

MAX EVERDRIVE

"The Hauntological Problem"

Episode #4

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COLD OPEN

INT. BREAKFAST TV STUDIO

A colourful, hopelessly cheerful TV studio is home to two equally smiley TV presenters, sitting on a couch. An ident at the lower-left identifies this as 'Channel 6's Large Breakfast'.

SMILING HOST A

My definitive ranking would probably be: Neil, then Louie, then Stretch, then Lance.

SMILING HOST B

Who are your favourite and least favourite Armstrongs? Call on our toll-free number and let us know! You could even win some Armstrong merchandise.

SMILING HOST A

And now: what if I were to tell you that scientists have found a cure for male pattern baldness?

SMILING HOST B

Well, know a lot of guys who'd be very relieved.

SMILING HOST A

Here on the Large Breakfast couch, we're joined by Dr. Anthony T. Barker, the creator of a new cure for male pattern baldness that could hit store shelves as soon as this August.

SMILING HOST B

August? Well that's just in time for all my hair to fall out! Hello, Dr. Barker!

Anthony T. Barker joins them on the couch. He looks uncomfortable.

ANTHONY T. BARKER

Thank you for having me here. I must point out that it isn't just me, this is actually the work of a large, multidisciplinary team.

SMILING HOST B
Dr. Barker, this is truly
incredible work!

Dr. Barker blushes.

ANTHONY T. BARKER
Oh, I wouldn't say that. In the
grand scheme of science, it's
nothing, really...

SMILING HOST A
Don't be so modest! Today is a
great victory for middle-aged men!

ANTHONY T. BARKER
Yeah, great. Just what middle-aged
men need. Another win.

SMILING HOST B
Exactly!

SMILING HOST A
And you have a live demonstration
for us today?

ANTHONY T. BARKER
That's right, yes, we've been doing
human clinical trials for some time
and the results so far are quite
encouraging.

SMILING HOST B
Well, everybody please give a warm
welcome to... Douglas!

The audience politely applauds as a man in his late forties enters from the left side of the studio. His hair is meticulously sculpted and really quite voluminous. But it doesn't look quite right. He sits down on the couch next to Anthony.

SMILING HOST A
Wow! It looks absolutely amazing!

SMILING HOST B
Can I touch it?

Douglas nods. They start touching his hair.

SMILING HOST A
This feels amazing! Dr. Barker, how
did you do it?

ANTHONY T. BARKER

Well, what you're seeing there is not actually human hair. We were able to engineer a fungus - a kind of pin mold - to grow chitinous hyphae that strongly resemble human hairs. It will anchor itself in empty hair follicles, so it can progressively replace lost hair while not interfering with your real hair.

SMILING HOST B

In English, please?

ANTHONY T. BARKER

It's a slender fungus that grows out of your scalp.

SMILING HOST A

Haha, in English, please?

ANTHONY T. BARKER

(annoyed)

It's a long, thin... mushroom.

There's something almost imperceptibly wrong with the fungus on Derek's head. It's moving. It's... writhing.

SMILING HOST A

Wow! Amazing! It's a living thing! Does this mean you have to feed it, like a pet?

ANTHONY T. BARKER

It does, actually. But it's engineered to subsist on pigment, so you'll be able to 'feed it' by giving it hair dye.

Derek is zoning out a bit. Barker gently elbows him and returns to attention. His hair is still moving, ever so slightly.

SMILING HOST B

So when can we expect to see this on store shelves?

ANTHONY T. BARKER

Well, our funders would really like it to be out as soon as possible!

(MORE)

ANTHONY T. BARKER (CONT'D)

But, nobody has ever done anything like this before, so I'm willing to predict it will be in extended clinical testing for the rest of the year. We want to make sure it's 100% safe to use. So try not to go bald until then.

SMILING HOST A

Thank you, Anthony. And good luck with your mushrooms!

ANTHONY T. BARKER

(being drowned out)

It's not just my mushroom, it's the work of a large, multidisciplinary...

The studio applause completely drowns him out.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. MUSEUM OF EARTH CULTURE

Merrick, Dog and Zoltran are standing in a darkened room.

MERRICK

Okay, three, two, one...

He hits the lights button. They're standing in a room about the size of a hairdresser's. Every wall is covered in human memorabilia, from sports jerseys to random family photos to artwork (of mixed quality) to big advertisements, pages from books, even wallpaper. There's also lines of Perspex display cases filled with more junk, of approximately the same quality. It looks like there's a few more rooms, one says 'seminar room' on the door and the other has a list of countries. Everything has a lengthy caption on it, one in English and one in standard galactic.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Ta-dah!

Dog and Zoltran peer into some of the cabinets.

DOG

Well, I gotta hand it to you - this is pretty cool.

ZOLTRAN

No it isn't. This cabinet's full of junk. I could have found this in a garbage can.

MERRICK

Found. Past tense.

Dog wanders past a collection of 9/11 memorial postcards that say 'never forget' and an onion in a case with a label reading 'Soviet Onion'.

DOG

I feel like an anglo-saxon in a museum about anglo-saxons. Like somebody's come and taken all my soiled underwear and broken tools and made a shrine to them.

MERRICK

What's an anglo-saxon?

DOG

Uh, they were like, between cave-people and normal people. And they lived in houses made of shit and sticks.

MERRICK

Fascinating...

Merrick writes this down.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Actually, that reminds me, I need one more thing clarifying. What did F.R.I.E.N.D.S stand for?

DOG

What? It doesn't stand for anything.

MERRICK

(disappointed)

Then why did they put dots in it? Dammit. I spent weeks working on that one.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Zoltran wanders past a case filled with Wii Sports DVDs, IKEA instruction booklets, and rolls of toilet paper.

ZOLTRAN

Man, this is old. A ZX spectrum?
How long have you been collecting
garbage?

MERRICK

Uh, not that long. Like maybe 10
years? But at the start I was just
casually into it. Now, of course, I
have every Garfield annual.

He motions to the Garfield Corner, which does indeed house every Garfield annual, plus the unreleased Garfield 'Birth Comic'.

DOG

So aliens knew about Earth for 10
years before the incident?

MERRICK

No, dude. The galactic community
knew for almost 100. All those
radio waves and stuff. But only
those who lived nearby were really
'up to date' on Earth culture.
Speed of light and all that.

DOG

It kinda freaks me out, the idea
that aliens were listening to all
of our media. Like, if we'd known
someone was listening, we might not
have done it. Why didn't you ever,
y'know, say hi?

MERRICK

I don't know. I couldn't... It's
hard to put it into words. They're
almost not precise enough.

Zoltran enters Pepsi Corner. It's blue, and has possible can of Pepsi, and every Pepsi variant, including Crystal Pepsi. It also has merch featuring Pepsi Man, the horrible, eyeless, mouthless, earless, muscled-up chrome man.

ZOLTRAN

What's with all the Pepsi stuff?

MERRICK

This museum is part-funded by
Pepsi.

DOG

Pepsi still exist?

MERRICK

Still exist? Man, they're buying a
planet soon, I think. It's gonna be
called 'Planet Pepsi'.

ZOLTRAN

Well it better be paying the bills.
This is an eyesore.

Zoltran points to an ad that says 'gravitational pull of
Pepsi'

MERRICK

Pepsi pays most of our operating
costs right now. We're also
splitting the proceeds from the
gift shop 20/40.

DOG

20/40?

MERRICK

Yeah.

DOG

Who gets the other 40?

MERRICK

Other 40?

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR

A SLENDER ALIEN is walking down the corridor, carrying a
briefcase. He stops at a receptacle on the wall, opens it,
and empties the contents of the briefcase - an avalanche of
canadian dollar bills. In a cavern below, an obese goblin is
sitting atop a pile of canadian money, jamming fifty loonie
bills into its mouth and gurgling.

BACK TO:

INT. MUSEUM OF EARTH CULTURE SEMINAR ROOM

It looks like any other seminar room, except for the seating, which is designed to accommodate aliens of different dimensions.

MERRICK

Now, we should be having our grand opening in a few days, and we'll be kicking it off with an evening of seminars on Earth culture. As you two are two of the last remaining Earthlings on the station, would you be willing to prepare some presentations? They can be on anything.

ZOLTRAN

Hell yea, dude.

DOG

I don't know, Merrick. I think I'd just bring the mood down.

MERRICK

Please? C'mon. I'll give you one copy of any Garfield annual.

DOG

I don't want Garfield annuals.

MERRICK

Please! You're the coolest earthling I know! You're always sad about stuff that I don't fully understand! You laugh at stuff that isn't funny! You even sleep! I don't have any idea what that's like! And despite what you might think, people DO care. You know what they say - a stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet!

Dog looks around at the mountains of garbage from a dead world, cabinets and glass boxes full of detritus. Like a hoarder house, everything has been saved, regardless of value. The worthless, the tacky. Perhaps a realistic representation of Earth culture, but a poor one.

ZOLTRAN

A stranger is just a friend you haven't met yet?

MERRICK

I read it on the side of a tube of tennis balls.

DOG

What if people don't like it? What if they think all of this is junk? What if it was really pointless to save all this stuff?

Merrick thinks for a minute.

MERRICK

Come with me.

They lead Dog over to the corner of the room, next to a small exhibit featuring a glass case, a cassette recorder, and an illustration of a bird. Merrick pushes the button, and a recording starts to play. The chirping of crickets, then the sound of a bird song. Sounds a little like 'twi-to-wu'. Twi-to-wo. The bird's calls have an odd, echoey quality to them. Twi-to-wo.

DOG

What is it?

MERRICK

The song of the Kaua'i 'ō'ō. A bird that lived in Hawaii.

The bird continues to sing its lonely song.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

This recording is of the last Kaua'i 'ō'ō ever to exist. The whole species went extinct some time in the eighties. The song you hear is a mating call, sung by a male. The pauses are for the female. She's supposed to sing back.

The tape winds back and repeats the sample again. The song is haunting.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

I can't imagine it. To be truly alone. To call out to someone who can never answer.

Twi-to-wo.

MERRICK (CONT'D)
 But someone recorded it. And
 because of that, I got to hear its
 beautiful song. The final song of
 the Kaua'i 'ō'ō.

Twì-to-wo. Dog decides that he'll do the seminar after all.

INT. MUSEUM OF EARTH CULTURE

The museum is open, and seems to be quite the success. There's a banner saying 'grand opening' hanging outside. A motley assortment of aliens are wandering around. Two insectoid aliens are looking at a picture of an earth mantis. The first points at it.

BUG ALIEN #1
 Whoah. She's cute, huh?

BUG ALIEN #2
 Uh...

BUG ALIEN #1
 What?

BUG ALIEN #2
 Well, I dunno. Maybe.

BUG ALIEN #1
 C'mon. Say yes. Humour me this
 once.

BUG ALIEN #2
 It's hard for me to say, man. Do
 they have a picture of her
 proboscis?

BUG ALIEN #1
 Her proboscis?

BUG ALIEN #2
 Yeah.

BUG ALIEN #1
 No.

BUG ALIEN #2
 How can I say whether she's cute if
 I haven't seen her proboscis?

Dog, Merrick and Zoltran are standing at the rear of the room.

DOG

Wow. So many people turned up.

MERRICK

Dude, I'm so psyched. This place is like Earth's greatest roadside attractions, but on a galactic scale! Like Stonehenge, the Denver Demon Horse, or Belgium! Hey, are you two ready with your presentations?

DOG

I'm kind of nervous. I didn't think this many people would turn up.

ZOLTRAN

I was fabricated ready.

INT. MUSEUM OF EARTH CULTURE SEMINAR ROOM

MONTAGE

Zoltran takes the stand for the first talk. An image of Carrot Top appears on the screen.

ZOLTRAN

The first term of President Carrot Top was marked by political turbulence and scandals far in excess of anything that had so far been seen in this generation.

An image of an old Carrot Top, sitting in the white house in a vaguely presidential Hawaiian shirt appears onscreen.

ZOLTRAN (CONT'D)

After beating out the incumbent democratic president Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson by an extremely narrow negative thirty-seven percent, Mr. Top entered the white house carrying nothing but a toilet seat and an enormous oversized novelty pen. His first signed piece of legislation was the enormously controversial 'Prop Prop', which, among other things, is cited as one of the main causes of the second great depression, or as we now call it, the Even Greater Depression. The other main cause, of course, was the space butter elevator.

Merrick is up next. His screen displays a complicated diagram full of Garfield media from different eras.

MERRICK

Garfield can be broken down into five ages - the baroque era, starting in 1978, the classical era, starting in 1888, the romantic era, starting in 1998 and the modern era, which started just a few short years before the incident when Jim Davis was tragically killed while ballooning with former U.S. vice president Mike Pence. In 1995, Garfield's continuity was irreparably split by the video game 'Garfield: Caught in the Act', in which Garfield travels through time. This, of course, created both the Garfield TV and movie show continuities as well as the Garfield-free timeline, also called the 'Swedish Garfield' timeline.

The screen now shows a picture of Swedish Garfield, who is talking to a blond-haired Jon. Jon is asking 'who ate all the mayonnaise?'.
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 The screen now shows a picture of Swedish Garfield, who is talking to a blond-haired Jon. Jon is asking 'who ate all the mayonnaise?'.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

As you may have seen, the Swedish Garfield timeline, or Gustav Timeline owes its name to Gustav, an identical-looking Swedish cat whose only difference from Garfield is that he loves mayonnaise instead of Lasagna and smokes a pipe.

Dog is almost ready to take the lectern. Merrick is introducing himself. Standing at the front of the room, he practices his breathing.

DOG (V.O.)

Breathe in... 1, 2, 3, 4 5...
 breathe out...

The crowd politely applauds. He walks up to the lectern. On the screen are a whole bunch of pictures of Luke Skywalker.

DOG

Bigger Luke is a slightly larger manifestation of Luke Skywalker who appears rarely in the original Star Wars trilogy.

(MORE)

DOG (CONT'D)

Bigger Luke's exact height is not specified but he is believed to be a couple of centimetres taller than Luke Prime. Now, this is not my original research, this comes from the Bigger Luke internet community (Lukers, for short), most of whom are now dead. Here's a comparison of two stills from the same scene in Episode 4. Luke never stands next to a ruler or an object with known height, so we typically measure him relative to Han Solo, except in the case of NHPs (no Han pics). And as you can see, in the second frame, Luke is noticeably bigger, even though his posture and the camera positioning are roughly the same. Indeed, there are TONS of pictures like this on the internet, all over the original Star Wars trilogy. And I know what you're thinking, but no, it can't all be explained away with perspective.

Zoltran. The screen is now showing a series of technical drawings depicting an enormous space elevator.

ZOLTRAN

The humans undertook an extremely sophisticated enterprise, to construct an elevator that could be used to eject garbage into space (see exhibit 2.23 for an index of human space garbage). Previous efforts to launch garbage into space had been few and far between, due to Earth's high gravity, and the relative tight-fistedness of human leaders. This new space elevator stood at 70,000 kilometers tall, was constructed solely from carbon nano-tubes, and represented one of the earthlings' premier engineering accomplishments. Over 9 years from conception to first launch, it was the product of a collaboration spanning almost every geographical region, except for the state of Nebraska, USA (see exhibit 4.19).

(MORE)

ZOLTRAN (CONT'D)

Late in the project, a health and safety committee identified several health code violations in the proposed design, most notably the lack a way to repair damage to the lift from the exterior.

The screen changes to show the side of the elevator, and rungs of a ladder.

ZOLTRAN (CONT'D)

To combat this problem, a maintenance ladder was installed on the outside of the elevator. The ladder was comprised of 229,659,000 rungs and would take a skilled technician approximately 2.5 years to climb. Unfortunately, more problems made themselves apparent. The technician could take basic clothing and a 'hanging tent' from which they could sleep, and oxygen recycling technology was sufficient to last the full length of the trip. However, humans require a near-constant stream of nutrients in order to survive, the weight of which would have almost certainly over-encumbered the technician.

Merrick. Regrettably, the Garfield timeline is still on screen.

MERRICK

You'll notice that I used the word 'chronologically' there, and there's a reason for that. You notice that the arrows on this chart are going the opposite way to time?

Merrick advances the slides, and the screen shows a progression of Garfield character designs over time.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

That's because Garfield is written in reverse chronological order. As the series goes on, Garfield becomes smaller, cuter and less world-weary. I have heard rumours that before his untimely death, Jim Davis was planning to end Garfield with a series of comics showing the titular cat being born.

(MORE)

MERRICK (CONT'D)

But that's all speculation. Nobody can know for sure.

Merrick advances the slides again, to show an image of a synthetic 'Garfield Cat' comic strip. Garfield is thinking 'Monday is undesirable', and then Jon admonishes him, saying 'Feline, did you partake in violence against the Canine?' to which Garfield responds 'No. It was another creature.'

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Garfield ran for a few months after Davis died - they replaced him with a computer. But the resultant strip, which was renamed 'Garfield Cat', never recaptured the magic of the original comic. Truly, I wish I could travel back in time and experience all of Garfield for the first time once more. But I can't, so I'm doing the next-best thing and reading all of Nancy.

Dog is back. The screen now shows two diagrams, one saying 'Hamill Hypthesis' and one saying 'Canon Luke'.

DOG

There are two reasons why Bigger Luke might exist. One, the Hammill hypothesis, states that Mark Hammill had an uncredited stand-in. This is a conspiracy theory. There's no evidence for it. The second is that Luke is bigger within the fiction of the films, and there are strong in-universe hints at this.

He switches to clips from the film.

DOG (CONT'D)

First, after his training, Obi-Wan tells him that he's 'taking his first steps into a larger world'. This either means that the world is bigger, because Luke is smaller, or he has taken his first steps into the world of Bigger Luke. Secondly, when Luke arrives in Leia's cell, she asks 'Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?'. This is Leia's thinly-veiled acknowledgement that there is a size discrepancy between different manifestations of Luke.

(MORE)

DOG (CONT'D)

It could be viewed as evidence for Smaller Luke (after all, why didn't she say 'aren't you approximately the correct height for a stormtrooper?') but it seems weird that the irregular manifestation of Luke would get the majority of the screen time. Next: when Luke is fleeing the Cloud City, in The Empire Strikes Back, we get this shot of Lando scrutinizing Luke. Isn't his expression saying 'wait, is he bigger?'. Lando has a keen eye, perhaps the keenest in the galaxy, and I think he is the most likely to notice a change in size between his two viewings of Luke. Finally, there is a minor character in A New Hope named Biggs.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Zoltran is back.

ZOLTRAN

Fortunately, this nutritional problem was also spotted before work on the elevator ceased. A committee was assigned the task of devising a cost-effective solution. It was calculated that the most energy-dense foodstuff that could be used was butter, an oily wet paste made from the fatty excretions of an unrelated species. The initial plan was to store the butter in a series of caches which could be replenished from a working elevator. However, the extreme temperature and pressure differentials made this difficult, and the proposed 'butter docking procedure' (BuDP) would have been complex and prone to failure.

The screen shows a hastily-modified elevator with some kind of pipe running up the side of it.

ZOLTRAN (CONT'D)

A new system was devised called the 'butter transport system' (BuTS), in which pressurized liquid butter was pumped from the bottom of the elevator to the top. This allowed for liquid butter to be instantly dispensed into the technician's mouth at almost any point on the ladder, with a simple attachment procedure, and no need for replenishment and maintenance of butter caches. The only problem with this system was the butter pressure required, especially at the base of the elevator. Liquid butter exerts approximately 1 earth atmosphere of pressure every 5 cubic meters. At the very base, the liquid butter exerted 20,000,000,000,000 Pascals of pressure on the butter transport system (BuTS) butter-conducting vessel (BuCV).

The scene changes to show a destroyed floridian city.

ZOLTRAN (CONT'D)

On November 30th (see exhibit 12 for an explanation of months) of that year, during routine maintenance, the BuTS near the base of the elevator ruptured. The extreme force of the escaping butter instantly vapourized the technician and a large segment of the elevator. Luckily, the elevator itself crashed into the sea, triggering only a small tsunami. However, the BuTS had no automatic shutoff system, and dispensed well over 340,000,000 metric tons of butter across Florida at near-relativistic speeds. There were in excess of 20,000 casualties, and most of western Orlando was destroyed. The elevator project was cancelled the following year, and NASA, the organisation behind the elevator, was disbanded. No surviving human space junk dates from beyond this point.

Merrick again. He's showing Garfield comics.

MERRICK

Now, you may also notice a split in the timeline here. This split is not a time travel split, instead it signifies the difference between reality and the imagined world in Garfield's head. In 1988, a story arc showed Garfield slowly starving to death in an abandoned house. At the end of the arc, Garfield begins to imagine the other characters, suggesting that all comics from this point onwards (chronologically) take place solely inside Garfield's mind. The world in which Garfield dies becomes the Heathcliff universe.

Dog is back, showing visual aids from Star Wars.

DOG

Now, why would Luke change in size in-universe?

(MORE)

DOG (CONT'D)

Well, he could've been cloned via the force, and the clone could be bigger to be more intimidating. In the extended universe, Luke already has two clones, one called Luuke and the other called Luuuke. And Luuuke does look slightly bigger. He could be resizing due to his own force sensitivity, although we never see him resize on screen. He could be a biological clone created by Uncle Owen. Owen wanted a Luke that would be more robust, for the purpose of moisture farming, but he decided that a huge, overly muscle Luke would be unsightly, so he compromised on a slightly bigger Luke. Or maybe, just maybe, Bigger Luke is a clone created by R2D2, who knew everything that was going on and decided to keep a slightly bigger clone of Luke as a backup and occasionally swap him out in dangerous situations. In this theory it goes that Luke is a single consciousness with two bodies, and RD2D swaps them at will. To maintain parity, he also cuts off one of the Luke's hands after the Empire Strikes Back. So what happens to Bigger Luke? He dies. Yoda learns of Bigger Luke and decides to use Bigger Luke to train Luke Prime on Dagobah. The second Luke in the Darth Vader suit you see on Dagobah isn't a hallucination or a dream, it's actually Bigger Luke, who sacrificed himself in order to teach Luke Prime a lesson about violence or something. He brought this vital revelation to Luke Prime, and that's what enables Luke Prime to resist the temptation of the dark side and win the day at the end of the film.

END MONTAGE

INT. MUSEUM OF EARTH CULTURE SEMINAR ROOM

Dog, Merrick and Zoltran are at the front, forming a sort of panel.

MERRICK

Thank you all for listening, this concludes the presentations for today. We will now be holding a short Q&A. Not all of you have hands to raise, but you can still ask questions by pushing the buttons in front of you, or moving it with your mind, or expelling friendly gases onto it, or whatever.

There's a buzz from the audience. A few camera flashes go off.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

You, with the tubes.

QUESTION ASKER

Hey, do you know anything about American culture?

A pause.

MERRICK

Dog?

DOG

I dunno.

MERRICK

I've seen a lot of movies, so I'll try. It was kind of like a crazy, every man for himself race to the finish line, you never stopped or looked back, you just kept running.

QUESTION ASKER

What was the goal?

MERRICK

The goal was to get shot. If you were lucky you would get shot in a school when you were like twelve. That way you'd die for something you really believed in. Some people went their whole lives and never got shot. But here's the twist: if they caught you shooting someone else, they took you away and they killed you by some other means, so you lost also. It was like this careful balancing act.

(MORE)

MERRICK (CONT'D)

If you were good enough, and selfless enough, you got enlisted in the military, which was like a free pass for shooting people, and everyone told you that you were great. You just had to hope that you went off to some other country and that someone shot you before you shot them. Y'know they always congratulate the poor bastard who came back alive, but it's more like a consolation prize, the real winner is the guy who comes back in a plastic bag, they say he's a hero, they build a big brick with his name on it.

More questions come in from the audience.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

You, there, with the tentacles. Oh, that's an arm? Sorry, arms. Sorry.

QUESTION ASKER

Why do you think such a weird and interesting culture developed on Earth, and not on an objectively better planet, such as Gracilis Five, the Planet of the Sphere People?

MERRICK

Ah, screw those people. All they care about is making things round. Is it round? Good. Is it not round? Make it rounder. It's boring. Earthlings, on the other hand, don't have a purpose, and that makes things a lot more interesting.

ZOLTRAN

I don't know if that's entirely true, there's lots of species that don't have a purpose and they're still boring.

MERRICK

Hm. Maybe purpose is the wrong word, then. A correct way of being or doing?

ZOLTRAN

What do you mean?

MERRICK

Take this joke: how do you make a turtle fast?

ZOLTRAN

You... increase 4-velocity tensor.

MERRICK

You take away his food.

Merrick smiles. Dog groans.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Eh? Eh? Do you get it?

ZOLTRAN

Is that your actual answer or did you just want to tell your turtle joke?

MERRICK

No, man. That's my actual answer. Like, my species doesn't have words. We exchange ideas by encoding them into carefully-constructed lipid bilayer membranes. It took me a long time to learn words. Every time I try and put an idea into words, I feel like I'm losing a part of it. Somehow.

DOG

I never thought of it like that, but you're right. You can do the grease thing. Even Zoltran has IPX networking. But most earthlings can never know what it's like to be another earthling. We can only see one another indirectly. A true connection to another person is rare, and very beautiful.

MERRICK

We've got time for maybe one more question.

Silence for a second. Merrick scans the audience.

MERRICK (CONT'D)

How about the guy at the back made of pure energy? Sorry we couldn't get any energy chairs, by the way.

ENERGY GUY

It's fine. Why didn't anyone make contact with this species earlier?

Merrick says nothing.

DOG

Merrick?

MERRICK

Dog asked me the same question earlier and I didn't know. I still don't know. We spent decades listening to humans and we never made contact. Perhaps we were afraid of what their reaction would be. We just kept putting it off. Have you seen the golden record?

ENERGY GUY

No?

MERRICK

I feel a pang of guilt over it every time I ooze past. I still think the golden record is one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen. All that music, art, culture, language, even little slices of nature, like animal calls and crackling thunder. It was all so amazing. I'll never forget what it said. It said 'this is a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours'. Kind of ironic, now that I think about it. You guys were so lonely out there. The record was almost like a cry for help. Like, someone, anyone, talk to us. We're cool. We promise. Well, I think you're cool, but most people definitely did not. All those nuclear bombs and war crimes and stuff. Golden record didn't have any nuclear bombs on it. Like, maybe if we had made contact, none of this stuff would have happened.

DOG
Don't beat yourself up, Merrick.
You did good.

MERRICK
Thanks.

Dog sighs, and mutters to himself.

DOG
That damn bird.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

INT. DOG'S KITCHEN

Dog, Zoltran and Merrick are all drinking tea. Well, Dog is drinking tea, the others are just looking bemusedly at the teas dog has poured for them.

ZOLTRAN

You know, I think that went pretty well.

DOG

I'm just glad somebody else cares about Bigger Luke.

ZOLTRAN

I don't care about Bigger Luke. I actually talked about important political events and there you were talking about Bigger Luke and Garfield, bullshit.

Dog is holding a polaroid picture. It's of himself, Merrick and Zoltran at the panel. He never looks quite right in photos, but it doesn't matter. It's a nice picture.

MERRICK

That stuff you said about pain. Was that for real?

DOG

Yeah. Well, I think so. I've had a lot of time to think, recently.

MERRICK

I wish there was some way I could help.

ZOLTRAN

Me too.

DOG

Thanks. It's been good just to have something to do these past few weeks.

Merrick opens the fridge.

MERRICK

And now, my peace du resistance...
I baked a cake!

Merrick takes it out of the fridge. It's a bit deflated in the middle, and it seems to be covered in fondant footballs and other random decorations, but it's a pretty decent looking sponge cake. Dog takes a piece and bites into it with some uncertainty.

DOG
(eating)
You know, this is pretty good!

MERRICK
Thanks! I made it with my own oil.

DOG
(gagging)
What?

END OF SHOW