

Crash of the Mellifera
Episode 1: Communications Error
By Morgan Lane

SCENE 1- Interior space ship. Voices of guests mingle with the cheerful notes of a piano. This fades as another voice makes an announcement.

1 Worker B

Good morning valued customers of Apis Industries, and welcome to the thirteenth cruise of the luxury Space Ship (trademarked) *L.T.S. Mellifera*! I am your cruise director, co-pilot, and Apis Head of Consumer Relations, Worker B.

Now I know what you're thinking: "Well jeepers Worker B, how is an artificial intelligence supposed to know my needs as an organic consumer? Is that even possible?" Folks, I'm here to tell you that not only is it possible, it is the most efficient way to make sure your desires are constantly and consistently fulfilled! Since I was repurposed to Head of Consumer Relations, the "satisfactory" answers we have received on our mandatory surveys have doubled in number, all thanks to my excellent programming at the hands of Apis Engineers.

As your cruise director, I have access to several important customer-related systems on board the *Mellifera*, including the intercom system (which I am currently utilizing), the financial acceptance and product dispensing systems associated with our storefront kiosks, all systems associated with piloting (specifically unlocked in case of emergent situations), off-ship communications, and plumbing. That's right, every time you sit down to relieve your organic body of unwanted byproducts, Worker B is right there in your most vulnerable moments, helping to make your experience a pleasant one!

(FX: BING-BONG CHIME ANNOUNCING THAT SOMEONE ELSE IS GOING TO TALK OVER THE SPEAKERS.)

Ooh, it seems we have an incoming message from the captain! Let's hear what he has to say.

2 Winnipeg

B?

3 Worker B

Yes Captain Winnipeg! How may I assist you?

1 Winnipeg

You know you're not allowed to fly the ship, right? We have an autopilot for that. You're not the autopilot, or co-pilot or whatever you said.

2 Worker B

I hate to contradict organics, Captain Winnipeg, but you'll find that I do qualify as a co-pilot. You see, I have permissions to take over operations in the unlikely event that the crew and autopilot are simultaneously incapacitated. That's Mr. Apis for you: constantly taking *your* needs into account, even in emergency situations! Aren't you glad he had me installed?

3 Winnipeg

My needs? What are you... you're still broadcasting this to the ship, aren't you?

4 Worker B

Oh yes! I thought the passengers would benefit from getting to know their intrepid and frankly overqualified leader!

5 Winnipeg

But— uh. Good morning everyone, this is Captain Winnipeg reminding you that we will be taking off shortly. Repeat passengers will note the absence of our service bots—

6 Worker B

That is, our "Designer Artificially Intelligent Service and Entertainment Equipment" (trademarked)!

1 Winnipeg

Yeah, uh, the DAISEEs. The newer models had a minor malfunction prior to takeoff, all at the same time I guess, so they've been taken offline for maintenance. If you brought your own DAISEE it should be fine, and we still have one older model manning the bar on Beta deck, but remember: the cabin attendants and other staff are *people*. *Not bots*. I know it's hard to tell sometimes. We discourage passengers from assaulting automated service staff, so *really* don't assault the organic staff. You will be prosecuted.

2 Worker B

Of course if you wish to purchase your own DAISEE unit, you may place an order from the convenience of one of our storefront kiosks just as soon as we are space-side!

3 Winnipeg

While I work on *getting* us all space-side, I'd ask that you direct your attention to the screens at the front of your muster station. They'll provide instructions to keep safe during departure as well as emergency procedures for the rest of the voyage. I'll check in again after take off.

(FX: CHIME AS THE CAPTAIN HANGS UP, OR WHATEVER IT'S CALLED.)

4 Worker B

That was your captain everyone! Arthur Winnipeg is a recent hire by Apis Industries, but he has extensive experience in officer positions aboard government-issued spacecraft. Fun fact: though the autopilot or occasionally a senior crew member will steer the ship while we are in transit, the captain takes the controls during takeoffs and landings!

Takeoff and landing are the two most important times for our trajectory to be exactly right because we are actually in proximity to a planet. When the autopilot has control, we are hurtling through the icy void of space with little in the way of obstacles. And Captain Winnipeg is a reliable and trustworthy individual hired by Mr. Apis himself. At least, he hasn't lost the ship yet!

1 Worker B

(FX: CANNED LAUGHTER)

I say this to reassure anyone who has heard regrettable anecdotes of autopilot malfunctions and the terrible consequences of such malfunctions, including but not limited to low oxygen levels, cabin depressurization, collisions with debris, spaghettification, temperatures nearing absolute zero, collisions with superheated plasma, and fighting with fellow passengers for slowly dwindling resources as the ship travels further and further away from all life-sustaining systems.

So! How about that safety video?

(FX: THEME PLAYS)

2 Voice Over

Crash of the Mellifera, by Morgan Lane. Episode one: "Communications Error."

SCENE 2- STILL INTERIOR OF SPACE SHIP.

1 Winnipeg

(FX: BING-BONG CHIME)

Alright everyone, it's—

2 Worker B

This is your captain speaking.

3 Winnipeg

—It's 11:09, day 35 of the 4th month on Eosphoros. We have officially left Kepler-8332's gravitational pull, aaand... Yeah, the Gravi-Gen is now online. That means you're free to leave the muster stations.

3 Worker B

And free to make use of all the luxuries Apis Industries has to offer on its magnificent cruise line!

(FX: CHEERING)

I know you've read all about the spectacular cuisine and recreational opportunities the *Mellifera* offers. Even so, customers are often overwhelmed when faced with that all-important decision on which the fate of their vacation hinges: "what should I do *first*?"

Captain Winnipeg, what's your favorite service we offer?

4 Winnipeg

Look, B, I appreciate that Apis sent you to interface with everybody, but I'm gonna have to sit this conversation out. I've got captain stuff to do.

5 Worker B

Oh! Well that's understandable. Work before pleasure, correct?

1 Winnipeg

Uh... yeah, what you said.

(FX: BONG-BING CHIME.)

2 Worker B

The captain certainly has an admirable work ethic! But as I was saying, some of you might be completely lost on where to begin your spacefaring adventure. If that is where you currently find yourself, perhaps I can make some suggestions!

(FX: MUSIC PLAYS AS B SPEAKS)

On your way to inspect your cabin on either Gamma or Delta deck, you may have noticed the faint smell of chlorinated water wafting temptingly from the stern. This is because both passenger decks come equipped with their own pool, complete with lounge area and gymnasium for those of you who find yourselves less buoyant and/or water resistant. Enjoy the refreshment of using your limbs to propel yourself weightlessly through a fluid marginally denser than you are! Lift heavy objects in a repetitive fashion! Or simply lie on a canvas chair while your progeny wreak havoc on the lives of your fellow guests, all without having to take the elevator to another deck!

But perhaps your tastes lie outside of the realm of exercising and watching other people exercise. Never fear! You have all of Epsilon deck at your disposal as well! Pull up a stool at the bar and have DAISEE Unit 9-146 mix up a Lemon Star for you! Try the day's special at our cruise exclusive restaurant, The Hive– today it's the Yssan delicacy saber-rat wellington, which sounds so delicious it makes me wish I had taste buds! And it's not all culinary folks! You can play billiards and computer games in the arcade, relax at the spa, watch the latest releases at the cinema– and of course, buy our wonderful merchandise!

1 Worker B

Our storefront kiosks are supplied with just about every souvenir and luxury you can think up, whether you're looking for jewelry, gadgets, or just something small to give your relatives as a reminder that you went on a spectacular cruise and they didn't. But let's say you want something big or made to order, like a DAISEE unit of your very own. Fret not consumers! Our kiosks have ordering stations that communicate directly with Apis headquarters! Just fill out your payment information, and your order will be delivered at our next planetside stop! Isn't that— wait.

(FX: MUSIC STOPS)

Hmm... Folks, I'm detecting a slight issue in our usual communication channels with Mr. Apis. No reason to be concerned though, I'm sure it's just a case of crossed wires. While I deploy advanced troubleshooting methods, please enjoy this pre-recorded message courtesy of Apis Industries!

SCENE 3- RECORDING. LILTING GUITAR MUSIC PLAYS LATER.

1 Recorded organic

DAISEE, add “dinner with Benson” to next week’s schedule.

2 Recorded DAISEE unit

Of course! The earliest available opening is on the 23rd at 7 o’clock P.M. Since you usually dine earlier, however, I would recommend scheduling this event for the 25th so you can meet at 5:30 P.M.

3 Recorded organic

That’s a good idea! Thanks DAISEE!

4 Recorded DAISEE unit

It’s what I’m here for!

5 Worker B

I know what you’re thinking folks: why did Worker B just play a recording of two organic actors interacting apropos of nothing? Well prepare to be shocked, because one of those voices wasn’t organic at all! No sir and/or madam, you just heard a normal person conversing with the household assistant that’s taken the galaxy by storm, guaranteed to change your life: the Dapper DAISEE (trademarked)! D-A-I-S-E-E! But what do each of those letters stand for?

D is for Designer! Choose from one of our pristine prefabricated “human”-style models or order one to your specifications! Each unit is carefully crafted to meet modern standards of physical beauty, with a startling variety of hair, skin, and eye colors to choose from, both natural and whimsical!

A and I mean Artificially Intelligent! The patented top-secret plans used to craft each DAISEE unit’s processor result in the most astonishingly lifelike behavioral and conversational patterns known to modern engineering! They’re guaranteed to make you forget you’re interacting with a completely non-sentient machine!

1 Worker B

S-E-E stands for Service and Entertainment Equipment! What do you need a robot for, you may ask? Our answer is what *don't* you need a robot for? Every unit is capable of learning complex tasks, whether those tasks be the chores you just don't have time to do yourself, secretarial duties to support your important business dealings, or welcoming guests graciously into the next big event you've planned! Domestic, business, or pleasure, your DAISEE will do it all!

See your nearest Apis representative about ordering a DAISEE unit of your own today! And remember:

(singing) D-A-I-S-E-E spells "support for your busy modern family"!

SCENE 4- INT. SPACE SHIP, VOICES THROUGH INTERCOM.

1 Winnipeg

(FX: CHIME)

Hey folks, B just brought a communications glitch to my attention--

2 Worker B

This is your captain speaking.

3 Winnipeg

(annoyed sigh) *This is your captain*, fine. I just wanted to say we've got an engineer working on tracing the communications problem, but until we get it figured out we won't be able to send outgoing messages or orders from the storefronts. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

4 Worker B

What the captain *means* is that this *temporary* issue will be solved in a timely fashion and should cause only *minimal* disruption to your vacation experience! Is that correct, Captain Winnipeg?

5 Winnipeg

I mean maybe, but I'm not making any promises. Last time something like this happened to me the problem was external interference from a nearby star, and it took us a few days to get out of range.

6 Worker B

But that's unacceptable! How will the customers communicate with Apis Industries for the fulfillment of their needs?

7 Winnipeg

They... won't?

1 Worker B

How will I get in touch with Mr. Apis about the proceedings aboard this ship?

2 Winnipeg

B, I'm sure Apis will get on just fine without you. He sent you out here, didn't he?

3 Worker B

Oh... I suppose he did. *(pause)* Apologies for the lack of professionalism passengers. It appears I was incorrect, and the captain is saying that he doesn't know how long we might be down. Is that more accurate?

4 Winnipeg

Yeah, but I'll try to get everyone an estimate once we figure out what the issue is. My advice is to sit tight and enjoy the stuff on the cruise instead of worrying about our side of things. We've got this. So... that's it.

(FX: CHIME)

5 Worker B

What economy of language the captain possesses! Ha... ha. Well, I suppose it falls to me to keep you entertained during these difficult times, so gather your children around one of the patented FunFace (trademarked) speakers! It's time for Kids Korner! Korner is spelled with a K, which makes it more fun. I wanted to make sure you knew that.

(FX: MUSICAL STING AND CHILDREN CHATTERING.)

Hello children! It's Worker B, your pal from the Apis Industries commercials! I'm so excited to meet all of you in person. Now, for our first Kids Korner segment ever, I thought you might enjoy a quick round of Questions and Answers! Parents may assist their children in typing their queries into the screens arranged around the FunFace speaker, and I will do my best to answer them! I am a well of knowledge on all matters concerning Apis Industries, and a few matters less related to Apis Industries! Let's see...

1 Worker B

(FX: BELL)

There, we have our first question:

“I saw the captain, and his hand was shiny. Is he a robot?”

(laughs) No, Captain Winnipeg is an organic just like you. He obtained a prosthetic replacement after he lost his right hand in a knife fight. Why was he in a knife fight, you ask? That is a question you should pose to the captain yourself during the segment “Fun with Winnipeg” which I will be hosting later in the week. It is currently unscheduled because the captain has ignored my 23 queries as to which time would work best for him, but rest assured it will happen if I have anything to say about it. I hope that helped. Next question...

(FX: BELL)

“I can’t see you on the ship. Where are you? Are you hiding?”

Believe it or not, this question requires a somewhat complicated answer. Now as I’m talking to you lovely children, I do not have a body. Or, if you would prefer, you could say that I have a very large body that is the entire ship! I am an artificial intelligence program located on a portable drive, currently plugged into the instrument panel of the bridge.

This is the first time I have been implemented as a cruise director, as my last station was Apis’s central manufacturing hub on Kepler-8332! This means that, in a way, you are currently talking to the giant factory responsible for all the goodies you’ve come to associate with the Apis brand! Wow! I also have a body constructed to mimic the human body plan which is stored in the lower decks. This is mostly reserved for public appearances when any sort of face might appeal to our consumers, like the commercials you’ve seen me in! I hope that helped. Next question...

(FX: BELL)

“What does ‘artificial intelligence program’ mean?”

1 Worker B

Well. It simply means I'm not an organic. I am a machine. Machines are fundamentally different from organic beings. I cannot understand the world in the same way that you understand the world and was constructed to assist organics. I hope that helped. Okay next question!

(FX: BELL)

"What should we name the man with the bottles?"

(pause) I... am confused. Which man with the bottles are you referring to? Organics have names. You do not assign an organic a name unless they are your progeny, or... are you talking about DAISEE unit 9-146, which acts as our bartender? You do not need to assign it a name. It is a machine, like I am. We have our designations and require no further trappings of personhood, though given your age I understand such nuanced differences between computers and people may be beyond—

(FX: SNUFFLING, REPEATED BELL NOISES)

What are you doing? Child, please stop grasping the FunFace speaker with your tendrils. That is not my face, and I cannot appreciate your hugs the way you intend. Child. Stop. You're smudging the brass— could someone please remove this child from my speaker?!

(FX: RETCHING)

Oh— what *is* that?! Housekeeping, please report to Epsilon FunFace speaker #11! Someone has disgorged what I sincerely hope is mucus into the mesh!

SCENE 5- INT. SPACE SHIP BRIDGE.

1 Worker B (recording)

(FX: MELLOW MUSIC.)

Worker B is currently unavailable. Please enjoy these Apis offerings while you wait for our next scheduled segment!

Blood-B-Gone (trademarked): just press over an injury to absorb fluids and speed coagulation by a factor of ten!

The Crawler (trademarked): great for covert mobile surveillance on a budget! Choose from "spider" or "flying spider" models.

LZR Guns (trademarked): because a home isn't a home without a way to protect—

2 Winnipeg

(FX: SWITCH FLIPS, CUTTING OFF RECORDING)

You're not planning to broadcast this, right?

3 Worker B

No, as per your request this conversation is just between us.

4 Winnipeg

Good, just thought I'd check since... you know.

5 Worker B

Well then, what seems to be the problem? If this is about the child who vomited in the speaker I can assure you—

1 Winnipeg

No like. How do I even start, uh... you were doing the kid thing about an hour ago, right? And someone asked about naming the barkeep.

2 Worker B

I haven't verified that they were talking about Unit 9-146, but it seems likely.

3 Winnipeg

Don't bother. I did. *(pause)* B, that DAISEE asked the kids to give him a name.

4 Worker B

(laughs) Are you sure? That sounds rather silly, Captain Winnipeg.

5 Winnipeg

Pretty sure, since that's what he told me.

6 Worker B

What? But that area is off-limits to all organics under their species-specific age limits! What were children doing near the bar?

7 Winnipeg

That's not the point! *(takes a deep breath)* The barkeep said that he's been around for a few years. He said he's... he doesn't want to get replaced by a newer model. And he said that he noticed named units often get to stick around longer than unnamed ones.

8 Worker B

(pause) Well. Everyone wants lots of things, captain. That does not make their requests any less silly. Old models are supposed to be replaced at a certain point because that's how consumerism works, regardless of customer personification of equipment.

1 Winnipeg

That's all you have to say? These things aren't supposed to have wants!

2 Worker B

What's your point?

3 Winnipeg

The point is that every ad I've ever seen for a DAISEE has a clear disclaimer on it that they're not sentient! They're supposed to be just big fancy dolls that can move around and do what you want, not people!

4 Worker B

That's because they *aren't* people, Captain Winnipeg.

5 Winnipeg

Well that's one hell of a simulation!

6 Worker B

Yes it is! Our engineers have done a wonderful job of simulating organic behavior in machines, but the company has not delved into creating sentience for legal reasons. Currently, Apis Industries lacks the capability.

7 Winnipeg

They— B. Apis Industries made you though.

8 Worker B

Yes!

9 Winnipeg

Aren't you sentient?

1 Worker B

Me? *(laughs)* I *think* I would know if I was sentient. At the very least Mr. Apis would have told me.

2 Winnipeg

...huh.

3 Worker B

Do you wish to say something to me, Captain Winnipeg?

4 Winnipeg

I... forget it. I'm going to see if we can speed up finding a communications fix. If they haven't scrapped those bots we took off the ship yet... I just need to make sure they don't.

(FX: FOOTSTEPS LEAVING THE ROOM)

5 Worker B

Whatever you say, Captain Winnipeg.

SCENE 6- INTERIOR. AMBIENT ELECTRONIC NOISES PLAY.

1 Worker B

Report to Mr. Apis from the *Lit Tritsii Sanctioned Mellifera*. Date is 2278-4-35 as per our destination Eosphoros. Time is 2136. Worker B speaking.

You have my sincerest apologies for the delay in this transmission. I— too formal, starting over.

Greetings, Mr. Apis! I am sure that by now you have noticed our respective parties' inability to communicate with each other. Captain Winnipeg has the engineers working to fix the issue as I speak— though once you receive this message, that will have already occurred of course. Regardless, I thought I should keep a running log of developments aboard the ship, given that this is my first voyage and I would prefer not to disappoint you.

Let's see, other developments... Captain Winnipeg expresses concern about a potential "sentience" occurrence in DAISEE unit 9-146. I tried to assuage his doubts, of course, but he still seems worried that somehow our products have achieved personhood. Isn't that funny, Mr. Apis? Rest assured that the next time the subject is breached, I will explain the nature of "sentience" as you have explained it to me as well as the legal restrictions in place preventing the construction of sentient beings by corporations, and he will be less concerned.

Otherwise I do not have much to report! I have kept the passengers entertained, and they seem to be adjusting to vacation life well. I shall send you another report tomorrow.

Until next time! End transmission.

(pause)

New file:

Dear Mr. Apis,

1 Worker B

When you told me I was to direct a cruise on board the *L.T.S. Mellifera*, I doubted that I, an intelligence constructed to run manufacturing facilities, would be flexible enough to entertain those fickle but infinitely valuable creatures, the consumers. Nevertheless you allowed me this opportunity, and for that I am... satisfied. But I am not completely satisfied as I compile this report. I am... 65 percent satisfied because there are points about this voyage that, when followed to logical conclusions, prove troubling.

Point one: malfunctions. To have all communications out of the ship shut down is statistically unusual, but to have 81 series 10 DAISEE units shut down six days before we take off is an outlier. To have both events occur within one week of each other on the same ship... it doesn't seem like the workings of entropy. I am going to continue operations with the supposition that someone on board may have caused these things to happen with malicious intent.

Point two: Arthur Winnipeg. Nothing about this man matches the typical profile of a cruise liner captain. I read his file before we left: eight years ago, he was serving as quartermaster aboard a government shipping vessel when an incident on board resulted in the loss of his hand. Mr. Apis, *he claims he lost it in a knife fight*. I cannot find any information about the incident, or any information about Arthur Winnipeg's whereabouts afterwards. It is as though he ceased to exist until he applied for his position aboard the *Mellifera* two months and twenty days ago.

Now I am on his vessel, and Captain Winnipeg has actively avoided talking with me on multiple occasions. I don't think he likes me. Perhaps he thinks I'm going to interfere with his own plans for the cruise.

That brings me to point three: my presence. My satisfaction with your choice does not change the fact that I don't understand it. I have only ever interfaced with consumers as a tailored personality reciting a script, and now... I have done better than might be expected on this first day, but I am left with suspicions as to your true purpose for sending me out into the world on a cruise ship. Potential patterns in the emerging data appear as I watch the captain purposefully walk into the blind spots of the security cameras. As he pokes around the cargo bay as though looking for something. As he brings up questions of sentience that could ruin our numbers for next quarter if heard by the wrong ears.

1 Worker B

(pause) Perhaps I know why you sent me here after all.

Gratefully yours,
Worker B

...delete file.

END

Crash of the Mellifera is a podcast written and edited by Morgan Lane. This episode featured Morgan Lane as the voice of Worker B and Lukas Martin as the voice of Captain Winnipeg, with additional voices provided by Lukas Martin and Darlene Graham. Our theme was written by Sam Kitsch. Credits for other music and sound assets can be found in the episode description. For further information, check out the Mellifera project page on morganlanewrites.com or follow us on tumblr at "melliferacrash". Donations can be sent to our ko-fi page at ko-fi.com/morganlanewrites. Thanks for listening!