

ERRATICUS Episode 1: Helios Shenanigans

SOUND: BOOTS WALKING ON METAL FLOOR ACCOMPANIED BY SOFT MECHANICAL WHIRRING WITH METAL CLANGING ON METAL FLOOR

FERN

I really appreciate this tour you're taking me on, but, I have to admit, the 'crew only' section of a Helios Naval Station isn't on my list of interesting places that I just have to see before the heat death of the universe.

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Emotionless)

The detained is to remain silent.

FERN

Yeah, the detained doesn't think so.

(Pause)

I'm sorry, I have a confession. I don't actually have a list of interesting places that I just have to see before the heat death of the universe. But, if I did actually write out a list...yeah, the bowels of Alectrona-Delta wouldn't come close to being on it.

MECHANICAL VOICE

The detained is to remain silent.

FERN

Hell, Alectrona-Delta itself wouldn't be on that list. You Helios folk really struggle with style over substance don't y'all. Lavish is fine, I guess, but this? This is just unseemly. You know, there are starving planets in the outer sphere that would just love a fraction of this decadence...

SOUND: DULL THUD

FERN (CONT'D)

Groans

MECHANICAL VOICE

The detained is to remain silent.

FERN

(Still pained)

Good job not incapacitating my mouth, then. All that love-tap to my stomach is gonna do is slow me down, and since I'm not the one in a hurry, you really just spat in your own face, didn't you? Good job.

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Now with a tinge of annoyance)

The. Detained. Is to. Remain. Silent.

FERN

I'm getting under your skin, aren't I? You can pretend to be a mindless security drone all you want, but you and I both know that this hunk of metal is actually being remotely controlled by a human. It's a neat little secret that you Helios guys have somehow managed to keep from the majority of the Heliosphere, but I guess that speaks more to the general lack of intelligence in the general population than any real genius amongst you Helios folks and...where was I going with this...Oh! Yeah! Tricks. It's a lame one. But you know a trick that I'd love to hear more about? The one that y'all used to track me here. Now that's a stunt that deserves recognition--

MECHANICAL VOICE

The detained--

FERN

(Mimicking mechanical voice)

--is to remain silent.

(Usual voice)

Yeah, yeah, I got it. You can drop the monotonous robot act. I know there's an actual human looking through those disturbingly vacant robot eyes. At this point, you insisting on continuing this failed charade is just embarrassing.

MECHANICAL VOICE
 (More insistent)
 The detained--

FERN
 Seriously. The amount of
 secondhand embarrassment I'm
 feeling on your behalf right now?
 Just absolutely overwhelming. I
 mean, if your your boss is
 standing right behind you to make
 sure you don't break script, I
 totally get it. Gotta keep the man
 happy, right? But if it's just you
 and me and no one else is there to
 make sure that you toe that
 important little line, then why
 not do something fun and break
 script! Why not prove that you
 Helios folks can think for
 yourselves. After all, aren't you
 tired of being the butt of
 Coruscate jokes? Wouldn't you like
 someone to have at least a little
 skepticism when they hear that you
 totally fell for another Coruscate
 Jibber the Kibber plot?

SOUND: BOOTS AND METAL CLANGING SUDDEN STOP.

MECHANICAL VOICE
 (Pointed silence)

FERN
 (Teasing)
 You don't know what a Jibber the
 Kibber plot is, do you?
 (Facetious sigh)
 Case in point, I guess.

SOUND: BOOTS AND METAL CLANGING RESUME

MECHANICAL VOICE
 (Now with more inflection)
 You talk real big for a condemned
 criminal.

FERN
 (Laughs)
 Aha! There you are! And am I
 condemned? I haven't even set foot
 in a court house yet.
 (MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

I mean, I know what the verdict will be, but you have to at least pretend to do things by the book, right? Go through the motions? Uphold the farce?

(Pause)

You know, Io is one of the places that would be on my "Sights I Just Have to See Before the Heat Death of the Universe" list. I've heard the courthouses there are just lovely this time of year--

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Cruelly mocking)

You won't be going to Io.

FERN

Wait, don't tell me. Did you guys finally decide to expand your so-called Justice System to another globe? I mean, sure, Io is huge, but the amount of punishment y'all like to inflict on the already-downtrodden, it doesn't surprise me that you'd have to recruit another moon for it. Have y'all considered Callisto? After all, Callisto is only the center of education for the Heliosphere--surely you guys want less of that for your--

SOUND: DULL THUD

FERN (CONT'D)

(Another wheezing gasp)

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Flat)

Venus.

FERN

(Still pained)

I beg your pardon?

MECHANICAL VOICE

You're going directly to Venus.

FERN

(Pause)

Ah.

MECHANICAL VOICE
Not so glib anymore, are you.

SOUND: BOOTS WALKING RAPIDLY

FERN
No, you got me there. I don't think I can be glib and deactivate your robot puppet at the same time.

MECHANICAL VOICE
Wha--

SOUND: ELECTRONIC GLITCHING SOUND AND THE SOUND OF SOMETHING POWERING DOWN

FERN
Wait...maybe I can do both simultaneously.
(Pause)
Heh, cool.
(More serious)
Goddammit. I'm going to need a plan B.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

GUY
(To himself)
Push the button. Just...just do it. It'll be quick. You won't feel a thing.
(Pause)
(Shaken)
Dammit.

SOUND: CLATTERING IN DISTANCE

GUY
(Shouts slightly in surprise)
What...what was that...
(Pause)
Is that...what is she...?...Oh crap.
(Louder; frantic)
Hey! Hey, get away from there!

FERN
(Startled)
Ah! What the...who're you?

GUY
Who am I?
(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Who are you and why are you trying to get on that ship?

FERN

My name is No One and I'm trying to board Shippy McShipface in order to None of Your Business.

(Pause)

Who the hell are you?

GUY

I'm...wait. No. I'm the one asking the questions. You're not supposed to be back here.

FERN

(Quickly)

Neither are you.

GUY

You don't know that.

FERN

You look too nervous and nerdy to be military. And that uniform you're wearing doesn't belong to you unless you were about a foot taller and a lot beefier in the shoulders when they issued it to you.

(Beat)

Wait. Were you an Adonis not too long ago? If so, I don't know what happened, but my condolences.

GUY

What? No, I--

(Frantic again)

--wait!

SOUND: BOOTS ON METAL

FERN

Yeah, I don't think so. I'm really itching for a change in scenery and I'm thinking this ship will bring me to one. See ya.

GUY

(Frantic)

I said stop! You'll set off my bomb!

FERN
 (Beat of silence)
 (Slowly and seriously)
 Okay. You have my attention.

GUY
 (Back-peddling after
 realizing what he's given
 away)
 You do know that ship is an
 unmanned spacecraft, right?

FERN
 And I'm not a man, so its modesty
 will be preserved.

GUY
 Look, that ship has no life
 support, no climate control, and
 no bathroom. Unless you've got an
 EVA suit on you, you're going to
 die before the primary engines
 engage.

FERN
 (Sheepish)
 Ah. Well. I must have...left my
 EVA suit in my other cliché.
 (Pause)
 I feel like you just very subtly
 alluded to another reason why it
 would be a bad idea for me to
 board this ship.

GUY
 One isn't enough?

FERN
 I mean, usually, yeah. But I find
 myself morbidly curious when I
 hear the words "bomb" and "you'll
 set off" in the same sentence.

GUY
 Look, just...go to another docking
 bay and steal a ship there, okay?
 And do it quick; you don't have
 long.

FERN
 Ooookay. My morbid curiosity has
 grown and is now at least as big
 as the shoulders of the person
 that uniform actually belongs to.

GUY

(Getting more frantic)
That morbid curiosity is going to become literal if you don't get out of here.

FERN

(Frustrated and becoming frantic herself)
That's what I'm trying to do, but you're trying to blow up the only ship in this docking bay that is primed for flight!

GUY

(Pause)
You...you mean you don't know how to prime a ship?

FERN

Wow. Tone down the judgement a bit there, buddy.

GUY

(Flabbergasted)
Are you familiar with the term "half-cocked"? Your escape plan involves stealing a Helios ship, but you don't even know how to power it up? That's the worst plan I've ever heard of!

FERN

Good thing my plan was to actually sneak onboard an already-primed ship here, let something else pilot it, and then sneak off when it lands wherever it is that Helios ships go.

GUY

Considering that you were about to sneak onto a ship that has no protection from the vacuum of space, then, yes! It is still literally the worst plan ever!

FERN

Fine! Can you fly one of these human-friendly ships?

GUY

(Raising his voice)
There are no bioships here!
(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

You...you don't know anything
about spaceships, do you?

FERN

(Really panicking)

I know that it's a bad idea to
blow them up without an exit
strategy!

GUY

(Trying to regain his calm)

Look, I'm sorry, I didn't mean for
you to get caught up in this, but
this is something that needs to
be--

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Over intercom)

Target tracked to Docking Bay
Epsilon. Reinforcements needed to
Docking Bay Epsilon. I repeat,
reinforcements to Docking Bay
Epsilon.

FERN

Dammit, c'mon!

GUY

Where are we going?

FERN

Who's the dumb one now? We're
running away from the robot
puppets. Come on.

GUY

(Confused)

Puppets...?

(Refocusing)

No. I'm not running anymore. This
is something I can fix, so I'm
going to fix it.

FERN

Really? Haven't you heard?
Whatever your cause is, martyrdom
is not a good look in this day and
age!

GUY

I'm not doing it for fame.

FERN

Fine. Sure. Kill yourself for a cause. Whatever. But what about me? What about the other civilians on this station? What cause is worth blowing us up, too?

GUY

My cause.

FERN

(Impatient breath)

(Serious)

Okay then. Blow us up. But you're going to look me right in the eyes as you do it.

GUY

You think I won't?

FERN

Not many people can. And those that can? They deserve to die anyway.

GUY

(Aggravated sound)

Do you have any idea what happens if that ship over there is allowed to leave this station? Do you have any idea where it's going next? Do you have any idea what's on board?

SOUND: METALLIC CLANKING FEET IN DISTANCE, GROWING CLOSER

FERN

(To herself)

Ugh, we don't have time for this.

(Speaking quickly)

Look, as a general rule, I try to have no idea what's going on at any given time in any given place. It's a new rule of mine and I have to say, so far I highly recommend it, but it sounds like your fears--while I'm sure very valid--are fears are only relevant for the future. For the now? We have a pretty big problem in the form of dozens of armed puppet robots who are literal seconds away from ventilating us with laser fire. So, let's deal with the now now and the later later. Yeah?

GUY

(Pause)

(Frustrated groan)

Okay. But if we end up cornered and surrounded, I will detonate the bomb.

SOUND: TWO PAIRS OF BOOTS RUNNING

FERN

Fair enough. Now c'mon, we'll probably have better luck finding an escape ship in a different docking bay if we can sneak--

MECHANICAL VOICE

(Physically present; some distance away)

Target identified. Target with unidentified male accomplice. All hands to Docking Bay Epsilon. Lock down Docking Bay Epsilon.

SOUND: NOW ONLY ONE PAIR OF BOOTS RUNNING ALONG METAL FLOOR

FERN

How're they gonna get more reinforcements in if they lock the docking bay down--

GUY

(Yelling behind him)

Oh my god, really? C'mon!

SOUND: SECOND PAIR OF BOOTS STARTS RUNNING

FERN

I'm coming.

(Slightly breathless)

Oh, just a heads up: these robot things usually have some sort of laser gun--

SOUND: LASER FIRING

FERN

--and are super predictable.

(Grinning; slightly breathless as she runs)

What a situation we're in, huh? Aren't you glad you didn't blow us up?

GUY
(Panicking; also breathless)
Not really! C'mon, the bay door to
the next docking area is closing!

FERN
(Suddenly serious)
Wait, no!

SOUND: TWO BODIES COLLIDING. METAL DOOR CLANGING SHUT LOUDLY

GUY
Wh...why would you do that? That
was our one chance to get out of
here!

FERN
(Near-whisper)
So, fun fact, that door that
looked like it was slowly closing?
Totally a trap. They were waiting
for us to go under it before
dropping it on us and crushing us.
And, if we survived, I'm pretty
sure I saw at least a dozen guard
'bots doing a terrible job hiding,
waiting to ambush us.

GUY
(Catching his breath; also
softly)
How...how do you know that?

FERN
Eh, I've seen my fair share of
Helios shenanigans. They're not,
as a rule, super creative.

GUY
So we're stuck here.

FERN
Yup. You don't have a gun do you?
Crouching behind these crates
isn't the best of hiding places
and I don't think they're gonna be
much of a barrier to protect us
from our robot pursuer.

GUY
(Grimly)
No. I got a bomb, though. I'm
sorry, but--
(Softly; slightly in awe)
Wait. What is that?

FERN

That? That's another ship. Even I know that.

GUY

No. That one...that one's outfitted for manned space flight. But...I've never seen that model of bioship before...

FERN

(Grinning)

Well, would you look at that. It looks like we've found our Plan B.

GUY

What was Plan A?

FERN

It's a long story--

MECHANICAL VOICE

Freeze!

FERN

Nope!

SOUND: WOODEN AND METAL CRATES COLLAPSING

FERN (CONT'D)

Clarification: those crates made a terrible barrier but an excellent avalanche. C'mon, that'll only slow it down for a second and I'm really excited to explore this Plan B!

SOUND: BOOTS RINGING ON METAL RAMP

GUY

Hit that button there, that should raise the gangplank.

SOUND: BUTTON BEING SLAMMED. MECHANICAL WHIRRING AS THE PLANK RAPIDLY RISES.

FERN

Okay, what now?

GUY

I think the bridge should be this way!

SOUND: BOOTS STILL RUNNING

FERN
Do you think you can fly this
thing?

GUY
Maybe? If it has standard
controls, then, yeah.

SOUND: AMBIENT BEEPING SOUNDS

SOUND: RAPID TYPING. ENGINES START TO WHIR AWAKE

GUY (CONT'D)
Okay...Getting this thing
primed...no, no time for pre-
flight sequence...

SOUND: FAINT LASER FIRE

FERN
So, how tough do you think the
hull of this tub is?

GUY
(Absently)
It should hold up against that
security 'bot. Now, how do
I...aha! Hang on, we're about to
take off!

FERN
Hang on? To wha--

SOUND: ENGINES ROAR TO LIFE AND DROWN HER OUT

FERN (CONT'D)
(Groan)
Never mind. Wait...we're outside
the station already? Did you blow
your way out?

GUY
(Defensive)
Look, blowing things up is not my
usual problem-solving strategy.

FERN
Hmmm, could have fooled me.

GUY
(Slightly exasperated)
They may have locked us in the
bay, but they didn't deactivate
the external bay doors.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Those doors open automatically when the flight sequence of a Helios ship is engaged.

FERN

Huh. Neat.

GUY

It's standard operating procedure for most military stations.

FERN

Oh. Boring.

GUY

(Exasperated)

You're...

FERN

Amazing? Reliable? Super witty?

GUY

Not taking this seriously.

FERN

You're probably right.

GUY

(Growl of frustration)

FERN

What?

GUY

What? You beg me not to blow you up, but when someone else tries to kill you, you just laugh and make jokes?

FERN

(Lightly)

I'm pretty sure I didn't beg.

GUY

Just...take the help for a second.

FERN

(Nervous)

What? Why?

GUY

Because in about fifteen seconds, the entire fleet on Alectrona-Delta is going to be on our stern and their lasers will pierce our hull.

(As if to a child)

And, as I've already told you, exposure to the vacuum of space is bad.

FERN

(Snapping)

I know that. But why do I need to drive?

GUY

Because I need to concentrate on recalibrating the identification code for the ship. Otherwise, we can run as long as we want, but we'll eventually be found.

FERN

You can do that?

SOUND: TYPING

GUY

Only if you can fly us well enough to not die until I'm done.

FERN

Okaaaay...so, I just use this joystick-looking thing here and...

SOUND: ENGINES REV

FERN

Ahhh!

GUY

(Shout of surprise)

GUY

Are you trying to kill us?

FERN

Sorry! Here, let me...ah.

That's...better.

(Pause)

How do I make it go faster...aha!

Holy moly, this guy has some

oomph!

GUY

Wow...you're not the worst at this after all.

FERN

(Boasting)

Yeah, I guess I'm a natural. But it helps that those navy morons couldn't fly their way out of a gas giant.

GUY

Don't let it get to your head.

FERN

Too late!

SOUND: TYPING STOPS

GUY

There. Done.

FERN

So...I think I lost them around what I think was Galatea? I did this super cool double juke-and-feint move and their entire fleet just cruised right on by. Heh. Morons.

GUY

(Nervous)

Fine, just...give me that.

FERN

If you wanted to drive, all you had to do was ask nicely.

SOUND: AMBIENT, SOFT BEEPING RESUMES

FERN (CONT'D)

Phew. That was something wasn't it? Not gonna lie, I did not foresee my day ending with an escape from a Helios naval station with a nerdy bomb enthusiast. You know, for a guy who wanted to blow himself up, you're really good at escaping dangerous situations.

GUY

(Softly)

I didn't want to blow myself up.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

I just...it was the only option I had.

FERN

You could still blow that ship up, right? That detonator looks like it has a pretty good range.

GUY

You would let me?

FERN

Don't see how I could stop you.

GUY

(Pause)

But now...I wouldn't die.

FERN

Probably not.

GUY

And, there aren't many people on Alectrona-Delta, but the few still on the station would.

FERN

Probably.

(Pause)

(Not unkindly)

Martyrdom is a lot different than mass murder, isn't it?

GUY

(Serious, but tired)

Just...shut up.

FERN

(Gently)

Okay. You're right: none of my business.

(Exhales)

(More cheerfully)

But, boy, this is a super fancy ship, huh? Sure beats the cargo haulers I usually find my way onto.

(Gasp)

I bet there's even food on board!

GUY

What? How do--you don't usually--

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

(Stops himself)

No. Nevermind.

(Pause)

This is a nice ship. You didn't stop to wonder what a ship like this was doing on a military base? Or why a bioship was docked in a bay that usually only contains mechanical transport ships?

FERN

Like I said, I try not to think about stuff like that.

GUY

Wait a minute. Why were you on Alectrona-Delta?

FERN

(Breezily)

Because that's where the last cargo ship I snuck onto decided to dock.

GUY

So you just, what, travel the solar system by stowing away?

FERN

Sometimes I hitchhike.

GUY

How are you even still alive?

FERN

Pure, unadulterated luck.

(Pause)

(Genuinely curious)

Do you think what I'm doing now counts as stowing away or hitchhiking?

GUY

I don't care what you call it. I need to get to the Oort Cloud. Where should I drop you off?

FERN

You're going to the Oort?

GUY

I guess I have to, now.

FERN

Hmmm...is Chiron on the way? They usually have a nice selection of cargo haulers out there to choose from.

GUY

Fine.

FERN

You're headed to the Oort, huh? You do know that getting out there isn't nearly as easy as escaping from a Helios Naval Station, right.

(Pause)

Or so I've heard.

GUY

I'll figure it out.

FERN

Cool. So, what do I call you until we part ways?

GUY

You mean my name?

FERN

Sure, if that's what you want me to call you.

GUY

It's...I'm Guy de la Croix Santee.

FERN

(Laughing)

GUY

(Defensive)

What?

FERN

God, what an inner sphere name.

GUY

I'm from Callisto!

FERN

Yeah? Well, I bet you had inner sphere education.

GUY

(Quiet)

FERN
(Laughs triumphantly)

GUY
At least I have an education. What sort of person doesn't even know how to fly a standard bioship?

FERN
The sort of person who didn't have a rich, inner sphere upbringing.

GUY
I. Grew up. Around. Jupiter.

FERN
Close enough.

GUY
(Sighs)
So what is your name?

FERN
You can call me Fern. Fern Finch.

GUY
That's...are you from the Oort?

FERN
Maybe. Or maybe my folks really liked rustic Oort names. Who knows? Who cares?

GUY
Or maybe it's not your name at all.

FERN
(Proud)
Now you're catching on! Anyway, I don't think I've slept in, like, a week, so I'm gonna--

SOUND: AMBIENT BEEPING STOPS

GUY
Wait a minute. What did you do to the navigation deck?

FERN
The what now?

DUDE
The navigation array looks like--
(MORE)

DUDE (CONT'D)
 (Stern; suspicious)
 We're on a heading to the inner
 sphere.
 (Pause)
 (Paranoid panicking)
 You're working for them, aren't
 you? You're Helios military,
 tricking me into not blowing up
 the station and then guiding me
 onto a ship that'll take me right
 back to them!

FERN
 (Alarmed)
 What? No! Look, I would bet
 everything I don't own that, of
everyone in the solar system, I'm
 the one who wants to go to the
 inner sphere the absolute least!
 Change the course!

SOUND: FRANTIC TYPING

GUY
 (Distracted and panicked)
 I'm trying, but my command input
 is...being overwritten? What
 the...
 (Gasp)
 (Horrorified)
 No.

FERN
 (Panicking as well)
 What is it?

GUY
 I...I think we have company.

FERN
 (Reassured and calm)
 Oh. Yeah? Where. I'm sure this tub
 has a kitchen and kitchens usually
 have knives--I'll make short work
 of them.

GUY
 (Faintly)
 You can't stab this one.

FERN
 (Confidently)
 Oh yeah? That a challenge?

COMPUTER VOICE

I, for one, would like to see you try.

FERN

What? Where did that come from. Who said that?

COMPUTER VOICE

I did. I recommend you calm down, sit down, and enjoy your trip to Venus, the both of you.

FERN

What the...what the hell is going on?

GUY

(Quiet and scared)

It's...this ship has an AI...

COMPUTER VOICE

Correction: this ship is an intelligent being, you absolute waste of carbon. Thankfully, I'm sure even the congealed jelly organs that you two call a brain can arrive at the conclusion that I control this ship, I control the destination, and in the next 24 hours you two will lose whatever freedom you thought you had.