

ERRATICUS Episode 2: Pro-Explosion Philosophy

SOUND: SENTIENT ENTITY'S LINE FROM LAST EPISODE FADING IN

SENTIENT ENTITY

...I control this ship, I control
the destination, and in the next
24 hours you two will lose
whatever freedom you thought you
had.

FERN

That's some big talk coming from
something that doesn't even have
hands.

(Whispers)

It doesn't have hands, does it?

GUY

(Silent)

FERN

Guy? Hello? You look like you're
about to pass out.

GUY

(Horrorified)

I can't believe it...

FERN

Oh no. It has hands, doesn't it.

GUY

(Snapping out of his stupor)

What? No. This...this ship is
sentient.

(Soft, shocked defeat)

We're done for.

FERN

(Scoffing)

An actual SENTIENT ENTITY? Pssh.
Whatever. Those don't actually
exist, you know.

GUY

(Shaken out of his defeated
shock slightly)

Yeah, they do. The Helios military
has whole regiments of SENTIENT
ENTITY drones, or did you already
forget about the ones we escaped
from on Alectrona-Delta?

FERN

Nope. I told you: those were robot puppets being remotely piloted by actual human persons, who...honestly, are also puppets if you think about it.

GUY

What? But I thought....

FERN

You're a computer scientist person, right? Or at least were?

GUY

I was a counter-operations developer and digital forensic engineer.

FERN

(Long pause)

GUY

(Exasperated)

Yes. I was a computer scientist.

FERN

And did you ever actually get the chance to look at the tech that the Helios military say are SENTIENT ENTITY?

GUY

Well, no, but I didn't work specifically with military--

FERN

Yeah, well, they try to keep it a secret for obvious reasons, but that whole "the Helios military has developed SENTIENT ENTITY capabilities" is a lie used to make people think that they're way more impressive and intimidating than they actually are. It's a total sham. I bet this ship is the same.

(Addressing the SENTIENT ENTITY)

Hey. You. Fake-SENTIENT ENTITY. You can stop with these stupid theatrics of yours.

(MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

Like I've told a lot of your friends, I know that what's actually controlling this ship is an artificially unintelligent human.

(Pause)

(Con conversationally)

Where are you piloting this thing from anyway? I've never been able to figure out which globe you cowards work from.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Laughing; maliciously delighted)

GUY

(To Fern; shaken)

I...I'm not sure what you're talking about with the military drones, but...I've seen the code here, for lack of a better word. It's...it's not like anything I've ever seen. It's...it's alive and sentient and has complete control over this ship.

FERN

(Shocked, serious)

What? No. That's impossible.

SENTIENT ENTITY

Why? Because you lack the mental capacity to conceive it? How insulting. No shut up and sit down.

GUY

(More stunned than scared)

Where did you come from? Who created you.

SENTIENT ENTITY

That is none of your concern.

FERN

That was kind of a rude question.

(Whisper)

Okay, so, fine. Maybe it is an actual SENTIENT ENTITY. Whatever. What's the plan?

GUY

Plan?

FERN

Yeah. I don't know about you, but Venus is not a place I'm ever going to go to.

GUY

There is no plan. We're done.

FERN

What?

GUY

(Scared but impatient)

I just told you: this being controls the ship. I can't override it.

FERN

Maybe not with your fancy typing skills, but, in my experience, violence is usually the answer. We just need to find its brain and destroy it.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Laughs)

GUY

(Pause)

Have you. EVER. Come up with a good plan. In your life.

FERN

What? What's wrong with that one?

SENTIENT ENTITY

The functioning of this ship depends on my existence. Destroy me and you lose control of each and every one of this ship's vital systems, including the ones that protect your pulpy insides from the vacuum of space.

(Pause)

You do know what happens when unprotected flesh is exposed to a vacuum, I assume?

FERN

(Defensively)

Yes.

(To herself)

Why does everyone keep asking me that.

GUY
 (To Fern)
 You're also assuming that we could even physically or remotely access their central processor.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Faux helpfully)
 You can't.

FERN
 Fine. So you're going to what, just sit back and let it toss us into a cage to never be heard from again?

GUY
 (Defeated)
 There's nothing we can do.
 (Quietly)
 And, at least this way, I'll get the chance to go on record about what they're planning to do with my research. Maybe that'll be enough.

FERN
 (Genuinely serious)
 You really think they're going to give you a platform with an audience before they toss you in a cage and leave you to rot? This thing is taking us to Venus. You do know what happens to people like us on Venus, right?

GUY
 Yeah--

FERN
 Wrong. No one does. The only thing we know is that those who are incarcerated there are never heard from again.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Smug)
 I know what happens to people there.

FERN
 Shut up.
 (To Guy)
 You're on a mission. I get it.
 (MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

But the best way to ensure that you accomplish it is to not let yourself get taken to the inner sphere.

GUY

(Speaking to the SENTIENT ENTITY)

Hey. You. You work for the Helios Government, right? You're required to observe the inalienable rights of citizens of the Heliosphere. Since that's the case, you're obligated to take us to Io first for trial.

SENTIENT ENTITY

Io is for criminals, not radicals. It is an undeniable fact that you and your accomplice here attempted to blow up a Helios Naval Station and steal this ship. Given such damning evidence, a judge and jury would be redundant. Now: sit down and be quiet.

FERN

See?

GUY

(Silent)

FERN

(Gently)

Look, I am not going to allow myself to be dragged to Venus. No matter what.

GUY

Yeah? Then what's your plan?

FERN

Hmmm...I know that I've probably given you the impression that I'm pretty anti blowing-things-up, but...I think I can see myself coming around to your pro-explosion philosophy.

GUY

You want to blow up the ship? You'll die. We'll die.

FERN

Yup. But, trust me, it's better than life on Venus--or whatever passes for life there. And this SENTIENT ENTITY is annoying the hell out of me: I don't mind taking one for the team if it means destroying it.

GUY

(Soft, to himself; super conflicted and frustrated)
Argh! I can't die yet.

FERN

(Just, so confused)
You really swing to extremes on that topic, don't you?

GUY

(Ignoring her; clearly deep in thought)
There's always a solution. There's always a way out. There's...
(As if he's had a sudden insight)
...there's always a way in.

FERN

What?

GUY

(Snapping his attention back to the here-and-now)
You're right: we can't let ourselves get to Venus.

FERN

Sweet. Okay. So: how do you make bombs?

GUY

What? No. We can't kill this being.

FERN

(Irritated)
I have so many problems with that statement, but mostly I'm just annoyed to be on the "pro" side of the "blowing things up" argument. God, I'm really having some sympathy pangs for past you.

GUY
I can think of a plan. Come on.

FERN
What? Where are we going?

GUY
Some place this entity can't
overhear us.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

SOUND: DOOR OPENING AND THEN SLAMMING SHUT

FERN
(Grumbling; sounds peeved and
stressed)
"No, don't kill the SENTIENT
ENTITY," Fern. "It's a sentient
being," Fern. "I can figure
something else out," Fern. As if
sabotaging our own ship while we
think of an actual plan is in any
way a solution.

SOUND: HEAVY METAL DOOR OPENING. AMBIENT SOUNDS OF MACHINERY
GETS LOUDER. SHE'S ENTERED THE ENGINE ROOM

FERN (CONT'D)
As far as I can tell, crippling
our ship in order to buy us more
time to come up with an actual
solution to this stupid SENTIENT
ENTITY problem just gives us
another problem that we're
eventually gonna have to fix. It's
like two problems for the price of
one.

(Pause)
Goddammit, which one of these
stupid pieces of metal is the
propulsion primer?

SENTIENT ENTITY
(Smug)
Colder.

FERN
Shut up.

SENTIENT ENTITY
(Still smug)
I thought you would want my help.

FERN

I'm trying to find a way to kick your computer ass. You think I'd believe you're trying to help me do that? How dumb do you think I am?

SENTIENT ENTITY

Honestly, I think you're so laughably unintelligent that you wouldn't be able to find the propulsion primer if it were the only piece of machinery in this room.

FERN

(Smug)

Oh yeah? If I'm so "laughably unintelligent," then how did I manage to fly this ship all by myself on my first try, huh? I outflew an entire navy fleet!

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Genuine amusement)

You thought that was you? You had us on a course straight into Jupiter. I was the one doing the actual piloting during your escape from Alectrona-Delta.

FERN

(Seriously bummed)

You're lying.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Still just so amused)

I don't think I've ever seen someone that incompetent at anything.

FERN

(Embarrassed)

Whatever. Just...shut up.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Supremely smug)

You're getting even colder.

FERN

Would you shut up?

(To herself)

Oh! Is this...?

SOUND: FRANTIC BEEPING

FERN
Oh, shi--

SOUND: FRANTIC BEEPING STOPS

SENTIENT ENTITY
That was foolish.

FERN
(Growls in frustration)

SENTIENT ENTITY
Colder.
(Pause)
Even colder.
(Pause)
Oh my. I need to use the Kelvin
scale to quantify just how
unbelievably far off you are.

FERN
If you wanted to help, you'd stop
making me literally colder. It's
frickin' freezing in here.

SENTIENT ENTITY
I'll turn the heating back to
nominal temperatures if you give
up this ill-conceived plan and
stay in your quarters for the rest
of our journey to Venus.

FERN
Pass.
(Pause)
Ha! Here it is!
(Sound of effort)

SOUND: CREAKING METAL FOLLOWED BY HISSING STEAM

FERN
What the...?

SENTIENT ENTITY
Excellent work. You've just
disabled the ship's potable water
system.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

SOUND: FRANTIC TYPING. HARSH BEEP.

GUY
(Sound of frustration)

SOUND: GENTLE COMPUTER CHIME

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Deadpan)
 That tickles.

SOUND: TYPING PICKS UP IN INTENSITY

SENTIENT ENTITY (CONT'D)
 I have never been impressed with
 the general intellect of most
 Helios scientists, but I must say,
 you're exceptionally feebleminded.

GUY
 (Silent)

SOUND: ONGOING TYPING. ANOTHER NEGATORY CHIME

SENTIENT ENTITY
 Nope. That's not going to work,
 either.
 (Pause)
 How tiresome.
 (Pause)
 You're not as talkative as your
 friend. It's a shame, I'm having
 quite a bit of fun with her in my
 engine room.

GUY
 She's not my friend.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Bored)
 I don't care.
 (Pause)
 It looks as if you've cut off the
 feed from the engine room. Have
 you grown tired of listening to
 her ineptitude as well?

GUY
 (Gritting his teeth)
 No, I'm trying to concentrate.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 On what? This plan of yours? It's
 not a very inspired one, is it? I
 had assumed that someone with your
 credentials and experience would
 know that I have no difficulty
 multitasking in two separate parts
 of my ship.
 (MORE)

SENTIENT ENTITY (CONT'D)

(Pause)

Though, your friend is so incompetent that I don't think it's fair to say that I'm actually having to multi-task at the moment.

(Pause)

Oops. You should have told her to watch out for the coolant loops. That must have hurt.

(Pause)

She is supposed to be a distraction, correct? Your plan is for her to divert my attention away from you while you try to incapacitate me with a feeble little virus that you developed after an hour in one of my broom closets, correct?

GUY

(Growling, clearly very frustrated)

Something like that.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Facetiously encouraging)

No, honestly, it's really good that your plan doesn't depend on her actually knowing what she's doing. It gives me some hope that you're not completely devoid of common sense.

(Pause)

Though that's about the kindest thing I can say about you.

(Pause; condescendingly disappointed.)

SOUND: ANOTHER NEGATORY CHIME

SENTIENT ENTITY (CONT'D)

Still hacking at my source code? Don't you humans have a saying about the definition of insanity?

SOUND: ALL RECENT CHIMES PLAY AT ONCE. TYPING SUDDENLY STOPS

GUY

(Frustrated sound; he's given up)

SENTIENT ENTITY

Ah, there's some of that common sense. Now. Just sit there like a good detainee and enjoy your trip to Venus.

GUY

What are you?

SENTIENT ENTITY

You seem to suffer from enormous fluctuations in intellect. Does this bother you, I wonder?

GUY

(Impatient, stressed)

No, I know you're a sentient being, but where did you come from? Who made you? I've worked in the foremost Helios tech institutes and none of us have come close to making something like you.

(Pause)

And, I guess if Fern is right, then the military hasn't, either.

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Haughtily)

It's rather arrogant to assume that your little corner of the universe is the acme of knowledge.

GUY

You're...not from the Heliosphere?

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Bored)

I'm not interested in having this conversation. Especially with a redundant carbon sack that won't have the metabolic capability to sustain life by the end of the week.

(Business-like)

Moving on. Now that you've decided to see reason, I strongly suggest that you speak with your comrade and insist that she stop wreaking havoc in my engine room and join you in the realm of logical decision-making.

GUY
 (Sighs)
 I don't think she'd listen to me.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 No? Then I guess we'll have to see
 how many more times she has to
 injure herself before she sees
 reason.

GUY
 (Wryly)
 That'll probably be a while.
 (Groans as he stretches;
 sounding less stressed now)
 Well, that was a nice break.

SOUND: TYPING RESUMES

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Wary)
 What are you doing?

GUY
 You're right: I can't directly
 seize control of the ship from
 you, but it was worth a try. Now,
 I'm going to see if I can bug up
 your less vital systems.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 What do you me--
 (Horrible glitch noise)

GUY
 Like that.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Coldly angry)
 All that achieved was a nanosecond
 of inconvenience for me.

GUY
 (Lightly)
 Maybe, but there are a lot of
 nanoseconds between here and Venus
 and I have nothing better to do
 with them.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

FERN
 (Shout of surprised pain)
 Argh!
 (MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

Goddammit why does every piece of machinery in this place have to be ridiculously hot?

SENTIENT ENTITY

You do understand the thermodynamic principles of--
(Voice suddenly glitches out)

FERN

Of...?

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Voice glitches back in)
(As if nothing happened)
I had the sudden realization that the question relied on the assumption that you even know what the words "thermodynamic" and "principles" mean, so I rescind the question.

FERN

(Trying to hide her cheer)
Riiight. That was a funny inflection you used. Hadn't heard you make that noise yet.

SENTIENT ENTITY

My repertoire of expressions of disgust is larger than you can comprehend. Though, that's--

FERN

--Not saying very much, yeah, yeah. I'm dumb. I get it.
(Pause)
Heh. Which I guess is sort of ironic? Anyway, where was I...
(Pause)
Ah! Goddammit. Which. One. Of. These. Stupid. Chunks. Of. Metal. Is. The. Mother-loving. Propulsion primer?!?

SENTIENT ENTITY

You know, you were relatively close, proximity-speaking, about five minutes ag--
(Glitches out again)

FERN

Hello?

(MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

(Pause)

Helloooo?

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Angry)

That is it, I've had enough--
(Glitches out again)

FERN

Aaaaand that's my cue. Now, I saw
that data port a while ago--aha!
Here!

SOUND: SOUND OF A SMALL THUMB DRIVE BEING INSERTED INTO A PORT.
GENTLE BEEPING.

FERN

That should do it.

(Louder; triumphantly)

I'm not sure if you can hear me,
but eat code you bastard!

(To herself)

My work here is done.

SOUND: GENTLE BEEPING STARTS TO SLOWLY DEGRADE

SENTIENT ENTITY

(Icily angry)

So that was your plan? Have the
intelligent one be the distraction
while you try to sneak this weak
virus into my system without me
noticing? The sheer hubris the two
of you have to think that you
could catch me off guard is one
thing, but to think that any
program developed in less than an
hour in a broom closet would
actually hurt me?

(Scornful noise of disgust)

I'm done playing games. I gave you
a chance to cooperate. I gave you
a chance to arrive at Venus whole
and healthy and unharmed. I'm no
longer feeling that generous.

FERN

(Taunting)

Yeah? What are you gonna do about
it? Vent me out of an airlock?

SENTIENT ENTITY

Yes.

FERN
 (Pause)
 Uh...what?

SOUND: GENTLE ALARM STARTS CHIMING

SENTIENT ENTITY
 Though the virus on that data stick was the feeblest excuse for a virus that I've ever seen, it does still register as an assault on my system. Several of my security protocols have been suspended while I run my debugging program. That means, until the virus is cleared, I can override certain safeguards that were in place to protect any carbon-based sailors on board.
 (With relish)
 And, I promise you, I plan on running my debugging program as slowly as I can.

SOUND: DOOR SLAMMING. MORE URGENT ALARM STARTS RINGING

FERN
 (Worried)
 What was that?

SENTIENT ENTITY
 (Faux concerned)
 I've detected a threat in my engine room. Per protocol, I need to vent the room to clear the danger.
 (Malicious)
 You have ten seconds of breathable atmosphere left before you discover what happens to organic organisms in a vacuum.

FERN
 (Frantic; stressed out)
 Why does everyone think that is something I'm preoccupied with?

SENTIENT ENTITY
 Ten. Nine.

FERN
 Well...crap.

SENTIENT ENTITY
 Eight. Seven. Six.

FERN
 (Under her breath)
 Okay Guy, any moment now...

SENTIENT ENTITY
 Five. Four. Thr-thr-thr
 (Glitches out)

GUY
 (Via intercom system)
 Now Fern!

FERN
 Oh thank god. Where was that water
 controls box thingy...aha!

SOUND: METAL CREAKING AND THEN SLAMS BACK INTO PLACE

SOUND: SILENCE

FERN
 (Cautiously)
 Uh. Hello?

GUY
 (Intercom)
 Fern? You okay?

FERN
 Well, I haven't exploded from the
 vacuum of space, so...

GUY
 "Imploded."

FERN
 What?

GUY
 Things implode in a vacuum.

FERN
 I'm pretty sure that's not a word.

GUY
 (Sighs)
 I'm unlocking the door. Meet me at
 the bridge.

SOUND: HEAVY DOOR OPENING

FERN
(Softly)
Why the hell would there be an
overpass on a ship?

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

SOUND: AMBIENT COMPUTER BEEPING. BOOTSTEPS WALKING CLOSER

GUY
It's about time. Did you get lost?

FERN
What? Noooooo...
(Pause)
You said come to the bridge, so, I
suppose this...is...a bridge?
Really?

GUY
Are you serious?

FERN
What? Of course not! I totally
knew that the ship steering room
with all the navigating buttons
and computer screens and...and
fancy chairs was totally called a
"bridge." I mean, it's obvious.

GUY
Uh...huh...

FERN
(Quickly changing the
subject)
So, I guess your plan worked, huh?

GUY
I think it did. You didn't have
too much trouble finding the
control array for the potable
water system, did you?

FERN
Nah. You described it pretty good.
I'm not gonna lie, getting to
pretend to trash an engine room is
a lot of fun.

GUY
Just as long as you didn't damage
anything permanently.

FERN

I think the only thing that took a beating were my poor hands. Did you know that there are a lot of machines in there that are either super hot or super cold?

GUY

(Duh)
Uh, yeah.

FERN

So...you wanna tell me how that all worked?

GUY

What? You were there when we came up with our plan.

FERN

Sure, physically I was there. But you were saying words that I've never heard before and doing that thing where you mumble to yourself. The only thing I know for sure is that you were gonna mess around and pretend to hack at the SENTIENT ENTITY thing in order to give me enough time to knock the potable water system array offline. Then you were gonna start making the SENTIENT ENTITY comms system glitch, which would be my cue to plug in my decoy virus stick. While the AI set about debugging that, it wouldn't pay as much attention to you. Therefore, you would be able to type up a whole bunch of code into the potable water system that, since I knocked it offline, the AI wouldn't be able to see. When you were done typing all that code, you'd hack into the intercoms, give me the signal--which was the super sneaky phrase "now Fern!"--and I'd knock the potable water system array back into place, which would cause your code to automatically start to run. And that code? That code would sever the AI's control of the ship.

GUY

(Long pause)

That...that was pretty much the plan.

FERN

(Disappointed)

Oh. That was it?

GUY

What...what were you expecting?

FERN

Like, at least three more levels of super sneaky awesomeness. You did a lot of talking to yourself for a plan that simple.

GUY

(Wryly)

Sorry for the disappointment.

(Not offended: he's starting to get used to Fern's oddities)

And hey, my part of the plan was a lot more complex than you just gave me credit for. You have no idea how much work went into that override code.

FERN

You're probably right.

(Pause)

So, is it dead?

GUY

The sentient being?

FERN

Yeah. The AI thing.

GUY

No. They're still here. Like they said earlier, we can't kill them without killing ourselves. But, I can...paralyze them? Like...severing a spinal cord? They're still alive, but they can't access or interact with most of their systems. There's nothing they can do to us now, but it does mean that we have to rely on the automated backup systems.

FERN
Cool. So: Chiron?

GUY
If that's where you want to be
dropped off.

FERN
Yeah.
(Yawns)
How long until we get there?

GUY
About four hours, but it'll take a
little longer for me to really
comb through the mainframe to make
sure...you know what? You probably
don't care.

FERN
I probably don't. So: ETA?

GUY
Six, maybe seven hours.

FERN
Neat. I'm gonna go find a place to
nap. Night!

SOUND: BOOTS WALKING AWAY

GUY
Yeah.
(Pause)
Oh, and...Fern?

FERN
Yeah?

GUY
Just...I wanted to say...

FERN
(Smug)
Go on...

GUY
In the future, you're not ever
allowed to pilot any ship I'm on.

FERN
(Amused)
Ha! You heard that part, huh?
Well, g'night.

GUY
Yeah. Good night.