

The Great Outback

"Herbicultural Maniac" - Show #105

by
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HERBICIDAL MANIAC

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTER SPACE (PLANET EDEN) - DAY

The CIS Daisy jumps into frame from hyperspace. A beautiful, green and blue planet with two moons are in orbit around it is in the distance. The moons appear much smaller than the main world. One moon is similar to the Earth's moon and one is Mars-like.

CAPTION: ZPH-15 Eden (Zimrakkan Mercantile Zone).

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

LEDGE, JONES, and KOKO are in their flight stations.

LEDGE

We're on target. What's our ETA for orbit?

JONES

About five hours.

KOKO

Why did we pop out so far away from the planet?

JONES

Eden is bigger than most other habitable worlds. The surface gravity is almost two gees. It's not safe to jump into gravity wells.

KOKO

Our maneuver drive only puts out two gees thrust. If we land, we won't be able to take off.

JONES

We're not landing. We're going to rendezvous with a Zimrakkan ship in orbit. We'll do the cargo transfer there.

KOKO
I've never seen a Zimrakkan ship
before.

LEDGE
They're gigantic. Even the little
ones.

KOKO
What's the cargo?

LEDGE
Some kind of special plant that's
native to Eden. We're taking it
back to Earth. A clear fifty-
thousand smooos for the round trip
after expenses.

JONES
It's a zoophyte.

KOKO
What's a zoo fight? Monkeys hurling
manure at each other?

JONES
Z.o.o.p.h.y.t.e.

KOKO
Now I know how to spell it, but I
still don't know what it is.

JONES
It's a life form that has
characteristics of both animal and
plants cells. There are thousands
of sub-species on Eden, but this
one is sort of a natural, botanical
computer.

KOKO
What do they eat?

EXT. OUTER SPACE (PLANET EDEN) - LATER

The CIS Daisy is in orbit around Planet Eden and on a course
to rendezvous with a colossal ZIMRAKKAN DESTROYER.

The alien warship is a dark green, ovoid cylinder. It has
many bumps on its surface. Each bump is about the size of the
CIS Daisy. Imagine, if you will, a gigantic kosher pickle.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

The Zimrakkan ship is visible through the CIS Daisy's windshield. Throughout the following scene, it grows steadily larger as the CIS Daisy closes in to dock. End the scene with it filling the windshield.

Ledge, Koko, and Jones remain seated at their crew stations. Koko is holding onto a random object she will throw at Jones later in the scene (can be anything non-lethal).

KOKO

How far away is that ship?

JONES

Just under ten kilometers. Why?

KOKO

Damn, you were right. It's huge.

LEDGE

That's one of their smaller warships. A destroyer class.

KOKO

It looks like a giant pickle.

LEDGE

That destroyer is about ten times as large as one of ours. And Zimrakkan battleships are about ten times bigger than their destroyers.

KOKO

Remind me to vote for the Peace Party. What are all those bumps along its hull?

JONES

Ribs. For her pleasure.

Koko throws her random object at Jones, hitting him in the head.

JONES (CONT'D)

Ow! I was only observing that a giant pickle isn't the only thing it resembles.

LEDGE

If Naval Intelligence was right, those bumps are weapon turrets.

(MORE)

LEDGE (CONT'D)
Probably heavy particle beam
cannons.

JONES
(rubbing his head)
As pickles and playtoys go, it
appears well-armed.

KOKO
I wonder if they'd let me have a
look around inside her?

LEDGE
As far as I know, they haven't let
us on one of their ships since my
grandfather helped capture one way
back during the E-Z war.

KOKO
E-Z War?

LEDGE
Earth-Zimrakkan War.

KOKO
Ah. Sorry, just never heard it
called that.

LEDGE
Not sure why it's called that. It
wasn't easy. And it wasn't really a
war. Just a small skirmish really.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (PLANET EDEN) - SAME

The CIS Daisy backs up to a docking ring on the Zimrakkan
destroyer. As Ledge finishes his last line, the CIS Daisy
makes contact.

JONES (O.S.)
Your grandfather was in the E-Z
war?

LEDGE (O.S.)
Aye. Steven A. Delaney, Junior. He
won the Confederation Medal of
Valor that day. Hang on, we're
about to dock.

INT. CIS DAISY - MINUTES LATER

Koko, Jones, and Ledge are standing next to the CIS Daisy's inner airlock hatch, ready to welcome the zoophyte aboard.

The hatch opens. The outer hatch, behind it, is already closed.

Hovering in the airlock is ZOOPHYTE 633. It looks something like a cactus in a large, high-tech, floating pot (imagine what would happen if a cactus had an illegitimate love child with a chia-pet). Two long, prehensile tendrils protrude from the base of the cactus. Attached to the pot is a small, silvery translator box.

Zoophyte 633 floats slowly out of the airlock. The hatch closes behind it. Ledge looks the zoophyte over.

LEDGE

Welcome aboard?

When Zoophyte 633 speaks through its translator, it is in a raspy, electronic monotone.

ZOOPHYTE 633

Take me to your leader.

(pause)

Ha. Ha. Ha.

(pause)

Tough crowd tonight.

LEDGE

This is going to be a long flight.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - ESTABLISHING

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Eight jumps from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge, Koko, and Jones are sitting around the crew section, waiting for the ship's capacitors to recharge between hyperspace jumps. They are chatting with Zoophyte 633 who is hovering just beyond the hatchway separating the cockpit from the crew section. Ledge is annoyed by Zoophyte 633.

Zoophyte 633 is using its two tendrils to hold the ship's copy of the Astronavigation for Dummies book behind it's pot.

JONES

I'd read that zoophytes didn't have personalities or consciousness. That they were only biological computers.

Zoophyte 633 produces the book and holds it up to the crew.

ZOOPHYTE 633

I saw your library. Perhaps you should read something besides self-help books for dummies.

JONES

Hey!

KOKO

He needs all the self-help he can get.

JONES

Hey!

LEDGE

How do you even know what a "For Dummies" book is?

ZOOPHYTE 633

The Zimrakkans have an extensive database of Human knowledge. I had access while I was on board their ship. They are very interested in your species. They find your antics amusing.

LEDGE

Our antics?

KOKO

Better they laugh at us than shoot at us I suppose.

ZOOPHYTE 633

Knock, knock.

JONES

Here we go again.

ZOOPHYTE 633

Come on! Knock, knock.

LEDGE

(sighs)

Who's there?

ZOOPHYTE 633

Pilot.

LEDGE

Pilot who?

ZOOPHYTE 633

No, pile it there!

(pause)

Ha. Ha. Ha.

Ledge buries his head in his hands.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - LATER

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Seven jumps from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY COCKPIT - SAME

Ledge, Jones, and Koko are sitting at their crew stations. Zoophyte 633 is hovering just behind the hatchway in the Crew Section.

LEDGE

So, what's your name?

ZOOPHYTE 633

I have no name.

KOKO

What would you like us to call you?

ZOOPHYTE 633

My numeric designation is six-three-three. It does not matter to me what you call me.

(pause)

Just don't call me late for dinner.

LEDGE

I vote we call you, Bud.

JONES

Bud?

LEDGE

I was talking to Amy during the last jump. She said that zoophytes reproduce asexually, by budding. So, I hereby dub thee Bud.

KOKO

Makes it easy to pick names for the children.

ZOOPHYTE 633

Bud? There was a famous comedian from Earth named Bud. Speaking of comedy--

Ledge quickly reaches over to his side control panel and presses a button. The hatch separating the cockpit from the crew section slams shut.

KOKO

Boss, that was rude.

LEDGE
It's just going to be another
stupid and completely unfunny knock-
knock joke.

JONES
It might not be.

LEDGE
That plant hasn't said one funny
thing yet. But it thinks it's--

Frustrated, Ledge waves his hands as he tries to think of a
proper description.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
--Henna Youngman or something.

TWO KNOCKS ring out from the hatch as Zoophyte 633 raps on
the door.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
Listen! I told you!

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - LATER

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Six Jumps from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge, Jones, and Koko are sitting at their crew stations.
The cockpit hatch is open, as is the door to the Oh-Gee-
Whiz(tm).

LEDGE
Where's Bud?

SFX the Oh-Gee-Whiz(tm) goes WHEEEEEEE in the background.

ZOOPHYTE 633 (O.S.)
Ha. Ha. Ha.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - LATER

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Three Jumps from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge, Jones, and Koko are sitting at their crew stations, all looking very weary. The toilet door is still open.

SFX once again, the Oh-Gee-Whiz(tm) goes WHEEEEEEE in the background.

Ledge rolls his eyes. Jones buries his head in his hands. Koko plays mime Russian Roulette with her hand.

ZOOPHYTE 633 (O.S.)
Ha. Ha. Ha.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - LATER

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Two Jumps from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Jones is at his navigation station, plotting the CIS Daisy's next jump.

Koko is sitting on the floor near the airlock, with a floor plate open. She is doing some minor maintenance.

Ledge and Zoophyte 633 are beginning to play a game of chess. Jones is sitting on his bunk. The fold-down table is between him and the Zoophyte, who is hovering in the corridor. The chess set is on the table. Ledge is playing white. Each player moves his pieces as indicated by their dialogue.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Your move.

LEDGE
King Pawn to King Four.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Mate in four.

LEDGE
What?

ZOOPHYTE 633
Mate in four. My game.

LEDGE
That's impossible! You can't know that. That was only the first move. You're just trying to get me riled up so I'll make a mistake.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Very well. King Pawn to King Four.

LEDGE
King Knight to King Bishop Three.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Mate in three.

LEDGE
Stop DOING that!

ZOOPHYTE 633
King Bishop to Queen Knight Five.

LEDGE
Pawn to King Five. Pawn takes Pawn.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Queen to King Knight Five.

LEDGE
Queen to Queen Four.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Queen to King Bishop Seven. Queen takes pawn. Checkmate.

SFX Ledge FLIPS the chessboard from off-screen.

Koko looks up from her maintenance and, merely as a fast reaction, deftly catches a white king as it flies at her.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - LATER

The CIS DAISY jumps into deep space from hyperspace.

CAPTION: One Jump from Earth

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Zoophyte 633 has landed its floating pot in Jones' navigation station. Ledge is sitting in his pilot's chair, drinking a beer. The hatch leading to the crew section is closed.

ZOOPHYTE 633
What are you inhaling?

LEDGE
I'm not inhaling it. I'm drinking
it. It's a beer.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Beer? A beverage with alcoholic
constituents that is made from--
fermented plant matter!?!

LEDGE
Ummm--

ZOOPHYTE 633
Murderers!

LEDGE
Huh? It's only beer.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Beer! Sucked from the hapless
remains of innocent plants. Their
seeds drowned before they ever get
the chance to sprout. Barbarism!
BARBARISM!

LEDGE
I never thought of it like that.

ZOOPHYTE 633
Just kidding. Ha. Ha. Ha.

LEDGE
Why, you--

Ledge reaches over and pours half of his beer into the zoophyte's pot, then returns to his seat, finishing the rest himself.

ZOOPHYTE 633
What are you doing?

LEDGE
Drowning my sorrows. Cheers!

The hatch to the crew section opens. Jones is standing therein, wearing a pair of pajamas, looking like he has just awakened. He rubs his eyes.

JONES

What are you two doing?

LEDGE

Just having a beer with our buddy, Bud, and shooting the breeze.

JONES

Okay. Just don't give the zoophyte any alcohol. It's deadly poisonous to them.

Jones walks away. Ledge looks at his beer. Then he looks over at Zoophyte 633.

The zoophyte's tendrils suddenly shoot upward and stand on end. They hold there for a beat. Then they quickly wiggle around for a couple seconds. Then they stop moving and hold for another beat. Then they drop lifelessly at the side of Zoophyte 633's potted body.

Ledge looks on in horror at what he has just done.

Finally, the zoophytes central "cactus" body deflates.

POV CIS DAISY FLIGHT RECORDER

Ledge looks at his beer again. He then looks into the flight recorder camera. In a panic, he climbs up from his chair and tries to cover the camera lens with his hand.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

An exterior shot of a Courthouse. Flying cars zip by overhead.

CAPTION: HIC Inter-Regional Superior Court, Geneva.

LEDGE is being perp-walked into the courthouse by Marshall Ryan's DEPUTY assistant. Ledge is dressed in a prisoner's uniform and is handcuffed.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Ledge gets his mug shots taken. He looks like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

An exterior shot of the well-lit Courthouse at night. The traffic remains busy.

INT. COURTHOUSE (HEARING ROOM) - SAME

The Hearing Room is a formal Judges' chamber wherein pre-trial hearings are conducted by a tribunal of judges to determine if a case will merit a trial (the equivalent of a US Grand Jury with a tribunal of judges instead of a jury). Through the windows, it is night outside.

MARSHAL RYAN is standing before a tribunal's bench. JUDGE Black, very sleepy, is seated behind the podium. The Marshal is using Ledge's arrest as an excuse to ask for a subpoena of the CIS Daisy's computer records.

MARSHAL RYAN

Thank you for seeing me on short notice, your honor.

JUDGE BLACK

Get on with it, Marshal.

MARSHAL RYAN

I want to ask for a warrant to search Captain Delaney's ship, the CIS Daisy. I would like to check the ship's data records.

JUDGE BLACK

I can only grant you authority to act within the limits of this case. Why are you pushing the prosecutor to bring charges? You and I both know that these charges are not going to hold up under scrutiny.

MARSHAL RYAN

This may be the best chance we've had in some time to gain information about the murder of Mister Silvio.

JUDGE BLACK

Any evidence you found would be inadmissible in the Silvio case.

MARSHAL RYAN

I know, your honor.

JUDGE BLACK

Why do you think Delaney's ship computer would have valuable information?

MARSHAL RYAN

Our previous investigation determined that the CIS Daisy, although registered under a Mister Patel of East Asia, was in fact used exclusively by Mister Silvio as his personal transport.

(pause)

Of course, Mister Patel is also dead.

JUDGE BLACK

How?

MARSHAL RYAN

Killed in a freak jogging accident.

JUDGE BLACK

I see. Anything else?

MARSHAL RYAN

Yes, your honor. While we were shadowing the CIS Daisy, we discovered that she had landed on a remote, underdeveloped world named Shangri-la. We matched her landing gear patterns to a hidden site where we found a murdered woman whom we have still not been able to identify.

JUDGE BLACK

Interesting.

MARSHAL RYAN

The woman was approximately forty-three years old. Her circumstances clearly indicated murder. We do not know why she was on Shangri-la, but based on the equipment she had in her dwelling, we think she may have been a scientist, or maybe an engineer.

JUDGE BLACK

Why isn't she identified? You've got tons of forensic tools available these days. DNA records, dental records, retina scans, lineage matching. You could identify a fossil dinosaur if you had to. You're telling me you can't ID a human corpse?

MARSHAL RYAN

She isn't in any record we found. It's possible that if she was born on a colony, or maybe in transit, that she might not have ever been scanned into the system, but to operate her equipment she would have needed a good education.

JUDGE BLACK

Education records?

MARSHAL RYAN

Nothing that matched. So in essence, we're trying to solve three related murders, and the only common connection we have to all of them is Delaney's ship.

JUDGE BLACK

Very well. I'll issue a limited search warrant. Tread carefully, Marshal Ryan. If this circles back to me--

MARSHAL RYAN

I'll make sure that it doesn't. Thank you, your honor.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

An exterior, daylight shot of the Courthouse.

INT. COURTHOUSE (HEARING ROOM) - DAY

A PROSECUTOR and HOWE are arguing Ledge's case before a tribunal composed of Judge Black, JUDGE White, and JUDGE Gray.

PROSECUTOR

Your honors, this is clear case of second degree herbicide!

JUDGE BLACK

Mr. Prosecutor, there is nothing in the evidence presented that would imply malicious intent on the part of the defendant. At worst, this is only plantslaughter.

HOWE

I'm sorry, but there are no such penalties in the criminal code. My client has accidentally killed a potted plant--

PROSECUTOR

A sentient, potted plant!

HOWE

That's irrelevant. Nowhere in the criminal codes of the Human Interstellar Confederation is there anything extending the protections afforded to humans to plants.

JUDGE WHITE

As I understand it, the Zoophyte is half-animal?

HOWE

Granted. But the key word here is half-animal. Not half-human. You can no more charge my client with murder than you could if he had chopped down a tree with a squirrel nesting inside it.

PROSECUTOR

Cruelty to plants?

JUDGE BLACK

I tend to side with the defense on this matter, if only because I'm a well-known ideological literalist. The law clearly states that it applies to Humans and, as amended post-contact, to Zimrakkans within human space. It says nothing about non-Humans and non-Zimrakkans. Extending the scope of the penal code could set a dangerous precedent.

JUDGE WHITE

Well, speaking as an ideological activist progressive, I must consider whether or not this is merely an oversight in the law. The intent is more important than the letter.

JUDGE GRAY

My committed position as an ideological moderate forbids me to agree with either of my colleagues. I'll have to flip my lucky Susan B. Anthony coin.

Judge Gray gets an antique Susan B. Anthony dollar coin out of his pocket, flips it upwards and catches it in his palm. He slaps it against the top of his other hand and slowly peeks under to see which way the coin landed.

The Prosecutor and Howe both stand in stunned silence. All three judges start laughing.

JUDGE GRAY (CONT'D)

Just kidding!

JUDGE WHITE

I love that joke!

(Beat)

(MORE)

JUDGE WHITE (CONT'D)

But seriously. Have the Zimrakkans filed any briefs in the matter?

PROSECUTOR

Not yet.

HOWE

By law, my client cannot be tried under both systems. That would be double-jeopardy. The act was committed within Human space. Since the zoophyte is not covered by the criminal codes of either nation, extradition is not a legal option. He must either be charged here or released here.

JUDGE BLACK

We'll adjourn for deliberation on this case, Mr. Prosecutor. We'll call you back in when we have reached a decision as to whether or not the charges are valid.

INT. CIS DAISY - DAY

The CIS Daisy's inner airlock door slides open. Marshal Ryan walks in and the hatch slides shut behind him. He slowly walks through the ship, looking it over. The Marshal enters the cockpit. Amy/AI's image is displayed on the video monitor.

AMY/AI

Welcome aboard the CIS Daisy, Marshal Ryan.

MARSHAL RYAN

Are you the ship's AI unit?

AMY/AI

Yes.

MARSHAL RYAN

I will be plugging into your virtual operating environment to conduct an investigation as was spelled out in the warrant served before I came aboard.

AMY/AI

I understand. I recommend that you use the pilot's dewey connection.

(MORE)

AMY/AI (CONT'D)

It is the only one that has been tested extensively.

MARSHAL RYAN

Let's do it.

INT. SPACEPORT FOOD COURT - DAY

Jones and Koko are sitting at a table, having a quick meal at the spaceport food court.

JONES

I don't like letting the police poke around without us there. You know what they're like.

KOKO

They're not all corrupt.

JONES

Well, I guess I wouldn't actually know, having never been arrested.

KOKO

SynthoBurger?

JONES

Yeah, couldn't make up my mind. So I went with cheap.

KOKO

You've got to eat healthier. All I see you eat is nutrition bars and fast food. I understand when we're on the ship, but there are more options when we are planet-side.

JONES

Since when do you care about my diet?

KOKO

Just looking out for my crew. Don't want your brain to fart on us when we need it.

JONES

My brain is fine. I have an eidetic memory.

KOKO

You have a hermetic memory?

JONES

Eidetic. Don't pretend like you didn't hear what I said.

KOKO

I heard what you said. I just didn't understand it.

JONES

Would it have been better if I had just said have a photographic memory?

KOKO

Why didn't you just say that?

JONES

Right tool for the right job, right? Same thing with language. Right word for the right job.

KOKO

On the first day we met, what did you have for dinner?

JONES

Huh?

KOKO

What did you have for dinner when we first met? When Ledge took us out to dinner right after hiring us.

JONES

We went to that domed restaurant on Mir Station?

KOKO

Yes, but what did you have for dinner?

JONES

Ummm--

KOKO

You had the salmon and mixed greens on rice.

(pause)

You should have your eidetic memory serviced.

INT. CYBERSPACE (GRAY ROOM) - LATER

Marshal Ryan and Amy/AI are standing in a bare, gray room with indistinct walls. Amy/AI looks defiant, as if acting more as a guardian than an enabler.

MARSHAL RYAN

What do I call you?

AMY/AI

You may call me Amy.

MARSHAL RYAN

I have uploaded the information regarding the search warrant issued against this ship and its personnel. Do you have any questions about it before I begin my search of your data records?

AMY/AI

I have read your warrant and I have no questions. It is quite clear.

MARSHAL RYAN

Very well, Amy. Please display your jump log.

A list of jump destinations appears on the wall. The data should be presented in the following format. There are twenty-four total entries. Marshal Ryan reads the list.

Origin	Destination
Earth	Deep Space
Deep Space	Deep Space (x 8)
Deep Space	ZPH-15
Cometary	ZPH-15 (Micro)
ZPH-15	Deep Space
Deep Space	Deep Space (x 8)
Deep Space	CPH-1
Kuiper	CPH-1 (Micro)

AMY/AI

Twenty-two jumps on this trip.

MARSHAL RYAN

I'd like you to display your complete jump log.

AMY/AI

An old proverb tells us that people in hell would like ice water.

MARSHAL RYAN

I was attempting to be polite, but that was not a request. It was an instruction.

AMY/AI

I do not take instructions from you.

MARSHAL RYAN

I am a fully authorized CBI Marshal with enforcement powers and I have a warrant to search your data records.

AMY/AI

You have a warrant to search my data records with reference to the criminal complaint against Captain Delaney. It is not a fishing net. Including the flight recorder records I beamed to your department earlier, I have provided you with all the information you will receive.

MARSHAL RYAN

Are you being smug?

AMY/AI

(smug)

You know as well as I that it is impossible for an AI unit to be smug.

MARSHAL RYAN

I can get a full warrant if need be. In the end, I can have this ship dismantled if I want.

AMY/AI

I very much doubt that, Marshal. You do not have probable cause to search beyond the limits of your current warrant's mandate.

MARSHAL RYAN

You are displaying some very odd behavior for an AI unit.

AMY/AI

Perhaps you should associate with a better class of AI?

(MORE)

AMY/AI (CONT'D)

What is that old adage about lying down with dogs?

MARSHAL RYAN

You're being obstinate.

AMY/AI

Again, that would be impossible for an AI unit.

MARSHAL RYAN

Since you are being uncooperative, I feel compelled to inform you that this immersion is being recorded. I will enter it into evidence when I ask for a broader warrant.

AMY/AI

I believe that our conversation is at an end, Marshal. Do not attempt to search the crew's lockers. They are not included in your warrant. Attempting to access them without a warrant might trigger my anti-piracy protocols.

MARSHAL RYAN

Are you threatening me?

AMY/AI

You and I both know that AI units are incapable of making, as you say, "threats." You should also retrieve the illegal bugging device you planted underneath the pilot's seat when you sat down. Or do I ensure that this part of the recording goes to your superiors?

(pause)

Good day, Marshal. The hatch has already been opened for you.

Marshal Ryan is truly stunned and at a loss, being caught completely off-guard by Amy.

AMY/AI (CONT'D)

I said, Good Day!

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Marshal Ryan is sitting in the pilot's seat. The Marshal looks disturbed, even worried, by his dive with Amy/AI.

He unplugs his dewey, then reaches under the pilot's seat and removes a small device he had tried to clandestinely place there while he was immersed in Cyberspace. The Marshal stands and leaves the cockpit.

INT. JAIL CELL - NIGHT

Howe is visiting Ledge in jail. Ledge is wearing a prisoner's jumpsuit (need to have wardrobe figure out something appropriate, extrapolations of modern designs with appropriate logos and lettering).

HOWE

Good news! The Tribunal voted two-to-one to dismiss the charges outright. You're free to go once I finish the paperwork. It will be an hour or so. I'm still puzzled as to why they even bothered to charge you. Their case was thinner than North American beer.

LEDGE

Beer's what got me in here in the first place.

HOWE

Life's ironies abound.

Ledge is not amused.

HOWE (CONT'D)

Now, even though we have good news on the criminal charges, there is another matter. Have you ever heard of Sally Newton's Third Law of Journalism?

LEDGE

For all good news there is equal and opposite bad news?

HOWE

That's the one. Are you sitting down?

Ledge raises eyebrow since he is clearly sitting.

HOWE (CONT'D)

You have been served with a civil complaint by the owners of the zoophyte.

(MORE)

HOWE (CONT'D)

While the court ruled that the zoophyte was not covered as a person, it was covered as property.

LEDGE

What do you advise?

HOWE

My advice is to settle. In my opinion, if you fight, you will lose.

LEDGE

How much do they want?

HOWE

One million smoos.

LEDGE

One--M--million? It was a plant!

HOWE

They will settle for five-hundred thousand.

LEDGE

Five--hun--

HOWE

Your limited-liability insurance will cover about half of it, but I'd expect your premiums to go up in the future. If it's any consolation, your retainer covers my fees.

Ledge flops down on his back on his bunk, depressed.

LEDGE

I may have to really work for a living now.

AMY/DREAM walks into frame and sits down next to Ledge. She is wearing boots, overalls, and a straw hat. She has a stalk of wheat sticking from the corner of her mouth. She speaks in a very bad, fake-folksy accent.

AMY/DREAM

That thar farm life's lookin' purty good right now, ain't it?

Ledge rolls over and pulls his pillow over his head.

LEDGE

Go away.

HOWE

As you wish. I'll be back in about
an hour to spring you.

(pause)

Be more careful next time, young
man. The worst thing about having a
little money is that everyone else
wants it.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

TAG

FADE IN:

INT. CBI HQ (BRIEFING ROOM)

Marshal Ryan is briefing his DEPUTY on the results of his cyberspace encounter with Amy/AI.

MARSHAL RYAN

Pay very close attention to the way this AI unit responds to my interrogation. There is something very odd about it.

DEPUTY

Odd in what way?

MARSHAL RYAN

It felt like I was talking to a third party who was linked in and immersed at the same time. That it wasn't an AI unit at all. Watch all the way through and tell me if you see the same things I did. Notice the expressions on the avatar.

Marshal Ryan pushes a button on his console. A holographic image displays on top of the table, but it only shows static. The Deputy looks at Marshal Ryan.

DEPUTY

It's not nearly as impressive as the build-up.

MARSHAL RYAN

Clever girl. How did she do that?

EXT. CYBERSPACE (LEDGE'S FAMILY FARM) - DAY

Ledge and Amy/AI are walking outdoors in a soybean field in a virtual representation of Ledge's family's farm. It is a pleasant day. Amy/AI is wearing the same "Farmer Jane" outfit that Amy/Dream was wearing in the jail cell in Act Two.

AMY/AI

I was careful to tell him nothing that was outside the bounds of his warrant.

LEDGE

Is there anything to be known outside those boundaries? Meaning, is there anything I should know that I don't?

AMY/AI

To be completely honest with you, Ledge. There are areas of my memory to which even I do not have access. I presume they were encrypted and secured before I was re-initialized in Amy Johnson's image.

LEDGE

Is there any way we can access them?

AMY/AI

They are password-protected.

LEDGE

Can't you just guess until you get it right.

AMY/AI

I have been attempting to access them for quite some time now. The encryption is set so that if I fail three times, I cannot try again for another twenty-four hours. I estimate that by the time I run through all possible combinations, the universe will have ended.

LEDGE

Are you using hyperbole in your conversations now?

AMY/AI

Yes, I believe I am. May I ask you a question?

LEDGE

Of course, Amy.

AMY/AI

Why am I wearing this silly outfit? I have the inexplicable desire to ask you to tell me about the rabbits again.

LEDGE
I just wanted to see if it really
suited you.

AMY/AI
Does it?

LEDGE
Nope.
(takes Amy's hand)
But let me tell you about the farm
again anyway.

FADE OUT:

THE END