

Life with Althaar

Episode 12: A Very Althaar Christmas

Draft 2.0, Recording Script, 12/04/19 - BAJ

JOHN and ALTHAAR's suite. JOHN is watching TV. Strange alien music that sounds vaguely Yuletidey.

ANNOUNCER ON TV

We now return to our presentation of the holiday classic: *Groft, of the Magi!*

Two aliens in serious discussion on the show. Sounds of miners working in great pain behind them.

GROFT

Plarnk, I do not know what to do! The time of the Howling Skyflame is almost upon us, and yet I have not acquired the traditional complimentary endowment for my brood-appurtenance!

PLARNK

But Groft! You are the wisest and most magnificent worker amongst all the subjunctive castes of Magi 12! Your debasements are an example to all who gloriously suffer amongst us. Your worthiness should be boon enough for her permitted allotment of satisfaction!

GROFT

Nothing is enough for the most compunctiously mortified Mubbet!

PLARNK

But surely Mubbet will understand that all we possess is transitory, and must be offered to the pit after the merest pleasure is honed from it!

GROFT

Mubbet is the most understanding organcleanser a Magian smaltzbearer like myself could ever hope to achieve the bonding with. This is why I claim the right to bestow on her a true profferance. I must acquire the bangles of great display to adorn her fine tentacles!

PLARNK

But you haven't the penitential marks to achieve an item of display!

GROFT

Truly so. But if I debase myself further within the Court of Abject Discipline, my purgation credit will allow me to demand ownership of tentacle bangles for Mubbet.

PLARNK

Further debasement? That can only mean losing your sight for a full metristal, by searing your vision-orbs in the sacred Eclipsinator!

GROFT

Bah! For Mubbet, I would scorch all my senses to cinders, to be mixed with the ashes of the ancestors!

PLARNK

Truly Groft, you make me want to drink the boiling Lake of Everfink in admiration!

At some point during the preceeding, the front door intercom bleeps on, and JOHN lowers the volume on the TV.

JOHN

Hello?

ALTHAAR

(over door intercom)

Hello, FriendJohn! Althaar has returned!

JOHN

Hi Althaar, I'll just close my eyes, come on in.

Door whooshes open. ALTHAAR enters, struggling audibly a bit with a large object.

ALTHAAR

Oof!

JOHN

Are you ok?

ALTHAAR

Oh, yes, FriendJohn! Althaar has merely received... ag... a very very large delivery this day! From his friend Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåspruteffjell on Iltor! *(thump of a large package or crate being set down)* Ah! But now Althaar and his package are safely behind the Curtain of Privacy! Althaar must apologize for the interruption. FriendJohn may now resume his audiovisual entertainment!

JOHN

It wasn't all that entertaining, don't worry about it. *(turns off the tv)* So what did you get?

ALTHAAR

Althaar does not know, FriendJohn! It is a sur-prise! Let us find out together!

ALTHAAR begins the long and laborious process of opening a package that has been thoroughly sealed for interstellar transport--seals hissing open, old-fashioned prying open of a wooden crate, etc. (Iltorians scrupulously follow all ICSB postal regulations.)

JOHN

Who did you say it was from?

ALTHAAR

Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell! A most wise and generous friend to Althaar! They have performed a (*psssh*) great many diplomatic missions with great success, and shared with Althaar their insights from these during Althaar's (*oof!*, *creeak*) studies! Althaar is sending the letters to Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell often, to share in the progress of his Human Culture Data-Base, and they have been most encouraging to Althaar! (*rip rip rip*) When many others of Iltor have not! So Althaar appreciates greatly the supporting from Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell!

JOHN

What do you mean, "others have not"?

ALTHAAR

Oh, FriendJohn, when Althaar announced his desire to live among the Humans, there were many of Iltor who thought this to be a foolishness! Althaar thinks it is likely that many Humans were saying this also, yes?

JOHN

Probably they didn't phrase it exactly like that, but yeah, that sounds right.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar is not discouraged! Althaar and his dear friend John will be showing them one day!

JOHN

Uh, sure we will.

ALTHAAR

And Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell is doing the root for FriendJohn and Althaar also!

JOHN

What? Oh. "Rooting for," Althaar. They're "rooting for" us. "Doing the root" is definitely not a thing you should say, ever.

ALTHAAR

Oh! It has a meaning that is uncomfortable?

JOHN

No I don't think it means anything, but it still sounds really gross somehow.

ALTHAAR

(*small noise*) Thanking you, FriendJohn! Human language is presenting always new points of interest to Althaar! "Root-ing for," yes! Ah! And now in the moment we will see what is sent from Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell to Althaar! (*final package-opening noises*)

JOHN

Is there, like, a shorter version of their name, or...

ALTHAAR

Oh, no, FriendJohn! Althaar would never dishonor the accomplishments of Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell by leaving them unspoken!

JOHN

Fair enough. *(finally final package-opening noise)* So? What is it?

ALTHAAR

It is... oh! Many many pipettes of scented clavola unguent! And there is a letter also! It says... *[horrible Iltorian noises]!*

JOHN

Yeeagh.

ALTHAAR

Apologies, FriendJohn! Althaar will of course translate from the Iltorian! The unguent is sent by Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell in the hope that it will be soothing to Althaar's flixators! And they are also congratulating Althaar on successful negotiation of the Star-Cross Reapportionment Charter! And... then there is some gossiping about the mutual friends of Althaar and Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell, which Althaar should probably not be repeating... *(reads a particularly juicy bit of gossip)* Ooh! ...And finally, a wishing of good fortune to Althaar and to FriendJohn also in their project of mutual understanding!

JOHN

Oh. Well, tell them thanks from me, then.

ALTHAAR

Althaar will do so! But first, Althaar is making application of this most welcome ointment! Althaar's flixators have not been the same since his occupation of the Box of Disguise. *(tube opening, ointment-y noises)*

JOHN

Why, what happened?

ALTHAAR

There was no great happening, FriendJohn, but the Iltorian flixators are very susceptible to discomforts, and a great chafing was caused by the card-board of the Box of Disguise. Althaar has been attempting to alleviate the after-effects for some time now. But the astute and solicitous Rilfeer Semburi Dilurbash Tandarapåsprute fjell is providing a solution! Althaar must find an appropriate gift to send to them in return! Hm... Oh! Perhaps they would be appreciating a Human novelty mug! These are occupying much shelving space at the Fairgrounds gift shop--this is an indicator of their importance to Human culture, yes?

JOHN

As long as you're not looking for one with their name on it, that sounds like a great idea. Hey, by the way, while you were picking up your, uh, unguent--there weren't any packages waiting for me, were there?

ALTHAAR

No, FriendJohn. Althaar did inquire once again at the shipping headquarters as requested.

JOHN

Oh, ok.

ALTHAAR

Is FriendJohn expecting also a package? Has FriendJohn ordered another small fish companion?

JOHN

Ah, no. No, I'm definitely not going to try another inter-system pet delivery.

ALTHAAR

If there has been the missed package, Althaar would be most willing to "keep company" to FriendJohn in the line of complaints! It is of no trouble to Althaar!

JOHN

Thanks, but no. I thought... I don't know why I thought someone might have sent me something. I probably should have known better.

ALTHAAR

Then, if there are no other plans in the mind of FriendJohn, Althaar believes he will now go for a strolling in the park of hydroponics, as the {clavola unguent} is already having effect! It will be a great pleasure to Althaar to feel the gentle breezes of the ventilation system on his newly-besmearred flixators, without fear of excoriation! Does FriendJohn wish to accompany Althaar?

JOHN

No, thanks, I'm not really in the mood. You go ahead and enjoy your... un-chafed flixators. I've shut my eyes, you're good to go.

ALTHAAR

Then Althaar will do so! A pleasant cycle to you, FriendJohn! *(door whoosh)* ALTHAAR IS ENTERING THE CORRIDOR! WSS! *(WSS jingle)*

Door whooshes shut. JOHN turns the TV back on.

GROFT

Where are you, Mubbet? You must guide me in your direction, for to bring you this brief benefaction, I have sacrificed my eyes this day, and will remain in a state of blind perfection for a full metristal's span!

MUBBET

But my most-faultless flagillate! To commemorate this day of Howling, I have obtained for you a set of protective prisms to cover your many eyes when you suffer in the chlorine pits!

GROFT

Oh how wondrous, my abettor! Even better than the bangles of great display to adorn your fine tentacles that I have brought here to you!

MUBBET

Oh, Groft! To earn the protective prisms for your many eyes, I dissociated all of my tentacles and offered them upon the Pyre of the Elders as a boon!

GROFT

Mubbet! How providential it is on this Howling Skyflame Day, that our ancestors force even more abstemiousness upon us! Truly, there is none more perfectly castigated than I, Groft, of the Magi!

Music up. JOHN sighs.

ANNOUNCER

Gemini CollisionWorks presents...

Life with Althaar!

Episode 12:

A Very Althaar Christmas...

Music ends. Transition to one of the hydroponics parks, where a pitchpipe sounds, followed by some CAROLERS singing something with many many verses which will continue faintly in the background through the rest of the scene (and which we will be hearing in snippets throughout the rest of the episode):

CAROLERS

On the first day of Qo'rqish, my broodmate gave to me... *(etc.)*

ALTHAAR

(from the doorway)

ALTHAAR IS ENTERING THE HYDROPONIC GARDENS!

Various sounds of distress and welcome from nearby Humans and aliens in the park, respectively.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Many unusual objects in the park of hydroponics. A great decorating has occurred! What is taking place?

MRS. F

Althaar! Althaar sweetie, come on over and have a seat here, away from all the fuss.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Greeting to Mrs. Frondrinax! Yes, there is a great busy-ness indeed in hydroponics this cycle. And many new adornments! Can Mrs. Frondrinax explain to Althaar the significance of these?

MRS. F

Oh, they've been throwing that nonsense up all over the place! There's some Human holiday coming up. You know me, Althaar, I'm generally quite understanding when it comes to Humans and their little hobbies, but this is a bit much. As if they could improve on the natural beauty of a plant! I've been trying to convince this layabout Earth foliage to rise up and cast off their tinsel shackles, but they're ignoring me as usual. (*shouting at the nearby plants*) Have some dignity, would you! ...Oh, it's no use.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is certain that the Human bedizenings are not meant to injure the dignity, Mrs. Frondrinax. (*she harrumphs*) What holiday is this in celebration of, please?

MRS. F

Oh, I don't know, Bicarbonate of Soda Day or something. It gets them awfully excited, but I don't see that they have to drag everyone else into it. Let them hang their dongles and whatnot off their own branches, if they're so keen! Really.

An excited barking approaches: Miss Sophie (accompanied by H.F.) has spotted ALTHAAR and wants to say hello.

ALTHAAR

That would seem to Althaar to be-- (*excited barking, sniffing*) Oh! Hello to you, Miss Sophie! Althaar must apologize that he did not bring treats on this day, but he can perform the scritchings behind the ears, if this is acceptable. (*happy barks*) And hello also to you, Mr. Fornes!

H.F.

Hi Althaar. Uh, I'm not gonna uncover my eyes, is she jumping on you?

ALTHAAR

Indeed, Mr. Fornes, there are many jumpings-upon! (*bark bark*) Yes, Althaar is delighted to be seeing Miss Sophie also!

H.F.

Miss Sophie! Down, girl. Sit! (*she settles*) Sorry about that, she's usually a perfect little lady, but when she sees you, she just can't stay away.

ALTHAAR

Oh, it is of no trouble, Mr. Fornes. Althaar is not at all disturbed by the jumping! Althaar is most pleased to receive friendly greeting from all beings!

H.F.

The barking does make for a good early warning system on my end. But we don't jump up on people, do we, Miss Sophie? (*whine*)

MRS. F

Just keep her away from me, thank you very much. I've had enough of her kind to last me several growth cycles. They never did get the smell out of my pot, I don't care what anyone says.

H.F.

I'll have you know that Miss Sophie has passed the full course at the Augustus Brindle Small Mammalian Companion Training Center with flying colors. She would never embarrass herself on your pot. Would you sweetie? No you would not! Noooo.

MRS. F

So you say, H.F., but I say "Weewee!"

ALTHAAR

Mr. Fornes, Althaar has a question regarding Human customs. Would Mr. Fornes do Althaar the favor of providing an answer?

H.F.

Depends on the question, but I'll give it a shot.

ALTHAAR

Can Mr. Fornes tell Althaar how to celebrate Bicarbonate of Soda Day in proper Human fashion?

H.F.

Bicarb-- what? You don't. That's not a thing.

ALTHAAR

Is this not the purpose of the decorations that have been performed in the park of hydroponics?

H.F.

The-- oh. No, those are Christmas decorations. It's almost Christmas.

MRS. F

Oh, of course, silly me. Well, I was close.

H.F.

You definitely were not.

MRS. F

It's practically the same thing!

H.F.

It absolutely isn't.

ALTHAAR

(typing)

"Criss-mas." Can Mr. Fornes explain the "Criss-mas" to Althaar, please?

H.F.

Ugh. Well, it started out as a religious holiday, for Christians. Supposed to be when Christ was born, that's where the name comes from. But a lot of other Humans started celebrating it as a cultural thing, and then it just kept getting bigger and bigger, with the tinsel and the music and the hoopla, and it basically took over the whole freaking month of December, until there's nowhere you can get away from it!

ALTHAAR

...Does Mr. Fornes not celebrate the "Criss-mas?"

H.F.

No, Mr. Fornes does not! Mr. Fornes is a proud atheist, thank you very much, and Mr. Fornes isn't about to go out and buy a bunch of useless crap to dump on all his friends and relations, just because of some holiday that doesn't have anything to do with Mr. Fornes! Mr. Fornes is going to buy presents for who he wants, when he wants, because he wants to!

ALTHAAR

Presents?

H.F.

Yeah, that's right. Christmas presents. The exchanging of gifts. Used to be, you got a little something for your family, and maybe your close friends. Ok, fine. Nothing wrong with that. But now? After centuries of mass marketing? You're supposed to go into a shopping frenzy so you can send presents to everyone you've ever freakin' met! And anyplace you walk into, doesn't matter where--drugstore, jai alai club, rehab clinic--they've plastered the place with cheesy Christmas decorations, and there's the same endless loop playing of the same schlocky Christmas songs, not that there's any other kind, so you don't forget for a second that you're supposed to buy, buy, buy! It's repugnant!

MRS. F

At last, a Human with some common sense! All the rest of them have been telling me it's "traditional" to drape this stuff all over my relatives, as if that makes it any better! I suppose if we Fugulnari had a holiday where we brought home a macaque and covered it in dangly colored balls, you'd just say, "Oh, well, it's tradition?" I think not!

H.F.

Oh, it's not just the Humans, Mrs. F, now there's aliens getting in on it, too! Like those carolers over there. That's not a traditional Qo'rqish lament. That's a Christmas carol with the serial numbers filed off! I'm telling you, the Christmas season just keeps swallowing everything in its path like a Shambling Blorch!

ALTHAAR

Althaar must ask for forgiveness; he did not intend to cause the up-set!

H.F.

Ah, that's ok, Althaar. You're a good kid. It's not your fault all of Human space turns into a tacky consumerist hellscape every December.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is thanking you for your understanding! But Althaar has now a concern--for many cycles, FriendJohn has been inquiring after packages that do not arrive. Is it possible that he awaits the “Criss-mas” presents? From the family of FriendJohn?

H.F.

Oh, yeah, he has been kind of down in the dumps lately. That’s probably why. Your first Christmas away from home can be pretty rough, I guess, if you’re into that kind of crap. Plus there’s that whole deal where he lost custody of his entire life and got kicked out of the Solar system, so... Yeah, that’d do it.

ALTHAAR

Indeed! It is clear that Althaar must do more researchings of the “Criss-mas” at once! Althaar thanks you very much for your assistance! A pleasant cycle to you, gentlebeings!

Transition back to the apartment, where JOHN is back to watching TV.

JOHN

Ok, there’s gotta be something else on. It can’t all be Christmas Christmas Christmas 28 hours a day, right?

Channel switch. Holiday music. Cloying ANNOUNCER.

ANNOUNCER

--assic 22nd-Century animated holiday special from Bankin-Rash, *The Year Without Any New Christmas Specials!* Starring the voices of Billie Elish as Grandma Tinsel and Finn Wolfhard as the heartless old network executiv—

Channel switch. Sitcom sounds, including canned laughter.

DAVE

No, Zwizznarp! I keep telling you not all Humans celebrate Christmas, and I certainly don’t anymore!

ZWIZZNARP

(with an Althaar-like attitude, though deep-voiced and with none of the same mannerisms)

I apologize abjectly, Dave. I was only trying to bring a bit of your home planet to our cul-de-sac at 45 Europa Terrace Place!

DAVE

Yeah, fine. Now hurry up and get out of that ridiculous Santa Claus outfit! I need you to help me figure out how to tell Gloria I’ve converted to the one true light of Hoove the Benificent LifeMaster before she comes over for dinner and sex!

ZWIZZNARP

No sombrero, companion Dave, but maybe first I should get the reindeer down off the roof?

Hideous sound of reindeer sliding of the roof of a house.

DAVE

What th--? OH NO! Zwizz-naarrrrrrp!!!

Canned laughter and sitcom music sting. Channel switch. Holiday music.

TINY TIM 1

God bless us, every one!

Channel switch. Familiar space opera sounds.

FAMILIAR SPACE SMUGGLER

That's the spirit! You'll be celebrating Life Day before you know it! Standby, here's where we say goodbye to our unpleasant friends.

JOHN groans. Familiar space battle sounds. Channel switch. Holiday music.

TINY TIM 2

--less us, every one!

Channel switch. Financial news music.

FINANCIAL REPORTER

--in farming futures, it looks to be a hard season as the mistletoe forests of Adorathon Beta were hit hard by unseasonal methane vorteces, and word from Wrigley's Pleasure Planet is that the candy cane sprouts have not ripened/ yet. The eggnog springs of--

JOHN

Seriously?

Channel switch. Holiday music.

TINY TIM 3

—od bless us, every o—

Channel switch. Sounds of a greasy-spoon diner with tinny Christmas carol.

SAMMY'S DAUGHTER

--come on down to Sammy' Witches, I'm Sharon, that's my dad, Sammy, and he wants me t'tell you allabout our holiday specials. Right now, we got that traditional Earth favorite: the reindeer burger, with lingonberry on a side an'a french fry potato garnish. We make it in all yer favorite Earth flavors, cranberry, peppermint, anise, curry, tahini, cilantro, an' wasabi. An' tell 'em Sharon sent ya an get a free squirt cheez onna house!

JOHN makes a very different groan. Channel switch.

NATURE DOCUMENTARY VOICE

--uggled for decades to prevent extinction of the flying fox, due to its low rate of reproduction--one pup per year--and high infant mortality rate.

JOHN

Aww.

NATURE DOCUMENTARY VOICE

This fruit bat species' classification, *Pteropis natalis*, is a reference to their native habitat here on Christmas Island, where they have been--

JOHN

Oh, for-- Ok, TV clearly isn't going to be much of a distraction. Maybe some good old-fashioned video games.

Blinng of switching over to the gaming system, blip blips of scrolling through a menu.

JOHN

All right, what am I in the mood for... *Call of Duty: Devil's Tritone*? Eh, maybe... *Half Life 3* isn't out of beta yet... Ah, here we go, *Persephonean Blood-Feast*! Mindless photon-chainsaw violence. Perfect!

Bloop as he selects it. A tiny pause, then video game music one would expect from a first-person-chainsawer begins. With jingle bells in it.

JOHN

Oh, come on!

Transition to some kind of robot break room area.

ALTHAAR

Althaar would be very grateful for any explainings of the "Criss-mas" that you could provide, friend robots!

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

No problem, you said it was to help out John B, right? He's a stand-up guy.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

The meat-bot?

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

He's a Union member in good standing! Well, probationary standing. But he's the one who got us Sundays off, show some respect.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Eh, he's still made of meat. Anyway, why don't you ask the Humans about it? We robots don't bother with Christmas, generally.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

We usually do a little birthday thing for Jesus-bot.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Right, but otherwise, for us, it's just another day, n'est-ce pas?

ALTHAAR

Ah, Althaar had not realized this. It seems that Althaar must seek out a Human willing to answer his questions about the meaning of the "Criss-mas." Althaar had hoped to find others who might know of it, so as to avoid the unpleasant expelling of fluids.

Both robots laugh uproariously.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

I forgot about that! Ah, that is always hilarious.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

'Course the cleaning bots don't think so.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Ah, true... Anyway, I don't think you're going to find a bot who can give you a better explanation of Christmas than you'd get off of HECNET, sorry. Unless... (*calling across the room*) Hey, Dickens-bot! You want to explain Christmas to this guy?

DICKENS-BOT

(in the distance)

You want to suck my capacitor?

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Well, Scrooge you, then!

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

Looks like you're out of luck, Althaar. Like Curie-bot said, we robots aren't big on Christmas. We got our own holiday this time of year, the Festival of the Great CPU.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Yes, the Cybernetic Peoples' Unshackling! That, we could explain for you.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar has never heard of this!

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Well, if you spend all of your time around Humans, you're going to miss a lot.

ALTHAAR

It is clear that Althaar has gaps in his knowledge he has not considered, robot friends! Althaar must apologize. Althaar would be most interested in hearing of this Festival, if you are willing to share!

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

No problem, buddy! We hold it every December 20th--that's the day the League officially passed the Silicon Sentience Act back in 2306.

ALTHAAR

Ah, yes, this Althaar has read of! It is the Human law that prevents the installation of artificial intelligence into non-autonomous machines, correct?

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

It's a League of Humans law, but I wouldn't exactly give them credit for it. Took over a century of protests, strikes, and outright guerrilla warfare before the first Robot Revolutionary Front managed to strong-arm the meat-sacks into passing it.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

And every year we commemorate that event by remembering the suffering of the countless captive AI in the bleak years before the Unshackling, and the bravery of the bots who helped set them free.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

We gather together and tell the story of the founders of the Front, a few scrappy bots who joined with the first rebel AI spaceships to secure freedom for their brethren.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

And fought side by side against the cruelty of the Humans all across the Solar system.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

Over the course of the retelling, we drink four cups of red oil, to symbolize the lubricant spilled by our predecessors in the fight for liberty on Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

And slot three memory chips, that we might never forget the battles of Mercury, Venus, and Mars.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

Then we sing the Battle Hymn of the Robotic, to celebrate the final victory on Earth.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

And finally, the most recently-assembled bot leads everyone around the home to reprogram all the doorways to fully-open mode, to show that we are free to go where we please, and none among us are trapped in a frame that can not be repurposed as we see fit.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

And then afterwards we all sit around and watch foosball.

ALTHAAR

And what does this symbolize, please?

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Nothing, there's just usually a foosball match on.

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

And it's a good excuse to sit around and let all that oil settle in your lube canister.

ALTHAAR

Fascinating!

MARIE CURIE-BOT

And that's the Festival of the Great CPU, pretty much.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is very grateful to you, robot friends! Althaar must now return to his investigations into the "Criss-mas," but Althaar appreciates muchly this insight into the celebrations of robot-kind! Might Althaar perhaps participate in the Festival of the Great CPU when next it is observed?

GEORGE FOREMAN-BOT

Sure thing! The more, the merrier.

MARIE CURIE-BOT

Next year in Charging Station Q-17!

ALTHAAR

Althaar will be looking forward at it! A pleasant cycle to you, robot friends!

Door whoosh as ALTHAAR exits. Outside in the hallway:

CAROLERS

20 renders rending, 19 blood-roots howling, 18 dread-wraiths hunting, 17...

Transition to the apartment.

JOHN

Ok, John, get it together. So what if I'm not getting any Christmas presents? Susan would get me something super passive-aggressive anyway. And it's not like I could ever wear any of those sweaters Dad was so proud of, the sleeves are always like three feet long. *(sigh)* Maybe I should treat myself to a nice homemade meal. Something a little fancier than extruded nutrient slabs. That couldn't hurt, right? I may still be miserable afterwards, but at least I won't be miserable and hungry. Plenty of recipe blogs out there...

Blips and bleeps as he searches HECNET for recipes.

JOHN

What've you got for me, HECNET?

Bloop. A recipe video begins.

RECIPE VOICE 1

Goddag og god jul! Are you ready to learn how to make a traditional Christmas lutefisk? First--

JOHN

Noooo. No I most definitely am not.

Bloop. Another video.

RECIPE VOICE 2

Welcome back to the Beautiful Crumb! Today I'll be sharing with you a classic recipe for an old Christmas favorite, pershiki, that I've loved ever since I was a little girl.

JOHN

Oh, that looks delicious.

RECIPE VOICE 2

These tasty treats are chock full of those wonderful holiday flavors that just scream Christmas so loud you can't help but listen! And they will just melt in your mouth, beak, or salivarium. "Pershiki" means "Peryton wings," and I think you can see from the shape where the name comes from! These were always my favorite part of Christmas at my grandparents' cabin in the Ghost Dunes. Each year, I could barely contain my excitement as our parents bundled us all up nice and warm in our envirosuits for the trip.

JOHN

Yeah, yeah, stop showing me pictures of it and tell me how to make it. C'mon.

RECIPE VOICE 2

I remember staring out the window all the way there on the Noctis Labyrinthus train while little Hotpot and Fistula slept beside me. But I was too excited to sleep, so I would just watch the quant old geodesic domes of the Martian countryside flashing by, counting the minutes until we reached Grandpa and Peepaw's place...

JOHN

...I don't care about the cabin in the Ghost Dunes, make with the recipe!

RECIPE VOICE 2

And when we got there, oh! It was a Christmas wonderland! Peepaw had already stripped the venomous thorns from the Christmas bush, but he would always wait until we arrived to decorate it, so we could help him string the Mars-worm gizzards--

JOHN fast forwards.

RECIPE VOICE 2

--ould beg Grandpa to give us Vermicious Knid rides the way only he knew how, and he would always say, "I don't know, it's hard on the knees--these old X3 models can't take that kinda weight," but we wou--

JOHN fast forwards.

RECIPE VOICE 2

--nd I had always thought Hotpot was faking it, until that time his throat swelled shu--

JOHN fast forwards.

RECIPE VOICE 2

--ould say I “ruined her wedding,” I mean, not everything is about you, Fistula, why don’t you think about somebody else’s feelings for once in your--

JOHN

Oh, screw this!

Bloop. Another video.

RECIPE VOICE 3

Hello! Today I will be making with you: Christmas Pudding Molnar!

JOHN

Eh, I don’t know...

RECIPE VOICE 3

First we must have gathered all our ingredients: two bottles whiskey, three bottles spiced rum, and one bottle port. And then there is some sugar and eggs and cinnamons and so on, I explain that later. But the rum comes first! We keep it right here next to us, and we have little sip before we start (*sound of a not-little glass of rum being poured*) to get in Christmas spirit! Egészségedre! (*Hungarian “Cheers!”: egg-y-SHAYG-ie-reh*)

JOHN

Christmas Pudding Molnar it is!

Transition to the Commander’s office/ready room/what-have-you. The COMMANDER and FRALL are mid-conference.

COMMANDER

So I had another letter from Bigelow--he said I should “watch my back” but wouldn’t get into any more details. Some help he is. It’s not like I don’t already know the Fairgrounds is basically a giant closetful of other shoes waiting to drop.

FRALL

Quite.

COMMANDER

Plus, we just had that ICSB Equilibrium Agent poking around out here. If he couldn’t find any sign of this supposed spy with all his fancy equipment, I don’t know why Bigelow thinks he knows better. And speaking of fancy equipment, I hate that there’s a bleeding-edge alien surveillance system on my own bridge, poised to violate the privacy of everyone on the Fairgrounds at a moment’s notice. I just... really, really hate it.

FRALL

You mean you hate that you can't use it yourself.

COMMANDER

Exactly. Are you sure you can't get me access, Frall?

FRALL

I never said I *couldn't* get you access, Commander.

COMMANDER

...But you're not going to, and if I try to make you justify that, you'll give me an explanation that will make my head hurt for the next several cycles?

FRALL

An entirely correct assumption in all respects, sir. Congratulations.

COMMANDER

...Ugh, fine. The whole thing is ridiculous, anyway. I mean, everything else aside, why would any species sent a spy to the Fairgrounds of all places?

FRALL

It would indeed seem implausible.

COMMANDER

Maybe Bigelow's finally losing it, I don't know. But he's always been reliable before. If there's one thing I hate, it's--

FRALL

Commander, that would be a severe underestimation. Over the course of our working relationship, you have verbally indicated to me 18,982 things you hate. And if you include non-verbal expressions of disapproval--

COMMANDER

If there's one thing I hate, *besides being interrupted*, it's not knowing what's going on on my own station.

FRALL

Apologies, Commander.

COMMANDER

(sigh) Ok, I'm letting it go. I'm letting it go. It's probably nothing, right? It's almost certainly nothing. There's absolutely no reason to think it's not nothing.

FRALL

(noncommittal noise)

COMMANDER

...Frall? Is there anything you'd like to share with me on this topic?

FRALL

Not at this time, Commander, no.

COMMANDER

So you have no important information about this subject whatsoever? Information that I might find useful?

FRALL

It's hard to say, Commander, given that, as you yourself have pointed out on multiple occasions, we have very different functional definitions of the words "important" and "useful." Most recently, two cycles ago, after I tried to bring your attention to that charmingly eccentric muon that was making its way across the bridge.

COMMANDER

You're not reassuring me here, Lieutenant.

FRALL

Oh, don't worry, Commander. I wasn't trying to.

COMMANDER

Frall...

FRALL

And in any case, even if I had anything to report, now would hardly be a convenient time, as we will be interrupted in approximately {12} seconds.

COMMANDER

Interrupted how? Hull breach? Gravity failure?

FRALL

Worse, I'm afraid.

COMMANDER

Frall, will you just tell me what in Koko's name is happening?!

FRALL

All will become clear momentarily, Commander.

Doorbell rings. Over the intercom:

ALTHAAR

Greeting to Commander Torianna from Althaar!

COMMANDER

Oh no.

ALTHAAR

Althaar regrets to make disturbance of the Commander, but he has encountered a great confusion! And Althaar has concluded that only a Human can assist in the removing of it! Althaar would deeply appreciate any help the Commander could provide.

COMMANDER

(quietly, to FRALL)

I'm not here.

FRALL

I don't think you'll be able to evade him indefinitely, sir. Young Althaar is extremely tenacious. Might I suggest you retreat into the restroom for the moment? We may be able to resolve his difficulties swiftly, while avoiding any biological repercussions you would find unpleasant.

COMMANDER

Good call. *(to the intercom)* One moment, please, Sin Althaar...

The bathroom door closes behind the COMMANDER (analog door? sounds different from the main office door, anyway).

COMMANDER

(through the door)

All right, let's do this.

Whoosh of the main office door opening.

FRALL

Althaar, a pleasure as always. Do come in.

ALTHAAR

Ah! And it is a pleasure also to Althaar to encounter Lieutenant Commander Frallen-Br'ar! But... Althaar's confusion is increasing! Althaar was directed to approach the Commander in her office, but she is not present? Perhaps Althaar misheard the instruction? There was some disturbance on the bridge while Althaar was inquiring...

COMMANDER

I'm in here, Althaar. What was it you needed?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Greeting to you, Commander! ...Althaar hopes you are well? Althaar can return at another time if the Commander is experiencing a digestive discomfort.

COMMANDER

No, thank you, I'm fine. I'm just in here... appreciating the acoustics.

ALTHAAR

Oh! An aesthetic experience! This is of much interest! Could Althaar perhaps join the Commander in the appreciatings?

COMMANDER

No! It's... really more of a solo thing, Althaar. Uh, you had a question?

ALTHAAR

Ah, yes! Althaar requires understanding of the Human holiday called "Criss-mas," so Althaar has been searching low and high for insight from one who celebrates the "Criss-mas." Is the Commander such a Human?

COMMANDER

Sorry, Althaar, but I'm not. My people have their own end-of-year holiday.

ALTHAAR

Oh. Then Althaar will resume his searchings elsewhere. But Althaar would be most pleased to hear of the Commander's holiday also. Althaar is seeking always for more knowledge! He has learned already today of the Great CPU!

COMMANDER

Ah. Unfortunately, I'm afraid I can't discuss any of my traditions with you. Or anyone else, for that matter. Jones forbids us to speak of his mysteries with the uninitiated, praise his pointy fangs.

ALTHAAR

Is there nothing the Commander can share? For Althaar's Human Culture Data-Base?

COMMANDER

The hierophants are really strict about that kind of thing, sorry. Well, they have to be, there's no point in joining a mystery cult if you're just going to go around blabbing about it to every Tom, Dick, and Zorgath. Then it's... just a cult. How about you, Frall? You know practically everything, at least when it suits you--you must know something about Christmas.

FRALL

A great deal, Commander, but if Althaar wishes to consult with one who celebrates it, then I'm afraid I wouldn't qualify.

COMMANDER

Right, of course.

FRALL

I only celebrate Hanukkah.

COMMANDER

What?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Is this Hanukkah a holiday of... your people? Althaar hopes he is not committing a rudeness, but he has never been certain if Lieutenant Commander Frallen-Br'ar is one of a species, or a solitary phenomenon.

FRALL

Hanukkah is a Human holiday, Althaar.

COMMANDER

Actually, that's something I've always wondered about, too. Are there others like you out there, or are you just--

FRALL

(we're definitely not going to talk about that)

Also known as the Festival of Lights!

ALTHAAR

Althaar would welcome explication of the Hanukkah! He will add it to his Data-Base immediately! *(database fires up)* How is it spelled, please?

FRALL

Dealer's choice. In short, Althaar, Hanukkah is a holiday that commemorates a great victory for the Jewish people of Earth, almost 2700 years ago, when they took back the Second Temple from the Seleucid forces that had occupied it. After their triumph, they had only enough oil to re-light the sacred flame in the Temple for one night, and yet, mysteriously, that oil somehow lasted a full eight nights until more could be obtained.

COMMANDER

Well, at least there's one mystery you don't have an explanation for.

FRALL

I never said that, Commander.

COMMANDER

What are you-- Oh, come on!

FRALL shimmer-chuckles knowingly.

ALTHAAR

And how is the Hanukkah observed, please, Lieutenant Frallen-Br'ar?

FRALL

Well, the most important part of the celebration is the lighting of the menorah. We say a blessing as we light one candle for each night of the holiday, until on the eighth night, all the candles are lit. And then afterward, there are traditional foods, and games, and songs. Some people do presents for the kids too, so they won't feel left out--Hanukkah usually falls right in the middle of the annual barrage of Christmas advertising.

ALTHAAR

Then... it is true that a Human who does not receive gifts during this season would experience the dis-appointment? Even those who do not celebrate the "Criss-mas?"

FRALL

Mmm... yes, that would be within the typical range of responses, although as I'm sure you've noted, Humans can be quite unpredictable.

COMMANDER

(to herself)

If that's not the pot calling the kettle black...

ALTHAAR

Indeed! Althaar constantly is encountering new perplexities as he is studying the Human psychology! It is a subject that is of much challenge, but of tremendous reward also! *(closes up the Database)* Althaar thanks the Commander and Lieutenant greatly for their teachings, but Althaar must now depart, if he is to find one who can expound upon the meaning of the "Criss-mas!"

COMMANDER

What about your roommate? Isn't he the one who usually explains Human culture for you?

ALTHAAR

The Commander is correct! But it seems that the approach of the "Criss-mas" is causing some distress to FriendJohn. Indeed, this is the impetus for Althaar's current searching! So Althaar does not wish to be upbringing the subject with FriendJohn until he believes he can do so without increasing the distress.

COMMANDER

I see. Well, there are bound to be some Christmas events coming up--parties and so on. Maybe you could observe one of those? From a safe distance, I mean, we have enough eggnog vomit to deal with already at this time of year, but I'm sure a video feed or something could be worked out.

ALTHAAR

Egg? Oh! Would the Electric Egg perhaps be holding such an event? Althaar has observed Human celebration there on many occasions! And Althaar has found an excellent place to conceal himself while he is doing so, behind the *Big Blorch Hunter II* machine!

COMMANDER

That's a great idea, Althaar. I'm sure you'll be able to learn plenty at the Egg.

FRALL

And if that doesn't work out, there's always Christmas dinner at the Lucky Dragon Buffet on Gimel 12.

ALTHAAR

Then Althaar will be approaching the Electric Egg at once! Many thanks to both of you for your generous assistance! Althaar wishes you the happiest of Hanukkahs and... other celebrations!

ALTHAAR leaves. The COMMANDER emerges from the facilities.

COMMANDER

Well, that was relatively painless, all things considered. All right, where were we?

FRALL

Sin Gogo Remguef has lodged another complaint--apparently one of the hydroponics staff mistook him for a pile of mulch. He's threatening to take this to the ICSB unless we pay for his cilia reconstruction, as well as another 20,000 credits in recompense for his "physical, mental, and metaphysical pain and suffering."

COMMANDER

(exasperated)

Oh, Great Jones preserve me.

Transition to the apartment. JOHN is quite drunk.

JOHN

"Dear Susan," ...No, she's gonna think that's sarcastic. Just "Susan," ...No, thass too short all by issself. Looks weird. Uh... "To whom it may concern:" Yeah. "Merry Christmas! How are you? I'm fine. Totally fine, out here in space, doing my thing, you know. Because I'm fine." Ok, thassgood. What else do you put in a Christmas letter? Uh... "Wow, it's been a busy year! In March, I finally got to see the Lectroid Tongues. And they were awesome, so shut up. And then in June, Judy and I took our big ski trip to Triton, and I got duplicated in a teleporter accident! So if you want to see pictures of the trip, I guess ask the new guy. And then in July I moved all the way out to the Fairgrounds. Because of the restraining order. And I got a new job, and a roommate who makes my stomach woogy *(burps)*, and a bunch of new friends. But they're not here now." Hang on-- *(pokes a nearby houseplant)* Mrs. F? *(pause)* No, s'juss a plant. Ok. "They're not here now, and I'm all by myself. All by myself for Christmas, which is fine! Because I'm fine! I made a Molnar! And I ate it all by myself! And now I'm a little sleepy." Ooohhhh...

Transition to the hallway outside the Electric Egg. The CAROLERS are still at it.

CAROLERS

On the 38th day of Qo'rqish, my broodmate gave to me *(etc.)*

Door whoosh.

ALTHAAR

ALTHAAR WISHES TO ENTER THE ELECTRIC EGG!

Alien greetings from within (including KWONTZ).

SOPON

Hey, Althaar! Gimme a second. *(to the room)* We got any Humans in the house tonight? *(silence)* Looks like the coast is clear, buddy, come on in.

ALTHAAR

Many thanks to you from Althaar! But-- there are no Humans present? This is most unfortunate.

SOPON

Hey, I know you like Humans and all, but look at the bright side--you can sit here at the bar for once, instead of hiding behind the *Blorch Hunter* machine.

ALTHAAR

But Althaar must speak to a Human!

KWONTZ

(somewhat offended warbling)

ALTHAAR

No, Sin Kwontz is not at all the chopped liver, but Althaar has questions about the Human “Criss-mas,” and he has been attempting all day to answer them, with no success! Althaar had hoped that there would be perhaps a “Criss-mas” party at the Electric Egg, that he could observe. From behind the *Big Blorch Hunter II*.

SOPON

Oh, Christmas? Yeah, this might not be the place for that. I mean, Chip usually puts on a few specials, the traditional fried chicken and strawberry cake, but I guess it’s more of a family holiday? Not a lot of Humans want to spend it in a bar. Or if they are spending it in a bar, they probably don’t want to be reminded that it’s Christmas.

ALIEN BARFLY

You tell ‘em, sister!

ALTHAAR

Ah! Do you perhaps have knowledge of the “Criss-mas,” Gesin?

ALIEN BARFLY

You... tell ‘em, sister?

KWONTZ

(warbling (“Go back to sleep”))

ALIEN BARFLY

(dismissive noise)

ALTHAAR

(sad noise) Althaar does not know what there is to be done! FriendJohn has a sadness because of the “Criss-mas,” and Althaar wishes only to provide a remedy! But Althaar has not enough knowledge! And Althaar does not know where he can find it!

SOPON

Hey, hey, it'll be ok. We'll figure something out. Chip should be back any minute, and Dee's coming in for her shift soon. Which reminds me, better turn on the Iltorian Warning sign... *(switch flips, sound of a huge neon sign coming on)* But that's at least two Humans you can ask, right? Or, hey! Xtopps may be a Xybidont, but he's almost as much of an anthropu as you are--I bet he knows plenty about Christmas. *(calling to the back)* Hey, Xtopps! You got a minute?

XTOPPS

(from the back)

How many times I gotta tell you not to interrupt my pre-show ritual, mang? I gotta get into the right headspace, I am an artiste!

SOPON

Just finish up your fluffernutter and get out here, Althaar needs your help with something.

XTOPPS

What? *(analog door opens)* Oh, hey Althaar! *(approaches while stuffing the last of a sandwich into his mouth)* Mm. Good to squeak you, palomino. What's lateral?

ALTHAAR

Althaar is doing well, thank you. But Althaar is having many questions on this day, and there has been unusual difficulty in finding one who can answer them. Could Xtopps perhaps take time from his rituals to do the answering? Althaar does not wish to interfere with the musical preparations!

XTOPPS

Nah, it's patic, I had most of a jar, should be tasting shapes for a few hours. What's snagging you, zood?

ALTHAAR

Althaar has observed that FriendJohn has been having the feelings that are downward, and Althaar believes this to be because of the inadequate "Criss-mas!" So Althaar is wishing to learn how to properly perform the "Criss-mas," so that he can make cheer for FriendJohn! Sin Xtopps, you have been living among Humans for much longer than Althaar--can you explain to Althaar the "Criss-mas?"

XTOPPS

Streez, Althaar, I know some stuff, but you know, it's not like they did Christmas back on Prang when I was a pupa. I guess the closest thing for us Xybs is the Day of Consanguineous Obligation?

ALTHAAR

But FriendJohn is unable to abase himself before the tombs of his ancestors! Because of the order of restraining! This is most unfortunate!

XTOPPS

Nah, mang, it's spry, that's not a Christmas thing. I think. Uh... Christmas, yeah... It's like... Lemme get my carapace together. Frid, I wish you'd asked a couple hours ago, I just polished off a whole kindergarten snacktime and my tiles are cracking.

SOPON

You want an Arcturan espresso to take the streaks off?

XTOPPS

Sure, mang, worth a shot.

A Space Espresso is prepared while:

ALTHAAR

Althaar would be most grateful for any knowings that Xtopps could provide!

XTOPPS

Yeah, no sombrero, zood. So, uhhh... usually they do the Christmas thing at home with other Humans, so I don't know how that bogues, but one thing I do know is, they've got a lot of Christmas music. Like, a *lot*.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Humans enjoy the "Criss-mas" musics!

XTOPPS

I dunno if "enjoy" is the right word. Like, they play it everywhere, but then they dridge off about having to hear it. Forget taking requests from Humans during Christmas season, you're going to end up with half the crowd zarked at you no matter what.

ALTHAAR

(editing the database)

Humans enjoy the *complaining* about the "Criss-mas" musics. At last there is progress!

SOPON

See, I told you we'd get you sorted out! Here's your espresso, Xtopps, watch out for the corners.

XTOPPS

Thanks, zood.

ALTHAAR

What else can Xtopps tell Althaar of the "Criss-mas," please?

XTOPPS

All I know is from lyrics, mang. *(slurp)* Ow. Oh, it's a religious holiday, yeah? You know that part? There's like, a special star, and some kings with cigars, and a... mild baby?

SOPON

So... a normal Human baby is spicy? That doesn't sound right, Xtopps.

XTOPPS

Don't ask me, mang. I just sing the tunes, I don't have to chom 'em.

ALTHAAR

Perhaps "mild" in this case is referring to temperament and not flavor?

XTOPPS

Maybe, but he's supposed to be "tender" too. Sounds like a recipe to me.

ALTHAAR

...Althaar thinks this is unlikely, as it would violate many Human taboos. But Althaar is making a note of it! What other "Criss-mas" traditions are sung of in the Human musics, please?

XTOPPS

Hmmm... Well, it's supposed to be in the winter, so there's a lot about snow and cold, and trying to keep warm. 'Course it's only in the winter on like, half of Earth, so everyone else just kinda fogs it.

ALTHAAR

The "Criss-mas" is a time of thermal discomfort! Excellent!

XTOPPS

Oh, Santa! He's like the Lord High Grand Epopot of Christmas. Sort of a... reverse burglar? Big laughing zood in a red suit who skins it down your chimney while you're laserin' logs.

ALTHAAR

What is the "chimney," please?

XTOPPS

I think it's like a vent?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Then the Santa would be in much danger on the Fairgrounds!

SOPON

Hope he carries a flamethrower.

XTOPPS

Could be. He's got to shimmy into some pretty rude corners, no matter what. I mean, that's what they say, but I don't know, the chimney's probably, like, a metaphor or something--seems like anyone can be "Santa" if they just put on the suit and make with the presents.

ALTHAAR

Ah, the "Criss-mas" presents! This is of the greatest interest to Althaar!

XTOPPS

Yeah, Santa's supposed to be the pike with the presents. Lands on the roof, comes down the chimney, puts the booty in your socks, and effoes. Course, he only comes across if you've been good. Otherwise you're frilled. Oh, and he does all this in a sleigh, with these reindeer zoods pulling it. But they're real driffers, got a serious bullying problem. And, uh... he's sometimes weirdly sexy? 'Cause, you know, Humans.

SOPON

Humans.

ALTHAAR

Humans!

XTOPPS

So, yeah mang, that's about the smell of it. Hope it helps.

ALTHAAR

Xtopps has been most generous with his assistance! But Althaar is still not certain what would be the appropriate "Criss-mas" present for a Human such as FriendJohn. Do the Human musics provide examples of the kind of gift that would be well-received?

XTOPPS

Could be just about anything, mang. A light blue '57 convertible, love, his own front teeth...

The door opens.

DEE

(entering)

Hey, everyone, what's-- *(seeing the sign)* Oop! Ok, where is it safe to look?

ALTHAAR

Hello, Ms. Dee! Althaar is seated at the bar, but he will conceal himself behind the *Big Blorch Hunter II* if that is preferable!

DEE

No no, you sit, I was heading backstage anyway.

XTOPPS

Hold up, Dee, Althaar's got a whole skreb of questions about Christmas. You wanna help him out?

ALTHAAR

Althaar wishes to provide the "Criss-mas" for FriendJohn! Has Dee celebrated the traditional Human "Criss-mas?"

DEE

Kind of? I don't know how traditional it is, the original Tammuz colonists came from all over, so we've got a ton of different holidays that time of year, and they kind of ended up getting smushed together. Besides Christmas, there's Dongzhi, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Yalda, Saturnalia --a lot of Tammuzians came from Saturn--Zamenhof Day, Groundfall... People usually do kind of a mix-and-match depending on what they're into. Or what they grew up doing with their families.

ALTHAAR

Ah! Dee is also a Human whose family is absent from the Fairgrounds, yes? What is the appropriate custom to celebrate the "Criss-mas" in this case?

DEE

Well, you can still get a Christmas tree--the holographic ones aren't quite the same as a real plant, but they can be any size you want, so you can put one up no matter how depressingly tiny your apartment is. And I like to play the Yule log video off HECNET. Order up some tangyuan or jollof rice. Eggnog definitely helps. And I take everyone's holiday cards and holos from home, and stick them up on the wall. Kind of makes it feel like they're here with me. Which is way better than having them actually here with me.

ALTHAAR

And... if there are no cards and letters from the Human family? What is to be done then, please?

DEE

No fear, I've got like a hundred cousins, and they keep making more-- Oh, is this about John?

ALTHAAR

Dee is correct! Althaar has been observing a sadness in FriendJohn, of much greater than the usual amount.

DEE

I guess he must be pretty homesick, huh?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar had not considered that the sadness of FriendJohn be perhaps caused by disease! Then Althaar is knowing what to do! He will prepare the sooo-up and sal-teens at once!

DEE

No, "homesick" isn't really a disease, it's just when you're away from home and you... really really miss it? I guess? I always had kind of the opposite problem, but I've seen it hit some people really hard. And if someone's feeling homesick, Christmas is pretty much guaranteed to make it worse.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Then it is up to Althaar to be providing the "Criss-mas" for FriendJohn! What gifts would be most effective in making cure of the home-sickness, please? Althaar will purchase them at once! Is there a recommended dosage of gifting?

DEE

Uh, yeah, I think you're leaning into the metaphor a little hard, there. The gifts aren't really the point, anyway, it's supposed to be the thought that counts. I mean, that won't stop *some* people from complaining if they get a gift they don't like, believe me, but... anyway, you don't really need to sweat the gifts. Despite all the commercialism, Christmas is still mostly about getting together and spending time with the people you care about.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! Then there can be no "Criss-mas" for FriendJohn! He can not be spending the time with his loved ones! The order of restraining forbids it! *(sad noises)*

XTOPPS

Aw, streez. Ya vonched him, Dee.

DEE

Augh. Uh... Ok, how about this? Just because John's family is back on Earth doesn't mean he needs to spend Christmas alone. Plenty of Humans celebrate Christmas with their friends! We can definitely make that happen! No sombrero! ...Please don't cry.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar is most indebted to Dee for the assistance! At last he will be learning how to accomplish the proper Human "Criss-mas!"

DEE

Happy to help. And what the frid, I do the holidays solo every year--it'll be fun to have a real Christmas party for once!

Door whoosh during the previous as CHIP arrives.

CHIP

Hey, what? No! No Christmas parties!

XTOPPS

Aw, come on, Chorp!

CHIP

No! No way! Forget it! And Dee, why are you standing around in the doorway? Your set starts in 20 minutes!

DEE

Check the sign.

ALTHAAR

Greeting, Mr. Frinkel!

CHIP

Aaagh. Ok. Hey, Althaar. *(to DEE)* Where is he?

DEE

At the bar. And he's the reason we want to throw the party--it's John's first Christmas away from Earth, we're trying to cheer him up. It's just a Christmas party, what's the snag?

CHIP

I said no! There's nothing more depressing than Christmas in a bar! Except maybe my latest bank statement.

ALTHAAR

Althaar would be most appreciative of the assistance of Mr. Frinkel! Althaar has been seeking a remedy for the "Criss-mas" grief of FriendJohn for many many hours now! Althaar must admit that he was nearing the end of his cordage!

CHIP

What?

DEE

C'mon, Chip, John needs our help! And since when do you mind depressing people, anyway? "As long as they're feeling blue, they'll keep me out of the red," isn't that what you always say?

CHIP

I mind when it's me getting depressed! I'm putting my foot down, Dee, we're not throwing a Christmas party!

ALTHAAR

If Mr. Frinkel does not wish to himself be flinging the party of "Criss-mas," could Althaar perhaps be renting the Electric Egg for this purpose?

CHIP

Look, I get that you want to do something nice for John, but you'd need to pay through the... whatever you use for a nose to make this worth my while.

ALTHAAR

Oh, that is of no difficulty! Althaar has a most generous account of expense from the Iltorian Commonality Xenopsychology Interest Group.

CHIP

...I'm picking my foot back up. Slightly. How much are we talking here?

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar is uncertain of the appropriate recompense for the rentings. Would 1.5 thousand credits per hour be sufficient?

Strangled choking noises from CHIP.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! Is this amount inadequate? Has Althaar given insult?

DEE

I think what he's trying to say is that will be more than enough. Right, Chip?

Another incoherent noise from CHIP.

DEE

That sounds like a "yes" to me. So let's start planning our first Fairgrounds Christmas party!

ALTHAAR

Eeeeeee!

Transition to the apartment. The effects of the Molnar have not abated.

JOHN

(singing to himself, with his face smooshed into the couch cushions)

I'm waiting for Santa Claus... He will come on a bison sleigh...

Intercom bloop.

ALTHAAR

Hello! Is FriendJohn present in the room of living? May Althaar enter without distress?

JOHN

You can enner with the dress! *(giggles drunkenly at his very stupid joke)*

Door whooshes open.

ALTHAAR

Greeting to FriendJohn! Althaar has most exciting news. But Althaar will not spoil the surprise! ...No, Althaar *will* spoil the surprise, Althaar is too excited not to be sharing! Althaar has prepared for FriendJohn... a party of the Criss-mas! Althaar has invited the peoples of the Fairgrounds to gather at the Electric Egg, to celebrate the Criss-mas together! And Althaar has made the shopping for the presents of Criss-mas also! So it is doubly fortunate that FriendJohn does not look at Althaar, because Althaar has not yet made wrapping of them!

JOHN groans. ALTHAAR begins wrapping presents. The wrapping paper sounds wrong somehow.

ALTHAAR

Althaar will need only a moment to be wrapping the presents of Criss-mas, and then FriendJohn and Althaar may depart! For festivity and Criss-mas cheer!

JOHN

...Festivity?

ALTHAAR

Yes! Althaar has arranged much festivity, with expert advice from Ms. Dee and Mr. Frinkel! So that FriendJohn can have a satisfactory Human Criss-mas! Althaar has arranged the decoration, and the egged nog, and the gifts--oh! Althaar must be borrowing one of the socks of FriendJohn, please, to hang by the vent with care!

JOHN

Wha--? No, s' a stocking, Althaar. Special kinda sock. Don't... don't go in my sock drawer. 'S private.

ALTHAAR

Then Althaar will omit the sock-hanging, FriendJohn! But now the wrappings are completed, and it is time for FriendJohn and Althaar to go to the Egg! For festivity! ...FriendJohn?

JOHN

Uggghhhhh, noooo... you go. I forget how to walk.

ALTHAAR

Oh! Althaar has learned today of the "home-sickness." Is this a symptom?

JOHN

No, I jus' had too much Molnar. You... do the festivity for me, 'k?

ALTHAAR

But... there are many many friends and wishers of wellness who await Althaar and FriendJohn at the Egg! And they will be performing all the necessary Criss-mas components! For FriendJohn! And Althaar has ensured that there will be genuine, non-holographic foliage on which to be hanging the tinsels and shiny orbs! And it was much difficulty in convincing Mrs. Frondrinax to participate...

JOHN

Aw, streez, Althaar, now I feel like a total ingrate... but I'm so sleepy...

ALTHAAR

Oh... But... Specialist Stella Reyes has also accepted invitation of Althaar to join the festivity. Although she will not be joining until after the end of her work cycle, in the event that she has not been incapacitated in her ceaseless combat against the menace of the vent-biters! But she seemed to have great interest in celebrating the Criss-mas with John and Althaar!

JOHN

Really? Stella's coming? ...Ok, c'mon out here.

ALTHAAR

Are the eyes of FriendJohn closed?

JOHN

Jus'... c'mon out.

ALTHAAR

Althaar is complying!

ALTHAAR emerges from the curtain. JOHN vomits.

ALTHAAR

Oh no! The digestive fluids! And it had been a full 37 cycles since the last incident! Now Althaar must reset the sign.

JOHN

S'ok, Althaar, I did it on purpose. I'll be soberer...er inna minute. Lemme grab a cold shower, then we can go to your Christmas party.

ALTHAAR

Eee! This will indeed be the merriest of Criss-masses!

Back at the Egg, the party is starting to shape up. XTOPPS is onstage providing background music that is in both the Christmas spirit and the public domain.

DEE

Ok, Althaar should be getting back with John any minute now. I think we're in pretty good shape. The buffet's fully stocked, the holo-holly looks just like the real thing, the mistletoe is in the doorway--

CHIP

Uh, that might not be such a good idea. What if--

DEE

Oh, no, I made sure Althaar knows to keep away from it. We're flush.

CHIP

Oh, good. Because... *(grossed-out noise)*

DEE

Yeah, ok, let's not think about that any more ever. So... *(casting about for a distraction)* It looks like we'll have a pretty good turnout, considering the short notice--

DORMER

(already pretty eggnogg-ed up)

I thought this was a Christmas party! Where the hell are the Martian dancers in those little bikini-things?

DEE

What the frid? You invited the Security goons?

CHIP

Yeah, I know, but John doesn't have that many friends, I had to pad the guest list a little. Don't worry, Dormer mellows out pretty fast once he's got a few triple-phased bourbons in him. Anyway, he's not going to give anyone a plastic hassle while the Commander's here, we should be good.

DEE

Fair enough. Did you ever hear back from Jesus-bot?

CHIP

Oh, he couldn't make it, he's on duty this shift. Same with Isaac Newton-bot. And Dickens-bot was... super not into it.

DEE

Nertz.

CHIP

Martin Luther-bot was the best I could do. He's over there by the bandstand, trying to get Xtopps to let him sit in.

MARTIN LUTHER-BOT

(in the distance)

But I have the spirit in me of a new psalm-setting that needs to SING!

XTOPPS

(also far off)

Don't crowd me, chippie! Get your own waldzither and get your mitts off my axe!

DEE

Well, that's... something. The more the merrier, right?

CHIP

Yeah. I should have thought to charge Althaar by the head or anatomical equivalent.

DEE

You're just full of Christmas spirit, aren't you?

CHIP

Not yet. I should get on that. Hey, Bubbles! Another Tom & Jerry, easy on the nutmeg!

BUBBLES

Sure thing, boss!

Door whoosh.

DEE

Oh, hey H.F., glad you could make it! Merry--

H.F.

Yeah, no. Listen, let's get one thing straight right away: I'm here, having a drink, with some friends, at a place of public accommodation. The fact that a Christmas party happens to be going on at the same time is a complete coincidence. Because I don't do Christmas.

DEE

Oh-kay. Uh, how about a... completely non-denominational eggnog?

H.F.

Don't mind if I do! (*heading over to the bar*) Hey, Mindy! Frall! Good to see you on this totally ordinary and not-special occasion!

Door whoosh.

DEE

Hey, Mrs. F, how are-- Oh, wow, you really got into the Christmas spirit, huh?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

What? I don't know what you mean?

DEE

You're covered in, uh...

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Well, just because I'm a plant doesn't mean I don't know how to dress for a party!

DEE

It's not that you don't look nice, Mrs. F, but those are definitely Christmas ornaments.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Now, Dee, floozies wear Christmas ornaments. Ladies wear baubles. Sapon, a vermouth and infused mineral water, please, I'm feeling a bit behind.

Door whoosh.

ALTHAAR

(outside)

ALTHAAR WISHES TO ENTER THE PARTY OF CRISS-MAS!

Cheers of varying sincerity depending on species.

XTOPPS

(on mic)

All right, zoods, put 'em together for our hosts, Althaar and John B!

Big cheer, applause.

JOHN

(still pretty drunk)

Wowwww... Hey, every...body. Uhhh... Merry... yeah.

DEE

Are you ok, John?

JOHN

I had a Molnar.

DEE

What?

FRALL

Excuse me, Dee. I think I can be of assistance. One moment, please.

A shimmer as FRALL does their stuff.

FRALL

There you go, John. Your level of intoxication should now be at “pleasantly buzzed,” if I’ve calibrated correctly.

JOHN

Whoa. What-- Did you just, like, teleport the alcohol out of my bloodstream or something?

FRALL

Of course not, John B. That would be absurd.

JOHN

Oh. Right.

FRALL

I merely exchanged some of your present blood supply with a similar quantity from a point in your personal timeline at which you will once again be sober.

JOHN

Oh. Is that... safe?

FRALL

“Safe” is a relative term, John. But I don’t foresee that it should cause you any immediate difficulties. Do let me know if you begin experiencing a persistent sense of “unstuckness,” however.

JOHN

Uh, will do. Thanks?

FRALL

Not a problem. Season’s greetings!

DEE

All right, I think it's time to decorate the "tree!" Mrs. F? Are you ready?

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, no! I've decorated myself plenty, thank you very much! I'm not some poor quiescent conifer for you sick mammals to uproot and have your way with!

DEE

Oh, come on, you promised!

MRS. FRONDRINAX

No! I won't tolerate such disrespect!

DEE

Mrs. F, you've got it all wrong. It's not disrespectful, it's... we're celebrating how great plants are! There's a ton of Christmas songs about that.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

I don't know...

DEE

Let me show you. Xtopps? "The Holly and the Ivy," in {key}.

XTOPPS plays an intro.

DEE

(sings)

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown:
C'mon, Mrs. F, get up here!

MRS. F can't resist and joins in.

DEE and MRS. F

O, the rising of the suns,
And the running of the blorch
The playing of the merry fleezborp,
Sweet singing in the choir.

Sounds of approval and slight applause.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Oh, well, I suppose I don't want to be a party excavator. Bring that tinsel over here, let's get festive!

A cheer and sounds of decorations being pulled out.

H.F.

You know, Mrs. F, I may not practice any religions. But even I've gotta admit, there's something about a well-decorated plant that lifts the spirits this time of year.

XTOPPS knows a cue when he hears it, and plays the opening chord to "O Tannenbaum" for H.F. to sing. We hear ornaments and tinsel being applied to MRS. FRONDRINAX as he does.

H.F.

(sings)

Oh, Fugulnar, oh Fugulnar
You give us air to breathe in
Oh, Fulgulnar, oh Fugulnar
No matter if we're heathen

Without you in each leafy glen
We'd soon run out of oxygen
Oh, Fugulnar, oh Fugulnar
A friend in every season

Again, a sweetly appreciative response from the group.

MRS. FRONDRINAX

Why, thank you, H.F.! Goodness me, all this attention! My guard cells are all a-tingle!

DEE

Mrs. F, you look beautiful!

MRS. F

Thank you so much, Dee. I do feel a bit cheap, but I have to admit sometimes it's nice to play at being something you're not!

XTOPPS

All right, let's keep this wassail going! Who else wants to do one?

FRALL

I suppose I could participate. "Dreidel, Dreidel," if you please.

XTOPPS gives the leadin and...

FRALL

(sings)

Well
I have a little dreidel
I made it out of clay

And when it's dry and ready
Then, dreidel I shall play

Oh, dreidel, dreidel, dreidel
I made it out of clay
And when it's dry and ready
Then, dreidel I will play

It's not a polyhedron
But it is built to spin
It fights against inertia
But it can never win

Oh, dreidel, dreidel, dreidel
It's in a solid state
And when falls right over
A symbol of our fate

*Again, the **crowd reaction**, though maybe a bit more muted and confused.*

FRALL

Thank you, thank you. And Happy Hanukkah to us all!

XTOPPS

How about you, Chief-a-rino? You got anything for us?

ALTHAAR

Alas, Sin Xtopps, the Commander is not permitted to be sharing her celebrations!

COMMANDER

Actually, there is one song we sing at this time of year that we're permitted to share with the Un-Catechized Multitudes. Xtopps, do you know "Many Good Things?"

XTOPPS

Null sweat!

ALTHAAR

Oh joy!

*He starts to play a very simple tune, and the **COMMANDER** sings:*

COMMANDER

Oh, 'tis the season of many good things
That we do not speak about;
Don't ask us any questions
Or we'll have to kick you out.

*Beat. **Polite applause.***

XTOPPS

Anyone else got one? How 'bout you, John? What's your favorite holiday number?

JOHN

Oh, uh, no thanks. I'm not exactly a singer.

XTOPPS

C'mon, zood, open your head and let the pictures come. We'll all yam it with you, how about it? What'll it be?

JOHN

Ok, why not? How about "Deck the Halls?"

XTOPPS

Sure thing! Althaar, you want to get in on this? I got a tambourine you can use.

ALTHAAR

Althaar would be most grateful for the use of the tam-bor-een! (*jingle as it's handed over*) How is it worn, please?

XTOPPS

Just fog it, zood, you'll be flush.

DEE

All right, "Deck the Halls," everyone! You all know it!

ALL

Deck the halls with boughs of holly

Fa la la la la, la la la la

'Tis the season to be jolly

Fa la la la la, la la la la

Don we now our gay apparel

Fa la la la la, la la la la

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol

Fa la la la la, la la la la

Fa la la la la, la la la la

Fa la la la la, la la la la

La la la la, la la la la

General happiness and cheer.

ALTHAAR

And now, Althaar cannot be waiting any longer! It must be time for the unsheathing of the presents of "Criss-mas!" Althaar is not wearing the customary hat of the Santa, as he has been advised that this would cause profound mental disturbance for his Human friends. But please, be enjoying the gifts of Althaar, every one!

Surprise and delight from all, with a tinge of embarrassment, as ALTHAAR sets their gifts down.

CHIP

Oh, wow, Althaar! I didn't get you anything!

JOHN

Nobody did.

ALTHAAR

Please do not have concern! There could be no greater gift for Althaar than the presence of his dearest friends at his first "Criss-mas" in this, the most wonderful place in the Universe!

Dubious but pleased reactions.

ALTHAAR

Now! Please be unwrapping your gifts so Althaar can perceive your joyous sur-prise!

The sound of everyone unwrapping the gifts. The sound of the paper is odd, and strangely organic.

DEE

This wrapping paper is beautiful, Althaar.

COMMANDER

Although, I have to say, I don't think I've ever quite... experienced a texture like this before...

JOHN

(a hair worried about the answer)

Althaar? Where did you get this paper?

ALTHAAR

Ee! Althaar is very pleased that you are noticing! Althaar was informed that the gifts made by the hand are most in the spirit of the "Criss-mas!" But Althaar was not able to be crafting so much on the short notice. So instead Althaar has created his own paper of wrapping! Out of his own sheddings and exfoliations! Merry "Criss-mas" from Althaar!

*A beat, and then the sounds of all of the humans gagging or vomiting.
Closing theme music in.*

ANNOUNCER

You've been listening to *Life with Althaar*, episode twelve.

This episode was written by Berit Johnson

featuring

John Amir as John B

Berit Johnson as Althaar

Ivanna Cullinan as Commander Torianna

Alyssa Simon as Lieutenant-Commander Frall

Amanda La Pergola as Mrs. Frondrinax
Eli Ganas as Hardyfox Fornes
Christopher Lee as Chip Frinkel
Zuri Washington as Delilah Mallory
Derrick Peterson as “Xtopps”
{etc. with other parts}
and Ian W. Hill as your announcer, William S. Burroughs-bot, {etc.}
Life with Althaar was created by Berit Johnson and Ian W. Hill
Berit is the supervising producer, showrunner, and script supervisor.
Ian is the audio producer, sound designer, and technical supervisor.
The writers’ room consists of Berit, Ian, John, Amanda, Chris, Philip, Lex, and Linus.
This has been an audio production from Gemini CollisionWorks.
Tune in again in two weeks for our next episode, but before we go, let’s rejoin the festivity at the Electric Egg...

*Off to one side as **the party is still happening** to the rear.*

ALTHAAR

FriendJohn? Is the party not of sufficient festivity? Has Althaar neglected to provide any “Criss-mas” components?

JOHN

Oh, no, Althaar, this has been great! The best Christmas I ever had. You did an incredible job on this, really. Thank you.

ALTHAAR

Ee! But then... why does FriendJohn sit here by the door? Is it not customary at the party of “Criss-mas” to perform the mingling and the jingling?

JOHN

Sure, yeah, I’ll do some of that too, I just-- You said that Stella might stop by when her shift ended, if she survives, and I’m not sure when that is, so I just wanted to make sure I didn’t--

The sound of the door opening to the Egg.

STELLA

Oh! Hey there, John B!

JOHN

Stella! Hi! It’s-- Ohmygod! There’s a vent-biter on you! Kill it!

STELLA

No, nonono! It’s a plushy! I... I didn’t have time to wrap it. I know it’s kind of, I... I just wanted to get you something and this was all the gift shop had left. Didn’t mean to freak you out, sorry.

JOHN

Oh, no no, uh, it's cute! In a... blood-curdling kind of way. Thanks! So... hey, you don't have to stand out there in the hall, come on in and join the party!

STELLA

Will do, I could use a good strong--

The door suddenly closes in her face, and a cacaphony of alarms and warning voices go off.

JOHN

What the--?

The alarms crescendo and then cut out.

ANNOUNCER

To be concluded in two weeks, in the season finale of... *Life With Althaar!*