

Life with Althaar

Episode 15: A Simple Game of SuperNova

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

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

FRANK STUART

(getting SOPON's attention)

Hey, buddy! Got a minute?

SOPON

(affected accent)

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

SOPON

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

FRANK STUART

Oh, ok.

STUART

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

FRANK

Easy on the Midori.

STUART

Hold the cherry.

SOPON

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

Drink being made: pouring, shaking, pouring.

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

We'll definitely need to introduce ourselves.

SOPON

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

STUART

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

FRANK STUART

Keep the change.

SOPON

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

STUART

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

SOPON

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

FRANK

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

STUART

...he can't refuse.

SOPON

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

FRANK

You do that.

STUART

Just remember:

FRANK STUART

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

SOPON

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

BUBBLES

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

SOPON

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

BUBBLES

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

SOPON

Yeah? Are they packing?

BUBBLES

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

SOPON

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

BUBBLES

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

SOPON

Twice!

BUBBLES

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

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

DEE

(on mic)

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

FRANK

(in the distance)

Wonderful!

STUART

(also in the distance, obviously)

Terrific!

FRANK STUART

Bravo!

XTOPPS

Ohhhh mang...

DEE

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

XTOPPS

Hey, Dee? I gotta vague.

DEE

All right, see you in 20.

XTOPPS

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

DEE

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

XTOPPS

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

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

DEE

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

XTOPPS

Time to make some devious sausage!

DEE

Oh, frill me.

XTOPPS

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

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

XTOPPS

Chorp!

CHIP

(through the door) Just a—

Office door opens.

CHIP

—minute... Yeah, Xtopps, what's up?

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

What? Oh, for— Get in here.

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

SOPON

Sounds like your problems are actually his problems, boss.

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS groans.

SOPON

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

CHIP

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

SOPON

Sure, but—

CHIP

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

SOPON

Yeah, but—

CHIP

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

SOPON

Ok, but—

CHIP

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

SOPON

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

XTOPPS and CHIP

(gasp)

CHIP

They said that?

SOPON

Twice!

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

SOPON

Definitely.

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

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

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

CHIP

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

SOPON

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

CHIP

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

SOPON

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

CHIP

I want him for backup.

SOPON

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

CHIP

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

NERCA

Initiating lockdown sequence. 20 seconds.

CHIP

All right, Sopon, let's go.

SOPON

Uh, boss? What exactly is happening?

CHIP

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

NERCA

15 seconds.

SOPON

We're out of limes?

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

CHIP

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

Theme Music!

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents...

Life With Althaar!

Episode 15:

A Simple Game of SuperNova

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

I’m glad you’re enjoying it.

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

Sure, let me just—

JOHN’s phone rings.

JOHN

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

SOPON

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

JOHN

What, the CO₂ again? You need to call W.— you need to call the office, H.F.'s on duty right now.

SOPON

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

JOHN

More lethal than the seltzer machine?

SOPON

Afraid so.

JOHN

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

SOPON

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

JOHN

The situation. Which is...?

SOPON

Serious!

JOHN

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

SOPON

Nope.

JOHN

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

SOPON

You're a lifesaver, B!

JOHN hangs up.

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

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

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

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

Transition to the bar area at the Egg.

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

All I did was introduce myself.

CHIP

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

FRANK

Calm down, pal.

STUART

You got nothing to worry about.

CHIP

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

SOPON

(this is not a thing)

...Right, boss.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

(a bit choked)

—an offer?

STUART

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

CHIP gasps.

FRANK STUART

If you know what's good for you.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

CHIP

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

BUBBLES

One "Napalm Nebula" coming up.

SOPON

(sotto voce)

You sure about this, boss?

CHIP

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

SOPON

We send him over to your table?

CHIP

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

BUBBLES

Under the ice well!

CHIP

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

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

It's going to be an offer...

CHIP

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

STUART

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

CHIP

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

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

Sound of flames igniting on the glass.

STUART

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

CHIP

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

Shake shake shake.

JOHN

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

CHIP

John B!

FRANK STUART

John B?

CHIP

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

FRANK

We don't.

STUART

At all.

CHIP

Oh.

Beat. Shake shake shake.

JOHN

Chip, what's going on?

CHIP

Shh!

FRANK

What does he do?

STUART

Is he gonna try and toss us outta here?

FRANK

With those tiny little noodle arms?

STUART

Because I could use a laugh.

CHIP

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

JOHN

What?

FRANK STUART laughs uproariously.

FRANK

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

STUART

We want to run a legitimate business proposition by you!

FRANK

(laughing, can barely get it out)

What'd you think we were here for?

STUART

You think we're here to break some legs?

FRANK

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

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

STUART

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

CHIP

(starting to chuckle a little)

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

Peals of laughter.

FRANK STUART

Shake him down!

FRANK

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

CHIP is tentatively laughing with them too.

FRANK

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

STUART

We're business-beings, Mr. Frinkel!

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK STUART isn't laughing all of a sudden.

CHIP

(still laughing, now somewhat forced)

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

FRANK STUART

We do.

CHIP

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

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

Can we call you Chip?

CHIP

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

STUART

Ha ha! You could not.

FRANK

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

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

We've got the demographic research right here.

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK STUART

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

CHIP

I don't know...

JOHN

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

FRANK

See? John B agrees.

STUART

And he's John clutcher-flotting B!

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

Who?

CHIP

The, uh, Xybidont who was up onstage earlier.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

At our expense.

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

We do.

FRANK

No contracts, Chip. Our word is our bond.

STUART

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

CHIP

Uh huh.

FRANK

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

Bleeping as FRANK STUART pulls up some Very Impressive Charts.

CHIP

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

FRANK

I knew you'd see reason, Chip.

CHIP

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

JOHN

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

CHIP

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

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

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

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

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

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

STALIN-BOT

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL shimmers in.

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

Alas not, sir.

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

FRALL

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

AMBER

Who?

COMMANDER

Xtopps!

AMBER

The fleezborp guy?

STALIN-BOT

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

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

STALIN-BOT

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

COMMANDER

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

STALIN-BOT

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

Those were crazy times, Commander.

COMMANDER

What? You weren't even there!

FRALL

(a soft chuckle) Wasn't I?

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

STALIN-BOT

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

Perhaps a mucilage or epoxy would assist in the process?

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

Door whoosh as he exits.

ALTHAAR

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

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

ALTHAAR

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

COMMERCIAL ANNOUNCER

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

BRO 1

Sports! Woo!

ANNOUNCER

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

Zapping SFX.

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

(energetic sexy whisper)

Shocked Seltzer!

ANNOUNCER

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

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

Shhhhhhhocked Seltzer!

ANNOUNCER

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

BRO 1

Sweet!

ANNOUNCER

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

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

Shocked Seltzer!

ANNOUNCER

Beer tastes like sad bread.

BRO 1

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

ANNOUNCER

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

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

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

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

CHIP

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

DEE

Not bad, Chip! I'm impressed.

CHIP

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

DEE

Okay. Like this?

CHIP

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

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

DEE

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

Miiiiiiiiinnndy!

COMMANDER

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

DEE

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

CHIP

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

FRALL appears.

CHIP

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

FRALL

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

CHIP

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

VERT

(in the distance)

Sorry, boss!

CHIP

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

VERT

Right, boss!

CHIP

Aagh!

NESS

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

COMMANDER

A gentle-being's agreement!

DORMER

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

Ah ha!

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

...how major are we talking, here?

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

Oh, by Simone's prickly papillae!

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

I didn't smuggle anything!

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

DORMER

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

Whine of electro-cuffs booting up.

NESS

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

CHIP

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

DORMER

Aw, nertz.

Sad whine of electro-cuffs shutting down.

CHIP

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

NESS

Sir, are you currently experiencing a medical issue?

CHIP

Uh, no...

DORMER

Your left eye is twitching. Looks real uncomfortable.

NESS

Do you require the assistance of a MedBot?

CHIP

It's called winking! Sheesh!

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

NESS and DORMER

Yessir!

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

...Frall?

A fact-gathering shimmer.

FRALL

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

CHIP

Thank you!

FRALL

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

CHIP

(through gritted teeth)

...Thanks a lot.

FRALL

My pleasure.

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

Yes, fine.

FRALL

Enjoy!

FRALL discorporates.

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

They move across the bar toward the office.

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

They enter the office.

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

Clickity Clack my zooooooooooooods... Clickity... Clickity... Clock!

COMMANDER

Oh.

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

Sooooap in the waaatahhh...

CHIP

...goes.

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

Locked in and pinged, «chef de vaisseau».

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

Comment ça vut you say?

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

No, I don't.

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

No.

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

(still whispering)

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

(suddenly shouting)

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

COMMANDER

What?

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

No Soap-brero.

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

I don't!

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

Hotlanta!

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

(on her way out)

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

Door slams shut.

CHIP

That went pretty well, all things considered.

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

Life is best medium rare, Chorp.

CHIP

Can't argue with that.

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

Right, yeah, thanks.

H.F.

I got you covered. *(opens a capacious drawer full of bottles, ampoules, tubes, and assorted hypochondriacal paraphernalia)* I got ibuprofen, acetaminophen, and triopenine—there's some aspirin too, if you want to go old-school—and take some of these vitamin C₁₂ gummies while you're at it. Then you wanna follow it up a half hour later with a few of the riboflavin pastilles, and a bottle of Plutonian electrolyte infusion. Then forty minutes after that, you take these copper ear clamps—

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

Hang on, billiards is a sport now?

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

Sporting is necessary for something to be considered a sport.

JOHN

Ok, what about Mimasidodgeball?

H.F.

Love it!

JOHN

And you'd call it a sport?

H.F.

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

JOHN

But they don't get sweaty.

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

So?

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

Right. Maybe I will have some of those C₇ gummies.

H.F.

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

JOHN

I'll pass, thanks.

H.F.

You don't know what you're missing.

JOHN

I'm super-fine with that.

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

H.F.

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

Janky office door whooshes open.

JOHN

Ok, see you then!

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

JOHN

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

Door whooshes back open, jankily.

H.F.

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

H.F./JOHN

Electricity Kills Humans. Dead.

JOHN

Got it, thanks.

Door shuts. Beat.

JOHN

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

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX rustles in.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

Hilarity as both ALTHAAR and MRS. FRONDRINAX consider this.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is most looking forward at experiencing these Human works!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Happy to help, dearie.

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

They do get awfully noisy, don't they?

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

ALTHAAR

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

Blinng of the TV system turning on.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

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

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

SOPON

Hey, mister, does she have ID?

H.F.

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

SOPON

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

Happy MISS SOPHIE noises.

SOPON

What about you, can I get you anything?

H.F.

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

Pop of a beer cap.

SOPON

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

H.F.

Ugh.

SOPON

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

H.F.

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

SOPON

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

H.F.

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

SOPON

Too true.

Walking through the crowd sounds. Yips from MISS SOPHIE.

H.F.

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

Whine.

DEE

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

A chorus of overlapping greetings:*

XTOPPS

*Hey, zoods!

AMBER

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

VERT

*They'll let anybody in this place!

JOHN

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

DILURIAN 1

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

DILURIAN 2

Ha ha... you said foke.

DILURIAN 3

Ha haha nice.

McENROE-BOT

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

CHIP

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

McENROE-BOT

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

H.F.

(to JOHN)

Wow, intense. Where'd you find him?

JOHN

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

DEE

Alright, McEnroe-bot, bang 'em up!

H.F.

I gotta say, that is a beautiful table.

CHIP

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

JOHN

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

McENROE-BOT

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

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

H.F.

Wow, look at 'em spin!

JOHN

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

H.F.

What's that fuzzy thing?

JOHN

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

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

DILURIAN 1

Nice shot, Bro!

McENROE-BOT

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

Clack zoom Clack Thump

H.F.

Wow, he's really good!

JOHN

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

H.F.

Is that even fair?

JOHN

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

Clack zoooooom Thump. Clack zoooooom Thump.

H.F.

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

JOHN

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

Clack zoom thump.

McENROE-BOT

You cannot be serious!

H.F.

What happened?

JOHN

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

Clack zoom clack fzzzz. McEnroe unintelligible grumbling.

JOHN

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

DILURIAN 1

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

DILURIANS laugh, douchily.

DILURIANS 2, 3 & 4

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

Clack clack Thump Clack zoom fzzzzzz

McENROE-BOT

Laugh it up you commie smarkhead, but you missed.

JOHN

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

H.F.

And why would he do that again?

Clack zoom fzzzzzzz.

JOHN

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

Clack zoom clack zooooooooom (as JOHN continues)

JOHN

—combo past the neutron.

Clack... beep... beep... beep.

JOHN

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

Beep beep beep clack zooooooooooooom beep borp shuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurp.

H.F.

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

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

JOHN

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

McENROE-BOT

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

MCENROE-BOT continues his tantrum in the background while:

JOHN

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

CHIP

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

JOHN

Uhhh, ok. What should I do?

McENROE-BOT

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

CHIP

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

VERT

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

CHIP

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

McENROE fades as CHIP hustles him out.

DEE

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

JOHN

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

DILURIAN 1

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

DILURIANS 2 & 3

HOLE! (*rampant hilarity*)

DILURIAN 1

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

CHAD (DILURIAN 4)

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

More douchey laughing from the DILURIANS.

DEE

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

DILURIAN 2

"SUCK!" Bwaaaaa-hah hah hah!

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

DILURIAN 1

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

JOHN

Ummm... Vert!

VERT

Yes, John B?

JOHN

You're up!

VERT

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

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

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

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

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

STELLA

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

JOHN

Shh! He'll hear us!

STELLA

So?

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

He's asleep. It's late.

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

Oh yeah? You got designs on me?

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

Whoosh of JOHN's bedroom door.

ALTHAAR

(over intercom)

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

Oh, ok, yeah.

STELLA

Good job with the metaphors, Althaar!

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

...FriendJohn is not up-set?

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

They were winning a lot.

JOHN

Right. And we were losing. A lot.

STELLA

But Acting Team Captain John B turned it around!

ALTHAAR

Then the evening of competition was ultimately victorious?

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

Congratulation to you from Althaar!

JOHN

Thanks, buddy.

ALTHAAR

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

STELLA

Althaar, you're way too hard on yourself.

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

ALTHAAR

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

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

JOHN & STELLA

Goodnight, Althaar.

Door whooshes shut behind them. Transition to the Bridge:

COMMANDER

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

NESS

Affirmative, sir!

DORMER

Total radio silence from the Egg, Commander.

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

Sir?

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

I have?

COMMANDER

Asking or telling, Amber!

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

You don't like a good time?

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

DORMER

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

NESS

MechaJaws really kicks some Nazi ass!

COMMANDER

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

AMBER

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

COMMANDER

What?

DORMER

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL incorporates.

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

It is, sir.

COMMANDER

Ah hah!

FRALL

But not for you.

COMMANDER

...Really?

FRALL

Really.

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

Truly.

COMMANDER

I don't know what to think about that.

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

Oh, good.

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

FRALL

I didn't say that, sir.

COMMANDER

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

NESS & DORMER

Yessir!

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

(suspicious)

My personal intervention how?

FRALL

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

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

DILURIAN 2

Awwwww, no! You skunked us again!

CHIP

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

DILURIAN 1

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

DILURIAN 2

Yeah, me too, bro.

JOHN

Suit yourselves.

CHIP

Come back anytime you want a rematch!

DILURIAN 1

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

DILURIAN 2

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

DILURIAN 1

Sweet!

CHIP

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

JOHN

No kidding!

FRANK STUART

Well, if it isn't the proprietor himself!

CHIP

(nervous)

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

JOHN

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

FRANK STUART

Aw, you've got time for one more.

CHIP

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

JOHN

...Ok, just one more.

FRANK

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

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

ALTHAAR

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

Well, maybe your life.

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

Wished for another season of *Voltron*?

E-BOT

Hey, we actually got that, you know!

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

So much loss of life in the name of fondant.

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

SYSCO

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

E-BOT

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

ALTHAAR

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

Obnoxious Shocked Seltzer rock music.

ALTHAAR

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

BRO 1

Yo Bro, this party's strictly for driffers.

BRO 2

No worries Bro! I've got this.

Sound of a can opening. Heavy metal guitar riff!

BRO 1

Shocked Seltzer, bro? Yessss!

ANNOUNCER

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

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

(sexy whisper)

Shocked Seltzer!

ANNOUNCER

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

BRO 1

Really, bro?

ANNOUNCER

Yes! Literally!

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

Shocked Seltzer!

BRO 2

Like, literally literally?

ANNOUNCER

Literally! And in no other way!

BROS 1 & 2

Sweet!

ANNOUNCER

New Shocked Seltzer. Grab the party by the can!

Zapping noise, obnoxious guitar.

SEXY ROBOT VOICE

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

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

SOPON

Hey, Reyes. Can I get you anything?

STELLA

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

SOPON

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

STELLA

Great, thanks. Change is all you!

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

STELLA

Hey, folks!

XTOPPS

Heyoooo!

DEE

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

STELLA

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

Clack zoom beep beep zoom slurp slooooooshhh thumpthumpthumpthump pop

STELLA

Way to go Nova there, champ!

JOHN

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

CHIP

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

STELLA

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

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

Wow, you guys are way out of my league!

FRANK

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

STUART

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

JOHN

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

FRANK STUART

Sure sure.

STUART

I know you've got places to be—

FRANK

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

JOHN

Thanks, but no thanks.

STUART

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

CHIP

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

JOHN

Yeah, I don’t know...

CHIP

(aside, to JOHN)

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

JOHN

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

STELLA

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

FRANK STUART

Let’s go, boys!

CHIP

My break!

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

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

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

(to himself)

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

(to the SHARK)

Is this all your luggage, gesin?

SHARK

Yup!

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

Name?

SHARK

Donald. Donald Escroc.

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

Are you a League citizen?

SHARK

Nope!

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

Species?

SHARK

Shark!

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

Purpose of travel?

SHARK

Business.

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

And just what is your business?

SHARK

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

And is this a permanent position?

SHARK

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

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

SHARK

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

Any restricted substances to declare?

SHARK

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

KAISER WILHELM-BOT

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

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

CHIP

(in the distance)

What!? That's not— I mean— what?!

XTOPPS

Sounds like boss-man bit it.

DEE

Maybe that'll be good for him.

STELLA

What? Why?

DEE

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

FRALL appears.

FRALL

I couldn't agree more, Dee.

DEE

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

FRALL

Indeed. Shall we adjourn to the gentlebeings' parlor?

DEE

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

XTOPPS

Abso-tivo-luciously!

STELLA

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

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

CHIP

No! How!?

FRANK STUART

Wow! I can't believe it!

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK STUART

What a conversation piece!

FRANK

Well, it's been fun, Chip.

STUART

See you around sometime!

CHIP

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

FRALL

Good evening, Mr. Frinkel.

CHIP

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

FRALL

Obviously. And that is?

CHIP

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

JOHN

I got nothing.

CHIP

Nertz!

FRALL

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

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK

Because there's nothing here to observe!

FRANK STUART

We were just leaving.

CHIP

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

JOHN

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

CHIP

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

STELLA

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

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

How about double or nothing? No, triple!

FRANK STUART

Fine with me!

CHIP

All right then. Bang 'em!

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

STELLA

That... was quick.

JOHN

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

FRALL

You'll be seeing it again.

DEE

This is amazing.

CHIP

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

STUART

If you insist.

FRANK

Same bet this time?

CHIP

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

JOHN

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

DEE

Shh! Don't ruin this for me!

STELLA

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

JOHN

Fair enough.

XTOPPS

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

CHIP

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

XTOPPS

Mad money!

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

Ouch!

FRANK

No need to get personal, Mr. Frinkel.

STUART

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

FRANK

See, we play for credits, not coinage.

STUART

We like to keep on the move, you know.

FRANK

Keep our assets liquid.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

CHIP

Dammit! I'm all out of cash!

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

To keep it interesting.

CHIP

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

STUART

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

CHIP

You mean all the glassware at the Egg?

FRANK STUART

Yup.

JOHN

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

CHIP

What do you want with my glassware?

FRANK

It's more the principle of the thing.

STUART

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

CHIP

Ok. My glassware. Against all your winnings?

FRANK STUART

Oh, no.

FRANK

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

STUART

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

CHIP

Anything.

FRANK

How 'bout the tables?

STUART

And chairs!

FRANK

Right, why keep one without the other?

FRANK STUART

Deal?

CHIP

Deal. Let's go.

Clack zoooooom BANG zoom beep thump thump thump POP!

CHIP

AAGH!

STUART

Another Nova on the Big Bang!

FRANK

This really is my lucky day!

DEE

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

XTOPPS

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

FRANK

All right, Chip. Time to pay up.

STUART

Unless you'd like to play for something else?

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

We'll play you for that, Chip.

CHIP

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

FRANK

No problem.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

Rrrrgh... Rack 'em up!

Clack zoooooom BANG clack thump

XTOPPS

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

Clack zoom clack thump.

DEE

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

FRALL

Eventually.

Clack zoom thump.

CHIP

Ha! The Frink is back!

JOHN

Good one, Chip!

Clack zoooooom thump.

STELLA

Looks like he may pull this off!

Clack zooom clack pfff

FRANK

Nice run there, Chip!

STUART

You almost had us that time.

FRANK STUART

Almost.

XTOPPS

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

FRALL

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

DEE

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

STUART

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

Clack zooom thump.

FRANK

And I wouldna even hadda chance to shoot.

Clack zooom thump.

STUART

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

Clack zooom beep beep beep.

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

But for our purposes tonight....

STUART

If we win this one...

Clack beep beep slorp slosshhhhhhhh thumpthumpthump

FRANK

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

Pop!

FRANK STUART

Well, wouldja look at that!

CHIP

Noooooo! My aquarium...

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

Why not just tip it over in here?

CHIP

Hey, I never said you could wreck the place!

FRANK

But it's kinda ours to wreck, Chip.

STUART

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

FRANK STUART

Is there?

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

JOHN

Uh, Chip?

CHIP

Yeah, John.

JOHN

You got hustled, Chip.

CHIP

I got hustled, John.

JOHN

What're you going to do?

CHIP

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

STELLA

Can't you just cut your losses and reboot?

DEE

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

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

Hey, no hard feelings, pal.

FRANK

We feel real bad about all this, you know?

STUART

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

CHIP

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

FRANK

I don't know about that, Chip.

STUART

There's always some, whaddayacallem...

FRANK STUART

Intangibles.

JOHN

Uh oh.

CHIP

Intangibles?

FRANK

Services you could perform for us.

STUART

Actions that would be to our benefit.

FRANK

That you might not otherwise be willing to undertake.

CHIP

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

STUART

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

FRANK

Ours is a little different.

STUART

Involves a lot more compound fractures.

CHIP

Oh.

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

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

CHIP

And the stakes?

STUART

A simple favor. It's nothing, really.

FRANK

Literally nothing.

STUART

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

CHIP

This sounds like a complicated nothing.

FRANK

Well, you would have to keep your mouth shut.

STUART

And not cause any trouble.

FRANK STUART

While we walk the Xyb out of here.

XTOPPS

Aw, blech.

DEE

Uh, Frall?

FRALL

Wait for it.

CHIP

I thought you didn't care about Xtopps!

FRANK

Did we say that, Stu?

STUART

I don't think we said that, Frankie.

FRANK

What we said was, we came here for business.

STUART

And the billiards business... is good business.

FRANK

But you know what isn't?

STUART

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

FRANK

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

FRANK STUART

That's bad business.

STUART

So we're gonna play one more game.

FRANK

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

STUART

But if you lose...

FRANK STUART

We're taking the Xyb.

CHIP

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

FRANK

There is not.

CHIP

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

STUART

We know all that, Chip.

FRANK

We're pretty well informed.

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

STUART

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

CHIP

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

FRALL

Yes, Chip Frinkel?

CHIP

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

FRALL

Yes. It's hilarious.

CHIP

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

FRALL

I didn't hear the magic word.

CHIP

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

FRALL

Of course, Chip. I already have.

CHIP

You—what? When? How?

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

FRALL

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

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

They hustled you, smark-for-brains.

CHIP

They took everything. Even the aquarium!

FRANK STUART

You got some real nice fish, Chip!

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

FRANK STUART

We know.

COMMANDER

But I'll play you for him.

FRANK

What?

STUART

You?

COMMANDER

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

STUART

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

FRANK

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

CHIP

Uh... am I?

FRALL

You are.

CHIP

I am!

COMMANDER

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

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

FRANK STUART

That's right!

STUART

Easy as 2000 year old geometry!

FRANK

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

COMMANDER

Now, what were the stakes again?

STUART

If we lose, Chip gets everything back.

FRANK

If you lose...

FRANK STUART

We take the Xyb.

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

Right. Well, here goes...

Click zzzip thlep fzzzzz (bad miscue)

COMMANDER

(sotto voce)

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

CHIP

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

FRANK STUART

No thank you.

Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump. Clack zoom fizz.

CHIP

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

COMMANDER

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

Clack zoom fizz.

CHIP

Oh, frill me.

FRANK STUART

Ooh, so close!

FRANK

Now let's see, here—

Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump.

STUART

Oops!

XTOPPS

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

COMMANDER

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

FRANK

Frank

STUART

Stuart.

COMMANDER

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

FRANK

What did you have in mind?

COMMANDER

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

STUART

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

COMMANDER

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

FRANK STUART

... You're on.

COMMANDER

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

DEE

What, this one? Sure, here you go.

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

FRANK STUART

Uh oh.

Clack zoom BANG clack clack thump.

JOHN

Off to a good start...

Clack zoooooom clack thump. Clack zoom thump

XTOPPS

Looking spry, Commandante!

Clack zoom crack crack thump thump

DEE

I did not see this coming.

Clack zoom crack crack thump thump

CHIP

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

SOPON

You got it, boss!

Clack zzzooooom crick thump clack fzzzzzzzzzz beep beep beep

FRANK STUART

Aww nertz.

COMMANDER

Frank Stuart,

Clack zzzzzzooooom bbeeeep slloooooooshhhh thumpitythumpthumthwaappityPOP

COMMANDER

Don't bring your shness to the Fairgrounds.

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell 'em, sister!

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

Fade into an announcement:

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

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

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

A slow day at the Egg. Pool league practice.

CHIP

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

JOHN

Great job, Vert!

VERT

No retreat! No surrender!

CHIP

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

Overlapping responses:

AMBER

Okay?

DEE

Works for me!

JOHN

You got it.

VERT

Okay, boss!

McENROE-BOT

Chalk it up!

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

FRALL

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

CHIP

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

FRALL

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

CHIP

You've got to be kidding me.

DEE

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

VERT

You have to stay low and follow through.

FRALL

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

CHIP

This is...

JOHN

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

McENROE-BOT

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

CHIP

(grumble)

FRALL

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

CHIP

(grumble)

FRALL

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

Clack zooooooooom BOOOOM

CHIP/FRALL

Cheese!

Closing credits music.

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life with Althaar*, episode fifteen.
This episode was written by Chris Lee for Gemini CollisionWorks and starred
Berit Johnson as Althaar
John Amir as John B
Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna
Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall
Eli Ganas as H.F.
Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax
Chris Lee as Chip Frinkel
Zuri Washington as Dee
and Derrick Peterson as Xtopps
and also featured
{additional credits}.
Life with Althaar was created by Berit Johnson and Ian W. Hill
Berit is the supervising producer, showrunner, and script supervisor.

Ian is the audio producer, sound designer, and technical supervisor.
The writers' room consists of Berit, Ian, John, Amanda, Chris, Philip, Lex, and Linus.
Theme and Interstitial Music composed and performed by Anna Stefanic
Life With Althaar logo and illustration by Dean Haspiel
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We'll be back in two weeks with another Tale from the Fairgrounds, but first, let's see how Althaar's experiment in binge-watching is coming along...

Whoosh of the door to Suite C.

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

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

ALTHAAR

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

JOHN

Sounds good! What's it called?

ALTHAAR

*M*A*S*H!*

Blinnng as ALTHAAR starts up the TV again.