

[Dramatic science-fiction music plays, like the text crawl at the beginning of Star Wars]

NARRATOR: It is a period of civil war. The rebellion against the sinister and corrupt Federated Alliance grows stronger, and the fate of the galaxy hangs in the balance. Now, Rebel Emissary Pleck Decksetter and his intrepid crew travel the farthest reaches of the galaxy to explore astounding new worlds, discover their heroic destinies, and meet weird bug creatures and stuff. This is [echoing] Mission to Zyxx.

[Music becomes more dramatic and trumpet-y, then fades away]

[electronic noises]

C-53: You know, I gotta say, I know we don't need to have it read until the book club meeting tonight, but I really enjoyed *It's the Stars' Fault*.

DAR: [gasps] I loved it! I just can't stop thinking about it.

C-53: Yeah. Me as well.

PLECK: When did you guys find time to read it? I just got started.

DAR: I couldn't put it down! I read it all in one go!

C-53: I did as well, but reading is a little different for droids.

PLECK: Oh, I guess that's true.

BARGIE: I got an audiobook where I was the narrator for it.

PLECK: You read it to yourself?

BARGIE: Yeah, I was the audiobook voice. [Pleck goes 'huh!'] Did it a couple years back for some kroon.

PLECK: Yeah, cool.

DAR: Pleck, if you haven't read the book, how do you plan to read it by tonight?

PLECK: [stammering] I just figured, you know, like--

C-53: Are you thinking just because it's a YA novel, you'll be able to read it quickly?

PLECK: Well, I mean, yeah.

DAR: [indignant] Excuse me--

C-53: That does a disservice to the whole genre.

DAR: A YA book instructs AIs how to show and feel compassion.

PLECK: Uh-huh. Okay. I just don't have a lot of time these days. If you must know, I have been meditating on my place in the Space. [audible eye-roll from C-53]

BARGIE: Yeah, we have a clip of how that sounds. [brief audio clip of Pleck making a weird groaning noise] Yep, that was it.

C-53: That's--

PLECK: That's not *always* the sound it makes.

DAR: How long do you do that a night?

C-53: You could have been much further into this book if you had not wasted your time meditating on the Space.

PLECK: Listen, guys, [hushed] I kind of feel like I'm starting to, like, *feel* something. [C-53 walks over, impact noise] Ow! You just poked me right in the eye!

C-53: [extremely sardonic] Did you see that coming at all?

PLECK: [affronted] I would have, if I had been focusing.

C-53: Mm. I don't know if I buy that.

PLECK: Alright. Well, anyway, I haven't read the book.

DAR: Well--

C-53: You really must. It's exceptional.

DAR: It's a must-read.

PLECK: Alright, alright. I'll read it on the way to our next mission.

[incoming-transmission noise]

C-53: Emissary Decksetter, I have an incoming transmission from Missions Operations Manager Nermut Bundaloy.

NERMUT: Hey, guys!

PLECK: Hey, Nermut! What's up, man?

NERMUT: [airy sigh] You know.

PLECK: Did you read the book?

NERMUT: What?

PLECK: Did you read the book?

NERMUT: What--

PLECK: The book club book!

DAR: Uh...

NERMUT: What do you mean?

[Dar and Bargie clear their throats; awkward crosstalk]

PLECK: Oh, man, we really--

DAR: This is supposed to be a book club for only people who are on the Bargarean Jade.

NERMUT: Huh.

PLECK: Yeah, it's sort of a BJ book club.

NERMUT: [mildly offended] I mean, I'd like to petition to join the BJBC.

C-53: Then we'd have to change the name.

NERMUT: I feel like I'm a honorary--

DAR: And also we'd have to wait for you to read the book.

[Nermut scoffs indignantly]

PLECK: Nermut?

NERMUT: Yes?

PLECK: Do we have a mission?

NERMUT: Yes, we have a mission. So this is cool. We are going into a, I guess open-arms type of situation, you know?

PLECK: Uh...

NERMUT: We're going to a place where the-- what?

PLECK: No, that's good. What does that mean?

NERMUT: Well, it just means that-- you know, when there's a planet that is so against the Federated Alliance, you can know that they're just gonna have basically the Rebellion flag already flying when you land. So it's gonna be cool. It's called Flurp.

C-53: Uh oh.

DAR & PLECK: Flurp?

C-53: Oh no.

NERMUT: Wait, that--

C-53: No, we can't go back there.

PLECK: Yeah, no, I don't think--

NERMUT: I thought that sounded familiar when I actually--

PLECK: I think we've actually been there. That place--

NERMUT: Oh.

DAR: That place *hates* us.

PLECK: [small laugh] Yeah. That--

NERMUT: Oh, no, but they hated the Alliance! That was when you-- that's back when you were using cue cards.

PLECK: That's true.

DAR: Oh, we're responsible for them hating the Alliance, though.

C-53: Yeah. They may also hate us personally.

NERMUT: [disbelieving noise] I can't imagine. I mean, the--

C-53: I-- I can imagine.

PLECK: Okay, listen, Nermut. What's the plan, exactly? Like--

NERMUT: So you're just gonna go in and you're going to establish relations on behalf of the Rebellion, as an emissary.

PLECK: [laughing] Oh, I know that part.

NERMUT: AKA, literally the job description.

PLECK: Sure, sure.

NERMUT: So yeah. I think that this is just--

PLECK: We sort of murdered the leader's daughter, if you remember correctly.

DAR: Is no one angry about that?

NERMUT: I mean, I think as far as they know, the Grand Kula's daughter got to meet Bargie, her hero--

BARGIE: Yeah, I had a great time. I have only good memories about that meeting.

PLECK: Sure.

DAR: Sure.

C-53: [droll] Yeah, she also was released into the vacuum of space twice.

BARGIE: [rushed, defensive] That was her own decision. Everyone makes their own decisions in life. What am I gonna do, stop them? Come on. We're free. We're free.

PLECK: Nermut--

NERMUT: Huh? Yeah?

PLECK: Sorry. Just to clarify, do they know that we're coming? Like, I don't want to surprise these guys. They're sort of this-- I would say, like, maybe a war-like culture.

C-53: I don't think you need the word like.

PLECK: Oh, yeah, sure. A war culture.

NERMUT: A war culture. Yeah, no, they know that there's a scheduled meeting with representatives of the Rebellion.

PLECK: Okay!

DAR: But they don't know *which* representatives.

NERMUT: They thought it was best to just have it be kinda general, just in terms of-- all the other emissaries were scheduled up, and so.

PLECK: Sure. Alright. Well, you know--

C-53: Just seems like a bad idea, but.

PLECK: Well, you know, I think it's worth mentioning-- I think the Space is gonna look out for us on this one. [C-53 and Dar sigh] Right?

[sounds of Beano running around and swinging something]

DAR: Well, if you want your little wooden toy, you're gonna have to ask Beano for it back.

PLECK: [indignant] Why does Beano have my woodsaber?

DAR: We gave it to him.

PLECK: [stern] Beano!

BEANO: Beano love woodsaber. [Beano whacks something metallic]

NERMUT: Is it in his mouth?

PLECK: Stop! Stop!

DAR: He's teething!

PLECK: Beano! [clapping] Beano!

DAR: What else were we supposed to give him? He's teething.

PLECK: That's an elegant weapon, Beano, drop it.

NERMUT: That's an overstatement. But still.

BEANO: Beano love elegance. Beano love luxury. [distant] Beano /ove elegance!

PLECK: Beano, just give-- [Beano drops the woodsaber on the floor] Alright, Nermut. I got my woodsaber, let's go.

NERMUT: Great. Good luck, everybody!

C-53: [displeased] Mm.

[intermission music; gentle rain]

GRAND KULA: Rebel emissaries.

PLECK: Uh--

GRAND KULA: [slow, menacing] Pleck Decksetter.

PLECK: Hey! I was sort of hoping you might--

GRAND KULA: We meet again.

PLECK: [nervously] Yep. Hey.

C-53: Emissary Decksetter, remember: challenge him to one-on-one physical combat. You will immediately earn his respect.

PLECK: Listen--

GRAND KULA: As you know, I am the Kula of this planet.

PLECK: Yeah. That's a war chieftain!

GRAND KULA: That's right.

PLECK: [triumphantly] Hey! So I just wanted to let you know-- listen. I feel, we all feel, pretty bad. And I just wanted you to know that we've--

GRAND KULA: Guards!

PLECK: [hastily] No, hold on, wait wait wait--

GRAND KULA: Seize them!

PLECK: No, no-- oh-- [sounds of manhandling and guards grunting] Listen--

GRAND KULA: Yes! [grunting continues] I have a special-- alright, okay. Okay. I think we've grunted enough. [grunting subsides] Everyone get their grunts in that time? [sporadic grunts] Alright. I have a special punishment for you, Decksetter, and your crew.

PLECK: Uh, okay.

C-53: The crew is getting lumped into this? This is more of a--

DAR: You know, I really think this is a punishment you should reserve just for the--

GRAND KULA: *All* of you have crossed the Kula.

DAR: But, you know, he shot me the last time we were on this planet, so I feel like I've been punished enough.

GRAND KULA: I will feed you to a beast infamous on Flurp.

PLECK: Uh... okay.

GRAND KULA: The Zellnaaz. [guards cheer and growl fervently]

PLECK: Okay, I'm sorry, hold on. What did you-- what was it called?

GRAND KULA: The Zellnaaz. [guards cheer again]

PLECK: [laughing] Sorry, no, every time you say the name and then the growling starts-- can you just say what the name of it is, again?

GRAND KULA: [stammering] Okay. The Zell-- [guards go wild; laughter]

PLECK: [straining to be heard] I can't-- okay. I'm just gonna--

GRAND KULA: He's right. He's right on this one, guys. I need you to dial it down, just like, two ticks. I need to get the name out. I'll throw you to the dreaded Zellnaaz!

C-53: It's a Zellnaaz.

PLECK: Zellnaaz? Okay, okay. Just making sure.



GRAND KULA: A beast-- [guard noises] No, guys.

GUARD: Sorry, it's my first day.

GRAND KULA: No, I know, I know. [resuming] Whose ferocity is beyond measure!

PLECK: Okay, yeah. Sure. Uh, what if I challenge you to one-on-one combat, though? Would that be--

GRAND KULA: Nope! That time has passed. Too late! Throw them to the Zellnaaz!

[guards grunting; yells and thuds as the crew is thrown to the beast; something heavy is dragged shut]

PLECK: Ugh. [beast growling] What was that?! C-53, uh, what do you know about fighting these guys?

C-53: [dry] Uh, it's a bad idea.

PLECK: Okay. Yep. Sure.

SHMORBY: [echoing] Be careful.

PLECK: Uh, what?

SHMORBY: [sounds of a torch being lit] Be. Careful.

PLECK: Um, absolutely. I was--

SHMORBY: He's hungry. He'll kill ya. Eat ya whole.

PLECK: Uh, hello.

DAR: Ooh! Are you the Zellnaaz? Because I could *easily* take you in a fight.

SHMORBY: No. What's that supposed to mean?

DAR: I mean-- I mean, look at you.

SHMORBY: That's very aggressive. I could sic my beast on you immediately.

C-53: Oh, so you're sort of a Zellnaaz keeper?

SHMORBY: Yeah.

DAR: Ahhh.

SHMORBY: It's very clear, I think. There's a giant sign.

C-53: Oh! Didn't see it.

DAR: Oh, I see!

SHMORBY: Zellnaaz keeper.

DAR: Oh, it's kind of like a little degree.

SHMORBY: I have a degree in Zellnaaz keeping, yes.

DAR: How many years of school is that?

SHMORBY: Fifteen.

ALL: Wow.

PLECK: Wow, that's-- that is a long--

C-53: Well, it's a big beast. You need--

SHMORBY: 450,000 kroons.

C-53: Wow.

PLECK: Oh, okay. Well, that's not--

DAR: Oh, it's one of *those*.

PLECK: You don't have to make it about that.

SHMORBY: Well, it is about that. I paid a great deal of money for it.

PLECK: Oh, that's how much you *paid*? I thought that's how much you *got* paid.

SHMORBY: I paid. Yeah, I went to school.

PLECK: [laughing] I'm sorry. I thought that's how much you got paid to be a Zellnaaz keeper.

SHMORBY: I wish. I'd be out of debt. But no.

PLECK: [laughing] Oh no! So, wait, you spent 15 years and spent 450,000-- I'm sorry. I digress. That seems--

SHMORBY: I know, it's a lot of backstory. I apologize. But just be careful of my beast, because he will eat you. And if you make fun of me or get in *my* way, I will sic my beast on you. And... you'll die.

PLECK: Really? Uh--

C-53: So is there-- is there an option where we just leave peacefully and do not interact with the Zellnaaz?

SHMORBY: I don't think so?

C-53: Mm.

SHMORBY: I wish.

C-53: That's a shame.

SHMORBY: But there never has been. This may be the time, but I doubt it, because already I feel like it's not going great. [the crew agrees]

PLECK: So it's up to you.

SHMORBY: It's not up to me, it's up to the beast. Nothing's up to me. The only thing I do is give him food, shelter, love. I sing.

DAR: You-- and you went to fifteen years of school for that?

[beat]

SHMORBY: Yeah. Does that sound so crazy? Do you know how long it takes to perfect singing?

DAR: Actually, no.

PLECK: Yeah, I'm--

SHMORBY: Fifteen years!

PLECK: Okay, yeah, sure. I mean, I guess that makes sense. Yeah.

SHMORBY: It's a very hard job! What do you do for a living?

DAR: Mostly this.

C-53: We're an emissarial team.

PLECK: We're emissaries!

SHMORBY: Oh, okay. Yeah, no, see, you get it.

C-53: Yeah.

SHMORBY: It's hard! I mean, doing things are hard! Especially this.

DAR: Sure. Could you give us a little sample of the song to the beast?

SHMORBY: It goes like this. [clears throat, harmonizes with a few notes, starts singing softly as with a lullabye] The beast is my boy. The beast is my little boy. The beast, the beast, will feast on your spine. [rustling noises]

PLECK: [laughing] Dar! Dar, wake up!

SHMORBY: Fifteen years.

DAR: I'm sorry.

SHMORBY: Fifteen years.

DAR: [groggy] I'm sorry, that was-- what?

PLECK: That was very soothing. Dar fell asleep!

DAR: Whew! That was deep. I was in a deep REM cycle.

SHMORBY: Good morning. I hope you slept well, because that was fifteen years' worth. Now do you feel a little silly about what you said?

DAR: I get it.

PLECK: I mean, I gotta level with you-- sorry, what is your name, sir?

SHMORBY: My name?

PLECK: Yeah.

SHMORBY: No one's ever asked me that before. I am just the Zellnaaz keeper. But my true name? Shmorby. [the beast growls]

PLECK: Shorty?

SHMORBY: No, Shmorby.

PLECK: [laughing] Oh, sorry. Shmorby. What's your relationship to the monster? Like, do you-- are you guys friends?

SHMORBY: Are you asking-- get to what you're saying. Get to what you really want to say.

PLECK: [desperately] No--

SHMORBY: [resigned] Everyone-- it's the first question everyone asks.

PLECK: No, that's not-- no, I don't think that's-- no.

C-53: Emissary Decksetter, he's asking you to ask--

SHMORBY: What do you think I'm thinking of?

PLECK: [laughing desperately] No! I don't want to ask what you think I'm gonna ask.

DAR: Pleck, ask him.

[Pleck sighs]

SHMORBY: Just do it. Because it's wasting time at this point.

PLECK: I really wanted to know, like, is the Zellnaaz your *friend* or is it like your pet?

SHMORBY: That's really the first inquiry? I think you wanted to know if I have--

PLECK: If you've jucked the-- if you've jucked it?

SHMORBY: Pardon me?

PLECK: Is that what you-- now, see, now I feel weird for asking that, because you're making me feel like that's not what you wanted me to ask you.

SHMORBY: I didn't want you to ask me anything. I just wanted to make sure my beast is well-kept and alive. [the beast roars] I think the problem here is, you were sent down here to die

by the hands of the beast that I take care of. So it's always awkward for me because, like, you seem like nice people! We're having a conversation! I've never told anybody my real name is Shmorby before.

PLECK: Sure. Yeah.

SHMORBY: I've never told anybody that was my name. Ever. So you guys seem great, but now I have to feed you to this beast.

PLECK: Yeah. Is that a contract situation? What's your obligation to feed us to the beast?

SHMORBY: My obligation? It's my job! It's what I get a paycheck for. I keep this beast.

DAR: He's trying to pay off student loans right now!

SHMORBY: Yeah. I'm not killing you, the beast is. I'm just making sure the beast is a well-oiled machine of death. [the crew makes unhappy noises of agreement] It sucks. I don't want to do this.

C-53: [sincerely] Are we holding up your day? Should we die? Would that be easier for you?

PLECK: [alarmed] C-53! Come on, C-53!

C-53: I'm just trying to-- you know, I feel a little bad for Shmorby.

SHMORBY: Uh, no, you're not holding up my day at all. I mean, like, [stammering] every day is the same for me. I'm just trying to explain my feelings.

PLECK: Well, thank you, Shmorby. I appreciate it.

DAR: If you have other feelings you want to talk about with us, we can-- we can really dive deep.

[beat]

SHMORBY: I feel like my feet are gigantic, and I hate it.

PLECK: [laughing] Oh, no. I actually would never have--

SHMORBY: They're big feet.

C-53: Yeah, look how big those feet are.

SHMORBY: When you guys came in the room, the first thing you did was look at my feet. [talking over the crew] I could see it. I don't like that. I don't like having big feet. That's not-- I can't change it.

PLECK: I don't even know what your species is, so that might not be-- it might be totally normal.

SHMORBY: [sighs] Look at these things. [sounds of velcro pulling apart] Just look at them. Because they're terrible.

C-53: Yeah, I mean, those are big.

SHMORBY: That's why they keep me down here, in a way, I think.

PLECK: You think *that's* why you're down here?

SHMORBY: I don't know. I mean, I'm not a pretty boy up there, [disdainful] trippin' the night fantastic in my spaceship. I'm down here. The keeper of the beast. [the beast roars]

PLECK: Oh boy. Wow.

C-53: What sort of people normally are down here in the pit, about to die?

SHMORBY: Thieves, criminals, just general deadbeats. One time there was a baker.

PLECK & C-53: Sure.

DAR: Wow.

[the beast roars again]

SHMORBY: [soothing] I know, honey, I know. I know. It's starving.

DAR: The beast is obviously attached to this very long leash, and it's back there in that cave out of sight. When does it come--

SHMORBY: It likes to stay in the dark. It's kind of like-- we like to keep it in suspense. You don't see what's gonna happen. 'Cause if you saw what it looked like right now, if you could actually physically see the beast's features, you might die just from seeing it. I've seen it happen.

PLECK & C-53: Really?

C-53: You saw someone die just by looking at it?

DAR: Wow.

SHMORBY: Yeah.

C-53: Straight system overload.

SHMORBY: Yeah.

DAR: And that's the only exit out of this pit, I'm gonna hazard a guess.

SHMORBY: Well, that and the secret backdoor that I have. But I mean, other than that, no, yeah. Just would be death through the anus of the beast.

C-53: Specifically through the anus?

SHMORBY: Yes.

C-53: [quietly, somber] Anus-first. Rough.

SHMORBY: You'll come out the mouth-hole many days later. But whole. Also whole. Not butt. [Dar and C-53 make noises of understanding] It's terrible. Yeah, it's a lot of cleanup.

PLECK: Yeah. I mean, knowing that information, it makes it even scarier. Because, you know, if you have to pass through, you know, sort of the butthole on your way in-- [the beast roars] okay. Yep.

[grate opens, sounds of a tiny criminal falling and landing]

CRIMINAL: I was thrown in here! I'm a criminal, and I hate everybody in here, and I want everyone to *die*!

SHMORBY: Nice.

PLECK: Okay, that seems-- that seems extreme.

CRIMINAL: They said something's gonna eat me!

PLECK: Uh, yeah, that definitely seems to be on the agenda.

CRIMINAL: I'm gonna fight it! Because I'm a criminal!

C-53: No, that would be--

PLECK: No, see, you shouldn't--



[the beast roars]

SHMORBY: That would not be a good idea. You will die.

CRIMINAL: Where is it? I'm gonna kill it!

DAR: This criminal's adorable! [babytalk] It's so small! I wanna squish it!

CRIMINAL: No! [sounds of a knife being drawn and swung around] I got a little knife!

DAR: Aw, look at it--

CRIMINAL: [stabbing noises] I'm gonna get the big monster!

DAR: [unmoved by being stabbed] Look at it stab me with its tiny little knife! Ooh! Tickles!

PLECK: Are you okay, Dar?

DAR: No, it's just such a cute little-- [the beast roars] whoa.

[sounds of the criminal attacking the beast and being consumed with a meaty schlorp]

C-53: Yep. Anus-first.

DAR & PLECK: Wow.

SHMORBY: Yep. Gets you every time.

DAR: Did you see the way that its anus puckered and just [laughing] *sucked* that little criminal right up?

PLECK: Ooh, boy. Wow. That was very quick. Is it normally that fast?

SHMORBY: Yes. Especially when he's hungry.

PLECK: Yeah, I guess so.

SHMORBY: I've never seen him last this long without eating a creature or droid or anything.

PLECK: Hmm. Well, you know, Shmorby, I've gotta say, thank you for keeping the beast at bay, I guess you could say.

DAR: Yeah, yeah. You're here to collect a paycheck. We get it.

PLECK: I get it. I get it. We're just all just doing our jobs, you know?

SHMORBY: That's it, man. Just workin' for the weekend, bro.

PLECK: Yeah.

DAR: What do you do on the weekends?

SHMORBY: A lot of reading. Curled up with a good book.

PLECK: Really?

DAR: [gasp] Have you read [with C-53] *It's the Stars' Fault?* We're all reading it right now as a book club!

SHMORBY: Shut... [beat] up.

DAR: No, *you* shut up.

SHMORBY: I can't-- this is-- I just started [Dar gasps] this past weekend.

DAR: Oh, good! No spoilers!

PLECK: No spoilers, we still don't know.

DAR: We're still all in the middle of it right now.

PLECK: We all started it, yeah.

SHMORBY: I would never, no. Ugh, it's such a treat. I can't wait to talk about it, if you'll have me. [Dar makes a delighted noise]

C-53: Oh, absolutely.

DAR: Yeah, you should join our book club!

SHMORBY: Fantastic. I'm in.

PLECK: You know, Shmorby, I gotta say, you seem like a pretty cool guy.

SHMORBY: I'm not so bad!

PLECK: You ever thought about, like, a career change? You could come with us, like, maybe become a rebel emissary. Travel the galaxy!

SHMORBY: Gosh, I... I don't even know what to say about that. I've spent so much time down here-- and once again, I spent *fifteen years*--

PLECK: No, I--

DAR: Yeah.

SHMORBY: On a prestigious, hard-to-get position.

C-53: You sort of feel locked into this career.

SHMORBY: Well, I'm also ugly, and have giant feet. If I go into the sun, I'll probably die. I've been down here for so long just with this beast. I smell terrible.

PLECK: But that leather vest is so cool, though! I like it.

SHMORBY: Thank you. But I mean, would you still think it was cool if I told you I took this off a dead man not but three years ago?

DAR: Honestly?

C-53: Arguably cooler.

DAR: Yeah.

PLECK: Yeah. That gives you some cred, you know?

SHMORBY: I did not kill him. I found him, and [Pleck laughs] I just took his coat. And also, I had to sew part of his pants to the coat so it would fit.

PLECK: [laughing] Oh, that's-- you didn't have to tell us that.

SHMORBY: This is really a leather vest, but the back is the butt of a pair of pants.

PLECK: Your secret is safe with us, Shmorby.

C-53: Wow, you turn around, you can clearly see the pants.

DAR & SHMORBY: Yeah.

PLECK: Yeah, you don't see a lot of pockets on the back of a vest.

DAR: But that's resourceful! You have a skill! You have another skill!

SHMORBY: I know. I don't know why I'm trying to convince you about how terrible I am. It's just-- it's so-- I can't believe that I've been... *accepted* by others! It's shocking, to be honest.

PLECK: I mean, well hey, you know, listen. We're here. We're just a few emissaries in a dark pit, about to get eaten by monsters, and you're okay with us.

SHMORBY: That should be lyrics to a song, man. I'm telling you. That was beautiful.

PLECK: Oh, thanks.

DAR: Ooh! Could you use it in one of your songs that you sing to the beast?

[beat]

SHMORBY: I guess. [Dar laughs; the beast roars and shakes its chain]

PLECK: Oh, uh, what is he doing now?

[rumbling and clanking noises as the beast moves around]

SHMORBY: Right now, he's actually doing the dance of acceptance. He has taken you in.

C-53: Wow.

SHMORBY: So he's at his most vulnerable. I've only seen this once before.

PLECK: Oh, wow. That's amazing.

SHMORBY: [stammering] This is unprecedented. He's only done this with me a handful of times.

[the beast roars; footsteps]

PLECK: Oh, uh, is that part of the dance?

SHMORBY: No, that--

PLECK: Mighty Zellnaaz--

SHMORBY: Okay, so no, don't do that--

PLECK: Be not afraid!

SHMORBY: No!

PLECK: I am a Zima-in-training, [Shmorby stammers unhappily] Pleck Decksetter!

SHMORBY: You have to stop doing that!

PLECK: But this woodsaber [sounds of Pleck swinging the woodsaber around] is not an instrument of war!

SHMORBY: [desperately] Please! No, you can't do that, 'cause he'll die!

[the beast howls miserably; chains clinking; heavy thud]

DAR: [accusatory] Pleck, what did you do to that beast with your woodsaber?

PLECK: [stammering] I was trying to--

SHMORBY: [tearfully] Why would you do that?

PLECK: I was trying to sort of--

[meaty tearing noises]

CRIMINAL: I'm free! I'm free! [triumphant laughter] Criminal wins again! Bye-bye!

SHMORBY: [weepy] Oh, that tiny criminal.

DAR: Did you see how he crawled right out of his anus?

C-53: Wow. That was fast.

SHMORBY: [crying] What have you done?!

PLECK: Oh no!

C-53: Oh, Shmorby, we're so sorry.

PLECK: Shmorby, listen--

SHMORBY: [crying] Don't jucking call me Shmorby!

PLECK: But that's-- that's your--

SHMORBY: [deep breath] What have you done to my beast?!

PLECK: Uh, listen, I apologize--

SHMORBY: No, I won't listen!

PLECK: Okay.

SHMORBY: [tearfully] I won't listen!

PLECK: Okay.

C-53: Shmorby, we feel extremely guilty about this.

PLECK: That's not what I--

SHMORBY: [hysterical] I just said don't call me Shmorby, and then you called me Shmorby right after! It's so rude!

PLECK: You're right. You're right.

SHMORBY: [still weepy] You killed my best friend, and then you said something that I specifically asked you not to!

PLECK: Okay, sure, sure. What should we call-- like, what, beast-master?

SHMORBY: [crying] Beast-master? No, I never would ask such a thing!

PLECK: I-- [desperate laugh] listen--

SHMORBY: I just want to be called the keeper of the Zellnaaz!

PLECK: Right, sure.

SHMORBY: [in despair] But I can't do that anymore, because he exists no more! [the crew make unhappy noises] You've taken everything! You've erased fifteen years-- [no longer crying, audibly annoyed] *fifteen years* and 450,000 kroon.

C-53: That's a lot of kroon.

PLECK: That's a lot of kroon, yeah.

SHMORBY: Who's gonna pay that back now? All for naught! [tearful] All for nothing, because you came! People who decided to be friends, that killed my friend! You're tricksters!

C-53: Shmorby, maybe we could get another Zellnaaz for you.

SHMORBY: Oh, why don't we just get another one?! [indignant/tearful spluttering] Why don't you get another life?!

PLECK: I mean, that's a good question, yeah.

DAR: Well, technically C is a droid, so he's had... many.

C-53: I don't know if this is the time for a semantic argument.

DAR: You're right, you're right. I'm sorry.

PLECK: Listen, uh... what can we do? You know, the offer still stands. You can come with us. Maybe this is a good chance for you to kinda change gears.

SHMORBY: Oh, why? 'Cause I have nothing? 'Cause you took it all from me? So now I should come with you?

PLECK: [laughing] Yeah, sort of. I mean, you live in this pit.

SHMORBY: I know. When I said it, it sounded more right than it should have.

PLECK: Maybe it's-- maybe it's time.

SHMORBY: [tearful] I-- maybe it *is* time. Who knows, even? [crying]

PLECK: Oh, boy. Wow. Listen, I really-- [Shmorby continues keening in despair] Oh boy. That's-- listen, Shmorby, I get-- I get what it's like to lose someone you care about.

SHMORBY: [quietly] You do?

PLECK: [uncertain, drawing out his words] Uh, 'cause one time...

C-53: Oh, I'm dying to hear this.

SHMORBY: You're making this up-- [hysterical noises] I can hear it so clearly, you're making this up to make me feel better!

PLECK: [laughing] No! I wouldn't do that, I just--

SHMORBY: You stalled for like three seconds! [in tears] You would remember!

PLECK: I mean, no, it's just-- there are so many things that I could choose from of the--

C-53: Choose one now.

PLECK: Okay. [hesitantly] I, one time-- there was this, uh-- [sighs] I'm sorry. You know what? I should actually--

C-53: [scornful] Terrible.

DAR: Or, in *The Stars' Fault*--

C-53: [gasping] Yes!

DAR: Hansel thinks he's lost Gretel.

SHMORBY: The best part!

DAR: Forever! But then he travels to the most distant star and finds a mirror of her. It's like this! You're Hansel! You just need to travel and find your next-best Gretel!

[thoughtful silence]

SHMORBY: You mean it?

[the crew provide a chorus of 'yeah' and 'absolutely']

SHMORBY: They won't make fun of my feet?

[the crew all say no]

PLECK: Listen, Shmorby, you know how to sew. You've got an expensive degree.

C-53: You're a reader. That's a good thing.

PLECK: You're a reader, yes. Stable. You've got a low center of gravity, with those feet. [Dar goes 'mm-hmm'] Oh, boy, let's see--

SHMORBY: I know a lot about Ty-Priters.

PLECK: What?

C-53: Typewriters?

SHMORBY: [enunciating carefully] Ty-Priters, yes.



C-53: Oh, sure.

SHMORBY: The ships.

C-53: Yeah, yeah. Are you familiar with a Ty-Priter?

PLECK: No.

C-53: They're very small ships.

SHMORBY: Very, very small.

C-53: Yeah.

SHMORBY: I know how to build them.

PLECK: Okay.

SHMORBY: Paper-thin.

PLECK: Really? Huh. What function does a Ty-Priter serve?

SHMORBY: It's a small ship that carries letters to people from different galaxies in a quick fashion.

PLECK: Okay, sure.

C-53: Part of the mail service.

PLECK: Gotcha, gotcha, gotcha.

SHMORBY: [deep inhale, incoherent sobbing]

PLECK: Oh, no, Shmorby.

SHMORBY: [tearful] I just remembered there for a second, and then I saw the body! He's gone forever!

C-53: It's *very* big.

PLECK: Difficult to ignore.

SHMORBY: [sobbing] So big!

PLECK: Sort of taking up half the cavern in here.

DAR: Yeah.

SHMORBY: [tearful] I must take it with me.

PLECK: Uh...

C-53: Oh, Shmorby, I don't know if that's--

PLECK: Doesn't seem--

SHMORBY: I have to! I can't leave him behind! What kind of keeper would I be if I left it? So yes. I will come with you. I will make the leap. I will find a new life, but I also have to bring the dead body of this beast.

PLECK: Oh, uh, I don't know if we can--

SHMORBY: No, no, it's gotta be done. I have to-- [noises of exertion]

PLECK: No, no, come on.

SHMORBY: Just give me a hand, please, with this.

PLECK: Shmorby, stop! It's too--

SHMORBY: All you have to do is just-- just get right-- yeah. You're just gonna want to nuzzle up right in that tight anus [the crew makes unhappy noises] and give it a big ol' push. Just like you mean it.

PLECK & C-53: [dejected] Okay.

SHMORBY: Please just get up--

PLECK: Sure.

SHMORBY: On the count of forbz.

PLECK: Okay.

DAR: Mm-hmm.

PLECK: Okay.

SHMORBY: Forbz.

PLECK: Okay-- alright, go, go! [noises of exertion, heavy thuds and clanging chains] Listen, Shmorby, what-- we can't-- what are we gonna do with a Zellnaaz corpse?

SHMORBY: Yeah, we're probably gonna have to lose some of your stuff in order to fit.

C-53: Uh...

PLECK: I don't think that's-- you want us to push it through this secret backdoor?

SHMORBY: If you can, that would be great, yes. Just try and-- just--

PLECK: How did the Zellnaaz get in here, though? Inside this cave?

SHMORBY: Why, it was built around it.

PLECK & DAR: Oh.

C-53: That's smart.

SHMORBY: I built this cave around it myself.

C-53: So Shmorby, you also know construction?

SHMORBY: Correct. I do. I'm a jack of all trades, as they say.

C-53: You could work *anywhere*, Shmorby.

SHMORBY: I mean, not *anywhere*. I mean, sure. I'm a pilot, I'm a cook, I'm a politician, I'm a senator--

PLECK: A singer!

SHMORBY: I was a mathematician for sixteen years. When I was a child, I used to be a scientist. I used to do surgeries on people. I've rebuilt buildings, droids. I created a money system for the Goltars.

PLECK: Wait--

SHMORBY: I've done it all, but what I'm best at is being... a keeper.

PLECK: Yeah, I mean-- but Shmorby, listen. It sounds like you've got a long--

C-53: Galaxy's your oyster!

DAR: Shmorby, if you could be anything right this second, including out of debt, what would you [Pleck snorts] want to be, Shmorby?

SHMORBY: [sardonic] Uh, the best friend to a live beast.

DAR: Okay.

PLECK: You kinda walked into that one.

C-53: Maybe excepting that.

SHMORBY: Yeah, that was--

PLECK: Besides that. Take the Zellnaaz out of the equation.

SHMORBY: Besides that, probably... [sighs] it's impossible. It's stupid. It's an impossible--

C-53: No, come on.

SHMORBY: [slightly pained] A shoe model.

[pregnant silence]

C-53: [somewhat hesitant] That's not so crazy.

DAR: Shmorby, look at me. I want you to get away from here. I want you to go get in that Ty-Priter that I know you have in the back of this cave--

PLECK: Yeah, mail yourself somewhere.

DAR: And just... head out. Strike out for the nearest shoe store and just start modeling them shoes.

PLECK: [laughing] Dar, you mean like, freelance-- [Dar makes a 'shut up' noise] I don't know! But how would that work--

DAR: I don't know! Listen, if I understood how the industry worked, I would be a lot further in my own career.

PLECK: [laughing] Sure, sure. Fair enough.

SHMORBY: From what I understand, you go to a shoe store, you put on the shoes, you walk out, and you show people. And hopefully it happens for you.

DAR: Yes. And Shmorby, that is what you have to do. You've stayed in this pit too long!

SHMORBY: It never seemed like a viable option, but now...

DAR: But now you have years ahead of you!

PLECK: Yeah.

C-53: Why not spend them happy, modeling shoes?

DAR: Yeah. Why not spend them with happy feet?

SHMORBY: I never really thought of it that way. Thank you.

[grate opening, sounds of tiny criminal falling in]

CRIMINAL: I was just thrown in here! I'm a criminal, and I hate everybody!

[Pleck and Dar laugh]

C-53: This is a lot like the last criminal that landed in here.

CRIMINAL: [knife-swinging noises] I have a tiny knife and I'm gonna stab, stab, stab!

PLECK: Okay. Alright. Let's just--

C-53: [unmoved] It's pinging off my exterior.

SHMORBY: Instead of stabbing, why don't you take a look... at these shoes?

CRIMINAL: Um... okay. [footsteps] Huh. You know what? Crime is bad.

SHMORBY: Oh snap.

[intermission music; transition to rainy planet surface]

GRAND KULA: Emissary Decksetter, I must say, I am impressed. No one has defeated the dreaded Zellnaaz in combat.

PLECK: Yeah. Listen, I am sorry about that. We really--

GRAND KULA: I bow.

PLECK: What?

GRAND KULA: In respect to you.

PLECK: Uh...

GRAND KULA: You have proven yourselves in combat.

PLECK: Yeah, uh, well, you know--

GRAND KULA: No one has figured out its allergy to wood.

PLECK: Uh--

DAR & C-53: Oh!

C-53: Okay, I see what happened here.

PLECK: Yeah! Okay.

GRAND KULA: I'm impressed. Even though my beast keeper is now a... shoe model.

PLECK: Yeah, we did not mean to kind of mess up your whole thing--

GRAND KULA: Emissary Decksetter.

PLECK: Yes. Yes.

GRAND KULA: The Flurp is at the service of the Rebellion.

PLECK: Wow. Really!

GRAND KULA: And we shall also *die* for the Rebellion! Long live the Rebellion!

[the crew makes surprised but enthusiastic commentary]

PLECK: Long live the Rebellion!

GRAND KULA: [crinkling noises] As a token of my appreciation--

DAR: Uh-huh?

GRAND KULA: I give you this Federated Alliance koozie. [Dar laughs] Given to me by a *weakling* of the Federated Alliance.

PLECK: Yeah, that-- okay. Thank you. We appreciate it.

C-53: [muttering] Maybe he really doesn't remember us.

GRAND KULA: What?

DAR: Nothing!

C-53: Yeah, nothing.

GRAND KULA: I must say, in recent months I have been heartbroken because my daughter has gone missing.

[the crew makes uncomfortable noises]

PLECK: Oh, boy. Wow, really?

GRAND KULA: But I feel that the Rebellion has given me new purpose.

DAR: [pleasantly surprised] Oh!

PLECK: Uh... yep.

GRAND KULA: And seeing a mighty warrior like you defeat the Zellnaaz gives me hope that one day I might find my beloved Kulata. And one day we might topple the sinister Federated Alliance.

DAR: Yeah!

[ship noises]

BARGIE: And finally, Bargarean Jade is here! Hello, yes, hi. Everyone calm down, it's me, I know.

GRAND KULA: [somber] My daughter-- my daughter loved you.

BARGIE: I know. Here's the thing. So I came because I all of a sudden feel guilty.

PLECK: Uh, Bargie--

BARGIE: Maybe I was responsible. I guess she may be alive. I do not know.

C-53: Bargie, this may not be a great time for this.

BARGIE: [talking over the crew's protests] Actually, at first, I was like, okay with it. Because I was like, you know, she's a fan and fans can do whatever they want.

GRAND KULA: [talking over Bargie talking over the crew] Kulata...

PLECK: Okay, Bargie, let's just open the hatch, let's--

GRAND KULA: No!!

PLECK: [urgently] Yep, let's go! Let's go! Let's go!

GRAND KULA: It was you all along!

PLECK: [increasingly urgent] Let's go!

GRAND KULA: Guards! [guns warming up] Seize them! [guards grunting, gunfire]

DAR: Bargie, now they're shooting at us!

[grunting and gunfire continues]

GRAND KULA: Honestly, less grunts. You make us all look bad. [more grunting] No, you make us all look bad when you do it.

[intermission music; electronic beep]

AUTOMATED VOICE: One new message. Likely annoying.

[transmission noise]

BORDOFF: [hushed, speaking in tones of dire importance] Your excellency, it is Bordoff with... troubling news. Using an advanced technology known as a *search engine*, I have deduced that the Rebellion has its very own... website: therebellion.space. And I fear that it is... incredibly well-made, and was clearly easy to do so using the designer templates and award-winning customer support of... SquareSpace. And it is my duty to report that on this site, they have posted encrypted messages that their pathetic code-breakers cannot crack! Messages intercepted from the Federated Alliance, and also from-- from me. But they will never crack them, your highness! There's also other critical intel on therebellion.space, such as a detailed guide to neutralizing CLINTs and an advice column from Hark Tartigast, their square-jawed pilot who's thankfully lost in a hyperdrive netherworld. Now, I figured it must have cost the Rebellion *critical kroon* to build a site of this quality, but it turns out that anyone can get a free



SquareSpace trial by visiting [squarespace.com/zyxx](https://squarespace.com/zyxx), and then get a special discount on their first order of a site or domain! And the sites include free and secure hosting! [furious] After your ascent, we shall *squash* amazing deals like this! They just make people too happy! But until then, this deal is sadly available to all at [squarespace.com/zyxx](https://squarespace.com/zyxx). It is also [disgusted noise] conveniently linked to on the Rebellion's shamelessly elegant website, [therebellion.space](https://therebellion.space). May my next news be happier.

[transmission-end noise]

AUTOMATED VOICE: Sender removed from favorites.

[intermission music; pages flipping]

PLECK: Okay, Dar, I think I might actually do this. I think I might be able to finish in time.

DAR: [excited] See? I told you! Once you start reading--

PLECK: It's very good! I got a couple chapters in--

DAR: Exactly!

PLECK: And it just hooked me right in!

DAR: Wait. How far have you gotten?

PLECK: Um--

C-53: We don't want to spoil you. Where are you?

DAR: Because the ending is--

PLECK: Okay, don't, don't-- don't talk to me. Don't talk to me.

DAR: I would never want to spoil this for you.

BARGIE: By the way, are we starting book club? Because I need a little more time.

DAR: No, not yet, not yet.

PLECK: No, I just-- oh, guys, we gotta call Nermut and let him know how the mission went.

C-53: Oh. I'll call Nermut, let him know everything went great.

PLECK: Sounds good.

[outgoing-transmission noise]

ROLPHUS: Uh... why are you calling me, crew of the Bargarean Jade?

PLECK: Oh, uh--

C-53: [surprised] Commander Tiddle.

PLECK: Rolphus! Hey, uh, sorry, I thought we were trying to call Nermut. Is everything okay?

ROLPHUS: Yeah, he's on personal leave. He's taken a couple of days out of--

PLECK: What?

DAR: Oh, he's forwarding all of his calls to *you*.

ROLPHUS: [mildly annoyed] What did you want to talk to me about?

PLECK: Oh, uh...

C-53: The mission on Flurp was a resounding success!

ROLPHUS: Was it? Fantastic.

DAR: Well, technically it was a success to a point.

C-53: Oh, right, I forgot.

[Rolphus sighs heavily]

DAR: When we were leaving, it felt like we may have overshared, but you know, nothing we can't bounce back--

ROLPHUS: [extremely sarcastic] Really? You guys? You guys overshared?

BARGIE: I messed up. I kind of pretty much told the guy--

ROLPHUS: [sarcastic] Oh, really? The ship talking was a bad thing? Huh.

C-53: Commander Tiddle, the tone of your voice suggests that you are perhaps perturbed with our behavior. Is there something we could improve upon?

ROLPHUS: No, I appreciate you retrieving me from the Dumps--

PLECK: Hey, Rolphus-- I mean, sorry, Commander Tiddle, how... [sympathetic] how are you holding up? You doin' okay?

ROLPHUS: [clipped, icy] Yeah. I'm fine.

DAR: Are you really? Because you can talk to us. You can--

ROLPHUS: Why?

PLECK: Do you wanna join our book club?

C-53: Yeah, we're reading *It's the Stars' Fault*.

ROLPHUS: Goodbye.

[end-transmission noise; Pleck laughs quietly]

PLECK: Where do you think Nermut went?

DAR: I wish-- I wish he would answer-- I wonder where he is.

[distant alarms]

BARGIE: Oh, he's here.

PLECK: Uh, what?

BARGIE: Yeah, there's a Ty-Priter that just arrived in my back, and I can sense that it's... [struggling] Norman... Nor--

C-53: Nermut Bundaloy?

BARGIE: Jroshuash.

C-53: It's getting further away.

PLECK: Is it Gorch?

BARGIE: Gorbin? Anyway, he's-- that thing is here.

[ship door opens, C-53 sets something down]

C-53: Not sure this package is big enough.

[sounds of cardboard opening, Nermut struggling]

PLECK: Oh, hey! Nermut!

[Nermut gasps for air]

DAR: Nermut! What are you doing here?

NERMUT: Hey, guys! [breathing heavily]

AUDIOBOOK: [tinny, low-quality, almost inaudible recording of Bargie's voice]

C-53: Nermut!

[audiobook-paused sound]

NERMUT: Sorry, I've been-- I was behind, so I've been listening to the Bargarean Jade's audiobook version of *The Stars' Fault*.

PLECK: Wait, Nermut, why are you here?

NERMUT: [laughing] Oh, yeah, right. Sorry. I got ahead of myself. Yeah, well, I remember you said that the book club is only for crew members who are on the Bargarean Jade, and I realized that I had personal days available!

[beat]

DAR: You came here for book club?

NERMUT: Well, and to see you guys! But yeah. I mean, it's--

PLECK: [surprised] That is irresponsible and adorable, Nermut!

NERMUT: Oh. Well, uh, I take that personally, and thank you!

DAR: You really hate being left out that much?

NERMUT: Um...

C-53: Well, at this point we have no qualms for allowing Nermut to join the BJBC.

[the crew make various noises of agreement]

PLECK: Yeah! Welcome, Nermut!

DAR: Did you finish the book?

NERMUT: No, I'm not done yet, but I'm really--

DAR: Ooh!

NERMUT: Really close.

PLECK: I'm not done yet either.

NERMUT: You're not done yet?

PLECK: You guys open a bottle of Flucarian brandy. We will finish it up. Five, ten minutes.

NERMUT: I'm gonna put these earbuds back in, and we're gonna--

PLECK: Alright.

NERMUT: Finish it up.

BEANO: Beano read the book!

NERMUT: What?

BEANO: Beano know spoilers.

DAR: [chiding] Beano...

BARGIE: Beano, no.

C-53: Beano.

PLECK: Beano, don't.

C-53: [gently scolding, like a parent teaching a toddler about empathy] Some people haven't finished the book.

PLECK: [laughing] Stop shrugging your skinny little shoulders!

BEANO: [singsong] Beano know spoilers! [Dar groans] They both die.

C-53: [indignant] Beano!

DAR: [also indignant] Beano!

PLECK: [still indignant] Beano!

NERMUT: [again, indignant] Beano!

BEANO: [taunting] Beano know!

BARGIE: Yep.

---

SHMORBY: Instead of stabbing, why don't you take a look... at these shoes.

CRIMINAL: Um, okay. [pause] Huh. You know what, crime is bad.

SHMORBY: I'm sorry. I guess I shot too far, too close to the sun on my first try with the shoe modeling. I thought maybe I could change his criminal ways. [laughing]

C-53: No, you did! He's thinking it over!

SHMORBY: Oh, I couldn't hear! My apologies!

[all laugh]

CRIMINAL: Huh. Wow.