

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 14: Gardening at Night

By Joe Fisher

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 14: Gardening at Night

SFX: ANNOYING MUSIC.

VOICE

Interplanetary travel. Enjoyed by so many across The Triad, and made possible only by the hard work and constant innovation of The Ted Empire. With our Ted Tubes, we are able to connect all citizens of the three galaxies for trade, tourism, or to start a new life somewhere out there among the stars. But sometimes with new innovations, comes new problems, and with those problems, new responsibilities.

One of those problems is piracy. Did you know that over 1300 ships per Ted-cycle find themselves the victim of piracy? Though the Ted Empire works day and night to ensure the safety of the Ted Tube network, that doesn't stop piracy from occurring. In this broadcast we're going to go over the what you need to do if you hear of or are currently experiencing an act of piracy. Let's start at the beginning. First, what is piracy?

SFX: STATIC AND BUZZING.

SFX: PIRATE MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen and every other damn thing, live from the Galaxy Brain, it's the Gladiator of the Galaxies, the Sultan of the Starways, The Invader Zim of the Outer Rim, The Hullabaloo of NGC 6302, iiiiiiiiiiiit's Låfftraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaax!

SFX: APPLAUSE.

LÅFFTRAX

Hello, hello, hello, everyone out there in the great beyond it's your old pal Låfftrax! Breaking in yet again to talk in your ear about, well, whatever the hell I want!

SFX: LAUGHING.

LÅFFTRAX (CONT'D)

Let's face it, you didn't want to listen to another damn message from the damn Teds, did you? No. You know why? Booooring! That's why! Leave it to the Teds to have control of three galaxies and somehow make it a snooze-fest!

SFX: LAUGHING.

LÅFFTRAX (CONT'D)

You know, Låfftrax can remember a time when there were no Teds. The Galaxy was run by a bunch of kings and warlords! Guys who really knew how to do galactic domination you know? They did it with style. Anybody remember Emperor Bug-Bug of the Iron Quadrant? Damn he knew how to party. That guy had a ship the size of a moon just to hold all of his other ships. The guy had a ship for his ships. And guess what? He never went anywhere. You know why? He was the damn Emperor! Everybody came to him!

SFX: APPLAUSE.

LÅFFTRAX (CONT'D)

Now look at us. Three galaxies dominated by a bunch of bean counters! It's a disgrace! Where's the panaché? Where's the pageantry? Somebody ought to do something!

Oh, what's that? What's that you say? Somebody IS doing something? Oh, it's your old pal Låfftrax? Well thank the cosmos for me, am I right?!

SFX: CHEERING.

LÅFFTRAX

Folks, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking "Låfftrax, we know the Teds suck, but what can we do about it? They control everything!"

Well if that's the case, how am I breaking into their broadcast right now? If they control everything how am I saving you from hearing another bullshit public service announcement about what to do when you encounter a pirate?

(CONT'D)

I'll tell you what to do if you encounter a pirate. Get out your thank you cards! Start writing. Write this: Dear Mr. Pirate, thank you for saving me from a galaxy that has lost all sense of style! Before I met you, life was merely survival. But now that I see you out there, breaking laws and doing all sorts of violence, I'm reminded that the universe is a pageant! That we have but one life! That control is an illusion and we are all just clumps of stardust smashing into each other and then returning to oblivion. Sincerely... and then write your name there.

(CONT'D)

That's what you do when you encounter a pirate. Pirates are important, folks. They're necessary. With the rise of every empire, something always rises in its shadow. The black market, the underworld, the Pirates! Thesis... antithesis... synthesis... it's the way of all things...

(CONT'D)

"But Låfftrax" you say "Låfftrax I can't thank you for what you do. You too are cruel! You steal, you lie, you wound, you kill. I'm to thank you for the terror you bring to the great cosmic landscape?!"

(CONT'D)

Well, to that I say, look above your head, theoretical person! Atoms disintegrating. Meteors raining. Suns collapsing. Galaxies colliding! Black holes obliterating. All without a care for you or your loved ones.

(CONT'D)

Look up! Look up into the swirling gyre and ask yourself, "Should I not mimic that which bore me?! Or should I be a good citizen of the Ted Empire, attend some shitty job as a customer service rep or whatever, and wait for death to take me?"

(CONT'D)

Only stardust colliding folks. Everything else is play-acting.

They don't hate me for the violence, they don't hate me for the looting, they hate me because of what I'm a reminder of. A reminder that our lives are nothing but a sandcastle on a beach, with the tides fast approaching.

(CONT'D)

... You know, speaking of chaos and uncertainty, I'm going to be honest. I can't remember why I broke into this broadcast now. The spirit moved me. Anybody remember?

(CONT'D)

Ah yes... Yes, I have it now... Strange things are afoot in The Triad my friends, strange things. The Teds are cracking down like never before, and with Midnight Burger zipping around our little corner of the universe, I have it on very good authority that an old friend is back in town. An old friend that I thought was gone for good. And I'm desperate to speak with him folks, DESPERATE. We have a lot of catching up to do.

(CONT'D)

He's an Earthling... His name is Leif... And if you can lead me to him I can promise you a new world awaits. A world where you are cruising through the stairways guzzling FREEDOM! And it can all be brought to you by Låffrax.

My friends, before I return you to your previously scheduled boredom, let me reiterate my previous point: If you see a pirate, thank a pirate. Embrace them. Give them your valuables and perhaps a few of your children. In the end, it's only the pirates who are doing it right..

SONG: TENNESSEE MOON - HEIDELBERG QUINTETTE

ZEBULON

My Dear, Gloria appears to be pondering over that cube again.

EFFIE

She is, Dear. As if there were some sort of prize within it's tiny frame.

ZEBULON

What do we suppose is inside?

EFFIE

A key perhaps?

ZEBULON

Perhaps little candies.

EFFIE

Let's ponder it with her.

ZEBULON

Yes.

GLORIA

...

EFFIE

...

ZEBULON

...

GLORIA

Guys. Stop, there's nothing inside it, I'm just thinking.

ZEBULON

Sorry to disturb.

LEIF

Okay, I went up on the roof, tried to get a good look around. I think the planet's uninhabited.

GLORIA

It's dead.

LEIF

Not just dead. It's like it's dying. The trees and shrubs are brown, the whole planet's brown.

GLORIA

Leif, explain to me again how this thing works.

LEIF

Gloria, we already talked about it, do I have to?

GLORIA

You didn't tell me you were an engineer, you didn't tell me you were a criminal, you hid a bomb in the diner, and you put us all in danger so you could get this tiny box-

LEIF

Okay.

GLORIA

You're kind of down in the polls right now, Leif. You want to bring your numbers up?

LEIF

Okay, again... The genius of The Ted Empire is that they have no leader. Over the centuries they've managed to evolve into an entire society of middle management. Everything is done by committee and the one who's really in charge is the rules themselves.

GLORIA

Why is that genius?

LEIF

Because you can't assassinate a rulebook. The only thing that gets assassinated is personal responsibility. See it all goes back to-

GLORIA

Skip to the end.

LEIF

Okay. If I plug this into any Ted mainframe, in a matter of days everything stops.

GLORIA

Everything?

LEIF

The entire Ted Empire grinds to a halt.

GLORIA

How?

LEIF

It creates a memo. And that memo's job is just to create another memo. And another and another and another. Each memo erodes these things called linear classifiers. A linear classifier is how a computer tells the difference between one set of data and another. In a few days this thing rips through the Ted Empire and the code that runs their empire turns into alphabet soup.

GLORIA

It's that easy?

LEIF

In the end, every empire screws itself, it's never an outside invader. This code's really simple. So simple that they don't even look for it anymore. Imagine a master thief trying to break into your house. They know how to hack your complicated security system, but would have no idea how to get past a moat full of alligators because nobody looks for those anymore.

GLORIA

Empire. How big is this empire?

LEIF

That's another genius thing. The Teds don't control any territory other than their home planet, but they control everything.

GLORIA

How?

LEIF

It started about 250 years ago. They started building these Ted Tubes, warp gates that could take you from one side of a galaxy to another instantly. And they just kept building them. They used that to leverage control over everything else. Fast forward 250 years and there's very few parts of your life that don't involve the Ted Empire.

GLORIA

That's all it took?

LEIF

Remember when Amazon was a bookstore?

GLORIA

I don't understand, if the Teds are so bad, why didn't you just use this thing back when you made it?

LEIF

I tried to explain this to you-

GLORIA

Explain it again.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA

Hi. What are you guys talking about?

GLORIA

Nothing.

AVA

Okay. Something weird's going on outside, I need my pencil.

LEIF

Why?

AVA

Because I'm going to figure out what's going on.

GLORIA

With a pencil?

AVA

You know how many problems have been solved with pencils? I'm taking the radio too, c'mon guys.

EFFIE

Well alright, just remember what happened yesterday when we tagged along.

AVA

You'll be fine. Leif come out here.

LEIF

I'll be right there.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Why are we not telling Ava about this?

GLORIA

Because Ava is a friggin' chaos wizard who'll want to use a doomsday device just to see what happens.

LEIF

Okay, I just want to say, I kept it a secret but now you're keeping it a secret and that feels like a double-

GLORIA

Oh don't even start with that shit. Let's go outside and see what she's talking about.

LEIF

Okay.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUNDS OF AN ALIEN PLANET.

GLORIA

Jeez, look at this place. Dead trees everywhere, the plants are dead, what happened?

LEIF

What's going on?

AVA

I'm looking at the sun.

LEIF

Okay.

AVA

I shouldn't be able to look at the sun but I'm looking at the sun.

GLORIA

Weird, I'm looking at it, too.

LEIF

Is it an eclipse?

AVA

No, because watch this...

GLORIA

Oh, it's bright again.

AVA

And now we can't look at the sun but then wait for another second...

LEIF

It's dark again.

AVA

Not a cloud in the sky so it's not the weather, and there's no pattern to it. It fluctuates randomly.

EFFIE

It's acting like some kind of a light bulb that needs changing.

ZEBULON

Ava, is it possible for a sun to be like a light bulb, for it to need changing?

AVA

Yes, but when they need changing they explode and obliterate everything for billions of kilometers.

ZEBULON

I see.

AVA

And then collapse into a black hole.

ZEBULON

I think a simple yes or no would do.

EFFIE

Ava, I know you are regarding this strange land as a simple curiosity but I'm feeling a certain way about it.

GLORIA

What's going on, Effie?

EFFIE

There is a sadness here. One that overwhelms. As though we've caught the story at its end.

GLORIA

Well the sun's acting weird and the planet's dying, I'm assuming the two are related.

LEIF

They're definitely related but...

AVA

This just isn't how planets die in the universe.

LEIF

Something else is going on.

EFFIE

Oh my... something approaches!

SFX: STRANGE ALIEN SOUNDS.

LEIF

Oh boy.

AVA
Weird shit alert.

GLORIA
There, in the bushes. What is that?

LEIF
I don't see it.

GLORIA
Oh, it's not in the bushes, it is the bushes.

SFX: WET FOOTSTEPS.

AVA
Bushes don't walk, you guys.

LEIF
This one's walking.

GLORIA
It's a plant person?

LEIF
Everybody keep your distance.

AVA
It's kind of adorable.

LEIF
Yeah, it's real adorable and then it spits poison at you.

EFFIE
Fear not, y'all. This creature that smells vaguely of petunia means us no harm.

ZEBULON
It appears frightened, as though a sheep that's lost its flock.

LEIF
Who's on the rotation for first contact?

GLORIA
It's me... Hey. Hey there. Hi. I'm Gloria. You... look like a plant to me. I want you to know... we're cool with that.

AVA
Maybe it's one of Leif's illegitimate children?

LEIF
Okay, the jokes are old now.

AVA
Oh, they're so young, Leif. As young as all your illegitimate children spread across the multiverse.

GLORIA
Shut up, you two.

SFX: CREATURE SQUEALS AND FALLS TO THE GROUND.

GLORIA (CONT'D)
Oh, shit.

LEIF
Are you happy? You killed it with your jokes.

AVA
Wouldn't be the first time.

GLORIA
Goddamnit. I knew I shouldn't have made first contact, I always kill plants.

EFFIE
Take heart, Gloria. This creature has not expired, though they do seem to be in great distress.

LEIF
Doesn't surprise me. It's a plant. Look at the sun on this planet, I'm surprised it's not dead just like everything else here.

GLORIA
But it's not dead, it's alive, which means... we have a customer. And our customer is dying. Shit. Okay... it's a plant. Plants need dirt and sunlight. It's got plenty of dirt around here so it needs sun. How do we make a sun?

AVA
Well, it's a very complicated-

GLORIA
Don't.

LEIF
The heat lamps.

GLORIA
Seriously?

LEIF
Sure, why not?

GLORIA

The heat lamps keep food warm, they're going to bring an alien back to life?

LEIF

I think so, Ava?

AVA

Sure. I mean, you'd need a fuller spectrum for long term growth but if you want cheap and dirty light energy that could be the way to go.

GLORIA

Okay, Leif bring it inside and put it under the heat lamps. Ava, what do you need to figure out what's wrong with the sun?

AVA

I've got a pencil, paper, and a radio. It's all a girl needs.

SFX: LEAVES RUSTLING.

LEIF

Okay, I've got it. This thing is so weird.

GLORIA

Get it inside.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

Okay, clear off the counter for me.

GLORIA

Okay. Do you really think this is going to work?

LEIF

Well, like most things we do, there's not much of a choice.

SFX: ALIEN BEING SET DOWN ON COUNTER. HEAT LAMPS BEING SWITCHED ON.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Okay, let's give it some time under these lamps and hope for the best.

SFX: SPRAY BOTTLE SPRAYING.

LEIF (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

GLORIA

Spraying it with water.

LEIF

Why?

GLORIA

I don't know. I see people doing this to their plants sometimes.

LEIF

Sure, why not?

GLORIA

So if everything on this planet is dead how is this thing still alive?

LEIF

I guess it got lucky, though that's a weird word to use. It would definitely be dead if it weren't for us. You ever been to Carlsbad?

GLORIA

What? No.

LEIF

When you take the tour of the caverns they bring you to this fern. It's deep in the caverns away from any sunlight. They say a seed may have hitched a ride on one of the bats that lived there. Somehow it managed to grow hundreds of meters from where it's supposed to. Maybe our friend here is a cavern fern- Oh shit!

GLORIA

What?

LEIF

Of course. Leif you idiot. Hang on.

GLORIA

What's happening now?

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

It's a Dyson Sphere.

AVA

What?

LEIF

The sun. It's a Dyson Sphere.

AVA
No it's not.

LEIF
It is.

AVA
That's a nerd thing.

LEIF
It's a real thing, the Teds use them.

AVA
Shut up.

LEIF
They do it all the time, it's how they make their warp gates.

AVA
Seriously?

LEIF
You want to make a wormhole, what's your biggest hurdle?

AVA
A power source.

LEIF
Well then why not harness the sun? Can you think of a bigger power source?

AVA
Well, shit. How'd they solve the stability problem?

LEIF
You need to keep each end of the wormhole constantly interacting and they stabilize themselves.

AVA
Huh. That makes sense.

GLORIA
You know what, plant person? I'm not even going to ask anymore. I'm just going to sit here and spray you. It's very calming. I think I get plants now.

LEIF
The Teds are killing the planet.

GLORIA
By doing what?

LEIF

Building a structure around the sun and capturing the energy.

GLORIA

But we can still see the sun.

LEIF

I know, they must not be done yet.

SFX: LEAVES RUSTLING.

GLORIA

Oh, shit. Leif it moved. Come here.

LEIF

It did?

GLORIA

Its, I don't know, leaves rustled?

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

Okay, give it some space, it'll still be a while until it's up-

PLANT PERSON

PLATFORM JAIL MECHANISM BURN MUSEUM THEORIST... Hold please...

LEIF

Well, your plant care has improved.

GLORIA

How is it talking to us?

LEIF

I don't know

GLORIA

I'm Gloria. What's your name?

PLANT PERSON

Names don't translate well- Wait. There were three of you.

LEIF

Ava is the third one, she's outside.

PLANT PERSON

Outside?

GLORIA

Yeah.

PLANT PERSON

I feel like when something bad is happening I'm supposed to they this: shit.

LEIF

True.

GLORIA

Where are you going?

PLANT PERSON

Shit, shit, shit.

SFX: SMALL FEET RUNNING FOR THE DOOR.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

PLANT PERSON (CONT'D)

The third one's gone!

SFX: SMALL FEET RUNNING TO THE KITCHEN.

LEIF

Where'd Ava go? Ava!

GLORIA

The radio's gone too. Ava?

SFX: POTS AND PANS BEING TOSSED AROUND IN THE KITCHEN.

LEIF

What's it doing?

GLORIA

Ava?

PLANT PERSON

Listen, I apologize about this in advance. Everything's going to be okay, I promise.

LEIF

Where's our friend?

PLANT PERSON

It can't be helped. Things just follow their biological imperative, right? Imperative, that's a fun word.

GLORIA

Get out here and tell us what's happening!

PLANT PERSON

Can I borrow this?

LEIF

Five pounds of hamburger meat?

PLANT PERSON

Sorry, it doesn't smell me anymore, so I need something that smells, and this, wow, this will do it.

GLORIA

Tell us what's happening, right now!

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUNDS OF THE ALIEN WORLD.

PLANT PERSON

Look, I don't know who you people are but I feel like you being here is a good thing.

LEIF

Something's moving.

PLANT PERSON

I could really use a good thing right now, so let's not read into this too much.

GLORIA

Read into what?

SFX: SOMETHING MASSIVE MOVING INTO THE PARKING LOT.

LEIF

What the fuck is that!?

PLANT PERSON

Let's try and stay positive!

GLORIA

Look out behind you!

PLANT PERSON

Yeah, I know. Proper nouns aren't translating really well so all I can call this huge creature behind me is: Huge Carnivorous Plant. We'll work on names later. I have to go get your friend. They'll be fine!

LEIF

Go get her?!

PLANT PERSON

This thing is really sweet when it's not trying to eat you!

SFX: ROAR OF THE GIANT CARNIVOROUS PLANT. HUGE JAWS SNAPPING SHUT.

PLANT PERSON (CONT'D)
(Inside the huge carnivorous plant)
It's going to be fine!

GLORIA
The big plant ate the little plant.

LEIF
Did the little plant just say that the big plant
ate Ava?

GLORIA
Leif. Go make something that can kill a big fucking
plant.

LEIF
On it.

SONG: MY CAROLINA HOME, RILEY PUCKETT AND BOB DANIELS

SFX: THE OOZING INNARDS OF THE BIG FUCKING PLANT.

ZEBULON
...In the end, the story of Jonah is one of God's
unwavering love. Jonah, though he ran from God and
that path led him into darkness, God continued to
love him through his trials and crises, and God's
love became a beacon that guided him through his
trials.

EFFIE
And we think of that story now because Jonah's path
led into the belly of a sea-beast and we now find
ourselves... here, in the belly of whatever this
thing is.

PLANT PERSON
I know it's disturbing... strange box people... but
please trust me, everything's going to be fine.

EFFIE
Well, we'll differ to you on such things, but I'm
sure you understand our concern.

PLANT PERSON
Just be patient, it'll all work out. That music
sounds really nice.

EFFIE
Yes, it's one of our favorites.

PLANT PERSON

So, let me go over this again. There was a guy named Jesus.

ZEBULON

Yes.

PLANT PERSON

And he said "Hey, be nice to people. Take care of sick people."

EFFIE

In a very large nutshell, yes.

PLANT PERSON

And then there was a group of people called the "Romans" who said, "We're not into that."

ZEBULON

Yes, in an even bigger nutshell.

EFFIE

Oh, dear. Ava appears to be stirring. Husband we should warn our new friend that when Ava awakes there will be language.

PLANT PERSON

Honestly I only understand you guys half the time anyway so I'm not too worried about it.

EFFIE

When she awakens, it's best to be direct with her.

AVA

...what the... fuck?

PLANT PERSON

Hi there.

AVA

Jesus fuck shit!!

EFFIE

Did she have to throw the Jesus in there with everything else, Dearest?

ZEBULON

I've given up.

AVA

Where the fuck are we?

PLANT PERSON

I've been told to be direct so: You're in the digestive chamber of a gigantic carnivorous plant.

AVA

I'm what?!

PLANT PERSON

But everything's going to be fine.

AVA

No, it's not!

PLANT PERSON

For sure, it's going to be fine, you've got to trust me.

AVA

You're talking.

PLANT PERSON

I am.

AVA

You weren't talking before.

PLANT PERSON

Long story short: I'm very adaptable.

AVA

Lengthen your story.

PLANT PERSON

I've been told to be direct.

AVA

Never mind! How is being inside of a carnivorous thing something to not worry about?

PLANT PERSON

Okay, so this particular creature is an apex predator-

EFFIE

Be direct!

PLANT PERSON

Two reasons 1) Their digestive process is incredibly slow and 2) Me.

AVA

You?

PLANT PERSON

Yes.

AVA

What do you have to do with it?

PLANT PERSON

We've co-existed with these creatures for centuries. Over epochs of evolution we've learned how to taste bad.

AVA

Taste bad?

PLANT PERSON

Yes. Eventually it's going to realize it accidentally ate me and will... void itself.

AVA

Void itself?

PLANT PERSON

Yes.

AVA

We're about to get puked up by a carnivorous plant?

PLANT PERSON

Oh, THAT's what puke means.

AVA

When is this going to happen?

PLANT PERSON

Any time now.

AVA

...You're sure?

PLANT PERSON

Yes.

AVA

...Fine... it smells terrible in here.

PLANT PERSON

It's a digestive chamber, what were you expecting?

AVA

I was expecting to not get eaten by a giant plant and then told by a four foot plant that everything's going to be fine. I think that's a realistic fucking expectation.

PLANT PERSON

That's fair, sure.

EFFIE

Ava, perhaps some introductions are in order before you roll out any more explosions of foul language?

AVA

I'm being digested. You want me to make tea?

EFFIE

Ava, our new friend has assured us that you're going to be just fine.

ZEBULON

And not to put too fine a point on it but our new friend did heroically leap into the innards of this behemoth to insure you wouldn't be harmed.

AVA

What do you expect me to do?

EFFIE

We just said introductions, Dear I can't believe I have to explain these things to her.

ZEBULON

Again, I've given up.

AVA

Fine. I'm Ava. What's your name?

PLANT PERSON

I have no idea.

AVA

Great, that went well.

PLANT PERSON

I mean, I know what it is but when I absorbed your language lexicon proper names don't transfer very well.

AVA

Give it a shot.

PLANT PERSON

Okay... My name is Sheliaksimmeonsuliasamiasulia.

AVA

I'm just going to go with Shel.

SHEL

Great. Shel. I like it.

AVA
So... you're a plant.

SHEL
Um... what's something small and dumb on your planet?

AVA
Most things on my planet are small and dumb. A squirrel?

SHEL
Okay. Isn't you saying to me "So, you're a plant."
Like me saying to you "So, you're a squirrel?"

AVA
That's fair... Photosynthetic?

SHEL
Yes.

AVA
But you don't have a root system, obviously.

SHEL
Not for several thousand... years? Is that the word?

AVA
Yes. Years. And how are you speaking to me?

SHEL
Spores. I'm constantly emitting them from my body.
Some of them interact with your brain's language
center and report back.

AVA
You put spores in my brain?

SHEL
Yes, I'm realizing now that sounds alarming.
They're harmless. It's just... it's how we talk.

AVA
Okay. Well, you're lucky a lot of weird shit has
happened to me, I don't phase easily.

SHEL
I'm noticing the word "shit" has many uses.

AVA
Yes.

SHEL
That isn't confusing?

AVA
Huh... No, it's really not.

SHEL
Okay. Speaking of weird shit, can you explain this talking box to me?

AVA
Not really. You kind of just have to go with it.

ZEBULON
Well we have no trouble explaining ourselves. I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife Effie.

EFFIE
Hi, Shel.

SHEL
Uh... hi. They scare me, are they supposed to scare me?

AVA
Yes. At first.

SHEL
So... who are you guys?

AVA
We're traveling salesmen, can I interest you in a set of encyclopedias?

SHEL
I didn't understand most of that.

ZEBULON
Myself, my wife, Ava, and our friends travel all of God's creation helping those in need.

SHEL
Really?

AVA
"Help" is a strong word.

SHEL
I don't suppose you know how to fix the sun, do you?

AVA
No. Your sun doesn't need fixing.

SHEL
It may seem that way to you-

AVA

Someone's blocking it. Someone's blocking the sun. We call it a Dyson Sphere. For us it's just in science fiction novels but someone went and made a real one. It's a massive construct that wraps around an entire star and harnesses it's energy. The downside is that anyone who depends on that star for warmth, gets screwed. Especially if it's a planet of people who get their energy directly from the sun. Like you.

SHEL

Why would someone do that?

AVA

Because if you want to do anything big, you need massive amounts of energy. And in any universe the biggest source of energy will always be a star. Especially your star. Your star is very special, there's only a few like it.

SHEL

Someone... killed us?

AVA

I'm sorry. Yes.

EFFIE

Ava, this land appears to us as a field that's been left to fallow, waiting for a new wave of life. Do you mean to say that because the sky has been so darkened that that new life will never come?

AVA

Yeah, there will probably always be residual microbes, but life can't exist on this planet anymore. Sorry.

ZEBULON

You'll have to forgive Ava, Shel. She has a tendency to discard the emotional content of the moment.

AVA

Aw, Zebulon, you say the nicest things.

SHEL

Wait, stop. Who did this? Why would they do this?

AVA

Shel, I'm sorry, it's hard for me to talk to you because I don't know anything about you. Do you know that there are other civilizations on other planets?

SHEL

We did. Every once and a while we'd get visitors from the sky. They said they came here to study us. They said there weren't a lot of people like us out there. They were nice for the most part. They would tell us about where they came from. They would tell us about the things they built and the places they had been. It all sounded interesting but... My people don't... my people didn't build things.

AVA

But you seem very intelligent.

SHEL

We are very intelligent. But we don't need things. From the second I split from my seed I had everything I needed. Sunlight and soil. We're born perfect. Why would we build things? Why would we want to? So when you tell me that someone built something so big that it covered up our sun... I don't understand it. Do they know what they're doing, do they know what they're destroying?

AVA

I don't know, Shel. But, probably. If you have the ability to create something so massive, you definitely have the ability to check the nearby planets for life.

SHEL

Tell me why they would do this?

AVA

Shel, I can't tell you why. It's a race called The Teds and... they're dicks.

ZEBULON

I can tell you why, Shel.

SHEL

Please.

ZEBULON

My wife and I have spent our lives studying a book called The Bible. Now, I won't speak on it too much since I know that it won't mean much to you. But I can tell you what it has taught me. There is one sin above all others that poisons humanity. Do you understand this word? Sin.

SHEL

Yes.

EFFIE

Arrogance, Shel. It's a word that's been ground down over time to mean foolishness or overconfidence. But the arrogance we speak of is the sin of putting yourself before another. To decide that another is outside of God's blessing.

ZEBULON

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others before you count yourself." That is the way. And these beings who have darkened your landscapes have strayed far from that path.

SHEL

They don't even care.

ZEBULON

They do not.

AVA

How'd you manage to survive all this time?

SHEL

We don't move around a lot. We may have abandoned our root systems a long time ago, but we still don't travel very far from where we're born. But I figured out that the patches of sunlight moved. So I moved with them. It's unlike us to do that, but I kind of liked it. It suited me, I guess. So I just walked and walked, trying to keep up with the sun. I don't even know how far I travelled. But then the patches of sun got smaller and smaller. I got more and more tired all the time. Today I could hardly move but then I saw you all outside and ran to warn you about the big plant that was about to eat you.

AVA

You failed.

SHEL

Sorry. It really is going to be fine, just give it time. If it's any condolence, I'm still having a worse day than you.

AVA

That's true.

SHEL

You have two languages. Like Gloria.

AVA

I do?

SHEL
Quare duas linguas loqueris?

AVA
Oh jeez, um... Natus sum loqui anglicus. Didici latine, cum senior essem.

EFFIE
Come again, y'all?

AVA
Shel sucked the Latin out of my head. Glad to know it's still in there. Latin's a dead language so of course a bunch of scientists speak it. I'm a scientist so I speak it.

SHEL
That's another one. Scientist. What does that mean?

AVA
You don't know what scientist means?

SHEL
No.

AVA
How is that possible?

SHEL
I don't know.

AVA
You don't have scientists on your planet?

SHEL
If I don't know what a scientist is, how am I going to know-

AVA
Someone who... looks at the world and tries to figure out how it works.

SHEL
Oh. I do that all the time, does that make me a scientist?

AVA
Well you do know Latin.

SHEL
I feel like that's all I've thought about lately. I don't know why. I've been walking across my planet, wondering how I got here.

(MORE)

SHEL (CONT'D)

I would walk past all these dying trees and grasses and bushes and wonder, "Why am I the one who wonders?" Why not the other living things on this planet? Why do they get to be so blissfully unaware of everything that's happening?

AVA

You've been thinking about how you got here?

EFFIE

I think that's fairly natural, Shel. Often times when reaching the end of a road we think about it's beginnings.

SHEL

You said that a scientist thinks about the way things work. Have you ever thought about this? About how we all got here? How it all began?

AVA

Zebulon, you want to tell Shel about the garden of Eden?

ZEBULON

I believe Shel is taking in quite a lot right now, Ava. Best to not confuse things.

AVA

I'm trying to be accommodating over here.

EFFIE

You're not at all trying to do that, Ava, but we do appreciate you pretending to.

AVA

So far I've had a very good attitude for someone being slowly digested.

SHEL

Listen to me, though... I'm dying. My planet is already dead and I'm trying to create some meaning before I turn to dust like everything else. Can you tell me how I got here, please?

AVA

Okay. Yes, I can. Too much energy.

SHEL

What do you mean?

AVA

Complicated life, conscious life comes from too much energy. You have an abundance of energy and a bunch of atoms lying around.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

Eventually a couple of those atoms say to themselves: "Hey, let's take this energy and do something with it. Let's use this energy to become more complex. Bigger, stronger, smarter. There's so much energy around, why the hell not?" All that led to you.

SHEL

Where did the energy come from?

AVA

From your great, big star. Your star is very special. We call it a Wolf-Rayet star. It's energy output is off the charts. There's only a few like it in the known universe.

SHEL

So, life like me comes from stars?

AVA

Not all the time. For us the excess energy was probably volcanic jets at the bottom of the ocean. You came from the sun, we came from the sea. Anyway... that's why you're here. Okay?

SHEL

Okay. Thank you... Now what?

SFX: THE INNARDS OF THE HUGE FUCKING PLANT BEGIN TO RUMBLE.

EFFIE

That is a very disturbing sound.

SHEL

Get ready, you guys.

AVA

Oh, God, this is going to suck so hard. Give me the radio.

SHEL

Here.

AVA

Okay, guys. I've got you.

ZEBULON

"From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

AVA

A little on the nose there, Zeb.

EFFIE

You hang on tight, Ava. You don't want to have to come back for us.

SHEL

Everything's going to be fine..

SFX: FADE TO THE SOUNDS OF THE ALIEN PLANET.

GLORIA

Leif, hurry up!

LEIF

(Inside the diner.)
Don't get too close to it!

SFX: DOOR CHIME. BUCKET SLOSHING.

LEIF (CONT'D)

I'm not much of a chemist, but honestly you don't have to be to kill something.

GLORIA

It's not going to hurt them is it?

LEIF

Gloria, they just got eaten, let's roll the dice on the chemicals giving them a rash, okay?!

GLORIA

Fine.

LEIF

Stand back. I'm going to dump this bucket on it and hope for the best.

SFX: GROANING OF A HUGE ALIEN STOMACH.

GLORIA

Uhhh.

LEIF

The fuck was that?

GLORIA

It's moving, stand back!

SFX: HUGE ROAR FOLLOWED BY A RIVER OF PLANT VOMIT.

EVERYONE:

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

SFX: HUGE FUCKING PLANT SLOWLY BEGINS TO DRAG ITSELF BACK INTO THE TREES.

SHEL

See? What'd I tell you? Everything's fine.

EFFIE

Is it wrong that I found that enjoyable?

ZEBULON

I too am guilty of thinking it a hoot.

AVA

I am now ready to die.

GLORIA

Is everyone okay?

AVA

READ THE ROOM, GLORIA.

GLORIA

Sorry.

AVA

I'm covered in plant.

LEIF

What happened?

AVA

Can someone not covered in goo do the updates please?

EFFIE

Of course. Gloria, Leif, this is Shel. Shel was on the brink of expiring when they saw us in the path of that big old plant. When Shel was too late to warn us, they leapt into the mouth of the beast to save us. Truly a day of heroism from our new friend.

ZEBULON

Also, our vegetal compatriot appears to have many strange skills. They were able to cause that enormous beast to expel us from it's bowels and also appears to magically bridge gaps of the vernacular variety. She learned to speak the language of Rome simply by sitting near Ava.

GLORIA

Shel, it's nice to meet you. Thank you so much.

SHEL

It's the least I could do. When I collapsed I thought I was done for, I don't know what you guys did to me but you saved me.

GLORIA

Kinda what we do.

AVA

Okay, two things need to happen. 1) Someone needs to get me a towel and a cigarette. 2) Shel is going to die on this planet. We need to figure something out.

GLORIA

Okay. Leif, get a towel and a cigarette, okay?

LEIF

Yeah.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

Thanks for saving our friends, Shel.

SHEL

I've been wandering so long, trying to stay in the sun, I couldn't even remember why I was doing it. Everyone was gone. I knew eventually I was going to end up like them. Why endure? Why not just lie down and die. Then I saw you guys, and I realized I had been staying alive for this. Thanks for giving it meaning.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

We're probably going to jump soon, guys.

GLORIA

I'm so sorry about your planet, Shel.

SHEL

You know, I've traveled more than any other member of my race. I may have walked across my entire planet, trying to stay in the sun. I may have met every member of my race. It's not like there was a lot of us to begin with. I would try and convince them to walk with me, but they were old. Set in their ways. The thing is, when I meet someone like me, we exchange spores. I carry the genetic information of everyone I've met inside of me. My entire race may be inside of me. So it doesn't feel like I'm dying alone. At least there's that.

SFX: LIGHTER. LONG DRAW OFF A CIGARETTE.

AVA
Maybe it's because I look like I'm covered in Peri-
Peri sauce right now, but I have no interest in
joining the plant pity party.

LEIF
Ava.

AVA
Shel, they're all dead. You are the last dinosaur.

SHEL
What's a-

AVA
It's a fucking tragedy. It really is. But you, my
little leaf-covered friend, are alive. So, mourn
all you want, but we're moving forward.

SHEL
Move forward where? I've got nowhere to move to.

AVA
Yes, you do. Because of what Gloria's about to say.

GLORIA
You're coming with us.

LEIF
Oh yeah? Cool.

SHEL
Coming... like in your ship?

GLORIA
It's a diner.

SHEL
I don't know what that means.

GLORIA
We travel all over the place, Shel. Tomorrow we'll
be a billion miles from here. The same thing the
day after that.

SHEL
You mean like... up there?

GLORIA
Yes, Shel. Up there.

SHEL

Oh, no no no no, that's not okay, I'm not okay with that. People aren't supposed to be up there. Not okay!

AVA

It does feel that way sometimes.

LEIF

It's going to be okay, Shel. You might like it.

SHEL

Nope. No. This is where I belong. Up there? No. No I can't do that. That's...

AVA

Shel, you said it yourself, you liked moving.

SHEL

Yes. Laterally. Up? No.

AVA

Look, we'll put you in a pot, we'll make sure your by a sunny window.

GLORIA

Ava.

SHEL

What does that mean?

GLORIA

Shel, you're going to die.

SHEL

Everybody else is dead. Why do I live? Who am I?

GLORIA

You're the only one left. And that changes things. It means your life doesn't belong to you anymore. It belongs to the ones that didn't get to live. You have to live for them now.

ZEBULON

Shel, I declined before to speak of the Garden of Eden, but that story parallels your own now. My people, like you, began in a garden. And then there was a great tragedy, and then a great journey. You are on that journey now.

AVA

Shel, this big thing in the sky, we call it a Dyson Sphere because the guy who used to talk about it was named Freeman Dyson.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

He had some pretty crazy ideas. Another idea of his was called a Dyson Tree. He imagined a tree that could live on a comet. Cruising through the universe, surviving on whatever nutrients the comet provided, until it finally crashed down on a planet and was able to take root in a new home.

GLORIA

You be the tree, we'll be the comet. Okay?

SFX: THE WORLD BEGINS TO CHANGE.

LEIF

Here we go.

SHEL

...What's going to happen?

GLORIA

It's going to be really fucking weird. But you'll get used to it.

SHEL

Get used to what?

SFX: SHEL'S WORLD VANISHES. SOUND OF SPACE TIME RUSHING BY.

SHEL (CONT'D)

What... what happened... where's my planet?... Where's my home...

GLORIA

It's going to be okay, Shel.

SHEL

It's all gone black, what are all those lights?

AVA

Those are stars going by.

SHEL

They're moving too fast.

LEIF

Shel, try and look at the pavement for a while. Sub-space really does a number you.

SHEL

The ground is too hard. My home is gone...

EFFIE

It's not Shel. Shel, sometimes home has to be inside you for a little bit.

SHEL
I don't feel good...

GLORIA
Shit, Leif?

LEIF
I got you, Shel.

SHEL
I can't stand up.

LEIF
I know. We're going to get you under the heat lamps again.

SHEL
Those were nice.

GLORIA
I'll get the door.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUND OF SPACE TIME FADES INTO THE BACKGROUND.

LEIF
Can you turn the lamps on?

GLORIA
Yeah, I've got it.

SFX: HEAT LAMPS BUZZ.

LEIF
(Laying Shel down on the counter.)
Okay. Here we go.

SHEL
...Massiksikiasuniasikia...

GLORIA
What's that?

AVA
I think it's a name.

GLORIA
That's a name? Is that a friend of yours?

SHEL
They were old... Brown around the edges... that's what happens when we get old, we turn brown at the edges... we liked the same hill in the morning... They were one of the first ones to go... They're gone now...

GLORIA

But you spent time with them. So, they're inside you now, right?

SHEL

... They're inside me now...

GLORIA

Then you need to find them a home.

SHEL

... I need to find all of them a home...

GLORIA

You will, Shel. We're going to help you. Rest now, okay?

LEIF

... Jeez, that got heavy really fucking fast.

GLORIA

Outside, Leif.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

LEIF

Am I going to get yelled at again? I keep getting yelled at.

AVA

I know, it's been really great for me. Come on.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SPACE TIME RUSHING BY.

GLORIA

They killed everyone, Leif.

LEIF

I know.

GLORIA

The Teds killed everything on that planet.

LEIF

I know that.

GLORIA

For what?

LEIF

So they could build a warp gate.

GLORIA

A fucking warp gate. There were things on that planet that had lives, Leif!

LEIF

You don't have to tell me.

GLORIA

So their spaceships could go a little faster, they killed everyone?!

LEIF

It's the galactic equivalent of someone building a freeway through your back yard.

GLORIA

It wasn't through their backyard, Leif, it was through their planet!

LEIF

None of this is my fault.

GLORIA

...

LEIF

...

GLORIA

We're using the doomsday device, Leif.

LEIF

No we're not.

AVA

What?

GLORIA

Yes we are, Leif.

LEIF

You can't.

AVA

There was a doomsday device and nobody told me?

GLORIA

Yes, we can.

AVA

(Chanting.)
Use it. Use it. Use it.

LEIF

You can't just burn everything down.

GLORIA

Like hell we can't! Look at what they're doing!

LEIF

If we use it, people are going to starve. They're going to get sick.

GLORIA

What are you talking about?

LEIF

There are a ton of planets in this system that are completely dependent on those gates. They can't support themselves. Entire planets with no agricultural base. Nothing. We shut down the Teds and everybody dies on those planets just like they did on Shel's.

GLORIA

Fuck!

LEIF

This is why the Teds are geniuses. They fucking suck and they're fucking indispensable. Let's say we go crazy and do it anyway. Let's say we shut it all down and send three galaxies into total chaos. Guess who makes their move when everything goes to shit? Låfftrax the fucking space pirate. You know, the guy whose goons tried to rip your arms off yesterday? Congratulations, you just went from three galaxies ruled by anal retentive fascists to three galaxies ruled by a chaotic psychopath. You want to pick one?

GLORIA

Fuuuuuuuuuuuuck.

AVA

For the record: I still say use it.

GLORIA

We're not using it.

AVA

Fine. You know I met a plant today that's more interesting than you guys.

GLORIA

They've got us trapped in their territory.

LEIF

Looks like it.

GLORIA

So, odds are, any planet we show up on the Teds are going to be running some kind of a racket.

LEIF

Oh absolutely. They're everywhere.

GLORIA

Fine... Fine... Okay, here's what we're going to do. The next planet we go to. We find out whatever the Teds are up to on that planet, we're going to find it, and we're going to fuck it up.

LEIF

We are?

GLORIA

That's what we're doing. I don't like these people Leif. I thought once I got away from Earth, people would stop sucking. They still suck, Leif. Whatever they're up to, we fuck it up. Do you understand me?

LEIF

Fuck it up how?

GLORIA

I don't know. We've got a scientist, a guy who can make stuff, a magical radio, and a PISSED OFF MEXICAN! That's going to have to be enough!

ZEBULON

And I will exact great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the lord-

EFFIE

Dear. Perhaps no Ezekiel at the moment?

ZEBULON

I was carried away

LEIF

You're scaring me a little bit.

GLORIA

They think they have us trapped in their territory, but that's not what it is. They're trapped in here with us.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

AVA
What the fuck was that?

LEIF
Gloria just declared war on an entire galactic
empire. Should go fine.

END.