

ATTN: Mandatory Holiday Briefing

(Breathing Space: Flying Further Season Finale)

By

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Breathing Space, Fading Frontier includes adult content such as adult language, sexual situations, violence, and substance use.

This episode contains drug use or abuse and implied animal abuse.

Additional sensory contact warnings can be found in the show notes.

Intro plays.

(Sung in a bluesy, bluegrass tone with simple percussive and fiddle background music)

"I ain't got no home to go to
I ain't got nothing to sell
But my stars will never leave me
Even when I'm sold to hell
I was born under a blue sky
And I'll die out in the black
When I'm gone don't no one mourn me
'Cause my debts will drag me back"

Instrumental Interlude - fiddle solo.

Intro Repeats, then slam cut to silence.

Sound effects: Tranquil festive music on strings overlaid with the sounds of wind rushing leads into speech, then stops.

ANNOUNCER

(smooth narrator voice)

It is said that Gryla, the
child-eating giantess, dwells
somewhere deep in the frozen
mountains, ever hungry for naughty
children to put into her cooking

pot. And who does she send to seek
out little ones who misbehave?
None other than her 13 Sons, the
Yule Lads.

Music: Peppy, upbeat, seasonal winter holiday tune on bells.

ANNOUNCER

(Cheerful) And now one of those
charmingly mischievous Yule Lads
can be your child's constant
companion, with the Look and
Listen Lad, from YuKon!

LOOK AND LISTEN LAD

(Eerie, growly voice)
I'm always watching.

ANNOUNCER

That's right! These adorable
semi-autonomous robotic gnomes
have a full suite of surveillance
equipment to make sure your little
ones are never truly alone. Don't
know what to get your children for
the holidays? The Look and Listen
Lad is connected straight to
YuKon's servers, and ready to
deliver targeted advertising based
on your child's inner desires—no
matter how secret!

LOOK AND LISTEN LAD

I hear everything.

ANNOUNCER

In fact, don't be surprised if the
Look and Listen Lad gives you and
other adults in your household a
look and listen as well! Hey, we
can all use an extra pair of eyes
and ears to make sure we're
keeping it nice—and not naughty.

LOOK AND LISTEN LAD

Gryla's always hungry.

ANNOUNCER

The Look and Listen Lad from
YuKon. Be Good, For Goodness'
sake. He'll make sure of it.

Section break whoosh.

NETPEDIA NARRATOR

(heavily digitized artificial
voice)

Waystation Markets Employee
Handbook, page 27. Holiday
Celebrations.

(less digitized, still
slightly artificial voice)

Waystation Markets strives to be
an inclusive and welcoming
environment for customers of all
backgrounds. In order to refrain
from appearing to prioritize any
one culture or tradition,
previously,

(distortion to the voice)
it was official Waystation Markets
Policy that no holidays of any
kind

(distortion ends)
be acknowledged by Waystation
Markets employees while in
uniform.

Sound effects: The remainder of the speech is mostly a
minimally distorted artificial voice, although
distortions and digitizations occasionally cut across
phrases, especially the name of the holiday.

However, Waystation Markets
understands the teambuilding,
morale boosting, and company

spirit-generating nature of
nondenominational celebrations. To
this end, The Waystation Markets
Nondenominational Terran Winter
Holiday Celebration has been
created.

This holiday will be celebrated
the first shipment day after
holiday bonuses are released by
payroll. As such, it may differ by
store and shipment region.

Stores will implement the Holiday
Decoration Plan at least three
weeks prior to The The Waystation
Markets Nondenominational Terran
Winter Holiday Celebration,
including displaying Nonny and
Dominic banners, dolls, and
flashing holographic signage
indicating the 25% holiday
discount available to employees.

Note: Nonny and Dominic are
fictional siblings who function as
the company's official Office of
Holiday Happiness and Cheer,
henceforth referred to as the:
O-H-H-C.

Employees with numerous
infractions such as

(different artificial voice
of a lower tone)
Price

(return to usual voice)
of Store 369 waive their discount
eligibility.

Waystation Markets employees are
encouraged to give gifts to one
another during The Waystation
Markets Nondenominational Terran
Winter Holiday Celebration,

especially if said gifts are official Waystation Markets merchandise or in-store essentials like better models of automatic vacuums or training course access codes, which can be ordered by submitting Request Form A-32 through the Waystation Markets Employee Portal.

Employees are further encouraged to write 'wish-memos' to the O-H-H-C, expressing their desire for certain gifts this season in a short note. Notes exceeding 500 characters will not be considered valid. When all the memos have been received, Nonny and Dominic will get to work fulfilling the best-budgeted requests, with Nonny's managerial smarts and Dominic's anti-union tendencies representing the ideal Waystation Markets employee ecosystem.

Please note that the current seasonal edition of the Waystation Markets polo shirt is an acceptable substitution for the standard Waystation Markets employee polo shirt in the three weeks prior to The Waystation Markets Nondenominational Terran Winter Holiday Celebration only.

[distorted] an official condition of employment, Stores are encouraged to engage in a practice known internally as Randomized Gift-Giving Measures, but which employees are encouraged to refer to as Discreet Dominic. Official Waystation Markets manager terminals now contain a program allowing all workers in the store without infractions to be shuffled

and given their gift recipient in a single unbroken loop. Please note: Waystation Markets Store 369 cannot utilize this program as only 1 of 3 staff members is without infractions and eligible for participation.

Sound effects: Electronic distortion as speech ends.

Scene break.

Sound effects: Cat purring.

PRICE

I'm going to need you out of my chair, Ori.

Sound effects: Cat mew.

PRICE

I know. But remember, Orry, from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. I need to sit my ass, and you have the ability to get out of the chair.

Sound effects: Short meow, then impact as the cat jumps down.

PRICE

(Over a retreating meow) You're a real asset to the movement, little lady.

MANAGER

Price, I'm back! You didn't burn the place down while I was gone, right?

PRICE

Well, I tried, but there's no oxygen outside. So, I gave up.

MANAGER

(Chuckles) How've things been?

PRICE

Take a look around, boss. We clearly haven't changed a thing.

MANAGER

You haven— (Annoyed) Oh, PRICE!

PRICE

What? What the hell?

MANGER

You were supposed to put up the official nondenominational winter holiday decorations!

PRICE

What? When?

MANAGER

I left a reminder on my terminal for you.

PRICE

Your terminal? I don't go on your terminal.

MANAGER

When I'm gone for several weeks and I leave things for you, you probably should! Stars without, Price, what am I going to do with you?

PRICE

(Slowly) Give me a raise?

MANAGER

The only thing raising around here is my blood pressure.

PRICE

Fine, I'll go get the boxes.

Sound effects: Footsteps on a hard surface retreating.
Assorted distant thumps.

PRICE

How did recording the new spots
go?

MANAGER

Wasn't anything like the first
time. They really wanted to get
the spin going. And I can't blame
them- I wasn't exactly happy about
having my voice attached to an ad
making light of the Centennial
Storm.

PRICE

Hmm, who would have thought a
mega-corporation would actually be
antsy to do some damage control?

MANAGER

I wasn't even planet-side for half
an hour before getting shoved in
the booth. But I think it turned
out well enough.

PRICE

When can we expect to hear it?

(beat)

MANAGER

Price, it's been airing for three
days.

PRICE

No shit?!

MANAGER

Have you turned on the radio once
since I left?

PRICE

Are you kidding me? You leave for a few weeks and you still want me to have to hear you?

MANAGER

You are my worst employee.

PRICE

I straight up don't know the other guy's name, so he can't be that great.

MANAGER

And yet...

PRICE

"And yet," "and yet," I know.

(beat)

Sound effects: Slight rustle.

PRICE

What's this?

MANAGER

It's a gift.

PRICE

(Confused) You...want me to take it to the mailbox for you?

MANAGER

(Affectionately) It's for you, jackass.

(beat)

PRICE

(With genuine surprise) O-Oh. You... didn't have to, boss.

MANAGER

Well if you want to return it, the store's over 300 million kilometers that way.

PRICE

Point taken.

Sound effects: Rustling paper.

PRICE

It's...a beanie. With a little slice of pizza on it. Why pizza, boss?

MANAGER

It's your favorite flavor of pretzel.

PRICE

Why not get one with pizza pretzels on it?

MANAGER

It's just flavoring dust, it would just look like a pretzel. You wouldn't be able to tell.

PRICE

I would be able to tell.

MANAGER

Well if you don't want it, I can just, y'know-

PRICE

No, no, thanks! Seriously. It's... nice. It'll keep my head warm when the heating sparks out again.

MANAGER

I'm glad you like it. I'm going to go clean the dust out of the office.

PRICE

Uh...Hold on a minute, there's, u-uh-

MANAGER

What's this?

PRICE

Just take it.

MANAGER

Did you get me a holiday gift? I thought you forgot about the company holiday schedule, I-I mean, you didn't do the decorations or anything.

PRICE

Well I don't give a shit about the decorations. They're tacky and they suck.

MANAGER

Oh, so you don't think I'm tacky?

PRICE

Damn, will you just- fucking take it already?

Sound effects: Rustling paper.

MANAGER

(Impressed) The Encyclopedia of Early Spaceship Design. Oh.

(pause)

Price, how did you... how did you know?

PRICE

I can't reach for a single thing in that damn office without knocking over one of your little models.

MANAGER

How'd you get this book? I thought they stopped printing it.

PRICE

Mmm, I know a guy.

MANAGER

Okay, but-

PRICE

Hey, less talking, more reading, slacker! I'm trying to work here, in case you haven't noticed.

MANAGER

All right, all right. Price...
thank you.

PRICE

Yeah, yeah.

Sound effects: A cat purrs, mews.

MANAGER

...Price?

PRICE

Yes, boss?

MANAGER

...Was that a cat?

PRICE

It's...a very long and funny story
that I'll tell you all about after
I go into your terminal and make
sure nobody else has applied to
work here so you can't possibly
fire me.

MANAGER

(laughing)

Oh, jackass.

Section break whoosh.

Music: Twangy Western-style strings.

ANNOUNCER

(voice with a jovial drawl)

Howdy, y'all! Comet Kyle here to
wish you a Happy Hog-a-days!
Because here at Comet Kyle's
All-You-Can-Consume Country
Kitchen, we're celebratin' the
holidays the only way we know how:
by piggin' out!

Sound effects: Happy Oinking.

ANNOUNCER

Fer just one meal voucher, you
gain unlimited access to our
Happy-Hog-a-Days Pigstravaganza
pork-based menu. That includes
bacon-infused bread-based ham
rolls served with real boar
butter, triple-decker hog burgers
lacquered in our homemade
cranberry paste, and a Hog-a-Days
Classic: the All Hog Yule Log, now
with extra sugar and Southern
Hemisphere-style red velvet
barbecue sauce. Now that's an
oinkin' good time!

Sound effects: Deep, rapid oinking.

ANNOUNCER

But all this pressurized pork
product won't last forever, so
come on down to Comet Kyle's
All-You-Can-Consume Country
Kitchen before the Hog-a-Days
Pigstravaganza is over. After all,
the Hog-a-Days only come once a
solar cycle!

Music: Begins to fade out.

Comet Kyle's!...If only the stars
tasted this good.

Section break whoosh.

NETPEDIA NARRATOR

(Same slightly artificial
voice as previous Employee
Handbook narration. The distortion
in the voice continues to fade in
and out through the speech,

especially on numbers and proper nouns.)

Netpedia Entry: Aphelion, sometimes called "Martian New Year," though mostly by non-Martians, is a two-week festival centered around the Martian aphelion, the point in which Mars' orbit is furthest from the sun.

As a full orbit of Mars takes approximately 1.9 Earth years, and most inhabitants of Mars use a modified version of the Terran Standard calendar that has been synchronized with Earth's orbit, Aphelion is observed roughly once every two years, with dates varying dependent on the current synchronized cycle. There is an off-world cliché that says "Martian New Year only comes once every other year."

Aphelion started as a periodic maintenance procedure in the early days of Martian settlement. To kill off unwanted fungal and biological contaminants, residents would be required to don pressure suits and camp either outside the city domes or in subterranean maintenance tunnels while the domes were flushed of atmosphere and opened to the freezing outdoor environment.

Typically, a modern Aphelion festival begins with a procession through local residential areas, with city officials going door-to-door to "check if everyone is out," and performers with large puppets and/or costumes of the

mythological figures of Phobos and Deimos dancing through the streets to "scare people out of the dome."

Other traditions include "tunnel bazaars," a combination of ad-hoc marketplace and semi-historical reenactment similar to Terran "Renaissance festivals," and the sharing and consumption of foods associated with the early Martian settlement period, such as marinated freeze-dried mushrooms and vat-grown meat jerky.

Section break whoosh.

Sound effects: Clicking of a ratchet wrench or tool, a person grunting.

JULY

All right, that...that wasn't so bad after all.

Sound effects: A groan of springs and leather, then the click of a switch.

JULY

This is Boone Actual to the EVA crew;
how copy, Ari?

ARI

(on comms)

Don't you mean "Starlit Sky Actual"?

JULY

(playfully chiding)

No, I do not, until a certain someone actually gets the paperwork filed to change her name in the registry, this ship's name is still the Jackie Boone.

ARI
(on comms)
(Sheepishly) Right, well.
I...guess a certain someone had
better get on that then.
(laughs)
Ah, fine, hearing you five by
five, Boone Actual. Sounds like
you've fixed
our blueline encoder issue.

JULY
Yeah, fingers crossed but I think
I got it. How're things out there?

ARI
(on comms)
Almost finished, uh, I just need
to muscle Remote Drone Number 3
here into the airlock and I'll be
done for the day.

JULY
"Remote Drone Number 3"? I thought
you'd named them all by now.

ARI
(on comms)
I know...I'm still trying to find
one that suits him. Though given
that he keeps drifting slowly to
the right no matter how many times
I recalibrate his gyros...I've
been leaning toward "Dexter."

JULY
(Laughs) Well, I'm sure Molly and
Bosco will be happy to hear their
new sibling has a name.
(laughs again)
You want me to come down and use
the manipulator arm? Help you get
Dexter inside?

ARI
(on comms, suddenly
cagey)

Uh, no, no, that-that's not necessary, no. No need to trouble yourself.

(a beat, then slyly)
A-although, I could probably use some assistance in the maintenance bay once I get inside. Could you meet me there in, say, ten minutes?

JULY
(a little suspicious)
What kind of assistance? Are you feelin' all right, Ari? Is your leg botherin' you again?

ARI
(on comms)
My leg is fine, Jules.
(beat)
Well, oh, oh! Well. OK, it is aching a little.
I might have to adjust some pressure settings on the suit again?

JULY
(no longer suspicious)
OK, we can check that out once you're inside. Ten minutes?

ARI
(on comms)
Ten minutes. More or less.

JULY
OK, see you soon. Love you.

ARI
(on comms)
Copy that, Dispatch. Love you too.

Sound effects: Switch clicks. JULY sighs.

JULY
(to self)
Oh, and it looks like we're

receiving blueline messages again,
too. Lessee... junk, junk,
(scoffs) YuKon junk... oh! A
message from Alma!

Sound effects: Short electronic beep.

ALMA

(over comms)

Hey Jules! Hey Ari! It's Alma,
just sending a message to check in
on my favorite spacers! Are you
all still on Ceres, or is that
ship of
yours finally spaceworthy again?

Mm, anyway, I hope this message
finds you well. Things are still
pretty much the same here. Red Sky
is still Red Sky, and YuKon is
definitely still YuKon, not that
I'd expect anything different.
Mari and Alejandro are doing well,
they're both neck deep in
commissions but they send their
love.

(slyly, joking)

Now I'm not saying that I'm
looking, but, if
you all decide that you could use
an, oh, I don't know, say an old
gossip of a comms operator and her
artist spouses on your crew, well
you just say the word and we'll be
on the first shuttle out, y'hear?

Anyway, just wanted to let you
know we're thinking about you, so
message us back soon! And have a
happy Aphelion! OK. You all take
care. Buh-bye!

Sound effects: Short electronic beep.

JULY

Wait, "Happy Aphelion"? Aphelion
isn't for...

(pauses, then wistful)

Huh...well. Huh! I'll be damned!
First day of 'phelion.
 (a little sad)
Our first Aphelion off-planet.
Huh...
 (sighs)
Well, there's always the next
one.

Scene transition whoosh.

Sound effects: Ambient buzzing of the interior of a
spacecraft continues under the rest of the scene.

 ARI
 (under breath)
Okay, okay...and as long as that
stays put, we should be good to
go. Just don't-Don't. Go.
anywhere.

Sound effects: A questioning high-pitched electronic
beep-boop noise, then a loud rush of air as an airlock
door opens and repressurizes.

 JULY
OK, I'm...
 (stops)
Oh. You're... already out of your
pressure suit.

 ARI
I am, yes.

 JULY
And Dexter is...

 ARI
Still in the airlock, for the
moment. It-it's fine. He's fine in
there. I think he likes it?

 JULY
So, when you said you could use my
assistance in the maintenance
bay...

ARI

I was completely lying to you,
just a little bit, yeah. Um.
But! it's because I wanted this
to be a surprise.

Sound effects: Crinkling rustling.

JULY

What's this?

Sound effects: Rustling.

ARI

Well, today is the first day of
Aphelion, after all, so...I
thought we should have at least
one of the
traditional festival treats.

JULY

Crunchy mushrooms!! How in the
world did you get crunchy
mushrooms all the way out here?

(beat)

ARI

I... sort of... made them.

JULY

You MADE these? (surprised and
pleased) Oh! Mm, ooh! Cold! Mm,
mm!

ARI

I did, sort of. The actual
mushrooms were bio-printed by the
person who runs the station café.
They took pity on me when I
mentioned I couldn't get the
texture right on our ship's mini
printer. But, but! The marinade is
from a mix I brought with us, and
I freeze-dried them the
old-fashioned way. Popped them
outside in a very cold, very

dry place.

JULY

Ah- outside-outside? Like, outside the ship?

ARI

(confirming)

There's no place drier, and very few colder.

(beat)

I mean, they don't even do them like that on Mars anymore. Doesn't get cold or dry enough these days.

JULY

(hums in agreement)

ARI

(beat)

So? How...are they?

JULY

(mouth full) They, uh, need to warm back up a little, but-

(pauses to swallow)

Oh, they're perfect. Absolutely perfect.

(curious)

I-But- why go to all the trouble? You-you were never all that big on celebrating "Martian New Year," as I recall.

ARI

No, I wasn't, but...I know Aphelion was always a big deal for you. And with this being your first one off-planet, I figured you might be missing it. So, if we can't be on Mars for Aphelion, I thought I'd... try and bring a little bit of Mars here to the Starlit Sky.

JULY

(touched) Aww. (playfully) To the Jackie Boone.

ARI
(also playful)
To the Name Change Pending.

(both laugh affectionately)

JULY
(Sighs) Seriously, Ari... Thank
you. I know I'm where I wanna be,
and I don't need the tunnel
bazaar, or crunchy mushrooms, or
folks dancing in the streets with
those big lion-headed Phobos and
Deimos puppets to help
me look back on the past two years
and know we made the right choice,
but...

(bag rustles)
This is wonderful. Thank you.

ARI
Happy Aphelion, Jules.

JULY
Happy Aphelion, Ari.

(beat)

ARI
Incidentally, it's funny you
mention Phobos and Deimos, because
I did do... one other thing.

(beat)

JULY
Oh, really? What?

ARI
Dexter, Bosco...

Sound effects: Several beeps.

ARI
...run choreography A-haitch-one.

Sound effects: An airlock door whooshes open, then a series of sounds all together: short, jerky, rhythmic servomotor whirs and faint beeps with an upswing roughly every fourth beat; brushy swishes; the faint sounds of beads and coins clinking together. In short, it is the sound of two small robots with elaborate costumes doing a little dance across the maintenance bay. The sound continues for the rest of the scene.

JULY

(Gasps. Ari giggles under the line) YOU MADE THE DRONES LITTLE PHOBOS AND DEIMOS PUPPETS?!?

ARI

(still laughing)
Yes, I did! I did!

JULY

(Giggles, then cooing:) How are they so cuuuute?!

ARI

I don't know, it just sort of happened!

JULY

Oh, G- Ari- c'mere, you! Ah, oh, uh, (half-laughing) oh no-

(exclamations and laughs from both overlap)

ARI

Oh- Dex-

JULY

(laughing)
Oh no! No, not, uh, no, don't do that-

ARI

(giggling)
Dexter, Dexter, not that way!

JULY

Oh, do not-

ARI
(laughing) No, no!

Sound effects: Fade out on laughing over the sound of irregular servomotor whirring.

Section break whoosh.

Sound effects: Crackling fire, charming old-timey Christmas music.

COLONEL YUM-YUM
(Distinguished voice) Greetings.
I'm Colonel Yum-Yum. And there's
three things I enjoy around the
holidays. A roaring fire. A glass
of ultra-chilled extra-strength
eggnog, and a bowl of my delicious
Self-Heating Gingerbread
Personages.

Sound effect: Airy crunch.

COLONEL YUM-YUM
Ah, marvelous. That's because
Colonel Yum-Yum's Self-Heating
Gingerbread Personages are made
with real yeast-based flour
substitute and chemically treated
for maximum sweetness and crunch.
Try some of my amazing flavors:
barbiturate for when you want to
take the holiday edge off,
stimulant for when your holiday
party needs that extra kick,
extra-strength opioid to really
set the Christmas mood, and
cinnamon.

Sound effects: Crinkling paper.

COLONEL YUM-YUM

Not to mention the fact that children can have fun identifying the various likenesses from the histories of the British Isles that I use as the basis for my personages. Ah, there's Oliver Cromwell. Lord Protector, you are delicious.

Sound effects: Crunching.

COLONEL YUM-YUM

So procure yourself a package of Colonel Yum-Yum's Self-Heating Gingerbread personages and give the holidays a little extra yum. Colonel Yum-Yum's

Distinguished Edible Materials.
Snack with style.

Section break whoosh.

NETPEDIA NARRATOR

(Same slightly artificial voice as previous Employee Handbook and Aphelion sections. Distortion in the voice again fades in and out through speech slightly.)

Netpedia Entry: Secular Christmas traditions of Terra and the Inner Belt.

While Christmas as a holiday has its roots in religious celebration, it has been adopted in many locations as a secular holiday honoring family and gift giving. On Terra, this holiday is celebrated through a range of

traditional practices, utilizing a specific set of symbolic ritual items.

One of the most important and widely used elements of Christmas celebration is the "Christmas tree." Historically, this was an organic tree grown via biological methods. Several coniferous evergreen species were, in fact, farmed specifically for this purpose. Modern Christmas trees, though generally of fabled plastic, retain the traditional pyramidal shape with cylindrical trunk. In the days leading up to the holiday, gifts are placed under or around the tree, which are then opened on December 25th, known as "Christmas Day." Gifts are wrapped, concealing their contents until they are opened. Wrappings tend to be in colors associated with Christmas-- red, green, silver, gold, and white--with Christmas-associated imagery or designs printed on the boxes or paper.

Food also plays an important part in secular Christmas tradition, with large, communally-taken meals serving as a central feature of many holiday celebrations. Dishes included vary by culture and locale, but generally include a baked meat or meat substitute, one of any number of potato-based dishes, and a NEM precursor called "cranberry sauce."

Seen as a time to bring together family and friends, some cultures use Christmas as a time of reconciliation. It is also common for individuals who celebrate the holiday to return to their

ancestral home on the days leading up to December 25th, in order to spend Christmas Day there.

Overall, the common thread between all secular Christmas celebrations on Terra and in the Inner Belt is in honoring and celebrating an individual's connection to others, and honoring that connection by the exchange of gifts and the sharing of a meal.

Section break whoosh.

Sound effects: Whooshing, whistling wind over faint Christmas carols in the background and the low hum of machinery. These sounds continue under the dialogue throughout the scene.

Sound effects: A short, high-pitched beep.

STAR FREIGHTER

(Brightly) Hey there, James. It's Carla, your big sis here. I'm just sendin' you a little pre-recorded message for Christmas, though I got no idea when the damn thing'll actually get to ya. It's been a while, ain't it? I got some good news! I've found me some steady work, enough credits coming in to get a room in a little boardin' place on a Terran island near California. It ain't much, but it's got a view of the ocean. And, something else... I've... met a fella. He's polite as pie and I...I know he'll be good to me. I think he's gonna ask me to marry him, if he works up the courage. But right now, I-I've got a bit of bad luck. Engine trouble's trapped me on Alaska, in this place called Port Kringle? They built it too close to

the poles for it to get too much traffic, so they dolled it up with this Christmas theme, y'know, try and attract an audience.

AUTOMATED ANNOUNCER ON PORT
KRINGLE

(A gently resonant clang marks the start of the broadcast. The speakers and wind heavily distort the voice, but it is deep and jolly)

Ho-ho-ho, Merry Christmas to all spacefarers! Santa Claus will be available for photos by the Reindeer Dog pens in fifteen minutes. Bring your Christmas Spirit and come on down! Ho! ho! ho!

Sound effects: The sound of footsteps crunching on snow.

STAR FREIGHTER

It's...godawful, as you can imagine. I don't think it attracted much business either. The only starships I've seen are those humming over, flying on their way to somewhere else, and I-

MILKY WAY

H-Hey, hey Star! It's me, Milky!

STAR FREIGHTER

(Genuinely) Well, there you are! You enjoyin' the scenery?

MILKY WAY

If I never hear Carol of the
fucking Bells again, I'll die a
happy man. Come on to the generator
room, Star. I made our friend
comfortable. You were, uh,
recording something?

Sound effects: A heavy metal door rattles and
shuts, abruptly cutting off the whistling
wind and distant music. Quiet footsteps on a
hard surface continue under dialogue.

STAR FREIGHTER

Message for my brother. He's out
there on Callisto with his family.
I ain't seen him for years, but you
know. It's the holiday season. You
got somebody, you send them a
message.

MILKY WAY

Yeah. If you got somebody.

Sound effects: Footsteps stop.

Hey there! Low-Low Orbit, you all
right there? Look who I brought.

LOW ORBIT

(coughs thinly, almost half a
laugh. Speaks grandly)

Ah, the illustrious Star Freighter.
Welcome to my present abode.
Please, sit and relax. The weather
outside is frightful, and all that.
But the generators make a nice
warmth. Until the workers of this
wretched place catch on and summon
the police to eject us, it's all
ours.

(Coughs)

Apologies. You find me the recent victor of a tremendous bout with a bad case of Spacer's Flu.

STAR FREIGHTER

Hey there, Low. This place don't seem so bad. Certainly ain't many customers around. But, y'know, still, I don't envy ya. Getting sick this close to Christmas—that sucks.

LOW ORBIT

Channukah for me, actually. It's the eighth night and I spent all the previous seven in various states of vomiting. Truly, the cosmic dreidel has spun for me and it has landed on the worst possible outcome. (Bitterly) Shin, shin, shin. Well, you are welcome to share my Channukah feast—I have protein bars and cheese substitute cubes aplenty.

MILKY WAY

You just rest there, Low — gimme a sec.

Sound effects: A few footsteps, then a sigh.

(Speaking lowly) Ain't right, you know. Poor guy saved my life a dozen times and he was sick all Channukah long... Now he's just starting to feel better, he's gonna eat the same sort of garbage we scavenge or buy the rest of the year. It ain't right.

STAR FREIGHTER

Mmm. There's a rumor going round, about life not being fair.

MILKY WAY

Yeah. But it's so close to Christmas. And you know these folks got food, or at least the money to buy some. I'm betting that if you and me make like old St. Nick, and do a little stealthy chimney-work, we can make off with some presents and get Low Orbit the Channukah feast he deserves.

STAR FREIGHTER

Or, we get busted and they ring up the cops. And we get to spend Christmas in jail.

MILKY WAY

Hey. Won't be the first time.

STAR FREIGHTER

Well I guess you got me there. And it ain't like I got much else to do. Who knows? Maybe we'll get a Christmas miracle.

MILKY WAY

Thaaat's the spirit. (Chuckles) Ok, here's the plan. (Dialogue fades out)

STAR FREIGHTER (NARRATING)

They had a kitchen complex, but you needed a special sort of keycard to

get in, and the owner kept it on his person, so that was out. Instead, he decided to do a little crawling through the vents, check out the employee lounge. Place like this, the workers probably brought their own meals. Otherwise, they'd just be licking on candy canes when they got hungry. So he made it, snuck down, made his steal, and got back into the vents— Just as the door opened and two of the workers entered, their Christmas cheer about to get sucked into a black hole.

BILL-JOHN

It's my break, Miss MacDougal. Even Santa Claus needs a break, and I'm just the poor sap you hired to play him. Right now, I wanna enjoy some milk and cookies—make that a bottle of Milky Way Dairy Liquor and a Caramel Crunchy. I do not wanna go searching for your imaginary NoGos hiding in the spaceport.

MACDOUGAL

Oh, come on, Bill-John. You're my number one Santa Claus! You're physically imposing! You want me to ask Svetlana to go do it? Or Krastner? Goddamn, that kid would just sing showtunes to them.

BILL-JOHN

What makes you think these NoGos exist at all?

MACDOUGAL

The Reindeer Dogs are agitated!

Sound effects: Rapid high-pitched beeps of a keypad and error chirrups under the next lines.

BILL-JOHN

The Reindeer Dogs are a couple of stray husky half-breeds with costume antlers that are known to bite the hands of children trying to pet them. They'll bark at just about anything.

Ah, this stupid security code of the fridge. Can never get it right. What's the problem anyway? A few NoGos sleeping near the generators to stay warm? Not exactly enough to put them on the naughty list.

MACDOUGAL

I'm *trying* to run a respectable Space Port and Christmas-themed family entertainment destination! We can't have a bunch of homeless types running around causing trouble.

Sound effects: More keypads beeping under the next line, then a series of high-pitched rapid beeps and the sound of a plastic door opening.

BILL-JOHN

Well, take a look outside, Miss MacDougal. You're not exactly hauling in customers anyway. Maybe having a few NoGos here would be a nice change of pace. Ah, here we are. Now, let's see if I can...Wait a minute...

MACDOUGAL

What's wrong?

BILL-JOHN

My Milky Way and my Caramel
Crunchy, they're not here.

MACDOUGAL

Maybe you misplaced it?

BILL-JOHN

I check my list twice,
motherfucker. I do not forget where
I leave my treats. Ah, would you
look at that, those grooves on the
lock. Telltale sign of a digital
lockpicker.

MACDOUGAL

How would you know?

BILL-JOHN

Santa's got a past. I didn't always
bust into places via the chimney,
you know. NoGos use digital
lockpicks all the time. Helps 'em
break into cargo holds and the
like. So it looks you were right,
Mr. MacDougal. We got NoGos. Now,
what do you want to do about it?

STAR FREIGHTER (NARRATING)

That was bad. Wasn't really a limit to what them folks could do to us. One option was calling the cops, of course, so that we could spend Christmas in the aforementioned jail cell? But they could roast us on an open fire if they had a mind to, and no one would care. Not this far north. Not in this cold.

Then it was my turn. I had some cash saved up—loaded into a charge card from the ice harvesting. I was thinking of saving it for a rainy day, but, oh hell, who am I kidding? Financial security's like believing in Santa Claus, I might as well spend it! Except that there wasn't any food for sale beyond some shots of gingerbread slurry in the gift shop, and I tried to buy anything there, I'd be pinched for sure. I needed a ride.

There were some skimmers in the parkin' lot that would work, but I'd need the keys to open one up.

Two employees were outside, by the pen where the dogs waited. Between them, I bet they had a key.

Sound effects: Wind and distant carol music picks up under the next line and continue under the scene.

STAR FREIGHTER (NARRATING)

Time to put my pickpocket skills to use.

KRASTNER

So, I'm thinking that I got a good chance of landing the lead. The audition? I nailed it! I know it's not much—it's just a community theatre production of A Christmas Carol. But it will look really nice on my resume for when I move out to Luna after I graduate.

SVETLANA

(With a clipped accent)

You really care about acting thing, yes, young Krastner?

KRASTNER

Oh, God yes! That's why I like playing Krampus so much here at the Spaceport Kringle. It's the perfect chance to practice a very over-the-top character and work on my improv skills.

SVELTANA

Not much of an audience, though. Only these mutts with fake antlers get to watch.

KRASTNER

Well, you know what they say: there are no small parts, only small actors.

SVETLANA

Well, eyes up, young Krastner.
Looks like we have customer right
now.

KRASTNER

Oh shit. Let me put my mask on.

Sound effects: A cork-like pop, then a
clearing throat.

(In an absurd monstrous accent,
muffled and echoey) Greetings! It
is I, the Krampus- Yuletide Demon!
Terror of sinners.

Naughty children shall find
themselves are the mercy of claws
and whips-a-hah-hah-hah!

STAR FREIGHTER

(Unimpressed) Um, hi.

KRASTNER

Would you like to care to pose for
a picture, wretched sinner? If
you'd like, you can get it turned
into a holographic snow globe at
the gift shop for only 9.99! And
less if you have a membership!

STAR FREIGHTER

Ah, no thanks. And, uh, who's your
friend?

SVETLANA

(Flatly) Snegurochka, the Snow Maiden. Beautiful daughter of Ded Moroz, Grandfather Frost.

STAR FREIGHTER

Big hit with the Russian audiences?

SVETLANA

Oh, sure. Oligarchs from the Slavic Union used to come by. Make me pose with them. Not so many now since they opened Winter World in Vladivostok. You want to pose for picture? Only 9.99.

STAR FREIGHTER

Well, I'm actually just looking for directions. Is there a convenience store nearby?

KRASTNER

There are no convenience stores—not in this frozen Hell!

SVETLANA

You could try Moose Mart down the road a ways.

STAR FREIGHTER

Thanks. Appreciate it. I'll head over—

Sound effect: Slight shuffle, quiet jingling.

oh, 'Scuse me—

SVETLANA

Sorry—no problem.

STAR FREIGHTER

Oh, I got one more question: what's
with the dogs?

SVETLANA

Oh, the reindeer dogs? You know how
expensive real reindeer are? I
think they got one in Winter World.
Cloned, maybe. We have to make do
with these.

KRASTNER

Mass extinction and ecological
collapse? Now, that's true
evil-a-hah-hah-ha-ha!

STAR FREIGHTER

Got that right. Well, thanks, guys.
I'll see you.

Sound effects: Departing footsteps.

SVETLANA

Didn't even want to buy picture.

KRASTNER

(Still in the accent) Don't worry.
I-oh (coughs slightly, drops the
accent) I bet the next one will.

Sound effects: Distant music rises.

STAR (NARRATING)

Goddamn, my heart was pumping. I had the key and they didn't suspect a thing. But then, Santa Claus and some lady in a parka— maybe the owner— was coming over. Had they caught wise? I had to get out of there before it got even colder.

KRASTNER

(In character as Krampus)

Santa Claus! My nemesis! You seek once again to do battle for the soul of Christmas past, present and—

BILL-JOHN:

Not now, kid. That woman you were talking to, who was just here—

SVETLANA

What about her? Miss MacDougal, are you all right?

MACDOUGAL:

She's a NoGo—a thief! There's a bunch of them here, hiding somewhere in the Spaceport!

BILL-JOHN

They already raided the fridge in the staff room. Stole my snack and some of the party grub we had in deep freeze.

Sound effects: A cork-like pop. When KRASTNER speaks, it is no longer muffled or in the Krampus voice.

KRASTNER

This woman seemed nice enough.

SVETLANA

Hold on. Yes—she picked my pockets. Stole keys to my skimmer. Goddamn it.

BILL-JOHN

We should call the police.

MACDOUGAL

We're so far out—winter storm brewing—it might take them a long time to get here.

SVETLANA

You are so scared? They are NoGos. Harmless.

MACDOUGAL

They stole from us!

SVETLANA

They're starving. And it's so close to Christmas. Besides, they didn't take everything in fridge, and they didn't hit the safe in your office, MacDougal. And I do not think that woman will sail away with skimmer. She asks for directions to a store. She's going to buy something.

Then, I think we will find my vehicle somewhere on the road, with the keys waiting on dashboard.

KRASTNER

You seem awfully certain.

SVETLANA

You grow up with nothing, you must be a good judge of character. These people—they have nothing.

KRASTNER

So what should we do?

BILL-JOHN

Well, I've had about enough. MacDougal, can you leash up old Rudolf there? The one with the red fur.

MACDOUGAL

What are you planning, Bill-John?

BILL-JOHN

It's a big spaceport. We've got to find them.

KRASTNER

And then what?

Sound effects: A dog whines.

BILL-JOHN

I'll finally get to do what Jolly Old St. Nick is supposed to do.

Sound effects: A large dog barks twice.

Come on, boy. Let's go.

Scene transition whoosh.

Sound effects: Distant Christmas carols, humming generator under the dialogue.

MILKY WAY

Here we are, Low! Take a look at this spread. We got a seal sausage, a three-pack of banana chips that Star picked up from the convenience store with spray-on nacho cheese, and for dessert, a Caramel Crunchy, split three ways. Oh - and a jelly doughnut with a red-hot cherry center. That's a Channukah thing, ain't it?

STAR FREIGHTER

And some Milky Way Dairy Liquor to wash it down.

LOW ORBIT

(Beat) None of that for me, please.

STAR FREIGHTER

You're sure?

LOW ORBIT

(Beat) Quite sure. But this is...Star, Milky Way... this is one of the grandest feasts I've had in many years. It would be an honor to share it with my good friends.

Sound effects: Three loud, slow, hard knocks on a metal door interrupt the last line. A pause.

STAR FREIGHTER

Oh, *shit*.

BILL-JOHN

(Distantly) Open up in there! Come on, we know you're inside. I know when you're sleeping and when you're awake, for Christ's sake.

MILKY WAY

Aw, shit! Santa's at the fucking door!

LOW ORBIT

Perhaps we might barricade the door and slip out a window?

MILKY WAY

You're still restin'. Besides, they-they got a key.

Sound effects: Metal door rattles open, and the sound of whistling wind enters the background noises. A large dog barks.

BILL-JOHN

So, there you are. Three of you. Hey, easy there, Rudolf.

SVETLANA

And look at this. Some stuff from our fridge and what you could buy from Moose Mart with spare change. Thanks for leaving my skimmer out front, by the way.

STAR FREIGHTER

(nervously) Heh. No problem.

KRASTNER

(Faintly horrified) You've just been living here? For how long?

LOW ORBIT

This will be my eighth night—the eighth night of Channukah as well. Spending it in a Christmas-themed Space Port harbored a unique irony. But the twinkling decorations and the starships above provided a singular take on the Festival of Lights. Still, I was terribly ill. I didn't have much choice in the matter.

MILKY WAY

NoGos often don't.

BILL-JOHN

Well. You do now.

STAR FREIGHTER

What do you mean?

KRASTNER

Look, it's close to the holidays.
You shouldn't have to spend it
hiding in our generator room. So we
pooled our money, and MacDougal
went to an old-fashioned North
American place and bought a feast.

MILKY WAY

What?

KRASTNER

I even got to try some of the
Scrooge lines. "Go buy the biggest
turkey in the shop!" Though-well,
we had to settle for bovine burgers
and fries.

STAR FREIGHTER

Bovine burgers? I love bovine
burgers!

SVETLANA

Well, we got too much. So please,
come join us. You can eat your
fill.

MILKY WAY

This, uh. Ain't a trick, right?

BILL-JOHN

No trick. It's nearly Christmas.
Peace in the stars. Good will to
man. Now, come on. Food's getting
cold.

Scene transition whoosh.

STAR FREIGHTER (NARRATING)

So, I ended up having a good
Christmas meal anyway, with some
new friends. It was nice.

(Pause)

James, I-I gotta tell you the
truth. There's no fella who's sweet
on me. I'm not staying at a
boarding house and there ain't no
ocean view.

(Pause)

Uh. Jamie, I-I could use a few
bucks—if you can spare 'em.

Sound effects: Dialogue begins to double and
echo slightly on itself, as the speech and
the recording of the speech overlap. The rest
of the speech sounds clearly recorded.

Maybe I'll see you, next time in
Callisto. If you'd like that.

(Sighs) Well, that's about everything. You take care now, and happy holidays.

JAMES

(Sighs. Softly) Happy holidays, sis.

Section break whoosh.

Sound effects: Jungle noises; elephant trumpeting, crickets chirping, deep big cat roars, monkey chatters, and screeches.

ANNOUNCER

(elegant, refined voice)

The noble elephant. The proud polar bear. The playful gibbon. Once, they were nature's. Now, this Valentine's Day, they can be yours.

Music: Harsh, electronic synthetic tune.

ANNOUNCER

The Endangered Species Bone Jewelry Collection. From Expensiva. We use ethically poached semi-wild animals purchased from third-party biological dealers, flense excess flesh to reveal the precious bone within, and craft one-of-a-kind pieces that are as unique as your love.

Sound effects: Snuffling, animal grunting.

ANNOUNCER

Why not show that special someone that you'll stop at nothing to get

what you want by giving them a
necklace made from the spine of a
Giant Anteater?

Sound effects: Yipping.

ANNOUNCER

Or give a gift that shows your
love is as timeless as the desert
sands, with a watch-strap made
from the vertebrae of a fennec
fox?

Sound effects: Squeaks, splashes.

ANNOUNCER

Surround your family in playful
joy, with a silver-embossed frame
engraved by real river otter
teeth.

Sound effects: Simultaneous combination of all above animal
sounds.

ANNOUNCER

The Endangered Species Bone
Jewelry collection. Once, they
were wild. Now, they're yours.

Expensiva. The best that money can
buy.

Section break whoosh.

Sound effects: Loud electronic whirring that rises in pitch
and rushes into distant applause and cheering from a large,
happy crowd. A peppy galactic-sounding synthetic tune plays
over continuing cheers. Music fades to a lower level, then
cheers fade out. The music plays softly under the dialogue
for the whole scene.

SATELLITE SALLY

(very cheery)

Hello everyone! Welcome back!

ASTEROID ANDY
(also cheery)
Thanks for stopping by again!

SATELLITE SALLY
I'm Satellite Sally!

ASTEROID ANDY
And I'm Asteroid Andy!

SALLY AND ANDY
(together)
And this is the Shuttle of
Knowledge!

SATELLITE SALLY
Where we travel around the stars-

ASTEROID ANDY
-and find fun new things to learn
about!

SATELLITE SALLY
(Speaking carefully, as if to
children) And today, we have a
guest with us! Please welcome
Professor Roseline! She has come
here from the planet Venus to talk
to us about a very special
holiday!

Sound effects: Cheering, whistling, and the footsteps of
heels on a wooden surface.

ASTEROID ANDY
We're so happy to have you on our
show! Why don't you introduce
yourself and tell us why you're
here?

SATELLITE SALLY
Yes, please!

PROFESSOR ROSELINE
(Staid but positive)
Hello all. My name is Professor
Virginia Roseline and I am here to
talk about the Tiedings of Venus.

It's a very important holiday on the planet I come from.

SATELLITE SALLY

Yes! It was inspired by the Terran holiday Valentine's Day, right?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

(encouraging)

Yes, exactly! You could say that Valentine's Day was the original holiday before it became what it is now. Some parts of Valentine's Day still exist within Tiedings.

ASTEROID ANDY

Oh that's so much fun! What kind of things?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Hearts are still a common decoration choice, but most of them have been replaced by ribbons or special knots or braids to emulate Philia's Bows.

Parties are still thrown all over Venus, there are even places specific for getting together and celebrating in large groups.

There's also the baking and exchanging of sweets. Some places on Venus specialize in crafting the right kind of cake or brownies for the holiday, each one designed for the person receiving it.

ASTEROID ANDY

(excited)

Ooh, I know I would love to receive a cupcake from someone!

SATELLITE SALLY

You can't even eat! And they say I'm the silly one.

Sound effects: A child giggles.

ASTEROID ANDY

Heh. It's the thought that counts.

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Andy is correct. The thoughts and feelings that go into each gift make them special. To represent the bonds that people have. To show that they want to keep those bonds and make them even stronger. Sentimental gifts are often cherished over expensive ones.

Heh, I'll always remember being given a patched-up version of a teddy bear that I thought I had left behind on Ma'ah Mons. My mother went back for it. It was one of the most special gifts. And everyone exchanges gifts like these.

SATELLITE SALLY

Ooh, what about the ribbons?
People exchange those too right?

ASTEROID ANDY

Does everyone get one?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

I think everyone should. Philia's Bows are a tradition for Tiedings and the main way that it is celebrated. It's how it's got its name. People tie colored ribbons around each other's wrists to represent their bonds with that person. Even if you don't exchange other gifts, everyone gives each other a Bow, the color meant to be perfect for its owner.

SATELLITE SALLY

Ooh, I'd love to have a pink Bow!

ASTEROID ANDY

Even kids get one?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Of course! You see the Tiedings of Venus is about love in all of its forms. It's not just for couples, friends and families celebrate it together too. If there is someone you're close with, that's the person you give a Bow to. Love is meant to be shared with everyone, and no one is excluded from Tiedings.

ASTEROID ANDY

We know that friendship and family is important!

SATELLITE SALLY

We learn here that everyone deserves a chance to participate.

ASTEROID ANDY

Be good to everyone!

SALLY AND ANDY

(together)

Kindness and friendship are magical!

Sound effects: Two rapid ascending pings, like a "correct!" chime.

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

(chuckles fondly)

Yes indeed. No one deserves to be excluded from Tiedings. No one should be alone. Which reminds me..

Sound effects: A cardboard box is opened. A child excitedly exclaims, "woah-ho-ho!" Adult laughter.

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Your own Philia's Bows! To show my thanks and appreciation for having me on your show.

ASTEROID ANDY

Wow! This is wonderful. And it's even in my favorite color, gray!

SATELLITE SALLY

And it's pink! Just as I always wanted.

ASTEROID ANDY

Next year I'll be sure to get you one too, Sally. You're my best friend after all.

SATELLITE SALLY

And you're mine! Thank you Professor Roseline. It's too bad we don't have one for you.

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

That's quite alright. Most people outside of Venus don't celebrate the holiday, or have their own version. Those who leave the planet behind often take it with them and share it with others, and from that, the tradition has grown in its own way. There is no wrong way to celebrate the connections we form with other people.

ASTEROID ANDY

When is it celebrated, anyways? It's coming up, right?

SATELLITE SALLY

Oh! Venus has its own calendar isn't that correct?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Yes! Venus's days are longer than those of other planets and stations. On Venus we celebrate it during the second month, usually in the middle week on the middle day. But those who don't live on Venus, or want to celebrate with others who don't live there celebrate it on whatever month is second wherever they are. Sometimes they celebrate it twice, so they can reconnect with those from home.

SATELLITE SALLY

Are you going to go back home to
celebrate Tiedings Professor
Roseline?

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Absolutely. My wife and daughter
are there, and I always make time
to celebrate it on-planet.

ASTEROID ANDY

That sounds really special!

Sound effects: Three rising chimes.

SATELLITE SALLY

Oh! Sounds like that's all the
time we have for today! Thank you
for joining us.

ASTEROID ANDY

Yes thank you for sharing this
very special holiday with us!

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

Of course. It is my honor to share
the wonderful holiday of my home
planet and help spread the joy
that it brings.

Should I tell you how we greet and
say goodbye to each other on the
holiday?

ASTEROID ANDY

Yes, please!

SATELLITE SALLY

I would love to hear it!

PROFESSOR ROSELINE

"May our bonds only grow in
strength!"

SALLY AND ANDY

(together)

"May our bonds only grow in
strength!"

ASTEROID ANDY

Thank you all out there too for
joining us today!

SATELLITE SALLY

May you have your own friends and
families to share the holidays
with.

ASTEROID ANDY

Don't forget to check us out next
time-

SATELLITE SALLY

-as we travel the universe meeting
new people-

ASTEROID ANDY

-and learning about new things!

SALLY AND ANDY

(together)

Safe travels to all who journey
through knowledge with us!

Sound effects: Electronic whirring that lowers in pitch and
fades. Calm applause from a large crowd.

Section transition whoosh.

Sound effects: Discordant pipe organ tune.

DR. TERRORSTEIN

(Deep, slow voice) The artificial
day-night cycles are growing
shorter. Automated temperatures
are growing colder. It can only
mean one thing: Halloween is near!
And that means it's time to
perfect the ultimate Haunted Hab
Unit or Crew Quarters!

Sound effect: Crash of lightning, a witch's cackle.

DR. TERRORSTEIN

But what if you work hard on the perfect holographic ghost display and still get this result?

TRICK-OR-TREATER

Boring! Where are the scares?

DR. TERRORSTEIN

Don't worry. Just give those Trick-R-Treaters a quick shot a syringe of Dr. Terrorstein's One-Shot Injectable Fear Solution and watch the horror increase at a chemically consistent rate!

TRICK-OR-TREATER

(Annoyed, then with increasing fear)
Ow! Oh!

Sound effect: Scream of terror.

DR. TERRORSTEIN

Dr. Terrorstein's One-Shot Injectable Fear Solution uses a high-powered cocktail of glutamate, cortisone, and pure adrenaline to create the perfect feeling of fear. Just poke, stick, and plunge to send a chill down any spine. And why use it only on visitors to your crypt? A quick hit of Dr. Terrorstein's One-Shot Injectable Fear Solution makes the perfect complement to any horror movie or the perfect office prank.

Sound effects: Echoing horrified scream.

DR. TERRORSTEIN

Dr. Terrorstein's One-Shot
Injectable Fear Solution. One
shot, infinite terror!

ANNOUNCER
(different voice)
Please use responsibly.

Section break whoosh.

NETPEDIA NARRATOR
(Same slightly artificial
voice as previous Employee
Handbook, Aphelion, and Christmas
sections. The distortion in the
voice again fades in and out
through speech.)

Netpedia Article: Singing the
Sorrow Song.

While widely practiced amongst
Peregrination ships, Singing the
Sorrow Song is a highly variable
celebration, with traditions and
observance dates ranging vastly
from ship to ship.

The Song itself describes the
origins of the Peregrination,
detailing the Neptune Mining
Disaster, and the rescue fleet's
subsequent denial of entry by
Terran and Belter governments.

As stated, the performance and
celebration of this ritual varies
from ship to ship, but there are
common elements between all of
them. First is the Song itself.
While minor variations in words
and melody do exist, by and large,
the Song has been preserved intact
across the fleet.

Second, the character of "Rook." River Rook, Remy Rook, Old Rook, Rook the Crook, or just Rook is a mythological trickster figure. They command or represent the interest of the Knockers, who are said to inhabit the unused parts of Peregrination ships. (For more information on Knockers, see the associated Netpedia article.) Depictions of Rook are not uniform, with some ships representing them with a puppet, a marionette, or even a costumed performer, but the character is always present.

Similarly, there is always some element of reenactment of the early Peregrination's journey and rejection. This may be done as a parade through the ship, a pageant or performance, or simply a call and response, but regardless as to the form it takes, it will always be present in the celebration.

Singing the Sorrow Song does not occur on a fixed calendar. Rather, it is done one to two times per quint, during the longest stretches of time between meeting other ships or going into port. Few outsiders have been able to observe the celebration.

Less common features include face and body painting, periods of shipwide silence to "listen for the Knockers," five to ten days of fasting wherein participants partake of a single meal per day as a remembrance of the "lean times," regular performances (theatre, plays, dances, songs, recitations) and a periods of "rankless time" where the command

structure of a ship may be relaxed or even temporarily invalid. For more information about Peregrination cultural celebrations, see, *Celebrating Sorrow to Inspire Joy: Cultural Traditions of the Peregrination as a Historical Narrative* by T. Zanches, Tycho University Press.

Section break whoosh.

RIAN

Thank you so much for agreeing to help me, Kai.

KAI

Hey, You've had, what, three years of Christmases and Zodiac New Year and Founding Days with Dad and the twins without me. So, of course I'm gonna jump at the chance to play catch-up and learn about all the new stuff you brought home.

RIAN

Yeah, but I know it's...weird. You didn't sign up for all this Peregrination stuff just because I married your dad.

KAI

Well, I'm signing up now. You're Family and you married Dad so that makes him Family, right? And he's my dad so, transitive property, I'm Family too.

(pause)

Wait, that is how it works, right?

RIAN

(small laugh)

It can be.

KAI

So what can I help with with
the...uh, uh... Sorrow Song?

RIAN

You got it. I need your help
making a new Rook. I did my best
with the last one but... I'm a chef.
Building things is a little out of
my wheelhouse. And so the one I
made sort of...reverted back to its
component parts midway through the
song last year.

KAI

OK. A Rook? What's that?

RIAN

It's a puppet. Or it could be a
costume, other ships do that and
maybe that's more your style?
You dad's got pictures of the
costumes you made all over the
apartment. Some of those are
unreal.

KAI

Oh, yeah, yeah. It's fun to see
what you can, y'know, get out of a
fabber if you program it right.
What's this Rook look like? Is
there a design or something we
should follow?

RIAN

Here, I've got a picture of the
puppet we had on the Reach. Let me
just...

Sound effects: Soft electronic boop.

there.

KAI

Oh! Oh, that's cool! I love the
whole found objects aesthetic.

RIAN

It's one of the oldest Rooks in the Family. At least the outside bits are. Someone reworked the mechanism to be waldo-driven a while back. Obviously we don't need to do anything so complex.

KAI

Yeah, uh. Yeeeahh, I think I'd need some more time for something like that. Or access to better gear. You would not believe the fabbers they have back at Tycho. I am not going to miss Luna, but (in amazement) ah! I will be dreaming about the university fabbers for a long time. The local ones are so *basic*. Hey, would a mask work? Uh, that shouldn't be too hard.

RIAN

That'd be great!

KAI

Can I load this image onto my terminal? I can project some of the surfaces as a starting point.

RIAN

Sure. There are a couple more angles too.

KAI

(cautiously)

If I open your camera roll, I'm not going to see any...um...

RIAN

(interrupting)

Actually, let me send those over for you, real quick.

KAI

(shuddering)

Ugh!

RIAN

Your dad and I were long distance
for a long time before I moved
here and-

KAI

No! No, no please! It is deathly
important that we stop talking
about this, change the subject,
never speak of it again.

RIAN

Heh. Fair.

KAI

So, um. The um. The Rook.

RIAN

Yes.

KAI

What is it, like, what is it for?

RIAN

Oh, the Rook takes the kids on a
path through the ship, reciting
the Sorrow Song and telling the
story of the Family's trouble in
the early days. They knock on
various compartments and the
people inside sing back at certain
parts.

KAI

Ohh, oh! It's wassailing.

RIAN

It's what?

KAI

Oh, wassailing. It's a thing they
do back on Terra? Where people go
from house to house singing.
Tycho's twinned with Cardiff so
the one I know is the Mari Lwyd,
it's this, like, (excited) ah,
it's this, like, big rad horse
skull thing, right? And it shows
up on like, Christmas, and it

demands people let her in to drink
their booze and eat their snacks.

RIAN

Oh, fun.

KAI

Yeah, remind me when we're done to
show you the Mari Lwyd we built
last year, oh, you'll love it!

RIAN

Yeah. Yeah! Obviously, we can't do
the compartment-to-compartment
thing here, since it's just us
celebrating, so I play the Rook
and your dad does the other parts.

KAI

There aren't more Peregrination
ex-pats? Oh, is-is expat the word?

RIAN

(uncomfortable) Mm. That's the
thing. There isn't a word for it,
really. I'm still Family, but I'm
living among the ulko - the
non-Family. We don't really *do*
that. Until very recently, when
someone left, they...left. Go out
to the ulko and assimilate. You
pass as "normal," or face the
consequences.

KAI

Consequences?

RIAN

Harassment. Attacks, even. When
you have a reputation for stealing
children to eat, people can be a
bit touchy.

KAI

Okay. Yikes!

RIAN

Yeah. So there could be other Family members here on Ganymede and I might not even know. I should ask around, though. At least send a message back to the Reach and see if anyone knows someone who settled here. Maybe could put something together in the future.

KAI

Sure, and, um. In the meantime, you've got dad and the twins... and me.

RIAN

Yeah.

KAI

Hey, uh. How does this look? Tell me if I'm messing something up.

Sound effects: Typing, then a soft electronic bloop.

RIAN

That looks fantastic! Uh, and feel free to get creative, the Rook can look like anything. They are a shapeshifter.

KAI

Oh yeah?

RIAN

Yeah, lots of different faces. Lots of names: Old Rook, Remy Rook, Rook the Crook. Rook's who you blame if little things go wrong or big things go right. And They're the voice of the Knockers. That's why they lead the Song.

KAI

Knockers?

RIAN

You don't have Knockers?

KAI

Uh, not that I know of?

RIAN

You might not notice them. They live in all the unused parts of ships, so they must be in stations too. When things are quiet you can hear them knocking on the hull, or bulkheads.

KAI

Oh. Oh, that's creepy as *hell*. I love it!

RIAN

That's the story anyway.

KAI

So they're like, a-a gremlin or something?

RIAN

(Matter-of-fact)

They're ghosts. The homeless dead.

KAI

How do ghosts end up in space?

RIAN

Well, people *die* in space. But, also a ghost is just a human soul with no body. No body means no mass. Gravity won't stop you. You could die on Terra and just float on up into the void. Doesn't have to happen very often. In the last, mm, hundred thousand years, there have been a lot of people. If even just one in a hundred wanders up here into the black, space would be full of them.

KAI

Just floating out there?

RIAN

Well, if a soul isn't put to rest, sure. That's why people invented funerals. To ground the soul to those who knew it. A soul wanders too long, forgets it was ever human. Just floats in the black. Yearning and not even remembering what for. And then a ship comes along. A little bubble of warmth, but not too warm. Light, but not too bright. Air. Water. Life. The ghost can't help but follow. Drawn in. Slips into the ship and stows away. You don't hear them when you're busy, when the engine is firing or when you're in port.

But when it's quiet, when you're bedding down to sleep and you've got your head pressed against the hull and you know there's nothing but vacuum for a million miles or more. And then, you hear them knocking.

KAI

Shit. Have you... have you actually heard them?

RIAN

Yeah. A couple times. It's terrifying. And...sort of comforting.

KAI

I can't imagine how that could be a comfort.

RIAN

That's what the Sorrow Song is about. See, the rescue fleet, the original Family, before they were *The Family*. "A flight of homeless, hearthless, hopeless pilgrims. A fleet of the forgotten." They went all over looking for help. Mars, Ceres, and Jupiter. And they were

turned away, for one reason or another.

And so they headed out into the black, where there was nothing. They were just barely scraping by out there, half-starved, nearly dead, when the Knockers found them.

Knock-knock-knock on the airlock doors. And the Family, who weren't the Family yet, asked the Knockers what they wanted. And Rook said,

"We are lost in the blackness.
Our story is grim.
We have no graves to go to, we've no light within.
We beg for safe harbor,
Please give us a place!
Where we can be happy.
Please spare us from space."

And so they let them in. To stay.

KAI

Why?

RIAN

Because. When you've needed help and been denied so often. You can't bear to do that to anyone else.

(beat)

KAI

(Typing) H-hey, um. How does this look?

Sound effects: Typing, then soft electronic boop.

RIAN

(Impressed) Oh, that's *fantastic*.

KAI

Cool! Um, then I'm gonna send this
to the fabber.

RIAN

Awesome. Great.

KAI

Hey. Rian?

RIAN

Hm?

KAI

Um, teach me the Song?

RIAN

Yeah?

KAI

Yeah.

RIAN

Of course.

(spoken)

"Before.

Before there were patches and
pins.

Before there were Things and
All-Things.

Before the hygge. Before the
veils.

Before you found the heartbeats of
your ships.

Before you had traditions and
words

Before you had names.

There was a sorrow time.

You wandered, unceasing, unending.

You wandered but you were not
lost.

It was painfully, *achingly*,
obvious where you were.

You were in the black.

From port to port, station to
station, moon to moon, you
traveled. A flight of homeless,

hearthless, hopeless pilgrims. A
fleet of the forgotten.

(Sung, a lilting, simple
tune)

Hearth kinfolk and fam'ly, come
join me in rhyme
Our words and our voices together
in time

(the voice fades away slowly)
We'll sing of our hist'ry, our
joining, our bond.
For we faced death together...

(Fade into silence.)

Jaunty Outro music of plucky strings begins
playing and continues under the credits.

Thank you listening to this
episode of Breathing Space, Fading
Frontier.

This episode, ATTN: Mandatory
Holiday Briefing, was written and
directed by Lee Seguinte, James
Big, Charlie Neal, Michael Panush,
and Scott Paladin and edited by
Kale Brown, Erin Olsen, and Scott
Paladin.

Insert credits here

Our theme, Blues for the Black,
was composed by Michael Freitag
with vocals by Jeremiah and lyrics
by Scott Paladin.

You can find links to learn more
about our cast and crew in the
show notes and more information
about our show at our website,
breathingspace.lawofnames.com.

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is a Law of Names Production.