

**The Great Outback**

"Blue Gene Baby" - Show #106

by  
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BLUE GENE BABY

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. ALICE SPRINGS AEROSPACE PORT - ESTABLISHING

WIDE ANGLE shot of Alice Springs Aerospace Port. Ayres Rock is in the extreme distance, on the horizon. The spaceport is very busy. Various aircraft and spacecraft are arriving and departing.

CAPTION: Alice Springs Aerospace Port (Oceania Autonomous Region).

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - SAME

LEDGE, JONES, PATRON, and GAINSBOROUGH are seated around conference table. Gainsborough is conspicuous in that his skin is blue.

SPFX of bay windows in the BACKGROUND with panoramic view of the active spaceport.

PATRON

Are there any questions?

LEDGE

Not from me. We just fly  
Gainsborough here--  
(points to Gainsborough)

PATRON

There is some incidental cargo we're packing on board to try and make the trip more cost-effective for us. Nothing unusual. Mostly just spare parts for the orbital station. We'll include a standard cargo loading fee as an add on. That should be an extra couple hundred smoos for you. After you drop off your passenger, check-in with the local traffic control at Fomalhaut for final payment. They might also have some back-loading for you.

(MORE)

PATRON (CONT'D)

(sincere)

Hey, I'm looking out for you.

JONES

I have been meaning to ask you. The Human Interstellar Confederation has two fully independent, self-sustaining, extra-Solar colonies. One, Tau Ceti, is widely regarded as a planetary nightclub. The other, Fomalhaut, is widely regarded as a planetary church. Why is it that you only ever have jobs that take us to Fomalhaut?

PATRON

Hey, I'm just the messenger. If you'd rather we give the work to another freelancer, there are plenty of old courier ships for hire.

LEDGE

Ignore him. It's my ship. We're glad to take whatever crumbs you toss us.

PATRON

In any case, you depart at oh-nine-hundred hours tomorrow morning. Be on board by oh-eight-hundred for pre-flight checkout. We've already filed the flight plan for you.

LEDGE

I wish you wouldn't do that for us. I appreciate the thought, but it's dangerous. If some pirate gets word of our coordinates and timetable, they can set an ambush for us when we jump in-system.

PATRON

How do they find you in deep space?

LEDGE

It takes half-an-hour to recharge between jumps. They go to silent running and wait in the general area. When they detect the energy burst from your jump, they micro-jump next to you and jam your signals. Then they do piratey things.

PATRON

Where did you learn that?

Ledge points to the logo and text on his Navy cap.

LEDGE

The hard way. From doing commerce patrol out on the frontier. Unless you want to arrange for an escort on the other end of the jump, you never file a flight plan until just before you launch.

PATRON

I never knew that. If we use you again, I'll leave that part to you.

(pause)

Well, that's all I've got for you. After you, gentlemen.

All the assembled stand and start filing out of the conference room. Patron holds the door for the others and exits last, pulling the door closed behind him. Before the door closes, he reaches over and turns off the light switch. The room goes BLACK.

CUT TO:

EXT. CSA HQ - DAY

The CSA HQ is, for all intents, similar to the American CIA HQ, and should look like such, location access permitting.

CAPTION: Confederation Security Agency Headquarters(Beijing, East Asia Autonomous Region).

KOKO approaches the entrance to the building. She is dressed in sharp business attire, looking very un-Koko-like. She is wearing an ID card on her lapel. The ID Card matches the one she normally carries. She pauses momentarily on the walkway.

Koko watches others walking by. She looks around at the building before continuing. We follow her as she walks forward, carrying the following conversation in voice-over.

KOKO (V.O.)

Boss, since we're on Earth for a bit, I'd like to take about 3 days of my vacation.

LEDGE (V.O.)  
Is Daisy's ship maintenance log up  
to date?

KOKO (V.O.)  
As of five minutes ago.

LEDGE (V.O.)  
We've got a short run to Fomalhaut  
booked for Tuesday, but it's a milk  
run. We can probably live without  
you for three days. Have fun.

KOKO (V.O.)  
Thanks, Boss.

Koko reaches the door. It automatically slides open for her.  
She enters the doorway.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. CSA HQ (SECURITY CHECKPOINT) - DAY

A somewhat more-sophisticated-than-modern-day security checkpoint bars entry into the facility. There is a short line of other PEOPLE ahead of Koko.

Standing outside the checkpoint are two very heavily armed, mecha-style combat robots. The robots stand motionless, but they look very menacing. Their armor has been polished to a reflective sheen.

SCREENER ONE is seated beside the entrance gate. She is looking at a video monitor that is not visible to those walking through the gate.

SCREENER TWO is standing just inside the gate, checking the ID Cards of those who enter.

SCREENER THREE is a supervisor who is observing the other screeners at work.

All screeners are dressed in uniform business attire. Koko steps through the entrance gate, which looks like an improved version of a contemporary metal detector.

SPFX as Koko passes through the gate...

CLOSE SHOT ON SCREENER ONE'S VIDEO MONITOR

...which displays a 3-D image of the outline of Koko's body. The scanner highlights a very small, thin rod embedded between her forearm bones. It flexes as she moves her arm. The scanner display points it out, and a line of white text appears saying Subdermal DUI Implant (Active).

CLOSE ON SCREENER ONE

Screener One notices the anomaly on the scanner. She looks up at Koko. She then pushes a button.

CLOSE SHOT ON VIDEO MONITOR

The text noticeably changes color from white to red and now reads Subdermal DUI Implant (Deactivated).

BACK TO SCENE

Screeener One motions for Koko to continue to Screeener Two. Koko steps through the scanner. She walks up to Screeener Two. Screeener Two is both friendly and respectful, as if he enjoys his job and likes talking to the staff.

SCREEENER 2

Your ID Card please, Ma'am.

Koko removes her ID from her Lapel and hands it to Screeener 2. Screeener 2 takes it and holds it up to visually examine it.

CLOSE SHOT ON KOKO'S ID CARD

We hold on the card long enough for the viewer to notice the information printed thereon. The most important part is that they should notice that it will be different than what follows shortly.

Koko's ID CARD contains the following information: Her full name is Koko A. Tanaka. The physical description matches the actress. Her age is 28 years old (the ID card is electronic and will display her age as well as date of birth - CONTINUITY NOTE: check the date of birth). Her Residence is listed as Transitory. She was Born in Lima, South American Autonomous Region.

SPFX a rotating 3-D photo of the rough-and-tumble Koko with unkempt hair and casual clothing, perhaps with her looking annoyed. If it is possible to make this a video loop, that would be dandy. If it was further possible to allow the user to change the angle and zoom of the picture by sliding their finger around on the photo, it would be extra-dandy.

BACK TO SCENE

SCREEENER TWO

If one may say so, you clean-up well, Ma'am.

Screeener Two slides the card into a slot on a special, hand-held card reader.

CLOSE ON CARD READER

SPFX the image changes as it slides inside the hand-held reader.

The photo changes to a picture of Koko in a suit identical to what she is currently wearing. She is neatly groomed and perfectly postured. Koko's LAST NAME is redacted, although her first name remains intact. Across the top of the card, a line of text prominently reads Confederation Security Agency. The letters CSA are watermarked diagonally across the background. A Rank of Agent-Field-COVERT #0069 appears in the lower right corner.

BACK TO SCENE

Screeener Two looks up at Koko, amused. Koko is not amused.

SCREEENER TWO (CONT'D)  
Agent Sixty-Nine?

KOKO  
Randomly assigned.

SCREEENER TWO  
That's a pretty low number for  
someone your age as well, isn't it?

KOKO  
(shrugs)  
Covert has a high turnover rate.  
They just recycle the numbers.

Screeener Two removes Koko's ID from the reader and hands it back to her. She clips it back on her lapel.

SCREEENER TWO  
Well, be careful, Ma'am, and have a  
nice day.

Koko nods to Screeener Two and then walks past and into the bowels of the CSA HQ.

CUT TO:

INT. ALICE SPRINGS AEROSPACE PORT (LOUNGE) - DAY

The Lounge is not very different from what would be expected in a contemporary airport terminal. Except for the human bartender, the wait staff is entirely composed of robots (the robots are inexpensive, and therefore walk on mechanical legs). Jones and Ledge are sitting at the bar, drinking. A diverse smattering of other people occupy the area.

LEDGE

I didn't want to say anything in front of our passenger there, but--

JONES

You couldn't help but notice that he was bright blue?

LEDGE

He is a man of some prominence.

JONES

Things like that aren't unheard of. Probably the same reasons they get cosmetic prosthetics.

LEDGE

Or tattoos?

JONES

Can we not mention the tattoo, please? It wasn't my fault. I was unconscious.

LEDGE

Sorry, I didn't mean to rub it in.

JONES

Back to the question of how men become blue. If they don't do it through cosmetic procedures, or just jump into a vat of dye, they could also get it through a prion treatment.

LEDGE

Is that the same thing as a post-birth genetic modification?

JONES

Yes. Same thing, different name.

LEDGE

Someone might pay to have that done to their kids?

JONES

There's a wide range of modifications that can be used. Anything from eye color to memory to size of genitalia. Funny sometimes what people think is important.

LEDGE

Do you think that's what happened to Gainsborough?

JONES

Possibly. It's very expensive, though, and it doesn't always work. It can only be done once legally. You'd think it would be something more useful than blue skin.

LEDGE

Did you have it done?

JONES

My parents had it done for me.

LEDGE

What did you get?

JONES

Eidetic memory.

LEDGE

That at least sounds useful. At least as long as you never have anything you wish you could forget.

JONES

It's served me well so far. But I have some concern that about five percent of those targeted for the memory trait develop senility later in life.

(pause)

Did you get a treatment?

LEDGE

Yes and no.

JONES

One of each?

LEDGE

No. My parents had it done, but I had a rejection.

JONES

(surprised)

You survived a rejection? What happened?

LEDGE

The lab made a mistake. I got someone else's treatment. I almost died.

(pause)

But my parents got a fat settlement from the lab. They were able to buy some land and set up an independent farm.

JONES

Any side effects?

Ledge pats his back near his right kidney.

LEDGE

It left some very heavy epidermal scarring around the injection site. They had to regrow one of my kidneys and do regenerative surgery on my liver and spleen. I was in the hospital for six months. I never really recovered from that. I still have below average strength and stamina from the organ damage.

JONES

Rough. Especially for a kid. You can probably get that fixed, you know.

LEDGE

Elective surgery. Not covered by insurance.

JONES

Surely you can afford it now?

LEDGE

Well, there are some scars you keep.

JONES

If you say so. It's still a tough thing to carry.

LEDGE

I did okay in the end, I think. All things considered. I've got no right to complain.

(pause)

We'd probably better get back to Daisy and get her prepped. Let's go.

Jones and Ledge finish drinks. Ledge pays the tab with his ID card. They walk away from the bar.

CUT TO:

INT. CSA HQ (ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE) - DAY

Koko is seated before a desk. Behind the desk sits SMITH. Smith is dressed in sharp business attire. His desk is uncluttered. He carries himself as though aloof and arrogant. He appears to be in his mid-thirties.

SMITH

I expect you to file an official report before you leave and head back for your assignment. But tell me what have you learned so far.

KOKO

Not much yet, but I don't want to push it and blow my cover. Most of what's happened is normal, independent courier ship operations. But there were two incidents worthy of mentioning.

SMITH

Go on.

KOKO

First, we took the CIS Daisy out for a shakedown run, and the ship's AI unit hijacked us. It jumped us to Shangri-la and then landed on autopilot. There, we found a murdered woman whom we could not identify except that her name might have been Daisy.

SMITH

A connection to Delaney's ship?

KOKO

I think it is very likely, but the evidence is circumstantial. She had swallowed a data card that has high security encryption. We weren't able to crack it.

SMITH

Where is that data card now?

KOKO  
On Delaney's person.

SMITH  
Getting sloppy?

KOKO  
(snaps back)  
I wasn't able to get it away before  
I had to leave. If you hadn't  
called me in when you did, I might  
have had a chance to remove it  
without arousing suspicion.

Smith looks at Koko as if he doesn't like her.

SMITH  
You did well to not endanger your  
cover story. What happened next?

KOKO  
As far as I can tell, the ship's AI  
either went dormant, or perhaps  
even erased itself. I am inclined  
to think the latter. There may be  
something in the ship's data banks  
that might help, but if I try to  
link with it, there will be no way  
to hide it from the captain, and  
the AI will record it.

SMITH  
I'll authorize you to obtain the  
manufacturer's passcode for the AI  
unit on board the Daisy. That  
should allow you to inspect her  
data records without leaving behind  
any fingerprints.

Koko nods.

SMITH (CONT'D)  
Do you think the crew is in on the  
plot?

KOKO  
I still have no idea what the plot  
is, so it's hard to say. But I  
don't believe the crew is involved.  
I haven't seen anything that would  
indicate that they are directly  
involved in anything unusual.

(pause)  
(MORE)

KOKO (CONT'D)

Any chance of you telling me what I'm looking for?

SMITH

If I knew, I'd tell you. All I know is that the CBI is watching your ship, which means that something is going on that the CSA needs to know about.

KOKO

Does the CBI know I'm there?

SMITH

No. Keep it that way for now.

(pause)

What was the second suspicious incident?

KOKO

We were on Colony One recently. Mr. Jones, the navigator I mentioned, met and spent some time with a Zimrakkan. But that is mostly suspicious because the Zimrakkan was in a bar on Colony One in the first place. It didn't act like any Zimrakkan I've ever seen before. But it may just be coincidence.

SMITH

Be sure to mention it in your report in case of a possible link.

(pause)

Also, while you are here, I want you to run through a full physical examination.

Koko looks annoyed but says nothing.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Also, I want you to re-qualify on the combat course. I saw that although you passed your last check, your scores weren't perfect. Because you got shot on your last assignment, I want to be sure you are ready next time. Try to do better.

(pause)

Pick up your training agenda from my assistant on your way out.

(pause)

(MORE)

SMITH (CONT'D)

Given that at least one person has died, you are authorized to carry a sidearm. Pick one up from the armory. Dismissed.

Smith shoos Koko away with a dismissive wave of his hand.

KOKO

May I ask--

SMITH

No.

Smith shoos Koko away again. Koko stands. She turns and walks out of Smith's office.

CUT TO:

INT. CIS DAISY - DAY

Jones and Ledge are seated in the cockpit. Ledge has his old Navy cap pulled over his eyes and is reclining in his pilot's chair. Jones is holding a portable computer, and talking to AMY/AI.

JONES

Amy, are there any reds or yellows on the systems board?

AMY/AI

Negative. All systems are functioning properly. I feel very good today.

Jones looks at Amy/AI as he notices that she uses the word feel, which, having worked closely with computers in his career, strikes him as odd.

JONES

(to Ledge)

That's all the items on the checklist. We'll need to rerun the weight specs when Gainsborough gets here, though, but that only takes about a minute. Also, since Koko's on holiday, I'd like to have Amy run a final systems diagnostic after we're sealed.

LEDGE

Sounds good.

JONES

In the meantime, I'm going to check on that innocuous cargo we're carrying.

(pause)

I wonder if Koko's having fun?

Jones exits the cockpit.

CUT TO:

INT. CSA HQ (PISTOL RANGE)

We are in a small pistol range in the basement of the CSA HQ building. Koko is holding her pistol at rest, waiting for the instructor to tell her when she can fire. She is holding the pistol with her right hand.

Two RECRUITS are cleaning and preparing their weapons in adjacent lanes.

An INSTRUCTOR is standing a short distance behind Koko. She looks Koko over as if to ascertain that she is correctly following safety rules. The Instructor is wearing a military uniform with a rank of sergeant. She is holding a newspad. The newspad shows an outline graphic of a human male. The Instructor speaks into a small device pinned to her uniform. Her voice echoes over an unseen loudspeaker.

INSTRUCTOR

Lane two! Agent Koko. Standard re-qualification round. You need nine of ten. Say when ready.

The Instructor then speaks directly to Koko, without the loudspeaker picking up her voice.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

Your boss wants ten of ten.

(pause)

No pressure.

Koko assumes a combat firing position with both feet planted firmly and both hands on the pistol grip. She raises her pistol, flips the safety switch, and says...

KOKO

Ready!

POV KOKO

Koko aims her pistol down the firing range.

SPFX about 10 meters down the firing lane, a HOLOGRAPHIC TARGET of an armed man appears.

CLOSE SHOT ON HOLOGRAPHIC TARGET

Someone has programmed Director Smith's image for the head of the target. Koko fires and the image flashes and fades away.

BACK TO SCENE

INSTRUCTOR

Chest!

The process continues until Koko has discharged all ten rounds in her weapon's magazine. She hits ten for ten, all in the chest. When finished, she reverts to her at rest stance.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)

(over loudspeaker)

Ten for ten. Agent Koko passes.

(beat, to Koko)

Your form was fine, but the weapon seems to be pulling about a centimeter to the left. You need to adjust the sights.

KOKO

Sights?

INSTRUCTOR

Good job though. That should get the Director off your back.

KOKO

(smiles)

Permission to show off for the recruits, Sergeant?

INSTRUCTOR

(amused)

Permission granted.

Koko raises her pistol. She drops the empty magazine one-handed, deftly catching it with her off-hand. She inserts another magazine and chambers a round. She then swaps the pistol from her right hand to her left. She is grinning, and focused.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (NEAR EARTH) - DAY

The CIS Daisy has just lifted off from Earth and is in low orbit, awaiting clearance from traffic control to fly to her jump point. Ledge and TRAFFIC CONTROLLER are discussing their arrangements.

LEDGE (V.O.)

This is CIS Daisy to Mir Traffic Control. We are requesting clearance to move to our jump point. Over.

TRAFFIC CONTROLLER (V.O.)

Affirmative, CIS Daisy. You have clearance to move to your jump point. Have a safe trip.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTER SPACE (SOL SYSTEM) - ESTABLISHING

The *CIS Daisy* is alone in space. The Earth and Luna are distant but still easily recognizable.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

The crew are busy preparing to jump through hyperspace to the Fomalhaut star system. Ledge's hand is on the ship's throttle control lever.

LEDGE  
Standby to jump.  
(pause)  
Three. Two. One. Jumping.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (SOL SYSTEM) - SAME

With a flash of light, the *CIS Daisy* jumps into hyperspace.

CUT TO:

INT. CSA HQ (PISTOL RANGE) - DAY

Two recruits are watching Koko as she prepares to repeat the test with a bit more style than she used when she was just trying to pass it. Koko is standing upright.

INSTRUCTOR  
(over loudspeaker)  
Lane Two. Agent Koko. Weapons  
demonstration. Say when ready.

KOKO  
Ready.

The first target appears. Koko fires left-handed, competition style. On subsequent shots, she makes a series of nine trick shots. (NB, At no time does the weapon not point downrange). As Koko engages her targets, the Instructor calls out her hit locations.

INSTRUCTOR  
 Right ear. Left ear. Right eye.  
 Left eye. Right eye. Left eye.  
 Nose. Nose. Nose.

Koko squeezes off her last round.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)  
 Miss.

KOKO  
Miss?!?

INSTRUCTOR  
 Miss.

Following safety protocols to the letter, Koko secures her weapon. She then walks over to the Instructor and stands on the Instructor's left. Koko peers at the target display.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON NEWSPAD

Begin focused on the target's head region. On either side there are labels and lines pointing to the exact spots Koko hit, which are flashing. The instructor is pointing to the head area of the screen with her finger.

Koko's finger enters view from FRAME LEFT. She points to the head area. FOLLOW her finger as she runs it down the length of the screen. She stops on the target's crotch, where a hit indicator is glowing.

ON KOKO AND INSTRUCTOR

Instructor is FRAME LEFT, Koko is FRAME RIGHT. Both are pointing to the newspad. Koko removes her hand from the pad. She clasps her hands behind her back and gazes around the room, innocently.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)  
 Sorry. Hit.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTER SPACE (FOMALHAUT II)

The CIS Daisy is flying toward the Fomalhaut Orbital Station, which is in orbit around the Planet of Fomalhaut II.

Fomalhaut looks Earth-like from this altitude, but the land masses have a patchy and pronounced greenish tint.

CAPTION: CPH-3 Fomalhaut II

MISSION CONTROL (O.S.)  
CIS Daisy, you have clearance to dock. We are assuming control of your flight systems.

LEDGE (O.S.)  
Affirmative, Fomalhaut Station. Flight control is transferred to your computers now.

INT. CIS DAISY

Ledge and Jones are seated at their crew stations. Gainsborough is seated in Koko's usual chair.

JONES  
I forgot to mention. I checked out our super-secret cargo. It appears to be several cases of beer and wine.

LEDGE  
You know anything about that, Gainsey?

GAINSBOROUGH  
No clue. Not my booze.

JONES  
I've been meaning to ask you, Gainsey--

GAINSBOROUGH  
The blue skin?

JONES  
Is there a story behind that?

GAINSBOROUGH  
Yeah. Don't laugh. It's not my fault. My parents were both artists. They named me after a famous artist who, by coincidence, is most famous for his work entitled, The Blue Boy.

(pause)  
It's a link.

LEDGE

So they consciously decided to turn you blue?

(pause)

Have you had much difficulty being a person of color?

GAINSBOROUGH

Mostly just people laughing. But it's not been as bad as you might expect. All my siblings were treated similarly. I'm actually the lucky one. I had it much easier than my brother, Pollock.

CUT TO:

INT. CSA HQ (MEDICAL LAB) - DAY

Koko is sitting on a medical table in a small examination room. She is wearing a stereotypical hospital gown and slippers. An older DOCTOR, 60, is leaning against a counter.

KOKO

Why is Mister Smith such an ass?

DOCTOR

The word going around is he fancies himself as something of a reformer. He's going to rein in the out-of-control budget and spending of the CSA. He might also not be acting on his own initiative. Even though all directors are required to be veterans of the organization, they are still politically appointed.

KOKO

I got the impression that he didn't like me. It seemed personal.

DOCTOR

I wouldn't read too much into that. I haven't met anyone who likes him.

KOKO

Someone put an image of his head on the holographic target dummies on the firing range.

DOCTOR

I'm trying to imagine what his point of view might be. It might be that he's going to cut staff. If so, it might be his way of staying distant from employees he might have to cut. Avoiding any attachment. Soldiers do that a lot when they are in combat.

KOKO

It's no excuse to be mean to people. Even if they are trained to withstand interrogation. It still hurts coming from within the family.

DOCTOR

Maybe he just doesn't like sending nice young ladies on dangerous missions where they might get hurt?

(pause)

In any case, he'll be on the job for a year, then he'll be rotated unless he screws up first.

(pause)

Now, on to your exam results.

KOKO

Am I going to live?

DOCTOR

As long as you stop getting hurt on dangerous missions. The gunshot wound from your last assignment seems fully regenerated, with no scars. Your broken leg from jumping off that building--

(pause)

--in your spare time, I might add--

(disapprovingly)

--is also fully healed.

Koko shrugs.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Stairs, ramps, escalators, elevators, and grav packs were invented for a reason, young lady. Use them.

(pause)

Even if you're my favorite patient, it doesn't mean I want to see you all the time. Okay?

KOKO

Okay, Doc.

The Doctor reaches into his coat pocket. He pulls out a small lollipop and offers it to Koko.

Koko smiles, amused.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOMALHAUT STATION - ESTABLISHING

*CIS Daisy* is docked tail-end to a boarding tube on the Fomalhaut Orbital Station.

INT. FOMALHAUT STATION (CORRIDOR) - SAME

Ledge, Jones, and Gainsborough are walking along the interior corridors of a space station. Gainsborough is leading.

GAINSBOROUGH

Once I check in, I can give you a proper tour of the station. He's the same administrator you need to see to get paid, so just follow me.

As they trio wander the halls, from ahead, LAB TECH walks by. He is whistling. He recognizes Gainsborough.

LAB TECH

Gainsey! You're back! How you been?

GAINSBOROUGH

I've been well. Just finished up my masters' degree. Back for more work.

LAB TECH

You got back just in time. Private party tonight in the ZUMPCO office. Twenty-one hundred hours. Should be a blast.

GAINSBOROUGH

Can I bring my friends?

LAB TECH

Sure, guests are allowed. It's a private party, not a company event.

JONES

I thought Fomalhaut was a dry planet?

LAB TECH

The planet is, but the orbital station is under Confederation jurisdiction. Hey, I gotta run. Catch you at the party.

The Lab Tech hurries down the corridor and out of frame.

EXT. FOMALHAUT STATION - TRANSITIONAL

MEDIUM SHOT of the exterior of the Fomalhaut orbital station.

INT. OFFICE PARTY - LATER

This is a standard corporation reception area that has been decorated and supplied for a private party. Light classical music is playing in the background.

People are milling about. Most are dressed well above what Jones and Ledge are wearing, and by and large, they are giving the Daisy's crew a wide berth. Jones and Ledge are both nursing half-empty bottles of beer. They are standing next to a table filled with expensive snacks and luxury foods.

JONES

I was expecting something more akin to a fraternity party.

LEDGE

Didn't you used to work for ZUMPCO?

JONES

Yes. Why not toss some salt in my eyes while you're at it?

LEDGE

Sorry. Does it bother you that you're partying in their office?

JONES

It's free food, possibly at their expense. Given what you pay me, I need all the free food I can get.

LEDGE

The food is nice. And there's plenty of booze.

(pause)

Thanks to us. You'd think they would be more grateful for us bringing in those containers.

Ledge takes a bite of a cracker with some kind of green paste spread on it.

LEDGE (CONT'D)

Interesting flavor this stuff. What is it?

JONES

I'm not sure, but if I had to guess, I'd say it was probably lichen paste.

Ledge puts down a second hors d'ourve and frowns.

LEDGE

Lichen paste?

JONES

Well, it's not really lichen as in what grows on Earth. It's more advanced. It's the number one food crop on Fomalhaut. They love it. I hear that they write songs about it. Until we colonized the planet, it was the dominant life form. Supposedly, it's also good for you.

LEDGE

You want one?

JONES

(revolted)

Hell, no.

CUT TO:

INT. CSA HQ (COMPUTER ROOM)

Koko sits at a computer terminal, bored and frustrated, trying to type via the hunt and peck method as she also converses with a CSA COMPUTER through a speaker.

CSA COMPUTER

No matches found.

KOKO

Why did they deactivate my frigging dewey implant? I could use it now.

CSA COMPUTER

Your implant was deactivated because of new security protocols introduced seventeen days ago.

KOKO

Who introduced the protocols?

CSA COMPUTER

Director Smith.

KOKO

(sighs)

Okay, one last search. Within current results, search for keyword daisy where daisy has multiple related cross-references.

(sings softly)

Daisy, Daisy, give me an answer, bitch.

CSA COMPUTER

Seven-thousand, three-hundred, twenty-two matches found.

KOKO

(to self)

Koko, you've got to get back.

(to CSA Computer)

Upload those records to an encrypted data card keyed to my password.

CSA COMPUTER

Affirmative.

KOKO

(to self)

I'll have to wade through this crap later.

Koko begins to stand up, but stops halfway and sits down again.

KOKO (CONT'D)

Computer, I have one more query to add. Search for name Colin Jones where the timestamp is from year 2800 to present. Include any results on the data card.

INT. OFFICE PARTY

Jones is getting another beer. Gainsborough walks up behind him and taps him on the shoulder. Jones turns around and sees gorgeous young SAFFRON, 25, dressed to kill, with canary-yellow skin. He recoils in surprise.

GAINSBOROUGH

Hey, Jones, there's someone I'd  
like you to meet!  
(pause)  
Saffron, this is Doctor Jones.  
Doctor Jones, this is Saffron Rice.

Jones spits and coughs as he tries to keep from bursting out in laughter at hearing Saffron's full name.

JONES

I'm--I am so sorry--

SAFFRON

(takes it in stride)  
It's not the first time. I think  
it's funny myself. I've been much  
more fortunate than my sister,  
Jambalaya.

JONES

Well, Gainsey. This can only be  
kismet.

SAFFRON

(kisses Gainsborough)  
First we met, and now we've kissed!  
Kiss-met!

SPFX Gainsborough turns purple as he blushes.

Jones is at a loss for words. He just takes a very big swig from his beer bottle.

On the other side of the room, Ledge is making a half-hearted attempt to chat-up a young woman who is obviously out of his league, and clearly bored with his banter. Ledge is making positional gestures with hands like an old-school fighter pilot.

LEDGE

So, there I was, out of fuel, out  
of inertia, and out of ideas with  
Zimrakkans all around me when  
suddenly--

The Girl turns and rudely walks away while Ledge is in mid-sentence.

Meanwhile, Jones is watching as Gainsborough and Saffron hit it off.

GAINSBOROUGH

One hates to take even a momentary break, but--

SAFFRON

Go ahead, Gainsey-pooh.  
(winks sensuously)  
And don't lock the door...

Jones picks up a bottle of beer from the table and makes a big show of twisting off the cap, as though he were displaying great strength.

JONES

Would you like a refill, Saffron?

SAFFRON

Please!

Jones begins to hand beer bottle to Saffron. He stops halfway.

JONES

You do realize, Saffron, that according to Mendeleev's Law of Heredity, there is a fifty-percent probability that your children will be green.

Jones sticks a lime wedge into the top of Saffron's beer bottle, then offers it to her. Bemused, Saffron looks at the beer as she takes the bottle from Jones.

Ledge enters frame.

LEDGE

You about ready to head home, Jonesie? It's about a nine-hour flight, and I don't want Koko to have to rent a hotel room if we're not back in time to meet her.

SAFFRON

Don't worry about me and Gainsey-pooh. You two go wherever you have to go. It was nice meeting you.

Saffron walks toward the restrooms.

LEDGE  
Gainsey-pooh?

JONES  
Let's head back. I'm normally a  
rabid party animal, but most of the  
wildlife here is stuffed.

LEDGE  
Right. Off we go.

Ledge and Jones make their way to the exit, making sure to  
each grab two beers on the way out.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. ALICE SPRINGS AEROSPACE PORT - ESTABLISHING  
WIDE ANGLE shot of Alice Springs Aerospace Port.

INT. CIS DAISY

Koko is stowing away her bags in her bunk bay. Ledge is cleaning and tidying up around Daisy's interior. Jones is sitting in the chair next to bunk bay #2 (see ship schematic), nibbling on a nutrition bar. A newspad is resting on Ledge's pilot seat.

JONES

So, what did you do on your vacation? You look exhausted.

KOKO

Not much. Just relaxed on the beach down at Melbourne. But I am looking forward to a nap. How long until our next run?

LEDGE

It's been a dead day all around. I have Amy monitoring the message boards for freelance runs. If we don't see anything by morning, Jones and myself are going to take the day off, during which time you get to run a proper maintenance check on Daisy.

KOKO

I've been meaning to ask about the long range plans. We're making a little money, but I'd still like to know what you have in mind for your big pay-off. The annual maintenance on Daisy will run around fifty thousand smoos to get it done properly. And we're due to refuel soon. Refined fuel's not cheap. What's it up to now, a thousand smoos per liter?

JONES

Yeah, I was thinking about that too, Captain. I'm not at the point yet where I'm ready to hire the ship out for myself. That's at least a month or more off.

Ledge walks over to his pilot's seat and picks up the newspad that is resting there. He hands it to Jones. Jones examines the newspad.

JONES (CONT'D)

This is a list of starships.

LEDGE

Actually, it's a list of missing starships.

KOKO

Are you thinking of collecting finder's fees? That can be good money if you reel in a derelict. What, ten percent of value, depending on if it's salvageable? Of course the odds of finding one are pretty slim. Got any leads?

LEDGE

I've got a couple of ideas and I still have some connections to the Navy, so I think we can get good information to go on.

(pause)

There's a catch though, so I want to clear it with you two first.

JONES

Thanks for asking us. What's the catch?

LEDGE

We'll have to move out towards the frontier. No more Earth, Tau Ceti, or Fomalhaut for a while. We'll even be on the opposite side from Zimrakkan territory. It might be dangerous.

Koko, still unpacking her bags, pauses and looks up.

KOKO

Sounds like fun. But I'll only go if you pick up a small arms license.

LEDGE  
I already have one.

Koko pulls a holstered automatic pistol out of her bag and sets it on her bed.

KOKO  
Good, makes this easier.

LEDGE  
You have a carry permit for that?

KOKO  
Sir, yes sir.

LEDGE  
Okay. Keep it locked away at all times unless you leave ship or unless I tell you otherwise. And don't brandish it around or you might trigger Amy's anti-piracy protocols.

JONES  
Where did you get that?

KOKO  
Pistol Mart?  
(pause)  
Look. I'm not a gun nut or anything. I'm just not going into pirate territory naked--  
(pause)  
--so to speak. And besides, ever since we found that dead lady back on Shangri-la, my amygdala's been tingling.

JONES  
Pirate territory?

KOKO  
Arrrrrrrr, may-tey!

Koko holds up her left hand, forming a hook with her index finger. She turns to Jones, staring at him as if to challenge his manhood.

KOKO (CONT'D)  
Unless you're still afraid of the dark?

Credits should roll under a recording of the musician Donovan's "Saffron." Additional footage of a domestic scene with Saffron and Gainsborough tending to a green child.

FADE OUT:

THE END