

# *Life with Althaar*

## Episode 1: Welcome to the Fairgrounds

### Draft 3.0, 5/18/19 - BAJ/IWH

#### ANNOUNCER

It is the year 2521. A small, shabby passenger ship approaches a large, shabby space station, somewhere in the Teegarden's System...

*An economy-class space passenger vessel. Air vents blowing, rustling of human and non-human passengers, adjusting of carry-ons. A tone indicates an announcement is about to be made over the somewhat aged in-cabin speakers:*

#### SOOTHING CORPORATE PASSENGER RELATIONS VOICE

Attention valued GalaxBudget Spaceline adventurers: We will complete docking procedures at the Human Exchange Concourse in approximately 2 minutes. Once the captain has turned on the full-gravity sign, you are free to uncouple your safety webbing and move about the cabin. Please check around your bunk area for any personal belongings before disembarking; our cabin-bots will come through shortly to collect any unnecessaries.

*A ding as the gravity sign is turned on; a rustle & metallic un-buckling noise as JOHN detaches himself from the safety straps, then a bonk and **muted cry of pain** as he sits up & hits his head on the bulkhead. Rustling as he packs his few belongings back into his carry-on. **The CABIN-BOT can be heard approaching and collecting trash from the other passengers.***

#### S.C.P.R.V.

The hour is 07-24 RST; the local atmosphere and gravity are Earth standard. The internal temperature of the HEC is maintained at 20° Celsius (*a distant "Ha!" is heard from one of the other passengers*), and the exterior temperature is, as always, 2.7 Kelvins. Please be sure to have your full documentation ready for Standard League Customs processing. First class passengers, if you keep to your left on leaving the gangway, you'll be met by your individual Customs facilitator for speedy, personalized, sentient attention and transport to the HEC Hotel Splendide. Remaining ValueTravel individuals... to your right as you exit, please form a queue at the kiosks for processing by the CustomsBot on duty.

*During the above:*

#### CABIN-BOT

Good morning, valued customer! May I collect any refuse, excretions, or sheddings from your bunk area?

#### JOHN

Yes, uh, where do I...

#### CABIN-BOT

My torso serves as a disposal orifice, valued customer!

**JOHN**

Ok, thanks.

*Clank of torso trash receptacle. The Cabin-Bot moves on through the rest of the cabin as:*

**S.C.P.R.V.**

GalaxBudget Spacelines thanks you for your choosing us for your space travel needs. When you have finished your stay on the H.E.C., GalaxBudget is ready to provide convenient connections to most other ports in Human space, as well as all major ICSB core planets and several other outpost systems. On behalf of our president, board of directors, and the entire GBS family of transport services, we hope your visit fulfills all your expectations.

*This fades as we move with JOHN from the ship to the bustling customs/baggage claim area. KAISER WILHELM-bot is just finishing up with the previous passenger in line.*

**CUSTOMS BOT (KAISER WILHELM)**

*(bored but stern, German accent)*

...and if you prefer not to use the breathers, Floors 14 through 18 of Lamed Sector maintain a permanent methane atmosphere. Please-enjoy-your-stay-at-the-Human-Exchange-Concourse-and-share-in-the-many-wonders-humanity-has-to-offer-NEXT!

*Faint squelching as the previous passenger leaves and JOHN steps up to the customs kiosk and sets his bag down.*

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Is this all your luggage, sir?

**JOHN**

Uh, yeah, just the one.

*Unzipping & rummaging as the bot searches the bag.*

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Name?

**JOHN**

John B.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Port of origin?

**JOHN**

Earth. Sorry, are you... Is there a reason you look exactly like--

**CUSTOMS BOT**

First time on the Fairgrounds, sir?

**JOHN**

Uh, yeah.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

*(bored)*

When the H.E.C was downshifted, it was determined by Earth Central that the most cost-effective way to staff the station, given the lack of interest among the Human populace, would be to re-purpose us, the robots originally built to portray famous figures for the reenactments in the Hall of Human History. We were given programming updates in order to perform our new functions, but our original exteriors and voice matrices were left intact for reasons of economy. So yes, there is indeed a reason that I look exactly like Kaiser Wilhelm. Is that a problem?

**JOHN**

No, no, it's just a little weird is all.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

I can remove my face if you'd prefer.

**JOHN**

Please don't?

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Ok then. Are you a League citizen?

**JOHN**

Yes.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Species?

**JOHN**

...Human.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

It says here that you are registered as a--

**JOHN**

Right, it's, um. I mean, yes, legally I'm... yes, but I still need to like, breathe and eat food and everything, so I'm not sure if I should say--

**CUSTOMS BOT**

I don't need to hear about your hobbies, sir. There is a line.

**JOHN**

Sorry. I just... I want to be sure I'm not going to be put in like, a recharging cubicle or something. Sorry, is that offensive? I didn't mean, uh, I don't know how you--

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Your accommodations are your own business, sir.

**JOHN**

Right. Ok. Sorry, I was officially Human until a couple weeks ago, so I, uh, haven't really "updated my programming", you know? *(feeble laugh. pause.)* So...

**CUSTOMS BOT**

*(brusque--that was in fact offensive)*

Purpose of travel?

**JOHN**

Um, business? I have a job here. With WSS

**CUSTOMS BOT**

That would be... *(looking it up)* Wanting and Sustainment Systems, Incorporated?

**JOHN**

Yeah.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

So you're entering as a long-term resident?

**JOHN**

Yes.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Local address?

**JOHN**

Nnnnone? I left Earth on kind of short notice, I just got this job and headed right out on the next shuttle, so I'm still looking for a... is there like a hostel or a--

**CUSTOMS BOT**

There's a HECNET portal along the wall just there to the left, sir, the local real estate listings will be your best bet for finding a residence. So you don't end up in a *recharging cubicle or something*.

**JOHN**

Um.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Failure to secure a long-term residence within 36 hours is grounds for a vagrancy charge. You have now been so notified.

**JOHN**

Oh. Right. I'll, uh, I'll get right on that then. Thanks.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Any restricted substances to declare?

**JOHN**

No.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

You sure about that? Even the tiniest amount, the barest trace, well under the legal limit, of a Class F regulated item must be declared upon entry, under penalty of incarceration and/or fine. No... *snacks*... in your luggage?

**JOHN**

No, nothing like that.

*A suspicious pause, then the bot stamps JOHN's travel documents.*

**CUSTOMS BOT**

All right then. Welcome to the Fairgrounds. Please-enjoy-your-stay-at-the-Human-Exchange-Concourse-and-take-pride-in-the-many-wonders-Humanity-has-to-offer-NEXT!

*The CUSTOMS BOT and their next (Human) interviewee can be heard fading into the background as they go through the same questions, while JOHN approaches the nearby terminal & it bleeps on.*

**HECNET VOICE**

Welcome to HECNET, your full-service guide to everything in The Fairgrounds! Please insert chargepass to proceed!

*User interface bleeps as JOHN navigates through the menus.*

**JOHN**

Ok... hmm... Hecky's List, that's probably... 'Real Estate', there we go. 'Rentals'! Ok, so far, so good. One-bedroom in Samech 14, that looks... 1250 credits a month! Nnnope. Ok, how about... 2500!? What the hell? How are the rents so high when no one wants to live here? All right, go back, go back...limit search... 'price... less than 500'. Ok, 450 credits, that's better... 'hot-bunk in 12-person shift space, available 9:20am-4:40pm.' Great. Hm, here's one for 200 credits. Probably a time-share in a sewage processor... "Roommate wanted: bedroom available in spacious suite on Alef 1. Large shared living space, full water services, eat-in kitchen (roommate will stay out of kitchen while you are eating!). 200 credits per month. Humans only please. Contact Althaar." Yikes, kind of xenophobic, but whatever. For

200 credits a month they can have the whole place covered in Earth First holo-decals. Better lock this down... ‘Accept and pay deposit.’ Ok! Done! Great, so I have about... an hour to find Alef 1 Suite C, drop off my bag, see if my new possibly-racist roommate is in, and be at this new job right on time.

*During the above, the CUSTOMS BOT has been interviewing the SMUGGLER:*

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Are these all your bags, {sir/ma’am}?

**SMUGGLER**

Yes.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Name?

**SMUGGLER**

Flux Abondante.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Port of origin?

**SMUGGLER**

Io.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

League citizen?

**SMUGGLER**

Yes.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Species?

**SMUGGLER**

Human.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Purpose of travel?

**SMUGGLER**

Sightseeing.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Final destination?

**SMUGGLER**

Sembutan 3.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Local address?

**SMUGGLER**

Spotel TransisBunks.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Any restricted substances to declare?

**SMUGGLER**

*(slightly too perky)*

Nope! None at all!

**CUSTOMS BOT**

This is a very... sturdy bag, my friend. Very thick bottom on it.

**SMUGGLER**

Well, you know how the baggage handlers are on these long-haul flights, they just toss your bags around like--

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Mm-hm. So if I put this bag through the Roentgen-ator, I'm not going to see anything... untoward in there?

**SMUGGLER**

I... have no idea what you...

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Because if there were a restricted substance in there, now would be the time to declare it, {sir/ma'am}.

**SMUGGLER**

Well, there may be some... snacks in there. For personal use.

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Personal use.

**SMUGGLER**

I'm Human, it's legal for personal use!

**CUSTOMS BOT**

You expect me to believe you have 150 pounds of this stuff... for personal use?

**SMUGGLER**

These long interstellar flights, you know, you need a good source of protein...

**CUSTOMS BOT**

Okay, {sir/ma'am}, I'm going to need you to--WE HAVE A RUNNER!

*Alarms and shouts as the SMUGGLER takes off with their suitcases (they're hover-bags, I don't know, somehow they can haul them while evading capture), pursued by security forces. This should time out so that this kerfuffle takes place just as JOHN finishes with the terminal and:*

**JOHN**

Excuse me, do you know where Alef 1 is? I'm looking for Suite C.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Alef 1? Sure, just head along the promenade and then up the righthand mover, turn left, then take the third tube to Dalet, cross the landing, and follow the blue-coded signs to--you know what, it's on my way, why don't I just show you?

**JOHN**

Really? Thanks! I just got here, I don't know where anything is.

*The travel hub fades away as they travel along quieter corridors, through lifts, etc.*

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Just come in from Earth? What brings you to the Fairgrounds?

**JOHN**

I, uh, got a job here.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Oh, so you'll be with us for a while! Assuming the vent-biters don't get you, heh. No, I'm just kidding, Sanitation does a great job with those little buggers, you hardly ever hear about anyone getting carried off these days.

**JOHN**

Sorry, the what?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

So, Alef 1, huh? Fancy!

**JOHN**

Is it?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Sure, that's the diplomatic quarters. Not that a lot of them get used these days, of course, but still, pretty nice digs. You with Earth Central?

**JOHN**

No, I was just looking for someplace to stay, and there was a listing for a roommate.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

A diplomat looking for a roommate? That's weird.

**JOHN**

Ye-es... Someone named "Althaar"?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Oh, Althaar! Yeah, that makes sense, he's all about interspecies outreach, he's been looking for a roommate forever. You really lucked out there, he's--hang on, you're Human, yeah?

**JOHN**

Well, legally-- yes, I'm Human. Why?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Well, it's just... I mean, Althaar's great, he's just... you couldn't hope to meet a nicer sapient, I mean, they're all like that, the whole species is just... SUPER nice, their whole bag is diplomacy, you know, forging connections between species, I just thought... don't Humans have like, a thing with them?

**JOHN**

With who?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Iltorians. Don't you, like, have some kind of monkey freak-out when you see them, or something? Like, that's why they've stayed out of Human space this whole time?

**JOHN**

Althaar's an Iltorian?

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

You didn't know?

**JOHN**

He somehow left that out of the rental listing. I should have known it was too good to be true... Shit.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

I mean, he is SUPER nice. If you can get over the monkey freak-out thing.

**JOHN**

Ok... Ok, I can try. It's either that or sleep like some crewman on an old Navy vessel. And... and how bad could it be? No Human has seen an Iltorian in like... almost a hundred years, right? So, stories get exaggerated, yeah? Rumors start to fly, everyone ends up talking about these hideous monsters that will turn your brain inside out if you look at them. They can't possibly be *that* ugly.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

I think they're adorable. But I'm not a Human, so...

**JOHN**

I think I can make this work. No, I *have to* make this work. This is going to be fine. Everything's fine.

**HELPFUL ALIEN**

Welp, here we are, Alef 1, Suite C! Best of luck to you, and have a pleasant consciousness cycle!

**JOHN**

Ok. Ok. Right. I'll just... ok.

*JOHN presses the door buzzer.*

**ALTHAAR**

*(over the door intercom)*

Hello! This is Althaar's new Human "room-mate", John B?

**JOHN**

Um, yes, hello. Yes.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is so very pleased to meet you! Please enter and be welcomed in your new home, "Room-mate" John!

**JOHN**

*(to himself)*

Ok, you can do this. You can do this. 200 credits a month. You can do this.

*JOHN takes a deep breath to steady himself and opens the door (it should go without saying that all the doors on the station are space doors that make a satisfying 'whoosh' noise unless otherwise indicated).*

**ALTHAAR**

GREETINGS TO YOU FROM ALTHAAR!

*JOHN vomits. Theme music and shift from room tone.*

**ANNOUNCER**

Gemini CollisionWorks presents...

*Life with Althaar!*

Episode 1:

Welcome to the Fairgrounds...

*Music ends. Back to Suite C. JOHN is making panicked animal noises.*

**ALTHAAR**

*(shouting from the kitchen)*

Not to worry, Room-mate John! Althaar has anticipated such difficulties and purchased many cleaning supplies! Perhaps John would be more comfortable in his room behind the door shut? It is the first on the left!

*JOHN groans weakly and staggers into his room. Satisfying whoosh as the door closes behind him. He flops onto the bed.*

**ALTHAAR**

*(over an intercom)*

Althaar hopes he has made a home environment of much “coziness” for Room-mate John! Althaar has studied many Earth interior design maga-zeens!

**JOHN**

*(still pretty freaked out)*

Yeah, it’s... it’s actually really nice.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has acquired a welcome video for new arrivals to the Fairgrounds. Perhaps Room-mate John would find it relaxing?

**JOHN**

Anything’s possible.

**CHIPPER ORIENTATION VIDEO VOICE**

*(dopey cheap intro music)* Hello! And welcome to your new home on the Human Exchange Concourse, or the H.E.C. (**JOHN: “The heck--?”**) Colloquially known as “The Fairgrounds.” You most likely know some of the history of your storied new home among the stars, but since you’ll be staying with us a while, we’ll give you a refresher on “How the HEC got here!” When Humanity achieved the first primitive long-range space travel and began to reach beyond the Solar System, the Interstellar Cooperative of Sentient Beings made first contact to inform us we were now qualified for membership! (**JOHN: “Kindergarteners know this...”**) The ICSB gifted us with the marvel of supraluminal long-distance space travel, rendering long-sleep ships obsolete, and allowing us to join them among the stars. Humanity decided to thank them with... a party! *(cheesy happy party music; JOHN: “Whee.”)* Yes, we, as grateful newcomers to this grand new community, built the H.E.C. to host the first Galactic Fair. We wanted to show off the glories and wonders of Human society to the other sentients just getting to know us, through music, food, holovids, dioramas, rides, and of course, the hundreds and hundreds of

HistoriBots made in the images of Humanity's greatest citizens. (**JOHN: "Hundreds?"**) The Fair was originally intended to be an annual event, and the H.E.C. was built to introduce millions of alien visitors to the history and achievements of our species, but it seemed that our new friends from the stars had learned everything they wanted to know about us right away! So, the first Galactic Fair was also the last, becoming itself a famous part of Human history. (**JOHN: "As the biggest flop ever."**) Now that the League of Humans had the SuLu Drive, and embassies throughout the known Universe, we could settle into our new position as suppliers of minerals and other unprocessed materiel to galactic industry! (**JOHN: "Yup, that's what we're good for--helium."**) So, after an extensive renovation in 2489, (**JOHN: "They mothballed it."**) the H.E.C. now continues its mission as a waystation for travellers in and out of Human space, and some of those travellers, like you, have chosen to make it their new home! (**JOHN: "Chosen. Ha."**) Given its history, you may find the Fairgrounds a confusing place at first, but eventually, you'll come to appreciate its charmingly eccentric layout, designed as it was by a massive committee of top designers from every corner of the League of Humans' member planets, working together to show off all the styles of our peoples' many cultures at once. (**JOHN: "Yikes."**) Yes, you've chosen an exciting and unusual place for your new residence, but one that provides many of the comforts of your planet of origin, while at the same time giving you a chance to meet and interact with dozens of ICSB-affiliated races as they stop by on their travels. And you may even find a few of them among your new neighbors! Some call it the Human Exchange Concourse, some the H.E.C., some the "Heck", but everyone knows it as The Fairgrounds, "the most Human place in the Universe!"

**JOHN**

*(simultaneously with last line)*

"The most miserable place in the Universe."

*Music swells to end the introductory portion of the video (no doubt as a shot of the Fairgrounds looking as majestic as it can fill the screen), then changes to something more industrial-orientation-y.*

**CHIPPER ORIENTATION VIDEO VOICE**

Now, for those of you who are used to life planetside, you'll need to learn some new and exciting safety protocols! Of course, the most important of these is--

*There is a bleep from some kind of personal communicator, and JOHN switches off the video and answers it.*

**JOHN**

Hello, John B here.

**H.F.**

*(over comm)*

Yeah, this is H.F. at the WSS office. Are you the guy who was supposed to be here 10 minutes ago?

**JOHN**

Oh, right, sorry. There were some issues with my... housing situation.

**H.F.**

Welcome to the Fairgrounds, kid. Don't worry about it, we don't have any calls in yet today, but get yourself over here on the double before we get a backlog that could choke a vent-biter. We're in Vav 41, Suite G. You got that?

**JOHN**

Got it. I'm on my way.

**H.F.**

All right then.

*(sound over comm of something heavy crashing)*

Goddammi--

*Bleep as the comm cuts out, bloop as JOHN turns the apartment intercom back on.*

**JOHN**

Uh, Althaar?

**ALTHAAR**

*(over the intercom)*

Yes, Room-mate John? What can Althaar do to help with the "settling in?" Althaar has purchased many throw pillows!

**JOHN**

That's ok, thanks. I actually have to go to work right now, so if you could maybe--

**ALTHAAR**

Not to worry! Althaar will go to his room and practice his pillow throwing for John's return!

**JOHN**

That's not how you-- you know what, never mind. ...Althaar? Are you still out there? Ok.

*JOHN takes a deep breath and opens the door. Silence.*

**JOHN**

Right. *(raising his voice)* Althaar? I'm going out now.

**ALTHAAR**

*(from the next room)*

Althaar wishes John a joyous employment cycle!

*Front door whoosh as JOHN leaves. Corridor sounds.*

## **CONSUMER-FRIENDLY VOICE**

*(over P.A.)*

Hey there, Fairgrounds shoppers! For the next three cycles, Vilnaxim's Vape Emporium in Chet 33 will be having a 50%-off sale on all accessories. If you are partly or entirely made of vapor, now is the time to shop for a new container or focusing device. Viva Vilnaxim! *(mile-a-minute legal disclaimer voice)* This has been a paid announcement on behalf of the Kakisto Consumer Services Group. The Human Exchange Concourse assumes no responsibility for false or misleading claims. Caveat emptor, et hoc genus omne.

*Brief musical transition to a hallway near the WSS office. JOHN is walking down the corridor, reading signs.*

## **JOHN**

Vav 41, Suite G. Suite G... Ok, here's Suite B, C, D, L, M... what the hell? Where's the--? Oh, here we go, E, F... X!? Oh, come on! Thanks a lot, "massive committee of Human designers"... Maybe down here? Ah! There's a sign, what does that-- "Caution! De-commissioned area. No atmosphere beyond this point." Wonderful. I could have downloaded the map before I left, but no. "The floors are clearly numbered! How hard could it possibly be to find this office?" Idiot. I'm already so late... Oh! Suite G! Conveniently located between Suite J and Suite O-with-a-line-through-it. Because why not.

*He presses the buzzer.*

## **H.F.**

*(over the intercom)*

Is that B? Where the hell were you?

*The door opens with perhaps a less satisfying whoosh than the others--this office is not in a very well-maintained sector.*

## **JOHN**

Sorry, I got lost.

## **H.F.**

The floors are clearly numbered! Never mind, come in, come in, come in. Have a seat. I'm Hardyfox Fornes, I'll be your supervisor. You can call me H.F.

## **JOHN**

Where should I--

## **H.F.**

Oh, here, just give me those.

*H.F. shoves the stack of paperwork that was on JOHN's chair haphazardly into an old-fashioned file cabinet drawer.*

**H.F.**

So. “Welcome to the Wanting and Sustainment Systems family of entropy reduction professionals, Probationary Mechanic’s Under-Assistant John B.” What’s B short for?

**JOHN**

Nothing, it’s just the letter B.

**H.F.**

What is that, Estonian? Never mind. Moving on... “WSS is contracted to perform beverage systems maintenance, minor wire splicing, and portal preservation and ablation for the Fairgrounds. All other maintenance and repair duties are the responsibility of station staff or members of the Robot Union.” So don’t let anyone try to shemp you into doing anything outside your job description.

**JOHN**

I did all kinds of repairs at the business arcology I worked in back on Earth, I don’t mind helping out with--

**H.F.**

Son, I’m going to stop you right there. It is more than both of our jobs are worth to get the Robot Union on our ass. We handle exactly three things here. If it’s not a drinks machine, a minor wire splice--*minor!* I’m talking below 16 gauge here--or a window, you Don’t. Touch it. Understood?

**JOHN**

Ok. Why just those three things, specifically?

**H.F.**

Well, I wasn’t here when they signed the contract, but you’ll see pretty soon that the way the Fairgrounds infrastructure is set up is... you could say unusual. You *could* say completely ass-backwards. Don’t ask me why, but when they downshifted the place, the beverage systems ended up connected to a lot of stuff you wouldn’t expect. Usually by very small wires. My guess is that no one could agree which department should get stuck with them, which is why they outsourced it.

**JOHN**

And... portal ablation?

**H.F.**

The robots don’t do windows. You EVA-certified?

**JOHN**

Uh, no.

**H.F.**

We’ll have to get you set up with the training program, then. You’ll be docked 100 credits for the Professional Development Fee, but can’t be helped...

*Typing.*

**JOHN**

I'd just as soon let the other employees handle the space-walks for now, if that's ok...

**H.F.**

*(laughs)*

"Other--?" Son, the total staff of the Fairgrounds WSS franchise doubled when you walked in that door. And I can't handle zero-G like I used to--it's hell on my space shingles. EVA training starts tomorrow.

**JOHN**

I guess that's-- Wait, it's just us? Doing maintenance for the entire station?

**H.F.**

Doing drinks machines, *minor* wire splices, and windows for the entire station. And most of the place is mothballed, so it's a pretty easy gig, all things considered. You'll be on call for routine maintenance requests during your shifts--here's your convenient-carry WSS Page-o-matic, by the way, corporate policy is you have to wear that whenever you're on duty--

*Clunk of the unwieldy pager being set down on H.F.'s metal desk. It plays a few tinny notes of the "WSS" jingle.*

**H.F.**

--and WSS does reserve the right to call you in during off-duty hours in case of... let's see... "unforeseen events with potential to cause loss of life, limb, or over 10,000 credits property damage."

**JOHN**

Does that happen a lot with drinks machines or... minor wire splices?

**H.F.**

Heh. Anyway, like I said, I was doing all this by myself while I was waiting for corporate to finally pony up for a new assistant, so you're not going to be too busy.

**JOHN**

That's good, I guess? This isn't really what I expected when I interviewed with WSS back on Earth...

**H.F.**

Yeah, the "strong, steady, holistic, and integrated WSS family" may have 1.9 million members and a 32 billion-credit corporate headquarters, but out here it's just the two of us enjoying the dubious comforts of Vav 41, Suite G. Ok, what else... Ah. "Failure to complete your duties, infringement on functions falling within the purview of the Robot Union, or consumption of intoxicants while on call during your probationary period will result in immediate termination and the revocation of your residence permit." Questions?

**JOHN**

Wait, if I get fired I have to leave the Fairgrounds?

**H.F.**

Most people wouldn't be too sorry about that part of it.

**JOHN**

Haha! Right! Not a problem! There's no reason I couldn't just... go back to Earth, if that happened, heh. Which it won't. Because I'm a dedicated member of the strong, steady, holistic, and integrated WSS family!

**H.F.**

...Right.

**JOHN**

So, what do we--

*H.F.'s pager goes off with the same few notes of the WSS jingle. He answers it.*

**H.F.**

Wanting and Sustainment Systems, how may we reverse entropy in your immediate vicinity?

**AMBER ON THE BRIDGE**

*(with sounds of sparking in the background)*

H.F.? The... thingy?... on the bridge? Is at it again?

**H.F.**

On it.

*H.F. terminates the call with a bloop.*

**H.F.**

Ready for your first work call? On the bridge, too, you're in luck.

**JOHN**

Why's that?

**H.F.**

Outlets are too small down there for the vent-biters to get in. So you know you'll be coming back with both your legs.

**JOHN**

Wait, what?

*Music and sound bed transition to the bridge of the Fairgrounds. FADE IN as CMDR. TORIANNA, a human, is receiving a status report from LT. CMDR. FRALL, a glow cloud. In the background during this, sparks and sounds of computer equipment going haywire and occasionally **singing bridge officers** can be heard.*

**FRALL**

...so Robot Local 187 is finally satisfied with arrangements regarding the upcoming multicultural cyborg mixer. We have agreed to supply all necessary adaptors and power shifters to accommodate all involved parties, and they have agreed to the deposit on the banquet hall and to {hire their own crowd control personnel}.

**COMMANDER**

Great.

**FRALL**

Security reports that they have followed up on that tip from your informant back on Earth, but found no indications of a foreign intelligence agent operating on the Fairgrounds.

**COMMANDER**

I'm not so sure that's good news. Bigelow isn't usually wrong about these things. And those clowns in Security couldn't find their own asses with both hands and a laser compass. *(sigh)* I suppose all we can do is keep an eye out. What else?

**FRALL**

Sanitation reports that vent-biter levels are back down to a quarter of crisis-level conditions for the first time in 5 years, with only 2 fatalities and 8 hospitalizations in the last month.

**COMMANDER**

Those magnificent bastards. Make sure the survivors and the loved ones of the deceased are well taken care of. Organize a memorial, and write me a beautiful speech for it. Moving, impassioned, you know the drill.

Now. The bad news?

**FRALL**

Well, first, there's some problems with the computer system on the bridge...

*Some definite small FOOMs and screams are heard in the background.*

**COMMANDER**

I don't have to see through 27 dimensions to perceive that, Frall.

**FRALL**

Of course. The bridge Robo-Mechanic says it's not--

**ROBOMECHANIC**

*(from a short distance away, overlapping, interrupting)*

Not my department! Call the subcontractors...

**FRALL**

--so I called WSS to handle it. *Again.*

**ROBOMECHANIC**

...not my department...

**FRALL**

The Recreation Director-Bot reports that half of the foosball tables in the staff rec room have been damaged by overzealous non-Humans, and there aren't enough for the upcoming tournament.

**COMMANDER**

Tell him he needs to figure out a workaround. If he has to cut down the size of the tournament, that's what they get for not playing nice. We can't keep ordering more leisure equipment, the shipping fees alone will take out half our Recreation and Morale budget.

**FRALL**

Finally, the smuggler that fled Customs this morning with approximately 68 kilograms of contraband has not yet been caught.

**COMMANDER**

Oh, ye gods. How many Xybidonts are on the station at the moment?

**FRALL**

Well, sir, with the bridge computers currently non-functional--

**COMMANDER**

Frall... I know you don't need a computer for that.

*FRALL, who is a glowing cloud, makes a sound we will come to know well -- sparkly, electric, shimmering, bubbling -- that indicates their ability to see through dimensions.*

**FRALL**

*(fading a bit in from another dimension)*

Only 15, sir. Of those, 5 are currently in the brig and another 3 on supervised house arrest for substance abuse. I have put the remainder under observation until the contraband is secured.

**COMMANDER**

I really hate to think what might happen if even a few of those poor bastards get their hands on that much of the stuff at once.

**FRALL**

*(precognitive bubbling sound)*

The smuggler will be apprehended in 41 minutes and 12 seconds, sir, with the contraband intact.

**COMMANDER**

*(no matter how often she hears it, still a little freaked by FRALL's near-or-actual-omniscience)*

O-kay, thank you, Lieutenant. That's a relief. Though I still don't understand why you can't just tell us where they are right now. No, please don't explain it to me again, it's been a long cycle, I don't think I could take it.

*Whoosh of a very well-maintained bridge door opening.*

**JOHN**

Hello..? WSS Probationary Under-mechanic reporting in? About a... thingy repair? (*another minor explosion*) Whoa.

**COMMANDER**

Where's H.F.?

**JOHN**

He sent me, I'm the new assistant.

**COMMANDER**

Welcome aboard. I'm Commander Torianna, I run this place, for better or worse.

*FRALL makes their equivalent of throat-clearing.*

**JOHN**

Holy hell, is *this* the problem?

**COMMANDER**

No. *This* is my second-in-command, Lieutenant-Commander Frallen-Br'ar.

**FRALL**

I apologize if you find my lack of a physical form startling, John B.

**JOHN**

It's alright, I've just never met an energy cloud before. Wait, how do you know my name?

**FRALL**

I could give you an answer to that, but I can guarantee you won't like it.

**COMMANDER**

Best not to ask that kind of question with Frall, Mr. B. At a certain point it might as well just be magic. Speaking of. Would you work some magic on that faulty wire over there before we run through the station's entire stock of burn kits?

**FRALL**

Right this way, John.

*They move through the chaos on the bridge.*

**JOHN**

So you know what the problem is?

**FRALL**

Yes, this happens about every three weeks. Not regularly enough for Humans to schedule by it, but enough that it's never really a surprise. *I* always know when it's going to happen, of course.

**JOHN**

And you can't tell anyone in advance?

**FRALL**

I don't like messing around with causality--it gives me what you might imagine as the equivalent of 10,000 simultaneous migraines. Here you are, down through that open panel...

**JOHN**

*(audibly crouching, with apprehension)*

Uh, there aren't any of those... whaddy-a-call-em?

**FRALL**

Vent-biters? Oh no, they keep to the ventilation system. Never the electrical. So you see the problem?

**JOHN**

Well, I can see a-- you mean just this wire here? This one little frayed wire? *That's* causing all this?

**FRALL**

I'm afraid so.

**JOHN**

And that robot mechanic couldn't handle it?

**FRALL**

I'm afraid not.

**JOHN**

The one that's putting out fires, replacing viewscreens, sealing bulkheads, and applying burn creams all at the same time?

**ROBOMECHANIC**

*(in the near distance, busy with all these things)*

It's *clearly* outside my job description! Do I need to call in my shop steward!?

**JOHN**

Okay then... I just have to do a little hot splice here...

*Sound of clipping, winding, and sealing, and with a great shift, all the bridge chaos sound is replaced by your standard, well-running space station bridge sound bed. **There are sighs, some tired but sincere cheers, and clapping from the bridge staff as they go back to work.***

**JOHN**

So. There you go, I guess. Can't believe this one little frayed wire was doing all that.

**ROBOMECHANIC**

*(coming over)*

It's how the place was made. Whole thing jury-rigged to just get working as fast as possible. And nothing's changed since then.

**JOHN**

Speaking of changing... just looking at this... you know, if you took this wire here--

**ROBOMECHANIC**

Don't you dare touch that! That's 8 gauge! That's robot territory!

**JOHN**

No, no, I won't touch it. I'm just saying, you could bypass my wire completely, and do a patch from this green wire to that white one there. You could prevent the problem ever happening again without affecting anything else in the system.

**ROBOMECHANIC**

I'm not doing that.

**JOHN**

Why not?

**ROBOMECHANIC**

Look buddy, is there a problem?

**JOHN**

I'm not trying to start a fight!

**ROBOMECHANIC**

No, I mean, are there any problems in the system *right now*? Do you hear any sirens going off? Klaxxons?

**JOHN**

Well, no... but I was told there will be again in about three weeks.

**FRALL**

*(quietly)*

19 days.

**JOHN**

What?

**FRALL**

Nothing, please proceed.

**JOHN**

So doesn't it make more sense for you to just fix it *now*, permanently, so it doesn't happen again?

**ROBOMECHANIC**

But there's nothing malfunctioning right now. Except that I have to replace half the circuit boards in here like I do every three weeks, so if you'll excuse me...

**JOHN**

But you wouldn't have to do that all the time if you just made this simple jump!

**ROBOMECHANIC**

Listen... maybe you mean well, but first: a contract is a contract. You've got your territory, I got mine. Don't touch my wires, I won't touch yours.

**JOHN**

But--

**ROBOMECHANIC**

SECOND... even if I were willing to go outside my job description, the station rules are that all, I said *all*, wiring, plumbing, construction, or other permanent installations must adhere *exactly* to the specs in the 2490 stylebook from when the Fairgrounds was downshifted to its present form, unless changes have been approved by the H.E.C. Infrastructure Committee. Which meets on Earth. Every three years. Usually by proxy. Now, if you'll excuse me...

*As he moves away, banging on things to fix them or get them out of the way of their expensive replacements, the COMMANDER approaches.*

**COMMANDER**

Nice job, Mr. B. B--what is that, Uzbek? Never mind. Good work.

**JOHN**

Thanks. But that was so easy. So small. And so unnecessary.

**COMMANDER**

And yet so crucial. Welcome to the Fairgrounds, B. You'll get used to it.

**JOHN**

And maybe even learn to love it?

**COMMANDER**

....I... wouldn't go *that* far.

**JOHN**

Why did you come here, then?

**COMMANDER**

*(cagey)*

Oh. I had my reasons. No one ever really *comes* to the Fairgrounds, anyway, so much as they *end up* here.

**JOHN**

*(depressed)*

I'm starting to get that.

**COMMANDER**

Look, take a tip from me. If this place starts to bring you down, find one of the hydroponics parks and just sit a while. They're about the only relaxing places on this whole *mischuggeneh rustbucket*. H.F. can page you if he needs you.

*Brief music{??} and sound transition from the bridge to the hydroponics park. From a P.A. speaker, a general announcement:*

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Attention all Fairgrounds staff. This is the Recreation Director-bot. If you still wish to participate in the foosball tournament in the staff rec room, you will now need to sign up for a slot on a first come, first served basis. As always, participation is limited to sapients with two arms or fewer. Space and tables are limited. Those who are tardy or continue to mistreat the tables will be banned from leisure activities indefinitely. That is all.

*The park actually does sound very relaxing. JOHN is muttering to himself as he sits on a bench.*

**JOHN**

Well, I may not be able to go back to Earth, but I have a job and a home, which is more than I had a few days ago. And the job is easy, but frustrating, and the home is comfortable, but repulsive. Pretty typical for my luck. The light at the end of the tunnel usually turns out to be an oncoming transport. The Commander was right about the park, though. I mean, it's not Earth but... Kinda looks like it. If you ignore the grow-lights. At least there's somewhere in this place that isn't covered in scratched plasteel and busted sero-tiles.

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Additional update from Your Recreation Director. Sign-ups for the foosball tournament must be done in pen or pencil only. Pheromone stamps and other forms of odor signature will not be recognized. That is all.

**JOHN**

*(sighs, plays with the branches of a plant)*

This looks just like that plant grandma used to have in her living room--they've sure got a lot of them around the station for some reason...

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

*(the plant; her voice sounding though moving branches)*

That would have been a *Chamaedorea elegans* on Earth, young man, though your nana probably called it a Parlor Palm.

*JOHN yelps and moves away.*

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

But I'm no Earth plant! I'm a Fugulnari, and you can call me Mrs. Frondrinax.

**JOHN**

*(unsteady)*

Mrs. Frondrinax? Pleased to meet you. I'm John B.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Go ahead and shake a branch, Johnny, you already got a little fresh with me there, no reason to be shy now.

*They shake, hand and leafy branch.*

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

And I know who you are, sonny, I've been watching you since you got to Althaar's. I'm your neighbor up in Alef 1! I've been waiting to introduce myself, you seemed a little bit busy.

**JOHN**

So *you* were all the plants I kept seeing around the station?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Heavens, no, not *all* of them. Just a couple. Most of them were actual Earth plants. Boring fellows, if you don't mind my saying so. Never have time for a chat! No, I'm the only Fugulnari in this entire station. But I *do* get around the place pretty well.

**JOHN**

Oh, are there wheels on your... pot there?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

No.

**JOHN**

...So, how did you wind up on the Fairgrounds?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Oh, my stars, I've wanted to see this place for the longest time. This is prime real estate for some of us, dearie, believe it or not! Me, Althaar, a few of us actually *like* the Fairgrounds.

**JOHN**

Sorry, but... why?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Well, for practical reasons first. The League of Humans has a whole financial incentive program for us carbon dioxide-breathers, you know, to help with the oxygen processing, though we Fugalnari don't usually take advantage--we're not much for uprooting ourselves and gallivanting all over the place. But that's how I can afford to be your neighbor on the diplomatic levels. Oh, they can make artificial air filters, but nothing does the job like a plant! Of course, I could do that on any Human station. I wanted to retire to the Fairgrounds because you get all *kinds* of sapients here. Mostly Human, but other folks from all over the galaxy that I can chat with, and maybe even give them a little advice. We like to help people, us Fugalnari. So here I am!

**JOHN**

So you left your home planet behind just to help people? Wow. Good for you. I, uh, I didn't really come here on purpose. I guess I haven't really done much of anything on purpose. There probably wasn't any chance I wouldn't end up exactly where and what I am.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Oh, dearie, that makes you *lucky*! You Humans make everything so complicated! I do hope you can learn better someday. All these sapients in the galaxy that have to make things so *confusing*. You all just need a little help from some folks that don't get things so mixed up. We plants keep it simple, you know. What goes in, what goes out. Efficient! That's why I came here. I'd like to show everyone how we do things on Fugulnar!

**JOHN**

Is that what Althaar's trying to do?

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Oh, *Althaar*! He's a very special creature. Everyone here loves that sweet little Iltorian so much! Except you Humans, of course. Such a shame. No, I'm more... like a missionary, I guess. Althaar, well, he comes from a species of diplomats, but he's more than that. More like a sociologist. Most Iltorians, they like to be good hosts, you know--they learn everybody's customs and rituals and taboos, so they can have good manners. And good manners are important, you won't hear me saying otherwise! But Althaar wants to understand the *reasons* behind them, especially for Humans. Can't hardly stop him talking about it once he gets started! Course, none of you Humans will stick around to listen. He just wants so *badly* to figure out a way to stop you folks from spilling fertilizer every time you get a look at him! Maybe he'll figure it out, I don't know. He certainly tries!

**JOHN**

Great. And I'm the one who's going to be the test subject for this experiment of his.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

Well I hope you'll at least do your best. I'll never understand how you folks could have a problem with such a darling, handsome boy, but if you can help him get to the bottom of it, that might be one of the most important things any Human has ever done.

**JOHN**

Important? That's... that's more than I've ever hoped for. I usually just try to stay out of everybody's way, pretty much. Maybe it would be nice to actually feel important for once.

**MRS. FRONDRINAX**

That's it, Johnny! Go on! I *know* you can do it. Go on home now, and have a sit-down and a nice cup of glycosides with your new roomie!

*Transition to the corridor outside the apartment. Whoosh of apartment door opening.*

**JOHN**

Uh, Althaar? Are you--

*The thump of JOHN being hit in the face by a thrown pillow.*

**ALTHAAR**

WELCOMING HOME FROM ALTHAAR!

**JOHN**

*(holding the pillow in front of his face, muffled)*

Hi, Althaar! It's... good to be home, thanks.

**ALTHAAR**

Room-mate John does not want to throw the pillow back?

**JOHN**

No actually, I think I'm just going to keep it over my eyes for now, just-- you stay over in the corner, and I'll just hold the pillow here so that I won't--

*JOHN screams as he accidentally catches sight of ALTHAAR while removing the pillow from his face.*

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has not performed the throwing of pillows correctly? Althaar will try again! Constructive criticism is welcome, Room-mate John!

**JOHN**

*(not vomiting, with great effort)*

No! No! I just saw a little bit more of you than I meant to! The pillows aren't actually for throwing! Just put it down! Please!

**ALTHAAR**

Not for throwing? ALTHAAR IS LEARNING!

*PDA bleeps as ALTHAAR enters this into his Human culture database.*

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar apologizes for the many gaps in Althaar's knowledge, Room-mate John! There has been so little cultural exchange between our peoples! Because of the...

**JOHN**

...the monkey freak-outs, yeah.

**ALTHAAR**

Indeed! So Althaar is learning many many things about Human culture! And is writing them down for others! "...not for throwing..." Progress! What are the "throw pillows" for, please, Room-mate John?

**JOHN**

*(still uncomfortable, but recovering a bit)*

Well, you, uh, you throw them onto a bed, I guess, or a couch. And then they just... stay there. Until you want to use the bed or the couch. And then you, uh, you move them somewhere else.

**ALTHAAR**

And what is the significance of this?

**JOHN**

...I don't think anyone knows, really.

**ALTHAAR**

FASCINATING! So many Human mysteries to be solved by Althaar!

*Bleeps of furious many-appendaged typing as Althaar enters this information.*

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar's Human culture data-base grows by leaps and jumps already! And it is thanks to Room-mate John! Surely the name of John will be a famous one in the history of Human-Iltorian relations! Does John have a second-name yet?

**JOHN**

Not anymore.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is still on his first-name also! So much Althaar and John have in common! Compatibility will be very great between Althaar and Room-mate John!

**JOHN**

I wish that was true, Althaar, but I think you might be overestimating me here. I'm going to try, but... I'm just an ordinary Human, and it's... really hard to be around you.

**ALTHAAR**

You are ordinary, Room-mate John?

**JOHN**

I am incredibly ordinary, Althaar. Just a boring... standard-model Human. Really. I don't think I'm the kind of person you're looking for.

**ALTHAAR**

But that is wonderful, John! Althaar can learn most from the most typical of Humans! And already Room-mate John has lasted 3 times longer in the presence of Althaar than any Human before ever has!

**JOHN**

It's not that easy, Althaar, even when I'm keeping my eyes on the floor!

**ALTHAAR**

But John is in the room of living with Athaar, and we are talking as room-mates, and John is not screaming, or running, or even twitching very much! Althaar is filled with great happiness!

*ALTHAAR begins making more unpleasant noises than usual in his joy.*

**JOHN**

Oh god, what's that sound?!

**ALTHAAR**

Room-mate John, when an Iltorian experiences deep joy, our pedipalps cannot help but express it! They vibrate with the frequencies of Iltorian bliss!

*JOHN begins gagging at the noise.*

**ALTHAAR**

Oh no! Althaar's frillations cause the discomfort? Althaar will cease! Does Room-mate John need to expel nutritional fluids again? Althaar fetches the products for cleaning!

**JOHN**

No! Everything's fine! I just... I just need to... I just remembered I have someplace else to be right now-

-

*JOHN runs from the room, barely holding back his vomit, the door opening and closing automatically as he goes into the corridor.*

**JOHN**

*(hyperventilating a bit)*

Can't do it! I can't do it! He's... he's... he's so... NICE! He's SO DAMN NICE! But I can't live like this!

*As JOHN pulls himself together, the SMUGGLER runs down the hallway, followed shortly by two SECURITY OFFICERS.*

**SECURITY 1**

There he is!

**SECURITY 2**

*(somewhat out of breath)*

Flux Abondante! You are in violation of the League of Humans Anti-Contraband Act of 2483! Surrender and be searched!

**SMUGGLER**

*(fading into the distance)*

It's for personal uuuuuuuuuuuuse!

*JOHN's pager plays the WSS jingle. It bleeps as he answers it.*

**H.F.**

*(over paging unit speaker)*

Time for your second job, kid. I got a call from the Electric Egg, their seltzer compressor's on the fritz, and that's not good. I just coated myself in Vicks tritonium grease, and it'll take about 8 hours to soak in, so this one's on you.

**JOHN**

The Electric Egg?

**H.F.**

Bar up on Lamed 3. Decent place--big alien tourist crowd, but they got a Human singer in there most nights. Anyway, get over there and take care of it. And remember what I told you--check all the system connections before you get to work, make sure you know what you're dealing with before you start unplugging things. You don't want to end up like Under-Assistant Derbolt.

**JOHN**

What happen-- you know what, never mind. I'm on it. Um, by the way, I was just wondering, WSS doesn't offer any kind of... housing stipend for new hires, or anything like that, do they?

**H.F.**

Hah! You'll go far kid, you need a good sense of humor in this business.

**JOHN**

Right.

*As he heads off down the hallway, an announcement on the station P.A. system:*

**WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT**

Attention all Fairgrounds staff. This is the Recreation Director-bot. After the behavior this afternoon at the attempted signup, the foosball tournament is indefinitely suspended and all foosball privileges are revoked. In future, any non-approved sapients attempting to use recreation equipment will be subject to a 10-cycle proportional wage garnishment. That is all.

*Sound bed change: JOHN arrives at the Electric Egg. DEE and her band are just finishing a number. Applause and noises of approval, human and alien.*

**CHIP**

*(taking the mic)*

Wasn't that great, folks? Delilah Mallory and the 7-System Swingers, let's give them all a big hand. Or twelve hands, if there are any Xybidonts in the crowd tonight! *(forced laugh)* Wonderful, wonderful.

**ALIEN AUDIENCE MEMBER**

I wanna hear 'Beyond Uranus' with a fleezborp sola!

*DEE and the band groan. Drunk aliens laugh.*

**CHIP**

No, no, they'll be back after a short break, so stick around, have a few drinks, try the Ganymede wings, or, the Chalcogen Salad is our special tonight, so if your species can metabolize Ruthenium, you can check that on out. Highly recommended, highly recommended, although I can't say I've tried it myself, ha ha! So stick around, enjoy the most delicious refreshments from over two dozen worlds, and remember, later on we'll be having our Tuesday night jitterbug contest, so warm up those legs and other dancing appendages! Back soon!

*More applause. Music on the house system. Alien and human conversation in the background.*

**SOPON**

Haven't seen you around here before. Welcome to the Electric Egg, what can I get you?

**JOHN**

Oh, nothing, thanks. I'm actually here to fix the seltzer machine?

**SOPON**

*(calling across the bar)*

Chip! Guy's here about the seltzer!

**CHIP**

Oh, hey! Where's H.F.?

**JOHN**

He was... busy. I'm his new assistant. John B.

**CHIP**

Chip Frinkel! Owner and proprietor of the Electric Egg, finest watering hole on the Fairgrounds! So, he finally got a replacement for Derbolt, huh? Whoo, that was a hell of a thing. John Bee, huh? What is that, Venusian?

**JOHN**

No, it's... just the letter B.

**CHIP**

Oh-kay! So, I guess I better let you get to that seltzer machine before the place explodes, huh? It's right back here, excuse me Sopon, we'll just scoot through here... annnd here it is. It was making funny noises last week, and this, uh, "Check Induction Stabilizer" light here came on, but then when we came in today it seemed fine. Then about half an hour ago it made this kind of "whoooooooooooo-gagungkaklunk!" and quit.

**JOHN**

Induction Stabilizer?

**CHIP**

Don't ask me, you're the professional. Ok, gotta go, duty calls! Just give a shout if you need anything. *(heading back out from behind the bar)* Cleavanard! Buddy! Good to see you! How's the night life on Procyon these days, you old spacedog?

**JOHN**

*(muttering to himself)*

Okay. Seltzer machine, induction stabilizer. Never done this before, but hey, I just fixed the whole bridge by splicing a wire so... shouldn't be that hard.

*JOHN pops open the front of the seltzer machine, the door clanging to the floor. A horribly ominous collection of sounds comes from within.*

**JOHN**

Oh. Oh. OH!

Um... I'm... I think this may not be a great idea.

*(calling from behind the bar)*

Hello? Hello?

**DEE**

Hey back there, what's up?

**JOHN**

Do you work here?

**DEE**

I'm Delilah, the singer, but I'm on break now. Do you see any beer nuts back there?

**JOHN**

Uh, yeah, but Delilah--

**DEE**

Call me Dee. Toss me up a bag, would'ya? And you are?

*JOHN rummages, grabs a bag, and tosses it as he speaks.*

**JOHN**

John. John B. Uh, Dee? I'm supposed to fix this thing, and I have the feeling I'm in a little bit over my head right now.

**DEE**

Welcome to the Fairgrounds. What else is new, right? You're the repairman, they wouldn't give you the job if you weren't qualified, right?

**JOHN**

...right..?

**DEE**

So, there you go. Just get the seltzer flowing. It's just about the time of night a bunch of Sistaldians usually come in, and if they can't get their selenol and sodas before the dance contest, they're gonna get real ugly.

**JOHN**

*(to himself)*

Okay, John. You know what you're doing. Well, okay. That little tube over there looks like it's not quite in the right place. What if I put it back into... *here*.

*The tube clicks into place and immediately the sounds get louder and more ominous from the machine, and something like an alarm horn also now comes from it.*

**DEE**

Hey? Is that a good sound?

**JOHN**

Uh, maybe?

*The sound of FRALL suddenly appears as if coming through a wall (which they are).*

**FRALL**

Hey, John B.

**JOHN**

Lieutenant, hi!

**FRALL**

I just came by to make sure you knew that that is *not* a good sound.

**JOHN**

Oh. Shit. Did I break it?

**FRALL**

I'm afraid your situation is a bit worse than that. Oh, hello, Dee.

**DEE**

Hey, Frall.

**JOHN**

Worse than that?

**FRALL**

Haven't been able to hear you sing recently, Dee, I'm sorry. I'll have to make it back in sometime.

**JOHN**

*Worse than that?*

**DEE**

You better, Frall. My contract's up in a couple of weeks and I am *outta here* on the first transport the moment it is.

**FRALL**

*(small chuckle)*

Oh no, I certainly wouldn't expect you to stay here longer than your contract requires...

**JOHN**

WORSE THAN THAT? What's worse than what?!

**FRALL**

Well, John B, the way things are rigged here is a bit unconventional, as you may have noticed.

**JOHN**

YES. And?

**FRALL**

And so the coolant for the restaurant drinks machines is linked inseparably to the coolant for the station's life support systems.

**JOHN**

Oh, c'mon!

**FRALL**

And if you are unable to make a somewhat expeditious repair to that seltzer machine, then in about four or five minutes the coolant regulators will implode, life support will shut down, and in less than half an hour, any biological life on the station will cease to exist. In its current form.

**JOHN**

About four or five minutes?

**FRALL**

Oh, I could be more exact. I could even tell you how to accomplish the needed repairs. But you know, 10,000 migraines. Anyway, there's someplace more important I have to be right now. See you later, Dee.

**DEE**

Uh, yeah, later Frall...

*FRALL leaves through the wall.*

**JOHN**

More important?!

**DEE**

You *do* know what you're doing, right? You were trained in this, yes?

**JOHN**

Dee, maybe now's not the best time to admit this, but I've never had a day's training in my life. I've just always understood how to fix things, like by instinct. I look at them and put my hands in and it all makes sense somehow. I'm right most of the time.

**DEE**

Most of the time? Most of the time. Ok, so hurry up and "most of the time" this thing back into shape before we're all taking the big vacuum nap! I don't deserve this, my contract is almost up!

**JOHN**

*(exhaling, relaxing)*

Okay. Right. If I just... put my hands... here.

And... it feels right if this thing goes...

*(sounds of movement in the machine)*

Now... I just reconnect this hose over... and....

*There is a satisfying sound of a hose being sucked into place, a beat, and all the ominous sounds stop and the seltzer machine starts making a comfortable, happy hum.*

**DEE**

So, it's fixed..?

**JOHN**

I think so. Uh, you might want to stand back while I test it...

*Beep as he presses the dispenser button. Brief nervous pause, then the seltzer flows. The bartender, hearing it, comes back over.*

**SOPON**

Hey, it's fixed! That was fast!

**JOHN**

*(pleased with himself)*

Shouldn't give you any more problems, but if it does, just give us a shout at WSS. We're on call 24 hours a day!

**DEE**

What about the other four?

**JOHN**

What?

**CHIP**

It's fixed? Good to hear! Sopon, Table 5 wanted a lanthanide egg cream.

**SOPON**

Coming right up!

**CHIP**

Anything for you, buddy? On the house!

*In the background, there is the sound of the **SECURITY OFFICERS** questioning patrons as they move through the club.*

**JOHN**

Thanks, but I can't drink while I'm on call or I'll get kicked off the station, so--

**CHIP**

Soft drink, then! Sopon! Get this guy a Moxie!

*(moving away)*

The hell--? What's security doing in here..?

**JOHN**

...Thanks.

**DEE**

So, first day on the job?

**JOHN**

First day on the station. I just got in from Earth this morning. Is it always like this?

**DEE**

No, sometimes it gets crazy. Wait'll one of the big alien mating cruise ships comes in, then you'll really see something.

**JOHN**

Seriously? What kind of aliens think the Fairgrounds is a romantic getaway?

**SOPON**

One Moxie for the sapient of the hour!

**JOHN**

Thanks. *(He takes a sip. It tastes like Moxie, and he reacts accordingly.)*

**DEE**

Well, most species aren't that big on "romance", not like Humans, they just want to lay their eggs or whatever and then get hammered. And a lot of them think the Fairgrounds is kind of kitschy fun, you know. Chip really plays it up around here, "brood season specials", the whole nine yards. I've only been here a couple of months, but I've probably learned more about alien mating customs from this than a four-year xenobiology degree from Tharsis U.

**JOHN**

Wow.

**DEE**

Speaking of aliens, rumor has it Althaar finally found himself a roommate!

**JOHN**

I just moved in this morning. How did you--

**DEE**

He posted an announcement on HECNET. Seems like you two are getting along ok.

**JOHN**

*(reading)*

"Welcoming to 'Room-mate' John B from Althaar and all members of the Iltorian Commonality! A new age of understanding between Humans and Iltorians is at the hand!" Dammit.

**DEE**

You're not his roommate?

**JOHN**

I answered the ad, but... I can't do it. I can't stay there. Every time I see him, even out of the corner of my eye, I just... I already threw up twice today.

**DEE**

I know what you mean. I caught a glimpse of him a couple times in the hallway, and I still have nightmares. If you haven't pissed yourself yet, you're doing better than average.

**JOHN**

I have to find somewhere else. I don't know how I'm going to do it, he's charging me practically nothing and I can just barely afford that, but I can't stay.

**DEE**

That's rough.

**JOHN**

And then I have to tell him I'm not staying, which is-- he's going to be crushed. And he's really nice.

**DEE**

SO nice.

**JOHN**

So, so nice.

*The SECURITY MEN have found the SMUGGLER in the club and have him/her cornered, drawing their weapons.*

**SECURITY 1**

Flux Abondante! We see you and have you surrounded. Put down the contraband and raise your hands, and we won't have to use our neuro-dampers.

**SMUGGLER**

I don't know what you're talking about!

**SECURITY 2**

We have reason to believe you are currently in possession of 150 pounds of peanut butter!

*An audible gasp from the patrons.*

**SECURITY 2**

Gently push the hoverbags over to my partner and proceed with us out into the corridor, or we will be forced to render you compliant, in full accordance with section 27 of the Inter-Species Controlled Substances Act.

**SMUGGLER**

I'm doing it, I'm doing it, you got me...

## **SECURITY 1**

Everyone else, please go back to your regular evening entertainment cycle! We now have this incident completely under control. Thank you for your indifference.

*They move away to the door with their prisoner as **the crowd tries to settle back in to their entertainment**. CHIP follows SECURITY out, more than a little upset.*

## **CHIP**

Hey, *thanks a lot*, guys! You know, that sonovabitch has been in here for *hours*! I run a clean joint! You've just been letting him run around with that stuff? We get a ton of Xybidonts in here, you know what could have happened--?

*The club fades away as we transition (w/ music?) to the hallway outside Suite C. JOHN is preparing himself.*

## **JOHN**

Just keep it simple. "Althaar, I'm sorry, but it's not going to work out." That's all you need to say, just grab your bag, say it, and get out. Eyes on the floor, keep it together. Ok.

*Door whooshes open, then closed.*

## **JOHN**

...Hello?

## **ALTHAAR**

*(trying to use his 'inside voice')*

Welcoming home to Room-mate John! Althaar is not throwing things without permission! And Althaar will keep still his pedipalps, no matter how great Althaar's joy!

## **JOHN**

That's great, Althaar. Are you-- what's this?

## **ALTHAAR**

Althaar has installed a "privacy curtain" across the room of living! Althaar will warn Room-mate John before emerging! It is better? No more unexpected liquids from seeing Althaar, yes?

## **JOHN**

Yes, that's... that is better, but I actually have something I have to tell you--

## **ALTHAAR**

And Althaar has obtained a "white noise machine," which Althaar has read will help the relaxation of Room-mate John!

*Deafening blast of white noise as Althaar turns it on.*

**JOHN**

AAGH! TOO LOUD! TOO LOUD!

*White noise cuts off.*

**ALTHAAR**

ALTHAAR IS SORRY! (*inside voice*) Althaar is sorry! Althaar is learning! Please adjust sound levels for Human comfort, Room-mate John! The sound machine has many many settings for relaxing! “Amazon Rainforest”, “Bermuda Beach”, “Callistonian Salt Meadow”...

**JOHN**

That’s great, Althaar, but I--

**ALTHAAR**

And Althaar has cooked the chocolate chip cookies!

**JOHN**

...Is that what that smell is?

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar spent many hours assembling the necessary protective gear to handle Human choc-o-late in safety!

**JOHN**

Protective gear?

**ALTHAAR**

Your Earth choc-o-late is a thing of great danger to Iltorians, like sulfuric acid to your fragile Human skin! Very cumbersome and discomfoting garments are needed for Althaar’s safety! But Althaar has read much of the tastiness of the choc-o-late chip cookie!

**JOHN**

(*really guilty*)

Ok, but I--

**ALTHAAR**

Please taste them, please? Room-mate John? Althaar has been very very careful to follow exactly the recipe!

**JOHN**

I don’t know if that’s... Oh wow, they’re still warm.

*JOHN takes a trepidatious bite. Then several more.*

**JOHN**

*(muffled by a mouthful of cookie; they are THE BEST EVER)*

These are... really good, Althaar.

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar is very pleased! But Althaar is stilling the pedipalps!

*JOHN keeps scarfing down cookies as ALTHAAR continues.*

**ALTHAAR**

Althaar has been hoping to find a Human room-mate for so long! Althaar has read everything he can about Humans, and your history, and your customs, but Althaar still has so very much to learn! And Althaar has been trying and trying, and asking so very many Humans to help Althaar with understanding, but no Human has had the patience to talk with Althaar as long as Room-mate John! It is the truth that even Althaar was beginning to despair. Althaar was warned that our peoples can never live in contentment together. But now Althaar has many many hopes! And it is all thanks to the great kindness of Room-mate John!

But Althaar is committing a rudeness! What did John want to tell Althaar?

**JOHN**

Oh. I was going to say...

*(gulp)*

I was going to say thanks for letting me stay here, Althaar.

**ALTHAAR**

ALTHAAR IS SO HAPPY!

*Hideous noises as ALTHAAR flails about with joy.*

**JOHN**

*(literally almost about to toss his cookies, yet cheerfully resigned, to himself)*

Welcome to the Fairgrounds.

*Theme music up and leading into credits.*

**ANNOUNCER**

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

This episode was written by Berit Johnson and Ian W. Hill

featuring

John Amir as John B

Berit Johnson as Althaar

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Eli Gantias as Hardyfox Fornes

Christopher Lee as Chip Frinkel

Zuri Washington as Dee

{etc. with other parts}

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

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

Berit is the supervising producer, showrunner, and script supervisor.

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

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

This has been an audio production from Gemini CollisionWorks.

Tune in again in two weeks for our next episode, but until then, let's listen in as Althaar updates his journal...

*Switch from end music to sound bed of Althaar's room. He is recording a report.*

### **ALTHAAR**

Day one of Human Outreach Experiment, Phase Three!

Althaar has finally found... a room-mate! A *Human* room-mate!

His name is John B, and Althaar thinks he is perfect! He is *ordinary*!

Today Althaar learned about: the correct use of throw pillows, how to make choc-o-late chip cookies, how much it stings when choc-o-late dust accidentally gets on Althaar's flixators, and...

And how to keep a Human room-mate for more than 12 minutes.

Althaar thinks that this time... this time will be *important*!

*Music sting and out.*