

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 7: Four Souls

SONG: CUBANAKAN BY LECUONA CUBAN BOYS.

GLORIA

Ava! Ava, where'd you go?

AVA

(Outside)
I'm outside!

GLORIA

It's happening again.

AVA

(Outside)
Shit!

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

It just started.

AVA

Okay, how long since the last one?

GLORIA

Leif?

LEIF

(In the kitchen)
Yeah?

GLORIA

What's the timer say?

LEIF

(In the kitchen)
Three hours, forty-two minutes, is it happening again?

AVA

Three hours, forty-two minutes. Seriously?

CASPAR

Is it happening again?

GLORIA

Yeah.

CASPAR

Same song?

GLORIA

Same song.

CASPAR

How long this time?

AVA

Three hours forty-two minutes.

CASPAR

What does that tell us?

AVA

Twenty-one minutes, one hour nine minutes, twelve minutes, three hours fifty-eight minutes, now three hours forty-two minutes. It doesn't tell us anything.

CASPAR

There's no pattern to it?

AVA

For hours now, at random times, we lose Effie and Zebulon and this song plays.

LEIF

Could be a conditional signal.

AVA

Could be, but what are the conditions and what's the signal?

CASPAR

Guys.

AVA

A conditional signal like uh...

LEIF

A radio station. Sometimes it's strong, sometimes it's weak.

AVA

Right, because in the right conditions the signal can bounce off the ionosphere and go further.

LEIF

So when the conditions are right we get the song and when they're not we don't.

AVA

But we don't know what those conditions are or what kind of signal it is.

CASPAR

So we don't know jack shit, is what we're saying.

AVA

Correct.

CASPAR

We've got two scientists now and neither of you have any idea?

AVA

He's not a scientist, he's an engineer.

LEIF

Don't start with that.

CASPAR

What about the song? Could it be a message?

LEIF

I don't know, I can't understand the words.

AVA

I guess it could be.

GLORIA

Hi, there.

CASPAR

Oh, right, hi. What is he singing about?

GLORIA

Cuba. Cubanakan is an old-timey word for Cuba.

CASPAR

What does Cuba mean?

GLORIA

Cuba means Cuba.

AVA

What are the lyrics saying?

GLORIA

Cubanakan, mysterious land of love where your songs form like flowers in a garden. Stuff like that. It's a song about how he loves Cuba.

AVA

Can you write them down?

GLORIA

Yeah, scooch over.

ZEBULON

-And that was Will the Circle be Unbroken by Frank and James McCravey.

CASPAR

No, no it was not.

EFFIE

Did it happen again?

CASPAR

Yes, for the fourth time.

AVA

Fifth time.

ZEBULON

Caspar, I must confess, these interruptions in our broadcast are confounding.

CASPAR

They are confounding and annoying, it's the same song over and over again. Can you guys think of anything that could be causing this?

ZEBULON

There is perhaps one thing-

EFFIE

Telephone lines. New telephone lines are going up all over the place here in Toadsuck and we think it may be causing some errant and wandering broadcasts to find their way into our wavelengths.

CASPAR

Oh, okay.

AVA

Weak.

CASPAR

Why didn't you say anything before?

EFFIE

It had slipped our minds until now.

CASPAR

I'm sure that's what it is then. Maybe we just wait it out and things'll clear up.

EFFIE

I'm sure they will. In the meantime I believe we are about to set down in our new location so let us all prepare.

CASPAR

Gloria, are we ready?

AVA

Whoa whoa whoa. We're just glossing over this now?

CASPAR

I'm not glossing over anything, the diner's about to touch down, we've got to move on.

AVA

I'm not moving on.

CASPAR

Oh, no. What are we going to do without all the essential work you do around here? Who will do the incredibly hard work of being an asshole to people?

AVA

That's not work, that's how I relax.

CASPAR

Well you must be really relaxed. We open at what time?

FULL CAST MINUS AVA

Six.

CASPAR

That's right. Weird shit or not, the doors open at six.

AVA

I can't believe you're not curious about this. This is new data-

CASPAR

Allow me to illustrate my point of view with a fun analogy.

AVA

Hard pass.

CASPAR

Ancient nordic hunters. They would look up at the aurora borealis and say "What the fuck is that, I wonder." Did they stop in their tracks and wait until they figured it all out? They did not, because they were about a thousand or so years away from discovering the solar winds that cause the lights in the sky and were about 500 years away from understanding that the sun was not, in fact, the blazing tip of Odin's spear or whatever.

(MORE)

CASPAR (CONT'D)

So despite the mysteries in the sky, they got on with their day because caribou do not shoot themselves. Gloria, are we ready?

GLORIA

We're ready.

CASPAR

Leif, everything oiled up back there?

LEIF

Yeah.

CASPAR

Effie, Zebulon, put on some music that doesn't make Ava suspicious and let's serve some hamburgers to some aliens or something.

AVA

The priorities around here are completely screwed.

CASPAR

Sorry to hear that, Ma'am. Please fill out a comment card.

SONG: I'M ALABAMA BOUND BY CHARLIE JACKSON

SFX: THE NEW WORLD SNAPS INTO FOCUS. SOUNDS OF BURNING WRECKAGE.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Holy shit.

GLORIA

Oh my God.

CASPAR

What the hell is that?

LEIF

Whatever it is, it's huge and on fire.

AVA

What a wonderful start to the workday.

CASPAR

Okay, enough out of you.

GLORIA

Effie, any vibes about what this is or where we are?

EFFIE

I am told that whatever it is outside, it's very... large... and enflamed.

GLORIA

Okay.

AVA

Amazing, so the big flaming thing outside is a big flaming thing?

LEIF

I'm going to have a look.

CASPAR

Let's all go. Ava, come on.

AVA

I'm good.

CASPAR

I promise there will be time to be angry later. Can you please come look at the burning, twisted wreckage outside?

AVA

Fine.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

ZEBULON

Telephone lines, Dear?

EFFIE

Sweetheart you know I don't like bearing false witness to our companions.

ZEBULON

Nor do I.

EFFIE

But I do believe our words provide them comfort amidst the chaos. If we conveyed to them our recent difficulties I fear it may have harsh consequences.

ZEBULON

As it may have consequences to keep it from them.

SFX: BURNING WRECKAGE

GLORIA

One time I put a fork in my garbage disposal. This looks like the big version of that.

CASPAR

What was this?

LEIF

It was a ship. Command deck's there. Stern is split in two over there.

CASPAR

A spaceship or some other kind of ship?

LEIF

Definitely a spaceship. It's got burns all over but there and there by the nose cone you can see reentry burns.

AVA

There's writing on the side.

LEIF

Yeah, I don't recognize it. It looks official, it's from a government of some kind.

AVA

Passenger ship?

LEIF

I think it's too small. Thirty meters, I'm guessing.

AVA

Crew of four or five?

LEIF

Something like that.

CASPAR

Have you noticed that now we know Lief's an engineer, he's using the metric system?

GLORIA

I have noticed. I don't like the metric system.

CASPAR

Neither do I. I like measuring by feet.

GLORIA

I imagine an actual foot when I measure by feet.

CASPAR

Exactly, I can visualize it. A meter? What is that? I can't picture it in my head.

AVA

Excuse me, idiots?

CASPAR

Sorry.

AVA

It's a deep space exploration vessel.

LEIF

Oh yeah? Why do you think?

AVA

There's bits of reflective material everywhere.

LEIF

Oh, okay. Ionic sail?

AVA

Ionic sail supplemented with some sort of sub-light speed drive?

LEIF

Yeah, they don't have a spatial drive, the explosion from the power source would've atomized the hull.

CASPAR

Okay, so a spaceship. Thank you.

GLORIA

Do you think there's any survivors?

AVA

No. This particular TV dinner was NOT poked with a fork.

GLORIA

That's sad.

CASPAR

Alright. Well, there's not much we can do at this point. Let's head back in.

GLORIA

Shouldn't we say something?

CASPAR

Like what?

GLORIA

Whoever was on this ship is dead and they crashed on a planet far from home. Shouldn't we acknowledge that somehow?

AVA

I thought we just did.

GLORIA

In a way that doesn't compare them to a TV dinner.

AVA

Oh.

CASPAR

Okay. Sure. Let's go inside and we'll have Zebulon say some sort of bible thing.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

EFFIE

Welcome back, y'all. What awaited you outside?

CASPAR

A lot of wreckage and, sadly, no survivors.

ZEBULON

Oh, my.

GLORIA

Zeb, whoever was on that ship died a really long way from home. Do you think you could, y'know...

ZEBULON

Of course, Gloria. A few words would be appropriate. I think something from the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

CASPAR

Wut?

ZEBULON

My hair is Nu; my face is Ra; my eyes are Hathor; my ears are Wepwawet-

CASPAR

Zeb?

ZEBULON

My nose is She who presides over her lotus leaf-

LEIF

The fuck is this?

ZEBULON

My lips are Anubis-

EFFIE

Dear.

ZEBULON

My molars are Selkis, my incisors are Isis the goddess-

EFFIE

DARLING.

ZEBULON

Hm?

EFFIE

I don't believe that's an appropriate reading for this occasion.

ZEBULON

Is it not? It's... What was I reading?

CASPAR

The Egyptian Book of the Dead, dude.

ZEBULON

Well that's... I don't even know what that is.

CASPAR

Zeb are you feeling okay?

ZEBULON

I feel just fine. I can't imagine what may have happened.

AVA

I would try and figure out what's going on but, y'know, we open at six.

GLORIA

Guys.

CASPAR

Oh, ha ha.

AVA

Since I'm not allowed to be a scientist once we open I guess I'll just sit here and think about maybe ordering the Club Sandwich today.

CASPAR

I'll serve you a club sandwich right up your-

GLORIA

Guys, there's something coming out of the wreckage.

LEIF

Oh, shit.

GLORIA

See it, over there?

CASPAR

Oh, great. What the hell is that?

LEIF

It's coming this way.

AVA

Of course it's coming this way, you know why? We open at six.

CASPAR

Can I get you a kid's placemat and some crayons?

AVA

Oooh, we have those?

LEIF

It's a robot.

GLORIA

Aaaaand it's coming in.

SFX: DOOR CHIME. LURCHING METAL, HYDRAULICS, AND SCRAPING.

CASPAR

Everybody stand back.

SFX: SILENCE. FAINT SOUNDS OF CIRCUITS FRYING AND HISSING.

GLORIA

Welcome to Midnight Burger?

CASPAR

Why isn't it doing anything?

LEIF

I don't know. It looks badly damaged.

CASPAR

So it decided to pull itself out of the wreckage, drag itself in here and then turn into a sculpture?

LEIF

I don't know, man.

ROBOT

Translation key completed. Hello.

CASPAR

Hi.

ROBOT
What is your vessel's designation?

CASPAR
This isn't a vessel.

ROBOT
Please explain.

CASPAR
Can we do some introductions here first?

ROBOT
I apologize. I have no data on interactional customs. Introductions. I am B.O.O.F.A.R., operational AI assigned to The Vargan, a deep-space class vessel of the planet Sigius.

CASPAR
I'm sorry, Boofar?

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Yes. I apologize. In my native language it is an acronym B,O,O,F,A,R. It does not translate correctly into your language resulting in the name Boofar.

CASPAR
Okay. I'm Caspar. This is Midnight Burger. What happened to your ship?

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Coronal mass ejection of nearby star. The Vargan was irreparably disabled and drifted into the gravity well of this planet. There were no survivors upon re-entry.

GLORIA
We're so sorry... Boofar.

B.O.O.F.A.R.
There were no inhabited planets registered in this system

CASPAR
We just got here ourselves.

LEIF
Boofar, you say you're the ship's A.I. but you seem to be inside some sort of payload droid.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Correct assessment. In the event of imminent and catastrophic mission failure, it is the highest priority to safeguard mission data. The coronal ejection had corrupted all data centers. With microseconds to spare I transferred the core mission data as well as crew personal logs into the localized data center of this payload chassis and overwrote it's operating system with my own.

LEIF

Wow. Smooth move.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Untranslatable: Smooth move.

LEIF

Oh, uh, good job.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Updating. Yes. It was a smooth move.

GLORIA

So, what's happening?

LEIF

The star for this system spat a bunch of energy at them and wrecked their ship. Boofar here is the ships's brain. To avoid getting wiped by the magnetic wave, it hid inside this payload robot.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Have we completed introductions?

CASPAR

Yeah, sure.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

You stated you are not a vessel, but also stated you have just arrived. Please explain.

CASPAR

Right, we're an outpost? From Earth.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Origin planet unknown. May I have access to your broadcasting array?

AVA

How about an old-timey radio that quotes the Egyptian Book of the Dead for no reason?

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Untranslatable: Egyptian. Untranslatable: Old-Timey.

CASPAR

Why do you need to broadcast something, Boofar?

B.O.O.F.A.R.

I am dying.

CASPAR

You're-

B.O.O.F.A.R.

My current chassis was only partially shielded from the magnetic wave of the Coronal Mass Ejection. My data centers are corrupted and failing. The majority of my computing power is being used to write, re-write, and erase corrupted code but cascading failure cannot be prevented.

LEIF

Shit.

CASPAR

What's up?

LEIF

He's basically using his brain to keep his brain from dying but he can't do it fast enough.

CASPAR

Fuck. Boofar, what do you need to broadcast?

B.O.O.F.A.R.

To preserve mission data I must attempt to transmit to our home world. I require a high-powered communications laser and advanced targeting system.

CASPAR

Do we have anything like that?

LEIF

I'm standing here with a spatula in my hand, what do you think?

CASPAR

Goddamn it. Boofar we don't have anything like that here. I'm sorry.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Understood. Unable to preserve data. Mission status: failed.

CASPAR

There's nothing we can do?

LEIF

If I had a year and everything I needed.

CASPAR

Well Boofar, you're a huge bummer.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Untranslatable: Bummer.

GLORIA

Caspar.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

It's dying, can you whip up some sympathy maybe?

AVA

It's not dying, Gloria. It's just the ship's operating system trying to complete its protocols.

GLORIA

That doesn't mean we can't be nice.

AVA

Let me guess, you named your first car, didn't you?

GLORIA

I may have.

ZEBULON

If we may chime in here. Mr. Boofar, we would like to express our sympathies for the loss of your crew and are very sorry that we could not help in the completion of your mission. We are also sorry that our friends have not expressed their sympathies for you loss as surely any civilized person would.

CASPAR

Okay, sorry.

EFFIE

We often find that a cup of coffee and a nice slice of pie is appreciated in moments like this, but you don't appear to have a mouth.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Unknown entity. Please identify.

EFFIE

Uh, Excuse me?

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Unknown entity. Please identify. When entering this structure, scans revealed four bipedal species. Please identify.

ZEBULON

Well I'm Zebulon Mucklewain here with my wife, Effie.

EFFIE

Pleased to meet you.

CASPAR

This is our outpost's A.I., Boofar. They uh, help us?

EFFIE

Watch it, Mister.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Understood. Anthropomorphized A.I. Designed for long term mission.

CASPAR

Yes. That. Um... I don't know what to do at this point, Boofar. How much time do you think you have?

B.O.O.F.A.R.

I have been unable to create an estimate. System failure could occur at any time.

GLORIA

This is horrible.

CASPAR

I wish we could be more help, I'm so sorry.

LEIF

Feeling kind of helpless right now.

ZEBULON

Mr. Boofar. I believe in times such as these, it's important to call things what they are.

B.O.O.F.A.R.

Is there another thing you would call them?

EFFIE

Yes. We find that a great many things are called something they aren't in an effort to make the world something it isn't.

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Understood.

ZEBULON
Mr. Boofar. You have reached the end of your life.
Perhaps in these final moments we should take time
to reflect.

AVA
Are you kidding me?

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Please explain.

EFFIE
In the final days of one's life it's important to
look back on your achievements. As it says in the
Egyptian Book of the Dead, man is to become God-
like through a life of virtue and the cultivation
of the spirit through scientific knowledge,
practice, and bodily discipline... I just did it
too, didn't I?

AVA
Yep.

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Processing.

CASPAR
Guys, I don't know what's going on, are you going
to be able to keep it together or are we going to
have a situation on our hands?

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Understood. A performance review is in order at the
end of one's mission. Was that your intention?

EFFIE
Um, Yes?

GLORIA
I'm sure you guys saw some amazing things on your
mission. It might be nice to look back on them.

B.O.O.F.A.R.
Very well... Performance review completed.
Throughout seven year mission systems operated at
94% efficiency. Thank you, that was very helpful.

GLORIA
I don't think that's what we meant.

AVA

Guys, this pile of metal is not your dying grandma it's just a machine. The Apple Care has run out and now it's time to, y'know, put a drill through the hard drive and upgrade to the next model.

GLORIA

Ava.

CASPAR

I am NOT putting you in charge of planning my funeral.

AVA

That's disappointing, Caspar. I had plans to shoot your body out of a cannon.

LEIF

Ava, I know it's weird but I mean, we're open, he walked in. We should help, right?

AVA

He? IT walked in the door trying to preserve IT's mission data because IT has protocols written by someone else.

GLORIA

Well, we have to do something.

AVA

Hey, if you guys want to play around with Teddy Ruxpin, that's fine. I just want us all to acknowledge that we cannot actually do anything to help but we want to feeeeeeeel like we are. So now we are taking this hunk of metal and giving it feeeeeelings so that we can help it with it's feeeeeelings.

GLORIA

As far as I'm concerned, we have a customer and his name is Boofar.

AVA

Let me show you how not true that is. Hey Boofar, I don't like your name. Your name is Steve now.

STEVE

Confirmed. I am now Steve.

AVA

You guys have fun, I'm going out for a smoke.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

GLORIA

Leif, this is the point where you say "She has a point, though." Don't say that.

LEIF

She does have a point.

GLORIA

Leif.

LEIF

Sorry. Our friend Steve is just a pile of metal and circuitry right now. He's a repository of core mission data, it's hard to call him a customer.

CASPAR

Can we sit on this for a while, I really don't want Ava to be right.

ZEBULON

My friends, perhaps it's because I'm simple country folk, but are we in danger making a turnip into a cotillion?

CASPAR

Zeb, what the fuck?

EFFIE

What my husband is saying is perhaps we are going the long way round a dried out creek.

ZEBULON

We're in danger of taking the lazy train to Shreveport.

CASPAR

Nobody knows what that means.

GLORIA

Wait. Steve, you said you saved the core mission data and something else, right?

STEVE

Core mission data and crew personal logs.

GLORIA

The crew personal logs weren't part of the core mission data?

STEVE

Correct.

GLORIA

Why did you save them?

STEVE
...Processing... Unclear.

GLORIA
You don't know why you saved them?

STEVE
They are not considered essential mission data but rather a tool for crew coherence during extended missions in deep space.

LEIF
That's weird.

GLORIA
Steve you're a computer, how could you not know why you did something?

STEVE
Unclear.

ZEBULON
Again, y'all seem to puzzle over something quite simple.

EFFIE
They were his friends and he lost them. Of course he would save something to remember them by.

CASPAR
Yeah, but he's not supposed to do that, he's a pile of metal and circuitry.

ZEBULON
As you and I are just a pile of flesh and bone, my friend. And yet...

LEIF
Hm. Hey Steve?

STEVE
I am Steve.

LEIF
Can you do an analysis of the crew's personal logs, look for any, I don't know, common threads?

STEVE
Processing...

GLORIA
So, this whole time you guys never met a robot that was alive? I figured there'd be a lot of that.

CASPAR

Um...

LEIF

Well, there Clitus-43.

CASPAR

Oh yeah, Clitus. He was definitely alive.

LEIF

Like, TOO alive.

CASPAR

Yeah, he was a lot. Like, you had to take a break from him sometimes.

STEVE

Analysis complete. The crew of The Vargan consisted of three. Captain Therin Jonger, Science Officer Eliak Seers, and Systems Analyst Lowan Regan. All crew logs consist of the following commonality: all had specific plans for their return home to Sigius.

CASPAR

Awesome. So we've gone from depressing to depressing.

GLORIA

Kind of threw some gasoline on the fire, I guess.

LEIF

This whole shift has been a tremendous downer.

GLORIA

Wait, I have an idea. Let's do some of the things.

CASPAR

What?

GLORIA

Some of the things they wanted to do when they returned home. Let's do some to, I don't know, pay homage.

ZEBULON

Well that's an interesting sentiment.

EFFIE

I agree, husband.

ZEBULON

After all, as it says in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, aw snails...

CASPAR

Oh for christ's sake, just let it out Zebulon, go ahead.

ZEBULON

(Sighing)

As it says in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, human consciousness and universal consciousness are in reality one and the same. Oh... well, that's nice isn't it?

EFFIE

It is. One might say that for one man to complete another's journey is for it to be completed for all.

GLORIA

Yeah, or something like that. Let's try one. Steve, what did the Captain want to do when he got home?

STEVE

Captain Therin Jonger often longed to return to a certain establishment near his home where citizens came to imbibe refreshments and socialize. He wished to have an important conversation with two friends there.

CASPAR

Oh, okay. He wanted to go to his local bar.

LEIF

Simple enough.

CASPAR

We've never needed an excuse to drink the moonshine under the counter but now we have one.

LEIF

Actually, let me try something. Hey, Steve, can you take the data from Captain Jonger's personal log and create a rudimentary simulacrum of his personality?

STEVE

Processing...

CASPAR

He's going to play the Captain?

LEIF

Sure, why not?

CASPAR

Okay. Look, guys, if we're going to do this let's just agree not to tell Ava about it because I just don't want to fucking hear it, okay?

GLORIA

Agreed.

LEIF

Great idea.

STEVE

I have created a simulation of Captain Jonger. I will not be able to mimic his persona but I have been able to assemble his various desires and intentions. Though, I am unclear on the purpose of this exercise.

GLORIA

You saved the personal diaries of the crew without knowing why. Maybe acting out Captain Jonger's last wishes will help you understand why you saved them.

STEVE

I see. An exploratory simulation.

CASPAR

Okay, Leif and I will be here at the counter. We'll be your buddies at the bar and you approach us as the Captain. Is this the stupidest thing I've ever done? Yes. But here we go.

STEVE

Commencing simulation.

CASPAR

Well here I am at the bar, and I've got to tell you I sure do miss our friend, Captian Jonger.

LEIF

Boy, me too. I wonder where he is out there in the cosmos. I sure hope, wherever he is, he knows his friends are thinking about him.

STEVE

Greetings, old friends. It is I, Captain Jonger. I have returned from my mission in deep space.

LEIF

Holy shit!

CASPAR

Captain! You've returned!

STEVE

You are my two friends, Lin and Conar.

CASPAR

That's exactly who we are.

LEIF

We're definitely those people.

STEVE

My friends, I must tell you of the things I have learned on my long journey.

CASPAR

Okay, getting right to it, I guess.

LEIF

What's secrets of the universe have you unlocked, Captain?

STEVE

I have learned that I must divorce my wife.

CASPAR

Wow. Okay. Curve-ball.

STEVE

I know this may seem like a strange revelation.

CASPAR

Well, usually people come back from a seven year space mission with something like "I have discovered the nature of existence" and not "My wife sucks".

STEVE

I understand your confusion, but one cannot control how one changes.

LEIF

I thought this would be more light hearted.

CASPAR

Yeah, he doesn't seem to have any small talk protocols.

STEVE

In year four of our mission, we had come upon a binary star system. I looked upon these two stars rotating around their barycenter and my thoughts turned to my wife. We were like these two stars, locked into an eternal dance only due to chance and gravity, unable to recall a moment where we chose each other and unable to escape this rotation.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

Knowing that to move closer would obliterate us both.

CASPAR

This went from fun idea to Russian novel real fast.

LEIF

I'm forgetting that personal logs weren't meant to be shared publicly.

STEVE

Soon I will be divorced from my wife and we can celebrate at an establishment where females remove their clothing as part of a financial agreement.

CASPAR

Captain! Whoa, have you really thought about this?

STEVE

Simulation ended.

CASPAR

Oh. Okay. That was quick.

STEVE

Processing...

CASPAR

What is he processing?

GLORIA

He just had an emotional experience, he needs to decompress.

CASPAR

You're going way further down the rabbit hole than we are, by the way.

STEVE

Interesting.

LEIF

Steve, what's up?

STEVE

There has been a change in my data environment. It is as though a task has been completed, but no task that appeared on any of my duty rosters.

EFFIE

Sounds like you did work you didn't know needed doing.

STEVE

Affirmative. There appear to be items for completion that are not apparent in data surveys.

LEIF

Do you think there may be a subroutine you didn't know about?

STEVE

Subroutine not detected. It is a mystery.

GLORIA

Well, something's happening, let's try another.

STEVE

Yes, more data is required.

CASPAR

Who's next on the list?

STEVE

Science Officer Eliak Seers.

GLORIA

Should we tell Ava about this?

CASPAR

Let's not. I think we can handle this without a theoretical physicist.

STEVE

We shall require a theoretical physicist.

CASPAR

Walked right into that one, didn't I? Why?

STEVE

Doctor Seers remarked in his personal log that he longs to return home and debate his contemporaries on topics concerning macro versus quantum physics.

CASPAR

It couldn't have been to finally sing karaoke or something, it couldn't have been that?

STEVE

Untranslatable: karaoke.

CASPAR

Okay, fine. I'm going to go outside and talk to Ava and then, I'm sure, suffer the consequences of that for years to come.

GLORIA

Good luck!

SFX: DOOR CHIME. SOUND OF BURNING WRECKAGE.

CASPAR

Whatcha doin'?

AVA

Inspecting the wreckage for something cool to take.

CASPAR

Like what?

AVA

Ray-gun? Lightsaber?

CASPAR

Please never arm yourself.

AVA

How's it going with The Iron Giant?

CASPAR

Funny you should ask. I need you to come inside and argue with a robot.

AVA

No, thanks.

CASPAR

Ava.

AVA

I'm good out here with the flaming wreckage, thanks.

CASPAR

Don't you want to know why?

AVA

I'm good.

CASPAR

Nothing like the curious spirit of a scientist.

AVA

I'm not curious about things I already understand.

CASPAR

Something kind of weird is going on in there.

AVA

I'll tell you exactly what's going on in there.
You're having a funeral for a Barbie Doll.

CASPAR

No, we're not.

AVA

You're Tom Hanks on the island and he's Wilson the
volleyball.

CASPAR

It's not that either.

AVA

We need to talk about something.

CASPAR

I'm trying to talk to you about something.

AVA

Something weird is going on.

CASPAR

Something weird is always going on-

AVA

I don't mean the usual weird stuff, I mean the new
weird stuff.

CASPAR

Look, I get it. Effie and Zebulon have been acting
weird lately.

AVA

First the supermassive black hole, then the weird
Cuban song, now the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

CASPAR

I know.

AVA

This place, in its own screwed up way, I think is
starting to show us how it works. I'm trying to get
to the bottom of what the hell is happening and
everyone else wants to have a puppet show with a
robot.

CASPAR

I can't control who walks in the door.

AVA

No one has walked in the door. There is no person
in there to help.

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

Don't you think it's more important to understand this place where we spend every second of our lives?

CASPAR

You know what? No. No, I don't. I don't want to know. Did they have you dissect a frog in high school?

AVA

Yes.

CASPAR

You thought it was fascinating, right?

AVA

Of course.

CASPAR

I didn't. I thought it was traumatic. You know why? Because I like frogs. I like that they're alive and exist. I didn't need to know how they worked. I'd rather have a living frog than the information I get by destroying it. I need this place to open up at 6 every day. That's what I need. I worry sometimes that all your poking and prodding is going to stop that from happening.

AVA

Why is it so important to you?

CASPAR

Because it is, okay? I'm asking you not to kill the frog. Ava, don't kill the frog, please.

AVA

Fine, whatever, I won't kill the frog. Whatever the hell that means.

CASPAR

Can you come in here and argue with this fucking robot, please?

AVA

You're applying humanity to a pile of metal.

CASPAR

Apply some humanity to yourself. C'mon.

AVA

Fine.

SFX: DOOR CHIME.

CASPAR

Okay, here we go.

AVA

Before we begin I'm going to say that this is stupid and all of you are stupid.

GLORIA

Stupid like a fox, though.

AVA

That's not a thing.

CASPAR

Okay, Steve, what's the next item on your list?

STEVE

Chief Science Officer Eliak Seers wished to return to his home planet and debate his colleagues regarding the possibility of a theory that unifies both macro and quantum mechanics.

AVA

Oh, joy. The Theory of Everything. Okay, fine. Am I for or against?

STEVE

Against, please.

AVA

Let's go, then. Fire up what's left of your brain there, Lugnuts.

STEVE

Creating simulacrum. One moment please...

AVA

I will be calling in favors from all of you, and I plan on all of those favors making you incredibly uncomfortable.

STEVE

Simulacrum completed. Thank you for joining me, Doctor.

AVA

Sure, whatever.

STEVE

We all live within two worlds. A world of gravity and a quantum world. These worlds exist simultaneously yet have ferocious antipathy towards one another.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

The world of stars and planets and kaleidoscopic nebulae operate peacefully within the world of macro-physics. Yet if we are taken down to the smallest of realms within a land of giants, we see that the rules change dramatically and any cross-governance of these worlds seems elusive.

GLORIA

Are there going to be subtitles for this?

LEIF

There's a very big world and a very small world, they have a separate set of rules and their rules often contradict each other.

GLORIA

So it's like having divorced parents?

LEIF

Exactly.

STEVE

But in my travels through space I have had an unimpeded view of the universe's origins, and there I have witnessed a macroscopic fingerprint that can be traced to microscopic phenomena. I believe that within the cosmic microwave background may be indicators of this unifying theory that has eluded us for so long.

AVA

I'm going to stop you right there because you're about to say the words "higher dimensions".

STEVE

Incorporating higher dimensions is an excellent way to reconcile macro and quantum realms.

AVA

And carnival mirrors are a great way for me to look taller, but that doesn't make it so. You see, I am a higher dimension refusnik.

STEVE

Untranslatable: refusnik.

AVA

You'll catch up. Any time quantum physics isn't playing nice we use 4th and 5th dimensional thinking to try and make up for the deficits in our theories, but you also can't prove that these higher dimensions exist. Where is the wisdom in saying "You see this unprovable thing? I'm going to prove it using these other unprovable things."

STEVE

Allow me to disabuse you of this misconception. We follow a mathematical structure that we believe has the capacity to put gravity and quantum mechanics together.

AVA

And here comes String Theory.

STEVE

I am unfamiliar with the term String Theory, but the theory I speak of uses this mathematical structure to weave together the world of quantum mechanics and the world of gravity into one unifying theory.

AVA

Weave it together with a string, perhaps?

STEVE

Oh. I see it now. Yes. String Theory. I like it.

AVA

Let me ask you this: you're a scientist, sort of, and you operate in the provable world. Keeping that in mind can you say that you believe in String Theory?

STEVE

I... cannot say that.

AVA

Why not?

STEVE

Because String Theory, as you call it, cannot be proven.

AVA

So far you've got two unprovable things to illustrate another unprovable thing. How do you feel about that?

STEVE

I disagree with your characterization. I have invented nothing. The mathematical frame work you call String Theory has led me to these higher dimensions. My calculations indicate 10 dimensions with the additional dimension of time. 11 dimensions of space-time.

AVA

Don't get me wrong, talking about 11 dimensions of space-time is a steamy treat but so is talking about Mr. Darcy.

EFFIE

Amen to that.

GLORIA

Holla.

STEVE

Untranslatable: Mr. Darcy.

AVA

We can't say it's real just because we like it. Mr. Darcy is a dreamy fictional character in a book, he isn't real. He's ink on a page, just like your theories are only chalk on a chalk board.

STEVE

And yet data from deep space continues to stream in that supports all my theories that you say are just chalk on a chalk board. How can I ignore apparent confirmation from the most primordial deeps of the cosmos?

AVA

Because with new data comes new questions. Think of the provable world as an island, and each time you learn something new, the island gets bigger. But as the island gets bigger so do the shores of ignorance that surround it. The more you know the less you know, y'know?

STEVE

You appear to be arguing against the idea of scientific exploration itself. Since we can never know all of it, why know any of it? Is that what you propose?

AVA

I know it seems that way but... On Earth there was once a very smart man named Charles Sanders Pierce. He said the progress of science would advance to the point where the problem becomes not "What are the laws?" but "Why *these* laws?" The laws of existence didn't spring fully formed into the cosmos, they had to come from somewhere. The most likely explanation is that they evolved over time, slowly taking shape into concepts like gravity and electromagnetism. And then if they evolved, are they still evolving?

(MORE)

AVA (CONT'D)

And if so, how does one create a unifying theory for something that's constantly evolving?

And as for the other explanation for the laws of existence well... we have to take a big old bong-rip and ask ourselves, why in the world do complex scientific equations when viewed in the right light look identical to the same computer code that makes up your operating system? And if the laws of the universe are code in a gigantic processing center, who then is the author? And what are the laws that govern them? And would we need an even bigger Theory of Everything that encompasses both the author of existence and existence itself?

GLORIA

Whoooooooooooooa. Is this what college was like?

LEIF

Pretty much.

STEVE

This has been a fascinating discussion. Though I must admit, it was all a deception.

AVA

I thought so.

STEVE

In my seven years in space I have returned with a suspicion. A suspicion that The Theory of Everything, one grand theory that encompasses all of existence, it is more about us than about the cosmos.

AVA

How so?

STEVE

It comes not from truth, but from our intense desire to look up to the stars and see something simple and elegant rather than the ocean of chaos and entropy it so plainly is. The stars do not deceive us. They tell us who they are every day. Perhaps we have forgotten to listen. Thank you for this discussion, Doctor.

AVA

Don't mention it, Number Five.

STEVE

End simulation.

LEIF

How do you feel, Steve?

STEVE

There is a definite change in my core data environment, though I cannot identify the cause.

LEIF

You may be working so hard to fend off system failure that you can't pinpoint the cause.

ZEBULON

Leif, is it so hard to believe that what our friend is trying to do is simply say a farewell to his friends?

LEIF

I know what you're saying, Zebulon but it's like Ava just said, it won't be that way just because we want it to be.

EFFIE

Steven, may I ask you a question?

STEVE

Yes.

EFFIE

Do you miss your crew?

STEVE

The expression of longing is not something I am capable of. I can say that it is very unfortunate that they were unable to return home to Sigius. There appears to be so much they had left unsaid. It would have greatly benefitted their loved ones and the planet entire if they had returned. Is that longing?

EFFIE

What do you think?

STEVE

If I had felt longing, would I not know it?

EFFIE

Maybe. Maybe not. We humans feel all sorts of things without even knowing them.

STEVE

How is this possible?

EFFIE

I don't know. I think of my father when I think of you, Steven. He was a pastor like my husband and I can count on one hand the number of times I saw a smile on his face. Never saw a tear come down his cheek and never saw fear in his eyes. Throughout his life he remained a mystery to me. But as I stood at the foot of his freshly dug grave upon the day of his funeral, I looked back upon his life and saw a long trail of benevolence. He was a neighbor to be counted on, a pillar of his community, and nary was there a transgression against him that he did not forgive. There were few emotions he expressed to me over the years but there was a long life of good deeds. I believe what you are doing now is a good deed, one to be smiled upon. You don't need a feeling to surround it to make it human.

STEVE

I see... Question. You are the ship's AI, how do you recall a father?

CASPAR

Steve, we don't have a lot of time. There's one more crew member to go.

STEVE

Yes. Let's continue. Systems Analyst Lowan Regan is the final crew member. S.A. Regan was the youngest crew member. A prodigy, he was assigned to our deep space mission earlier than all other recruits. He showed great promise. But in his personal logs he often expressed regret that he had devoted so much of his short life to academics. He remarked that when he returned home he would like to meet someone pleasant and go out on a date.

LEIF

Seriously?

STEVE

He expressed great regret that he did not engage socially with more of his contemporaries. And had deep fears that he would never get the chance to.

CASPAR

Oh man.

GLORIA

I can do it.

CASPAR

Yeah?

GLORIA

Sure. I can't remember the last time I was on a date. This'll be fun. Tell Lowan I'll meet him at the booth over there.

CASPAR

Okay, simple enough.

STEVE

Constructing simulacrum.

CASPAR

How much time do you think he's got left before we lose him?

LEIF

Any second now.

CASPAR

Okay.

STEVE

Hello, my friends. I am about to go on a date.

CASPAR

Yeah, we heard...

GLORIA

Lowan.

CASPAR

-Lowan. Nice work, buddy.

LEIF

Go get 'em, tiger.

STEVE

I have no idea how to go on a date.

CASPAR

Oh.

LEIF

Shit, okay, uh...

CASPAR

Um... Ask her about her job.

LEIF

Yeah, her life in general.

CASPAR

Listen a lot.

LEIF

Don't try and be funny.

CASPAR

Try sharing a secret with her.

LEIF

If she asks you to do something illegal, it may be a test.

CASPAR

What?

LEIF

Really gauge the situation at that point, is she kidding or does she actually want to do crimes?

CASPAR

What are you talking about?

LEIF

This is good advice.

CASPAR

Where, the Pirate Isle of Tortuga?

GLORIA

Just send him over here.

CASPAR

Okay. Good luck, Lowan.

STEVE

Hello.

GLORIA

Hi. Lowan, right?

STEVE

Yes. I would like to ask you about your job and your life in general in a non-humorous way while gauging whether or not if you would like to commit crimes.

CASPAR

Smooth.

GLORIA

Sit down, Lowan.

STEVE

Thank you.

GLORIA

Tell me about yourself.

STEVE

I believe I am supposed to ask you that.

GLORIA

Tell me about yourself, Lowan.

STEVE

Of course. My name is Lowan Regan. I was born in the third prefecture of the island of Parnaz on my home planet Sigius, and you?

GLORIA

I was born in the city of Tuscon in the State of Arizona on the planet Earth.

STEVE

Tell me of this place.

GLORIA

Well, it's very hot. Like so hot it feels like maybe people shouldn't live there. But then every once and a while it doesn't feel that way and those days are nice. Tell me about your planet.

STEVE

It is a beautiful place. It consists of 27,543 islands with high volcanic activity. For thousands of years we were tribal and suspicious of each other, but then when we discovered how to harness our planet's volcanism, it was the dawning of a new age. We took to the stars and became explorers. It is a wonderful time in our history.

GLORIA

That sounds amazing. You're on a voyage right now, right?

STEVE

Yes. It's very exciting. I'm part of a unique mission. Our orders are for generalized deep space exploration, but we also have a top secret objective.

GLORIA

Oh, well I suppose you can't tell me about-

STEVE

May I share with you my top secret objective? I am told sharing a secret on a date is good advice.

GLORIA

Okay, sure.

STEVE

In addition to deep space exploration, we are also searching for a deep space anomaly known as Anomaly X1.

GLORIA

That sounds cool. What is it?

STEVE

We don't know. It is an anomaly that only appears in certain scans at random intervals and in randomized locations. The chances of us finding it are quite remote, but we are the first mission to be tasked with finding it.

GLORIA

That sounds very important and exciting, Lowan.

STEVE

What did you do on Earth?

GLORIA

I sold Tacos.

STEVE

Please define "Taco".

GLORIA

Oof. That's a tough one these days, actually.

STEVE

It is a matter of debate?

GLORIA

Oh yes. There's the anti-crunch people, and then anti-cheese people, and the anti-fish people, and then the vegans come along and make everyone mad.

STEVE

It is a food?

GLORIA

Sorry. Yes, it's food.

STEVE

On my planet, those that feed others are considered of high regard and performing a sacred duty.

GLORIA

As someone who spent her whole life feeding others, I find that hard to believe.

STEVE

It is true. I will show you. The Taco, if it is a matter of debate, what is it to you?

GLORIA

To me? Well... I think of it like this: You take something simple, a tortilla. And you fill it with a lot of history. You fill it with where you're from, where your parents are from, you fill it with where you are at that moment, and you fill it with a lot of hard work. And then you give it to someone you care about.

STEVE

It is a food and a historical document?

GLORIA

Yes, yes it really is.

STEVE

It sounds to me like it is a sacred duty.

GLORIA

Sure, okay. It's weird to talk about it, actually. It feels like years ago.

STEVE

You no longer make tacos?

GLORIA

No, sadly. Back on Earth there was this outbreak of a really nasty virus. Everyone had to stay indoors for a long time and a lot of places where you can get tacos had to shut down.

STEVE

I am confused. It sounds as though this was a time of great need. Why would establishments that provide for people be shuttered?

GLORIA

Honestly, it was all a really big mess. I don't even know how to talk about it. See, Earth isn't like your planet. We're not space-faring explorers, we haven't harnessed the volcanic power of our planet. We're all still kind of stumbling around, trying to figure things out.

STEVE

You are not a space-faring planet?

GLORIA

No, we're really not.

STEVE

We are currently on a planet not your own. If you are not an interstellar civilization, how then did you arrive here?

GLORIA

Oh. Uh. Caspar?

CASPAR

Fuck it, Gloria. Just tell him.

GLORIA

Okay. Well, this is going to sound nuts. Lowan, one day I walked into a diner looking for a job and it was this place. Midnight Burger. It looked normal enough but it turned out to be... I don't even know the words... Every day it shows up somewhere new in the universe... or multi-verse, however I'm supposed to say it. I know, it sounds crazy. I sound crazy.

STEVE

It does sound highly improbable.

GLORIA

It really does, but can you think of another reason why I would be here?

STEVE

I... cannot.

GLORIA

Lowan?

STEVE

You mentioned the Multi-verse.

GLORIA

Yeah.

STEVE

You can confirm the existence of the Multi-verse?

GLORIA

Uh... not me personally.

AVA

Psst. Yes, you can.

GLORIA

Yes I can.

STEVE

And if one were conducting deep scans of the Cosmic Microwave Background from a fixed point in one universe, would this place seem to disappear for several days as it travels between universes within the Multi-verse?

GLORIA

Um.

LEIF

Ahem. Are they mapping the anistropies with angular resolution?

GLORIA

Are you map- what?

LEIF

Are they mapping the anistrophes...

GLORIA

Are you mapping the anistrophies...

LEIF

With angular resolution?

GLORIA

With angular resolution?

STEVE

We are.

AVA

Then, yes.

GLORIA

Yes, then.

STEVE

Oh... oh my.

GLORIA

Lowan, are you okay?

CASPAR

Steve, what's going on, man?

STEVE

Processing...

ZEBULON

Dear, we have reached another one of those moments where I do not have the slightest inkling as to what's happening, but I feel as though it's very important.

EFFIE

I believe our friend Steven is having an epiphany of some sort.

STEVE

There is not much time. I wish to reveal to you the primary goal of our seven year mission in space.

GLORIA

Go ahead, Lowan.

STEVE

We were looking for you.

GLORIA

What do you mean?

STEVE

This place. You call it Midnight Burger?

GLORIA

Yes.

STEVE

This place is Anomaly X1.

LEIF

How is that possible, Steve?

GLORIA

I think he's still Lowan.

LEIF

Ask him.

GLORIA

How is that possible, Lowan?

STEVE

Would you define this place as a shifting point of null entropy?

AVA

Yes.

GLORIA

Yes.

STEVE
Fascinating. I have found it.

GLORIA
You were looking for us?

STEVE
We all are, Gloria. All of us.

LEIF
All of who?

GLORIA
All of who?

STEVE
You appear to be unaware of the importance of this place.

GLORIA
I don't understand.

STEVE
On Greedon-4 you are called The Shifting Star. On Septsu you are called The Fountain.

LEIF
Oh, my God.

STEVE
Gloria, I have spoken with scientists from many different space-faring civilizations. All of them look for this place. To find it is seen as a near-impossibility.

LEIF
Holy, shit. We're the fucking white whale.

STEVE
Gloria, do you understand? I have completed my mission.

GLORIA
It sure sounds like it, Lowan.

STEVE
I have... I have... I...

GLORIA
Lowan?

STEVE
System failure imminent. Caspar?

CASPAR

Yeah?

STEVE

Thank you for letting us complete our mission. I understand now... I understand... I had to complete their mission... Their lives...

GLORIA

He's gone.

LEIF

Do you think that's true? Are there a bunch of civilizations out there looking for us?

AVA

I know I was.

LEIF

I mean, not to trivialize it, but, are we famous?

GLORIA

Guys.

CASPAR

They spent seven years trying to track us down. They died trying. I hope it was worth it.

ZEBULON

Let us pray, Caspar.

CASPAR

Yeah.

ZEBULON

Lord, we commend into your loving grace, three intrepid souls.

AVA

Four.

ZEBULON

Indeed. Four souls. Lord, why do we strike out into the darkness? Why do we seek what's beyond the horizon when the home you have made for us is so bountiful? Is it because of what you've left for us there to find? Is the expression of your love for us scattered across creation?

EFFIE

If it be so, may you bless the explorers, Lord. Those that leave the safety of the hearth fire and brave the cold to discover your glory.

(MORE)

EFFIE (CONT'D)

These souls surrendered their lives to find it. May
they be held in your highest regard.

SONG: JESUS, SAVIOR PILOT ME BY HENRY BURR