

PARTY PLANET

by

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CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN	the grumpy captain of a spaceship
ENGINEER	a dutiful technician
SCIENTIST	a cynical exogeologist
COMPUTER VOICE	a talking computer
RADIO VOICE	someone from Earth on the radio

SETTING

A space ship, returning to Earth after a long, peaceful voyage to a distant planet. The inside of the spaceship contains an area where the astronauts sleep in stasis, with bed-like furnishings. There is also a command center, with the usual futuristic control panels, a porthole to see outside and an airlock doorway.

TIME

The future

SCENES

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Scene 1 | The living quarters, inside the spaceship |
| Scene 2 | The command center, inside the spaceship |
| Scene 3 | Outside the spaceship |
| Scene 4 | The command center, inside the spaceship |

SCENE 1

(The setting is the interior of a futuristic spacecraft. It is approaching its destination, after a long journey. The crew is waking up.)

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

All cryogenic systems have been deactivated. Raising internal temperature. Raising lights. What is your input?

ENGINEER

Captain, what are your orders?

CAPTAIN

Computer: snooze...

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Captain, the cryogenic systems are not equipped with snooze functionality. What is your input, Captain.

CAPTAIN

Oh. Right. Right, then. Where the hell are we?

ENGINEER

We are approaching Earth's solar system, Captain.

CAPTAIN

Ok, roll call.

ENGINEER

Chief Engineer on duty. You may take command, Captain.

CAPTAIN

Thank you. That was one hell of a nap, just now.

SCIENTIST

Chief Science Officer, reporting for duty. Hell of a nap indeed, Captain.

CAPTAIN

OK let's do a systems check and prepare to send data to Earth. Have they requested our status?

ENGINEER

Captain, they have not.

SCIENTIST

Have we heard anything else from Mission Control? I would like to know their response to the sample data we sent.

ENGINEER

We do have a transmission from them, but it's, well it's funny.

CAPTAIN

What do you mean, "it's funny"?

ENGINEER

It's, well Captain, listen to it.

(The ENGINEER calls up a recording of the last transmission from Earth. A recording of laughter plays over the intercom. It resembles the recorded laughter used for television comedies.)

CAPTAIN

Is that the whole thing? Play the previous transmission.

(Laughter plays again)

Play the one before that.

(More laughter)

Where the hell are they broadcasting all this laughter from, and why?

ENGINEER

It seems to be on every single one of Earth's communication channels. What do you think it is?

SCIENTIST

You haven't been home in a while, have you? It's called hilarity television.

(Beat. The other two are incredulous.)

It works like this: people hear fake laughter, then they laugh for real. It makes them feel better.

ENGINEER

When you hear someone else yawn, you yawn too, and you feel tired. It's like that, is it?

SCIENTIST

Oh, they have that channel, too.

(laughter again)

CAPTAIN

We're hurdling towards the Earth at top speed. This ship hasn't done any manual communicating with Mission Control in years. Landing this ship will require complex calculations and coordination with the ground base, to avoid collisions, explosions or who knows what, and all our damn radio can do is to laugh at us! Play back the earliest transmission on file. And slow this ship down!

(More laughter plays)

ENGINEER

I'm sorry, Captain. Maybe there's some sort of communications malfunction.

CAPTAIN

(to the Engineer)

I want you to suit up, get out there, and take a look at the receivers on the outside of the ship. I want to be certain we've checked everything twice.

(to the Scientist)

Take over the controls. Broadcast our position on all channels. Full stop.

(BLACKOUT.)

SCENE 2

(During this scene, the ENGINEER is outside the ship, on a spacewalk to check the communications equipment. The CAPTAIN and the SCIENTIST can communicate with the ENGINEER via an intercom. The outside of the ship can be represented on another part of the stage, or the ENGINEER can simply be offstage.)

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Airlock secure. Initiating spacewalk communications protocol.

ENGINEER (off)

Captain, can you read me?

CAPTAIN

Just don't do any laughing while you're out there and we'll know it's you.

ENGINEER (off)

No worries there, Captain. Out here, I'm nervous!

CAPTAIN

Keep your magnet boots on. We're right here on standby.

SCIENTIST

What's to be nervous about? It's just a spacewalk.

CAPTAIN

It's the new spacesuit. Probably has him a bit jittery. It's a semiautonomous suit.

SCIENTIST

Those suits that adjust your movements? I thought those were just prototypes.

CAPTAIN

Well, they are, but Mission Control wanted us to have one for this mission. There are only three of us up here in this very expensive can. Oxygen is precious. If the suit runs low on it, and the astronaut becomes unconscious, the suit can auto-correct, or it can be piloted from Mission Control.

SCIENTIST

That's, well, it's brilliant, I guess. They'd use our bodies as puppets?

CAPTAIN

Or, just the suits, but basically it seemed the best way to make emergency repairs and to bring the ship home.

ENGINEER (off)

I've made an adjustment to the equipment out here. Can you try scanning the communications channels again and see if anything has changed?

(SCIENTIST and CAPTAIN make adjustments. A new transmission plays. This broadcast from Earth consists of extremely upbeat music, annoyingly upbeat "catchy" or "pop" party music.)

ENGINEER (Continued)

How's that? Did it work?

(Beat)

What's going on in there you guys? Are you having some kind of party? I can't hear you! What is that?

SCIENTIST

It's the transmission. It's not coming from us.

ENGINEER (off)

Repeat. I do not copy. Over.

CAPTAIN

(yelling)

We are getting different signals now. Don't panic. Keep making adjustments!

ENGINEER (off)

Copy that, Captain. This suit is making things difficult. It's like I'm arm-wrestling with myself out here.

(The party music on the radio is interrupted.)

SCIENTIST

Captain, I think we have an open channel!

CAPTAIN

Hailing mission control. Requesting Earth approach coordinates. Hailing mission control. Do you copy?

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)

Helloooo, how's everybody doing out there tonight? One, two. One, two. Testing testing. One, two. Two. Two. Two. Helloooo! Mic check. Mic check. One, two. Can you hear me in the back? Can I get a whooop whoop?

CAPTAIN

Um, copy that. Requesting Earth approach coordinates. Our mission is on standby pending spaceflight directive from ground control. We're not moving until you say when.

RADIO VOICE (V.O.)

Yeah? Whatever! Check this out, man. I can make your ship flap its wings. Make it go flap! Flap flap flap. Fly!

ENGINEER (off)

I'm sorry to interrupt, Captain, but my suit, it's -

RADIO VOICE (Continued)

Oh my god, you have got to hear this song, dude. It's the best!

(More party music plays.)

CAPTAIN

That racket again! What the hell is going on out there!

COMPUTER VOICE

Initiating re-entry wing deployment. Rotating re-entry wings 45 degrees. Rotating re-entry wings negative 45 degrees. Rotating re-entry wings 45 degrees. Rotating re-entry wings negative 45 degrees.

CAPTAIN

Stop it!

SCIENTIST

Captain, I can't override the commands.

ENGINEER (off)

Captain, many of the ships mechanical systems seem to be moving in response to the signal. I'm going to try to turn the receiver back to its original position.

CAPTAIN

Fine. And shut off that noise!

ENGINEER (off)

I'm having trouble moving, Captain. It is very difficult to work under these conditions.

CAPTAIN

Well I don't give a damn! Get it done. We can't just park here and listen to music all day. Let's get moving, dammit! What is he doing out there? Can you see?

SCIENTIST

He... He looks to be... Dancing. He's dancing, Captain.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(This scene takes place outside the ship, where the ENGINEER is doing the spacewalk.)

(We hear more of the music from the transmission, as well as sporadic occurrences of the canned laughter. The ENGINEER is attempting to make adjustments to the equipment, which is perhaps similar to a satellite dish. There is zero gravity, so the ENGINEER's movements should be slow and fluid. While moving across the exterior of the ship, the space suit is receiving instructions to dance. The instructions come sporadically at first and the ENGINEER struggles to override them with other movements. After a while of this, there seems to be more dancing and less of the ENGINEER's intended movements. Eventually, the ENGINEER is overcome and the only movements are dance movements. As though it were some seductive dance move, the arms reach toward the chest of the suit, to open it revealingly.)

ENGINEER

No.. No.. No!

(The suit's chest is slowly pulled open. There is a terrible hissing sound as the precious oxygen escapes from the suit. The ENGINEER convulses briefly and dies. The suit then removes its own helmet, revealing lifeless remains within. The suit doffs its helmet, up and down, as one might do with a hat during a tap-dance.)

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

(This scene takes place back on the space ship. By now, the music has reached a crescendo and shows no sign of stopping.)

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Exterior airlock opening sequence initiated.

CAPTAIN

Good! That's our engineer coming back in. When that's done, I'll shut off all the communications, even if I have to bite the wires in half with my damn teeth! I'm sick of this noise!

SCIENTIST

Captain?

CAPTAIN

What is it now?

SCIENTIST

The dancing, Captain. It hasn't stopped and, well, I thought I saw... I can't be sure what I saw. We've lost contact. I can't get any readings. Not even... Not even life support from the suit.

CAPTAIN

Never-mind all that now. It's probably just another communications malfunction acting on the suit. We'll power it down in a moment and we'll get out of here.

SCIENTIST

The outer airlock hasn't closed yet.

CAPTAIN

What?

COMPUTER VOICE (V.O.)

Inner airlock opening sequence initiated.

(There is another hissing sound now, as all the air inside the ship begins to escape into the vacuum of space. The

CAPTAIN and the SCIENTIST are being pulled towards the airlock as it slowly opens to reveal the ENGINEER's body standing in the doorway.)

CAPTAIN

Shut it down! Send the distress signal!

(The SCIENTIST struggles to slam on some buttons. An alarm sounds, adding yet more sound to the crescendo of sound that has been building this whole time. The CAPTAIN and the SCIENTIST are pulled out of the ship, past the ENGINEER and into the abyss of space. The body of the ENGINEER stands ominously in the airlock doorway. Its autonomous space suit is disco dancing.)

(End.)