie, everything's gonna be okay. I don't hear any complaints so far, so I think we're in the clear. I can just scoop this up and no one will be the wiser. Let me just get a baggie, here, and...

Ominous leaf rustling.

H.F.

Ah, damnit! Come on, you perforated piece of crap! Get off that roll!

TRASH DETECTOR wailing, leaf rustling continues, and now footsteps.

H.F.

Hi, hello there! I know what this must look like, but we just found this here! A real shame, huh? So, I figured it was my responsibility as a good Human citizen to rid of it, because, you know, what kind of monster would want to soil some perfectly lovely sod like this!

DIVINE-BOT

Oh, step aside, little man. I'll show you how to deal with crap.

H.F.

What? What are you—? Oh! Well, you didn't have to use your hands, that's what I've got these little baggies f— OH! Euuuuugh. That's... Wow.

The offending turd is scraped from the ground and eaten. The alarms die down and the rustling subsides.

H.F.

Well, uh, thanks. Thanks a lot. I mean, watching a robot chow down on a turd with terrifying efficiency is not how I would have chosen to spend my afternoon, but...

DIVINE-BOT

Hey, they built me to do everything the original could.

H.F.

I'll say! I have never seen grass that clean in my life!

DIVINE-BOT

Well, gustatory disposal of canine bowel movements isn't something that comes up very often around here, but when it does, I'm the bot for the job!

H.F.

Thank you so much, Divine-bot. Really. I don't know what would have happened to me and Miss Sophie if you hadn't—

DIVINE-BOT

Oh, think nothing of it, sweetheart. As if I could let anything happen to this darling little floofball.

MISS SOPHIE barks happily.

H.F.

Well, I definitely owe you a favor. Anything you need, you just give me a call.

DIVINE-BOT

Don't you dare worry about it! Although... if you've got an in at Systems Maintenance, I could use some help getting to the top of their priority queue. I put in a ticket for a full fumigation routine on my inner workings months ago! And it just got a lot more urgent after today's little adventure. But they keep giving me some crap about "non-essential project distribution categories." Filthy solder-jockeys! Maybe I should drop off Miss Sophie's little deposit on one of their desks, see how "non-essential" that is.

H.F.

Say no more, I know a guy.

[scene 10] Transition to JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment. ALTHAAR is vacuuming and humming to himself. He suddenly stops.

ALTHAAR

It is always a pleasure to Althaar to be greeting guests to his quarterings, but if Lieutenant Frallen-Br'ar is wishing to perform conversation at this time, it is to inform Althaar so that he may make pause in his Hoovering.

FRALL manifests.

FRALL

My apologies, Althaar. I had intended to take a quick trip into your vacuum cleaner before I announced myself—I find the micro-vortices created by the operation of such devices quite soothing, if one is able to overlook their more granular components. But I'll forgo that pleasure for the nonce.

ALTHAAR

Thanking you, Lieutenant Frallen-Br'ar! Would you care for liquid refreshment while you are enacting the visit? It will take Althaar the briefest of moments to make preparation of the hot java, if this is desired. It is only to put on the kettle, and to unfurl the tarp that Althaar has secured for such an occasion. The carpet of the room of living has already made absorption of enough coffee to last several metristals!

FRALL

I appreciate the offer, Althaar—you're the only one who ever thinks to offer me coffee. But unfortunately, I only have a few moments to converse.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Then Althaar will not make further delay. What is the Lieutenant wishing to have discussion upon?

FRALL

Well, not to put too fine a point on it, I was wondering what you thought about all this.

ALTHAAR

About all... this? The shared room of living is quite spacious, and most comfortable! It is a truth that the Curtain of Privacy was not a component of its original design, but some sacrifices of aesthetic integrity have been necessity if there is to be simultaneous use by Althaar and FriendJohn!

FRALL

I was not referring to your living room decor, Althaar. Although in my opinion, the curtain actually adds a stylish touch of bohemian charm. No, I wanted to hear your thoughts on recent events. Specifically the establishment of the Fugulnari-Human Friendship Advisory Committee.

ALTHAAR

Ah. ...Althaar is hoping always for the advancement of friendship and understanding between peoples. So it would seem, on the exterior, that this Committee of Friendship is a thing most desirable.

FRALL

And on the interior?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has some worryment. The Fugulnari are speaking of friendship, but they are making great disturbance to the contentment of his Human friends.

FRALL

Indeed. One does not need to exist in 27 dimensions to see that.

ALTHAAR

And yet they have done nothing for Althaar to make objection to. They have made suggestion only. And if the Human leaders on Earth are choosing to follow these suggestions, then... that is Human business, yes? And Althaar should be keeping his pedipalps out of it. Because Althaar is still having so much to learn about Human culture, and it is never wise to make meddling in the conditions that are not fully understood.

FRALL

A sound principle. Not one that I've ever had to apply myself, of course, but generally sound.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar *is* understanding that his Human friends here are very unhappy, and discomforted, and frightened. And Althaar is wishing to make remedy, but none of his studies, or the examples of history, or all the expertise he been offered from the Iltorian Commonality, have been suggesting any method for this. It is... it is a concern to Althaar that perhaps the principles of Iltor are not adequate to the situation in which he is finding himself.

FRALL

Yes. Your people's reputation as diplomats is of course well-deserved, but there are perhaps limits to a system that relies too heavily on no one wanting to hurt an Iltorian's feelings.

ALTHAAR

Then a new system is perhaps needed. And this is a very great task.

FRALL

But not one you have to undertake alone, Althaar. You do have a great many friends all over the galaxy. And here on the Fairgrounds in particular. Without getting into details it would not be at all nice for you to know, I will say only that these latter will be of great importance to you in your task.

ALTHAAR

Ah. Can Althaar make inquiring if... his friends on the Fairgrounds...?

FRALL

You would like to know if all your friends are going to make it through this experience unscathed?

ALTHAAR

That was the drifting of Althaar's wonderment, yes.

FRALL

I can't tell you that, Althaar. I can tell you, from extensive personal experience, that it is not always a comfort to know what is to come.

ALTHAAR

Althaar can say from his experience that not knowing is not of comfort at all.

FRALL

Touché. Very well, I think I can safely add this: many, if not all, of your friends on the Fairgrounds will have a significant part to play in the events of the next several months. And I would also say that, whether or not the principles of Iltor will be entirely adequate to this situation, they will be of great use to you in your efforts nonetheless. Particularly your people's emphasis on generosity and kindness. A worthy objective in and of itself, of course, but also a potentially utilitarian one, under certain circumstances.

ALTHAAR

...Althaar will make considering of this. Thanking you, Lieutenant.

FRALL

My pleasure, Althaar. And I do apologize for not being able to assist you any further. Being a 27-dimensional entity with literally all the time in the world leaves me somewhat ill-equipped to understand the concept of impatience on any but the most abstract level, but I do advise you to be patient. And to be kind.

ALTHAAR

Althaar will do his best. If that is all the Lieutenant wished to be sharing, would you desire Althaar to resume his cleaning activities, so that you may enjoy the vortices of the carpet-sucking device?

FRALL

That's very thoughtful of you, Althaar, but I'm afraid you won't have time to finish your vacuuming today. Some other time?

ALTHAAR

Very well, Lieutenant Frallen-Br'ar! A pleasant cycle to you!

FRALL twinkles away.

ALTHAAR

Patience and kindness. One of these is coming to Althaar with much greater readiness than the other. But he can be making effort at both! (*doorbell*) Oh! Another guest is requesting entry! Althaar should perhaps have made preparation of the java after all. (*presses comm button*) Welcome to the home of John and Althaar! Who is there, please?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(over comms)

Oh, hello, sweetie! It's Mrs. Frondrinax! Long time no see, eh?

ALTHAAR

Ah. Mrs. Frondrinax. It has indeed been some time since you have made visit. But Althaar supposes there have been many matters making occupation to you.

Front door whoosh. MRS. FRONDRINAX bustles in.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Thank you, dearie. Oh, it's so good to see you! You're right, I've just been so busy with the Committee that I haven't had a moment's peace! But it occurred to me just now how much time had passed since I'd had a chance for a nice chat with my dear friend, Althaar! So I thought I'd just drop by and say hello! I hope I didn't catch you at a bad time.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is always pleased to be greeting guests at any time, Mrs. Frondrinax. And he is very pleased that you have honored the request of FriendJohn that guests are to make ringing of the door-bell, rather than appearing in the suite un-announced. This is a change most desirable!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ah. Yes. Well, you know, I don't think a neighbor popping in for a friendly visit counts as a "guest," really, but I suppose there's no harm in humoring John if he doesn't agree. I wouldn't want to upset the dear boy.

ALTHAAR

Mm. Then Althaar must suggest that you make swift ending of your visit. FriendJohn has had very much of the stress-ful in recent days, and the unexpected guest in the room of living is most likely to cause the up-set. Perhaps a reschedulement of the friendly chatting can be arranged?

Whoosh as he opens the front door back up.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Wait! I... All right, the truth is, I didn't just come by for a chat. I actually... well, I need some help.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is always pleased to be of useful-ness, Mrs. Frondrinax. ...But if he is making assistance to you, there is a favor he must be asking in return.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, of course I'd be happy to do whatever I can to pay you back, sweetheart! Although there are some things that are out of my fronds, you understand. I'm just one member of the Committee, after all!

ALTHAAR

Then perhaps you could be putting the word in at your colleagues on the Committee, that it is not so efficient to make direct interference in the scheduling of the workers of Sanitation? Supervisor Reyes is having much experience of her people, and of the peculiarities of the Fairgrounds that are causing complication in the sanitizing. So it would be advisory to allow her to be organizing her own schedulings.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh. Well, that might not be so simple, Althaar...

ALTHAAR

Diplomacy is not of great simpleness either, Mrs. Frondrinax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, I... Oh, all right. If that's really what you want, I'll just have to sell it to the Committee somehow. I need the help of the best damn diplomat I know!

[scene 11] Transition to the Electric Egg. KWONTZ is sitting in on piano.

XTOPPS

Now that is some serious conjuration.

SOPON

Who knew that one of our regulars was a galaxy-class pianist? Kwontz is amazing. I mean, of course he's only got the two arms, so he's not on your level, but he's still pretty impressive.

XTOPPS

Abso-lusciously. Those tentacles can coax some sweet sauces out of those those black and ivory bosses.

DEE

I never I thought I'd see it, but the Egg does feel sort of classy these days.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Hey! Pianoman! Prune that shness, I can't hear myself drink!

DEE

Annnnd the class is gone.

SOPON

It's kind of ironic we once thought adding some plants would brighten this place up.

XTOPPS

Want me to charge this thorny zood with violating the statutes of Kandephaa'a?

DEE

Is there a Xybidont law against being a drunken asspot?

XTOPPS

Eh, I could get him on "Offending the Exquisite Sensibilities of a Principal of Her Grandiosity's Scintillant Concord." Whole lot of latitude in that one.

SOPON

Better not, Xtopps. Chip wants us to keep our tiles straight with the Foogs.

DEE

Yeah, I have to say recent events have really put a dent in what little respect I had left for that guy. I knew he was cheap, I knew he could be a bastard, but giving a bunch of loud-mouthed shrubs a free pass to abuse his employees? That's a new low.

XTOPPS

Tough times make cowards of the bastards in us all, Capital D.

DEE

I guess us Eggizens have to look out for one another, since no one else is.

SOPON

I'd say that sentiment is worth a drink.

DEE

Thanks, but I've already cashed in my tickets this cycle.

SOPON

This one's on the house. In fact, I'll put it on Chip's tab. It's the least he can do.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Excuse me, gesin. What sort of wood is that piano made of?

KWONTZ

("What business is it of yours?")

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

What business is it of mine? Well, that would depend on the answer to my question. I don't give a fig if it's maple or oak, those sons of beech trees can rot as some vagrant lean-tos for all I care. But if you've mangled a spruce to make your little noise-box, then we are going to have a problem.

KWONTZ

("Don't bother me while I'm trying to play, please.")

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

I'm just saying that more thought should be put into these kinds of decisions. This place doesn't have the best reputation, you know.

KWONTZ

("Look, I don't even work here! Just leave me alone!")

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Then why are you on stage making that racket in the first place?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Yeah, I don't get this "music" thing. Why waste time banging on a weird casket-table thingy when you can sit and photosynthesize in silence?

KWONTZ

("You first, philistine!")

SOPON

Oh, mang. I better go break that up before one of them tries to throw branches.

DEE

Good call. Give a shout if you need backup.

XTOPPS

Hey, look who has arrived: Vert The Virtuous! Mang, you are looking de-juiced to Crashville.

VERT

(weakly)

Whaddya mean? I'm feelin' great. And good. Great and good, which makes... gate! Heheheh...

DEE

Vert, you look like death warmed over. When's the last time you ate anything?

VERT

I dun need foood... just some good ol' cool, clear water. That's it!

XTOPPS

I don't think water is going to hack it, my zood. You've got to dump this liquid diet shness and feast at the cornucopia of common sense.

DEE

Seriously, Vert. If even Xtopps can tell you're getting stupid, then you are getting quadruple-stupid.

VERT

What do you even care? All you people do is tease me, and step on me, and yell at me, and shake me up and down like a salt shaker...

DEE

Okay, that was one time, we were really drunk, and we honestly thought you were a salt shaker.

XTOPPS

The resemblance is uncanny.

DEE

And we did apologize. Eventually.

VERT

You never apologized for calling me "Elephant Ears"!

DEE

Oh, come on, that's just friendly teasing! We don't mean anything by it.

XTOPPS

Yeah, zood, you've gotta toughen up if you wanna do the tighten-up.

VERT

Well, I'm not tough! I've never been tough! I couldn't win a fight with a Bronsonian! I can't even stand up to you guys and you're supposed to be my friends! And if I can't stand up to my friends, how am I supposed to stand up to... to a bunch of... a bunch of freakishly strong, super-sneaky plant people?

DEE

Ohhhhh, ok, now I get it. Listen, Vert, you need to relax. The Committee hasn't said anything about not being able to eat plants. And even if they did, that would only apply to Humans! So you've got nothing to worry about.

VERT

For now! But no one knows what they'll do next! No one even knows why they're here in the first place!

DEE

Ok, that's true, but— No matter what, blowing out your thrusters like this is not going to do you any good. I think you'll feel a lot more optimistic about the situation once you've gotten something to eat, yeah?

XTOPPS

I got just the sufficiency for your deficiency. Lemme dip into the back.

*XTOPPS heads to the dressing room. During the end of above, **the argument in the background between SOPON and the FUGULNARI has been escalating:***

SOPON

Buddy, I don't care if you personally suckled at the teat of Nelson herself, you do not have the right to treat your fellow patrons that way.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

And what gives you the right to tell me what to do? You put a dishtowel in your back pocket and you think that makes you better than me?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

They're clearly not better than us. I mean look at them... they look a like a pile of autumn leaves in mid-January.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

You mean because of that ghastly gray pallor?

SOPON

I am warning you...

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

You're right. That is the grayest thing I've ever seen. They're grayer than charcoal!

DRUNK FUGULNARI

If they were charcoal, they would have been a plant at some point. Then they would at least have that going for them.

SOPON

Okay, that's it. You zoods are done here. I am officially kicking you both out.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

You? Kick us out? Ha! With what? Yer *probe*?

SOPON

You can get up and leave or I will carry your pots out the door myself. The choice is yours.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Leave? You're telling US to LEAVE? What kind of specist, anti-plant slur is that?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

I wanna... I wanna speak to your manager. He's a... he's a Human! Didja know that?!

SOPON

Yes, I had in fact noticed the species of my employer.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Okay! So... yeah! That means... that means he works for us now! MANAGER!

CHIP

Evening, folks. What's going on here?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

This strange tentaclawed creature was desecrating the corpse of a noble spruce, and when we raised an objection, this horrible gray thing told us we have to leave.

CHIP

Oh, did they now?

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Yeah! We're paying customers, and we are sick of this cinereal slob telling us how to act, as if they knew any better.

CHIP

Well, I'm terribly sorry about all this, folks. Sopon never should have tried to kick you out.

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

I'm pleased you see it that way.

CHIP

Because I should have done that a long time ago.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

Thass right! Wait, what?

CHIP

You heard me. I want you brambles out of my bar, permanently. You are officially banned! Your pictures are going right up there on the Wall of Smarkheads Who Don't Know How to Have a Good Time! And if you ever set so much as a root hair in here ever again, I have a friend with a wood chipper who doesn't ask a lot of questions. Am I understood?

OFFENDED FUGULNARI

Well! I have never been more insulted in all my life! Let's get out of here, Barturflex. I imagine the management of Chez Pazzo will know what side their soil is aerated on.

DRUNK FUGULNARI

You've made a big mistake, you hairless ape. The Committee's gonna hear about this.

CHIP

Great. Then you can tell 'em Fugulnari are always welcome at the Electric Egg, as long as they treat my employees with the respect they deserve.

SOPON

Wow, Chip. Thanks.

CHIP

Yeah, well, I should have done it a lot sooner. What kind of boss would I be if I let a couple of potted vonchers like that walk all over the best bartender I've ever known?

DEE

That's a good question, Chip. And I have to say it's one we've all been asking the last couple weeks.

CHIP

Ok, look, I get that this hasn't been fun for any of you, and I'm sorry about that, but I've been walking a real thin tightrope, here, and it's not getting thicker anytime soon. Between the Fugulnari and the Humans, plus every other species of customer we get in here, not to mention the Xybidont Empire and the League... I mean, our whole dual-jurisdiction setup was already more complicated than a Borromeo donut, and now we've got this Fugulnari Friendship Committee thing adding a whole extra layer of complication frosting with authoritarian menace jimmies on top. So yeah, I'm still figuring it out. But no matter what happens, I'm not going to just sit back and let a couple of jeckers like that mess around with my staff. Even if that means I end up out on the street. Or, well, corridor.

DEE

So, any other Foogs who want to toss their mulch around in here, we can kick them out? And you'll back us up?

CHIP

Absolutely. Anyone who's not here to have a good time, no matter the species, can get the jeck out.

SOPON

Well, I say that's worth at least one celebratory Frigilnakki, who's with me?

CHIP

I'm in. Ooh, but you'd better not pour any more for Vert. He looks dead drunk.

VERT

No, I'm just... undernourished...

XTOPPS

But not for long, Johnny Staccato. Ol' Xtopps has got this in hand, with plenty to spare. Here you go, mang. This'll put the brakes on the emaciation train.

VERT

Oh... is that a... a sandwich? Can I really eat it?

XTOPPS

Mange away, mon ami.

VERT

Oh, thank you! It looks so good! (*he starts eating*) Mmmmm... this is great... this is... this is... Xtopps, is this peanut butter?

XTOPPS

I have been told that this delectable peanut paté makes for an excellent source of protein for those unequipped to experience its more esoteric qualities.

VERT

But... Why would you give me a sandwich from your stash?

XTOPPS

'Twas simple, my arioso. You were in need of serious sustenance, and the gustatory offerings of the Egg, enticing though they may be to the palate of the thoroughly razzle-pated, are somewhat inadequate in nutritional manifestation. I could not in good conscience serve you any of the smark from there. But a PB and J of the classic variety? *That* I can assemble in a squib's trice.

VERT

Oh, wow. Well, thank you. It's very delicious.

XTOPPS

Just do me a husk, mang? Leave the hunger striking to the religiously-fixated and the politically-dedicated. Even when you've got the herbaceous habdabs, food is the first thing, morals follow on, you chom me?

VERT

Absolutely. It'll never happen again, I promise.

XTOPPS

It better not. I only have so much nutty butty to spread around and I don't want my stash getting too thin. Or we'll both be flipping the gizz.

[scene 12] Transition to the Beaux Show.

BEAUX SEVERAL

Hey, Fairgrounds, can you believe that it has only been two weeks since things really started making sense? Time sure does fly when you're watering the seeds of progress with a superior species, huh? You know, I can't understand how any of you were ever satisfied with the way things used to work around here, I really can't. 'Cause the way things used to work is "barely," amIrite? Seriously, you zoods had it no better than those xenomorph ice-pops you've got floating around outside. Now, okay okay, I know, some of you have a couple problems with all this "advice" you're getting all of a sudden. But hey, it always takes a while to adjust to new lifestyle philosophies. That said... Okay, not to be a thorn in anyone's side, but you know. This is Beaux talking, and what is Beaux if not honest? Right, Tess?

TESS

That's absolutely right, Beaux.

BEAUX

You ever know me to hold back when I got a gripe, Tess?

TESS

Never, Beaux.

BEAUX

Exactly. So anyway, yeah, I've been hearing from some Humans out there, and even a few non-Humans that are catching backwash from the new rules and regs. And I get it. I mean, no one likes being told when and where to go, yeah? I know I don't. But you know what's really getting to me, Beaux-vians, is this new smark going around about "superfluous energy expenditure." Have you heard about this schness, Tess?

TESS

Sure have, Beaux. Can't believe it.

BEAUX

Me neither. So for those of you that haven't heard, apparently, they're saying the Foogs might start telling everyone how much we're allowed to *move!* I mean, you gotta be flotting kidding me, right? Like, it's not as if anyone's running the Martian 100K in this tin can to begin with, and some of us need to keep things moving if we're gonna stay inertial. I mean, I am *not* giving up my daily Pilates to keep some shrub happy, I don't care what anyone says. Anyway, that's my two creds, and that's the Beaux of Wisdom for this cycle. Until the next one, Fairgrounds, keep your ears to the ground, your eyes in your hands and your brains in your feet. So long!

[scene #] Transition to a fairly empty corridor. A beat. Then TORIANNA, who is standing, leaning against a bulkhead, slurps at her takeout coffee.

H.F.

(coming up the corridor)

Oh, hey there, Mindy. You... ah... you okay?

TORIANNA

Why shouldn't I be, Hardyfox?

H.F.

Well. Besides all the various reasons for not-okayness we've got going at the moment, or I guess, one big reason with a lot of little sub-reasons daisy-chained off it, it's more than a little surprising to see you leaning against a bulkhead in a back corridor, nursing a takeout coffee.

TORIANNA

I decided to get my own macchiato from Tixondu's today, stretch my legs a bit. That's not what I'd call highly eccentric behavior.

H.F.

For most people, maybe not. But for you? Absolutely. Not to mention we're nowhere near the Bridge *or* Tixondu's. And while I know that shortest distance between two points on the Fairgrounds usually involves a minimum of three detours, the shuttles are actually having one of their rare confluences of functionality this cycle, so...

TORIANNA

So I took the scenic route.

H.F.

A scenic route that brought you all the way down to a maintenance access corridor in Mem 46.

TORIANNA

You're here.

H.F.

I'm here because I'm on my way to sweet-talk George Foreman-bot into bumping an unpleasant little job up in the Systems Maintenance task queue, and no, you don't wanna hear about it.

TORIANNA

Fine. I'm here because I don't want to be on the Bridge right now.

H.F.

You... Oh, c'mon, Mindy, you're always happiest on the Bridge.

TORIANNA

That's not true. I'm usually thoroughly exasperated when I'm on the Bridge.

H.F.

Thoroughly *happily* exasperated.

TORIANNA

That's not a— Well, you may have a point. But if my normal state of frustration on the Bridge seemed happy to you, it was probably because being on the Bridge meant I could at least *do* something about whatever was crawling up my jumper at the moment. But these days, everything up there seems precision-engineered to drive me crazy and... there's not a single thing I can do about it.

H.F.

The Committee?

TORIANNA

The Committee.

H.F.

They really making it hard for you?

TORIANNA

They're making it perfectly easy, as long as we go along with all of their "suggestions." Which are numerous, incessant, and as far as I can tell, utterly pointless. But we're taking all of them, because orders from Earth are to give our new "friends" our full co-operation. And even so, they have a really pissy attitude about it.

H.F.

Threatening?

TORIANNA

Oh no, never threatening, just pissy. But at the same time, they like to find ways of subtly reminding you that there's a lot of them on the Fairgrounds now, maybe more than we even know about, and that even the smallest of them appears to have the strength to bench press four or five Sanitation grunts at once. Or, you know, rip their arms off.

H.F.

Yikes.

TORIANNA

Not that they're looking to. It's clear they want to keep things very calm around here. No abuse, no violence.

H.F.

Nothing that would ruffle any aristates at the Office of Equilibrium.

TORIANNA

Exactly. Which makes me wonder if I'm betraying us all by going along with it.

H.F.

What else are you going to do? Resign? Refuse your orders, let it go to a court-martial? That doesn't help anybody either. And like you said, the Fugulnari haven't actually abused anyone so far. This has the potential to get a lot worse, sure, but so far it's just annoying.

TORIANNA

Believe me, you're not saying anything I haven't said to myself a million times. But what worries me is what happens when they don't stop at "annoying." If we wait until then to fight back, I don't know if we'll be able to at all. *(sigh)* At least you civilians don't have to deal with any of this shness.

H.F.

Actually, we've been getting new directives from corporate for the past few weeks, so I assume there's been some "suggesting" going on there too. Nothing as bad as what you've got on the Bridge, just random sector interdictions. Taking the long way around has been causing the odd backlog, but that's all. Although, some of those interdictions are for sectors where we normally get at least a couple calls a week, so it's anyone's guess who's handling those now.

TORIANNA

Maybe the Fugulnari have their own repair squads.

H.F.

That, or they've made some kind of backroom deal with the bots.

TORIANNA

Robots? Violate the Union contract? Come on, Hardyfox.

H.F.

Yeah, I know. Thing is, the bots don't particularly like the Fugalnari, far as I can tell, but they don't necessarily dislike them either, which puts the Fugalnari one up on us.

TORIANNA

Still. I can't imagine they'd... Would they?

H.F.

I don't know. If you want, I can see if Foreman-bot's heard anything. I mean, no promises, he might not want to talk to me about it, but he definitely won't want to talk to management, so.

TORIANNA

I'd appreciate it.

H.F.

No problem. You heading back to the Bridge?

TORIANNA

No... I think I'll finish my coffee right here. And then... And then I'll go right back to Tixondu's for another, and take my own sweet damn time with it. If there's an emergency, they can call me, but otherwise? I'd say aimlessly wandering the corridors is still a better use of my time than rubber-stamping a list of Fugalnari "suggestions."

H.F.

Well, if you ever want a slightly more comfortable and marginally less depressing place than this corridor to get away from the Bridge for a while, you're always welcome at the office of... oh-the-hell-with-it, WSS. (*WSS! jingle*)

TORIANNA

(*chuckling*)

Thanks, Hardyfox, but I've seen your office. I'll take a 45-minute lecture on process metrics from a ficus any day.

H.F.

(*walking away*)

Fair enough. Later, Mindy.

A brief beat. A sigh. A slurp. Then the sound of FRALL shimmering in.

FRALL

Commander?

TORIANNA
Oh. Hey, Frall.

FRALL
I'm afraid it would be advisable for you to make your way to the Bridge at this point.

TORIANNA
Emergency?

FRALL
No, just another annoyance. But it will be worse for all concerned if you aren't there when Oakensarx returns from their meeting in Hydroponics.

TORIANNA
(starting to move)
So I need to rush.

FRALL
(moving with TORIANNA)
Not at all. I anticipated this and left you enough time to amble there in a leisurely, relaxed manner, banter a bit with the Bridge crew, and get settled in to your command chair, before you are required to accept the latest suggestions from the Fugulnari.

TORIANNA
Hm. My command chair? I was thinking I would meet with them in my office.

FRALL
The choice is of course yours, sir. It will make no difference.

TORIANNA
It won't?

FRALL
It will not.

TORIANNA
Not even with the... you know?

FRALL
The bleeding-edge comprehensive surveillance apparatus the ICSB Office of Equilibrium has installed in your office, which you have been trying in vain for the past year to access?

TORIANNA
Right. That. You're saying that thing hasn't been listening in on my conversations?

FRALL

Oh, of course it has, Commander. But it has been doing the same for every conversation on the Fairgrounds, so inviting the Fugulnari into the office is somewhat surplus to requirements.

TORIANNA

Oh. Then... has it already reported back to the OE about what's going on here?

FRALL

Unfortunately not, sir. The System in your office is still in passive mode. It would only activate at the behest of an authorized agent, as you have yourself observed, or under certain very specific circumstances that the Office of Equilibrium would consider vital to the interests of the interstellar community. A criterion which the current arrangement between the Fugulnari and the League of Humans does not, alas, satisfy. In short, I'm sorry to inform you that the OE will not be riding to the rescue anytime soon, or indeed ever.

TORIANNA

Wonderful. So we're on our own. No help from the ICSB, and certainly no help from Earth. Just... the Fairgrounds. A shabby joke of a space station full of folks who wound up here because they couldn't hack it anywhere else.

FRALL

And yet, Mindy, I would advise you not to despair. In fact, at the risk of being dangerously indiscreet, I would say that the biggest mistake the Fugulnari have made thus far was involving the Fairgrounds in this first phase of their plans. Further, deponent sayeth not.

TORIANNA

First phase—? So they... Right. Well, then. Guess I'd better get to it. Whatever "it" is. Yes?

FRALL

Absolutely, Commander. And I'll pick you up another macchiato. I was headed that way myself.

[scene 14] Transition to a meeting room in Hydroponics.

OAKENSARX

Excellent work with the D'voraxi, Frondrinax. Top marks. You and Rooty are to be commended for providing such a valuable service to our people.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What can I say, Oakensarx. I suppose I just have a way with the little stingers. And Rooty, too.

ROOTY

Yay! Rooty can't fail!

OAKENSARX

Why, it would appear so, Rooty! Which means you both should have no problem with your next diplomatic assignment.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, another diplomatic mission? Wonderful.

OAKENSARX

Yes, of course! You think we're just going to put all of our seed stock in the D'voraxian bed? No, no, Frondrinax, that would be foolish indeed. If things go polar with these bees (and they very well might, they're so easily offended), we're going to want a good working relationship with another qualified group of pollinators.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Don't tell me...

OAKENSARX

That's right, we're extending a friendly branch to the Flutterians.

ROOTY

Yay! Butterflies!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Must we, Oakensarx? We've got a good deal going with the D'voraxi. If they get word that we're making overtures to the Flutterians, it could wilt the whole thing!

OAKENSARX

I'm not worried about that. After all, I've got my top two diplomats on the case!

ROOTY

Yay! I'm a top two diplomat!

OAKENSARX

Here's the dossier. You can of course contact me directly if you need any other resources, but I shouldn't think that will be necessary, given your obvious affinity for this kind of work. Vimspeed to you both.

OAKENSARX exits.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Wonderful. Well, Rooty? Any stirring insights into butterflies you'd like to share?

ROOTY

Ummm... butterflies are very very pretty, but... that means they're poison! So you should never eat one!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Very astute. All right, open up another bag of mulch, Rooty. We've got a lot of work ahead of us.

ROOTY

Yay!

[scene 15a] Transition to JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment, where they're watching Dave & Zwizz'linarp. After a couple of lines, the doorbell rings.

DAVE

Zwizz'linarp, what *have* you been doing in the kitchen?

ZWIZZ'LINARP

After you said that Sheila was insatiable, I thought I should make as much dinner as I could before she came over.

Canned laughter.

DAVE

It's not that kind of— Oh, Zwizz, I know you mean well, because Hoove the Beneficent Lifemaster teaches us that all beings ultimately mean well, (*canned audience: Awwww!*) but sometimes I wish you were better at picking up on the subtleties of Human language. Sheila's beauty pageant should be over by now, and she'll be here any minute! So would you clean up this mess?

ZWIZZ'LINARP

No sombrero, Dave!

Big canned audience laughter and applause.

DAVE

All right, thanks. Now where did you put my hat recharger?

ZWIZZ'LINARP

It's right over there, Dave. I was using it as a pressure cooker.

DAVE

Whaat?! (*horrible hat-and-stew explosion sprays stuff everywhere*) Zwizz'linarrrrrrrp!

A schlocky comedy boinnng! sound. The TV is paused. [scene 15b] Meanwhile:

JOHN

What the—? Althaar, were you expecting anyone?

ALTHAAR

Not in the smallest, FriendJohn! Perhaps it is one of those missionaries of Hoove the Beneficent that have been wandering the corridors as of late?

JOHN

Let's hope not. *(door intercom bloop)* Hi, just so you know, everyone here is thoroughly satisfied with the state of their spiritual energy strings.

STELLA

(over the intercom)

Aren't you an agnostic? Because I'm going to be really cheesed if I had to sit through that entire rant from H.F. for nothing.

JOHN

Stella? I thought you were working all night!

Door whoosh as he lets her in.

STELLA

That's what I thought, too, but I just got the all-clear from Command, which I guess means from the Fugulnari, on this month's schedule. So I won't need to pull a double shift after all.

JOHN

Nice!

STELLA

Even nicer, I apparently have full permission to arrange the Sanitation shift schedules as I see fit from now on. Well, the Foogs still reserve the right to "request" changes, but at least I don't need to sit around waiting for approval. So my hours should be getting back to something approaching normal, which means I have the next two cycles all to myself, and I intend to make very good use of them by splitting this bottle of Venusian Shiraz and giving those anti-grav units on your bed a serious workout.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is very pleased that your inconveniences of scheduling have been resolved, Supervisor Reyes! Can he be requesting that you do not make splitting of the bottle until he has had time to unroll the protective tarp across the carpet?

STELLA

Oh, hey Althaar! Don't worry, it's not that kind of splitting, the carpet is perfectly safe.

JOHN

You know, the carpet will be even safer if we take this bottle into my room right now...

STELLA

Good call. 'Night, Althaar!

ALTHAAR

Good night to you, dear friends!

*Whoosh of JOHN's bedroom door as they exit. A pleased noise from ALTHAAR.
Then another ring of the doorbell. Intercom bloop.*

ALTHAAR

Please be welcomed to the home of John and Althaar! Although if you are seeking the company of FriendJohn, Althaar must advise that you return at another time, as FriendJohn is currently occupied with the calibration of the anti-gravity units!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

That's all right, Althaar dearie, I just wanted to stop by and say thank you for all your help!

Door whoosh as ALTHAAR lets her in.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Then the mission of entente with the D'voraxi was success?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

It was, Althaar. The Committee is very pleased. And I couldn't have done it without you! Diplomatic negotiations aren't exactly my preferred climate, you know. So... thank you.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is always pleased to be offering assistance in the advancement of friendship! And it is a rare thing that Althaar has opportunity to make use of his course in Apinae choreography. It is a skill that had collected some rust, so Althaar was most gratified to be de-oxidizing it!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

It certainly saved all of our leaves. And it was quite the sight! You really know how to move, Althaar!

ALTHAAR

Ee! Perhaps Althaar should be opening the studio of dance in his surplus time!

They laugh for a moment as if nothing had changed between them. Then, things become awkward.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, anyway. I, uh, I took care of that thing you were asking about, so...

ALTHAAR

Yes, Althaar has been informed of this already. Thanking you.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, alright. Well... I'll be seeing you around the corridor, then.

ALTHAAR

This is very likely, Mrs. Frondrinax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes... you know, it has been AGES since we've had one of our Sunday brunches. If you want to get together for a mimosa sometime...

ALTHAAR

Althaar does not wish to cause the offense, Mrs. Frondrinax, but he is aware that your role with the Committee of Friendship is one of much busy-ness. So Althaar does not expect that you will have much surplus time to make brunching.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh. Yes. You're very right. How very silly of me. Well, back to work, I suppose.

ALTHAAR

Althaar hopes you are happy with the result of your efforts, Mrs. Frondrinax.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(weakly, unconvincing)

Thank you, Althaar. I am. I'm very happy. So very, very happy.

[scene 16] Closing credits music.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life with Althaar*, episode twenty-three.

This episode was written by Amanda LaPergola for Gemini CollisionWorks and starred

John Amir as John B

Berit Johnson as Althaar

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall

Eli Gantias as H.F.

Chris Lee as Chip Frinkel
Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax
Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna
Zuri Washington as Dee
and Derrick Peterson as Xtopps
and also featured
Fred Backus, Ian W. Hill, Olivia Baseman, Philip Cruise, Lex Friedman, Linus Gelber, Clara Francesca, Leila Okafor, Anna Stefanic, Jessica Stoya, and Holly Pocket McCaffrey.
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, so— Why, what's this?
Could that be unaccountably-popular interstellar broadcaster Beaux Several strolling through
the corridors of Tsade 31? Ooh, and he's got Tess with him! Let's listen in, shall we?

*[scene 17] BEAUX and TESS are walking down a corridor, chatting—a little more
“professional” than their on-air personae.*

BEAUX

Okay, Tess, tell Marty to get on that deal with the Bronsonians, and fast.

TESS

You think we'll see big heat coming down here?

BEAUX

Ah, maybe, maybe not, but honestly, the Fairgrounds is a real Snore-topia these days. I mean, sure, there's the smell of something bad coming through the warp, I can whiff that light-years away, but I'd say there's only a tiny chance we get a good angle on it. So it's time to bouge.

TESS

You want “tiny” chances, Bronsonia's the place to be.

BEAUX

Heh, right! One a those little jeckers tries to play tough, I can just drop kick him to Hardrax 10!

*They laugh, but suddenly two Fugulnari, DINORBIAX and FRACOTTIVERX are
right in front of them, blocking their way. For some reason, these two Fugulnari
talk in U.K. cockney “spiv”-gangster voices. Very VERY pleasant, but without any
trace of a smile in it.*

DINORBIAX

Oi! Hallo there! You're Beaux Several, aincha?

FRACOTTIVERX

Why it is, it is, Dinorbiax! I'd know him anywhere! He's famous, he is!

DINORBIAX

Beaux Several! The widest boy what ever put on a pair of shoes, they say!

FRACOTTIVERX

Big fans, we are, Sin Several, BIG fans. And of you too, Tess with Balls, of course, of course...

BEAUX

(turning on a rote "crowdpleasing" style, with low energy)

Well, that's just great! We always love meeting our fans, don't we Tess, but the fact is, we were just in the middle of—

DINORBIAX

See, this here is my cousin, Fracottiverx, and they just love your show—

BEAUX

And I love our leafy fans right back, but the thing is, it's been a while since my last allergy dot, so if you could just step back a—

FRACOTTIVERX

And I'd like you to meet my cousin here, Dinorbiax! And a bigger Beaux Several fan you won't find on the Fairgrounds!

TESS

That's great, but really, we've got to—

DINORBIAX

Oh, yeah, yeah, big fans, sure, but you know... recently, Sin Several, you've been saying some rather unpleasant things about us Fugulnari on your show, haven't you? Getting a bit shirty about us, I'd say.

FRACOTTIVERX

Insulting, even.

DINORBIAX

Oh! Not so much insulting, I'd say, Frac. But more than a bit... out-of-line, yanno? Unhelpful.

FRACOTTIVERX

Unproductive, even. And you know, with the whole Human-Fugulnari Friendship Advisory Committee just getting started, this isn't the best moment to be unproductive. Not about the League of Humans, and not about the Fugulnari, you understand, squire?

BEAUX

Hey, hey, hey! I think you've got the wrong end of the stick, here.

DINORBIAX

Oh, I think our sticks are doing just fine, squire.

FRACOTTIVERX

Oh yeah, very robust, I'd say. Vigorous.

BEAUX

Uh huh. Look, friends, here's the plump: none of my crew flies with a Human passport, not even Todd. I guess you could call us... citizens of the galaxy. But one thing you definitely can't call us is citizens of the League of Humans. So we don't have a Fidorian in this fight. Now, I love a lot of what you zoods are doing here, really, I do. But when I see something I don't love, well, I'm not gonna shut up about it. That's not Beaux.

DINORBIAX

Oh! did you hear that, Frac? Not a League of Humans citizen! Whaddya know? Not subject to L.O.H. restrictions, eh?

FRACOTTIVERX

I guess not! But see, Sin Several, sir, the flip side of that being, you're also not really under the *protection* of the League, now are you?

DINORBIAX

And we could all use protection, couldn't we, Frac?

FRACOTTIVERX

We certainly could, Dino, we certainly could.

BEAUX

Look, friends, I dunno what specifically has gotten up your xylem, but we're talking the Beaux Show! We're talking Beaux Several! And when we're talking Beaux Several, it's all about how Beaux is talking. And Beaux likes to tell a joke or two, you know? Ruffle a few feathers. Or fronds. But it's all in good fun, amIrite?

FRACOTTIVERX

Oh, we know from fun, Sin Several! We Fugulnari have a long and celebrated tradition of joculariry. Tell Sin Several a joke, Dino!

DINORBIAX

Okay. “What are about three foot long and go thud-thud?”

BEAUX

I give up.

FRACOTTIVERX

Beaux Several’s arms, after they’re ripped off and thrown on the floor.

DINORBIAX

Good joke.

FRACOTTIVERX

Ha-ha.

DINORBIAX

But hey, Frac? Maybe it should be “thud-thud... thud?” ‘Cause you know, these meaty types don’t stay vertical for too long after the arms come off. I speak from experience.

FRACOTTIVERX

You may be right, Dino. I’ll workshop it when I get the grease. But the point I was making to Sin Several is, *that’s* more the kind of humor that appeals to us Fugulnari.

DINORBIAX

Oh, yeah. More a kind of observational thing.

FRACOTTIVERX

We’re real good at observing.

DINORBIAX

But yunno? Sometimes it’s time to *stop* observing.

FRACOTTIVERX

And start doing.

DINORBIAX

And we know you like to ask a lot of questions...

FRACOTTIVERX

But we’d like to make just a few suggestions.

DINORBIAX

That's right. We're here to *suggest* you maybe retire all those little jokes about the way we're running things, and get back to offering us your support, just like you did when we first showed up here. Wholeheartedly. Without reservation.

FRACOTTIVERX

Oh, that was nice, wasn't it, Dino?

DINORBIAX

Sure was, Frac, sure was. Sin Several here seemed to have some understanding of where he properly stood. Knew how to talk about us then, he did.

FRACOTTIVERX

So now, Sin Jack-the-Lad Several, we'd like to hear a bit more of *that* again. Give 'em the list, Dino.

DINORBIAX

(handing over a piece of paper)

Here you go, Tess, and I must say, big fan of yours as well. But you know, where Beaux goes, or any of his various limbs and organs for that matter, so do you. Am I right? Anyway, Sin Several, that list there is just a short sampling of the kind of thing we Fugulnari would like to hear you sharing with your listeners.

FRACOTTIVERX

Again, suggestions there, just suggestions, alright? But, uh... you'd do well to be suggestible right now, Sin Several. If you want to keep your roots sunk into the Fairgrounds much longer. You take care now, gesin, and again, big fans we are!

The two FUGULNARI move away, chuckling a bit to themselves. Beat.

TESS

Okay. So. You want me to tell Marty to get the osmium out on that Bronsonian thing? I think we can be out of here this time tomorrow.

BEAUX

(seething quietly)

Tomorrow? Tomorrow? Oh, frid no, Tess. That plan's going straight into the chipper. We're not going anywhere.

TESS

We're not?

BEAUX

No one. NO ONE, I don't care how thick their trunk is, tells Beaux Several what he can and can't say.

TESS

I don't know, Beaux. I think what we're splashing around in this time might be a lot deeper than it looks. Might be time to pull up on shore for a while.

BEAUX

No way, Tess. We've pissed off way bigger honchos than these stupid Foogs, and no one's touched us yet. If they didn't fry us on Mebsuta, they sure as frid won't get us here.

TESS

Ok. So... what are we doing with these "suggestions"?

BEAUX

These? (*grabs paper from her*) Pfft. Like I'm even gonna read this schness. Frill that noise! These herbies have no idea who they're messing with. I'm Beaux flotting Several!

Sound of a piece of paper being ripped violently.