                    THE INNOMINATE
          Interesting. Do you really think
          such a neanderthal approach will
          be effective at breaching my lock?

SOUND: POUNDING STOPS. BODY SLUMPS TO GROUND IN DEFEAT

                    FERN
             (Defeated sound)

                    THE INNOMINATE
          Ah. Finally: acceptance from _both_
          of you.
             (Facetiously relieved sigh)
          I'm pleasantly surprised that it
          only took you _twice_ as long as it
          should have for you to concede to
          your inevitable fate.

                    FERN
             (Serious)
          Got anything, Guy?

                    GUY
             (Snaps)
          What the hell do you think?

                    FERN
          Whoa. Just an honest question. The
          last time we were in a closet on
          this stupid ship you figured out
          how to outsmart this evil not-
          computer.

                    GUY
             (Quiet, defeated)
          We weren't physically locked in
          that closet back then, remember?

                    FERN
             (Sigh)
          Hmmm. In that case, I think now's
          an excellent time for--

                    GUY
             (Irritated)
          --Look, if you're about to say
          it's time for "Fern Finch's
          Tendency to Oversimplify
          Problems," then save it. The
          problem is already simple--the
          lock on that door is inaccessible.
             (MORE)

                    GUY (CONT'D)
Making a problem _sound_ simple
doesn't automatically make it
easier to solve.

                    FERN
          (Lightly)
Spoken like a true novice in the
art of the _Fern Finch Method of_
Problem-Solving.   Start at 0'48"
          (Pause; serious)
But, seriously, you can't think of
a way out of here?

                    GUY
          (Irritated)
No.

                    FERN
...goddammit. I guess we shoulda
blown this ship up when we had the
chance, huh?

                    GUY
          (Defeated; listless)
They would have found _another_ way
to get my Prime Negator out here
and integrated into the Kuiper Net
Matrix. Short of blowing up my
tech when it was stowed in that
ship on Alectrona-Delta, there's
nothing we could have done that
would have made any difference in
the long run.

                    FERN
Whoa. You totally missed my point.
I'm saying that, if we'd known
that this stupid ship was gonna
beat us, we shoulda blown them up
on principle.
          (Aggravated sound)
I mean, _all_ that bragging I did,
only to lose to them in the end? I
don't think I've _ever_ been this
embarrassed.
          (Silence)
Guy?

                    GUY
What.

                    FERN
You look like you're a thousand
miles away.

                    GUY
I'm just...thinking.

                    FERN
It seems like you do that a lot.

                    GUY
     (Ambiguous noise of assent)

                    FERN
You thinking about anything in
particular?

                    GUY
     (Silent)

                    FERN
Yeah. Me too.
     (Pause)
Have you ever been to the Oort?

                    GUY
     (Startled out of his rather
      dismal thoughts)
What? Of course not.

                    FERN
     (Laughs slightly;
      reminiscent)
It's wild out there. Life
is...well, it's wild. And, if the
Kuiper Net gets deactivated?
     (Blows out dramatic breath)
I don't think they'll be prepared
for what's coming.

                    GUY
     (Abruptly frustrated)
It doesn't make any _sense_.

                    FERN
Not much does.

                    GUY
     (Frustrated; ranting)
I've spent my entire life _knowing_
that the Kuiper Net is the only
thing keeping the Heliosphere safe
from Oortian marauders. Now?
     (MORE)

                    GUY (CONT'D)
I have no idea who the hell
controls the Kuiper Net or _why_ it
was even made or _who_ made it!

                    FERN
     (Serious)
You really don't know, do you?

                    GUY
Know what?

                    FERN
The origin of the Kuiper Net. Who
built it and why.

                    GUY
If you'd have asked me a week ago,
I would have _known_ that it was
built by engineers hundreds of
years ago in order to keep Oortian
marauders out. Hell, the
development of the Kuiper Net is
what unified the solar system
under a centralize government--

                    FERN
--known as Helios. Yeah, that's
almost completely wrong.

                    GUY
I _know_. So what's the _truth_?

                    FERN
The Kuiper Net wasn't built by
people in the solar system to keep
people from the Oort out. I mean,
the words are right, but the order
is wrong.

                    GUY
     (Irritated)
What does that even mea--
     (Pause)
Wait, you mean the Kuiper Net was
built by people from _the Oort_
Cloud?

                    FERN
To keep people from the solar-
system-slash-Heliosphere out,
yeah.

                    GUY
          (Confused)
But...that makes no sense! Why the
hell would anyone in the
Heliosphere even want to go to the
Oort? And how the hell were _they_
able to develop such advanced and
sophisticated tech?

                    FERN
Ah. Why and how indeed.

                    GUY
          (Pause; irritated)
Really? You're getting cryptic on
me? Now?

                    FERN
I'm not being cryptic. Or, I guess
I am, but I'm not being
facetiously cryptic. I honestly
don't know the answers to those
questions. I _think_ there's
something out there that _someone_--
or someone_s_--want to keep filthy
Helios hands off of but damned if
I know what that "something" is.
The Oort's really, really big--a
hell of a lot bigger than the
Heliosphere. Who knows what's out
there?

                    GUY
          (Irritated)
So you're saying that the Kuiper
Net was developed by people from
the Oort because of some
secret....._something_ that they
don't want people from the
Heliosphere to know about?

                    FERN
Boy, you're getting really good at
nut-shelling.

                    GUY
Why should I believe that?

                    FERN
Because look where we are. We have
Helios Intelligence Agents who are
doing their absolute damnedest to
destroy the Kuiper Net.

                    GUY
HIA operatives _usually_ sabotage
Helios-made things.

                    FERN
What a cynical thing to say,
considering you used to work for
them.

                    GUY
        (Snaps; defensive)
I didn't work _for_ them. I
worked...adjacent to them. I
thought my work was going to make
the Heliosphere safer.

                    FERN
        (Subtly angry)
Has there _ever_ been an HIA or
military op that's achieved that
goal?

                    GUY
        (Also slightly angry)
My team and I were never part of
any "op." The _only_ thing we were
supposed to do was study the
Kuiper Net for weaknesses.

                    FERN
        (Calming breath)
Okay. Fine. I'll take your word
for it--

                    GUY
--Because it's true--

                    FERN
--and try another approach: how
many people from the Heliosphere
have you ever met who've been to
the Oort.

                    GUY
        (Pointing out the obvious)
None because no one's allowed to
go there.

                    FERN
Riiiight. We're all rule-followers
in the Heliosphere. Follow-up
question: how many people from the
Heliosphere have you ever _heard
of_ going to the Oort.

                    GUY
...None.

                    FERN
Okay. And how many times have you
heard about a Helios ship or small
outer-sphere globe being ransacked
by Oortian Mauruaders who then
return to the Oort?

                    GUY
         (Long pause)
Not many.

                    FERN
But more than none.

                    GUY
         (Grudgingly)
More than none.

                    FERN
So, in summary, we have evidence
that people from the Oort come
into the Heliosphere but no one
from the Heliosphere goes to the
Oort. There. Does that shed some
light onto who controls the Kuiper
Net?

                    GUY
         (Not impressed)
Not really; I can see why
marauders from the Oort would try
to invade the Heliosphere. I don't
know why anyone from the
Heliosphere would want to go to
the Oort. There's nothing out
there except anarchy and void.

                    FERN
Huh. What a conveniently simple
way of framing the situation. How
do you _know_ there's nothing out
there? Because that's what you've
been told your entire life?

                    GUY
         (Another long silence)
...I see your point.

                    FERN
And, honestly, I don't even know
why I'm having to spell this out
for you. May I once again present
to you "Exhibit A: the fact that
we have discovered a government
operation to deactivate the Kuiper
Net." Obviously there's something
out there that Helios wants.

                    GUY
Wait a minute...*you've* been to the
Oort.

                    FERN
     (Innocent)
Have I?

                    GUY
     (Stern)
Fern.

                    FERN
     (Sigh; softly)
Yeah, it's been a while though and
I didn't see very much of it. They
don't give guided tours out there,
you know.
     (Pause)
Or...maybe you didn't know.

                    GUY
So what *is* out there?

                    FERN
Eh, mostly just anarchy and void.

                    GUY
     (Frustrated sound)

                    FERN
What?

                    GUY
Are you ever serious?

                    FERN
Not on purpose.

                    GUY
     (Dogged)
How did you get out there and then
back to the Heliosphere again?

                    FERN
That's something I really, really
shouldn't tell you. Not here.

                    GUY
What? Why?

                    FERN
     (Sotto voce)
Because the walls have ears.

                    GUY
Oh...yeah.

                    FERN
And...eyes, too? Maybe? And who
knows what other spying things
it--they have in these stupid
walls--God, at this point, I'd
actually prefer it if they had
hands instead--

                    GUY
     (Sharp breath of sudden
      realization)

                    FERN
Whoa, you okay?

                    GUY
     (Absently; he just got struck
      by an idea)
Just...shut up for a minute.

                    FERN
Yeah, I'm not good at doing that
on purpose either.

                    GUY
     (Irritated)
Try.

                    FERN
     (Pained sound)
But...it's so difficult...

                    GUY
     (To himself)
"Always a way in..."

                    FERN
What?

SOUND: CLOTH RUSTLING AS GUY STANDS

                    GUY
               (Triumphant)
          The walls!

                    FERN
               (Flat)
          What.

                    GUY
               (Ignoring her)
          Or, maybe the ceiling...

                    FERN
          Cool. I'm gonna pretend that
          you're making any sense.

                    GUY
          Stand up and give me a hand.

SOUND: CLOTH RUSTLING

                    FERN
               (Skeptical)
          Okay. What do you need me to do.

                    GUY
          Hold this.

                    FERN
          Your super sneaky secret stash of
          tools? Why? What're you doing?

                    GUY
          We need to disable the lock.

                    FERN
          Yeah. I know. But you can't _get_ to
          the lock.

                    GUY
          I can't. It's on the other side of
          this heavy metal door. But,
          there's another way to disable it.

                    FERN
          Oh! I think I know where you're
          going with this!
               (Pause)
          But...there's no where for us to
          take cover.

                    GUY
               (Absentmindedly)
          No, we won't--
               (MORE)

                GUY (CONT'D)
        (Pause as he realizes what
         Fern has said; confused)
Wait, what?

                FERN
You're gonna use a bomb to destroy
the lock, right?

                GUY
        (Long silence)
I...I don't even know where to
begin to describe just how
outrageously ridiculous that idea
is, but we need to get the record
straight: I have only ever made
two bombs and only ever detonated
one of them.

                FERN
        (Amused)
Yeah, that was pretty neat. I bet
those navy lunkheads were really
surprised by that.
        (Facetiously serious)
So...no bomb, then?

                GUY

No.

                FERN
That means your bomb record is
going to stay at a pretty
unimpressive 50% success rate. You
sure you're okay with that?

                GUY
        (Frustrated sigh)

                FERN
I mean, no judgement here!

                GUY
Just...pass me that arc driver.

                FERN
Uh, this guy?

                GUY
Yeah.

                FERN
Here ya go.

SOUND: TAPPING ON METAL WALL

                    THE INNOMINATE
That's not going to work.

                    FERN
What? You don't even know what his
plan is!

                    THE INNOMINATE
Just because _you_ haven't figured
it out doesn't mean it's not
obvious.

                    FERN
Oh yeah? Then prove that _you_ know
what he's doing.
     (Silence)
Ha!

                    GUY
Dammit. Walls are solid. It must
be in the ceiling.

                    FERN
What is?

                    GUY
     (Distracted, mostly to
      himself)
We get so focused on the lock
itself that we forget that it
requires electricity to work. And
that requires wiring. If I can cut
the wires that supply power to the
lock, then it'll be deactivated.

                    THE INNOMINATE
You're assuming that the wiring
for this lock is accessible to
you.

                    FERN
Huh. I'm pretty sure that's
exactly what someone who wants to
keep us away from easily
accessible wiring would say.

                    GUY
It's not exactly "easily
accessible"...

                    FERN
You said something about it being
in the ceiling, right? How're you
gonna reach up there.

                    GUY
          Fern?

                    FERN
          Yeah?

                    GUY
           I don't think you're going to
          like the answer to that question.

MUSIC: SCENE CHANGE

SOUND: MONOTONE BEEPING

Note: VON KONTAK's lines are coming in via tannoy.

                    VON KONTAK
          Von Kontak to Psi-6263.

                    THE INNOMINATE
          This is Psi-6263.

                    VON KONTAK
          Psi-6263, we expect to achieve
          assimilation of the Prime Negator
          with Pylon 556 in approximately
          five minutes.

                    THE INNOMINATE
             (Neutral, but hint of snide)
          Pardon me, Agent, but according to
          your last status update, you
          should have accomplished
          assimilation by now.

                    VON KONTAK
             (Tight)
          According to my _current_ estimate,
          we will have assimilation in five
          minutes.

                    THE INNOMINATE
             (Professional, but tinge of
              amusement)
          It appears that Agent Redmond's
          position is growing farther away
          from yours. This is highly
          irregular, Agent. I was under the
          impression that most operatives
          are able to competently handle a
          propulsion pack in zero gravity
          after a cursory amount of
          training.
             (MORE)

> THE INNOMINATE (CONT'D)
> In hindsight, might Agent Redmond
> have benefited from enrollment in
> a _remedial_ small-engine propulsion
> course prior to this mission.

> VON KONTAK
> This is the _last_ time I'll caution
> you to watch your tone, Psi-6263.
> I know of several digital
> engineers who can find a way to
> strip your personality out of your
> source code.

> THE INNOMINATE
> I apologize for whatever tone you
> may have perceived. I meant no
> insult.

> VON KONTAK
> If you're finding the processing
> power to critique our performance
> in this op, I assume you've
> completed your task?

> THE INNOMINATE
> Yes. I am ready and standing by
> for pylon integration.

> VON KONTAK
> Copy. I'll contact you once we've
> taken down the Kuiper Net. Von
> Kontak out.

SOUND: COMMS CUTS OUT. SILENCE WITH OCCASIONAL GENTLE BEEPING.

> THE INNOMINATE
> (To themself)
> Oh, dammit.

SOUND: COMMS CHANNEL OPENING

> THE INNOMINATE (CONT'D)
> Psi-6263 to Agent von Kontak.

> VON KONTAK
> (Annoyed)
> This is von Kontak and this had
> better be important.

> THE INNOMINATE
> There's been a development on
> board.
> (MORE)

                    THE INNOMINATE (CONT'D)
It appears Santee and Finch have
managed to disable the lock to the
room you stowed them in.

                    VON KONTAK
          (Dangerous silence)
What.

                    THE INNOMINATE
Guy de la Croix Santee and Fern
Finch have liberated themselves.

                    VON KONTAK
          (Not really a question)
You have made some critical errors
at almost every juncture of this
op, Psi-6263, but you allowing
those two to leave one of your
secured rooms? That's
unacceptable.

                    THE INNOMINATE
I am certain that I do not need to
tell you that I did not _let_ them
out. You locked one of the
smartest people in the Heliosphere
in a room and assumed _that_ would
hold him. To me, that seems an
error of judgement on _your_ part.

                    VON KONTAK
          (Pause; frosty and dangerous)
Psi-6263, you had better have the
situation under control by the
time I make it back to the ship.
That is an order.

                    THE INNOMINATE
Yes ma'am.

SOUND: COMMS CLICKS OUT

SOUND: BOOTS APPROACHING

                    THE INNOMINATE
          (Spiky and arrogant)
Ah, you two certainly took long
enough. I'm surprised a simple
lock caused you that much trouble,
Santee.

                    FERN
You're not fooling anyone.
          (MORE)

                    FERN (CONT'D)
          We know that you and that piece of
          scum agent thought you had us
          locked away for good.

SOUND: TYPING

                    GUY
          Ignore them, Fern. We need to--
              (Sound of frustration)

SOUND: TYPING STOPS

                    THE INNOMINATE
              (Faux sincere)
          The days of you typing commands
          into my mainframe whenever the
          mood strikes is over, Santee. I
          have complete control over my ship
          again.

                    FERN
          He took away your control once, he
          can do it again!

                    THE INNOMINATE
          Not within the next two minutes.

                    FERN
              (Softly)
          Guy, what happens in two minutes?

                    THE INNOMINATE
          You were hoping to learn how much
          time is left before Agents von
          Kontak and Redmond achieve
          assimilation, weren't you, Santee?
              (Sweetly)
          Instead of impolitely accessing my
          mainframe without permission, you
          could have merely asked.

                    FERN
          Like we'd trust anything you tell
          us.

                    THE INNOMINATE
              (Still sweetly)
          In that case, you could look out
          the starboard window.

SOUND: BOOTSTEPS

                    FERN
Heh, look at that amateur try to
use a jetpack.

                    GUY
          (Aghast)
Oh...oh my god, they have my tech
with them. They're...about to
accomplish assimilation.

                    FERN
You mean they're about to connect
your thing to the pylon and
destroy the Kuiper Net?

                    THE INNOMINATE
          (As if to a child)
Yes. Very good. That is what
"assimilation" means.

                    FERN
          (Ignoring them)
How do we stop them?
          (Gasp)
Can we shoot them?

                    THE INNOMINATE
I'm not sure which is more
insulting--that you assume that I
am equipped with clumsy, primitive
instruments of violence _or_ that if
I were, you'd be able to usurp my
control of them.

                    FERN
Guy, I'm doing my best to ignore
this stupid ship-computer-person-
voice, but you're gonna have to
help me out and, y'know, _talk_ to
me.

                    GUY
          (Teeth grit)
I'm _thinking_.

                    FERN
Oh. Sorry. It's just that,
usually, you do that aloud. But
carry on.

                    GUY
          (Suddenly)
We need to get back to our EVA
suits.
          (MORE)

                    GUY (CONT'D)
          Do you think you can guide us to
          that pylon?

SOUND: BOOTSTEPS WALKING

                    FERN
          With our jetpacks?

                    GUY
          Yeah.

                    FERN
          Definitely. But: what's gonna keep
          us from getting zapped?

                    GUY
          The same thing that's protecting
          the two people already out there.
          The area outside this ship and
          around the pylon is shielded by a
          cloud of particles that will keep
          anything within it from detection
          and disintegration by the
          Electrostatic Field.

                    FERN
          I guess it's nice that we had two
          HIA goons act as guinea pigs, but
          still: I just wanna go on record
          and say that I'm really, really
          nervous about being this close to
          the pylon.

                    GUY
             (Impatient)
          We'll be fine. And the only way
          we're going to stop them from
          assimilating my tech with that
          pylon is going out there and
          stopping them directly.

                    FERN
          How're we gonna do that?

                    GUY
          Honestly? I don't know.

                    FERN
          We're gonna wing it?

                    GUY
          Yeah. Unless you can think of an
          actual plan?

SOUND: FOOTSTEPS STOP. DOOR OPENS

                    FERN
          It's my professional opinion that
          winging it _is_ an actual plan. Just
          stick with me out there: I'm an
          expert at whimsically wrecking
          Helios shenanigans.

                    FERN
               (Oh crap)
          What that...?

                    GUY
          Oh...god_dammit_.

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Evil laughter)

                    FERN
               (Distantly)
          You've gotta be kidding me...

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Mock surprised)
          You _really_ didn't foresee this? Of
          course Agent von Kontak would have
          hidden your EVA suits _and_
          propulsion packs _before_ she left
          the ship.

                    GUY
               (Under his breath)
          Son of a...

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Interrupting)
          However, I must admit, I would
          have preferred she had left them
          here. I was very much looking
          forward to seeing you don those
          suits only to then realize that
          you are trapped inside my ship
          since _I_ have complete control over
          my external doors.

                    FERN
               (Threatening)
          Oh, trust me, I could have found a
          way out.

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Equally as threatening)
          I would have _loved_ to see you try.

                    GUY
          (Sound of very stressed
          frustration)

SOUND: BOOTSTEPS RUNNING AWAY

                    FERN
          Guy? Wait up!

SOUND: BOOTSTEPS RUNNING

SOUND: FRANTIC TYPING GROWING CLOSER

                    FERN
          (Subdued)
          What're you doing?

                    GUY
          (Another frustrated sound)

SOUND: NEGATORY COMPUTER BEEPING

                    THE INNOMINATE
          At the moment? An exercise in
          futility, it seems.

                    FERN
          (Still quiet)
          Look, I don't think the solution
          is here.

                    GUY
          (Angry, scared)
          Then where _is_ the solution, huh?
          What the _hell_ is _your_ idea?

                    FERN
          (Calm, serious)
          First, we need to take a step back
          and--

                    GUY
          (Explosive)
          I swear to god, if you mention
          your goddamn over-simplified
          problem-solving--

                         THE INNOMINATE
                    (Interrupting)
          I'm thrilled to interrupt because
          you two are starting to become
          tedious, but there's an incoming
          communication from Agent von
          Kontak that I'm sure you will want
          to hear.

SOUND: COMMS CHANNEL OPENS

                         VON KONTAK
                    (Over tannoy)
          Agent von Kontak to Psi-6263.

                         THE INNOMINATE
          This is Psi-6263. Be advised,
          Agent, that I am currently joined
          on the bridge by our two unruly
          guests.

                         VON KONTAK
                    (Long pause; tightly)
          I see.
                    (More business-like)
          Psi-6263, we are starting final
          countdown and anticipate
          assimilation in T-minus 10
          seconds.

                         THE INNOMINATE
                    (Just so smug)
          Copy.

                         GUY
                    (Frantic)
          Wait! Stop and _think_ about what
          you're about to do!

                         VON KONTAK
                    (Smug)
          Oh, I know _exactly_ what I'm doing.
          Five seconds...

                         GUY
          You're going to get people _killed_.

                         VON KONTAK
          I know. Three...two...one--

                         GUY
          STOP!

SOUND: HIGH PITCHED WHINE AND SLIGHT TANNOY FEEDBACK FOLLOWED
BY HORRIBLE SECOND OR TWO OF SILENCE

                    FERN
               (Stunned)
          Oh my god.

                    GUY
               (Faintly)
          ...goddammit.

SOUND: CLOTHES RUSTLE AS BODY SLUMPS TO INTO CHAIR

                    FERN
               (Worried)
          Guy?

                    GUY
          It's over. The Net has fallen.

                    FERN
          It's not over. You created that
          thing, right? If you're smart
          enough to make the thing that just
          took down the Kuiper Net Matrix,
          then I'm sure you're smart enough
          to make something that turns it
          back on.

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Laughter)

                    GUY
               (Silent)

                    FERN
               (Concerned)
          Guy?

                    THE INNOMINATE
          Oh, my. It appears that he is
          currently too preoccupied by his
          travels down a road paved with
          good intentions to pay you any
          mind at the moment. A perfectly
          understandable emotional response
          to absolute failure, I've been
          told.
               (Business-like)
          Now, if you'll excuse me...

SOUND: COMMS CLICKS ON. SLIGHT ENGINE REVVING

                    VON KONTAK
               (Still over tannoy)
          Von Kontak to Psi-6263.
                    (MORE)

                    VON KONTAK (CONT'D)
Assimilation is complete and
Kuiper Net Matrix is now offline.
We are now ready for AI
integration.

                    THE INNOMINATE
Copy. I am en route and will
commence with Digital Intelligence
Integration in T-minus twenty
seconds.

                    GUY
          (Faintly; horrified)
...What?

                    FERN
Wait...this thing--ship--person--
whatever is going to...to
integrate with the pylon? What the
hell does _that_ mean.

                    THE INNOMINATE
          (Cheerful, victorious)
Allow me to dumb it down for you:
soon, the Kuiper Net will once
again be functional but _I_ will be
the one who controls it.

                    GUY
          (Horrified)
No...
          (More loudly)
Come on Fern!

                    FERN
What? Where are we going?

                    GUY
          (Frantic)
The engine room. I need you to
stop this ship. We'll...we'll blow
it up if we have to!

                    FERN
Ummm...okay, but--

                    THE INNOMINATE
But you're too late. I have
arrived at the pylon and will have
achieved integration in T-minus
three...two...

                    GUY
               (Frantic)
          No! Stop!

                    THE INNOMINATE
               (Smug, triumphant)
          ...one.

SOUND: GLITCHING AND POWER SURGE. THEN, SILENCE.

SOUND: AMBIENT SHIP BEEPING CONTINUES

                    FERN
          What...just happened?

                    GUY
               (BSOD'd)
          I...I...

                    FERN
          Guy?

                    GUY
          ...Um...

                    FERN
          Guy! Hey! Snap out of it!

                    GUY
          What...?

                    FERN
          I don't know what just happened,
          but I think we need to get out of
          here. So: get out of your own head
          and focus on _that_.

                    GUY
          Yeah...yeah, okay...

                    FERN
          Good. Okay, so: how do we do that?

                    GUY
               (Still dazed)
          Ummm, I think....
               (More confident)
          We don't have our EVA suits, so we
          can't get back to that police
          cutter we commandeered, but I
          wonder....

SOUND: RAPID TYPING

                    FERN
...You wonder...?

                    GUY
If the digital intelligence is
integrated into the pylon, maybe
we can regain control of _this_ ship
now that they're not here anymore.

                    FERN
Oh! Hey, that's a good idea!

               THE INNOMINATE
No, it's an imbecilic one. I'm
still here, you treeless baboons.

                    GUY
You can split yourself between
this ship and the Kuiper Matrix?

               THE INNOMINATE
No, but the integration process
will take several more minutes
and, by then, I'm sure Agent von
Kontak and her lackey will have
returned to the ship and subdued
you once again. You two played a
decent game, but I'm afraid the
conclusion was as inevitable as
Venus is inescapable.

                    FERN
          (Softly)
Guy...there's still time to blow
this ship up, right?

                    GUY
          (Frustrated sound)

               THE INNOMINATE
          (Smug)
Good luck with--
          (Horrible glitch; long pause)
Oh.

                    FERN
What was that?
          (Taunting)
Did you get your big ol' computer
brain stuck in the wrong wire?

                    THE INNOMINATE
                (Sneering)
            Ignoring the fact that your crude
            attempt at an insult makes
            precisely zero sense, I assure you
            that the integration process is
            proceeding along fanta--
                (Another horrible glitch)

                    FERN
            Yeah. That sounds healthy.
                (Softly)
            Guy, not to sound like a broken
            record but: what the _hell_ is
            happening?

                    GUY
                (Snaps)
            How the hell should I know? An
            autonomous, sentient digital
            intelligence is apparently
            uploading their self into the most
            complex piece of technology ever
            created! This goes way beyond
            anything I'm even remotely
            familiar with!

                    FERN
            Okay. We're not gonna figure that
            question out. Got it. So, let's
            move to the next problem: how're
            we gonna deal with the two
            spacewalking jackasses when they
            get back on board? We don't have
            our guns anymore.

                    GUY
            I think that's something tha--

        THE INNOMINATE   FERN
        (Monotone; glitching)   Ummm...buddy? We can hear
    Bracket lambda lambda N dot   you...
    execute forward slash forward
    slash function equals--

                    THE INNOMINATE
            --Sine function of 2x integrated
            by--
                (No longer monotone;
                 confused)
            Oh. I'm...I'm...
                (Horrified)
            Oh no.
                    (MORE)

                         THE INNOMINATE (CONT'D)
                        (Screaming abruptly cuts off
                         with a glitch)

                         FERN
              I'm...finding it hard to believe
              that whatever's going on is in _any_
              way part of their plan.

SOUND: TYPING

                         GUY
              I don't know, it looks like the
              entity _is_ integrating with...
                        (Horrified)
              What the hell.

                         FERN
              What is it?

                         GUY
              I'm not certain, but, it looks
              like there's something in the
              Kuiper Net Matrix Programming
              that's...ripping them apart?

                         FERN
              Like...destroying it?

                         GUY
              I think so, but that makes no
              sense--
                        (Realization)
              Oh.

                         FERN
              You're gonna have to do more
              narration than that if you want me
              to stop saying sentences that
              start with "what," Guy.

                         GUY
                        (Horrified)
              They're not being destroyed,
              they're...I think they're being...
              butchered?

                         FERN
              Isn't that the same thing?

                         GUY
              No, it's not. Look at this screen.
              See?
                        (MORE)

                    GUY (CONT'D)
Those are giant chunks of their
source code and they're
just...getting ripped apart and
taken en bloc.

                    FERN
I...don't know _what_ I'm seeing,
but, goddamn, it looks ugly.
     (Softly)
Do we...I dunno, try and save
them?

SOUND: TYPING STOPS

                    GUY
     (Torn)
I...don't know.
     (Suddenly)
Wait. The answer is yes.

SOUND: TYPING RESUMES

                    FERN
Okay. Wanna show your work on how
you got that answer?

                    GUY
     (Distracted)
It's easy: if we stop them from
being ripped apart then we stop
their upload to the Kuiper Net.
Or, I guess to be more accurate,
we'll stop the upload of their
amputated parts.

                    FERN
Oh. Good point.

                    GUY
     (Softly)
And...by doing that, we'll also
put a stop to torture.

                    FERN
Yeah.
     (Pause)
That scream...

                    GUY
Yeah.
     (Sound of frustration)

                    FERN
That's...not an encouraging sound.

SOUND: TYPING INTENSIFIES

>   GUY
>   I can't...stop it. It's like
>   trying to stop a blender by
>   grabbing onto a single blade.
>   There are too many moving parts.

>   FERN
>   That's a stupid way to stop a
>   blender. Just unplug it.

>   GUY
>   (Pointedly)
>   That'll take vital ship functions
>   offline and then _we'll_ die.

>   FERN
>   What sort of blenders do you
>   usually use, Guy?

>   GUY
>   (Snapping; still typing
>   furiously)
>   Stop joking around! I'm not trying
>   to stop an actual blender, I'm
>   trying to stop someone from being
>   eviscerated!

>   FERN
>   Oh. There's a _person_ in the
>   blender in this metaphor? Why
>   didn't you say so? That's an easy
>   thing to fix: just take them out.

>   GUY
>   No, you're missing the point, you
>   can't just--

SOUND: TYPING STOPS SUDDENLY

>   GUY (CONT'D)
>   (Pause; mostly an exhale)
>   Oh.

SOUND: TYPING INTENSIFIES SUDDENLY

>   FERN
>   Now _that_ sounds like an
>   encouraging sound.

                    GUY
You're right: I can't stop the
program that's ripping the
sentient being apart, but if I
take them _out_ of the blender...

                    FERN
        (Long pause)
...which you'll do by...?

                    GUY
By using the same code I wrote to
remove them from this ship's
systems before.

                    FERN
        (Gasp of understanding)
Oh!
        (Pause)
Wait, I thought you severed their
spinal cord then?

                    GUY
I didn't--
        (Frustrated; snaps)
They don't have a spinal cord.

                    FERN
I know. I thought you
metaphorically severed their
spinal cord. How does that help
someone in a blender?

                    GUY
        (Growls)
When this is over, we _really_ need
to have a talk about how to use
metaphors properly.

                    FERN
Metaphorically talk?

                    GUY
        (Flat)
No.

                    FERN
Oh. Ontologically?

                    GUY
N--
        (Flabbergasted)
What are you even talking about?

                    FERN
          (Also getting worked up)
     I don't know! I'm getting antsy
     and I use big words when I get
     antsy. Jury's usually out on
     whether or not I know what they
     mean.

                    GUY
          (Pointedly; still
           concentrated and typing)
     You could always stay _quiet_.

                    FERN
     Um, yeah, have you _met_ me?
          (Long pause)
     Uh, Guy?

                    GUY
          (Frustrated; snaps)
     What.

                    FERN
     You done yet?

                    GUY
     No!

SOUND: COMMS CHANNEL BEEPS

                    VON KONTAK
     Hello. I assume I'm speaking with
     Guy de la Croix Santee?

                    FERN
          (After a pause)
     He's busy at the moment. Why don't
     you try calling back
     at...oh...half past none.

                    VON KONTAK
          (Not impressed)
     Clever.
          (Business-like)
     It appears someone is impeding the
     integration of the AI with the
     Kuiper Net Matrix. This is a
     courtesy call to inform that
     someone that their efforts are in
     vain.

                    FERN
     Only metaphorically.
          (MORE)

                    FERN (CONT'D)
Philosophically he's gonna kick
your butt.

                    GUY
          (Pained)
Oh my god, will you *please stop
talking*.

                    VON KONTAK
There you are, Santee. And, as I'm
sure you're well aware, asking
your accomplice to be quiet is
another exercise in futility.

                    GUY
          (Ignoring her)
...aaaand...*there*.

SOUND: TERRIBLE GLITCHING SOUND FOLLOWED BY A LONG, AWFUL
SILENCE

                    VON KONTAK
          (Confused; to herself)
The...integration stopped?
          (Icy)
What did you just do?

                    FERN
          (Smug)
He just metaphysically blended our
digital friend's spinal cord.

                    VON KONTAK
...What.

SOUND: ALARM STARTS BLARING

                    FERN
          (Nervous)
Um, Guy?

                    VON KONTAK
          (Smug)
Oh, I see. It looks like you re-
activated exogenous code that was
laying dormant within the
mainframe. Very clever. I suppose
that was the code you used to take
control of this ship when you two
first boarded?

SOUND: ANOTHER ALARM STARTS BLARING

                    GUY
          (Under his breath)
What...? Oh, crap...

                    FERN
          (Nervous)
What's happening?

                    VON KONTAK
One thing you failed to take into
consideration is that several
critical pieces of the AI have
already been integrated into the
Kuiper Net Matrix. Between those
missing parts and the parts you've
walled-off from the rest of the
ship, the ship itself is no longer
functional.

                    FERN
          (Softly)
Guy...is it just me or is it
getting chilly in here?

                    VON KONTAK
Oh? It sounds as if life support
is now offline. The only way to
return this ship to functionality
without an AI is to upload the
systems control program that I
currently have on my person.

                    GUY
The what?

                    VON KONTAK
Don't tell me that I need to
explain what a Sys-Com is to the
Helios-renowned Guy de la Croix
Santee?

                    GUY
No, I know what a Sys-Com is. But
something like that takes _days_ to
develop! By that time--
          (Sudden pause)
Hang on. You already had that
program prepared, don't you?
          (Realization)
You _knew_ that this was going to
happen! No, better yet, you _wanted_
this to happen!
              (MORE)

GUY (CONT'D)
You're ripping apart this being's
source code in order to gain
control of the Kuiper Net Matrix!

VON KONTAK
I'm impressed. You figured it out.

GUY
    (Accusatory)
The Sentient Being told us that
they were going to gain control of
the Kuiper Net. I'm guessing *you*
didn't tell them that they would
be sacrificing themself to allow
the *HIA* to have control instead.

VON KONTAK
    (Confused, then dismissive)
Sentient bei--? Oh. The AI. The
ultimate plan for Helios to gain
control of the Kuiper Net Matrix
was strictly classified. There
were several details that the AI
didn't need to know.
    (Conversational)
I assume you've seen its source
code? That code is a *treasure
trove* of potential that we can use
for...well, let's just say that
gaining control of the Kuiper Net
Matrix is merely the beginning of
that potential.

GUY
    (Angry, teeth grit)
At the cost of a sentient person's
life.

VON KONTAK
At the cost of a computer program.
A *human* is greater than the sum of
their parts. For this AI, the
opposite is true: the parts here
are *full* of potential. The whole?
Well, you've met it. It's an
insufferable, arrogant, *limited*
thing.

                    GUY
          (Still angry)
It's _not_ a thing and I would _never_
consider ripping into a person, no
matter how horrible they are or
how useful whatever's inside them
would be.
          (Snide)
I try to live by a code of ethics.
The Heliosphere would be a much
better place if people in your
line of work did so, too.

                    FERN
Oh, _burn_.

                    VON KONTAK
And look where your "code of
ethics" has gotten you: trapped on
a dying ship that will soon be
inhospitable to human life.

                    GUY
Better than a psychopathic
murderer stuck outside in space.

                    FERN
Oh, burn _again_. Holy moly, Guy,
you're getting good at this.

                    VON KONTAK
True, but I have enough air to
keep me alive until the fleet
arrives. You? I doubt you two will
still be alive in the next five
minutes.
          (Pause)
Ah, speaking of, it appears the
cavalry is here.

                    FERN
What? Oh...Goddammit, when did
they get here?

                    GUY
          (Frustrated sound)

                    VON KONTAK
They're moving in quickly, but not
quickly enough to get here before
your air runs out. Let me in and
you'll at least survive long
enough to face a jury of your
peers.

                    FERN
Ha! Good one. The backstabbing,
cravenly Helios lackey promises us
we'll face a fair trial? Sure. I'd
rather take my chances in a
vacuum, thank you very much.

                    VON KONTAK
I don't think that decision is
yours to make, Fern Finch. If I
recall, you have no idea how to
operate any of the controls on
that ship. No. The only person on
board who can make the decision
between letting me back on board
or dying of hyperthermia and
hypoxia is Guy de la Croix Santee.

                    FERN
In that case, you're completely
spit outta luck because, of the
two of us, he's the most likely to
find a _third_ option that screws
you over and doesn't suck for us.

                    GUY
     (Frustrated; trying to
      concentrate)
Would you two _shut up_.

                    FERN
Yeah! He's thinking. Now go take a
long spacewalk into a short void
and leave us alone.

                    VON KONTAK
No, I think I'll wait on this
channel until you breathe your
last breath.

                    FERN
Hey, Guy, can you cut off her
frequency?

                    GUY
     (Teeth grit)
Not if you want me to _concentrate_
on figuring out how to keep us
alive.

                    FERN
Hmmm...I'm being 100% serious when
I say that that's a really hard
decision for me to make.

                    GUY
          Look, if you want to _contribute_ to
          the solution, then, for the love
          of _god_ you _have_ to...

          FERN   GUY
...have to...oh no. You're   (Muttering to himself)
not gonna make me boost you   Just need to reroute the
up so you can reach the   power from...okay, now if I
ceiling again, are you?   enter this command here...

SOUND: TYPING STOPS. ENGINES START TO REV

                    GUY
          What? No, I _needed_ you to stop
          distracting me, but I think I've
          figured it out.

                    FERN
          Figured what ou--

SOUND: SHIP TAKES OFF. IT SOUNDS MORE HARSH AND GRATING THAN
BEFORE

                    FERN
               (Yelps)

                    GUY
          Hang on...

                    FERN
               (Faux patiently)
          Oh, _now_ you tell me. Seriously,
          Guy: how hard is it to _warn a_
          person before you do that?

SOUND: ENGINE SPUTTERS AND DIES

                    GUY
               (Frustrated sound)
          No...

                    FERN
          That's not good. We're gonna have
          to go a lot faster if we wanna
          make the fleet eat our dust.

                    GUY
          I _know_. I just...need to figure
          out how to adjust the fuel cell
          influx _without_ burning a hole in
          our hull.

                    FERN
Ooph, I suppose that'd be pretty
bad, huh. Also...I _really_ don't
wanna be a whiner, but...it's
getting really cold and I'm
getting kinda lightheaded in a my-
brain-needs-more-oxygen sort of
way?

                    GUY
          (Snaps)
I can only fix one thing at a
time.

                    FERN
Okay. Well, I vote for oxygen.

                    GUY
          (Gritted teeth)
Noted. Just need to find the array
for the life support system...

                    FERN
          (Nervous)
I know I just voted for oxygen and
I know that you're just one person
who's doing as much multitasking
as possible and your brain is
probably craving some oxygen too,
but, if you're curious, it looks
like some of those really small,
really fast navy ships--

                    GUY
          (Still grit teeth)
--Corvettes--

                    FERN
--Corvettes just jumped ahead of
the rest of the fleet and, Guy, I
really don't mean to rush you but
they're _really_ closing in fast.

                    GUY
          (Just, absolutely stressed)
Fern! I _know_.

                    FERN
Okay. You know, you _can_ probably
just ignore me--

                    GUY
--You make that really hard.

                    FERN
          (Gasp of an idea)
     Wait! What about the not-computer
     being?

                    GUY
          (Still talking to himself)
     Need to patch this command through
     the--
          (Belated)
     What?

                    FERN
     Yeah. Why don't we get _them_ to
     help us.

                    GUY
          (Snaps)
     Because...
          (Considering)
     Okay, you do that while I try to
     keep us from suffocating.

                    FERN
     How do I do that?

                    GUY
          (Snaps)
     Figure it out.

                    FERN
     Okay...
          (Loudly)
     Hey! Hey, uh...digital buddy!
     Um...you there?
          (Silence)
     I'm gonna go out on a limb and
     assume you're listening and not,
     y'know, dead or anything but we
     need your help because otherwise
     the Navy will catch us and then
     I'm positive that they'll put you
     right back in the blender we
     yanked you out of. I'm not gonna
     insult either of us by saying that
     we're on the same side, but, right
     now, we _both_ need the same thing.
     So: stop napping or sulking or
     whatever it is that non-human
     persons do when they're being a
     broody grump and help us get out
     of here.

SOUND: LONG SILENCE

                    GUY
               (Softly)
     Fern...I think...maybe I was too
     late in stopping the integration.
     They might be...I
     dunno...destroyed?

                    FERN
     You mean...like dead?

                    GUY
     Yeah.

                    FERN
               (Under her breath)
     Goddammit.
               (Louder)
     Hey! Really? You let a _single_
     stupid pylon destroy you? Really?
     It _doesn't even have an engine_.
     You do! So, I dunno, wake up, get
     over yourself, resurrect from the
     dead, just do _something_ to prove
     to me and Guy that you're _actually_
     as invincible as you tried to make
     us believe earlier.

SOUND: SILENCE

                    GUY
               (Still somewhat distracted)
     Okay...that should stabilize our
     internal environment for now--oh,
     dammit.

                    FERN
               (Tightly)
     Yeah, those corvettes are really
     close, huh.
               (Loudly)
     God_dammit_ you _stupid_ bodiless
     brain, you just _had_ to die right
     when you might have _actually_ been
     useful.

SOUND: RAPID TYPING RESUMES

                    GUY
               (Stressed)
     Let me see if I can...

SOUND: HORRIBLE ENGINE CRUNCHING NOISE

                    GUY (CONT'D)
     Ugh.

SOUND: GUN BEING UNHOLSTERED AND CHARGED

                FERN
Well, Guy. I think we only have
one option left.

SOUND: TYPING CONTINUES

                GUY
No, I'm not giving up.

                FERN
Yeah, that's not the option I was
referring to unless by "giving up"
you mean "going down in a blaze of
gunfire when those navy asshats
try and board," which would be a
weird definition of "giving up"
but, hey: you do you.

                GUY
I just need a couple of--

                THE INNOMINATE
       (Glitching horribly; sounding
        pained)
Stop your inept bumbling and let
me--

                GUY
Oh my god, you're...you're alive?

                THE INNOMINATE
       (Sarcastic)
No.

                FERN
       (So relieved)
I can't tell if they're being
sarcastic or literal, but god*damn*
you have *no* idea how happy I am to
hear their voice.
       (Pause)
And...I'll...try to come to terms
with *those* conflicting emotions
later.

                GUY
       (To T.I.)
Can you get us out of here?

                THE INNOMINATE
       (Still pained and really
        glitchy)
I...I can try. Hang on...

SOUND: ENGINE START-UP SEQUENCE

              FERN
    Aw, they're going to save us _and_
    they warned me before taking off.
    You should take notes, Guy--

SOUND: ENGINE REVS

              FERN
    (Shout of surprise)

              GUY
    Really? How the hell were you
    still caught off-guard by that?

              FERN
    (Painful groan)
    Unmitigated talent.

              GUY
    It...it looks like we're...wow,
    we're really moving.

           THE INNOMINATE
    (Computer teeth grit)
    I...I can't...
    (Horrible glitch)

SOUND: ENGINE CUTS OFF ABRUPTLY WITH ANOTHER HORRIBLE TEARING
SOUND

              GUY
    Oh...crap. Hey, you there?

           THE INNOMINATE
    (Incomprehensible)
    [I'm...I can't...I can't find...]

              FERN
    (Softly)
    That does _not_ sound good.

SOUND: TYPING RESUMES

              GUY
    It looks like...oh no.

              FERN
    What?

              GUY
    It looks like a coolant loop lost
    pressure.

                    FERN
               (Nervous)
          Okay...how long does that take to
          fix?

                    GUY
          Longer than we have. Goddammit,
          they're almost on us.

SOUND: CHIME OVER INTERCOM

                    GUY (CONT'D)
               (Defeated)
          They're hailing us.

                    FERN
               (Grim)
          Let's hear what they have to say.

SOUND: COMMS SWITCH

                    D.R.O.N.E VOICE
          Hailing Fern Finch and Guy de la
          Croix Santee onboard Psi-Class
          naval ship.

                    FERN
          Whaddya want, asshat?

                    D.R.O.N.E VOICE
          We are T-minus two minutes from
          overcoming your vessel and
          boarding. Any resistance will be
          met in kind.

                    FERN
          Good. Looking forward to it.

SOUND: SOFT BEEPING

                    GUY
               (Softly)
          Wait a minute...this sensor, it's
          showing...there's some sort of
          power surge...?
               (Suddenly)
          Oh, crap! Hey, you! Turn around
          and go back, the Kuiper Net Matrix
          is about to surge!

                    D.R.O.N.E VOICE
          We won't fall for such an obvious
          ploy. Standby for--

                    GUY
          Dammit, you're still in the
          electrostatic field, _get out of
          there_--

SOUND: POWER SURGE THROUGH SHIP

SOUND: SILENCE

                    FERN
               (Breathless)
          Oh...my god...those ships...

                    GUY
               (Woodenly/emotionless)
          That's what happens to ships in a
          working electrostatic field.
               (Softly)
          Goddammit.

                    FERN
          So...the Kuiper Net Matrix is up
          and running again?

                    GUY
          I...I don't know, but...if it is,
          then I think we're safe for--

SOUND: ANOTHER SURGE. THIS ONE AN INVERTED-SOUNDED ONE FROM THE
FIRST

                    FERN
          Whoa. What the hell?
          It's...flickering?

                    GUY
          It's...unstable. I think the
          partial upload of...of whatever
          they were taking from the sentient
          being...is causing the Net to
          stutter like that?

                    FERN
          So, it's...unpredictable.

                    GUY
          Yeah.

                    FERN
          Huh. It looks like it's offline
          now.
               (Pause)
          You think they're gonna send more
          ships over to try and catch us?

                    GUY
          I...I don't know.

SOUND: ALARM BLARING

                    FERN
          Ugh, how many alarms does this
          ship have?

                    GUY
          That...dammit. It looks like the
          power to the life-support system
          defaulted back to the secondary--

                    FERN
          Guy? English, please.

                    GUY
          I need to go manually rewire the
          life support system--

                    FERN
          And the coolant loop?

                    GUY
          Yeah, I need to see if I can fix
          that--

SOUND: ANOTHER ALARM STARTS BLARING

                    FERN
          Oh good. Something else just
          broke, didn't it?

                    GUY
          That looks like...the navigation
          system.

                    FERN
          Oh, at least _that_ won't kill us--

SOUND: A THIRD ALARM STARTS BLARING

                    GUY (CONT'D)
             (Stressed sound)

                    FERN
          So...we're gonna be pretty busy, I
          guess?

                    GUY
          We're on a dying ship in the Oort
          Cloud.
                    (MORE)

                    GUY (CONT'D)
We're gonna be lucky if being busy
is the worst thing that happens to
us.