

ROGUEMAKER Episode 2: Odd-Size Baggage

[static]

[As the narrator speaks, soft synth music like 'ooh spooky mystery aliens' begins to play]

TRACER DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR

For all those who ask 'are we really alone? Or is there intelligence out there beyond just humans and gnonw?' the Tracers have always been a beacon of hope... or fear. Who were the Tracers? Who were the people who carved out vast patterns – dubbed Traces – on so many uninhabited worlds, across so many systems, only to vanish before humans or gnonw even left their home planets? It's a question everyone wonders about from time to time. The signs of the Tracers' ancient civilisation are all around us, marking the worlds we visit for work or leisure, and yet, we live among them largely indifferent.

KUTH MUDWO

People often forget that before we found each other, gnonw and humans both came across TRACES first. So there was this sense of dread or fear or excitement, building up with every new planet they visited with their slow, early lightflight – this sense of, oh Lamth, or oh God, or oh-what-have-you, who *made* these things... and when are we gonna meet them?

TRACER DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR

That's the voice of Kuth Mudwo, a historian from Hosklamthud University on Tand. They study the cultural memory of Traces among spacers – scientists, co employees, and others among the minority of our society that spend the majority of their time in space.

[The music picks up into a brighter tune that sounds like shyly meeting the kid who's gonna be your best friend forever on the playground for the first time.]

KUTH MUDWO

I want you to imagine the moment – about 1800 Tand years, 300 Earth years ago – when the first ñnonw popped up out of their ship on that moon in Gliese 876 system and saw the first human and, beneath the emotions of first contact, both of them were thinking "This is a Tracer." It was completely an understandable mistake – neither species had met anyone intelligent who wasn't of their species before, nor had they seen any signs of intelligent aliens BESIDES the Traces. And, of course, we still don't know of anyone else, besides each other... and a ton of microbes, I suppose.

TRACER DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR

As the human and alien partnership expanded, as cos took to space to solve our environmental crises and grow their profits, and as tourists took to space to see the sights, there was a quiet engine to all the bounty - Tracer tech.

KUTH MUDWO

Lots of the early tourism boom was fuelled by - what else, what we learned from Tracer ruins about how to make more efficient lightflight fuel. And that in turn got more people out to SEE the Tracer ruins. I still remember my first time seeing one in person. Oh it was out at Kapteyn's - it was a massive shape scarring half the planet - the spiral just spiralled in on itself and you felt like you could disappear in it. Disappear like the Tracers who made it.

They're - for most people who live on homeworlds, there's still this incomprehensibility to the Traces that goes way beyond the fact that we have no idea what they were meant for. It's just, the scale. Who would make shapes like that, and why only on dead worlds?

KUTH MUDWO (con't)

I mean, many of my colleagues think, and I would agree, that the cos never would have allowed AAA to be passed into law by J-Gov if there were any Traces on living worlds, but I digress. Are they art? Are they language? Are they blueprints? For what? You know, we don't even believe that any Traced world we've found is the one the Tracers originated from. We haven't found their homeworld. Where did this ancient species come from? Where did they go? Naturally, when a question goes unanswered for so long, people tend to lose interest - they just get used to living with the mystery. But I want to know.

TRACER DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR

Professor Mudwo isn't the only one who wants to know. In addition to sparking academic interest, passion for the Tracer mystery abounds in the conspiracy theorist community.

[Static starts to come in and out, making bits of the following paragraph almost inaudible until the documentary is completely overtaken by static.]

TRACER DOCUMENTARY NARRATOR (*con't*)

Celebrities have pet theories, the soap opera Dr. Sang Will See You Now even made an episode about the fate of the Tracers once, but hard-core members of the self-proclaimed "Trace-tester" community debunk-

[The static fades out; ROGUEMAKER Theme Song by Emily Branam plays.]

EMILY

(sung)

*Ground control, send me down
I'm lost up here and I can't be
found.*

*Ground control, are you there?
The voice in my head, it fills the
dead air, says*

*"You've got time,
You've got time."*

*"You've got time,
You've got time."*

EMMA

ROGUEMAKER: A science fiction podcast. Episode 2: Odd-Size Baggage.

[Alyss calmly hums "Oh, My Darling Clementine" to herself as she drums her fingers on something.]

ALYSS

Ugh.

(sighs)

So this is it, huh?

(beat)

Still not talking to me, rust bucket? Just gonna make me listen to a shitty Tracer documentary some armchair analyst thought would win them a Zhugg award?

[Soft, atmospheric synth music begins to play.]

[Alyss knocks on the wall of the pod.]

ALYSS

Huh?

SHIP

(A) The exit is sealed for your safety.

ALYSS

Hey, thanks, it's a lovely tomb!

[Sounds of shifting as Alyss tries to reach for something in the cramped pod.]

ALYSS

If I could just - get some light in here - ah!

[A click and a beep as Alyss manages to turn the flashlight on on her phone. More shifting as she looks around.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Nothing. Absolutely nothing useful in this tin can. No control panel, because oh my stars, what if someone hit the wrong button and SUED the co... so instead they just make us. HELPLESS.

[Another click.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

No signal, naturally.

(beat)

Mmmh. It's a burner. Gotta prepare for all possibilities... And, it's not like it'll matter if I'm found with what's in this suitcase...

[A click and a short chime from Alyss's phone.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Is the video recording? Good.

(clears her throat)

To the J-Gov agent who finds this:
give this video to Sandrine
Bawbee, of Groombridge Station.
No, that isn't her real name, and
you're going to leave her well
enough alone. Here's why: locker
J13 at Middleman Storage in
Dededo, code 206265. You might
have to work with the Sol System
authorities to access it, but I'm
sure you have your... ways. Inside,
you'll find damning evidence
identifying the perpetrators
behind over a dozen of your most
high-profile cold murder cases.
You'll recognise a lot of the
names from various co boards, but
you should know them for who they
really are: scum who hired a
contract killer like me to take
out anyone who was trying to rise
against them. I pulled the
trigger, but they called the
shots. These are all bad people
who have had it too good for too
long. They took their seat at the
table and they haven't budged –
and they've pushed others away,
leaving them starving on the
floor. I'd prefer they go out
staring down the barrel of my gun,
but – well, I don't do that
anymore. And, so long as they
suffer.

[A beat. The music fades out.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

I trust that's enough of a bribe for you, though you don't have to call it that if you don't want. If you find me dead in this pod, you'll soon have much bigger problems.

(A beat. A breath. Then, quieter:)

Well, if I die, I die on my terms.

[A pause, as we transition into another pod. Ship's voice fades in, and Malachi talks over it.]

MALACHI

Oh, Ship... you're trying so hard...

SHIP

(H) "You are in the wrong," replied the fiend; "and, instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I am miserable; am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? Would you not call it murder if you could-'
(A) Read-aloud paused.

(down-chime)

MALACHI

Hm? What's this now?

POD TEN

(as Hieronymous)

But Doctor, I'm afraid of skipping!

(as Dr Sang)

Never fear, Hieronymous, my friend here has the finest racing ship in the galaxy- it's fast, it's safe, and it's our ticket away from the mafia.

(as Hieronymous)

Doctor, it's not that - it's my motion sickness!

(as Dr Sang)

I've got the perfect cure for that, my dear - our love.

MALACHI

(clapping)

Bravo! Incredible memory.

POD TEN

AH! What- DaAH! AaaAAAah!

MALACHI

Those were lines from *Dr Sang Will See You Now*, right? The soap opera? Oh, if only love could cure motion sickness, but then, it's not the most accurate show, is it?

POD TEN

Yes. Ummm. Hieronymous wasn't very well written that episode.

(clears their throat)

To whom am I speaking?

MALACHI

Hey, sorry to startle you, there.
This is your flight attendant,
Malachi Tessera. Or, perhaps not
your flight attendant – your voice
isn't familiar. You definitely
aren't a passenger, but Ship seems
to have put us in contact, so
you're probably in another escape
pod. Good job, Ship! This
interference is a lot to untangle,
but you're doing great.

[A beat. Ship doesn't respond.]

MALACHI (*con't*)

Still can't hear me, huh?

POD TEN

It can't hear you either?

MALACHI

So you *are* in an escape pod.

POD TEN

Eh, uh – yeah, but I'm... not, like,
a passenger, per se.

MALACHI

You don't say! You don't seem like
a rescuer, either, so... stowaway?
Oh, we haven't had one of those in
ages!

POD TEN

Y-you're like, really casual about
this.

MALACHI

If you're a soul on board, I look after you. Never mind that we aren't really... on board, anymore. Plutonic are the only ones who care if you paid. We don't, right, Ship? (A pause. A sigh.) Oh...

POD TEN

Yeah... yeah. You got me, I'm a... stowaway. Heh. No point in like, not admitting that, I guess?

MALACHI

You're lucky we had an extra escape pod!

POD TEN

Oh stars. Oh stars, oh my stars, oh - oh you're right, oh dear surfaced *hell*, I should've- I could've like- I could've *killed* you, I could've killed *me*, this is- this is like all my fault, holy surfaced FUCK-

[Pod Ten starts to hyperventilate.]

MALACHI

Heyyyyy... woah woah woah there, hey - it's gonna be alright.

POD TEN

No it *isn't*, sorry, all due respect but like, you don't KNOW, I- I- I should've told you or- or the Captain, or something, or-

MALACHI

We'll have time for that AFTER you catch your breath.

[Nothing but rapid shallow breathing comes over the comm.]

MALACHI (con't)

You still there?

[More panicked breathing.]

[As Malachi speaks, soft calming piano music begins to play.]

MALACHI (con't)

Alright, let's work under the assumption you can still hear me, okay? Okay. I can hear you. I'm here. Just here. Not going anywhere. Remember to breathe, deep and slow, deep and slow. In for four, hold for seven, out for eight. Deep and slow, like that -

[Pod Ten gives a panicked, gasping attempt at a deep breath. Malachi joins them with a more calmed example.]

MALACHI (con't)

In. Out. Yeah, that's much better. Keep breathing, in and out, just like that. If you want, can you stretch your legs down as far as you can go in the pod. Twist the ankles, make the toes make a circle, feel that muscle stretching. And then relax it. I'm here, I'm with you, friend. Keep breathing.

[Tempered by Malachi's coaching, the breath evens, melting into the low-level background static.]

MALACHI (*con't*)

Good. You just keep breathing, friend. Hey, let's try a story, to pass the time and give you something else to think about. From what you were quoting earlier, it sounds like you're a big fan of *Dr Sang Will See You Now*. Now, I've only seen season one out of the what, ten? They've got out now, and-

POD TEN

Uh, fifteen.

MALACHI

Fifteen! Ooh, that's impressive. Well, the episode where Dr Sang and Hieronymous go skipping wasn't in season one, but, the two of us, my friend? Heh, we've got some time. And you're in luck. I CAN tell you about the time I went skipping. It was out at the twin suns of Luyten...

[The music shifts to some more upbeat, boopy synths for a fun happy space time.]

POD TEN

Woah...

MALACHI

Yeah! Nobody but cultists and skippers in that system, and it's as lawless as they say. J-Gov is far away, when you're out there. Now, it was my first time skipping and still to date my only time skipping. So naturally, one of the suns decided to flare. The red light flooded the screen and left me blinded and strapped into the pilot's seat, and the only thing there was to do was aim straight, and hope. The craft was souped-up, definitely not regulation but it held together, pushing the limits of mundane physics. And it made sense, you know? It did. What skippers say, about skipping being real living – just a person and a machine, straining eyes and muscles and resistors and thrusters and joints, all in tandem. About feeling the speed. Now, by definition it was slower than lightflight, but the stars have never looked so much like you could reach out and touch them.

POD TEN

W-what... what happened?

MALACHI

What do you mean?

POD TEN

Well, like, clearly you're still alive...

MALACHI

Oh, after? The memory of the flight is so crystallised, the details after aren't important. The flare died down. My opponent won, naturally – wasn't her first time. I think I got drinks with her after.

[A pause. Pod Ten is no longer hyperventilating.]

MALACHI (con't)

What's your name, friend?

[The scene shifts, as the music becomes harsher and more dramatic. We're back in Alyss's pod, right where we last left off.]

ALYSS

To my dear Sandrine –
Fuck you. Fuck you for all eternity. We were basically CHILDREN, Sandrine. My sister and I. You promised us prosperity and delivered us pain. You used my sister for her flying skills and me for my fighting skills, and you made us think we were *important*, but really you had us trapped, because we were too naive to know better back then. Well, I know now. You just kept dangling prizes in front of us.

ALYSS (con't)

There's a special place in hell for people like you... and don't you forget that it's only thanks to me that you aren't there right this second. You owe me your *life* for that night on the Fester, and because I know you take that stuff seriously, you're gonna use your channels to - safely - get this message to my sister. And you better correct the subtitles if the autosub screws them up.

And finally, my real message.

[Just before Alyss gets to her next message, we cut back to Pod Ten and Malachi. The music gets gentler again, as the piano comes back in.]

POD TEN

Um... Uh, you can call me Pod Ten.
Uh, they/them.

[Malachi laughs.]

POD TEN

Well, that's what the AI's calling me! Surfaced thing can't hear like, *anything* I'm saying-

MALACHI

Language, language. Ship's trying its best.

POD TEN

Really? It's, like, a customer service AI, and it can't even do that part of its job right now, let alone the whole like, survival thing.

MALACHI

Easy, Pod 10... nice to meet you. I'm Malachi, I use he/him pronouns.

Hey, how come you curse like a gnonw? You sound human. Are gnonw expletives hip with the kids these days?

POD TEN

I'm 19!

MALACHI

Sorry - are gnonw expletives hip with the 19-year-olds these days?

POD TEN

It's - like - I picked it up from Dr Sang. Um, Dr Sang's, uh, my favourite TV show, and Dr Sang's gnonw, and the gnonw used to like, exile people to the surface on Tand in the olden times when they committed a crime, so-

MALACHI

Gotcha, gotcha - it's okay. God, the etymology is fascinating.

(beat)

Was that your first panic attack, Pod 10?

POD TEN

N- um, uh, no, but. That's like, not important.

MALACHI

It is important. It's happened before?

POD TEN

Yeah. But I can handle it.

MALACHI

It never hurts to ask for help.

POD TEN

Sure.

MALACHI

How are you feeling?

POD TEN

It's... it's getting better.

MALACHI

Good. Take your time.

[A beat. The music intensifies, slightly.]

POD TEN

D'you - you're, like, the flight attendant, right? Do you know why the AI can't hear us?

MALACHI

No, I'm sorry. The sorts of interference that could cause this amount of comms difficulties are well outside a flight attendant's wheelhouse. You said your install of Ship called you by pod number?

POD TEN

Yeah.

MALACHI

That checks out. Well, Ship wouldn't have a record of you in the passenger log, anyway, what with you being a stowaway, but it doesn't matter because these pod instal's of Ship are 16 days old. They wouldn't know any of the passengers.

POD TEN

But it knows you?

MALACHI

Yeah, by bioscan. I've been crew on the 999 for a year now. Ship and I go way back.

(sigh)

For safety reasons, in the event of an emergency evac from a compromised flight, each escape pod has its own separate installation of the AI. When they're updated, they're all essentially the same person, they know all the same things - though, Ship doesn't consider itself a person, but anyway - updating the pod instal's is the flight attendant's job, but I was so busy adding things to the main install's media library that I forgot.

MALACHI (*con't*)

If I had done the pod installs,
Ship would at least know enough
about each of the passengers to
keep them entertained while we
wait!

Instead, my install here in Pod 8,
last updated 16 days ago, still
thinks we're in the middle of
reading Frankenstein. Which we
finished a week and a half ago.

POD TEN

You... read books with your AI?

MALACHI

Yeah! We love the classics.

POD TEN

D'you do a lot of mods on it?

MALACHI

Not really. I'm not a coder.

[The music starts to return to something more gentle.]

POD TEN

Yeah the UJ5 is... not really the AI
model a coder would go for.

MALACHI

Do you mod AIs?

POD TEN

I mean... like, I dabble. A UJ5,
though...

MALACHI

Ship doesn't need to be fancy to do its job, or to have a big custom media library. Even when someone can't hear us, it's still rude to talk badly of them.

POD TEN

Ooooookay. Well, your um, weird relationship with the AI aside. I. Um.

(A sigh)

There's something you should know? Uh, s-something I need to tell you.

MALACHI

Yeah?

[A new melody starts to play, like 'ooh there's a mystery afoot!']

POD TEN

Well... have you been in contact with No Go? Or, like, the Captain?

MALACHI

No, you're the first person I've talked to.

POD TEN

I'm not No Go, I'm Ch- oh. Ah.

MALACHI

Oh? Oh, I'm sorry, I was saying 'no', as in negative, not referring to the passenger named No Go. You know No Go?

POD TEN

Oh. Um. Sorry! Uh, s-ssame, you're the first person I've talked to also. I haven't spoken to anyone else since we got in the pods.

(beat)

Okay. So like... there's something I *really* need to tell the Captain.

MALACHI

Hey, Pod Ten, we've been over this. It's okay. You don't owe us an apology, you're fine. You didn't take anybody's resources here, it was just an engine failure. Plutonic are cheapskates on maintenance, everyone knows that. There's nothing we can do now but wait. Rescue'll be coming soon.

POD TEN

What if I told you it was sabotage?

[The music stops, the last note ringing out. Then, we're back with Alyss again. She sounds much more sincere and emotional than we've heard her before.]

ALYSS

Hey, Pilar.

I love you. I love you to the moon and back, and I love you to the stars and back, and I want you to know I'm sorry. I am so, so sorry. I wanted to protect you, but to keep you safe was to keep you near me, and that put you in the same kind of danger I was in. I know how much you hate when people think you need protection, but... you're my LITTLE SISTER.

ALYSS (*con't*)

I was convinced that making enough money was the way to get us out of there, but I only dug us in deeper. I only moved us to a prettier cage. And when I switched careers to something far worse... I went too far. And I'm so sorry for that. I kept sending you back money, postcards, dreaming of some future that was never going to be. I'm a damn stupid idiot who has to go through three layers of identity just to get a message to you before I die.

I wanted to sit on some porch somewhere beautiful with you, looking out on hills or something, drinking wine in crystal glasses. Two old ladies. I should've just sat with you in the present. It's better to just... BE with what you have, than to waste time pinning your hopes on the impossible. I know that, now.

But honestly, I gave up any rights to a peaceful retirement a long time ago. I don't deserve one. There's too much blood on my hands. You deserve everything, though. You were smart. You never got in too deep. You don't see their faces in your dreams.

(a forced chuckle)

ALYSS (*con't*)

To think, Sandrine said I'd never make it to thirty. Well, I blew her out of the water on that one, huh? Fifty's not too shabby for someone like me.

Pilar, I need you to know that I tried to make it right, at the end. I'm completely done with my... contracting for the cos... have been for a few years, now. I've been working with an organisation that's actually been trying to do some good! To make the universe better. And that's because of YOU, Pilar.

(Soft piano music begins to play)

ALYSS (*con't*)

Hey, hey, it's okay to cry, but not forever, alright? I want you to be happy, love. I'd sign it to you, but there's nowhere to mount the phone and I can't sign it one-handed.

If you're seeing this, Pilar,
then... everything will have
changed. You should know I tried
to stop it, and I failed. But I
died doing something that
mattered. For once in my damn
life. And there are other people
out there, also doing things that
matter, inside my new organisation
and out. You're one of them. And
you can find the others. No matter
how awful everything gets.

I love you. Goodbye.
(blows an air kiss)

[A click and a beep as Alyss turns off the phone.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Ugh, stars, Pilar, you'd hate this
pod. At least... it's me and not
you.

[More shifting noises. Alyss drums with her fingers a bit again.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Doesn't look like I'll be
delivering this to Jawn now. No,
absolute best option, if J-Gov
gets here before we're all dead, I
gotta ditch the case somehow and
pray they don't scan this part of
space too hard. Hm... Fat chance of
any of that.

[She raps the wall.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Hear that, Ship? If we get rescued
I need you to blow up my suitcase
for the good of society!

SHIP

(A) The exit is sealed for your
safety.

ALYSS

Good robot. Don't let any agents
in. Keep me safe.

[Alyss fingers the latch on the suitcase.]

ALYSS (*con't*)

Hang on, the, the latch... I swear
it was locked.

[She fully opens the case, and feels around in it.]

ALYSS

The delivery's still there. All
intact... but... but who opened my
suitcase?

[The music intensifies, like, 'oh shit whaaaat???']

[Aaaand we're back with Malachi and Pod Ten.]

MALACHI

What.

POD TEN

Sabotage! Like, someone-messing-
with-the-flight sabotage!

*[The music shifts to a more funky mystery beat, like 'oh yeah I'm
so cool, sneaking around, finding out who sabotaged the ship. I'm
basically space Sherlock Holmes over here.']*

MALACHI

Be very careful what words you're
throwing around, here.

POD TEN

The only people allowed in the
cockpit are like, you and the
Captain, right?

MALACHI

That's correct. And I don't often
have reason to go there.

POD TEN

I saw someone go in there.

MALACHI

What?

POD TEN

In like, the middle of the first
night, when everyone was asleep.

MALACHI

Are you sure it wasn't the
Captain?

POD TEN

Yeah, the Captain's a gnonw,
right?

MALACHI

Captain Tarsul's gnonw, yeah.

POD TEN

This was a human. Like, um, an
older human, long coat, short dark
hair?

MALACHI

(to himself)

That could be Alyss.

(to Pod Ten)

What were they doing in the cockpit?

POD TEN

Um, they were, um-

MALACHI

Wait, what were YOU doing in the cockpit?

POD TEN

I wasn't in the cockpit! I-I just like, um - I was just up to get some mac and cheese because hey, I gotta eat, and I SAW the cockpit. And the human.

MALACHI

..Right.

POD TEN

We just...stared at each other for a bit? Like, deer-in-headlights style. I had NOT expected to see anyone, and neither had they, um - then I had an idea, so I tried to like, play it like Quentin, in the Dr Sang episode where they find out their dad was the Luna President because they have the same rare blood type? Uh, Quentin pretended to be, like, a lightflight auditor to trick the spaceport staff. Only, this human saw like right through me - like, they said they needed to do something in the cockpit, and in exchange for my silence they wouldn't tell anyone I was a stowaway. And they'd like, mess with the AI's programming so it wouldn't notice me either, um-

MALACHI

WHAT???

POD TEN

Yeah, which, like, phew, that hadn't even occurred to me - um, anyway, I'm not an IDIOT, I asked them, like, what they were gonna *do* in the cockpit, and they said none of my business, so I asked would it HARM anyone, and they said, like, no, we'd all be fine and still get to Sirius and no one would ever even know about this if e-everything went well. So I said - deal.

[Funky mystery music fades out.]

MALACHI

You LET them go into the cockpit
and REPROGRAM SHIP???

POD TEN

Yeah! I'm- I'm sorry, what was I
supposed to do? I like, SERIOUSLY
needed to get to Sirius!

MALACHI

(breathing in)

Okay. Okay. That was probably not
the best move. Clearly this person
at the cockpit was comfortable
lying.

But! The good news is! These
16-day-instals of Ship are from
BEFORE the reprogramming! You're
okay, Ship!

[Malachi pats the hull of his escape pod.]

POD TEN

There's more.

MALACHI

What?

POD TEN

Well, uh, the next day I couldn't, like, stop thinking about it – I was like, crammed into a crawl space with nothing to do but edit my vlogs all day – so the next night, when I went to get my channa masala for dinner, I found the person from the night before. Sleeping. I like, I *know* that sounds super creepy, but I wanted to make sure they weren't up to anything bad. So I... looked in their suitcase? It was like, old-fashioned and leathery and covered in stickers – it took me like two minutes to open it slowly enough so the hinge wouldn't creak. That thing needs oil-

MALACHI

Alyss.

POD TEN

What? Huh?

MALACHI

It WAS Alyss. She has a suitcase like that. The suitcase looks very friendly and touristy, but she never talked to anyone and mostly just listened to her music. Which is fair enough. Some passengers prefer that.

POD TEN

Like, it definitely wasn't packed for a vacation.

MALACHI

What was inside?

POD TEN

...I have no idea.

MALACHI

But you must have seen -

POD TEN

I DID. I just have no idea what it was.

MALACHI

Can- you te- can you tell me what colour -

POD TEN

Look, I will like, describe it to you as best as I possibly can. It looked like a bird sitting on an old-fashioned boat, but constructed by someone who saw a picture of a bird, once, and didn't quite understand that they have, like, wings, and it was, like, reflected through a glass of something bright lime-green, and the swirly bits kept changing what direction they were swirling in, and then they'd added, like, a fluffy orange pom-pom for decoration.

MALACHI

Um...

POD TEN

Do you believe me?

MALACHI

Well-

POD TEN

You HAVE to believe me!

MALACHI

Honesty is the best policy, and this sounds fantastical.

POD TEN

I KNEW you wouldn't believe me, I swear I'm, like, a hundred percent sober!

MALACHI

-the SUITCASE part sounds fantastical. But if Alyss really did sneak into the cockpit and mess with Ship... *I'll need to have a word with her.* Just as soon as we're all in contact again.

Come on, Ship. You can do it.

POD TEN

I'm surprised you haven't asked me why I, like, stowed away?

MALACHI

Huh? Oh. Well, that hardly matters now, does it?

POD TEN

I just, I need you to know you can trust me and that I'm not, like, some kind of murderer or spy!

MALACHI

Pod 10, you really don't seem like either of those...

POD TEN

I stowed away because my mom wants me to be, like, a lawyer, but - I DON'T, I wanna study media studies, but she won't pay for it, but I'm in the final round for this, like, scholarship that would cover it, so I have to travel to interview for it but she can't know I'm travelling.

MALACHI

Okay. That's understandable.

POD TEN

I KNOW this sounds like a classic poor-little-rich-kid-my-mother-doesn't-understand-me-reluctant-heir-running-from-my-responsibilities scenario, but I SWEAR this isn't what it sounds like!

MALACHI

Of course, no worries. Good luck with the interview! When we get out of this.

[A pause.]

MALACHI

Pod Ten? Pod Ten, are you still there? Hello? Oh. The transmission's been cut.

(beat, Malachi chuckles)

Well, that explains where the crew food was disappearing to. Pod Ten should have said they were on board, we'd have been happy to make them some mac and cheese, huh, Ship?

(a pause, a sigh. Ship continues to not hear him.)

...right. They're either the worst spy ever or the best, I'll give them that.

Oh Ship... who messed with you?

[More static, this time leading into dramatic soap opera music.]

NARRATOR - DR SANG

On the latest episode of *Dr Sang Will See You Now...*

BARNARD'S STAR LOCAL

You're not from around these parts, are you? What did you say your name was?

DR SANG

I didn't. I'm a *doctor*.

[Static.]

HIERONYMOUS

Ever since we eloped to Barnard's Star, something just... hasn't felt right.

DR SANG

Hieronymous... don't do this.

HIERONYMOUS

Doctor, I... I have a confession to
make!

*[Scene shift. More static and transmission glitches. Medical
beeping.]*

DR SANG

Never, in all my career, have I
ever seen a case like this. This
is unprecedented.

[Scene shift. Ship landing.]

DR SANG

Who's landing?

HIERONYMOUS

(gasps)

Pirates! We have to move the
patient.

DR SANG

We can't.

[Scene shift.]

DR SANG

I'm... a professional.

NARRATOR - DR SANG

Tune in to *Dr Sang Will See You*
Now... now streaming on your
ZhuggPlug or YlemEyes.

*[We're with Pod Ten now. They've just heard that Dr Sang
commercial.]*

POD TEN

No, no, no! They CAN'T be taking the Hieronymous-is-secretly-evil track! Ugh, that surfaced wannabe hieronymicmuch9 is probably like, gloating all over my comments section...

(noises of frustration)

[Back in Alyss's pod.]

ALYSS

(grumbling to herself)

You'd think floating in an escape pod with no solid comms link is the one place in the universe you'd be SAFE from advertisements...

[Alyss breathes out and shifts in her seatbelt to find a more comfortable position.]

[A gentle guitar melody begins to play, other instruments, such as percussion and bass later joining in.]

ALYSS (con't)

Better me than you. You'd hate it here, Pilar. Though, at least you wouldn't have to hear all this garbage-
Wait. Wait wait wait wait... Wait a minute.

[Alyss fumbles for her phone again.]

ALYSS

Where's the light - *(click, beep)* there.

(a short, sharp chuckle)

Of course! Stars! the co can't have us having control over anything in the pod for liability reasons. They don't wanna get sued. THEY DON'T WANNA GET SUED! Piece of shit escape pod doesn't have a keyboard to write to the AI, but J-Gov passed that accommodation law a while back and even Plutonic's gotta follow the MINIMUM ACCESSIBILITY LAWS FOR DEAF USERS.

(laughs, feeling around for:)

There you are. 3D scanner, I could KISS you!

[Alyss turns on the 3D scanner. It comes alive with a beep and a mechanical whir.]

ALYSS

Alright, I think you're on. Hopefully this shit AI is programmed with enough sign languages to recognise Pan-Oceanian Sign Language...

(speaks aloud as she signs)

Can you see this, rust bucket?

[a steady beeping sound as a response is "typed" out by Ship. Alyss reads aloud:]

ALYSS

'Hello Pod Five I see you are a sign language user. I will write here. What is your name?' Yes!

(speaks as she finger spells)

A-L-Y-S-S O-B-E-L-U-S.

[More beeps as Ship types another response, shorter this time. Alyss reads it out loud again]

ALYSS

'Passenger identified'...

I thought your data wasn't backed
up?

[Another response from Ship, which Alyss reads.]

ALYSS

'Process of elimination. Your
scans and name do not match any
known Plutonic employee...'

(to herself)

It better not match any known
anyone, anywhere.

(speaking aloud while signing)

Ship, our coordinates – what are
they?

[A beat, while Ship types more information out on the scene. Alyss does not read it out loud this time. Some high, worrying sustained synth notes begin to play over the more cheerful background music.]

ALYSS

Are those numbers in an Earth
frame of reference?

[More text appears on screen. The formerly cheerful bassline slows to a stop, as the synth overtakes it.]

ALYSS

Fuck. We're too close.

[Alyss kicks the hull with a grunt of effort. The music stops.]

SHIP

(down-chime)

(A) The exit is sealed for your safety.

[Static fades in, as we begin to hear another transmission. Music like "ooo000oohh spaaAAAAaaace" plays over it.]

TEXTBOOK NARRATOR

-by photometrically monitoring the source brightness over time to produce a light curve, the gravitational microlensing event can be confirmed. The massive object that bends and distorts the light of the background source is never directly observed,

[Obnoxiously upbeat music cuts in, playing under the ad.]

TEXTBOOK AD

Want to study on the go? Don't have time to sit and read? Textbooks Out Loud is the app for you! We will always be free, but you can upgrade to premium for 500 bits a month!

[The spooky space music starts back up after the ad ends.]

TEXTBOOK NARRATOR

-thus the gravitational microlensing technique relies on electromagnetic sources and is not considered an example of multi-messenger astronomy. This consequence of Einstein's general relativity can be used to find objects as small as planets.

[More obnoxiously upbeat music.]

TEXTBOOK AD

Look at you! We applaud your savings-savvy in choosing our free version of Textbooks Out Loud. However, if you'd rather not hear these ads, you can always upgrade to premium for just 500 bits a month!

[Spooky space music starts again, but seems a bit more discordant under the static that starts to cut into the transmission.]

TEXTBOOK NARRATOR

The annular radius of the Einstein ring in a microlensing event-

[The transmission fades back into static.]

[A corrupted version of the theme song plays, repeating the line "Are you there?"]

EMMA

Thank you for listening to ROQUEMAKER. This episode, "Odd-Size Baggage", was written by Emma Johanna Puranen and directed by Rook Mogavero and Emma Johanna Puranen. The script was edited by Rook Mogavero and Shaoni C. White, with sensitivity reading by Caroline Mincks. Sound editing was by Emma Johanna Puranen and William R. Coughlan. Original music was composed by Emily Branam, who also sings our theme song. Our cover art was by Tatyana Archtander.

In order of appearance, this episode featured the voices of:

NHEA

Nhea Dourousseau as Alyss Obelus

EMMA

Emma Johanna Puranen as Ship

ALASDAIR

Alasdair Stuart as Malachi Tessera

EMMA

And:

ROOK

Rook Mogavero as 'Pod Ten'

EMMA

This episode also featured:

CALDER

Calder McClure as Tracer
Documentary Narrator

OLIVER

Oliver Herbort as Kuth Mudwo

NOORIA

Nooria Ahmed as Dr Sang

JUPITER

Jupiter Simpson as Hieronymous

JAMES

James Takahashi as Textbook
Narrator

EMMA

And:

ANNA

Anna Christensen as Textbook Ad

EMMA

Additional voices were lent by William R. Coughlan and Anna Coughlan.

Last but not least, our vibe checker was:

BRUCE THE CAT

Mrow!

EMMA

For transcripts and more, check out our website, roguemaker.space.

If you want to help support ROGUEMAKER, please consider rating and reviewing us on your podcatcher of choice. You can also follow @roguemakerpod on Twitter and Instagram, or tell a friend about us – whether or not you think Hieronymous is secretly evil!

Until next episode, take care of each other, and stay safe out there.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

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