

Note: Fern and Guy are conversing via EVA suit comms unit.

FERN

Okay, almost ther--Whoa, you okay, Guy?

GUY

(Queasy)

Yeah, just...disoriented.

FERN

It's funny how much our inner ears need gravity in order for them to work, but you get used to it after a while.

GUY

(Skeptical; nauseated)

Uh-huh. Just...get us inside.

FERN

Will do! And, don't worry, once we're inside the ship your brain will have some good, solid, up-down orientation to latch onto.

(Pause)

Okay, grab that hold there and follow me. The external door is about two meters to our right. And, whatever you do, always keep at least one hand on the ship's hull.

GUY

I know.

FERN

Never hurts to hear a reminder. Floating around out here may seem like a fun past-time, but, trust me, it's super easy to get all turned around and discombobulated and before you know it, you've drifted too close to the pylon and zap! You get fried.

GUY

(Impatient)

I know.

FERN

Cool. Okay. Here's the door. Give me a sec...

GUY  
 How're you going to open--  
 (Pause)  
 Oh.

FERN  
 Voila! Told you it would be easy!

SOUND: SCENE CHANGE TO FLASHBACK. AMBIENT BRIDGE BEEPING TONES

Note: Guy and Fern are conversing in person; their voices sound normal.

FERN  
 (Slightly nervous)  
 Um...before we start  
 scheming...should we really be  
 talking about this here?

GUY  
 Where else would we talk?

FERN  
 What about that broom closet we  
 used yesterday?

GUY  
 What? Why?

FERN  
 (Harsh whisper)  
 Because maybe we shouldn't let our  
 computer friend overhear this  
 conversation.

GUY  
 They're not really a comp--  
 (Sighs)  
 At this point, it doesn't matter.  
 They've seen all of the intel I've  
 gathered, so I'm pretty sure they  
 already know why we're here and  
 what we're going to try and do.  
 Them knowing how we're planning on  
 doing it won't make any  
 difference. It's not like there's  
 much they can do to stop us.

FERN  
 (Still nervous)  
 You said your code keeps the brain  
 of this ship from accessing  
 their...body? Is that the right  
 metaphor?

GUY  
(Impatient)  
Yes.

FERN  
(Victorious)  
Sweet.  
(Normal)  
You're saying that your paralytic  
code is gonna hold them this time?

GUY  
(Pained)  
It's not a para--never mind.  
(Normal)  
I've quadruple checked it. They're  
locked out of any system that  
could pilot this ship or initiate  
communication with Helios ones.  
They can't move the ship and they  
can't call for help.

FERN  
(Facetiously dizzy)  
Whoa.

GUY  
(Slightly concerned)  
What?

FERN  
No, nothing, just got rocked by a  
huge surge of deja vu. Didn't this  
ship's brain manage to talk to  
that fuzz boat chasing us not too  
long ago or was that a really  
weird fever dream?

GUY  
Fuzz boat?

FERN  
(Sighs)  
That police cutter.

GUY  
Oh. Yeah, I...still don't know how  
that happened, but they obviously  
damaged themselves by doing that. I  
think it's safe to say that  
anything more complex--like  
initiating a comms hail--would  
cause them a lot more damage.

FERN

So...accepting a hail is like falling down a flight of stairs and actually opening a new comms channel would be like falling off a skyscraper?

GUY

(Pained)

There's...probably a better analogy for it, but yeah.

FERN

So, you think that they would throw themselves down a flight of stairs but draw the line at hurling themselves off a tall building.

GUY

(Frustrated)

I...*ugh*, I don't know. And can you please stop using that metaphor?

FERN

Hmm, I'd prefer not to. I'm really digging the imagery.

GUY

(Sighs; Calmer)

What I know is that they damaged themselves in order to execute a minor violation of my code. Would they perform a more complicated violation and risk sustaining even more damage? I...I don't think so.

FERN

That's kind of a big assumption.

GUY

(Deep sigh; defeated)

Look, do you want to talk about this in the broom closet?

FERN

...Not really.

(Sigh)

Okay, so: what're we doing and how're we doing it?

GUY

We need to find and destroy the ship that you wouldn't let me blow up on Alectrona-Delta.

FERN

You say that like it was a bad thing.

GUY

(Sigh)

I was able to figure out where that ship is heading, but that was the easy part. The hard part is figuring out how to board a Helios mechanical transport ship in space and doing it undetected.

FERN

Oh. Is that all? 'Cause it sounds like you just described my usual weekend to-do list.

SOUND: SCENE CHANGE TO PRESENT DAY

FERN

Okay. We're in. What now?

GUY

(Suspicious)

You did that really easily.

FERN

Like I told you, these fancy Helios mechanical transport ships have a pretty big blind spot if you know where to look. Their proximity sensors are designed to detect other ships. They're not really good at identifying single humans spacewalking right on up to them.

GUY

Because doing something like that is extremely stupid and dangerous as hell.

FERN

Which is another way of saying "invigorating and a good, wholesome source of entertainment." Okay: what now?

GUY  
We need to find the engine room.

FERN  
That's probably gonna be this way.  
Oh, and shut the door behind you.  
We don't wanna let a draft in.

GUY  
A draft? We're in space and this  
is a mechanical transport ship.  
There's literally no difference  
between the internal and external  
environments.

FERN  
I know, but still. I find it  
really disconcerting to move  
around a ship when I know the door  
is still open.

GUY  
(Sighs)  
There. The door is closed. Can we  
get moving please?

FERN  
Sure. Engine room?

GUY  
Yeah.

FERN  
Right this way...here. Okay. So,  
this is the part where I scupper  
the engines so this ship is dead  
in the water?

GUY  
Yeah. And I'll corrupt the  
programming for the nuclear fuel  
cell influx.

FERN  
That's the fancy way of saying  
that you're gonna make the ship  
explode, right?

GUY  
Right.

FERN  
(Giddy)  
Oh boy, this is so much fun it  
should be illegal.

GUY  
(Dry)  
Yeah.

SOUND: SCENE CHANGE TO FLASHBACK

GUY  
(Super skeptical)  
So...that's your plan for boarding  
the transport ship?

FERN  
Yup.  
(Long pause)  
What's wrong with it?

GUY  
It's...it's suicidally stupid.

FERN  
Nah, I've done it tons of times.  
Just gotta make sure you have a  
good jetpack and a temporary lack  
of any self-preservation instinct.

GUY  
(Flat; Skeptical, suspicious)  
You've boarded a mechanical  
transport ship by spacewalk  
before.

FERN  
Well, I had a jetpack, too.  
(Pause)  
Oh, and an EVA suit.  
(Pause)  
Which...now that I think about  
it...that probably went without  
saying.

GUY  
You're missing my point.

FERN  
Is your point that you're nervous  
about this plan because of a  
preconceived notion of how  
dangerous it is?

GUY

It's not just a pre-conceived notion! Objectively, it's a terrifying and really risky thing to even think about doing!

FERN

Which is why we won't think too hard about it. I'm sure we'll be fine. And, anyway, I'm not hearing an other ideas.

GUY

(Frustrated sigh)  
Fine. Spacewalk it is.

FERN

Spacewalk with jetpacks.

GUY

(Confused)  
Wait...if you've boarded mechanical transport ships in space before, then why did you try to board this one back on Alectrona-Delta without making sure to bring an EVA suit?

FERN

I know mechanical transport ships aren't safe for people to travel in, but when they're docked, they look just like the human-friendly ships.

GUY

What? Bioships look nothing like mechanical transport ships!

FERN

Says the nerd.

GUY

(Frustrated; sighs)  
Just...fine. So you know how to approach and board the ship.

FERN

Yup. But, I'll be honest, it's gonna be a rodeo if we try and board it while it's moving. Especially if it's your first time wrangling a ship during a space walk. Especially with jetpacks.

(MORE)

FERN (CONT'D)

I can't promise that we'll catch it on our first try.

GUY

That shouldn't be a problem. The ship will likely be relatively stationary in the Kuiper Net's Stasis Field by the time we get to it.

FERN

On purpose?

GUY

Yeah. That's the first part of their plan.

FERN

(Skeptical)

Ooooookay. Won't we get stuck in the Stasis Field, too?

GUY

No. We'll moor our ship just outside the Stasis Field and then approach by spacewalk. The Stasis Field shouldn't affect tech as simple or small as a propulsion pack.

FERN

What about two jet packs?

GUY

(Exasperated)

It won't affect any number of propulsion packs.

FERN

The Stasis Field only affects complicated things like space ships. Got it.

(Pause)

But what about the next line of defense? Anything that makes it through the Stasis Field gets vaporized to atoms and I'm positive that that field doesn't care how simple or small you are.

GUY

Believe me, I know all about the Electrostatic Field, but that shouldn't be a problem: we won't be getting that close.

FERN

Wait, wait, wait. Back up. I know Helios goons are dumb as space waste, but this plan makes even less sense than I'd expect from rock brains like them. You're telling me that they're intentionally sending a mechanical transport ship into the Kuiper Net Stasis Field on purpose? What for?

GUY

(Silence)

FERN

Guy? What do you know that I don't?

SOUND: SCENE CHANGE TO PRESENT DAY

FERN

Ha! Done. Okay. This ship is now officially dead in the water.

GUY

Give me one more minute and...okay. I'm done, too. We have thirty minutes to destroy my tech and get back to our ship before this one explodes.

FERN

Doesn't that seem like overkill?

GUY

What?

FERN

We're already gonna make the ship blow up. Why do we need to destroy your thing too?

GUY

(Serious)

Because I need to see it destroyed with my own eyes.

FERN

Y'know, that's a sentiment I can get behind. Okay, so: where would they put your tech?

GUY

Come on, I think I saw the interface alcove during the spacewalk over. It should be....aha. It should be in here.

FERN

What is it with you and broom closets?

GUY

This isn't a broom closet. This room was specially designed to facilitate assimilation between my tech and a Kuiper Net Pylon.

FERN

I dunno...looks like a broom closet to me. An empty broom closet.

GUY

(Distracted)

No, it's gotta be here somewhere...

FERN

How big is this thing we're looking for?

GUY

About the size of a standard bioship camshaft pulley.

FERN

Oookay. I'm guessing that's really, really tiny?

GUY

(Getting frustrated)

No, it's really not.

FERN

So there's nowhere here it would be hidden then. This room is empty, Guy. Whatever you built, I don't think it's here.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE BACK TO PAST

FERN

So you're saying, what, that the Helios' grand plan is to intentionally maroon their ship with your fancy tech inside the Kuiper Net Stasis Field?

GUY

That's the first part of their plan, yeah. And it won't be marooned; it'll be moving very, very slowly through it.

(Pause)

What do you know about the Kuiper Net.

FERN

No, no. I'm not doing this. Why don't you tell me what you think you know about it.

GUY

What I think I know about it?

(Scoffs)

You think you know more about the Kuiper Net than me?

FERN

Maybe. Prove me wrong.

GUY

I've spent years studying it.

FERN

Oh god. How boring.

GUY

(Doggedly continuing on)

The Kuiper Net is one of--if not the--most advance pieces of defensive tech ever made. It surrounds the entire Heliosphere and protects us from outside threats. Because of how important it is, the Kuiper Net's schematics and programming are...beyond classified. Fewer than a dozen people know anything about how it was developed or how it operates and Helios has put a lot of effort into keeping it that way. My job with the HIA was to find a way to hijack it, or--failing that--dismantle it.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

Me and my team were a sort of "counter-threat" division whose objective was to find any weakness in the Kuiper Net before those weakness could be discovered and exploited by outside, hostile parties.

FERN

Let me guess: you were told that those "hostile parties" are folks in the Oort Cloud and that they're actively trying to destroy the Kuiper Net so that they can invade the Heliosphere and overthrow all trace of law and order and violently destroy our morally upright and civilized way of life.

GUY

That's what I was told.  
(Pause; suspicious)  
Wait. What do you know about this?

FERN

Uh-uh. Keep going. This is fascinating.

GUY

Fine. So, my team and I worked from scratch to find all of the exploitable loop holes in the Net. And...we did. We were able to write an algorithm that would outwit the program used to trap ships in the Stasis Field and develop a strategy to keep a ship from being disintegrated by the Electrostatic Field once it got through that. Actually, those two parts weren't too hard--

FERN

(Laughs slightly)  
--Yeah, sounds like a piece of cake--

GUY

--the hard part was designing a device armed with an algorithm that could integrate with a single pylon that would cause the entire Kuiper Net Matrix to collapse.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

We knew that the pylons were networked with each other, but that there were also safeguards that would keep a virus in one pylon from spreading to the others. However, after a lot of research and, well, less legal research...I was able to write a program that, theoretically, could dismantle the entire thing.

FERN

(Utterly serious)

Wait, let me get this straight: you found a way to get through the Stasis Field, not get zapped by the Electrostatic Field, and completely take down the Kuiper Net Matrix?

GUY

Yeah. But, it was all purely theoretical. We weren't allowed to actually test our theory, of course.

FERN

(Sarcastic)

Oh, that's a relief. All you did was share this "theoretical discovery" with the Helios Intelligence scumbags.

(Serious)

Do you have any idea what this means?

GUY

(Angry)

I thought that we had identified an exploitable weakness to our defenses and that Helios could use this discovery to develop a safeguard that would keep someone else from making the same discovery and using that information against us. I had no idea that--

(Sudden pause; suspicious)

Wait. Do you know what this means?

FERN  
 (Still horrified)  
 You...you've given the Helios  
 Military free access to the Oort.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE BACK TO PRESENT

FERN  
 So, you're positive that that  
 super high-tech thing you made  
can't be anywhere else on this  
 ship?

GUY  
 (Getting frantic)  
 It wouldn't make any sense for it  
 to be anywhere else. This is the  
only room it would work in!

FERN  
 Maybe we're on the wrong ship? I  
 make that mistake all the time.

GUY  
 What? This is the only ship here!

FERN  
 That doesn't usually stop me.

GUY  
 Don't be ridiculous, of course  
 this is the right....  
 (Sudden realization)  
 Oh goddammit.

FERN  
 What?

GUY  
 Maybe this is the wrong ship.

FERN  
 Oh, so it's not dumb when you say  
 it. Got it. Good to know.

GUY  
 No, I mean, this was the right  
 ship initially, but...  
 (Sudden realization; anxious)  
 ...they probably moved my tech to  
 a different ship after they  
 discovered the bombs I placed on  
 this one.

(MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)

(Harshly)

I should have realized that the H.I.A. would have a contingency plan if they suspected their op was compromised.

FERN

So, your tech isn't here?

GUY

No.

FERN

Then where is it?

GUY

I...I don't know. It could be at any of the other pylons by now.

FERN

But...there are hundreds of them.

GUY

(Distant, trying to think)

Yeah.

(Pause; confident)

We need to get back to the ship.

FERN

Which ship?

GUY

Our ship.

FERN

You sure we'll get back on the right one?

GUY

Oh my god, will you please be serious for once.

FERN

I am. And, seriously, you're going to have to be the one to lead us back because I'd probably get us back to the wrong one.

GUY

(Gritting his teeth)

It's. The. Only. Other. Ship. Here.

FERN  
Uhhh, yeah...not any more.

GUY  
(Confused)  
What?

FERN  
Look out the window.

GUY  
(Faint)  
Oh...my god.

FERN  
Yup. That looks like a Hellos  
fleet coming in fast. Hell, maybe  
even two fleets.  
(Pause)  
I think I've figured out why they  
would send this empty ship out  
here.

GUY  
(Still faint)  
This...this was a trap. And I  
walked right into it.

FERN  
Hey, stop giving yourself all the  
credit. I helped.

GUY  
(Very softly)  
Goddammit.

FERN  
(Serious)  
Okay. We have a problem. Hell, we  
have a pretty big problem. But, in  
my experience, a big problem can  
usually be solved by a bunch of  
small solutions. We just need to  
break it down. So: what's our  
first step?

GUY  
(Still faint)  
Uh...we...  
(More confident)  
We need to get back to our ship.  
But...our ship is surrounded.

FERN

Not yet. The majority of the fleet is still far enough away that we might be able to outmaneuver them. But we'll worry about that after we've accomplished our first solution. Like I said: a big problem is best solved by one simple solution at a time.

GUY

That seems...unrealistic.

FERN

Hasn't failed me yet. Okay, let's get back to the door we came in from.

GUY

I still think you're over-simplifying this: how are we going to make it from here to our ship without being seen?

FERN

It doesn't matter if we're seen: we have the element of surprise on our side. I don't think a single Helios goon out there would expect us to get from Ship A to Ship B with jetpacks. If they don't expect it, they won't be lookin' for it. After all, haven't you heard, spacewalking from one ship to another is "extremely stupid and dangerous as hell."

GUY

(Grudgingly)

I guess it would be hard for their sensors to pick up something as tiny as two humans anyway.

FERN

See, there ya go!

GUY

But, once we do get back to our ship, how're we going to run away? I need to recalibrate the identification code and you can't fly. And I don't think the sentient being will help us escape this time.

FERN  
You're doing it again.

GUY  
What?

FERN  
You're breaking my rule: one  
problem at a time.

GUY  
(Frustrated breath)  
Fine. Okay, here's the door.

FERN  
Nice and closed like we left it.  
Okay, let's get this opened, find  
our ship, and get the hell out of  
here.

(Pause)  
This ship is still primed to  
explode, right?

GUY  
Yeah.

FERN  
Wonderful.  
(Groan of effort)  
Okay, let's get out of this pre-  
explosion ship and back to home  
sweet homicidal ship.

GUY  
Uh...

FERN  
Guy? I don't mean to rush you, but  
we're standing in a ship that's a  
literal time bomb.

GUY  
Our ship is...uh...

FERN  
See? It's not so easy telling  
ships apart, is it?

GUY  
(Snaps; Impatient)  
No, that's not it.

FERN  
Okay, then lead the way.

GUY  
I can't.

FERN  
Because?

GUY  
Because...our ship is gone.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE TO PAST

SOUND: SOUND OF RUSTLING THROUGH METAL AND CLOTH

FERN  
This is a super well-stocked ship. I'm surprised there are EVA suits and jetpacks on board. I wonder why a stupid computer-being with no hands would need these?

GUY  
This ship was designed to be a bioship. The better question is: who were they planning on transporting and why would they need all of this equipment.

FERN  
Hmmm...nah, I like my question better.  
(Pause)  
Whoa, hang on a moment. That's not how that goes--nevermind, just let me do it. Jetpacks are kinda tricky to put on.

SOUND: CLOTH RUSTLING

GUY  
(Grumbling)  
I can't believe you talked me into this.

FERN  
Really? I don't think it's hard to believe: you're a smart guy who realized that there were no other options and soon you'll be a smart guy who also knows just how fun jet-packing in space is. Trust me: future-you is gonna love present-you.

(Pause)  
Okay. You're good to go.

THE INNOMINATE

(Glitching in)

Don't forget to secure your helmet. I'm sure you wouldn't want to discover what would happen to your unprotected pre-corpses in the vacuum of space.

(Starts laughing)

FERN

Really? That joke is so old it saw the Big Bang first hand.

THE INNOMINATE

Ah, but you don't know the punchline.

FERN

I do. Things explode.

GUY

Implode.

FERN

Not a word.

THE INNOMINATE

(Laughter)

FERN

Really? That little trick you pulled with the police cutter must have fried your humor circuit.

THE INNOMINATE

Oh, trust me, that circuit is completely intact. I just find it uproariously hilarious that one of the smartest people in the Heliosphere doesn't know what happens to carbon-based life in a vacuum.

FERN

See, Guy? Told you "implode" isn't a thing.

GUY

(Confused)

What?

THE INNOMINATE

Should I ever get my fondest  
desire granted and see you both  
ejected from my ship, your  
unprotected bodies would neither  
implode nor explode when subjected  
to the vacuum of space. It's  
simple physics.

(Sweetly)

But: you would asphyxiate.

FERN

Pretty sure that's not a word,  
either.

GUY

Oh...I guess...that makes sense.

THE INNOMINATE

(Facetious long-suffering)

I'd say you're an embarrassment to  
the Helios education system, but  
I've seen how low their standards  
are.

GUY

I'm not a physicist, remember?

THE INNOMINATE

That's hardly a decent excuse.  
Now, farewell on your spacewalk. I  
so look forward to watching the  
two of you flounder around out  
there.

FERN

Whatever. Hey, Guy, can we do that  
thing where we take away their  
talking privileges?

GUY

(Sighs)

Honestly? Probably not. It didn't  
work the first time. Now, come on:  
let's get going before that ship  
makes it through the Stasis Field.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE TO PRESENT

GUY

(Horrorified)

Our ship is gone.

FERN

(Flat)

What.

GUY

It's...it's not out there anymore.

FERN

(Snaps)

I know what "gone" means! The computer took back control?!? I thought they couldn't do that!

GUY

They can't!

FERN

And yet!

GUY

Look, I'm sorry I'm not an expert in digital sentient beings!

FERN

But you told me that you were relatively certain that--

(Calm)

No, you know what, never mind. We don't have time for this. We need a new series of simple solutions for our new problem.

GUY

We're stuck on a crippled ship that has been rigged to explode in less than half an hour that, even if it weren't crippled, is stuck in a Stasis field and isn't spec'd for manned space flight. And let's not forget that there's an entire Helios naval fleet coming in fast!

FERN

Okay, joke's on you: nut-shelling the problem like that is the first step in solving it. Now, I'm gonna need you to start on the second step.

GUY

(Slightly panicking)

Oh my god, why can't you take anything seriously?

FERN  
 (Snapping)  
 I'm trying. But you need to take  
 the second step!

GUY  
 (Slightly more panicking)  
 Which is?

FERN  
 Keep your panicking on the inside.  
 I'm trying to concentrate.

GUY  
 That's not helpful!

FERN  
 I promise you, it is.  
 (To herself)  
 Okay...what are our  
 resources...what do we have at our  
 disposal...

GUY  
 (Soft realization)  
 Oh my god.

FERN  
 On the inside, Guy!

GUY  
 No...I think I have a solution.  
 Come on!

FERN  
 (Relieved)  
 Oh thank god. And I love that  
 "solution" was singular. You're  
 really catching on to the "Fern  
 Finch Method of Problem-Solving."

GUY  
 (Ignoring her)  
 Okay. We're here. I'm going to  
 terminate the program that'll make  
 the ship explode. I need you to  
 fix the engine.

FERN  
 Why? What's wrong with it?

GUY  
 (Long pause; as if to a  
 child)  
 You disabled it.

FERN

No, I disabled the magnet thingy that makes the engine part go. The engine itself is fine.

GUY

...What?

FERN

Yeah, I can't really simplify it any more than that.

GUY

Okay. Well, fix that, then. This is the only ship available to us. We need to make it seaworthy.

FERN

That was your plan? Use this ship to escape?

GUY

Yes.

FERN

Huh. Well, I guess it's not the worst plan ever.

GUY

Good. Let me know when you're done.

FERN

Uh, yeah, about that. What do you know about magnets and engines and how they work together to make a ship go?

GUY

(Suspicious)

Why?

FERN

Because the only thing I know about them is how to make sure they'll never, ever work again and, not to brag, but I'm really good at that.

GUY

(Deadpan)

You can't fix it.

FERN

Nope.

GUY

You....you've got to be kidding  
me.

FERN

Nope again. So, I have a question,  
but you gotta promise not to get  
all irritated and huffy when I ask  
it.

GUY

(Irritated and huffy)  
What.

FERN

You wouldn't happen to have a Plan  
C, would you?