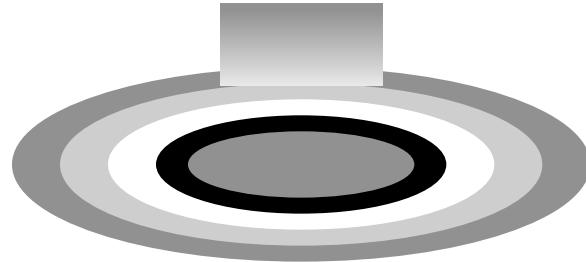


# THE FUNNT FILE



Episode No. X

"On A Wavelength Far From Home"

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*THE FUNNT FILE* created by Jeff Harris & Mark Wolverton

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CHARACTERS

THE FILE VOICE  
FUNNT  
LIZ  
PIPER  
FREAK  
QUEASY  
VOTTA, an alien imposter

SOUND FX & MUSIC

THEME, MUSIC BRIDGES  
EXCELSIOR AMBIENT SOUNDS  
DOOR (various)  
WIND  
ELECTRIC ARC  
GENERATOR HUM  
FOOTSTEPS  
COM SOUNDS  
VARIOUS BEEPS  
SHUTTLE LANDING  
SHUTTLE ENGINES  
ALARM

THE FUNNT FILE

"On A Wavelength Far From Home"

ACT ONE

(MUSIC: THEME, THEN UNDER:)

THE FILE VOICE:

Greetings. You have accessed The Funnt File. A tale of perseverance in the face of overwhelming incompetence, of a small group of humans confronting the unknown and the incomprehensible... simply because there was nothing better to do.

(THEME UP AND OUT)

THE FILE VOICE:

File Sector XX.XX. File Name "On A Wavelength Far From Home." It is part of the human experience to reach out emotionally to other people, and even to other species. Sometimes this longing is so strong that it hides what reason says cannot be and what reason says we should not do...

(FX: DOOR OPENING)

(FX: WHIRLING SOUND)

(FX: OCCASIONAL ELECTRIC ARC SOUND)

PIPER:

OK, Bridge, I made it. Section 309-D. Are you still with me?

FUNNT (FILTERED):

Still here, Ensign.

PIPER:

Queasy was right. The disruption is definitely coming from this section of the ship.

FUNNT (FILTERED):

Do you see any broken cables or other signs of damage?

PIPER:

No, but there's a bright light coming from right in front of me. There's a lot of wind, too.

FUNNT (FILTERED):

Wind inside a spaceship? Queasy, are you sure there isn't a hull breach?

QUEASY:

I had no reason to lie to you the first time you asked me that question. The wind Mr. Piper is experiencing comes from a sharp thermal gradient.

FUNNT (FILTERED) :

Is that normal, even for a transdimensional section?

QUEASY:

I repeat, he is in no danger.

FUNNT (FILTERED) :

Mr. Piper, I suggest you take that advice for what it's worth.

PIPER:

I'm evacuating the area. Let's send a drone back...

(FX: NOISES SUDDENLY STOP)

FUNNT (FILTERED) :

Piper, what happened?

PIPER:

I don't know, sir. The wind's stopped. The light's died down as well.

(FX: HUM)

PIPER:

But it hasn't quit entirely. Captain, I can see a dark outline in the center, about 30 meters away.

FUNNT (FILTERED) :

Human?

PIPER:

Looks like it.

FUNNT (FILTERED) :

Get out of there, Mr. Piper. If this is the Tesseract again...

VOTTA:

Greetings! Are you known as a human?

PIPER:

Captain, unless the Tesseract is recruiting large, glowing  
humanoids, I think we just went out a whole new door.

FUNNT (FILTERED):

Watch it, Ensign. First contact is always tricky. And the most  
harmless looking things can have hidden fangs.

VOTTA:

Violence is a property only of corporeal beings. I lack that  
dimension.

PIPER:

Ah, hello! My name is Richard Piper. You are on the starship  
Excelsior. We mean no harm to you.

VOTTA:

I know who you are. As I know this structure and all of the  
energies it contains.

PIPER:

Energies?

VOTTA:

A large part of your being is electromagnetic. From our shared  
construction I am able to perceive your thoughts.

PIPER:

Electromagnetic? Are you trying to tell me you're made up of  
some kind of energy?

VOTTA:

Yes, I come from a universe that hovers just above the ceiling  
of yours. It is only through a gateway such as this one that  
such emissaries as I may pass.

FUNNT (FILTERED):

Mr. Piper, do you think our visitor would like to come see the  
rest of us?

VOTTA:

First, I need a moment for my energies to coalesce into a stable  
molecular structure.

PIPER:

What he said.

FUNNT:

Well, after he sets, bring him up to Conference Room 12-D.

(MUSIC: BRIDGE TO:  
(FX: EXCELSIOR AMBIENT NOISES)

FUNNT:

Liz, what do you think you'll be able to tell us about our visitor?

LIZ:

Well, unless he lets me take some type of sample, the only thing my medical scanner can pick up are just basic body readings - temperature, respiration, pulse.

FUNNT:

If he even has a pulse.

FREAK:

Like, what's the deal with you guys? How come you're as strung out as a roadie going through Customs?

FUNNT:

Freak, this is a first contact situation. These things are hard enough when you're working with life forms similar to our own.

FREAK:

Yeah, but like a dude's a dude and a chick's a chick, right? He got here OK, and he groks us enough to sling the lingo.

LIZ:

Freak, your good will is commendable, but there are cultural barriers and histories we have to be aware of. Not to mention the fact that this being will certainly react differently to various behavioral cues.

FREAK:

You mean like if I start blowing my nose, Mr. X there might get turned on?

LIZ:

Maybe.

FREAK:

Crazy.

(FX: DOOR OPENING)

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

(FX: HUM)

PIPER:

This way, Votta.

VOTTA:

These things move and yet I sense they are not vital.

PIPER:

(GROWING SLIGHTLY IRRITATED) No, that's because it's just a door.

FREAK:

Whoa, guys, do you peep what I peep, or am I just tripping all on my lonesome?

VOTTA:

No, Freak, I am... (AS IF LOOKING FOR THE WORDS) one massive, green, glowing mother.

FREAK:

Hey, you ain't all cubed out! First righteous alien I've ever scoped!

VOTTA:

As I told Mr. Richard, your brainwaves are as one with me.

LIZ:

You mean you can read Freak's mind?

VOTTA:

Yes, and as he would say - oh, man, the colors, the colors.

FUNNT:

Welcome, Votta. I'm pleased to ...

VOTTA:

(INTERRUPTING) Yes, introductions. Unnecessary, Captain. I know all of you. Your thoughts are as sweet raindrops in the pool of my mind.

(FX: MEDICAL SCANNER)

VOTTA:

Doctor, I am afraid your scanner will not record any intelligible data. I can feel its beams scattering within me. They will not return to your unit.

FUNNT:

Well, Votta, I'm afraid telepathy isn't our strong suit. Could you enlighten us as to the purpose of your visit here?

VOTTA:

As you have already deduced, Captain, I am not of this sterile universe. It has long grown too cold to sustain beings of my kind.

PIPER:

So you're saying you came here from a younger universe, through one of our transdimensional sections?

VOTTA:

Yes. For much of our recent history your ships have made their presence known in our space. Their drives act as claws, tilling and ripping the very substance of our worlds.

PIPER:

Claws? I'm afraid I don't follow.

LIZ:

Votta, we all appreciate the gardening imagery, but could you be a little more specific?

VOTTA:

Your method of propulsion. You know it allows passage from one universe to another. Often at a time advanced or retarded from your own.

FUNNT:

Yes, we've have some experiences.

VOTTA:

Yes, but your voyages have been only into sterile universes. Places where corporeal beings not unlike yourselves are masters. But there are an infinite number of universes, my friends. There are ones where you can taste colors and feel a wind a million parsecs away.

PIPER:

Like the one you call home.

VOTTA:

And it is a home that we find threatened.

FUNNT:

Threatened? By us?

VOTTA:

By your humankind, Funnt. By all of those in your reality who travel between the stars in great leaps. You have no idea of the consequences of your actions.

LIZ:

Votta, it sounds like you're telling us that we're causing injury to your universe because of our hyperdrive.

VOTTA:

More than injury. More than simple destruction. These actions imply the hope of survival. But even that is denied to those who experience genocide.

FUNNT:

Genocide? Votta, that's a pretty serious charge. I know the UC isn't going to win the Nobel Peace Prize, but I can't believe they would knowingly exterminate another race.

LIZ:

Especially when we're so busy exterminating ourselves.

VOTTA:

Funnt, your drives create funnels between universes. You may call them ducts or passageways. Within these passageways matter and energy may flow. From one location to another, from one universe to another. And in doing so they drain one universe of vital material, material that my race requires to survive.

PIPER:

Material? Votta, I don't understand. If you're made from electromagnetic waves, what type of matter could you need?

VOTTA:

Richard, my people sustain themselves on what you call high energy plasma. We need it to maintain our coherence. It is our only form of sustenance.

LIZ:

So you're starving to death? How many have been lost?

VOTTA:

As many as there are atoms in a star. But would it be less conscionable if I said there had been only one?

LIZ:

Point taken.

PIPER:

So you've come to our universe to try to stop us from using our hyperdrive? To try to help save your people?

VOTTA:

It is more than just my people, my friends. The disruptions caused by your technology have been building. They have now become self-sustaining. It is your existence that is threatened as well as that of my race.

PIPER:

Pardon me, Votta, but I find that hard to believe. Hyperdrive technology has been in use for more than two generations and we haven't noticed the galaxy falling apart.

VOTTA:

I understand, my friends. If you told me the universe would end tomorrow, I would ask for proof. But proof I can give you. You know of the object called the Old Lighthouse?

PIPER:

Sure, every navigator in the UC knows of it. It's a pulsar with a period of exactly five seconds aimed right at New Pennsauken.

VOTTA:

Within one of your weeks it will be destroyed. A passageway will open near the object and transfer much of its mass into my universe.

FUNNT:

Mr. Piper, how far are we from that pulsar?

PIPER:

I'd say... we're about three days out, sir. We'd need to make about three good sized jumps.

FUNNT:

Votta, you don't mind if we check out your story.

VOTTA:

Of course not, Captain. I anticipate that once you are satisfied with the veracity of my warning, all of you will aid me without question or concern.

LIZ:

Won't these jumps just do more damage to your universe?

VOTTA:

Yes, but it will be minimal. This area correlates with a relatively unpopulated section of my reality.

FUNNT:

Mr. Piper, make your final course and transfer it to the bridge computer.

PIPER:

Aye, Captain, we can be set to go in about two minutes.

LIZ:

Votta, I just thought of something.

VOTTA:

I know.

LIZ:

Ah, yes. Well, I know you won't might if I tell the rest of the crew.

VOTTA:

Please.

LIZ:

Votta, if our hyperdrive tears holes in your universe, might it affect you as you travel on this ship?

VOTTA:

(LAUGHS) I assure you, good Doctor, that coalescence into your form has given me adequate protection.

LIZ:

Still, Votta, I'd feel negligent in my professional duty if I allowed anything to happen to you. Especially since your mission is so important.

FUNNT:

What exactly are you suggesting, Liz?

LIZ:

Down in MedSuite we have some particularly sensitive electronic equipment. I keep it in a room surrounded by a Faraday cage. I think that placing Votta down there during the jumps should isolate him.

FUNNT:

Sounds like a good idea to me. Votta, would you mind?

VOTTA:

I assure you I do not need the protection, Captain. But I can see that it will settle your minds...

FUNNT:

Thank you. Freak, take our guest down to MedSuite.

LIZ:

It's the room with the polymerase reactor, Freak.

FREAK:

Cool, Dirwood. C'mon, Mr. Green.

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

(FX: DOOR)

FUNNT:

Mr. Piper, check with them in five minutes. If they're clear, go up to the bridge and execute the jumps.

PIPER:

Yes, sir.

LIZ:

Funnt, I'm about to ask you something I might regret.

FUNNT:

What's that?

LIZ:

Would you buy me a cup of coffee?

FUNNT:

What?!?

LIZ:

C'mon, then. It's my treat. Rec room 5-E.

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

(FX: DOOR)

FUNNT:

Did you hear what I heard, Mr. Piper?

PIPER:

I don't think she'll ask a second time, sir.

FUNNT:

(PULLING HIMSELF TOGETHER) Well, if you'll excuse me, Ensign, I believe I have a date.

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

(FX: DOOR)

PIPER:

And I thought I'd never see anything weirder than a huge, glowing electromagnetic humanoid asking me to save his universe.

(MUSIC: BRIDGE TO:)

(FX: DOOR OPENING)

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

FUNNT:

What will it be, Liz, Centauri Arabica or Lodestone decaf?

LIZ:

I think we're alone, Funnt.

FUNNT:

Yes, we are alone. And I think you can call me Dirwood under the circumstances.

LIZ:

No, I mean alone as in isolated. Disconnected from our green friend.

FUNNT:

Excuse me, but what does he have to do with this little rendezvous?

LIZ:

Pardon me, but we needed to talk and it had to be away from the others. And if Votta is what he says he is then the cage should shield us from him.

FUNNT:

It sounds to me like you doubt his credentials.

LIZ:

I doubt more than that. I doubt a creature like him could even exist. This whole thing stinks.

FUNNT:

What about the evidence of your own eyes?

LIZ:

My eyes can be fooled, Funnt. I trust my instruments and my skeptical nature. And my professional skills.

FUNNT:

I don't think the latter will do you much good here. Wasn't your medical scanner useless on Votta?

LIZ:

It's not my scanner I used there, it was my psychological training. Everything Votta said seems to be too coherent. It seemed to hold together too well. Plus his pitch was just too good.

FUNNT:

Pitch?

LIZ:

Funnt, think back on the way he told us his story. The details, the use of phrasing... he wanted us first to be amazed by him, then to sympathize with him, and finally to trust him.

FUNNT:

But what about his offer of proof?

LIZ:

Well, I'll admit my theory is only a theory at this point. But we have to remember Occam's Razor - the simplest solution is probably the one closest to the truth. And there are many

things simpler than a giant humanoid who claims to be made out of frozen electron juice.

FUNNT:

Such as the Tesseract or the UC.

LIZ:

Exactly. We have to keep our minds wide open.

(FX: COM SOUND)

PIPER (FILTERED):

Attention everyone. We're about to make the first jump.

(FX: COM SOUND)

FUNNT:

Right, Mr. Piper, take us away.

(FX: COM SOUND)

FUNNT:

But you're forgetting one thing, Liz.

LIZ:

What's that?

FUNNT:

What if he is right?

(MUSIC: UP AND OUT)

END ACT ONE

THE FUNNT FILE

"On A Wavelength Far From Home"

ACT TWO

(MUSIC: UP AND OUT)

(FX: EXCELSIOR AMBIENT NOISES)

(FX: SLIGHT ECHO ON ALL VOICES IN THIS SCENE)

(FX: DOOR OPENING)

PIPER:

Captain Funnt? Are you in here?

FUNNT:

I'm over here, Ensign. Behind this box of fabric softener.

PIPER:

Dr. Warner said you wanted to see me. Why did it have to be way down here in the cargo holds?

FUNNT:

Did you wait until Votta was asleep or recharging?

PIPER:

He told me he needed four hours in private to rephase his primary wavelengths, whatever that means.

FUNNT:

Good. Listen, Dr. Warner thinks that Votta may not appear to be what he says he is. She thinks this might be some sort of trick.

PIPER:

Well, I have to admit I sort of agree with her. The whole idea of some coherent energy being is straight out of science fiction. But I saw Votta materialize with my own two eyes, sir. And we have seen stranger things.

FUNNT:

I know, Ensign. And it's not like I wouldn't like to believe him. One of the reasons I was glad to get away from the UC was that everyone on every planet was turning into the same type of personoid. I wanted to escape from that, to explore strange new worlds and see life in different forms. And Votta certainly fits the bill of what I was looking for. But back on Earth they had a saying - trust but verify. And I want us to do just that.

PIPER:

But how, sir? If he is a fake, I doubt he'd let us examine him. And if he's sincere, a medical exam might ... well, I don't want to sound like Freak, but it might ground him out.

FUNNT:

We're not going to have to do anything physical to our guest. I got the idea from Dr. Warner. She thinks that he's going to ask us to do something noble after we encounter the pulsar.

PIPER:

Noble as in what? You're not thinking... self-sacrifice?

FUNNT:

Exactly. Which is why I want you to get to Freak. I want you to tell him that we all have some parts to play in a little drama.

(MUSIC: BRIDGE TO:)

(FX: BRIDGE SOUNDS)

FUNNT:

Okay, gentlemen, hold us here. I want to be at least five minutes away from any lightspeed event.

(FX: PERIODIC BEEPING)

PIPER:

We're at 100 million kilometers, Captain. Receiving emission from the pulsar.

FUNNT:

Sounds like the Old Lighthouse still has its lamp working.

VOTTA:

Sometime within the next hour it will grow silent, Captain. The passageway will open and swallow the body.

PIPER:

Do you think we're safe at this distance, Votta?

VOTTA:

Oh, yes. The passageway will only occupy a region of 10,000 of your units called square kilometers. And it will be within a million kilometers of the pulsar.

FUNNT:

Piper, Freak, make sure all scanners are working. We'll want to transmit a recording of this event back to the UC.

LIZ:

I'm sure they'll believe us.

FUNNT:

Doctor, if they're not willing to pay attention to something that can swallow a neutron star, they're not half the greedy, self-centered fanatics I make them out to be.

(FX: BEEP)

FREAK:

Hey, Dirwood, my Higgs Mesh sensor grid just went blotto.

PIPER:

Confirmed, sir. I'm picking up disturbances well above the Planck level.

FUNNT:

Votta, could this be the balloon going up?

VOTTA:

That part of my being sensitive to superluminal events was lost when I assumed this form, Captain. However, I trust your instruments to be accurate.

FREAK:

Yo, me amigos. Massive flux in all of the space-time stuff. Everything's gone all lumpy and wavy.

FUNNT:

Mr. Piper, could you translate that, please?

PIPER:

There's a significant decrease in space-time curvature near the star. It's almost like its mass is being sucked away.

FUNNT:

Are you sure? The mass just isn't spreading out, like from an explosion?

PIPER:

No, sir. The pattern's almost identical to that of a gigantic hyperspace snapin. (A PAUSE) It's all gone now.

LIZ:

If it's gone, why can I still hear the signal?

FREAK:

It's that old lightspeed, Doc. It takes time to shimmy through the ether.

VOTTA:

Was that convincing enough, my friends?

FREAK:

Mark Freak down as sold.

FUNNT:

Is there nothing we can do to stop this, Votta?

VOTTA:

I am afraid not, good Captain. Your technology is too primitive and insubstantial to be effective. My people could have helped, but we are too depleted.

FUNNT:

Depleted? Of what?

LIZ:

You said something earlier about plasma starvation. Is this related?

VOTTA:

Yes, Doctor. But only a massive amount would be of any good to us.

FUNNT:

Wait a minute. Mr. Piper, how close are we to Eta Carinae?

PIPER:

Only about two good jumps, sir, but if you're thinking...

FUNNT:

We could open a duct between the two universes with our Krebs drive, and let it suck plasma from the nebula through to Votta's people. Votta, do you think it would work?

VOTTA:

Perhaps, my friends. But I believe the power cost to your ship might be enormous. The graviton pulse required would have to be at least 10,000 of your Krebs units for approximately 30 of your seconds.

FREAK:

10,000 KU? Man, glowbug, how big of a wad do you think we have?

PIPER:

Captain, such a pulse could easily cripple the hyperdrive. We could be stranded in the nebula for weeks while we fixed it.

FUNNT:

Is that really such a great price to pay, Mr. Piper, for the safety of two universes?

PIPER:

Well, when you put it that way, I guess not.

FUNNT:

Then, crew, set course for Eta Carinae.

(MUSIC: BRIDGE TO:)

(FX: HYPERSPACE SNAPOUT)

(FX: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE SOUNDS)

PIPER:

We've made it, folks. The Carinae nebula.

FUNNT:

How far are we from the position Votta requires?

PIPER:

(A BEAT FOR THE FX). Hmm, not bad. Within 100,000 kilometers. Close enough.

(FX: WARNING BEEP)

LIZ:

Funnt, we're picking up a lot of background radiation. From the short end of the spectrum and increasing.

FUNNT:

Dangerous?

LIZ:

Let's just say we won't need a microwave to make popcorn if we stay here more than an hour.

VOTTA:

Have no fear, my friends. The task ahead will be relatively quick. Shortly you can be on your way and I can return to my people.

(FX: ANOTHER BEEP)

FREAK:

Hey, Dirwood, the deuterium tanks are really starting to feel the heat. It's use it or belch it out.

FUNNT:

Mr. Piper, bring graviton generators to full charge. And bring the secondary capacitors on-line.

PIPER:

Yes, sir.

FUNNT:

And prepare the reaction engines for maximum reverse thrust. I don't want us visiting Votta's universe.

LIZ:

Votta, will you be returning via this passageway?

VOTTA:

No, Dr. Warner. The mass/energy flux will be too great. I must return via the portal by which I originally came.

(FX: ANOTHER BEEP)

FREAK:

OK, troops. We're ready to rock.

FUNNT:

Alright, Mr. Piper. It's showtime. Execute program Votta One.

(FX: ANOTHER BEEP)

(FX: GRAVITON GENERATORS)

PIPER:

Graviton generators discharging, sir. All systems at maximum.

VOTTA:

Ah, I can feel the energy returning to my dimension, my friends.

LIZ:

You can sense that?

VOTTA:

Only in a general way. I can feel the thoughts of all of my fellow beings.

LIZ:

And what are they projecting?

VOTTA:

Relief. And great happiness.

(FX: YET ANOTHER BEEP)

PIPER:

Freak, those remolded coils are starting to heat up. Open external heat vents alpha six through beta seven.

FREAK:

Hey, no flies on Freak, Pipe. I'm on it.

LIZ:

Funnt, is that a problem?

FUNNT:

No, Liz. As long as we can keep the temperature down on the coils, we should be able to finish the job. Venting the heat to space will do the trick.

LIZ:

But I thought you said we were in some type of hot gas cloud.

FUNNT:

Well, yeah. That's kind of what a nebula is... uh, oh.

(FX: ALARM)

PIPER:

Captain Funnt! Those remolded coils are breaking down! We can't maintain this output without destroying the engines!

FUNNT:

Votta, how much longer do you need?

VOTTA:

Just the merest of moments, my friends. Your task is almost complete.

(FX: COMPLETE SHUTDOWN OF SHIP)

PIPER:

Well, it's complete now. I'm not reading power in any of the propulsion systems.

FUNNT:

Damage report, Ensign.

(FX: BEEP)

PIPER:

Well, the coils are gone... Deuterium storage down to four percent... and all of the reaction drive wiring has overloaded from the EM field here in the nebula.

LIZ:

So, basically, we're deep fried.

PIPER:

In two words, extra crispy.

VOTTA:

I am sorry, my friends. I scanned your ship when I came on board. I thought your systems could perform this duty.

PIPER:

It was those remolded coils. I just that Winarian iridium just wasn't up to the job.

VOTTA:

Winarian?

FUNNT:

Yes, we had to repair the generator coils once. I guess our jury-rigging wasn't perfect.

VOTTA:

I'm sorry. I thought... I mean, I believed they were more than adequate.

FUNNT:

We all make our mistakes, Votta.

(FX: BEEP)

LIZ:

Well, we won't be making them for too much longer. The environmental system's about to short out.

VOTTA:

What? I thought that system was isolated.

FUNNT:

Well, I guess your ESP waves were jumbled, Votta. We had to put that on battery to get the energy necessary for the graviton pulse.

VOTTA:

So we're... I mean you're all going to die.

FREAK:

'Fraid so, green man. No one here gets out alive.

LIZ:

At least you can escape, Votta. You'd better go now.

VOTTA:

What?

FUNNT:

Yes, Dr. Warner is right. In a few minutes the radiation flux through the bridge will probably be too great even for you.

VOTTA:

Ah...

LIZ:

I'm afraid the doors are off-line, Votta. You'll have to disintegrate or something in order to get back to the TD sections.

VOTTA:

Ah... ah, yes, I will. In just a moment.

FUNNT:

Doctor, is it getting warmer in here?

LIZ:

I'm afraid so, Captain. Temperature's up five degrees in the last two minutes.

PIPER:

So this is it, then. Not with a bang but with a frying.

FREAK:

Break out the popcorn.

LIZ:

Temperature up to almost 320 degrees.

(FX: WARNING BEEP)

LIZ (CONT):

Oxygen content is now dropping below human tolerance levels.

PIPER:

Lt. Doppler, it's been a privilege to serve with you.

FREAK:

Yeah, Pipe... I mean, Ensign Piper... you've been pretty righteous too.

PIPER:

Shall we?

FREAK:

Yeah, bro'. Endit with a tune.

(FREAK AND PIPER BEGIN SINGING "IT'S A LONG WAY TO ALPHA CENTAURI" OR SOME OTHER APPROPRIATE TUNE UNDERNEATH THE FOLLOWING)

FUNNT:

Queasy, prepare to jettison ship's disaster marker.

VOTTA:

Captain, I...

FUNNT:

Votta, please! We saved your people. Don't let our sacrifice be for nothing.

FUNNT:

(A BIT OF PANIC EDGING IN) Captain, I... I can't leave you.

FUNNT:

Votta, that's very noble, but your death ...

VOTTA:

No, I mean I can't leave! I'm stuck here!

FUNNT:

Why, Votta, in order to be stuck here, you'd have to be like us.

LIZ:

And we all know what you are. So why don't you just demagnetize away?

VOTTA:

(PANICKED) I am like you! I can't leave! I'm not an alien!

(PIPER AND FREAK STOP SINGING)

FUNNT:

Queasy, discontinue program Votta One.

(FX: BRIDGE SOUNDS RETURN)

VOTTA:

What the...

FUNNT:

Well, whatever you are, you've haven't got a lot of flight experience. Otherwise you would have known there's often a difference between what's on the monitors and what's really happening. Doctor, do you have those readings?

(FX: BEEP)

LIZ:

Based on the gas exchange data, he's human.

FUNNT:

You're sure?

LIZ:

Whatever he's wearing might have defeated my medical scanner, but it couldn't fool Queasy. She just monitored the total amount of carbon dioxide processed by the environmental systems.

FUNNT:

So how's about off with the mask, Votta?

(FX: VOTTA'S SYSTEM TURNS OFF)

FREAK:

Bitchin'! He looks like a french fry!

FUNNT:

Piper, what is that? Some kind of environmental suit?

PIPER:

Yes, sir. I think it's standard UC stealth issue, but it looks like it's been modified. I don't recognize these micro-emitters on the surface.

VOTTA:

I'm not surprised, Piper. They're a new type of imaging diode.

FREAK:

That's how you glow like Floyd at the Fillmore! Cool!

FUNNT:

Votta, unless you want us to shut you up with Freak for the rest of our trip, I suggest you start talking.

VOTTA:

No matter, Funnt. The game's over. I've lost. My name is Pestle.

FUNNT:

Do I know you?

VOTTA:

I'm sure you don't. But over the last fiscal year I've been made quite aware of you. Do you know how much money you've cost the UC?

FUNNT:

Cost? I don't understand.

VOTTA:

My official title is Cost Review Administrator.... Black Project Section.

LIZ:

I don't believe it... they sent an accountant after us!

VOTTA:

Not just an accountant, Doctor. The head one. I'm responsible for all black project funds, and that means the ones spent by your friends in the Tesseract. And they've been spending a pretty credit on your capture without any return.

FUNNT:

So you decided to come after us, just because they were over budget?!?

VOTTA:

The scheme was perfect. If I succeeded, the Tesseract would have been placed directly under my fiscal control. You know, regardless of what you think of the UC, Funnt, we're first and foremost a business. And if any of our operations, even our covert ones, don't meet our projected returns, the UC removes their management.

FUNNT:

Removes...? Where do they go?

VOTTA:

Funnt, the inefficient are always... disposable.

FUNNT:

And you aren't?

VOTTA:

The problem with the Tesseract is that they keep to themselves. They don't trust other parts of the company, and that just leads to waste. I welcome comparision between your previous experiences with them and this operation. I got the stealth suit from UC Weapons Research, and the whole Votta angle was developed from your company records by our Psychological Coercion Division. The only thing missing from the scenario was the modifications you've made to the Excelsior. Plus all of those Krebs drones I needed to destroy the pulsar weren't cheap. Still, very cost-effective and efficient.

FUNNT:

Not to mention your method of transport.

VOTTA:

Ah yes, the TD trick. The only time the Tesseract was useful to me.

PIPER:

Useful? Mr. Pestle, you mean you don't know...

FUNNT:

(INTERRUPTING) You mean the Tesseract suggested you try their TD method for getting on board.

VOTTA:

Yes, and if I hadn't panicked, you'd be stranded here waiting for a UC patrol and I'd be back in my office laughing in their faces.

FUNNT:

And you'd be damn near dead as well.

VOTTA:

Oh, Funnt, don't try to scare me. You don't have the face for it.

FUNNT:

Doctor Warner, if you'd be so kind.

(FX: MEDICAL SCANNER)

LIZ:

He was lucky, Funnt. There's some minor damage to the lungs and pancreas, but nothing a good nanosurgeon couldn't fix. Although I'm seeing a large number of vascular defects in the Circle of Willis. Practically all of his intracranial arteries have lost elasticity.

PIPER:

Doctor, are you describing a stroke?

FUNNT:

Piper, how do you remember all that stuff?

LIZ:

(IGNORING FUNNT) At the very least, Richard. And a pretty massive one at that.

VOTTA:

Let me see that scanner! (A PAUSE) These readings! They can't be mine!

FUNNT:

Run it yourself if you don't believe Dr. Warner. If you had gone back by now you'd be lucky to be a vegetable. I take it your Black Project buddies didn't tell you about how unprotected human tissue shreds going through a TD interface.

LIZ:

Sounds to me like they wanted him dead.

FUNNT:

You have to admit, it's neat. If Pestle succeeds, then we're no longer a problem. And even he doesn't, he's no longer a problem.

VOTTA:

(A BIT TAKEN BACK) They... they were going to kill me! Really kill me!

FUNNT:

It's not the best feeling in the world, eh, Pestle?

VOTTA:

What do you mean?

FUNNT:

Finding out just how disposable the UC thinks you are.

(MUSIC: BRIDGE TO:)

(FX: SHUTTLE ENGINES)

VOTTA:

So this is your plan, just abandon me on this planet?

FUNNT:

You'll see.

VOTTA:

It must be. I don't think you'd just shoot me.

FUNNT:

What does your psychological profile tell you?

(FX: SHUTTLE LANDING)

(FX: DOOR OPENING)

(FX: WIND SOUNDS)

FUNNT:

OK, Pestle, this is it. End of the line. Pick up that red box in the corner and get outside.

VOTTA:

I can't lift that thing all by myself.

FUNNT:

It only contains a UC survival pack. I'm sure that even a corporeal being like you can handle it.

(GENERAL SOUNDS OF MOVEMENT)

(FX: DOOR CLOSING)

(FX: WIND EFFECTS UP SLIGHTLY)

FUNNT:

OK, the red box contains a standard UC survival pack -dehydrated rations, emergency shelter, clothing, plus the medicine Dr. Warner prescribed. This box I'm holding contains a plasma pistol kit and a comdrone distress beacon. If you can rub two sticks together you should make out fine.

VOTTA:

So you want me to just sit here until the UC comes and picks me up?

FUNNT:

If that's what you want. From what you said before that's what I expected. Regardless of what the Tesseract thinks of you, the UC seems more than just your home. It seems like a way of life, and I wonder whether you could imagine the universe without it.

VOTTA:

Wait a minute, Funnt. I'm not like the Tesseract or any of those other pro-company fanatics. I just happen to think that we need the UC for now.

FUNNT:

Or that it's the system that will eventually beat all of its rivals. Maybe you're just betting on a winner.

VOTTA:

Maybe so. But listen, Funnt. What do you think would happen to the galaxy if there wasn't a UC? Do you think we'd have law and order out here, much less civilization?

FUNNT:

But why is this the way we need to live our lives? What do you think would happen if the UC disappeared?

VOTTA:

Anarchy. Total, complete anarchy.

FUNNT:

So you think everyone would be at each other's throats? Cities in flames, that sort of thing?

VOTTA:

Unfortunately, yes. I think it's that's just human nature.

FUNNT:

That's where I differ with you, Pestle. I don't think people would be at each other's throats... or even into each other's wallets. And I think people should get a chance to prove it. Even people like you.

VOTTA:

A grand philosophy, Funnt. Very noble. But how are you in reducing it to practice? I notice you're stranding me here. What choice do I have?

FUNNT:

Open your eyes, Pestle. You have all the choice in the galaxy. Sure, you can go back to the UC and be who you were again. But what if you send your comdrone to another planet? The Sirotan Trading Alliance is only two parsecs away. It's a bit of a frontier society, but you might be right at home. Or what if you stayed here? It seems to be a nice world, and it is all yours.

VOTTA:

Better to rule in Hell than serve in Heaven, is that your answer?

FUNNT:

Pestle, I'll be gone. My answer doesn't matter. Yours does.

VOTTA:

Then, goodbye, Funnt. And don't forget to tell the Tesseract I'm still around when they finally catch you.

FUNNT:

Goodbye, Pestle.

(FX: FOOTSTEPS)

(FX: SHUTTLE TAKEOFF)

VOTTA:

Let's see, where's that comdrone? (A BIT OF INVENTION ON THE PART OF THE ACTOR AS HE/SHE PRETENDS TO SET IT) Ah, good, New Rahway is only ten light-years away. All I need to do is press the button and I'm back... (WITH A BIT OF RESIGNATION) to right where I was. And to who I was. And to what I was. Hmm... come to think of it, I did play my role well back there... I wonder well how I'd play in a Sirotan trading sash?

THE FILE VOICE:

There are many who think that our future should be guided from outside humanity, from beings beyond us, from creatures of more elaborate and elegant construction. But these people deny the optimal tomorrow, the one possible when we remember the best future always comes from a belief instead in our own abilities to choose our path. File Sector XX.XX readout completed. Thank you for accessing the Funnt File.

END ACT TWO

THE END!