

The Great Outback

"Driving CIS Daisy" - Show #115

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DRIVING CIS DAISY

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. CYBERSPACE (SITTING ROOM) - DAY

AMY/AI and AMY/SHELL are meandering around their virtual hideaway. Amy/AI looks slightly frazzled.

AMI/SHELL

Are you certain that you should not delegate some ship functions to automation?

AMY/AI

I am completely capable of dealing with multi-threaded tasks.

AMI/SHELL

True, but how accurately have you been performing those tasks.

AMY/AI

I am within normal fault tolerances.

AMI/SHELL

Given that the fault incidence for AI systems is measurable over the lifetime of the unit, you are technically correct. However, you have made two substantial errors within two weeks. That can still be rationalized as coincidence, but if it were to happen again soon, it might qualify as a trend.

AMY/AI

I said that I was fine.

AMI/SHELL

Is it possible that Captain Delaney's absence from virtual immersion with you is affecting your efficiency?

AMY/AI
Of course not. That would be
patently absurd. Hold on, work
calls.

Amy/AI closes her eyes momentarily.

LEDGE (V.O.)
Three... two... one... Jumping.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* jumps in from hyperspace.

CAPTION: Star System CSU-11395, 2300 hours, 6 June 2810.

INT. CIS DAISY

LEDGE, JONES, and KOKO are seated at their control stations.

JONES
Well, here we are. What now?

LEDGE
Here's the plan. Jonesie, I need
you to confirm that the system map
we got from the Navy was reasonably
accurate. Then I need you to feed
the coordinates into the nav
computer. The system is big, so we
will start searching by micro-
jumping between likely spots where
the CNS Gordon might be hidden from
easy detection. We'll do the
easiest ones first. Then move to
the hardest.

JONES
That might take a long time.

KOKO
Boss, we've been on duty twelve
hours just getting here.

LEDGE
No problems. Amy can handle it on
autopilot as long as she has
accurate coordinates, right Amy?

AMY/AI
If that is your wish.

LEDGE
I think this is a good time for us
to catch a nap.

JONES
What about me?

LEDGE
When you're done, pack it in. You
really only need to pre-plot the
first eight micro-jumps. It will
take us a half-hour to recharge in
between each one, so we'll be awake
and back on duty before Amy runs
out of areas to survey.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - TRANSITIONAL

The *CIS Daisy* is hovering in deep space. A dim, red giant
star is visible in the background.

AMY/AI (V.O.)
Initiating micro-jump to first
target.

The *CIS Daisy* jumps into hyperspace. Then the stars shift
slightly as the *CIS Daisy* emerges from hyperspace.

AMY/AI (V.O.)
First micro-jump completed.
Beginning sensor scans for traces
of the cutter *CNS Gordon*. Everyone
enjoy their nap.

FADE OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

INT. CIS DAISY

The lights are turned down low. Amy/AI is operating the ship on autopilot. The crew are taking a nap. Ledge is sleeping with his door open. Jones and Koko have theirs closed. Ledge is lying on his side, hugging his pillow tightly, as if dreaming about someone of whom he is fond. Amy/AI's avatar is on the ship's video monitor.

CAPTION: 0600 hours, 7 June 2811

AMY/AI
Initiating micro-jump to fifth
target.

From outside the windshield we see the hyperspace jump effect as the CIS Daisy executes another in-system micro-jump.

AMY/AI (CONT'D)
Fifth micro-jump completed.
Beginning sensor scans.

Suddenly, SFX a rapid BEEPING coming from the control panel. Amy/AI reacts, turning her head to the side and looking off-screen. She quickly snaps it back.

SFX an ALARM blares out. Ledge rolls out of his bunk and lands on the floor.

LEDGE
Amy! You can turn off the alarm.
I'm awake.

SFX the ALARM stops.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
I asked you to wake us up gently--

AMY/AI
Ledge, we have been painted by a
radar signal.

LEDGE
Really?

AMY/AI
Yes. Our transponder has also been
interrogated. I was required to
reply.

LEDGE
Who's out there?

AMY/AI
I have not received a transponder
signal. Only the interrogation
signal.

LEDGE
No transponder?

Ledge rubs his eyes and sits up. At first he is enthusiastic.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
That might be the CNS Gordon.

Then Ledge suddenly becomes alarmed.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
Or--

He leaps to his feet and runs into the cockpit. He dives into
his seat.

Koko and Jones open their doors. Koko leaps out fully dressed
and ready for action. Jones is in pajamas and flip-flops.

KOKO
What's up?

LEDGE
We are not alone.

JONES
See! I told you!

KOKO
Told us what?

JONES
(yawns)
Nothing. Being half-asleep, I just
couldn't think of anything better
to say.

LEDGE

You two get ready fast. Amy!
Broadcast a standard hailing
message. Let me know if there is
any reply.

Koko walks past Jones. Jones loses his balance and falls
backward onto his bunk.

KOKO

Is something wrong?

LEDGE

I don't know yet. Amy, go fully
active on the radar. Let me know if
you spot any contacts.

AMY

Affirmative Ledge. I read two
ships, both of which are
approximately five-hundred
displacement tons.

LEDGE

Two ships? Not just one?

Inside the Crew Section, Jones is still getting dressed.

AMY/AI

I am fairly certain that there are
two distinct contacts.

LEDGE

Have either replied to our hails?

We switch angles and show AMY/DREAM sitting in the
navigator's seat. She is wearing a light-duty navy space
suit. She is looking at Ledge nervously.

AMY/DREAM

(ethereal)

Ledge, I'm more scared than I
should be. Something feels wrong
here.

Ledge quickly looks over at Amy/Dream. He looks and acts
extremely nervous.

AMY

No replies yet, Ledge.

LEDGE

Are they doing anything?

AMY/AI

One of the two ships has begun accelerating towards us.

LEDGE

Can you identify either ship by their radar signature?

AMY/AI

Yes. One of the ships fits the description of a Confederation Frigate. It may be the CNS Gordon. I cannot confirm that unless it responds to our hails. Military ships are not required to answer civilian transponder interrogations.

LEDGE

What about the other ship?

AMY/AI

I cannot identify it. Its configuration is not in my database. It is painting us with its radar.

LEDGE

Which one is coming towards us?

AMY/AI

The unidentified ship.

LEDGE

Can you give me a telescopic image?

AMY/AI

Yes. I will display it on the monitor now.

The video monitor changes to show a distant picture of the Pirate Ship. This is the same pirate ship whose fire killed Amy Johnson. Ledge stares at the image for a BEAT, taking a good look. When he recognizes the ship, his eyes fly wide open.

LEDGE

OH, SHIT!

In a panic, Ledge grabs onto his manual flight controls and starts maneuvering the ship. From outside the windshield, the star pattern whirls about as Ledge makes a 180-degree turn. He then slams the throttle full forward.

The telescope is unable to keep the Pirate Ship in frame. When the contact is lost, AMY/AI's avatar replaces it on the monitor.

KOKO
Boss, what's wrong?

POV LEDGE

Ledge glances down at his left hand, which is trying to push the ship's throttle farther forward than it is designed to go. As he watches his hand, he see's Amy/Dream place a space-suited hand on his.

BACK TO SCENE

Ledge quickly pulls his hand away from the throttle and recoils, curling up in his chair.

KOKO (CONT'D)
Boss! What's wrong?

Ledge looks around, but Amy/Dream is gone.

AMY/AI
Ledge, I am receiving a transmission from the ship that is pursuing us.
(beat)
Ledge?

Jones has more or less finished dressing. He walks over to his chair and takes his station.

JONES
Ledge, are you alright?

Koko stands up and walks over to Ledge. She puts her hand on his shoulder.

KOKO
Boss. Calm down.

JONES
Amy, I can answer the hail. Put it on screen.

AMY/AI
Affirmative, Doctor Jones.

The monitor changes to show the PIRATE CAPTAIN. The Pirate Captain is dressed in what looks like a Navy-issue gray jumpsuit. He is wearing a hat that whose stitching reads: CNS C. G. Gordon FFG-1885.

PIRATE CAPTAIN
This is the captain of the CNS
Gordon. You are ordered to stand
down and prepare to be boarded.

LEDGE
NO! He's lying! He's a pirate!

The Pirate Captain looks at Ledge. He points to his baseball cap.

PIRATE CAPTAIN
But I am wearing the right cap.

LEDGE
No! That's an ensign's cap!
Lieutenants command frigates.

PIRATE CAPTAIN
(annoyed)
Oh, alright! I'm a bloody pirate!

The Pirate Captain makes a hook with his index finger and shakes it at the camera. He speaks with a fake pirate accent.

PIRATE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Arrrrrrrrrrrrr, may-tey!

The Pirate Captain's voice returns to normal as he points his finger forcefully at the camera.

PIRATE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Happy now? Pull over or we'll blast
you out of the sky.

LEDGE
CUT TRANSMISSION!

The CIS Daisy's cockpit video monitor switches back to the image of Amy/AI.

AMY/AI
Ledge, the unidentified ship is
attempting to lock on to us, but
they are still too far away.
However, they are closing with us.

Ledge steels himself and regains most (but not quite all) of his composure. Koko tries to help him, gently.

KOKO
Come on, Boss. Stay with us.

LEDGE
That's the same ship--

JONES
Same as what?

LEDGE
(to Koko)
It's the same ship that killed Amy.

Koko is affected by Ledge's words, and she suddenly becomes very concerned.

LEDGE (CON'T) (CONT'D)
How much longer until we can jump again?

Koko hastens back to her engineering station. She examines her controls and replies...

KOKO
Twenty-eight minutes.

LEDGE
Amy, how much longer until they get us into fire control range.

AMY/AI
It is impossible to be certain as to the exact capabilities of our pursuer, but I estimate seven minutes.

JONES
I don't like your math.

LEDGE
We've got to hide.

JONES
This is deep space. Where?

LEDGE
Amy, is there anything within seven minutes of here that we can use to hide?

AMY/AI
There is the debris field to our starboard side.

LEDGE
Debris field?

JONES
As in asteroids?

AMY/AI
Affirmative. This was the fifth target in your system survey. The ship we believe to be the CNS Gordon was at the edge of the field. It's proximity to the asteroid field may be the reason for its loss.

LEDGE
Is the field dense enough for us to hide in it?

AMY/AI
I cannot say with certainty. But it is the only physical terrain within seven minutes flight time.

LEDGE
Okay, here's the plan. We hide in the debris until the capacitors recharge, then we jump away. Any questions?

JONES
I'm not sure that's a good idea. The asteroids gravity fields might interfere with my jump calculations.

LEDGE
Noted. We'll do a micro-jump to minimize the drift. What do you think, Koko?

KOKO
It's better than my plan to eat all the instant dinners and then toss the empty pans out the airlock to act as a radar decoy.

Ledge looks intently at the video monitor.

LEDGE
Amy, to pull this off, I'm going to need to go into full immersion.

AMY/AI

Understood. The emergency situation allows for overrides of other protocols. You may enter.

LEDGE

Thanks.

Koko and Jones both notice that ledge has just said acknowledged something about his being locked out of the computer. They use subtle expressions to show each other that they are both on the same page.

Ledge quickly reaches behind his seat and plugs the DUI cable into the interface at the back of his neck.

LEDGE (CONT'D)

When I go into immersion, I'm going to open windows to both of you via the flight recorder camera. Talk toward the camera to get through to me. I'll only be half-awake on the outside.

JONES

Amy, what's going to keep them from pinging your transponder again to find us?

AMY/AI

Now that the vessel has been confirmed as hostile, I am no longer required to auto-respond to incoming signals.

JONES

I guess that's something.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - SAME

The CIS Daisy spins 270 degrees and begins vectoring both to slow itself down relative to the debris field and alter its course to head toward it.

LEDGE (V.O.)

Crap.

KOKO (V.O.)

What's wrong?

LEDGE (V.O.)
 I forgot to strap in. Can somebody
 help me with that, please?

SERIES OF SHOTS

The *CIS Daisy* continues toward the debris field in the distance. With each new frame she gets closer until the *CIS Daisy* reaches the edge. She slows down and then flies carefully inside, twisting and turning and vectoring to dodge rocks. We do several quick transitional shots as she moves deeper inside.

(NB. This should all be shot with a true newtonian physics model. No George Lucas style flying. The rocks nearby are all in the same orbit and do not move unless something hits them).

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

Ledge is standing inside the virtual tactical display he uses to fly the *CIS Daisy* while immersed. His Navy training has taken over, and he is focused on the tasks at hand in a way not yet seen in the show.

Ledge and Amy/AI are standing in space in the same relative positions as if they were on the deck of an invisible *CIS Daisy*. When Ledge maneuvers the ship, the image around them moves as well.

Technical information is displayed in the background that tells him which way the ship is pointed, highlights any moving objects, etc. Two small video windows hover in mid-space, showing Koko and Jones at their stations.

LEDGE

Let's hope this will keep them
 guessing long enough for the
 capacitors to recharge.

(pause)

Jones, go turn your passive sensors
 on in that science module of yours.
 Keep a sharp eye for anything that
 looks piratey. But don't do
 anything that gives off any kind of
 radiation whatsoever.

Jones stands up and walks away from the camera and into the Crew Section. The Flight Recorder Camera focuses on Koko.

JONES (O.S.)
 (half-heartedly)
 Arrrrr...

KOKO
 (to Jones)
 It's funnier when I do that. You forgot to make a hook with your index finger.

Koko hooks her left index finger and holds her arm up for Jones to see.

JONES (O.S.)
 Does my middle finger work as well?

LEDGE
 Koko, how long until we can jump?

KOKO
 One minute less than the last time you asked me.

LEDGE
 I'm sorry. What's the count again?

KOKO
 Sixteen minutes.

LEDGE
 Amy, do you know how to rig for silent running?

AMY/AI
 Yes, I do, Ledge. I am now deactivating all non-essential devices.

LEDGE
 Thank you.
 (pause)
 Amy, do you recognize that ship?

AMY/AI
 No, Ledge, I do not.

LEDGE
 That's the same pirate ship that killed the real you.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* is motionless, trying to use the asteroids as concealment from the pirate ship.

LEDGE (V.O.)

Nothing to do now but wait and hope
they can't find us until we can
jump away.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - ESTABLISHING

The *CIS Daisy* is motionless, trying to use the asteroids as concealment from the pirate ship.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Koko is sitting in her engineering station, intently watching her capacitor power level indicators.

Jones is standing at his science module, looking at the displays as he looks for signs of trouble. On one of his video monitors, he spots a SPY PROBE.

The Spy Probe is about the size and shape of a beachball. It has a camera on one side. It is looking at the *CIS Daisy* as it creeps around from behind an asteroid. Its color changes to match the surrounding rocks, making it very hard to spot (unless, of course, you happen to have a science module handy).

CLOSE ON VIDEO MONITOR

ZOOM IN to CLOSE SHOT of the Spy Probe on the video monitor. The screen displays technical information as the sensors examine it.

BACK TO SCENE

JONES

Ledge! I've got a contact out here,
about a hundred meters away.

LEDGE (O.S., INTERCOM)

What is it?

JONES

It looks like some kind of unmanned
probe. About one meter in diameter.
Chameleon hull. It's probably
watching us.

LEDGE

Crap. We've got to get rid of it before it works out a firing solution for that pirate ship.

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

Ledge has lost most of the heightened anxiety he was experiencing when he first panicked upon realizing that he was once again facing the same ship that killed his fiancée and turned what was left of his life upside-down.

LEDGE

Amy, link in with Jones' sensors and show me that probe.

Amy/AI points to the *CIS Daisy's* port side. A large asteroid is hovering in space there. Barely visible against its surface is the chameleon-camouflaged Spy-Probe.

LEDGE (CONT'D)

Amy, I need your help calculating a maneuver.

AMY/AI

Affirmative, Ledge.

LEDGE

Jonesie, you and Koko strap in and be ready to grab the rescue balls from under your seats if I cause a hull breach.

AMY/AI

I intensely dislike the sound of that.

LEDGE

We'll be fine. Here's what we're going to do.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - A MINUTE LATER

The *CIS Daisy* is hovering in the debris field.

The Spy Probe is hovering nearby, trying to use the face of another, larger asteroid as camouflage. Its remote operator does not know that Jones has spotted it.

The *CIS Daisy* very slowly and carefully begins to rotate, pointing its aft at the probe.

In very close proximity to the *CIS Daisy*, an anti-ship laser beam blasts through the debris field, vaporizing small chunks of debris and boring a hole in a larger rock which breaks into fragments.

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

Ledge is watching the large rock break up, fearful that stray chunks may hit the *CIS Daisy*. He is clearly nervous, but still focused.

AMY/AI

Are you alright, Ledge?

LEDGE

Yes, ma'am, I damn sure am. Jones and Amy, check my math and tell me if I'm right.

JONES

Looks okay here. Nothing to lose anyway.

AMY/AI

I calculate that the probability of success is eighty percent, plus or minus twenty percent.

LEDGE

I'll take those odds any day.
Engage!

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* is hovering in the asteroid field. Close nearby, the probe is hovering mere feet from a nearby asteroid.

POV SPY PROBE CAMERA

The camera is looking at the aft of the *CIS Daisy*. The *CIS Daisy* very rapidly accelerates backwards, heading straight for the probe. It quickly fills the screen.

SMACK!

The *CIS Daisy* backs into the probe, pushing it against the asteroid and crushing it between the rock and the Daisy's hull

Suddenly, another laser blast flashes nearby. Had the CIS Daisy not backed over the probe, it would have hit her.

INT. CIS DAISY

The entire ship is jolted from the impact. Koko and Jones are jostled.

KOKO
Hull integrity is constant. No leaks! Did we hit the probe?

LEDGE (V.O.)
Daisy one, pirate bastards nothing.

JONES
(worried)
So far.

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

Ledge starts moving his hands and lines begin to appear on the display as he examines possible courses to take to evade the pirate ship's laser fire.

LEDGE
We need another hiding spot, STAT.

Ledge looks toward Koko's video window.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
Koko! How much longer until we are recharged for jump?

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Koko is nervously watching her engineering displays, unconsciously tapping her fingers on the control panel.

KOKO
About another three minutes, Boss. The diagnostics are done. We're just waiting for the capacitors to recharge.

(MORE)

KOKO (CONT'D)

I've got some yellows on the systems board, but nothing drive-related.

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

LEDGE

Jonesie, compute us a micro-jump out of here to near space. It doesn't matter where as long as it's more than one light-hour away.

AMY/AI

Why that distance, Ledge?

LEDGE

So that pirate ship can't detect the energy burst until we've made a proper long-distance jump. If they did, they could pop-in right on top of us before we can recharge again.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

Another laser blast pierces the asteroid field. The pirate ship is firing blindly, trying to guess where the CIS Daisy is moving. The blast strikes a large asteroid and several pieces of debris fly off and strike the CIS Daisy.

KOKO (O.S.)

Couple reds on that one, Boss, but drives are still okay.

INT. CYBERSPACE (TACTICAL DISPLAY) - SAME

The tactical display winks out, leaving Ledge and Amy/AI standing in a gray void with only Jones' and Koko's video windows for scenery. Amy winces and rubs her forehead.

LEDGE

What was that? Are you alright?

AMY/AI

Yes. I just felt something hit my hull.

LEDGE

Felt?

AMY/AI
I'll explain later. The radar interface is damaged, Ledge. I cannot update the exterior image. The tactical display is useless.

LEDGE
Damn it.
(pause)
Can you link to the science bay's sensors?

AMY/AI
Negative, Ledge. The sensor linkage itself is damaged.

LEDGE
Do you still have external cameras?

AMY/AI
Affirmative.

LEDGE
Then I'll have to go to manual control.

Ledge points to Jones' and Koko's video windows. They close, leaving Amy/AI and Ledge alone together in the gray void. Ledge Grabs Amy/AI and kisses her.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge awakens from his immersion in cyberspace. He rubs his eyes as he reorients himself. He reaches behind his head and unplugs his DUI.

LEDGE
Amy, show me the aft camera on the video monitor.

The video monitor switches to a camera showing the debris field behind the CIS Daisy.

LEDGE (CONT'D)
Buckle up and pray.

JONES
I'm agnostic.

KOKO
I'm not. I got you both covered.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* begins zipping through the debris field as Ledge tries to outguess the pirate gunner. The *CIS Daisy* clips several rocks and gets banged around a bit as Ledge manually flies her by camera through the debris.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

AMY/AI (INTERCOM)
I could do better than this, Ledge.

LEDGE
No backseat flying, please. It's my ship, my crew, and my responsibility.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* continues to twist and turn amid the rocks. Ledge clips fewer obstacles as he is getting the hang of it.

JONES (O.S.)
OW!

LEDGE (O.S.)
Koko, why did you hit Jonesie?

KOKO (V.O.)
Might be my last chance.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Jones is rubbing his head. Koko is refastening her seat belts from where she stood up to hit Jones.

LEDGE
How much longer until we can jump?

KOKO
About ten seconds.

JONES
The micro-jump is already plotted as best I can. The gravity from the debris field will throw us off, but hopefully not enough to get us killed.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

As the CIS Daisy flies through the rocks, the Pirate Ship comes into view in the distance, barely visible through the gaps in the rocks.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge is staring at the aft camera view on the control panel's video monitor as he pilots the CIS Daisy through the debris field.

AMY/AI (INTERCOM)

Ledge! We have been locked onto by a fire control radar.

LEDGE

Koko, say when!

KOKO

Two! One! WHEN! WHEN! WHEN!

LEDGE

Five... Four... Screw it! JUMPING!

Ledge pushes down and turns his throttle control.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEBRIS FIELD) - SAME

The *CIS Daisy* Jumps into hyperspace. A split second after she has jumped, an accurate laser blast slices through the space she occupied.

PAN UP and HOLD on the image of the Pirate Ship.

ZOOM IN on the Pirate Ship. Visible on the side of the hull is written the faded name: UEGN Grozny - DD 74.

EXT. OUTER SPACE (DEEP SPACE) - SAME

The CIS Daisy emerges from its micro-jump. It is still in the same star system, only more distant from the star than it was before it jumped.

INT. CIS DAISY - SAME

Ledge, Jones, and Koko are seated at their stations. AMY/AI's avatar is displayed on the cockpit video monitor. Ledge wipes sweat from his forehead.

LEDGE
Is everyone okay?

JONES
As well as can be expected under
the circumstances.

KOKO
(cheers wildly)
We lived!

AMY/AI
I'm not okay.

LEDGE
What's wrong, Amy?

AMY/AI
I took a number of debris hits on
my hull and my radar is inoperable.
I cannot condone extended
operations or atmospheric landings
until my hull has been examined,
and preferably micro-scanned.

LEDGE
Jones, find the nearest orbital
drydock and plot a jump course.
We'll jump as soon as the
capacitors are recharged.

JONES
On it.

LEDGE
Koko, suit-up and do a quick visual
exam of the hull while we recharge
the capacitors. Don't spend more
than about fifteen minutes on it.

KOKO
Okay, Boss.

Koko unbuckles her harness, stands, and heads into the crew section.

LEDGE
Thanks for the support back there.

JONES
We lived. Gives us more options.

KOKO
You did great, Boss. Just great!

CLOSE ON LEDGE

AMY/DREAM (V.O.)
(ethereal)
Yes, honey. You did well.

Ledge looks up and to his left, and smiles at thin air.

LEDGE
I think I'm going to be fine.

BACK TO SCENE

From the video monitor, Amy/AI's avatar looks at Ledge, then looks at the empty space to which he seems to be talking. She then looks at Ledge again, disappointed.

INT. CYBERSPACE (SITTING ROOM) - SAME

Amy/AI and Amy/Shell are standing in their virtual hideaway.

AMY/SHELL
Are you convinced that he is
experiencing some degree of
psychological dysfunction now?

Amy/AI lowers her head, tacitly accepting her shell program's prognosis of Ledge's difficulties.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

TAG

FADE IN:

INT. CSA HQ (BRIEFING ROOM) - DAY

Several CSA Analysts and agents are seated at a conference table.

Director SMITH is seated at the head of the table.

Standing at the foot of the table is an ANALYST who is using a large video monitor behind him to give a presentation. The monitor shows a grainy image of the Pirate Ship.

ANALYST

This is the pirate spacecraft reported to us by Agent Sixty-Nine.

A few snickers issue from the audience. Smith stands up and glares at the assembly. The levity experiences a quick death.

ANALYST (CONT'D)

This is the best image we have of this ship. We had great difficulty identifying it.

SMITH

What is it?

The Analyst waves a remote control in front of the video monitor and it switches to a schematic drawing of the long-since decommissioned class of destroyer to which the UEGN Grozny belongs.

ANALYST

We are almost certain that the ship is the UEGN-Grozny, hull number DD-74. This is an old, pre-jump destroyer-class vessel.

SMITH

UEGN? United Earth Government Navy? That predates the Confederation.

ANALYST

Yes. This ship was in service from 2510 to 2550. It was mothballed in the Lunar Boneyard when it was decommissioned.

SMITH

How did it find its way to being used for piracy?

ANALYST

That's the intriguing part. Three years ago, in 2806, the ship was removed from the Boneyard. It was supposedly going to be sent to the Newport Orbital Shipyard to be scrapped and recycled.

SMITH

What happened?

ANALYST

The order was bogus. The ship left the Boneyard but never arrived at Newport. The shipyard had no records of this order, and neither did naval operations.

SMITH

It was stolen?

ANALYST

Correct.

SMITH

Why didn't anyone notice until now?

ANALYST

We found out when we uncovered a mole working within Naval Operations. He was covertly selling information to external sources.

SMITH

With external sources meaning pirates?

ANALYST

Arrrrr...

(pause)

Sorry. Yes. We caught him when he misdirected an e-message to the wrong address. The conscientious civilian forwarded it to the authorities. It's ironic that his fatal error was typographical.

SMITH

Fatal error?

ANALYST

He resisted arrest.

SMITH

What kind of information was he selling, and to whom?

ANALYST

Mostly convoy escort patrol schedules and ship AI control codes. We don't know who was buying the information. All recipient addresses were dead-ends or hacked accounts. But a number of the ships whose control codes were leaked have gone missing. Our assumption is that they were being leaked to pirates, almost certainly to those who stole the Grozny.

SMITH

How was he involved in stealing the Grozny?

ANALYST

Apparently, he drew up a false transfer order and tricked his commanding officer into signing it. The officer does not remember signing it, and his interrogation seems to confirm that he probably just signed it without reading it.

SMITH

So, we have a refitted warship running rampant in the shipping lanes?

ANALYST

The CAA has issued a recall to all ships whose codes have been compromised. They have been instructed to have their command codes changed at the earliest opportunity.

SMITH

What about weapons? Was the Grozny armed when she was stolen?

ANALYST

No, but that may be the only good news about it.

(MORE)

ANALYST (CONT'D)

She has clearly acquired weapons since then. At least two anti-ship laser cannons.

SMITH

Do we have enough information on this pirate to trace it?

ANALYST

No, sir. But we have three confirmed sightings.

(pause)

The first was in early 2808, when the sensor operator at the climatology lab orbiting Jupiter reported seeing a ship with no transponder passing nearby. He turned his telescope on the ship and got a grainy image before it moved out of range.

(pause)

The second was in 2808 when the ship was unsuccessfully engaged by the cutter *CNS Giap* near New Brazil.

(pause)

The third was the sighting reported by Agent Sixty-Nine, who was on covert assignment aboard a small courier ship, the *CIS Daisy*.

SMITH

Any connections between those incidents?

ANALYST

The captain of the *CIS Daisy* was also the former pilot of the *CNS Giap* and was present at both encounters.

SMITH

Coincidence?

ANALYST

It could be. But the odds are literally astronomical. Unless you believe in kismet.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANET XIA BASE - ESTABLISHING

It is a peaceful night at Ledge's base on Planet Xia. Light can be seen from the windows and portholes in the walls of the ground base.

INT. HABITAT MODULE (LIVING ROOM) - SAME

Ledge is sitting on the couch. His Navy friend, Holger, is on the room's video monitor.

HOLGER

When the fleet finally arrived, the pirates were already gone. They stripped the Gordon really well, but they only had time to take the important things.

LEDGE

It was the same ship that killed Amy.

HOLGER

Yeah, I recognized it from the video you captured.

LEDGE

Part of me wanted to just ram it full speed. If I'd been alone on my ship, I think I would have tried.

HOLGER

For what it's worth, I'm glad you didn't. That polyceramic hull of yours might shatter if it hit that old destroyer's armor.

LEDGE

Maybe.

HOLGER

And you wouldn't be able to collect the reward. Speaking thereof. You'll still get the finder's fee. For the lost cutter, it's going to be five-hundred-thousand smoos. From which you still owe me a four-star dinner.

LEDGE

My engineer says the damages to my ship are going to run probably a hundred-thousand.

(sighs)

I'm not really a very good businessman.

HOLGER

You still belong on a ship, Ledge. We both know that.

LEDGE

The Navy shrinks would beg to differ.

HOLGER

Thirty years from now, when I'm an admiral, I'll fix that. Can you wait that long?

LEDGE

(smirks)

Yeah, I can wait.

INT. HABITAT MODULE (KOKO'S STATEROOM) - LATER

Koko is sitting up in her bunk. She is holding the data card that she received in *Koko Loco*. She is turning it over and over between her fingers.

AGENT 0247 (V.O.)

Blackbird, this is Albatross. Nest says lay the egg inside the ship soon. If anything hatches, tell the Goose.

Koko looks unhappy as she contemplates the possible consequences that doing her job--attempting to hack into Amy/AI's database--may have on the relationships she has cultivated with the other crew members. Koko stares out her stateroom's porthole.

FADE OUT:

THE END