

Life with Althaar

Episode 28: False Faces, True Colors

Version 2.2 (Recording Script), 07/05/21 - ALaP (v2, BAJ)

[scene 1] The crackle of the Fairgrounds' PA systems coming on-line in an unusually empty corridor/public area for an announcement from MRS. FRONDRINAX at an obscenely early hour of the morning.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Gooooood morning, everyone! Or good night, as the case may be—at this hour it's hard to tell the difference, isn't it? And of course it doesn't really matter to most of you, since you should all be in your living quarters relaxing in your—well, you call them “beds,” but they're not proper beds at all, really, are they? No soil whatsoever, not even so much as a scattering of redwood chips! Unless of course you're one of the lucky Humans participating in the pilot of our new integrated in-ground housing program, but I shouldn't really be talking about that until we finally get all the knots worked out. *(beat)* Anyway.

The reason I'm interrupting your sleep cycle is to announce— Well, it's not everyone's sleep cycle, of course, there are you terribly important third-cycle workers, where would we all be without you? Humans, you should all do one of your little hand-slapping appreciation dances the next time you meet a third-cycle worker. Or, well, no, that's a lot of unnecessary movement, never mind that, just, you know, say “Appreciation Dance!” or something and then be about your business.

Oh, I've gotten off track again, haven't I? It seems *I'm* not at my most efficient at this hour of the night either, ha ha! Or, morning. *(beat)* Where was I now? Oh! Yes! I'm making this announcement to announce that there will be no more announcements! For the rest of the day. We'll be taking the entire PA system off-line while we do a bit of routine maintenance, which means you won't be hearing any of the usual top-of-cycle messages from the Committee. But we didn't want you to think there was anything amiss when you didn't hear from us! Just some very, very boring routine maintenance tasks that you don't need to worry your little cranial nodes about. And it's looking to be a very, very normal, not at all unusual day on the Fairgrounds, so you can just go about your ordinary, everyday activities without any more instructions from me! At peak efficiency! Won't that be fun! All right, that's all for now. Until, er... sometime around 25 or 26:00 tonight, probably? Until later, yes, that will do. Frondrinax out!

[scene 2] By the end of the announcement, we are hearing it from DEE's cell. DEE gives an it's-four-in-the-morning-type groan.

DEE

What the frid are those photosynthetic jeckers up to now?

The door to her cell's anteroom clangs open. ASTONMARTLOX, a prison guard, does whatever the Foog equivalent of stomping is into the anteroom and activates the intercom.

ASTONMARTLOX

(over intercom)

All right, up and under 'em, meatbag!

DEE

I'm sorry, are you talking to me? Have you been helped?

ASTONMARTLOX

Don't get cute with me, Human. Off the cot, now!

DEE

Is this the latest tactic from you drifters? Flotting with my sleep patterns? Because I spent the better part of my wayward youth as a gig-hopper, I'm pretty sure I can handle sleep deprivation better than you.

ASTONMARTLOX

No drainage, I've been on third shift all week and it's been hell on my carbon fixation rhythms. *(catching themselves, back to business)* Never mind the sassafrass! You're being relocated. Back to the door, manipulator limbs behind you, you know how this works.

During the following, DEE follows their instructions—we hear the cell door opening, phase-cuffs being applied, and the two of them proceeding down the prison hallway.

DEE

(now very very worried about where this is going, but putting on a brave face)

Relocated? Is that what you're calling it now?

ASTONMARTLOX

(not over intercom)

...Yes? Because that's what we've always called it? Turn to the right and proceed down the corridor, no funny stuff.

DEE

Right. I'm being "relocated." In the middle of the night. After the Committee has shut down the entire PA system, so that even if my friends did find out what was happening here, they wouldn't be able to spread the news to every Human on the Fairgrounds. *(getting louder and more defiant)* Because you know that, no matter how hard you try to grind us Humans under your roots, we will *never* succumb to the tyranny of the Plant Way! We will fight! And we will persevere! You will never conquer Humanity as long as there is one of us left to stand up for truth, freedom, and dignity!

A beat. Another cell door whooshes open. This one has a water feature in it.

ASTONMARTLOX

And here we are.

DEE

What?

ASTONMARTLOX

On your right. Step inside, back to the door.

She does, the phase cuffs come off, the door closes behind her.

DEE

So you're— You really are just relocating me?

ASTONMARTLOX

(now over the new cell intercom)

That's what I said I was doing! You meatbags don't listen too well.

DEE

No, that's not what I— I just... I thought you were going to— Never mind. *(actually takes in her surroundings)* So, this is... different.

ASTONMARTLOX

Oh, I most abjectly apologize if the accommodations aren't to your taste, Your Splendorousness.

Wait, no I don't, because you're a frosting agitator, and I don't give two spent pods what you think of it.

DEE

No, it's actually really... nice? I mean, the little fountain is soothing, I guess. Although it might mean a lot more trips to the facilities—don't think I don't appreciate the privacy panel, though, that's definitely an improvement.

ASTONMARTLOX

Oh, the therapeutic water feature has a deactivation sensor—just wave one of your appendages over the little panel on the top there.

DEE does so—the water noise stops, then restarts.

DEE

Huh. Well this all seems... great. The simulated sunlight is a definite quality-of-life improvement. Not to mention the luxurious Rondakalki carpets.

ASTONMARTLOX

Makes a nice change from those hard plasteel bulkheads, huh?

DEE

(oh crap)

Oh. There's no— There's no bulkheads here. At all.

ASTONMARTLOX

Nope! Just three centimeters of sturdy, fully transparent ultra-crylion, all the way around. Which isn't what you'd call *soft*, but it's maybe a little more comfortable to lean against. You do that a lot, huh? Like, a *lot*. Seems like that's your favorite hobby, leaning on the wall. I'm usually on camera duty, which means I spend most cycles up there watching you lean on the wall. Doesn't seem like much of a hobby to me, but it *is* stationary, so I guess I gotta give you points for efficiency.

DEE

...Thanks.

ASTONMARTLOX

And now I'd better go report to Frondrinax that the transfer went smoothly. If you need anything, feel free to go right on needing it.

DEE

Wait, Frondrinax arranged this personally? Did she say why?

ASTONMARTLOX

Pfft. Like I would tell you even if I knew. But you can ask her yourself later today, she's reserved a three-hour block in the visitation registry.

DEE

Oh, frill me.

[scene 3] Opening credit music.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents..!

LIFE! WITH! ALTHAAR! Season Three!

Episode 28... "False Faces... True Colors!"

[scene 4] A meeting in TORIANNA's office, off the Bridge.

OAKENSARX

Exciting day, eh, Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Exciting is a bit of an understatement, Oakensarx. This could be the pivotal moment for our entire operation.

OAKENSARX

Nothing to strain your stems about. Did all of our guests RSVP in a timely manner?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Rooty? You were in charge of invitations.

ROOTY

All the guests have... *répondu sill voos*...poopy! (*giggles*)

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(very Not Amused)

Wonderful.

OAKENSARX

Excellent work as always, Rooty. Now all that's left is to demonstrate to our guests exactly how benevolent, compassionate, and completely above soil our work here is. Which should be easy, because it is above soil.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, of course I know that, and you know that. But you know how unreasonable some people can be. Particularly those in certain quarters who have been trying to cause trouble for us with the ICSB General Council. We need this fact-finding mission to go smoothly.

OAKENSARX

Absolutely. But I have full trust in your abilities, Frondrinax. I know you'll ensure that this commission finds only those facts that will cast the Fairgrounds branch of our operations in a light most favorable. And no doubt Rooty will be happy to help.

ROOTY

Yay! Rooty is a propagandist!

OAKENSARX

Ha ha! That you are, Rooty. And speaking of propaganda, you're entirely certain that our guests won't be hearing any untoward interruptions? The last thing we need today is a station-wide broadcast of some deranged screed full of blatant misrepresentations and counter-efficiency sloganeering.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I agree completely, Oakensarx, which is why we did that hard shutdown of the entire PA system early this morning. Let them broadcast their pirate signal as long as they like—there isn't a live speaker anywhere on the Fairgrounds capable of playing it.

OAKENSARX

Are you sure? These malcontents have demonstrated considerable technical expertise.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, yes, but that's part of why we've been keeping this whole ICSB wellness probe a secret, isn't it? So that no one could make any plans to disrupt it in advance. And I've laid out the route of the inspection tour very carefully, avoiding any heavily-trafficked areas. So with any luck, the delegation will be long gone before anyone in the Resistance even knows they were here.

OAKENSARX

Excellent. Now, as to the tour. Is each stop fully prepared? They have everything they need?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well as far as aesthetics go, I feel as though the budgetary subcommittee could have been a little less stingy with my set and costume allotment. But with a little creativity in staging, I managed to get by.

OAKENSARX

I'm less concerned with set dressing than I am with the trustworthiness of our Human "friends." You're sure they'll be on their best behavior?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I'm not going to lie, Oakensarx, rehearsals were a bit touch-and-go, but that's show biz for you. I think we're rooted in for a smashing opening.

OAKENSARX

I don't care about their showbeingship, as long as they're smiling and compliant. Or at the very least better behaved than our illustrious Commander and her Bridge crew. I still don't feel very comfortable about involving Torianna directly in today's proceedings.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Protocol, Oakensarx. Commander Torianna is still nominally in command of the Fairgrounds. It would be highly suspect not to include her in some sort of official capacity. But I don't anticipate any trouble. We'll just swing the delegation by for a brief "hello," then whisk them off to their next tour stop so that the Commander can get back to her busy schedule of supervising the waste disposal subroutines. Which I'm sure will keep her far too busy to interfere with our special guests in any way whatsoever. Is that understood, Mindy?

TORIANNA

Oh, am I included in this conversation, now?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, of course you are! What, do you think we'd just sit around in your office talking as if you weren't here?

TORIANNA

Well, I'm just so humbled that you would grant me the briefest illusion of autonomy.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

That's the spirit! Just be sure and carry that positive attitude on into your interview later, hm?

TORIANNA

Interview? No one mentioned an interview. Who am I supposed to be interviewing?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, dear me, no! You're being interviewed! By the documentary crew.

TORIANNA

Documentary crew? You mean those nulls who've spent all morning filling my Bridge with bulky holo equipment and covering the floor with cables?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I mean the professional film crew we've brought in to document the inevitable rousing success of this ICSB fact-finding mission! The main unit will be following me and the delegation, of course, but we've also asked them to get some B-roll footage of interviews with various station residents. Including you, Commander! So you'll be able to share your thoughts on the Plant Way with the whole Galaxy! Won't that be fun?

OAKENSARX

Although I would advise you to phrase those thoughts with great care, Commander. Frankly, I was opposed to this in the first place. You've hardly been discreet with your criticisms of the Committee in the past.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Now, there's no need to get our stems all twisted over that, Oakensarx! We have final cut, after all. I'm sure any little indiscretions the Commander may commit can easily be pruned right out.

OAKENSARX

Still—

The door buzzer rings.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh my pots and planters, they're here!

OAKENSARX

Settle your petals, Frondrinax. We have a few minutes yet. That's probably just our Human goodwill ambassador.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, you're right, I almost forgot! Come in!

Door whooshes open; enter JOHN B.

JOHN

Hey, Commander, did you— Oh, uh, hi Mrs. F. Oakensarx.

ROOTY

And Rooty!

JOHN

Right. Hi, Rooty. Sorry to interrupt, everyone. Just, uh, point me to the tiny wire or beverage dispenser and I'll be out of your way as quick as a... very quick thing.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

A hah hah! Very funny, Johnny! But don't use up all your best material yet—we're going to want some of that famous John B wit to charm the delegates with when they arrive!

JOHN

Uh, what? I got an emergency work page, said I was needed in the Commander's office immediately. Did you not call for any repairs?

TORIANNA

I certainly didn't.

ROOTY

It was me! Look, Mama! I gotted a ambassador!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Rooty. First of all, you will not call me "Mama" in public. Secondly, you will not call me "Mama" in private. And thirdly, when I told you to "get John down here" I, perhaps foolishly, assumed it was understood that you would at the same time inform him as to the nature of his task today. Did you not do that? Why did you not do that?

ROOTY

Umm... I dunno. But I gotted him! Yay, Rooty!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Rooty, I swear to Vim, one of these days...

OAKENSARX

Now, now, no need to fret. I'm sure this dedicated Booster will be up to the job! Isn't that right, Mr. B?

JOHN

I still don't know why I'm here.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, fortunately I have a hard copy of the script with me, here you go. Of course I'd prefer to have had a chance to rehearse you a bit, but I suppose it can't be helped. Let me just fill you in on a little background, dearie— *(alert bleep)* Oh, mulch me, they've arrived!

OAKENSARX

Well, that'll be my cue to clear off. Come along now, Rooty.

ROOTY

Bye, Mama! Good luck with the propaganda!

OAKENSARX

Yes, good luck, everyone. We're all counting on you.

Door whoosh as they depart.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, yes, thank you. All right, John, we don't have time to get into it now, just stick to the script and read the lines *exactly* as written, all right? But with energy! You're here to sell, sell, sell our little project to some very special interstellar guests. A good Booster like yourself should have no problem demonstrating the proper enthusiasm, yes?

JOHN

Um, yeah. I'm... brimming with enthusiasm for... what are we doing now?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Just read the lines, Johnny dear. You'll pick it up as we go along. I suggest you keep your thumb next to your lines in the script, that way you won't lose your place. *(a more urgent alert bleep)* Oh! Better not keep the audience waiting. Places, everyone! It's showtime!

Door whoosh as they head out onto the Bridge proper.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Welcome, welcome, one and all! How very nice of you all to make the trip all the way out here to visit our Human friends. Ah, Thoombon ros Roog! You're looking hale as ever! How was your journey?

THOOMBON

It was fine up until the end. Our assigned docking trajectory was... eccentric, to say the least.

Distant background grumbling from STALIN-BOT.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

How nice! And Charsh, darling! Your barbels are looking handsome; have you just had them sharpened?

CHARSH

Damn, Frondrinax, if you're going to lick my caudal fin, at least tell me how it tastes.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ahaha! Oh you! Ever so droll! And of course, Piklat Naff! It's wonderful to finally meet you in person for this very special occasion.

PIKLAT

Yes, quite. I'd like to begin with a quick look at your—

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, please, there's no rush! We have a very thorough tour planned out for all of you today. But wait just one moment! I don't think we're quite all assembled. Now, who could we be missing...?

Bridge door whooshes open.

“DAVE”

Did somebody order shenanigans?

Assorted gasps and excited titters.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, if it isn't the stars of everyone's favorite long-running Human sitcom, *Dave and Zwizz'linarp!*

Some squeals of excitement and murmurs of confusion from the guests and crew.

CHARSH

Dave and Zwizz'linarp? That's my favorite show! Oh, mang! I can't believe I'm standing in the same room as *Zwizz'linarp!*

GANGLION OCELLUS

I am not Zwizz'linarp. You are standing in the same room as the highly trained classical actor wasted on the role of Zwizz'linarp, Ganglion Ocellus.

CHARSH

Of course, Sin Ocellus! My apologies. Or should I say, "no sombrero!"

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh, Thonarab's grits, I already regret coming here.

CHARSH

And oh, wow, Dave! I mean... sorry, what's your real name again?

"DAVE"

Oh, you can just call me "Dave," friend! I had my name legally changed in order to more deeply connect with my character!

GANGLION OCELLUS

And to curry favor with our vulgarian producers...

"DAVE"

Haha! Pay no attention to Zwizz, here! He's a great guy, don't get me wrong, but he just doesn't understand what it means to give over to something greater than yourself.

GANGLION OCELLUS

The name is Ocellus, you Hoovian hack. And I was playing the lost works of Christopher Marlowe and Drenly Otpix while you were getting kicked out of your fourth consecutive cult. Not even the Scientologists want you anymore!

"DAVE"

Hey, now, buddy, what did we say at our contractually-mandated coworker mediation session? The Most Sacrosanct Chamber of Hoove the Beneficent LifeMaster is not a cult! We are an officially accredited, entirely legitimate religion-adjacent organization that only wishes to spread the compassionate, generous, loving message of Hoove to the Galaxy! And we will sue anyone who says otherwise into oblivion!

GANGLION OCELLUS

(under his breath)

Of course you will, you sectarian stooge.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, I'm just so pleased that two of the Galaxy's most popular sitcom stars have taken such an interest in what we Fugulnari are trying to do for Humanity! And come all the way out here to share their thoughts about it with you, valued representatives of the interstellar community!

“DAVE”

Darn skippy! Whenever I hear about a large organization making vague promises of happiness and enlightenment, I’ve just gotta learn more! Of course, my first allegiance will always be to the teachings of the sublime Hoove, but you know, his philosophy and the Plant Way have a lot in common! So we’re just thrilled to be here to help you understand what that’s all about! Isn’t that right, Ganglion?

GANGLION OCELLUS

I am 50% thrilled. You’ll get the rest when the remainder of my personal appearance fee is deposited to my account.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ah hah hah, well, I think that’s enough playful badinage for now! But before we head out, delegates, I’m sure you’d all like to meet the Commander of this station?

TORIANNA

Hello. It’s me, the Commander. Of the Human Exchange Concourse.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Thank you, Commander, very nice. We won’t be keeping you from your duties any longer. Wouldn’t want a lot of trash piling up around here, would we?

TORIANNA

(to herself as she heads back to her office)

It’s a little late for that.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

And finally, a very special Human friend who will be accompanying us on our tour today: John B!

JOHN

Hi.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(after a beat)

Ahem. Yes! It’s our Human friend, *John B!*

JOHN

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, isn’t that nice. I couldn’t have said it better if I had written it myself. Which of course I didn’t! All right then, let’s be on our way, the Plant Way, that is!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Why, oh, why did I leave my flask behind at the hotel...?

[scene 5] The In-Betweens. A small, cramped area STELLA has been using as yet another temporary “office” for the past couple of days.

STELLA

What do you mean we’ve lost Dee?

H.F.

I mean she’s not where she was yesterday. I checked the passive recorder, they took her out of her cell right after that weird announcement this morning. Or last night.

STELLA

And you don’t know where she’s been moved to?

H.F.

I tapped the bulkheads outside every cell in that block. If she’s there, she’s not answering. Couldn’t tell you why. Best case scenario, she’s just taking a nap or something. But I had the inducer turned up all the way, and usually she answers pretty quick. So...

STELLA

So this time is different. Shit. I don’t like this, H.F. Especially when you put it together with that weird announcement about shutting down the PA system. You think the Foogs are onto our recording setup?

H.F.

(a brief beat as he considers this)

No way to be sure, but... I got in and out no problem, and I didn’t see anything hinky when I was poking around behind the bulkheads, no surveillance equipment monitoring the area. Besides the stuff I installed myself, I mean. And believe me, as soon as I realized Dee was gone, I had the paranoia dialed up to maximum. Everything was exactly how I left it. I think we’re ok.

STELLA

That’s good. But we still need to get back in touch with Dee, wherever she is. We haven’t intercepted any orders relating to prisoner relocations? Or... terminations?

H.F.

Zilch. Whatever this is, it’s pretty hush-hush. But I did find one thing: an outgoing message from the guard post a few minutes after Dee got “relocated”. Couldn’t crack the encryption, but I grabbed the routing data—it went directly to Frondrinax’s personal address.

STELLA

Well, that’s a relief.

H.F.

Is it?

STELLA

I have it on very good authority that Frondrinax wants Dee alive. She's obsessed with the idea that she can "turn" Dee and use her as a pro-Fugulnari mouthpiece.

H.F.

...After the Foogs massacred Dee's entire planet? That's optimism for you.

STELLA

Like I keep saying, the worst thing about the Foogs is also the best thing about the Foogs: they just don't understand Humans. Like, at all.

[scene 6] A mulch processing facility somewhere in a little-trafficked corner of Hydroponics. Grunts of effort from beleaguered Human workers.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

JOHN

(reading)

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

"DAVE"

How bucolic!

CHARSH

And for how long do your mulch farmers labor each day?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, not very long. About 14 hours. 16 if they're really feeling it!

"DAVE"

Haha! Busy little bees!

JOHN

Seriously?

Bleep as PIKLAT looks something up.

PIKLAT

According to the Medical Advisory Bureau's records, that is over three times the recommended work shift length for the Human physiognomy.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? Let me see that.

Leaf rustle and bleeps as MRS. FRONDRINAX skims through the data.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, yes, *optimal* shift length for a Human may be four hours, but they've never been sticklers for that themselves. A much longer workday has always been customary. See, look here, at the historical data.

CHARSH

Hmm, yes, I suppose you're right. There does seem to be plenty of precedent.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Exactly! The Humans like it this way! They always have!

Bleepity scrollity as PIKLAT reads further.

PIKLAT

Wait, who were these "Wobblies...?"

A leafy smack and a splash! as MRS. FRONDRINAX knocks PIKLAT's device into some sort of liquid-filled tank.

PIKLAT

Hey!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh dear me! How terribly clumsy of me! I swear my branches have a mind of their own sometimes. Now don't worry, Sin Piklat, the Committee will of course repair or reimburse you for your device before you depart. Now, where were we? Ah, yes. At the end of every deeply rewarding and entirely tolerable session of completely voluntary mulch-squunching, each of our Human workers tucks into their own little burrow right here in Hydroponics, until it's time for another invigorating workday! Thus avoiding the innumerable stresses of the daily commute, and the onerous burden of skyrocketing housing expenses! Incredibly efficient, I trust you'll agree.

THOOMBON

Burrows, you say? Like holes in the ground?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, cozy little Human holes.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Forgive me, madam, but I performed Richard The Tenth for a full season at Shamash Rep, and I don't recall seeing any "Human holes" during my tenure.

PIKLAT

I'm reasonably certain there was nothing in our records about Humans being a burrowing species. Although of course I now have no way of confirming that.

THOOMBON

No, I'd definitely have remembered that. There aren't too many of us subterranean types kicking up dust.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well... these Humans must have grown a deeper appreciation for soil after spending so much time amongst us Fugulnari! It's only natural!

"DAVE"

Of course! That makes complete sense to me!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes! And, er... speaking of mulch!

A beat.

CHARSH

...Yes?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Speaking! Of! Mulch!

JOHN

Wha— oh. Uh... "Looks like this Human has (*sigh*) 'mulch' to say. Is that right?"

HUMAN LABORER 1

Well, I don't know that there's a whole lot to talk about... But I do have plenty to sing about!

"DAVE"

Oh boy, I didn't know this fact-finding tour was going to turn into a musical extravaganza!

GANGLION OCELLUS

(extremely un-delighted)

What an unexpected delight.

HUMAN LABORER 1

(singing)

There are lots of planets throughout known space
Lots of different sentients all over ev'ry place
But all throughout the Galaxy
On one point we all agree, and that is:
Plants Are Great,
Yes they're really really great
Oh yes plants are really really really really great!
From the grass to the trees,
There are no fallacies
When we say that Plants Are Great

JOHN

“Well, I think that—”

HUMAN LABORER 2

Plants are very smart

JOHN

(underneath)

Oh, there's more.

HUMAN LABORER 3

And they're oh so nice!

HUMAN LABORERS 2 & 3

With all the best ideas and the very best advice!

HUMAN LABORER 1

And now they're showing us all of us the way,

HUMAN LABORERS 2 & 3

And that makes us shout “Hooray!” Because

HUMAN LABORERS 1, 2, & 3

Plants Are Great,
Yes they're really really great
Oh yes plants are really really really really great!
From the fern to the kelp,

We're grateful for their help,
'Cause we know that Plants Are Great

JOHN

“Well, I think—”

HUMAN LABORER 1

If we have not already made it clear...

JOHN

(underneath)

How many verses are in this thing?

HUMAN LABORER 1

All of us are just so glad to have all these plants here
And we would like to freely say,

HUMAN LABORERS 1, 2, & 3

We were not coerced in anyway
To say that

HUMAN CHORUS

Plants Are Great,
Yes they're really really great (They're great!)
Oh yes plants are really really really really great!
From the herbs to the shrubs,
They all deserve our love,
'Cause it's true that Plants Are Great

Oh, yes! Plants Are Great,
Yes they're really really great
Oh yes plants are really really really really great!
From the grass to the trees,
We're all down on our knees
Just to say that Plants Are Great!

JOHN

Are we done? *(beat)* Okay. “Well, I think that speaks for itself. Or should I say, sings for itself?”

“DAVE”

I'll say!

GANGLION OCELLUS

I found it a bit pitchy.

OAKENSARX

How's the tour going?

MRS. FRONDRINAX and JOHN B are startled.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oakensarx! I didn't recognize you there amongst the hydrangea.

OAKENSARX

Well, I thought I'd stop by and wet my roots a bit, and have a quick look in on the delegation at the same time! And you know, I don't have occasion to bloom very often these days. Self-care is so important, isn't it?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, absolutely! I must say, I'd never pegged you as one for inflorescence. Those panicles are quite becoming on you, Oakensarx.

OAKENSARX

Oh, uh, these old things? I just know a good florist, is all.

JOHN

Do you two want a moment, or...?

OAKENSARX

What? We've just had one, Human. Pay attention. Anyway, things seem to be going very smoothly here, so I'll just be popping back to my office to make a few notes. Good luck with the rest of the tour, Frondrinax. We're all counting on you.

He leaves... heh, "leaves" as PIKLAT fishes their device out of its squelchy resting place.

PIKLAT

Hey, she said the Committee would be able to repair my— And he's gone.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Are you still on about that? I said we'd fix it, didn't I? Let's not get bogged down in trifling details here.

PIKLAT

But you will be able to fix it, right? There was a lot of irreplaceable data on there!

JOHN

You don't keep backups?

PIKLAT

Well of course I do, but... I was up to level 1839 in Snacky Smash!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes yes yes yes, everything will be taken care of. Now, there's nothing more to see here, so let's move along! We've got a great many more happy and fulfilled Humans for you to observe on our tour today!

PIKLAT

(as they follow FRONDRINAX out)

Do you at least have a bag of rice or something I could put it in...?

As the tour heads toward the exit, we stay behind with GANGLION OCELLUS and the HUMAN WORKERS:

A HUMAN

Is that... is that Zwizz'linarp? Please, gesin, I need to get a message to my family. Please, tell them—

ANOTHER HUMAN

Hey, it is Zwizz'linarp! Hey, Zwizz'linarp! “No sombrero”!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Yes. Quite.

ANOTHER HUMAN

You know? ‘Cause, that's the thing you say? Hey, Jerry, look! It's the “no sombrero” zood!

JERRY (YET ANOTHER HUMAN)

Wow, really? Get him to say “no sombrero!”

ANOTHER HUMAN

Hey, can you say “no sombrero” for my pal, Jerry?

A HUMAN

Please, my wife... I have to tell her...

JERRY

Did he say it?

ANOTHER HUMAN

Not yet!

GANGLION OCELLUS

I'm sorry, I have to go... be... somewhere that isn't here. Immediately.

A HUMAN

Please, gesin! They don't know what's happened to me! They're in Samech 31! Suite A-with-a-little-circle-over-it! Please!

ANOTHER HUMAN

Bye, Zwizz! "Adios, sombrero!"

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh, sobriety. What a heavy burden you are.

[scene 7] The Bridge. The documentary crew is in everyone's way even more than previously, as they have set up for the Commander's interview.

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Uh, Commander? I'd like to move you to this chair for your interview, if you don't mind.

TORIANNA

I do mind, actually. This is where I always sit.

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Sure, sure, it's just that that chair is very... festively colored. See, on camera? That combo of shades tends to make some of our friendly-little pixelreaders, uh, freak out a bit. Gets a bit smeary. So if you could you just help us out and switch chairs this once?

TORIANNA

Well, since you put it that way... no. This is my command chair, it's perfectly calibrated to my personal sitzfleisch settings, and I'm not inclined to disrupt the operations of my Bridge for this nonsense any more than I have already. Get on with it.

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

(sigh) Have it your way. Conrad? Anything you can do with that chair and this setup?

CONRAD

Yeah, gimme a sec.... *(beat, then rapidly to film crew as we hear the sound of equipment being unboxed and set up at light speed)* Diya! Gimme a 1K high right, a 500 low left, and a back inky direct kick, hit 'em all with ND55 to cut the damn smear, set the lower-rez reader right here on baby legs with a 50 and a black net filter and maybe we got something! *(a beat as all this is clicked into place and turned on)* That work for ya?

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Perfect. All right, Commander, if you're ready, we can get started. *(clears throat, into "interview" mode)* Commander Torianna, I'm sure the Galaxy would love to hear your thoughts on this unprecedented partnership between the Fugulnari and your own people.

TORIANNA

Ha! Oh, it's unprecedented, all right, and with good reason. Jones and Koko, this could mean the end of self-determination for all of Humanity—an entire sentient race with an advanced culture and star-faring technology! As far as I'm concerned, there is no point to the ICSB if they can't do anything to prevent this ridiculous overreach by the Fugulnari. Isn't this why we have an interstellar government? To protect us from this sort of outrage? Nelly's freckled snoot, the Fugulnari are not here to help us! They suborned Humans in key positions of power before anyone saw the full reach of their master plan! I no longer have the standing to fight off all of the changes they're making to daily life here on The Fairgrounds. I can only imagine what's happening in the rest of Human space. Every day, another abuse of power. They have no understanding of how Humans work or respect for what makes us unique. And would they care even if they did? I doubt it. The Fugulnari say things are getting better, but all I see is hunger and anger and profound division. I don't know how long we can last this way, and I can't imagine what lies ahead—if this is the future, it's not the one we expected. It's not the one we deserve.

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Ah. Well... thank you, Commander. That was... very candid.

TORIANNA

Next question?

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Oh, I think we got everything we needed, thank you. That's it, Connie.

CONRAD

Right. Pack it up, folks. Got it in one, it's not getting any better. Moving on.

Packing-up faffery continues in the background during the following.

TORIANNA

Really? That's it?

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Well, we're on a pretty tight schedule. Our contract says all filming has to be completed before the end of second cycle, and we still need to grab some sapient-on-the-corridor footage before we connect up with "Dave" for his... *(muttering to himself as he reads the schedule)* What the flotting plork is a "table interview"? *(back to TORIANNA)* Anyway. Thank you for inviting us onto your Bridge for that enlightening discussion. We'll be out of your tendrils in just a tick.

TORIANNA

I didn't invite you, but you're welcome. I'm pretty sure this was a waste of everyone's time, though. I can't imagine the Foogs will want any of my thoughts making it into the final product.

SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

Oh, you'd be surprised what we can manage in post. Thanks again!

The film crew bustles out. A beat.

TORIANNA

...Frall?

FRALL manifests.

FRALL

Yes, Commander?

TORIANNA

How much am I going to regret what I just did?

A brief shimmer.

FRALL

On a scale of "stayed up too late before work the next morning" to "three-day marriage to a Mantihomina mental floss tycoon?" I'd rate it somewhere around the level of... "impulsive mullet." Regrettable, but any repercussions will take care of themselves in time.

TORIANNA

Really? I was sure I'd just put the last nail in my coffin with that little rant.

FRALL

Not at all, sir. You will indeed be surprised at what they can manage in post.

TORIANNA

Ah. So I didn't even manage to annoy the Fugulnari this time around.

FRALL

No, sir. You will succeed in annoying one editorial department a great deal, if that is any consolation.

TORIANNA

Eh, I'll take it. I don't get a lot of consolation these days.

FRALL

Credit for your thoughts, Commander?

TORIANNA

Pretty sure you can see those entirely free of charge whenever you please, Frall.

FRALL

Indeed. However, one need not possess the limitless knowledge of the cosmos to see that you are in need of some verbal unburdening.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

I think they're right, sir? You seem more stressed out than usual? Which is saying a lot?

STALIN-BOT

Da, and I have been noticing that coffee breaks of Commander have coincided with mysterious depletion of Stalin-Bot's personal vodka stores.

TORIANNA

Well, why shouldn't I be down? The Foogs are playing Potemkin on my station, and there's nothing I can do but smile and curtsy as if everything is normal.

FRALL

Then perhaps the imminent abnormality will prove uplifting.

TORIANNA

Imminent...? Frall, I don't like "abnormal." "Abnormal" on the Fairgrounds tends to come with a side order of fiery explosions. Which are uplifting only in a very literal and extremely painful sense.

FRALL

No explosions this time around, Commander. At least of the fiery variety. This will be that rarest of Fairgrounds occurrences: a pleasant surprise. For the Human members of the crew, that is.

TORIANNA

Oh. All right. Then... why do you sound so ominous?

FRALL

As you may have noticed, sir, I am *not* a Human member of the crew.

The doors whoosh open. The Poomie delegation has arrived!

POOMIE 1

HOIIIIEEEE!!! I is Poomie!

TORIANNA

...Yes? Have you been helped?

POOMIE 2

Delegaaaaaaaa-shun!

TORIANNA

Oh! You're with the fact-finding mission. Well, you're a little late, but it's a pleasure to meet you, Sin Poomie.

POOMIE 1

Waaoohaaooowohh!!! Hoo-man!! Ooooooh, hoo-man so kewwww! Poomie plomp!

TORIANNA

Oh! Hahah, all right, "plomp" to you too. ...Aren't you soft? And are all of you part of the delegation as well?

POOMIE 2

HOIIIIEEEE!!! I is Poomie, too!

POOMIE 3

A Poomie is also me!

POOMIE 4

And I is also Poomie!

TORIANNA

Oh, I see, "Poomie" isn't...

POOMIE 1

And I be Poomie also, too!

TORIANNA

Right. Just to clarify: is "Poomie" your name, or your species?

ALL POOMIES

Yah-yah! Poomie! Poomie Poomie Pooooooo-mie!

TORIANNA

All right, then. Welcome to the Fairgrounds, Poomies.

ALL POOMIES

HOIIIIEEEE!

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Awwww? They're so cute?

STALIN-BOT

Like if puppies mated with kitties and made adorable puppy-kitty *маленькие (malen'kiye, "little ones")!*

TORIANNA

I don't mean to rush you, Poomies, but the tour already started some time ago, so—

POOMIE 1

Waaooohaaooowohh!!! Poomie knowses! Poomie skedj-oooo!

TORIANNA

Oh, you already have a copy of the tour schedule? Well, then, there you go. You should be able to catch up with them if you hurry. But please do feel free to ask any member of the crew if you should need directions. The Fairgrounds' layout can be confusing for people who aren't used to it. And people who are used to it.

POOMIE 1

Ooooooo-keeeeh! BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

ALL POOMIES

BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

Door whoosh as they exit.

TORIANNA

Um... did you need something, Sin Poomie?

POOMIE 4

Oooowaaooohaaooowohh!!! Floof cloud! Floof cloud! So kewwwww!

TORIANNA

Floof cloud—?

FRALL

I believe they are referring to me, sir.

TORIANNA

Oh! Poomie, this is my second in command, Lt. Frallen Br'ar.

POOMIE 4

Howaaooowohh!!! Lt. Frallfloof Cloud! Poomie love Frallfloof!

FRALL

Charmed, I'm sure.

POOMIE 4

Poomie plomp! Poomie plomp floofy Frall!

FRALL

You will do nothing of the sort, gesin. I am not to be plomped.

POOMIE 4

(upset)

Oooooowaaaaaaaahhhhh!!! *(their cry crescendoes to the royalty-free sound of a ceramic vase breaking)*

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

OH NO?

STALIN-BOT

ЩЕНОК- КИТТИ! *(shin 'ok-keeti, "Puppy-kitty!")*

TORIANNA

OH HOOKER'S BEANS! What just happened?!

FRALL

I'm afraid Poomies are not a terribly hardy species, sir. The slightest of disappointments, and they fall apart. Quite literally, as you can see.

TORIANNA

But— You knew that! You knew that would happen and yet you still—

FRALL

It was the only way to prevent the inevitable plomping, Mindy, and there was only so much of this creature's excruciating presence that I could endure.

TORIANNA

Oh, now, that's rather cruel, Frall. Sure, it was annoying, but it was so wretchedly adorable.

FRALL

To the Human sensorium, yes. The Poomies are possessed of an unusually high quantity of morphological characteristics your orbitofrontal cortices would categorize as "cute." When it comes to other sentients, however...

TORIANNA

What are you saying, Frall?

FRALL

There is a reason the Poomies are very rarely encountered off their home planet of... Poomie. The poor things seem to elicit an instinctive revulsion in nearly all sentient species. Humans excepted, for some reason. And the inevitable rejection by almost all they encounter has... heart-breaking results. Again, in the most literal possible sense.

TORIANNA

So, they're... like Iltorians, but in reverse?

FRALL

A very concise summation, sir.

TORIANNA

But... you were right here next to me when those Poomies came in. You seemed fine.

FRALL

In this iteration of reality, yes, I was able to retain my customary composure. In several others, however, I was howling the most revolting profanities conceived by sentient life in a manner most unbecoming an officer. And the promised plomping would have been more than even I could withstand, sir. I do apologize for the mess.

TORIANNA

Huh. So... these Poomies are intensely unpleasant to everyone but Humans... And now they're on the way to meet up with Frondrinax and her little sight-seeing tour...

FRALL

We could warn Frondrinax of their impending arrival, Commander.

TORIANNA

We could, Frall. But her instructions were very specific: I'm not to interfere in any way with the delegation. I'm just supposed to stay here and tend to the garbage. And I certainly wouldn't want to disobey a direct order from our leafy superiors, now would I?

FRALL

Certainly not, sir.

[scene 8] A very very slow mid-day shift at the Egg.

BUBBLES

(yawns) Slow day.

SOPON

Tell me about it. If we don't— Hang on, did you just yawn? How did you yawn? Why would you yawn?

BUBBLES

Well, I don't really *need* to, but I spent a little quality time with that ICU monitor-bot who came in last night—you remember, the one with those cute little antennas? And I don't wanna swap and tell, but long story short, this morning your favorite bar-bot has found herself in possession of a brand new pneumatic splint bladder. Well, not brand new, but, y'know. New to me. So I've been checking out a few of the available pre-set options. I've never tried breathing before.

SOPON

Huh. So how's that working out for you?

BUBBLES

Eh. It's fun for the occasional bit of punctuation, but I'd hate to have to keep it up all day long. Don't you get sick of it?

SOPON

We usually don't think that much about our breathing, it just, you know, happens. Although now I probably won't be able to stop thinking about it, so thanks for that.

BUBBLES

Sorry. Anyway, yeah, I'm probably going to swap it back out in a day or two after the novelty wears off. Maybe see if any bots around here are looking to unload one of them shiny new ring modulators.

SOPON

Whoa! TMI, Bubbles!

BUBBLES

(giggles) What can I say, Sopes? There's a lot of spare parts out there I haven't slotted yet. And you know me, I'm the ambitious type.

The door opens to reveal XTOPPS in a severely discombobulated state, for other than the usual reasons.

XTOPPS

Friends! Xtopps is most attitudinally maligned! Tell me they're gone! Or tell me they're there! I haven't a clarification as to what would be the bigger vonch, but I needs to know. Do you see them? Are they present? The little blowy-up things? Did I make of them a bad batch or what?

SOPON

Whoa! Yeah, sounds like you got into a bad batch all right. Hey, Chip?

The analog door to CHIP's office opens.

CHIP

What? What is it now?

XTOPPS

Chorp! I have seen horrors of the most obscenicious mannerisms! The end of all time may now be upon us! The signs are screaming. Small foul beasties blowing themselves to smithereenies! The timberwolves were released when the price of flesh exceeded the price of food! A battery of white-lipped barristers fallen on hard times! Open the soap duckets! I am wobbly!

CHIP

Sopon, what the frid is he talking about?

SOPON

How should I know? Sounds like he saw something... explode, maybe? And it put the horizontal squibbles on him for some reason.

CHIP

That doesn't make any sense. This is the Fairgrounds, something's always exploding around here. And Xtopps just sits there admiring the colors. If anything, he's not scared *enough*.

SOPON

So it was probably an explosion of the purely chemically-recreational variety. Unless a skreb of Poomies managed to get on station.

CHIP

A skreb of what?

SOPON

Sorry, that was in bad taste. Forget it. *(shudders)*

CHIP

Whatever. *(loudly and slowly)* Xtopps? Nothing's exploding. Ok? You're just on a three-slice spread. Go lie down in your dressing room until the nut lets you go.

XTOPPS

This ain't the nut, friendo, this is the glut! Too many peepy-creepies! They got a broken face, uh huh, uh huh hoo! And I need to break the ring! I want that G-note. Can't do any other thing. I am stuck proper and need to get more properly sticky. I am going abroad in my own narrow way!

CHIP

And stay back there until you've foobed out a little! I don't want you scaring these nice... *(takes in the empty bar)* completely absent... people. Aw, frill me. The place is still empty?

The green door slams in the distance as XTOPPS effoes.

SOPON

You couldn't hear the distinct lack of lunch rush from back in your office?

CHIP

Yeah, but I was hoping some of those Megachiroptoids who just docked had maybe come in for a quick drink and some friendly conversation outside the Human auditory range.

SOPON

No dice. But we've still got Kwontz and Vert.

CHIP

Aw, streez! Not even that barfly with the hair?

BUBBLES

Nah. She told me a couple days ago that she wants to expand her horizons, take some time off for self care, maybe get to know herself a little better.

CHIP

She told you all that?

BUBBLES

Well, I extrapolated as much from the way she said "You tell 'em, sister."

CHIP

Oh mang. She was our best customer. I mean, she's probably spent more time in the Egg than I have, and I've been sleeping in my office for six months.

SOPON

What about that new "associate" of yours? I thought she was going to hook us up with a new customer base along with our interstitial supply chain.

CHIP

Well, she said she'd spread the word around the shabbier sectors, but I guess it hasn't spread too evenly.

BUBBLES

Sounds like she's not holding up her end of the deal too good.

CHIP

Yeah, well, if you want to go complain to Nicklap Five-Arms about her customer service, you can go right ahead, and it's been nice knowing you.

SOPON

So what do we do?

CHIP

(sigh) I don't know. Most of the non-Human crowd have taken off for greener pastures by now. Or, less green pastures, I guess, if you want to get technical. The ones who stuck around are all broke, or they'd be gone too. Then there's the Boosters, who won't come in because we're openly anti-Foog, and the other Humans, who have to jump through so many hoops just to get in the door here, I can see why they don't think it's worth it. And we're sure as shness not changing the no-Foogs policy. So that leaves... nobody. I guess we just hold out as long as we can, and hope something happens to shake things up. As far as I can see, we've got nothing else.

VERT

You've got me, boss!

CHIP

I'm not your boss, Vert, and I couldn't afford to pay you even if I was. So unless *you* can afford enough drinks cover our daily overhead, I don't think you're going to be much help.

VERT

Who says I can't? Lemme just find an Interstellar Post terminal real quick, ok?

CHIP

Vert, don't—! Annd he's gone.

SOPON

At least the few customers we have are loyal.

KWONTZ

(gibberish: "You tell 'em, sister!")

Everyone laughs.

CHIP

Always ready with the quips, Kwontz! All right, that's enough feeling sorry for myself. The cycle is young, maybe something will turn around before we close.

ALTHAAR

(from outside)

Althaar is requesting entrance at the Electric Egg, please!

CHIP

Hi, Althaar. You can come on in—it's a slow day, no Humans here but me.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Then would it be permissible for Althaar to take seating at the bar?

CHIP

Sure. No reason for me to be out on the floor right now anyway, what with the way business is going. If anyone needs me, I'm going to catch forty winks in my office. But turn on the sign just in case, yeah?

SOPON

Sure thing, patron.

Switch flip and neon buzz as SOPON lights up the Illtorian warning sign.

ALTHAAR

A pleasant wink-capturing to you, Mr. Frinkel!

CHIP

(already off in the distance)

Thanks, Althaar.

Analog office door as CHIP exits.

SOPON

So what'll it be, zood?

ALTHAAR

Hmmm, Althaar is not certain. He has not made a great deal of practice on the "day-drinking." What would Sin Sapon recommend?

SOPON

How about a Tolimene and tonic? It's not too heavy, I think you'll like it.

ALTHAAR

Very well! Then Althaar will make attempting on it!

BUBBLES

I got it, Sapon, you sit.

SOPON

Thanks. *(back to ALTHAAR)* So what does bring you to the Egg at this shank of the cycle? We're not exactly a popular destination these days, as you can see.

ALTHAAR

Oh, Althaar had hope that the change of backdropping would be of assistance in making gatheration of his thoughts. He has been much occupied with the correspondings of late, but there are only so many letters that Althaar can be composing before the brain-condensation is settling in! And then there is also...

BUBBLES

Here you go, sweetie.

ALTHAAR

Thanking you, Sin Bubbles! (*sip*) Oh! A most delicious concocting! Althaar must be remembering this one for future imbibings!

SOPON

Glad you like it. So, what's the also?

ALTHAAR

Mm? Oh! The also is that Althaar has great concern for his dear friend and room-mate, who it seems is having very much of the stress-ful of recent.

BUBBLES

Yeah, I guess selling out your whole species has gotta be kind of a voider.

SOPON

Heh. Sorry, Althaar, but I can't bring myself to be too sympathetic. I mean, you saw what John's new leafy pals did to this place back at New Year's.

ALTHAAR

Yes. It was... It was causing Althaar very much of the up-set. But you must be knowing that it was of great up-set to FriendJohn also. And FriendJohn would never have desire to allow such violence to his dear friends at the Electric Egg, of this Althaar can make promising! FriendJohn is a Human of great kindness!

SOPON

Maybe so, but he still put on the headband, you know? He's picked his side, and we're not on it.

ALTHAAR

Mm. It is a great confusion to Althaar. But he must be trusting that FriendJohn is having his own reasonings.

BUBBLES

Could be he just wants to stay out of trouble. I doubt John would last long in on one of those Hydroponics mulch squads—he's not exactly in the best physical shape, even for a Human.

ALTHAAR

FriendJohn is not in the best mental shaping of recent either, Sin Bubbles. It is a worriment to Althaar.

The door opens.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Ah, blessed solitude! At last!

BUBBLES

Oh, wow, four whole customers. I stand corrected, this IS a rush.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Two fingers of Old Gorgonean, if you please, barkeep. Straight up.

SOPON

Whose fingers we talking exactly?

GANGLION OCELLUS

The biggest ones you can think of.

SOPON

Pliziod it is!

BUBBLES

I'll get the bucket.

VERT

Um...excuse me, gesin? I'm very sorry to bother you, but I couldn't help but notice that—

GANGLION OCELLUS

Yes, yes. I'm him. I'm Zwizz'linarp. I'm the "no sombrero" zood, that's what I do, that's all I do, that's all I'll ever be remembered for, despite my years of training and considerable body of critically-acclaimed, highly-nuanced, almost completely unseen work. Now could you please leave me be?

VERT

I was actually going to say that I couldn't help but notice that your elbow landed on my entire hand and I was wondering if I could have it back so that I could seek medical attention please?

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh. Yes, of course. I'm so very sorry.

VERT

It's alright. Accidents happen. No sombrero!

GANGLION OCELLUS

(dramatic groan)

ALTHAAR

Please be pardoning Althaar if he is enacting the unwanted intrusion, gesin, but Althaar must make enquiry: is he speaking with famed interstellar thespian Ganglion Ocellus? Because if so, Althaar must express his most ardent admirations!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh, by Rabathon's sainted tendrils, do you mean to tell me even the Illtorians are watching *Dave and Zwizz'linarp* now? Will that execrable slab of hackneyed smark haunt me to my funerary pyre?

ALTHAAR

Oh! It is a truth that Althaar has made much enjoyment of *Dave and Zwizz'linarp*—he is relating to the difficulties of Sin Zwizz'linarp very contiguously! But Althaar was at this time wishing to congratulate Sin Ocellus on his most fastening portraying of Henry the 37th at Pollera's demi-annual Shakespearean Neural Net Festival. Althaar was fortunate enough to be snaring it while he was there performing the study of traditional Polleran folk-walloping.

GANGLION OCELLUS

(genuinely moved)

Oh! Why, thank you. You're too kind. *(a small beat)* I must apologize for being a bit brusque with you, it's just that most of my interactions with the public these days are... Well, let's just say it's been quite a while since anyone has mentioned my work for the stage.

ALTHAAR

How could any sentient make forgetment of the most propulsive Ganglion Ocellus?

(reciting)

“This day is called the feast of [glottal alien name]:
They that outlive this day, and hover home,
Will splort in gladness when the day is named,
And rouse them at the name of [glottal alien name].”

GANGLION OCELLUS

“They that outlive this day, and see old age,
Or else choose cryogenic slumbering,
Will yearly on the vigil feast their neighbours,
And say ‘To-morrow is Saint [glottal alien name]:’
Then will they strip their sleeve and show their stumps:”

ALTHAAR and GANGLION OCELLUS

“These tentacles lost I on [glottal alien name] day.”

They laugh.

GANGLION OCELLUS

I simply must buy you a drink. Garçon, another drink for my dear friend... I'm so sorry, but I don't believe I caught your full name?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has already pitched it!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh. Just Althaar, then?

ALTHAAR

Yes! Althaar has yet to make achievement of the second-name.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Well, no doubt such a suave and cultured young Iltorian will be able to remedy that before long. I'm most immensely gratified to meet you, Althaar.

ALTHAAR

And the meeting of you is of the greatest pleasure to Althaar, Sin Ocellus!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Call me "Leon." So, what is it that brings you to this exuberantly humble Human establishment, and at such an odd hour?

ALTHAAR

Oh, it is a story of great longness, Leon, and Althaar does not wish to be emptying his trouble-sack upon a so new acquaintance.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Nonsense, dear boy. I have as much time as it takes to finish this bucket of fine Taphaoan whiskey, and I believe I am still capable of exerting enough willpower to imbibe at an appropriately deliberate pace. You just tell me all about it.

[scene 9] A corner of the In-Betweens. H.F. is approaching STELLA's "office."

H.F.

Hey, Stel?

STELLA

H.F.! Any news?

H.F.

Nothing, sorry. And I'm guessing from the look on your face that no one else has had any luck either.

STELLA

Not yet. Although a couple of squads still haven't reported back. But as far as we can tell, Dee isn't anywhere on the Fairgrounds.

H.F.

Chin up, Stel. She's gotta be *somewhere*.

STELLA

Yeah, but if that somewhere is somewhere we can't get to, she might as well be nowhere. Thrab it! We need to find her, H.F.

H.F.

I can keep checking the brig every couple hours, just in case. It's possible they just took her for a medical checkup or something. Or, here's a thought—Dee disappears on the same day the Foogs shut down the entire PA system, it's not too big of a reach to say maybe there's a connection.

STELLA

Sure, but where does that get us? We haven't been able to find out anything about the PAs either.

H.F.

Well, the announcement said this PA shutdown would only last until around 25:00. Not that I'd normally take Frondrinax's word for anything, but...

STELLA

She doesn't like to be publicly wrong about stuff like that.

H.F.

Right. So if Dee's disappearance is related, could be they'll send her right back to the brig after they're done with... whatever this is. Could be all we need to do is wait.

STELLA

Hm. That's a plausible theory, but we can't afford to hang our hopes on a "could be." Plus, finding Dee back in the brig tonight would be better than not finding her at all, but not nearly as good as finding her now. Ideally, we'd be able blast a new recording from her current location the second the PAs come back online.

H.F.

So the Foogs know that whatever it is they're trying now, it didn't work.

STELLA

Exactly. Except so far, it is working. (*sigh*) You know this station better than anyone, H.F. Can you think of anywhere else they could have stashed Dee? Any place we might have overlooked?

H.F.

I've been racking my brains, Stel, but no. Not anywhere we can reach from the In-Betweens, anyway.

STELLA

Shit.

H.F.

You said it. Unless we get some good news from one of the other search parties, I think we're out of options. If I were a religious man, I'd say this would be the time to send a few prayers toward your *deus* of choice, maybe shake the *machina* a little, see what falls out.

A crash as three POOMIES fall out of a nearby vent shaft.

POOMIES 1-3

HOIIIIEEEE!!!

STELLA

Whoa! What the—?

H.F.

Huh. If I were a religious man, I'd be pretty impressed with that kind of speedy service.

POOMIE 1

We is Poomies!!

POOMIE 2

And I is also Poomie!

POOMIE 3

Poomie is me also too also!

STELLA

Awwww, hi guys! Aren't you cute? Now, what are you doing here? Because no one's supposed to be back here, you know. Even us! (*suddenly a lot less friendly*) Did the Foogs send you?

POOMIE 1

FOOOOOOOOoooooog...

H.F.

Easy, Stella. You do not want to upset a Poomie, trust me. If you do, it'll be the most upsetting thing you see all day. Do me a solid and make sure there aren't any non-Humans headed this way, ok? I can handle these little cuties.

STELLA

I'm pretty sure the most upsetting thing I could see today is a bunch of leafy shock troopers storming in here after these little cuties give up our location. So, out of my way, please.

H.F.

Whoa, hey no, really, I promise you, these little fluff-bundles couldn't rat us out even if they wanted to. No Foog is going to listen to them long enough for that.

POOMIE 2

FOOOOOOOOooooog...

H.F.

No no, no Foogs here! You're fine! Everything's fine!

STELLA

Everything is not fine, our perimeter's been breached! What makes you think these... Poomies?

POOMIES 1-3

HOIIIIIEEEE!!!

STELLA

Yeah, hi. (*back to H.F.*) What makes you think they're not a security risk?

H.F.

Because the Foogs hate them!

STELLA

So? The Foogs hate us.

H.F.

No, they *really* hate Poomies. At like, a primal level. Everyone does, except us Earth-based species. Poomies are like... the anti-Iltorians.

STELLA

Really? (*beat*) Oh. That could be useful. That could be... incredibly useful.

H.F.

Right, except—

STELLA

Oh, no except. Why is there always except?

H.F.

It's just that— Well, there's no pleasant way of phrasing this. If their feelings get hurt, they explode.

STELLA

Like, they go berserk, or...

H.F.

Nope. Literally explode.

POOMIE 1

Poomies make crackle-sad and go BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIES 2 & 3

BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

STELLA

Ah. So, not what you'd call well-suited to the tasks of agitation and sabotage.

H.F.

Not so much. But they are cute as the dickens!

POOMIES 1-3

Oowaaooahaooowohh!!! POOMIE PLOMP! POOMIE PLOMP!

H.F.

Awwww.

STELLA

Ah hah, okay, yes, I suppose a plomp or two wouldn't hurt. Wow, so soft! It's like petting a cloud!

H.F.

I know, right? So, listen, folks—

POOMIES 1-3

POOMIES!!!

H.F.

Poomies. What brings you to our corner of the Fairgrounds this fine cycle? Because this place isn't exactly set up for visitors. We're actually hiding out back here.

POOMIE 2

Oooooooo! Why is Hoo-mans in hidey-holes?

POOMIE 1

Is Hoo-mans playing hidey-seeky?

STELLA

Kind of. In an extremely high stakes sort of way.

POOMIE 1

ooooOOOOohh, can Poomies play, too? Poomies love hidey-seeky!!

POOMIE 2

Poomies is bad at hidey-seeky, but we loves it!!!

POOMIE 1

Hidey-seeky!

H.F.

Well, you already found us, so I guess that means you won!

POOMIES 1-3

Oowaaooohaaooowohh!!!

STELLA

Yep, you won! Congratulations! So now you should probably get back to... whatever it is you came here for.

H.F.

Right. But don't tell anyone we're back here, ok? We're still playing. With the Fugulnari. Especially don't tell them you saw us. You know who I'm talking about, right? The plant people?

POOMIE 1

We see plantses! Say HOIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!!! Plantses so kewwww!

POOMIE 2

So kewwwww!

POOMIE 3

So we say HOIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!!!

POOMIE 2

HOIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!!!

POOMIE 1

But plantses say no! Plantses do scream-runny-ooop-falldown!

POOMIE 2

Oop-falldown!

POOMIE 3

And others Poomies make crackle-sad and go BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIE 2

BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIE 1

So we hides so we no makes the crackle-sad forever boiiiiieeee.

POOMIE 2

(sadly)

Forever boiiiiieeee.

POOMIE 1

(getting panicky)

But now Poomie lost! Poomie late! Poomie never finds delegaaaaaaa-shun!

POOMIE 3

Oooooowaaaaa—

STELLA

No no no no no no! It's fine! We'll help you find your delegation! Just don't... crackle-sad, ok?

POOMIE 1

Hoo-mans haaaaaaalp?! Hoo-mans so kewwww!!!

POOMIES 1-3

Waaoohaaooowohh!!!

H.F.

Don't you worry your fuzzy little noggins about it, we'll get you where you need to go. Ah, do you know where that is?

POOMIE 2

Poomie skedj-oooo!!! Delegaaaaaaa-shun!

H.F.

Oh, someone gave you a tour schedule? Let me just take a look here... *(bleep as he opens it)* Oh. Oh, frill me.

STELLA

What is it?

H.F.

I think we just solved one of today's mysteries. Check it out.

More bleeps as STELLA scrolls through the schedule.

STELLA

...an ICSB fact-finding mission?

H.F.

That's why they shut down the entire PA system! So there'd be no chance of us getting any word out to these delegates.

POOMIE 1

Poomies find factses! Waaoohaaooowohh!!!

STELLA

Damn it. They're slick, all right. No one had any idea this was in the works. Oh! And I think we just solved our second mystery, too. Look at this entry.

H.F.

(reading)

“Inspection of Entirely Species-Appropriate and Not at All Soul-Crushing Detention Facilities, Including Those of Noted Insurrectionist Prisoner Whose Basic Sentient Rights Are Being Scrupulously Protected to the Full Extent of, and in Full Accordance with, Interstellar Law. 15:30, Bet 33, the Brig.” Yeah, I've got a pretty good guess who that is.

STELLA

And according to this, she *is* still somewhere in the brig. Just not somewhere she can talk to us.

H.F.

But if we could get someone in with the tour...

POOMIE 3

POOMIE TOURZES!

POOMIE 2

Poomies can halp!

STELLA

I, uh... Listen, Poomies. I can't lie to you, this could be really dangerous. There's a good chance you could get caught. Or... disappointed. But if you really want to help us out...

POOMIE 1

Poomies will halp the Hoo-mans!

POOMIE 2

Hoo-man halp!!!

POOMIE 3

Hoo-mans so kewwww!!!

STELLA

All right. Thank you. H.F., what do you think? Is there enough time to set one of them up with a recording device?

H.F.

Oh, sure, that'd just take a couple minutes. I could rewire one of their translator units, no sombrero. But I'm thinking we might run into another couple problems. One, you may have noticed our floofy friends here are pretty... enthusiastic. And vocal.

POOMIE 1

Waaoohaaooowohh!!! Poomies loves Hoo-mans!

POOMIE 2

POOMIE PLOMP!

H.F.

Heheh, yeah, thanks Poomies. But that might present some, uh, sound engineering challenges. And that's assuming they even make it to Dee. I'm guessing Frondrinax won't be too happy about the Galaxy's least popular fuzzy-dumplings disrupting her little propaganda parade. She may just tell them to jeck off, and then...

STELLA

...crackle-sad?

H.F.

Right. So that would be problem two.

STELLA

I see what you mean. (*has a terrible, wonderful idea*) Oh. Oh. Hang on a minute... maybe those two problems can add up to one solution.

H.F.

Really?

STELLA

How about this: we've got about 40 minutes before these delegates are supposed to show up at the brig. What if the Poomies disrupt the tour, and while Frondrinax is distracted, we send a fake ICSB representative to the brig to record Dee? Do you think you could handle that, Poomies?

POOMIE 2

Waaooohaaooowohh!!! Hoo-man halp!!! Poomie halp!

STELLA

Great. Just make sure you have a nice lonnnng conversation with Frondrinax and the other delegates, ok?

POOMIE 1

OOOOOO-KEEEEEH!!! Poomies on best special diplomats mission!

POOMIE 2

Poomies is diplomats!

POOMIE 3

Poomies say HOIIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIES 1-3

HOIIIIIEEEE!!!

H.F.

Uh, Stel? Are you sure about this? A meeting between the Poomies and Frondrinax might be kind of... emotionally taxing for these little guys. Maybe we can do this without their help?

POOMIE 1

But Poomies wan halp!

POOMIE 2

Yah-yah! Poomies wan halp!

POOMIE 3

Why can Poomies no halp?? Oooooowaaaaa—

H.F.

Okay! It's okay! You can help!

POOMIE 1

Yaaaah! Poomies will halp keww Hoo-mans!

POOMIE 2

Hoo-man halp!!!

STELLA

Thank you, Poomies. Now, you'd better get going if you want to catch the tour in time. (*interface chime*) There you go. I've set your destination on your little map here, so once you're back on the Fairgrounds proper, you can just follow the little holo-sparkles, ok? They'll take you straight to the tour's current location, assuming they're on schedule.

POOMIE 3

Sked-oooo!

POOMIE 1

Poomies will be best diplomatses!

STELLA

I'm sure you will be. Ready, H.F.? All clear out there?

H.F.

Yep, corridor's empty. Let's get you on your way, Poomies!

Metallic noise of something that's not a door opening onto an actual Fairgrounds corridor.

POOMIE 2

Ooooooooookeeeeh! Poomie love keww Hoo-mans! BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIES 1-3

BOIIIIIEEEE!!!

STELLA and H.F.

Ok, bye!/Bye now! Good luck!

The POOMIES bumble off into the distance as H.F. reseals the entry. A beat.

H.F.

You do realize you just sent those cuties on a suicide mission, right?

STELLA

Hey, they wanted to help. Besides, we don't have time to worry about that now, we've got less than 40 minutes to find someone who can impersonate an ICSB official plausibly enough to fool the guards in the brig.

H.F.

That's going to be tricky. It obviously can't be anyone Human, which leaves out most of the Resistance.

STELLA

And the few aliens with us are also on the Foogs' most wanted list—they wouldn't be able to walk into the a high-security area like that without setting off the biometric scanners.

H.F.

So we need a non-Human who hasn't been flagged in the system.

STELLA

Right. Ideally someone from a species the Foogs wouldn't want to start trouble with. But it also has to be someone we can trust.

Distant barking can be heard approaching them.

H.F.

That's a tall order, Stel. I can't think of anyone who— (*as MISS SOPHIE exuberantly arrives*) Oh! There's my sweetie girl! Yes, I'm happy to see you too! But Papa's busy right now, ok girl? He needs to help Tante Stella find a non-Human to help us talk to Tante Dee!

MISS SOPHIE barks in response.

H.F.

Oh, I know you'd love to talk to Dee, but they don't make translators for doggies! No they do not! Well, unless those doggies are actually— Oh. Oh, frill me.

STELLA

What's wrong?

H.F.

Nothing's wrong. In fact, I just got an idea.

[scene 10] The Electric Egg. Still a very slow day. GANGLION OCELLUS has consumed most of his bucket of whiskey, and ALTHAAR has downed a few more Tolimene and tonics than he had intended.

GANGLION OCELLUS

(quite drunk, but hyper-enunciating to compensate)

So, let me...let me see if I read you aright. This "Frenjun's" behavior is unpress— unpressish— he is behaving in a heretofore unseen fashion? Is that... the gist of it?

ALTHAAR

(also drunk)

Sin Leon has found the eye of the bull and... Althaar is not sure what is to be done with the bull's eye after it is obtained. Althaar has... not so many English idioms in his house of wheels. So Althaar must... Althaar must... What was Althaar saying?

GANGLION OCELLUS

Your “Frenjun.” You said... different now. Is he.

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes! Thanking you, dear Leon! Yes, Althaar would never have expectation that FriendJohn would be making assistance to the Fugulnari. And yet FriendJohn... appears to do so. It is... puzzlement.

GANGLION OCELLUS

And have you... inquired as to why?

ALTHAAR

Althaar... Althaar has not wished to make pry-ment into the matters of unpleasantness... And... And Althaar has had some suspecting that... that FriendJohn has the secrets he must be keeping even from Althaar. And Althaar is not to be taking the deception of FriendJohn in the person! Althaar has himself performed the “white lie” on occasionings. But... Althaar is sensing that this is a lying of another coloration. A deception of a much greater... greatness. And Althaar is trusting that FriendJohn is doing what is best, but... it is a very deeply sadness to Althaar that he can not make dis-encumberment on the burdens of his dear friend.

A beat as GANGLION considers this.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Althaar, do you recall the final speech of Jacques (*pron. “Jack-wiss”*) in Act III, scene seven of *As We Tolerate It?*

ALTHAAR

Althaar... has not remembering, Leon. The “day-drinks” have made up-sneaking upon Althaar.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Think nothing of it, dear boy. I played Jacques on Aumatex for their entire summer season. Which... only lasts a day and a half, but I think I still have it in me:

“All the ‘verse's a stage,
And all the sapients in it merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one being in their time plays many parts,
As I must play my part and leave you here;
I have to go now, my planet needs me!”

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes, recollection! Althaar was leaking copious cylandotic fluids after Jacques was perishing on the way back to his home planet.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Yes, a somewhat... abrupt end, but... eminently practical, from a dramaturgical standpoint. Jacques had to be put out of the way before the massive inter-species orgy at the end of Act IV. But, do you take my meaning, here?

ALTHAAR

...Perhaps you must be spelling it out at Althaar.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Well, part of the... (*small burp*) Pardon me. Part of the... inherent tragedy of Jacques is his inability to reconcile his public and private personas, yes? He tries to be all things to all people. After the loss of Numbella, he has no one to... to remind him, d'you see, of his essential... his essential... essence. And that leads to his inevitable, er, thingy. Demise.

ALTHAAR

So... is it the suggestion of Leon that... that Althaar should be the Numbella to the Jacques of FriendJohn? To make reminding of his essences?

GANGLION OCELLUS

I have played many a part in my day, Althaar my lad, and I can tell you from long experience that not being able to leave a character behind is one of the deadliest perils of the craft. If this friend of yours is indeed spending his every waking moment enduring the humiliation of an... utterly distasteful, deeply insulting, trite, hackneyed, pandering, disingenuous... (*realizes he's getting off-track*) What I mean to say is, if the world is demanding of your friend that he play a character not of his choosing, you can help him best by letting him leave that part behind at the stage door, as it were. Allowing him to be... himself.

ALTHAAR

Ah. Althaar believes... Althaar believes this is of great wisdom. He is most gratified for your advisings, Leon!

GANGLION OCELLUS

And I am grateful to you, dear Althaar! Not only for the opportunity to discuss life and art with such a perceptive and erudite young individual, but for the brief respite from the cries of "No sombrero!" that otherwise plague the entirety of my existence.

SOPON

Hey, uh... Sin Zwizz'linarp? Sorry, my boss just found out that you were here, and he was wondering... Could we get a picture of you for the back wall?

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh, very well! But only because you've caught me in a rare sanguine humour.

ALTHAAR

Huzzah!

[scene 11] Another Hydroponics park, this one very chilly indeed. Maybe a faint Hardanger-fiddle track playing somewhere in the distance.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

And finally, the jewel of our operations: the lingonberry restoration project!

THOOMBON

It's quite remarkable. Although I wasn't expecting such low temperatures in a hydroponic facility.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, it's important to maintain the ideal semi-polar conditions in which the lingonberry thrives. They're broad-leaved evergreens, you know, very unusual! But a proper snow cover is essential to prevent damage.

CHARSH

Yes, I'm sure, but a bit of protective gear would have been nice. Or some warning, at least. Not all of us are biologically suited to such low temperatures.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well! If the sight of these hardy shrubs isn't enough to warm your heart, then I don't know what to tell you!

CHARSH

I could have at least grabbed a scarf, or...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, Johnny! You look like you have a question about these beautiful berries. Do you?

JOHN

"I certainly do. Restoring an endangered plant species must take incredible dedication. Who is it that loves plants enough to commit themselves round-the-clock to such a noble cause?"

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, our Human volunteers, of course!

PIKLAT

Volunteers? Are you not compensating the Humans for their labor?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, uh... of *course* we initially offered a generous salary and benefits package, but these selfless lingonberry nurturers eventually realized that the joy of restoring such a beautiful species to its pre-ME6 population levels was payment enough in itself. They're just that dedicated!

THOOMBON

The Humans... refused payment? That doesn't sound like typical Human behavior.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What can I say? It's just one of the countless examples of the new understanding between Human and Fugulnari! Making a better Galaxy for us all!

CHARSH

Is my heartbeat slowing down? I think my heartbeat is slowing down.

THOOMBON

And these Human lingonberry-tenders. Are they quartered nearby as well?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Of course! You can see the Human burrow colony just a few yards yonder.

PIKLAT

Ah. Very similar to the ones we saw by the mulch plant, then.

THOOMBON

And eerily similar to the burrows by the compost tanks.

CHARSH

And the ones by the sprouting racks... I'm so tired...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, yes, Human holes do tend to look a bit same-y to those who have never encountered a Human in their natural surroundings before. But they're very efficient, I trust you'll agree.

THOOMBON

Their efficiency isn't in question. It's their suitability I'm wondering about.

PIKLAT

Yes, what about these Humans' emotional well-being? Are they being given adequate time for leisure and relaxation?

THOOMBON

Not to mention their famous mating rituals!

PIKLAT

Precisely! I can't consult my dossier at the moment, obviously, but I'm reasonably certain your average Human would consider these burrows highly inadequate for that purpose with regard to both privacy and maximum occupancy. How exactly are these volunteers of yours meeting their, ah, "social needs?"

THOOMBON

Do you have anything to say about this, Human guide?

JOHN

(rustling his script)

Ah, apparently I do not.

CHARSH

(slurring)

My blood... It's slowing...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, my dear friends, I would be delighted to answer any questions you have about our management of the Human workforce!

THOOMBON

Then feel free to do so.

PIKLAT

Yes, please do.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, er... That is, you see...

A beat.

THOOMBON

Go on.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well... Frankly, gentlebeings, it seems like at this point you're just being difficult. Don't you think all these questions were addressed perfectly well by the Humans' charming little spontaneous musical number?

PIKLAT

They were not.

THOOMBON

Catchy though it may have been.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh. Well...

A long beat. Then, a door whooshes open.

POOMIE 1

POOMIES IS HERE FOR TOURZES!!!

SEVERAL POOMIES

HOIIIIEEEE!!!

POOMIE 2

Hoo-man!! Waaoohaooooowhh!!!

POOMIE 3

So kewwww! Poomie plomp! Poomie plomp!

SEVERAL POOMIES

PLOMP! PLOMP! POOMIE PLOMP! (*etc.*)

JOHN

Oh, wow! Hi there, little guys! Heh, you sure are cute! Little... puppy-kitten things.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Puppy what now—? Oh my withering filaments! Get away! For the love of everything that's fertile, GET AWAY FROM ME!

PIKLAT

Frondrinax? Are you— CHEESE ON A HOVERBOARD! Poomies! Back! Back, you wretched, misbegotten fluff-mongers!

POOMIE 1

No plomp?! Oooooowaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!!

POOMIE 1 shatters.

JOHN

Aagh! What the hell?!

MRS. FRONDRINAX, THOOMBON, and PIKLAT scream in horror and hurl insults as the other POOMIES attempt to “plomp” them. (CHARSH is equally horrified, but is too incapacitated by the cold to do more than groan weakly.) The rejection causes the POOMIES to wail and shatter in disappointment, as JOHN B tries to make sense of what is going on. Amidst the cacophony...

OAKENSARX

John, Frondrinax. Oakensarx again. I just wanted to wish you both good luck. We’re all count— oh FROST MY PISTILS! POOMIES!

OAKENSARX beats a hasty retreat. More chaos until the last Poomie shatters into a pile of Poomie shards.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

(somewhat out of whatever the plant equivalent of “breath” is)
Oh! Oh! Are they all gone?

THOOMBON

(out of actual breath)
I... I think so.

JOHN

What... just happened? Who were those little guys? And what did you do to them?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, stow it, Johnny! I don’t have time for your stupid questions! *(to the DELEGATES)*
Gentlebeings, I must apologize. I don’t know how those horrible little monstrosities managed to find their way in here, but I can assure you all that when I find out who was responsible, buds will roll!

PIKLAT

Aghhh... Never mind that now, Frondrinax. I just... need somewhere to sit and... recuperate...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, yes. Yes, of course. We’ll continue the tour after we’ve all had a chance to recover.

THOOMBON

Ugh. Let’s just call it a day, shall we?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh! Well, if you really think you’ve seen enough...

PIKLAT

I think we’ve seen more than enough. And Charsh is starting to turn mauve.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, yes, all right. Follow me, then, gentlebeings.

The ailing DELEGATES shuffle away behind MRS. FRONDRINAX, one dragging the inert body of CHARSH.

JOHN

Um...Mrs. F? I still have more lines. Should I—?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? Oh, for— Tour's over, Johnny! Go home!

Door whoosh as they exit.

JOHN

Okay! Feel better! (*surveying the Poomie remains*) Aww, those poor little kitten-pups. (*shivers*) I should probably get out of here too, before I start turning mauve. Mang, what a day.

[scene 12] The area outside DEE's new cell. The water feature cuts in and out a few times as she plays with it.

EUKATROX

Enjoying your new surroundings, Human?

DEE

(over cell intercom)

Well, the fountain is nice, but I don't much care for the foliage here. It's a little talkative for my taste.

EUKATROX

Oh, you're breaking my bulb, sweetheart. You're absolutely breaking my bulb. Better appreciate that fancy little hydration station while you can, because as soon as Frondrinax is done with you, you're going right back to—

They are cut off by a buzzer. A voice comes over an intercom.

ARCHEPLAX

Hey, Eukatrox. Lemme in.

EUKATROX

Eh, settle your sepals, just let me key in the— (*bleeping of a keypad*) C'mon, you stupid piece of— Ah! Got it! (*Big Serious Prison Door clonk*) Well well, if it isn't old Archeplax! What's got you shadowing my canopy this lovely cycle?

ARCHEPLAX

Got me some kind of official diplomat here. Wants to observe the prisoner.

EUKATROX

I thought Frondrinax said this morning she'd be bringing them around.

ARCHEPLAX

Yeah, well, she also said, "It's not your job to ask questions! It's your job to look efficient, keep quiet, and make sure that delegation leaves completely satisfied with what they've seen here today!" So, I'm gonna show this delegate whatever she wants, end of story. I'm in no hurry to get my petioles snapped for mulching up Frondrinax's operation.

EUKATROX

Yeah, sure, just— Aw, frost me, is that a dog? You keep that urine-dispensing mechanism away from my pot, you hear me?

ARCHEPLAX

Manners, Euk! You know there isn't a dog within light-years of this place. And she's wearing a translator unit, see? Earth dogs don't use translators, they're not even sentient. This is obviously the Fidorian representative, here with the *fact-finding mission*.

STELLA

(via the re-wired translator box on MISS SOPHIE's collar)

Yes! Yes! I am a Fidorian! And a good girl! I am best good girl Fidorian! Yes! Bark!

ARCHEPLAX

See? She just happens to look like a dog. And sound like a dog. And... act a lot like a dog. But she's most definitely not a dog, and we would never imply something so insulting to one of the Committee's honored guests! Who we are supposed to treat with *all possible courtesy*. Right?

EUKATROX

Oh. Uh, right. My apologies, gesin. Would you like to observe the prisoner's very comfortable and entirely species-appropriate accommodations at this time?

STELLA

Yes! Yes! Arf-arf! Wanna look around! Speak with prisoner! Woof-woof! I am a Fidorian!

EUKATROX

Fine. But diplomatic immunity or no, you keep that sniffer of yours away from my soil, you hear?

STELLA

Yes yes! Arf! Very good! Woof! I am a Fidorian and I will be very good! Bark!

DEE

Wait a minute...Miss Sophie?

MISS SOPHIE barks.

STELLA

Um...bark, bark, woof! These are the noises I make when I look around! Woof! Bark! Ruff! Ruff!

DEE

Hey, Miss Sophie! What are you doing here, girl?

MISS SOPHIE barks again.

STELLA

Bark! Yes! Miss Sophie! That is my name! Bark-bark! What a clever Human! To guess the name of Miss Sophie, who you have never met!

DEE

Whaaaaaat is going on?

STELLA

Hello, clever Human prisoner! It is I, Miss Sophie, the famous Fidorian diplomat! I am very pleased you have heard of me! I have come to visit and observe your living conditions. Woof!

DEE

OH! Right! I absolutely... appreciate this visit, Honorable Miss Sophie. My name is Dee Mallory, and as you can see, I'm a prisoner here. (*deliberately*) In this big ultra-crylion cylinder, smack in the middle of the brig.

STELLA

Ah! Yes! A pleasure to meet you, new friend Dee! Bark! I, Miss Sophie, would like to know how my new friend is doing. Is Dee... unharmed?

DEE

They are treating me quite well, Madam Ambassador. Thank you for asking. They moved me to this fancy new cell just this morning, in fact. Probably because they knew you were coming.

STELLA

Yes, yes! That is extremely plausible, woof woof! Does new friend Dee have anything to say to our ICSB fact-finding mission? Any *messages* she would like to share with the many peoples of the Galaxy?

EUKATROX

Hey, no messages to the outside! That's a standing order from top branch, I don't care what kind of big pot you're supposed to be.

STELLA

Bark bark! Are Fugulnari prison staff interfering with a prisoner's free expression of ideas and cultural identity, in violation of ICSB Cohabitation Code 421-peff-7b? Because I would definitely want to include that in my report! And that could cause a major interstellar controversy, in my opinion! (*realizes she got a little un-Fidorian there*) ...Bark bark!

ARCHEPLAX

Oh! Ah, no, no, we certainly wouldn't be violating any of this sapient's rights! Perish the thought!

EUKATROX

But Archie—

ARCHEPLAX

Shh!

EUKATROX

But we're not—

ARCHEPLAX

Compost it! We keep the delegates happy, remember? And *we don't ask questions!*

EUKATROX

Fine! On your nodes be it. If you need me, I'll be back at the guard station, staying very much not responsible for any of this.

ARCHEPLAX

Oh, thanks a lot! I'll be sure to let Frondrinax know what a huge help you were!

EUKATROX

Yeah, yeah, blow it out your stomata!

A bleep and another Big Serious Prison Door clonk as EUKATROX effoes.

STELLA

Woof woof! Please share your thoughts, new Human friend! And Miss Sophie will record them!

ARCHEPLAX

What?

STELLA

Er, for posterity! In my notes for this very important fact-finding mission, bark bark!

ARCHEPLAX

Oh. Well... I guess that's ok. You'll be taking your notes with you when you leave Human space, right?

STELLA

Of course! Bark bark!

ARCHEPLAX

That's all right then. I don't see how this could possibly backfire, go right ahead.

STELLA

Excellent! Woof! I'm ready to listen, Dee Mallory! What would you like to say to the Galaxy?

DEE

Hmm. Let's start with a little number that's been on my mind a lot lately...

[scene 13] The (relatively quiet, compared to pre-Foog levels) Transit Hub, where the DELEGATES are waiting to depart.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

How's everyone doing? Would anyone care for another ginger ale?

OAKENSARX

I'll take one.

THOOMBON

No more for me, thanks.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

And you, Sin Piklat? Can I get you anything?

PIKLAT

Not unless you've got a cure for bemulched electronics somewhere in that cart.

OAKENSARX

We apologize profusely for the damage to your personal device, gesin. You will be handsomely reimbursed.

PIKLAT

There is no reimbursement for years of wasted effort! All those petit fours pulverized, all for naught...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

And I would like to apologize once again for the... unfortunate disruption earlier today. I honestly don't know how those Poomies managed to get onto the Fairgrounds.

CHARSH

Please don't mention those horrible little things again. I'm having a hard enough time coping with the loss of my dorsal fin to frostbite without being tormented by the memory of those hideous abominations.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Again, we'll make sure to cover the full cost of the reconstructive surgery and any related follow-up care. Isn't that right, Oakensarx?

OAKENSARX

Absolutely. I'll be submitting a report to the budgetary subcommittee first thing next cycle.

CHARSH

It's the very least you can do, I suppose.

ROOTY arrives.

ROOTY

Rooty came to say that all the transportses have luggages and are ready to leave super fast and good!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, then, there you go. I'd like to thank you all again for taking time away from your busy, busy lives to witness our marvelous project here firsthand. I'll, er, I'll understand if you don't want to grab a gift bag on the way out, but we have prepared a lovely little assortment of artisanal fertilizers here if you're interested...

The DELEGATES are not. They grumble away toward their transports.

ROOTY

Bye! Goodbye! Rooty loves you! Bye!

The DELEGATES are all gone.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well...that could have gone better.

OAKENSARX

I'll say. Bourbon spritz, Frondrinax?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

You read my mind.

ROOTY

Can Rooty have one?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Sure, why not? *(beat)* Oakensarx, be honest with me. How badly did I frost things off today?

OAKENSARX

Well, I certainly wouldn't call today a rousing success. But it could well have gone much worse. Honestly, sap-curdling as those Poomies may be, they could not have come at a better time. The delegates were asking far too many questions.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I suppose you're right. And I was always a tad nervous about letting any outsiders speak with Dee, so it's just as well they didn't make it that far.

OAKENSARX

Didn't you assure me you had Mallory well in pod by now?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Ehhh... that was perhaps a tad optimistic. I've been making terrific progress with her over the last few months, of course, and I'm sure she's almost ready to crack! But perhaps she isn't quite ready for center stage just yet. So yes, I think you're right, the Poomies may have been a watering in disguise. I still don't understand what the frost they were doing here in the first place, though. I certainly didn't add them to the list of invitees! Who would even think to do such a thing?

ROOTY

Rooty would thought to do such a thing!

OAKENSARX

What's this, Rooty? *You* invited the Poomies?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, for the— What were you thinking, Rooty?

ROOTY

Ummm, I was thinking that "Poomie" sounds like "Rooty!" And that's me!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Vim lend me strength.

[scene 14] The In-Betweens.

STELLA

You think the Foogs bought it? It sounded like they bought it.

H.F.

It did, but I'm getting worried. Miss Sophie should have made it back by now. Where could she be?

Barking from MISS SOPHIE over the speaker of their comms device.

H.F.

Yes, you come to Papa, now! That's a good girl!

Another bark over the comm.

STELLA

You left that trail of treats for her to follow, right?

H.F.

Sazium boar bits. Her favorite.

STELLA

Then she should be fine.

H.F.

Yeah, but I can't help but worry. If she runs into one of those Foogs who arrested her last year...

POOMIE 5

(over the comms device)

Waaooohh!!! Fido-reen! Is Fido-reen!

POOMIE 6

(ditto)

Aaoowohh!!! Fido-reen so kewww!!! Poomie plomp!

POOMIE 5

Yah-yah, Poomie plomp!

Barking and plomping can be heard over the comm unit.

STELLA

Sounds like she just got an escort.

MISS SOPHIE and TWO POOMIES bounce in happily.

POOMIE 5

Poomie finded Fido-reen!

H.F.

Good job, Poomies! Aw, there's my girl! Good job, Miss Sophie! Who's the cutest little undercover resistance agent? You is! Yes, you is!

POOMIE 6

Yay Miss Fido-reen Sophie! Victory plomp!

POOMIE 5

PLOMP!

STELLA

Congratulations, everyone, but we need to wrap this up. We'll have plenty of time for celebratory plomps and belly rubs later. H.F., you need to get on mastering Dee's recording right away. I want it ready to go out the second the PA system is back on line.

H.F.

I'll see what I can do. Fair warning, though, we're talking about a recording we made over a prison intercom, through a simul-translator we jerry-rigged into a two-way comms device, hanging directly underneath the mouth of a sweet but admittedly excitable cocker spaniel. I'm not super optimistic about sound quality here, is what I'm saying.

POOMIE 5

Poomie will halp!

POOMIE 6

Yah-yah, Poomie will halp! YAY!

H.F.

Oh, thanks you two, but this is kind of a technical process. I don't think that would be such a—

POOMIE 5

Oooooowaaaaa—

H.F.

Okay! You can help! You can help!

POOMIE 5

Yaaaaay! Poomie halp!

POOMIE 6

Poomie halp! Poomie use denoisy halper! Harmonic mullllti-band quantum wave-detangle!

POOMIE 5

Poomie flotts with the fabric of time!

H.F.

Whoa. That... That's a really good idea, Poomie. Where'd you pick up a trick like that?

POOMIE 6

Poomie-Town Technicoo Institoot for Audio-Visoo-oo Engineewing! Poomie is Poomie-lor of Sciences!

POOMIE 5

Yah! Poomie also! Poomie get hands-on expewience!

H.F.

Well all right, then! Let me show you the setup I've been working with back here. *(fade this out as they head off to H.F.'s workspace)* I've had to improvise a little bit with frequency sweeps and the EQ, at a certain point I'm losing as much signal as noise...

And H.F. and the POOMIES are gone.

STELLA

Well, Miss Sophie, it looks like Radio Free Fairgrounds just acquired a couple of new sound engineers. For as long as we can keep from disappointing them, anyway.

MISS SOPHIE

(happy barks of agreement)

[scene 15] ALTHAAR cleaning at home. The door buzzer rings.

JOHN

(over intercom)

Hey, Althaar? It's me. Is it safe to come in?

ALTHAAR

Oh! One small moment, please, FriendJohn! *(he hides himself behind the curtain)* Althaar is concealed! FriendJohn may be entering in comfort! *(door whoosh)* Greeting to you, FriendJohn! Althaar is hoping that the work cycle was not of too great exhaustion on this day!

JOHN

Less exhaustion than usual, actually. But it was plenty weird.

ALTHAAR

Mm. Would FriendJohn wish to be speaking of it? Or, if FriendJohn is wishing rather to leave behind himself the weirdness of the work cycle, perhaps he might instead join Althaar in the shared tele-visual entertainments! It was the intent of Althaar this evening to continue his viewings of *Planet Earth*, if this is making appeal.

JOHN

Eh, I think I'll pass. I kind of lost interest once they ran through all the non-beetle species.

ALTHAAR

Yes, the quality of fluffy precious-ness among the subjects of the later seasons has been much reduced. But Althaar is persevering!

JOHN

Good luck. Actually, speaking of fluffy preciousness, there was one part of the weirdness I wanted to ask you about. Have you ever heard of—

Doorbell rings again.

JOHN

Were you expecting anyone?

ALTHAAR

Not in the leastment, FriendJohn! Please, make greeting of the unexpected guest at once!

Bleep of the intercom.

JOHN

Hello?

POOMIE 7

HOIIIIEEEE!!! I is Poomie!

ALTHAAR

OUAGH.

POOMIE 7

Poomie visit? Poomie plomp?

JOHN

Uh, one second!

Bleep of the intercom shutting off.

JOHN

Hey, Althaar? From that sound you just made, I'm guessing you feel the same way about the Poomies as everyone else. But, uh, I saw firsthand today what happens when you turn down one of their "plomp"ings, and I... really don't want that on my conscience. Will you be ok if I let this little guy in? Just for a minute.

ALTHAAR

Oh. Of course, FriendJohn. Althaar does not wish to make injury to the conscience. And it is a truth that the Poomie is not choosing to make feelings of unpleasant-ness. Althaar will endure.

JOHN

Thanks, buddy. I'll get him out of here as fast as I can, I promise.

Door whoosh.

POOMIE 7

Waaooaaaooowohh!!! Hoo-man so kewwwww! Poomie plomp!

JOHN

Oh, ok. Plomp to you, too. Holy crap, you're soft.

Happy plomping, plus distressed Iltorian noises from behind the curtain.

JOHN

So, listen, it's good to meet you, uh... Sorry, the galactipedia wasn't exactly clear—is Poomie your name, or your species?

ALTHAAR

(strangled)

It is both, FriendJohn.

POOMIE 7

Ooooooh! New fren? Poomie plomp!

JOHN

No, wait, don't go behind the—

ALTHAAR

(strangled noise)

JOHN

—curtain.

POOMIE 7

Waaoohaaooowohh!!! Ilto-reen! So kewwwwwww!

ALTHAAR

Greeting... to you... Sin... Poomie. Althaar is... WeLComing you... to his... home. Althaar is... most pleased to be sharING... friendSHIP. With. All... PEopLEs of! The! Galaxy!

POOMIE 7

Ooooooh! New fren so kewwwww!!! POOMIE PLOMP!

JOHN

No, don't—!

ALTHAAR

OOAGHGHAH.

[scene 16] A PA announcement.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Good evening, everyone! Just a quick announcement to let you know that announcements are back on line! Everything is back to normal and completely under cont—

Blast of static and feed back as she is immediately cut off.

RADIO FREE FAIRGROUNDS

And we're back, Fairgrounds! If you're wondering what that little shutdown was all about, well, so were all of us at Radio Free Fairgrounds, until we learned about the ICSB fact-finding mission our leafy overlords had touring the station today. We're sorry to say these visitors appear to have already left Human space without the slightest idea what's really going on out here. But that's no reason to give up hope! Even if the Foogs managed to pull the wool over this delegation's eyes, they can't stuff cotton in your ears. And we've got another song from Ms. Delilah Mallory, recorded this very day, to remind you that, even if at times we seem to be all alone in a vast and uncaring Galaxy, nonetheless: we're all in this together, Fairgrounds.

Bleep of switching over to DEE's song.

DEE

Let's start with a little number that's been on my mind a lot lately...

(singing)

Oh, it's a Booster man,

Livin' in a Booster town

I got the Booster blues,

And I'm sure gonna spread the news...

[scene 17] We hear the broadcast playing in Torianna's office.

TORIANNA

You can shut it off now, Frall.

FRALL

Not the most encouraging news, is it, sir?

TORIANNA

That's putting it mildly. I knew it wasn't exactly likely, but I was hoping against hope, right up to the last minute. Maybe the Resistance would find out about the delegation, maybe they could manage to make contact somehow, get some kind of word to the outside about what's really going on here... But no. It looks like Frondrinax managed to pull it off. If the General Council ever gets the real facts about the Fugulnari occupation, it won't be from this "fact-finding mission."

FRALL

I apologize for not being able to do more in that regard, sir.

TORIANNA

No, Frall, I trust you. I know you're doing the best you can, same as the rest of us. Even if I have no hope of understanding it. *(beat. a sigh)* You know, when this whole Fugulnari thing started, it all seemed so... absurd. Comical, even. I mean, Humanity may not be one of the Galaxy's power players, but it's not like the League is some two-credit backwater. There's over 300 billion of us! Inhabiting dozens of planets! A modern, fully interstellar government, a recognized member state of the ICSB, and the whole thing was just... hijacked by a bunch of shrubs. On paper, the concept is absolutely hilarious. But it's been eight months now, and I keep thinking, "Could you please get to the punchline?" But there is no punchline, is there? Just a big... setup. "Did you hear the one about the fall of Humanity?" That's it.

FRALL

Ba-dum-ching.

TORIANNA

No one's coming to help us, are they, Frall?

FRALL

Mm. Contrary to what one would expect, based on the numerous and frequently prodigious gaps in Fugulnari cultural understanding, they are indeed highly skilled at the art of public relations. They have allowed very little information contrary to their interest to escape Human space. And I am sorry to say that today's success will embolden them to exert even greater control in this regard. A sizable number of Sin Althaar's letters are likely to go missing in the coming weeks. Although Xtopps' missives to Prang remain, for the moment, undetected.

TORIANNA

Well, that's something. But it can't possibly be enough. Can it?

FRALL

It cannot. But I believe I can suggest another possible source of outside assistance.

TORIANNA

I know, I know, the Dilurians. But we're out of luck there until I can get in to see Big Steve. Which, you know, I really don't want to. I mean, I will, of course I will, the future of Humanity's at stake here. But I'm gonna hate every second of it.

FRALL

Quite so. But it was not in fact the Dilurians I had in mind, sir.

TORIANNA

Then who?

FRALL

The Fidorians.

TORIANNA

The— oh! You think they'd help us?

FRALL

One could argue that the Treaty of Fang Treat Campfire would oblige them to do so. After all, the Treaty predates any form of Human government, which could imply that it is Humanity itself, rather than the formal entity of the League, to which the Fidorian allegiance is owed.

TORIANNA

Would they see it that way?

FRALL

They are a very perceptive people, sir, and possess a deep and abiding sense of honor. As well as a formidable interstellar fleet.

TORIANNA

(remembering) Riiight. *(beat, then into problem-solving mode, thinking out loud)* Right. So... the problem now is: how do we get in touch. The Fidorians are fairly reclusive at the best of times... Wait, first things first: I can't get a message out through official channels. Which leaves unofficial ones. But the Foogs have everything locked down tight, and even if they didn't, I'm definitely under their close observation. There's no way I could manage to, say, slip something to a sympathetic passenger on an outbound flight, without it being intercepted. *(sigh)* What we really need is some kind of message that the Foogs won't recognize as a message... *(beat)* Oh, Hazel's pudge-pot! The ball! That stupid... Ark Thingy! We still have it, don't we?

FRALL

The Arc of Retrieval. We do indeed.

TORIANNA

If we could somehow “throw” that back to the Fidorians... If they found it, they’d respond, wouldn’t they?

FRALL

They would be compelled to, sir.

TORIANNA

Yes! So... how do we get it off the station without the Foogs getting suspicious...?

FRALL

If I may make another suggestion, sir? There is one function of the Fairgrounds that the Fugulnari have left entirely within your purview.

TORIANNA

What are you— Waste disposal? We just throw our last hope out with the trash?

FRALL

Trash that is ejected into open space, without any Fugulnari oversight whatsoever. You will recall, sir, that a direct interstellar trajectory was exactly how we acquired the Arc in the first place.

TORIANNA

Well, when you put it that way... what other options do we have?

FRALL

Emphatically, sir: none.

TORIANNA

All right then. Let’s do it. How soon can we get that ball into the trash compartment?

A shimmer during the previous line (as soon as the COMMANDER says “do it”).

FRALL

Already done, sir. The Arc is securely nestled in Waste Disposal Chamber epsilon-4, ready to be ejected into the vacuum of space.

TORIANNA

Excellent. *(bleep)* Amber?

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

Yes, sir?

TORIANNA

Initiate this cycle's waste disposal sequence. Maximum velocity, please.

A brief beat, then some sort of confirmation bleepity from AMBER's station.

AMBER ON THE BRIDGE

It's done, sir? Telling?

TORIANNA

Thank you, Amber. Over and out.

Bleep of the call ending. A beat.

TORIANNA

(solemnly)

All right, friends. Fetch.

[scene 18] Closing credits music.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life With Althaar*, episode 28!

This episode was written by Amanda La Pergola for Gemini CollisionWorks and starred

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Zuri Washington as Dee

Berit Johnson as Althaar

John Amir as John B

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant Frall

Derrick Peterson as Xtopps

Eli Gantias as H.F.

and Chris Lee as Chip Frinkel

and also featured

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

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

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

Berit is the supervising producer, showrunner, and script supervisor

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

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

Theme and Interstitial Music composed and performed by Anna Stefanic

Life With Althaar logo and illustration created by Dean Haspiel

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We'll be back in two weeks with another "Tale from the Fairgrounds," but first, it looks like everyone's favorite sitcom buddies have encountered a small difficulty with their flight back to New Hollywood...

[scene 19] The Transit Hub, at a departures desk:

GANGLION OCELLUS

Cancelled?! What do you mean, cancelled?

HARRIED DEPARTURE STEWARD

I am *so* sorry, gesin, but, well, with the drastic decline in travel between Human settlements—efficiency regulations, you know—there just weren't enough occupied berths on this flight to justify running it. All reservations were automatically re-assigned to the next Sol-bound flight next Thursday...

"DAVE"

Thursday?! I can't wait that long, I've got a Ceremony of Celestial Exfoliation booked for Friday morning! I can't miss that! I haven't had my energy strings plucked for two whole weeks!

HARRIED DEPARTURE STEWARD

Not to worry, sir, the Committee has arranged for alternate transport for you, their special guests! You can board right away.

GANGLION OCELLUS

Oh, thank Arathbon.

HARRIED DEPARTURE STEWARD

It's just down that corridor to your left: Uruz 3, Gate C. And it's a sharp ship, too! So you'll be back in the Solar System in just 22 hours.

"DAVE"

Oh, wicker wack! Thanks!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Wait just a moment. A sharp ship? Does that mean... no individual cabins? I'll be strapped in next to this inanity soufflé, with no respite, for 22 hours?

"DAVE"

Hey, look at the bright side, Zwizz! We can spend the whole trip practicing those conflict resolution exercises Dr. Harbinger taught us!

GANGLION OCELLUS

Rathbona preserve my wretched soul.