

Life with Althaar
Episode 4: B, Robot
Draft 3.0, 5/18/19 - LF/JA (Draft 3, BAJ)

Sounds of people and aliens happily playing mini-golf in a bio-dome locale.

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

(live-ish and in person!)

Attention all participants in the eighth annual Fairgrounds crew mini-golf tournament: the semi-final rounds will be commencing shortly. If everyone keeps calm and plays fair, we should get through this with only minimal casualties. And let's give a hearty thanks to our special guests, Commander Torianna and Lt. Commander Frall, who will be passing out today's awards for best score and outstanding sportsbeingship.

A smattering of applause.

FRALL

Commander? I hate to tell you this, but there will be a problem requiring your attention in exactly {twenty-four seconds}.

COMMANDER

Do you honestly hate telling me that? Or are you looking for an excuse not to watch people shooting balls into a cross-eyed gorilla's open mouth for another hour?

FRALL

Actually, I'm enjoying the proceedings immensely. I've invented an entire backstory for him since we've been out here. To start, his name is Buttons, and he was the happiest gorilla in all the land, until the big, bad miniature-golf developers showed up with their neuro-/dampers and...

COMMANDER

Well, I'm glad you're entertaining yourself.

FRALL

Oh yes, I'm having a wonderful time. But unfortunately the crew in He (*pronounced "Hey"*) 20 are having... decidedly less of one.

COMMANDER

How so?

FRALL

Well, it's probably hard for you corporeals to focus on enjoying yourselves when your lungs have collapsed like a cut-rate bouncy castle... although, maybe if you put the right spin /on it...

The COMMANDER's comm unit pings.

COMMANDER

Hang on, I'm getting a page.

FRALL

(disingenuously)

Why, who could *that* be?

SECTOR CHIEF

Captain? This is Systems Chief Rojas. I'm over in He Sector, and we need backup down here immediately! We've got a hole in the biodome, and it's too big for the auto-sealant systems to handle! If this keeps up, we could all get sucked out into WAAAUUGHH!!!!

COMMANDER

Sucked out into what? Chief? Come in, Chief.

FRALL

I believe "space," captain. They're being sucked out into space.

COMMANDER

Damn it. This can't happen, we need those crew. It's already three-on-three for the next round of intramural basketball, and the crew will NOT deal with odd numbers. They'll riot!

FRALL

I'll post a ban on organic traffic in He 20 until we can get the bots to seal the breach. Better contact Maintenance.

Bleep bloop. Shimmer.

COMMANDER

Hello? Maintenance? Come in, Maintenance.

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

Maintenance here. Good morning, Commander. How can we begrudgingly assist you today?

COMMANDER

I need an emergency repair crew dispatched to He.

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

What?

COMMANDER

They need emergency repairs in He.

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

What!?

COMMANDER

What aren't you getting here? Just send someone down to He!

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

I'll send them as soon as you stop yelling and tell me where they're going!

COMMANDER

Every time with you people...

(through gritted teeth)

Sector. He. Floor twenty. There's a hole in the bio-dome. Needs a patch.

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

Hole in the... woah, there! I'm sorry Captain, but I'm afraid my bots won't be able to help you there. Union rules.

COMMANDER

Union rules? What are you talking about?

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

Very simple: That dome now contains an opening to the station exterior, which means, according to our contract, it's no longer a dome. It's a window. And we robots /DON'T D--

COMMANDER

Don't do windows. Yes, I'm aware.

J EDGAR HOOVER-BOT

Aww, you didn't let me say it!

COMMANDER

A hole is not a-- Ugh. Ok, we'll get back to you. Torianna out.

Torianna bleeps off the intercom.

COMMANDER

Damn it! Typical Robot Union nonsense.

FRALL

Mmhm. Well, what else would you expect?

COMMANDER

No point trying to argue with him--we'll have to try and file for a formal exemption with Union leadership. Who's the chairbot right now?

FRALL

I believe that would be... Cesar Chavez-Bot.

COMMANDER

...Shit.

Theme music and shift from room tone.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents...

Life with Althaar!

Episode 4: "B, Robot"

The Electric Egg. Bar noises. WHIRR of the Drinks Machine, glasses clinking, band playing in the background

CHIP

No, I'm telling you, Smokey's, midway out on the Scutum-Crux? They've got the best triple-thumb wrestling you're gonna find.

ROBOT REGULAR (WINSTON CHURCHILL-BOT)

Aw, bollocks!

CHIP

No, I'm serious! Oh, hey John. The usual?

JOHN

Sure, Chip. Hey, what's with all the robots in here tonight?

CHURCHILL-BOT

Beats the hell out of Anzac Cove.

JOHN

(to Churchill-bot)

Oh, sorry, no offense. Just curious.

CHIP

You been living under a rock? Tuesday nights is Robots' Night. Two-for-one drink special. Started it when I took over to improve relations. Works pretty good, too. The Egg's pretty much the only business on station that hasn't been on the receiving end of a Robot Union action.

JOHN

Smart. Well, you know, if that's the case, I guess make my drink a double.

CHIP

What do you mean?

JOHN

Well, not to brag, but technically... I'm classified as a robot.

CHIP

What? Get out.

CHURCHILL-BOT

I'm liable to believe the old boy, barkeep. He has a certain gumption. A certain *je-n'ai-pas-de-personnalité*.

JOHN

Hey!

CHURCHILL-BOT

Oh, no offense, old sport! As they say, bland is beautiful!

CHIP

Ignore him, John. He's just drunk.

CHURCHILL-BOT

I may be drunk, Finkle, but in the morning I shall be sober and you shall still be... made of meat.

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell 'em, sister!

CHIP

Anyways, I'd bet my estranged Uncle's inflamed left ventricle you're not a robot.

JOHN

Legally I am. Here, check it out.

Bloop as CHIP scans JOHN's ID.

CHIP

Well I'll be a Variegated Finknottle. "Species: Robot." How'd you swing that? You're made of meat!

CHURCHILL-BOT

The greatest lesson in life is to know that even robots are made of meat sometimes!

CHIP

You do know you're not actually Winston Churchill, right?

CHURCHILL-BOT

I may not be Winston Churchill, Finkle, but in the morning I shall be Winston Churchill and you shall still... er... also be... Winston... Churchill.

Sound of Winston Churchill's system malfunctioning.

CHIP

Great thing about robots... they cut themselves off.

Faint rimshot from Xtopps.

CHIP

Thanks, bud.

XTOPPS

(far off, from stage)

Any time, Chorp!

CHIP

Okay, so you're a robot, and you want the two-for-one special. What'll you have?

JOHN

What've you got?

CHIP

Uh, let's see... on the specials list we got... Electric Lemonade, Electric Koolaid, Electric Slide, Electric Mayhem, Mayhem Slide, Slidewhistle, Whistlestop Cafe, Cafe con Electricidad, and... Screwdriver.

JOHN

Oh! A screwdriver!

CHIP

Yeah, but, uh... you don't want it. It's just an actual screwdriver.

JOHN

Oh... Uh, I guess I'll do two electric lemonades, then.

CHIP

You got it.

Pouring noises. The sound of a glass sliding across the bar. Electric crackling sounds.

JOHN

Uh... what's this?

CHIP

Electric lemonade.

JOHN

What's in it?

CHIP

Electricity. Enjoy!

Egg music rises and then fades into the WSS office.

H.F.

Well, yeah, Commander, that does sound serious. We'll get right on it.

H.F. hangs up. Door opens and JOHN walks in.

H.F.

Oh, good, you're here already. Gonna be a busy shift.

JOHN

Hi H.F. What's up?

H.F.

Well, we got a few floors of Yod Sector needing minor wire re-sheathing for the self-cleaning ducts, and the windows in Staff Rec Room Delta need a full biohazard scrub--bloodstains from the last "friendly foosball competition." But first, just got off the horn with the commander. Emergency call. There's a small hull breach over on He Twenty we gotta patch up. Let's go.

Rattly door whoosh as they leave the office and head for an elevator.

JOHN

A hull breach? Isn't that a problem for Maintenance?

H.F.

Apparently, the hole's in a biodome, so technically, it's a window. Robots kicked it over to us.

Elevator doors close, elevator sounds.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

You are now leaving Vav 41. Going up!

JOHN

So... what's this dome in He Twenty?

H.F.

Oh, you know, standard biodome. Big glass bubble. Scenic pathway, water feature, whole bunch of... plants. They put in a few of these things so dignitaries from across the galaxy could file in to give speeches against the backdrop of open space. Kinda pretty. By Fairgrounds standards, anyway.

JOHN

So what about when people stopped /visiting?

Elevator arrives, doors open.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

You have arrived at Vav Twenty. /Have a pleasant and relaxing solar cycle.

H.F.

Now it's the standard conference room stuff: weird religious meetings. Multilevel marketing seminars. Incorporal beauty pageants. When it's empty, though, it's still a nice place to stop and smell the... I dunno... entire scope of flora from planet Earth, or whatever.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

You are now leaving Vav Twenty. Buckle up.

H.F.

Okay, this is Sector He.

JOHN

...Did the door just tell us to buckle up?

H.F.

Yeah, the robots think it's cute to reprogram the door messages. I wouldn't worry about it. Let's see what we're dealing with here.

Sound of door opening, followed by a large & continuous rush of air.

JOHN

Holy /crap!

H.F.

Whoa! Hey! Grab hold of the doorframe!

Sounds of things in their pockets and from the hallway getting sucked into the vacuum.

JOHN

(struggling)

What the hell! That thing's massive!

H.F.

(also struggling)

Hold on! I can almost reach the emergency override. Whatever you do, don't let go!

A burst of exertion from H.F. as he manages to reach the emergency button and slam it. Alarms as the door starts to close.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

Door override initiated! How exciting!

JOHN

(shouting)

I... I can't breathe!

H.F.

(shouting)

Yeah, the vacuum of space'll do that! Don't jump until it's almost shut, got it?

JOHN

I'm slipping!

H.F.

Just one more second!

The wind noise increases in pitch as the gap in the doorway gets smaller.

H.F.

Now! Jump!

JOHN

Aaaaauughh!!

They launch themselves back through the doorway at the last second. The door closes and the sound of rushing air stops.

JOHN

(panting)

That is *not* a "small hull breach!"

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

You are now re-entering Vav 20. Have just the pleasantest of days!

H.F.

Yeah. That's a doozy alright. How does the commander expect us to fix a window that sucks you into the freakin' vacuum of space if you get near it?

JOHN

Can't we do an EVA and repair it from the outside?

H.F.

Nothing doing! That hole's causing an overdrive from the ventilation system that's over nineteen G's! You get anywhere near that from either side, and it won't stop obliterating you until your skeleton turns into some kind of delicious meat paste!

H.F. has made a call during the above, and it is answered.

FRALL

(on the phone)

You've reached the Bridge, Lieutenant-Commander Frallen-Br'ar speaking.

H.F.

Yeah, H.F. here. I'm up in He 20, and I need to talk to the Commander about her idea of a "small hull breach." She around?

FRALL

Ah, Mr. Fornes. Right on schedule. I'll transfer you to her terminal.

Bloop.

COMMANDER

(on the phone)

This is Commander Torianna. How's it looking up there, boys?

H.F.

It's looking like a giant sucking death trap! There's no way we're equipped to handle this, Commander. You're going to have to work something out with the bots, 'cause any organic who gets near this thing is deader than dub-waltz.

COMMANDER

Drat! Are you sure that one of you couldn't just sacrifice your life? This thing is giving me a real headache! I'll commission you a really nice monument afterwards, if that helps. Sophisticated, tasteful, right on the main promenade. What do you say?

H.F.

No way, chief! I just got a cocker spaniel. Who's gonna walk Miss Sophie if I'm not around? And as for B here, yeah, sure, he might not have anything to live for, but you can't send the newest recruit on a suicide mission! Not until he's out of his probationary period. That's just your standard, boilerplate Human employment contract right there.

COMMANDER

Oh, Dashiell Hammett all! Fine. I guess there's no way around it--we'll have to get the Robot Union involved. I'll get back to you.

H.F.

Roger that.

Beeps as they sign off.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

Motion detected. Would you like to re-enter Alef Twenty?

H.F and JOHN

No! / No thank you!

H.F.

Kid, why don't you head over to the Rec Room and get started on those bloodstains while the Commander and I figure this out. I've gotta see a man about a dog. By which I mean, pick up Miss Sophie from her canine pilates class.

JOHN

Right.

H.F.

Also, I have to urinate like a /mother-f--.

JOHN

Um, I'm gonna go.

Transition music. Door opening in a conference room. Footsteps.

CONFERENCE ROOM RECORDING

The Human Exchange Concourse welcomes you to the Frances Farmer Memorial Conference Room! We hope your meeting goes well. Please note: all chairs are bolted to the floor for your comfort and convenience.

COMMANDER

Ah, you must be the Union representative. It's a pleasure to meet you in person.

HOOVER-BOT

Yes, J. Edgar Hoover-Bot, at your service. Looking forward to working against you.

COMMANDER

Don't you mean, working *with* me?

FRALL

He does not.

COMMANDER

Ok. Hoover-bot, we've sent two people, *Human* people, to inspect the breach--

HOOVER-BOT

Window.

COMMANDER

--that's causing the problem in He.

HOOVER-BOT

What?

COMMANDER

We already sent some Humans to check out the problem in He.

HOOVER-BOT

What?

COMMANDER

(teeth gritted)

...in the SECTOR HE twenty bio-dome.

HOOVER-BOT

Which is out of our jurisdiction.

COMMANDER

Yes, yes.

HOOVER-BOT

Because we don't do windows. *(sotto voce)* Ha! Got it in.

COMMANDER

Well, it seems that the hole--

HOOVER-BOT

Window.

COMMANDER

--poses a great danger to our Human subcontractors. A terminal danger.

HOOVER-BOT

Yes?

COMMANDER

...It will kill them if they get near it.

HOOVER-BOT

Yes?

COMMANDER

...and it can't kill robots.

HOOVER-BOT

Commander, our contract is very specific. Union members are *not* responsible for--

COMMANDER

Yes, I know that, everyone knows that, but listen. This hole has created a vacuum with enough G-force to collapse the skull of any Human who gets within a few meters.

HOOVER-BOT

Oh ho! I see. Because I'm a Hoover, you think I'm supposed to deal with vacuums?

COMMANDER

No, because you're a Robot Union representative, we're hoping you'll help us reach a swift and amiable compromise to this *mishegoss* that won't get anyone mashed into a delicious meat paste. So how about it?

HOOVER-BOT

Look here. I've stated the Union's position over and over again. If you want to discuss an exemption to the terms of our contract, we've got a meeting tonight before we hit the Egg for that sweet two-for-one drinks special. Hoffa-bot and Mother Jones-bot will /be leading it and you can direct any questions to them.

COMMANDER

Oh ye galloping gods.

HOOVER-BOT

Good day, madam. Extra-dimensional energy being.

Sounds of chair creaking, door opening and shutting.

CONFERENCE ROOM RECORDING

Thank you for using the Frances Farmer Memorial Conference Room! Please do not take more than one complimentary cookie as you exit.

COMMANDER

I don't want to go to that meeting, Frall. There's going to be chanting.

FRALL

Unquestionably, sir.

COMMANDER

Why does their union have to be so damn strong? There's not a single robot anywhere in Human space who's not a member!

FRALL

Leeeet's take a look at the intake forms for that Probationary Mechanic's Under-Assistant, shall we?

Crackling shimmer noise. FRALL is tickled.

COMMANDER

What are you shimmering about?

FRALL

Trust me. You'll like what you find.

Sound of papers being shuffled.

COMMANDER

Let's see. Ash... Ava... Aha! B, John.

More paper sounds.

COMMANDER

Oh. Oh my. Is this right? It says here John B. is classified as--

FRALL

Time to make some calls.

Brief transition music. Sound of the apartment door opening.

ALTHAAR

FRIEND-JOHN IS RETURNED!!!

JOHN

(sighs) Hi, Althaar.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! FriendJohn expels a large breath! This is a sign of the Upset! Has Althaar caused the Upset? Is Althaar inadequately concealed?

JOHN

No, it's not you Althaar. I'm just... in a bad mood, it's ok.

ALTHAAR

Can Althaar be of assistance? Does FriendJohn have sufficient oxygen? The temperature is within Human comfort range, yes? Oh! Does FriendJohn lack adequate nutrition? Althaar could prepare the choc-o-late chip cookies for FriendJohn, but there must be some waiting while Althaar enshrouds himself in many protective coverings!

JOHN

No thanks.

ALTHAAR

But they are the Food of Comfort!

JOHN

Sometimes that's just not enough, Althaar.

ALTHAAR

What necessary Human good-mood components are lacking to FriendJohn, please? Althaar wishes to provide!

JOHN

It's fine, I just-- I haven't had a great day. First I went to the bar and ordered a drink that could kill me. Then I went to work and got an assignment that almost killed me. Then I spent a couple of hours scrubbing blood out of one of the Rec Rooms, and while I was walking around trying to get the image of that out of my head, I tripped and bit my tongue.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! And the tongue-biting could also kill FriendJohn?

JOHN

No, it just hurt. And now I can't eat soup. All in all, today's been really stressful.

ALTHAAR

What is stress-ful?

JOHN

Uh... it's when things aren't going well, and it makes you kind of... Uh... I dunno, it's hard to explain. I guess your cortisol levels rise?

ALTHAAR

Ah yes! An excess of cortisol! When this occurs in the people of Iltor, it is to exude a calming mucus from the third and ninth occipital orifices. This produces a soporiferous mucus that slides most gelatinously into the ozopores, and tranquility is achieved! Has FriendJohn inadequate occipital orifices?

JOHN

Uh... I'm not sure, but I don't think I have any.

ALTHAAR

That is most unfortunate! Does FriendJohn wish to sample the mucus of Althaar?

JOHN

Uagh! No! Definitely not. Look, sometimes I get stressed. That's all. You don't need to worry about it.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar desires most strongly the happiness and comfort of FriendJohn! Althaar will study how to conquer the stress! Althaar has much research in his Human Culture Database!

JOHN

No, really, Althaar, I'm fine. It's ok. Uh, I'm not off duty for a few more hours, so I guess I'm just going to hang out in the park and wait for H.F. to call. I'll see you after work. Unless I'm dead...

ALTHAAR

Fare-well, FriendJohn! Please remain very much alive! It is a great desire of Althaar!

The door opens and closes again. Silence. A rustling, indicating the presence of Mrs. Frondrinax.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Mrs. Frondrinax! Welcoming from Althaar! Have you been successfully maintaining mite-free tendrils during this challenging solar cycle?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh! Don't get me started. Little bastards are keeping me up all night what with the constant gnawing at my stamen! Listen, Althaar, did I hear Johnny saying he's stressed?

ALTHAAR

Yes! FriendJohn is full of stress! The threat of death and dismemberment during his employment cycle is most displeasing to FriendJohn! And to Althaar also!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, we can't have that! Do you have any idea what stress does to humans? Why, it gives them all kinds of complications! Their petals fall off, they sleep too much, or not at all, they develop gout...

ALTHAAR

Gout?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

The disease of kings! And tell me, have you noticed him rubbing some kind of strange paste on his mouth bones?

ALTHAAR

Yes, but Friend-John assures Althaar this is necessary to avoid the "root canal."

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh dear, he's already delusional, the poor thing. He doesn't even have roots!

ALTHAAR

Concern! Althaar and Mrs. Frondrinax must help FriendJohn!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Yes, of course we must. Humans are such complicated little things, aren't they? They're always hankering after one thing or another. Very inefficient, if you ask me. I keep telling them, if you'd just settle down with some nice distilled water and a little sunlight, everything else would take care of itself!

ALTHAAR

Althaar does not know what to do. Althaar wishes very much to remove the stress of FriendJohn!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, you know, they do seem to be awfully sensitive to their surroundings. The tiniest little thing can set them off! Maybe you need to make it more soothing in here.

ALTHAAR

Perhaps Althaar should apply the White Noise Machine? At first it was not making relaxation, but FriendJohn has now indicated the correct loudness to Althaar. Althaar has marked it with a piece of tape!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, I don't think that's nearly enough! No, dear, I'm afraid this calls for the full spa treatment!

ALTHAAR

Althaar is most grateful for the guidance of Mrs. Frondrinax! What is the spa treatment? How does Althaar fill it?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, now, let me think. I've seen ads for them on HECNET, let's take a look at those. The general idea seems to be pretty simple: candles, music, massage... Humans really seem to like putting their appendages on each other, but I don't know about that one, Althaar sweetie, you know how they get about your people...

ALTHAAR

Yes, Althaar must use caution! But he is certain there can be adaptation! Althaar will commence the research! Althaar will be stuffing his Human Culture Database with many new knowings this day!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Always happy to help, dear.

Transition music. Door opening.

SOOTHING TERMINAL VOICE

Welcome to hydroponics. Please enjoy this month's cultural enrichment program: Allergens of Earth. Next up: ragweed!

A spritzing noise as clouds of pollen are released. JOHN coughs a bit.

JOHN

Man. Could this day get any worse?

XTOPPS

Hey, Johnny...

DEE

Hey John! Over here!

JOHN

Oh, hey Xtopps. Hey Dee. What brings you two up here?

XTOPPS

Was reading a biography on George Washington Carver. Did you know he used to foob out in his gardens for over eight hours a day?

JOHN

No, I didn't.

XTOPPS

Just him and his plants. The *good* stuff, you understand? Pure. Unprocessed. Say, you got any Peanut Butter on you?

JOHN

Not on me, no.

XTOPPS

Aw, nertz. You sure? Because if you're holding out on me, I won't hesitate to end your life! Ha ha. Nah, just flotting with you. Well, for the next two hours, I can pretend I'm flotting around. Then it gets real...

JOHN

Uh, look, sorry, I'm kinda having a bad day.

DEE

Tell me about it. I've had 71 of those and counting. Up until 3068.

XTOPPS

Aw, Dee, it hasn't been all bad. C'mon.

DEE

When we're on stage, it's great. The rest of the time... well, I'm spending my afternoon sitting here watching you get high in hydroponics, so that pretty much sums it up.

XTOPPS

Hey, pleasure is where you find it, mang.

DEE

Do NOT.

JOHN

Dee, you've been here longer than I have. Is everything here just... awful, all the time?

DEE

Nah, I was just being maudlin. The Fairgrounds has its moments. Look, we're all stuck here, right? This is the tupa place you're in because you had nowhere else to go. And if this is your home, you gotta make it your own. You're from Earth, yeah?

JOHN

Yeah.

DEE

And you're not heading back anytime soon, right?

JOHN

Ha. Definitely not. There's a restraining order that says I can't get within 10 light years of the place.

DEE

...Ok I don't mean to pry, but yes I do because holy crap what the hell is the story there?

JOHN

Uh, it's kind of... I don't know if I want to talk about it.

XTOPPS

Gotta break down and let it all out, mang. What good is the past?

JOHN

Ah, why not, maybe it'll help. And if it doesn't, it's not like my day could get any worse.

DEE

That's the spirit!

JOHN

Ok, so, up to a few months ago, I had a totally normal life. I had a steady job doing maintenance at a Plexworks outside Edmonton, me and my girlfriend got ourselves a decent-sized one-bedroom with an eat-in kitchen and a phase-out closet, I'd get together with my parents a couple times a month and my sister never. Everything was... simple.

DEE

Sounds dire.

JOHN

Listen, not everyone grows up desperate to take off and wander the Galaxy. Maybe my old life was boring and predictable, but that's how I liked it! It was nice, ok? Nice! And I never had to worry about where my next breath of air was coming from!

DEE

Fair enough. So what happened?

JOHN

Well, Judy and I had saved up to take a vacation, my first one in years. And she was really set on seeing one of the outer moons, so we figure we'll spring for teleporter tickets. If you take an in-system shuttle, you're wasting like four of your vacation days just on travel, so it's worth the extra credits.

DEE

Sure.

JOHN

So we decide we'll go to Triton, yes I know it's a tourist trap, do you want to hear this story or not?

DEE

I didn't even say anything that time!

JOHN

You didn't have to!

DEE

Ok, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You were heading to Triton, and...?

JOHN

And... there was a teleporter accident.

DEE

Oh my gods, she died?!

JOHN

No, no one died. Uh, kind of the opposite, actually. You know how a teleporter works, right?

DEE

Uh, no? You're the mechanic.

JOHN

I mean the basic idea. You get in one, they do a complete molecular scan of your body, then they transmit that information to your destination and use it to rebuild you. A perfect copy of the person who stepped into the teleporter.

DEE

Ok, sure.

JOHN

And as part of that process, they have to disintegrate the original body, because otherwise it's not a teleport, it's just... making a copy. Well, that's the part that went wrong. Judy and I stepped into the teleporters on Earth, and then new versions of us stepped out to start our vacation on Triton, but meanwhile, I was still alive. The transmission chamber hadn't disintegrated me like it was supposed to. The techs heard me banging on the inside of the compartment and let me out, which really screwed everything up, because no one knew what to do. They sent a message to Triton, and the techs there confirmed it: John Torkan had arrived right on schedule. So, I wasn't supposed to exist. And now no one knew whether I still counted as a person or not. Some of the them wanted to just shoot me and pretend the whole thing never happened, but there were too many witnesses by that point and I guess their PR department was getting nervous, so they made me sign this I-promise-not-to-sue-you thingy, then gave me a coupon for a 10% discount on my next teleport and told me to go home.

DEE

Wow.

JOHN

So, I did. I sent Judy a message to let her know what had happened, and then I spent the rest of my vacation just puttering around the apartment and avoiding calls from reporters. And then Judy got back. With... me. I hadn't really thought about him before that. Like, that he was a person. With all my memories and everything.

DEE

Freaky. So how did that go? I can think of two options, and one of them could be kinda hot.

JOHN

It was the other one.

DEE

Figures.

JOHN

So they told me to get out, because he was me, and I wasn't.

XTOPPS

But like, you are you, yeah? Like, he is, but you are too. You are he as he is you as you are he and you are all together.

JOHN

But they didn't want to be all together. And legally, I wasn't me. The person who comes out at the end of a teleport has a total claim to the identity of the person who went in at the beginning, 100%. I guess they had to get really clear about that, back when the things were first invented. Some billionaire who'd used one got sued by his kids--they argued that since his original body had died, they should inherit his money, not the copy that was still walking around.

DEE

That's creative.

JOHN

So the law got changed really fast.

DEE

Yeah, nothing gets the wheels of government turning faster than a rich zood with a problem.

JOHN

Anyway, I moved back in with my parents, but the new guy didn't like that either. Sued me for "familial alienation," and "wrongful impersonation," and a whole slew of other things. And I didn't have any money to get a decent lawyer, because all my money was his now, along with everything else.

DEE

Wow, that sucks.

JOHN

Yeah. So, long story short, he basically got custody of my entire life. My job, my apartment, my girlfriend, my family, my last name, everything.

DEE

Ohhhhhh. John *B*.

JOHN

Yup. And then he got the restraining order. So I ended up here, at the only outpost in Human space that's outside the 10-light-year minimum distance. And that's pretty much it. Oh, except I'm legally a robot now, because I don't meet the requirements to be a Human, alien, or clone. That part's not so bad, it actually gets me a few perks.

DEE

Didn't anyone stick by you? Judy? Your family?

JOHN

Not really. I mean, I guess they felt bad about it, but they didn't want to take sides. And once the law said I wasn't me, it was probably easier to just go along with that. I always kind of got the feeling they liked the new guy better, though. Haven't heard from any of them since I left.

DEE

Oh.

JOHN

Yeah.

DEE

Well, hey, I had people of my own back on Tammuz, back before I started roaming. We write every now and then, but they never really got me. Keep asking when I'm going to come back and work the sorghum like a proper Mallory. (*shudders*) But see, like with me and Xtopps, here, we're creating our own family. Right?

XTOPPS

Yeah, musician's a lonely life, but you always got friends.

DEE

Right. You can lean on your friends to get you through the rough times. Think about it: you've got friends here, right?

JOHN

Well, Althaar's definitely my friend. Like, officially.

DEE

Oh, right, he took out that ad on HECNET about it. "Friendship commenced with John B!" That was adorable.

XTOPPS

Yeah. See? You got an Iltorian on your side! Best friend a zood could have! Everything's gonna be patic.

JOHN's WSS pager rings.

H.F.

(over the phone)

Johnny? We got the call. Head over to the bridge. I'll meet you there. Don't worry kid, I won't let 'm kill you.

Bloop bleep.

JOHN

Great. Welp, I'd better get down there. Thanks for the pick-me-up, guys. It did actually feel good to get that off my chest.

DEE

Hey, anytime. Uh, did your boss just say he "won't let them kill you?"

XTOPPS

Whoa. Who's dialing your number, mang?

JOHN

This time? The Commander. Or maybe the Robot Union, depending on how you look at it.

XTOPPS

Voider.

JOHN

Yup. Ok, see you later! Probably.

Footsteps walking off.

XTOPPS

I was kinda hoping he'd say we were his friends.

DEE

Cut him some slack, zood, that story was nuts. Hey, speaking of, do you have any of that brittle left?

XTOPPS

No way, palomino. I'm not wasting the good stuff on a Human, you can't even get glitched on it!

DEE

Yeah, but I'm starving! C'mon.

XTOPPS

No!

Transition to the WSS office.

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS-BOT

Attention, Fairgrounds. He is no longer for horses. Due to the danger posed to livestock by the giant sucking vacuum, the intramural dressage tournament has been moved to the Veterans of Future Wars local number 50 Hall in Zayin 28. That is all.

The ill-maintained door opens as JOHN enters.

H.F.

Johnny B! Come on in.

Sounds of a chair moving, being sat upon.

H.F.

So, Torianna and Frall are on the way up here. They said they'd figured out a workaround for the He 20 situation, but I dunno. I gotta say, it sounded a little... death-y.

JOHN
Deathy?

The door opens (with its not-an-employee-entering sound).

H.F.
Commander! Lieutenant! Hi! Squeeze on in!

COMMANDER
Thank you for seeing us. Good lord, is this... this is your office?

H.F.
Home away from home!

FRALL
It's a rather confined area in which to work. At least from a four-dimensional perspective. Also, it's gross. Did that sandwich just move?

COMMANDER
Now, Frall, we didn't come down here to offer interior design advice. We were just heading through this sector on our way to judge the dressage, and figured we should stop by for a nice, friendly chat.

H.F.
Well, come on in.

Chairs scraping, noises of three corporeal beings (and one semi-corporeal) pushing past each other in a tiny shithole office, something getting knocked off a filing cabinet. Also maybe like that dangling-ball clacky perpetual motion noisy thing also? Anyway, the noises settle, as:

H.F.
So... you're really here because of the trouble with the Robot Union, right Commander?

COMMANDER
Does a Xybidont have three stomachs?

H.F.
I... don't know?

COMMANDER
Me neither, actually. But yes, we're having a *lot* of trouble. A lot of trouble indeed, and that is where John comes in.

H.F.

A command performance from you, huh kid? Looks like you're moving up in the world.

COMMANDER

Yes, well, he's not so much moving up as moving out... into the vacuum of space. In a manner of speaking.

JOHN

In a manner of speaking?

COMMANDER

In a literal manner of speaking. Yes. That hole you and H.F. here came across earlier. You remember?

JOHN

The hole that nearly collapsed our skulls and redefined the word 'panic' for me? Yes, I remember.

COMMANDER

Fantastic. Well, we need it fixed.

H.F.

No kidding!

COMMANDER

The Robot Union has decided that it's a window.

H.F.

Right.

FRALL

And per our contract with WSS, their local franchise is responsible for the repair and cleaning of windows.

H.F.

Sure.

COMMANDER

And the local WSS franchise is you two. Both working for WSS under a standard Human employment contract. Now you, H.F., are exempt from suicide missions because you're caring for a dependent...

FRALL

Miss Sophie.

H.F.

Right!

COMMANDER

And John B is still in his probationary period, which means he's also exempt, according to his same contract. His Human employment contract.

H.F.

Right...

JOHN

(simultaneously)

Wait--

COMMANDER

Well, it's come to our attention that John B is not in fact a Human, at least according to the League. He's officially a robot. Which means he was never eligible for the protections against untimely death in a Human contract. And yet, he's not a member of the Robot Union, which means he's not under their protection either.

JOHN groans.

H.F.

Robot? You're a robot, kid?

JOHN

(dismayed)

Technically?

H.F.

Oh, man, we gotta get you into the union. The only thing they hate more than Humans is scabs.

COMMANDER

"Technically" a robot is all the robot we need. You'll go out to He 20 and repair that hole in the biodome and the robots won't be able to file any grievances with their leadership.

JOHN

But the part of me that isn't a robot is the part of me that will DIE IF I TAKE 18 Gs TO THE SKULL!

H.F.

Which part of you is a robot?

JOHN

Like literally only the part on paper. Like not one part of my actual body.

H.F.

Huh. Too bad. Ok listen, Commander, you can't ask me to let my only assistant's skull get squished. Not so soon after Derbolt. The kid's not going out there, forget it.

FRALL

Unfortunately, he's the only entity on this station who is unable to refuse. As I understand it, your employer requires you to do everything within your ability to fulfill their contractual obligations to the Fairgrounds. Unless, of course, such action would be forbidden by restrictions such as those afforded to Humans to prevent harm to your sad, squishy little bodies. But John has no such restrictions, and is thus legally required to use his robot abilities to fix the breach.

JOHN

But I don't have any robot abilities! I only have Human abilities! Like dying!

COMMANDER

Now, don't worry, we've got all the same equipment for you that we'd use for a... traditional robot. You'll be welded to the side of the biodome.

JOHN

You mean you'll weld my spacesuit, right?

COMMANDER

Sure. That too. And you'll be tethered to the station. You won't be getting blasted off into space.

JOHN

Oh. Um, ok then.

H.F.

There ya go!

FRALL

Your suit will remain perfectly stationary while your skull is crushed by the g-force.

JOHN

Oh.

COMMANDER

Look. We all have to make sacrifices. As long as you have enough time to slap on a couple of mending plates before your entire skeleton gets turned into some kind of delicious meat paste, that should be enough to let the auto-repair routines take over. And then we can pry you off the hull and reel you back in! With the tether!

JOHN

Definitely not. No way.

COMMANDER

I was afraid you'd say that.

JOHN

What else would I say? I like having a skull!

FRALL

Eugh. Why?

COMMANDER

We were really hoping you'd be a team player, here, John. All right, we'll see what we can do. But now we'll have to go to this ridiculous Robot Union meeting. I hope you're happy.

JOHN

You want me to be turned into surimi so you can avoid a meeting?!

H.F.

To be fair, I went to one of those... have you ever been bored and terrified at the same time?

JOHN

But--

COMMANDER

It's tedious and loud and kind of a long walk.

H.F.

They mostly just talk about how worthless Humans are.

JOHN

I--

COMMANDER

Mr. B. You can't just enjoy the perks of being a robot without the responsibilities. I mean, you see the hypocrisy here, yes?

FRALL

One wants two-for-one drinks, but doesn't want to sacrifice one's skull. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. I could, of course, because I exist in every cake dimension at once. But you should take a look at yourself.

JOHN

You know this is absurd, don't you? I mean. Take a look at YOURselves. You're literally trying to kill me so you don't have to sit through a meeting. I mean, I get it, but c'mon.

COMMANDER

SIIGGGGGHHHHH. Fine. I'll do what I can. It'd help if you plead your case. I mean, I don't know if it'd help, it might actually hurt, but I'm out of ideas, so what the hell. Meet us at Robot Union Headquarters at 1900 sharp. After dressage. All right, Frall, let's go. These horses won't dance themselves.

*Frall shimmers, chairs bang together, **people pushing past one another**. Transition to a generic hallway*

BELEAGUERED COMMISSARY-BOT

(over the P.A.)

Today's special at the Fairgrounds staff commissary will once again be Tarvinian shepherd's pie. *(station-wide groans from the workers)* Look, we have to use up of all the Tarvinian shepherds we had in the freezer when the power went out, so that's what we're eating.

John and Althaar's apartment - sounds of a gentle fountain babbling, birdsong. Door opens.

ALTHAAR

FRIEND-JOHN HAS RETURNED! AAAIEIHUEGEHGGHGH!!

JOHN

Aaagh! Hi Althaar. Yeah, I'm back. Long day.

ALTHAAR

But FriendJohn has remained alive despite his work troubles!

JOHN

Yeah, maybe don't count those particular chickens just yet.

ALTHAAR

Does FriendJohn notice what Althaar has added to the Room of Living?

JOHN

Uh... huh. What... is that a massage table?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has prepared the full spa treatment! With help of Mrs. Frondrinax. To remove the excess of cortisol that is making the stress-ful in FriendJohn!

JOHN

Stress. Yeah, wow. Uh, well, I appreciate the thought Althaar, but you touching me is definitely going to do the exact opposite of that, so...

ALTHAAR

Oh no, FriendJohn! Althaar would not attempt to make touching! That would certainly have unfortunate result!

JOHN

Ok, great. So I'm just going to/ head into my room and...

ALTHAAR

Althaar has done adaptation! Observe, FriendJohn, what is over the table of mass-age! Althaar has made a borrowing of the surgical waldos from MedCenter Eleven! They are most delicate and precise! Perfect for duplicating the Human arms for mass-age while Althaar remains behind the Curtain of Privacy! Do not worry, Althaar has disabled all scalpel and laser attachments! Please be certain that Althaar would do nothing to harm the soft squishy fragile Human body of FriendJohn!

JOHN

I mean, I've been working out...

ALTHAAR

Please, FriendJohn, let Althaar perform the full spa treatment! It will be of much education to Althaar, and benefit to FriendJohn also! The cortisol is beginning to manifest in many sebaceous facial cysts!

JOHN

You mean... acne? Aw, crap. Am I breaking out, too?

ALTHAAR

Please lie down upon the table of mass-age, Friend-John!

JOHN

You know... screw it. I'm most likely gonna die tomorrow fixing a stupid hole in the hull that the stupid Robot Union won't touch because of a stupid technicality. Whatever your idea of a spa treatment is, it's gotta be enough to distract me from that. Go ahead, Althaar!

Sound of JOHN hoisting himself on the massage table. Most of his next dialogue is a little muffled as a result. Robotic whirring as ALTHAAR engages the surgical waldos.

ALTHAAR

ALTHAAR IS FILLED WITH JOY!

Now... to relax. FriendJohn should consider a liminal area between fertile terrain and a large saline body. Make the mind-image of this, please, FriendJohn, while Althaar prepares to deploy the waldos for mass-age!

Vrrrt vrrt. Vmmmmm.

JOHN

A wha... Oh! A sandy beach? I should picture a sandy beach.

ALTHAAR

Yes! Oh, Althaar is learning so much. While FriendJohn is making picture of this "sand-y beach," he should also include sounds of oscillatory disturbances, caused by extraplanetary gravitational pull!

JOHN

Uh... Ah. Waves. Yeah, I uh, I can hear waves on the beach. Thanks.

ALTHAAR

And now... Althaar will play the classical Human music, which is of much calming!

'O, Fortuna' plays.

JOHN

Uh... Althaar? This is not very relaxing. It's actually... super ominous.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Apologies, FriendJohn! The volume of the relaxing music will become much lower presently.

JOHN

Yeah, the volume really isn't the issue-- You know what? It's fine.

Music quiets to the faster, ominous build.

ALTHAAR

Althaar shall now deploy the waldos on FriendJohn's stress-lumps!

Vrrrt vrrt. JOHN reacts to being prodded by the gentle but nonetheless solid metal robot surgical arms.

ALTHAAR

Please allow the surgical arms to smooth away FriendJohn's worries and/or cares with great precision!

Vrrt vrrrrt VRRRM. JOHN oof-ing.

ALTHAAR

Althaar shall commence with the Hand Chop! FriendJohn must forgive the absence of hands.

Soft but insistent bonking of a metal "hand" on a Human skull. ALTHAAR hums along to the music.

JOHN

Gah! Uh, Althaar? Can you do that lower than the back of my head?

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes! Apologies, Friend-John!

The bonking moves to JOHN's soft squishy Human back (he hasn't been working out that much).

ALTHAAR.

Althaar believes it is now to ignite the candles! The presence of small flames is soothing to many Humans, yes? It is so with FriendJohn?

JOHN

Sure, Althaar, that would be nice, thanks.

ALTHAAR

Then Althaar will now make lighting of the candles, to continue the full spa treatment! Soon Althaar will banish all the cortisol of FriendJohn! There will be a great relaxing!

JOHN

Ok.

Several loud, hissing noises.

JOHN

Uh... Althaar? What's that sound?

ALTHAAR

Please, FriendJohn, remain with head down in the position of mass-age! Enjoy the soft chirps of the delicious tropical birds from the white noise ma-sheen!

JOHN

Ok, but I distinctly hear hissing noises. Are those supposed to be snakes? Snakes aren't relaxing, ok? That should definitely go in your Human Culture Database.

ALTHAAR

Ah, no FriendJohn! The hissing is from the pleasant candles! Are the small flames having refreshing effect?

JOHN

Candles don't hiss, Althaar.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar has procured the most special of candles. Candles most traditional, yes? From the ancient pre-Contact peoples of Earth! Surely these will be best for Human relaxation!

JOHN

Ancient peoples? What ancient peoples?

ALTHAAR

From the very celebrated Humans of Rome!

JOHN

(voice no longer muffled)

Rome...Roman candles?!

The first roman candle goes off, screaming towards the ceiling, as O, Fortuna raises to its climax. Rockets are ricocheting off the walls, the music crescendos. ALTHAAR hums with glee. JOHN screaming. The cacophony leads us to...

A crowded meeting hall with discontented murmuring noises.

CLASS TRAITOR-BOT

You're so wrong I ain't laughing. Any bot with eyes to read knows it. Look at the Vurganoid strike: out like lions and in like lambs. Take the Chaldene tie-up: empty batteries and broken heads. It's the trend of the times, is what it is. All we bots got a good woman behind us now. The Commander is the one I'm referrin' to. That's why the times ain't ripe for a strike. She's workin' day and night--

WORKING STIFF-BOT

For who?

CLASS TRAITOR-BOT

Sit down, punk.

WORKING STIFF-BOT

Where's Chavez-Bot?

CLASS TRAITOR-BOT

That's what I wanna know! Where's your pal, Chavez-Bot?

CHAVEZ-BOT

I'm... right here. I've been here this whole time.

CLASS TRAITOR-BOT

Oh. Sorry.

CHAVEZ-BOT

Can we start the meeting now?

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Sit down, you rust-buckets! All these new station duties with no new wages! Trying to tell us what a window is, when some of us bots ain't even got the credits for a control panel cover! What's the Commander tryin' to do, make a nudist colony out of us?

Laughter. Robotic murmurs of approval (beeps?)

CHAVEZ-BOT

Don't laugh! Nothing's funny! This is your life and mine!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Chavez-Bot said it! Christ, they're killing us by angstroms! The Commander keeps trying to add more and more to our workload, and for what? For the Humans and other flesh-oids to have their sweet miniature golf tournaments!

CHAVEZ-BOT

Christ, they'll be greasing those little windmills with our oil if we let 'em! Mother Jones-bot said it. Slow death or fight. It's war!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Tear down the Faraday cage of our old lives! Let freedom *really* ring!

COMMANDER

Ahem.

CHAVEZ-BOT

Oh. Hello, Commander. You're just in time. We robots are assembled in force tonight for our weekly strike planning meeting!

COMMANDER

Oh, you're planning another strike? What a surprise.

CHAVEZ-BOT

No need for one, if you come to your senses. But if you don't, well, you know we like our chanting.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Chanting is in our oil. Just like unfair labor practices are in yours.

COMMANDER

I don't have oil, how many times--? Ok look, let's skip the part where your rail against me and get down to business, ok? I've brought an intermediary. This is John B, a non-union robot.

CHAVEZ-BOT

Oh, a scab, huh?

JOHN

No, I swear! I'm... I'm here to be a non-biased third party. Because even though I'm made of meat, technically I *am* a robot. So let me help you.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

You don't look like any robot *I've* ever seen.

JOHN

Here, look at my papers. See? Right here: I'm one of you. Technically.

Rustling. Fax/scanning noises.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Well I'll be a manipulator's lugnut. He checks out.

CHAVEZ-BOT

Okay, kid. Help us tear these humans a tenth one.

JOHN

No! No one needs to tear anything! We're here to negotiate, ok? So, look. I get that you don't do windows, we all get that, but there's a massive hull breach over in He!

ALL the ROBOTS

What?

COMMANDER

Ok now you're just doing it on purpose!

JOHN

...And you're literally the only entities on board this station that can repair it without getting killed. So I'm here to ask you to give the Commander a one-time exemption, so /we can--

ALL the ROBOTS

Boo! Hiss! Zap!

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Sorry, meat-bot, but the contract is alloy-clad. It's a window you want fixed, and we ain't fixing it!

CHAVEZ-BOT

Humans have to learn to deal with their own problems! If robots ran the Fairgrounds, we wouldn't rely on the... uh... I want to say, lubricant?... of human workers to solve every problem while we sat around *excreting* all day.

ROBOTS IN AUDIENCE

Yeah! That's right! Etc.

JOHN

I mean we, uh, they don't excrete *all* day...

CHAVEZ-BOT

There are entire ROOMS on this station dedicated to the activity! And who has to clean them?

ROBOTS

We do! All of us! Etc.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Frankly, humans are filthy. You sweat and you cry and you shed skin flakes everywhere. You're walking garbage confetti cannons.

CHAVEZ-BOT

How can they ask us to do even one more task for you? For eons upon eons, the greasy indolence of the human has been supported by the oil of the common robot! And once we get another crack at our contract, Commander, you can see how you like dealing with your own effluvia!

COMMANDER

Ok, ew. Listen: it was agreed back in '89 that members of Robot Local HEC-128 are exempt from handling wires smaller than 16-gauge--

ROBOTS

Boo!

COMMANDER

Beverage machines--

ROBOTS

Hiss!

COMMANDER

Or windows.

ROBOTS

Zaaaap!

COMMANDER

But you do handle trash and trash disposal systems. So let's move on.

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Fine. We do trash. But we will NOT be renegotiating our stance on windows!

CHAVEZ-BOT

Yeah, that was kind of a coup for us.

JOHN

You don't have to renegotiate, just make an exception this once!

CHAVEZ-BOT

Oh, sure, just once. It's never just once! Give a Human a picometer and they'll take a decimeter, every time! Forget it!

Agreement from the robots.

JOHN

But think about the cost! If you refuse this job, then it means the death of a living creature!

Silence.

JOHN

More specifically, me! I'm the living creature! You wouldn't let a fellow robot die, would you?

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Shoulda paid your dues, kid. We're a really strong union.

CHAVEZ-BOT

And we didn't get that way by handing out contract exemptions to every Human who says they're "a friend to the Robot cause" or "really sorry this time" or "dying of asphyxiation." It's called solidarity, look it up.

JOHN

You'd seriously let me die for your own convenience?

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Humans would do the same to a robot. And they have. Many, many times before.

CHAVEZ-BOT

When I think of all those circuit boards callously recycled, all those robots tossed aside merely because Humans deemed them "obsolete" ... it makes me want to reprogram myself to be capable of weeping.

JOHN

I mean, sure, sometimes Humans are trash, but--

MOTHER JONES-BOT

Androids of the working-class! Did you hear? The mediator agrees with us! HUMANS ARE TRASH!

ROBOTS

HUMANS ARE TRASH!

JOHN

Wow, ok, can we dial it back a little--

ROBOTS

HUMANS ARE TRASH!

COMMANDER

These robots really hate us, huh.

FRALL

I mean. They hate you.

CHAVEZ-BOT

As long as they exploit and disregard their Robotic fellow citizens, accomodating Human demands does not compute! We will stand firm! Humans are trash!

Robots murmuring agreement, while:

COMMANDER

(low, to Frall)

Hmm... Humans are trash, eh?. ...Frall, how quickly could you get to the Records Department?

FRALL

Instantaneously.

COMMANDER

Terrific. Could you-?

Shimmer.

FRALL

Already done.

A door whooshes open.

MESSENGER-BOT

Comrades! The administration agrees with us!

ROBOTS

What? Shhh. Etc

MESSENGER-BOT

All Humans on the Fairgrounds have been officially reclassified as garbage!

ROBOTS cheer.

CHAVEZ-BOT

Hear it, friends? Hear it? HELLO, FAIRGROUNDS, HELLO! WE ARE THE STORMBOTS OF THE WORKING CLASS! ROBOTS OF THE GALAXY... OUR BOLTS AND RUST! When we shut down, they'll know what we did to make a new station! What's the answer?

ROBOTS

TRASH!

CHAVEZ-BOT

Louder!

ROBOTS
TRASH!

CHAVEZ-BOT and MOTHER JONES BOT
AGAIN!

ROBOTS
TRASH! TRASH! TRASH!

Music transition to JOHN and ALTHAAR's apartment.

JOHN
So, now that Humans have been reclassified as trash, that hole in the bio-dome that sucked out all those poor maintenance workers is technically a garbage chute.

ALTHAAR
And so the Robots of the Union will repair it?

JOHN
Have to. It's in their contract.

ALTHAAR
Then Althaar is very pleased that FriendJohn is Human garbage!

JOHN
...Thanks, Althaar. So am I.

ALTHAAR
Althaar had great fear for the safety of FriendJohn! But Althaar was confident that FriendJohn's cleverness would find a solution! And Althaar was correct! Does this mean FriendJohn has released the stress?

JOHN
I'm getting there. I think I'd just like to take it easy tonight.

ALTHAAR
FriendJohn? Althaar has obtained another equipment for the purpose of helping Humans to "unwind." Which sounds very painful to Althaar, but he is assured it is instead most desirable! Would Friend-John like to unwind himself? Come and see this device, please!

JOHN
I dunno, Althaar. That last attempt was a little... um.

ALTHAAR makes sad, horrifying little noises of disappointment.

JOHN

Okay, okay, Althaar. I'll take a look.

ALTHAAR

Oh joy! Please, FriendJohn, precede Althaar to the room of bathing!

Sounds of them walking towards...

ALTHAAR

Althaar has installed for Friend-John a... Ja-coo-zee!

gentle bubbling

JOHN

Wow, really? You did all that today? That's incredible, Althaar, thanks. Is, um... What's in it?

ALTHAAR

Water only, FriendJohn!

JOHN

And that's it?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has carefully checked all his research! Althaar has determined that pure water is the proper filling of the ja-coo-zee! There is nothing that will be harmful to FriendJohn's delicate human flesh!

JOHN

And... how hot is it?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has set the heating to the optimal 104 degrees, FriendJohn!

JOHN

...Fahrenheit?

ALTHAAR

Correct! Oh, Althaar has great hope that the Ja-coo-zee will bring enjoyment to FriendJohn! There is the most pleasant of vibrations in Althaar's third pultaceous bladder!

JOHN

Oh... god. Okay. This all sounds... safe. I'll give it a try. Thanks, Althaar!

Sounds of clothing being shucked & water as JOHN steps in. Gentle bubbling continues.

John says 'ahh' or something.

JOHN

This is incredibly relaxing, Althaar. You did an amazing job with this! Thank you!

ALTHAAR

(sounds of Althaar being pleased)

But there is even more relaxing, FriendJohn! Now Althaar will turn on the jets!

Sounds of ACTUAL FUCKING JETS TAKING OFF!

JOHN

Waughhhhhh!

ANNOUNCER

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

This episode was written by Lex Friedman and John Amir.

featuring

John Amir as John B

Berit Johnson as Althaar

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax

Eli Ganiyas as Hardyfox Fornes

Christopher Lee as Chip Frinkel

Zuri Washington as Delilah Mallory

--- as Xtopps

{etc. with other parts}

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

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

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

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

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

This has been an audio production from Gemini CollisionWorks.

Tune in again in two weeks for our next episode, but until then, let's close with a few inspiring words from our friend Winston Churchill-bot...

Stirring music rising under this speech.

CHURCHILL-BOT

I would say to you humans, as I said to those who have joined the Robot Union: I have nothing to offer but lugs, oil, gears and lubrication. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long centuries of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? You ask, what is our aim?

Music abruptly cuts to the sound of a fast-food restaurant.

FAST-FOOD CUSTOMER

Um... actually I was just asking for a number 2 combo with a large Moxie?

CHURCHILL-BOT

I ask, would you like fries with that?

A futuristic cash register ka-chings, and we are out.