

Midterms & Motherships

by

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and

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BLACK:

Title on a black screen over an EERIE MECHANICAL HUM.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT.

Adorned with flying saucers and bug-eyed aliens, a souvenir magnet screams "Greetings from Roswell, NM." The magnet secures two twenty-dollar bills to a refrigerator door.

In the context of an undergraduate apartment, the HUM can now be understood as the sound made by a refrigerator compressor.

Working nearby at the kitchen table, LUKE probably wishes he were closer to graduation than he is. His attention flickers between a laptop, a couple of open books, and a messy sheaf of paper. Luke is trying to focus on his work, shutting out the world with headphones playing a MUTED POP SONG. Even so, Luke often glances toward the fridge magnet and money.

His roommate MAYA enters the undergraduate apartment with pizza, a victor home from the battlefield.

MAYA

Dinner.

Luke peels off the headphones.

LUKE

And does dinner come with
pineapple?

Maya parks the pizza on a counter and serves them each a slice

MAYA

Does the Pope wear a funny hat?
Pineapple, Spam, and jalapeños.

LUKE

Why you gotta be like that?

MAYA

Look, you wanna a grease frisbee
from Slice, Slice, Baby? Be my
guest. Otherwise, I think the
words you're looking for are
"Thank you, Maya."

LUKE

Where'd you get this?

His disordered homework occupies so much of the table it's
not easy to put a plate in front of Luke but she manages
it. Maya raises a clenched power fist.

MAYA

Pies Before Guys. Obviously.

LUKE

(a mocking
imitation)

Thank you, Maya.

Maya sits at the table. She savors the first bite of
pizza. Luke is tentative, skeptical. Perhaps Hawaiian
pizza is part of a plot to poison the patriarchy. Luke
aims his chin at the fridge.

LUKE (CONT'D)

What's with the twenties?

MAYA

Oh, you know: the Naxor thing.

LUKE

God, what is *with* him? Still?
Seriously. Ever since Break.

MAYA

I told you we shoulda stayed in
Vegas that last day, but no.
You're all like "It's Area 51!
It'll be cool!"

LUKE

Well I didn't know Ben was gonna
go full X-Files on us. I just
thought, you know...

MAYA

He says he can absolutely prove it
by next Friday.

LUKE

So you bet him a twenty.

Maya shrugs

MAYA

They got six-packs of Venom on
sale at Dollar General.

LUKE

Is that why he's skipping class?

MAYA

Psscht... No way he's skipping for
this.

LUKE

Yeah? When's the last time you
saw him leave his room?

Maya looks at her plate, then toward the closed door of
Ben's room.

MAYA

Um... last week? Pizza night?

LUKE

So, Thursday.

MAYA

I dunno what to tell you, Luke.
We've got totally different
schedules.

LUKE

Yeah, but the same major. You
haven't seen him at all in
Sterling or any of the labs? Hang
on. How'd you get his twenty if
he hasn't left the room for a
week?

MAYA

He shoved it under the door and
screamed at me to leave him alone.

LUKE

Ben screamed? Does that even
sound like something Ben would do?

Luke lets out a sigh of frustration then walks to Ben's
door. Maya follows.

An array of shifting colors shines from under the door.
Luke and Maya look at each other, trying to make sense of
an odd, muted MIX OF SOUNDS – static, weird frequencies,
indecipherable groaning – coming from within. Luke knocks.

LUKE

Ben? You okay, buddy? You doing
okay in there?

The SOUNDS persist, but Ben does not respond.

Luke looks at Maya. A silent entreaty for her support.
Maya shrugs in response.

LUKE

Dude? You okay? We got some
pizza out here. It's Hawaiian,
though. Sorry about that.

Maya sticks her tongue out at Luke.

LUKE (CONT'D)

At least it's warm.

MAYA

Just leave him alone, man. He'll
come out when he's done with his
OnlyFans or whatever.

LUKE

(to Maya)

Something ain't right, Maya. You
can't just... goon for a whole week.
Trust me.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(to Ben)

Ben? I'm gonna... We're gonna come
in, okay? Just... we're just
checking on you, okay?

Luke slowly twists the knob. He eases the door open and
peers cautiously inward.

INT. - BEN'S ROOM

The room is dark except for the colors splashing from
multiple computer screens on a desk in the far corner.

Luke's feet pick their way across the cluttered floor of a
darkened room. Bed covers and sheets hang off the
mattress. The floor is strewn with clothes, chip bags,
soda cans, scraps of tin foil. A trashcan overflows with
crap and, significantly, with gift cards and their
packaging.

Now near the desk, Luke's gaze rises from the floor to the
computer displays. One screen features an ominous chat log
which is unrecognizable to modern apps and software. Luke
leans close and squints. He concentrates, but is unable to
decode the stream of unfamiliar symbols.

LUKE

Uh... Ben...?

MAYA

(a warning, shouted
from the doorway)

Luke!

One hand leaps out of the darkness behind Luke and grabs
his shoulder. A second hand crams a tinfoil hat onto
Luke's head. Luke screams, whipping around.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Ben! What the fuck, man!?

BEN

Shhh!

Luke feels his head, removes the hat. He stares at the foil yarmulke. Luke is a little too angry, a little too breathless to be mystified.

LUKE

Dude! What is this!? How 'bout
you shush!

Ben turns Luke's body to face the screens.

BEN

Shut up! Shut up! He's typing!

Symbols appear in a window labeled "GalacticExcap33." And then... they stop appearing.

MAYA

What are you doing? What's
happening?

BEN

Dammit! Nothing's happening!
Luke scared him off!

LUKE

Me!? You're the scary one, dude.
You attacked me. Your... chat buddy
doesn't even know I'm here.

BEN

Of course he knows you're here.
He's got omnipsych.

MAYA

What do you mean "omnipsych"?

BEN

All of them have it. I mean...
after the larval stage.

Luke drops the foil in the trash can. Something catches his eye. He bends down and pulls a gift card package from the trash can. He looks from the card to the screen to Ben.

LUKE

Have you been giving this guy...
money?

Maya turns on the light. The walls of Ben's room are covered in posters that indicate his enthusiasm for sci-fi movies, TV shows, books, and alien conspiracies. Ben winces, sensitive to frequencies of bright light he hasn't seen for days.

MAYA

No way. What is he? Like, some kind of Nigerian Prince in space?

BEN

Naxor's not a prince, Maya. God. He's a prisoner. And without money, how's he gonna escape the Nebula Cartel? How's he gonna pay the Draven Disciples to smuggle him outta there, huh?

Luke sifts through a pile of gift cards. Maya walks closer, side-stepping trash.

LUKE

Jesus, Ben. How much have you given this guy?

BEN

Just. Like. Maybe. Four hundred -

LUKE

Dollars!?

BEN

I had no choice! Our signal keeps getting jammed. He can't redeem the codes before it messes up!

MAYA

Dude, that is *not* how gift cards work.

LUKE

You think E.T. needs to phone Home Depot?

MAYA

You're blowing your rent on
scammers, man.

BEN

Naxor is not a scammer, Maya. He
just needs a little help.
Besides, it's not like he's asking
for real money.

LUKE

I promise you, Ben: gift cards are
real money.

BEN

Not if he gives me the money to
buy 'em.

MAYA

(confused)

He sends you money. Then you use
his cash to buy cards. And then
you send them back?

BEN

Well, he doesn't send me "money"
money. He uses omnipsych to send
me the winning numbers for
PowerBall.

For a moment of disbelief, Luke and Maya stare at each
other

LUKE

You won the lottery?

BEN

Well, not yet, obviously. He gave
me the numbers for next Friday.
The jackpot will be more than
enough to -

Luke reaches for the computer keyboard

MAYA

Oh my god! Do you hear yourself?

LUKE

That's it. That's enough. Lemme talk to this guy.

Luke muscles his way into the chair, but before he can start typing, the computer dings. The indecipherable symbols appear, one at a time, in a string, right to left. Ben reaches over, presses a button. A kind of pidgin English appears in a separate translation window:

H3ll0 Earthlings. N33d \$100 more. Last tim3! I can tast3 fr33dom.

Ben rescues the tinfoil hat from the trash and crams it back on Luke's head. He pulls the keyboard away from Luke and starts typing.

BEN

You see that? He's almost out!
Just let me finish this!

LUKE

Ben! This guy's a con man. He's a thief! You're just letting him steal from you!

Luke pulls off the hat.

BEN

Put it back on! C'mon, it's a protector! I can't have you messing up the connection!

The monitor begins to flash rapidly with error signs and lines of code.

BEN

No no no! We're losing him!
Luke, keep the hat on! Maya, stay back! Don't get too close!

LUKE

Did you give him access to your computer?

The computer's COOLING FAN is whirring furiously. Maya lays her hand on the side of a desktop tower, but pulls it back quickly, startled by its temperature.

MAYA

It's overheating. You're gonna melt something!

BEN

(to Luke)

He said the remote thing helps with our connection!

Maya takes a resolute breath. She unplugs the computer. The machine goes dark and quiet.

BEN

Maya! What the hell!?

Silence drains the emotional energy from the room.

LUKE

She just saved your computer, dude.

Ben rubs his eyes. He surveys his room. It's as if he hasn't seen it in weeks. Finally, his gaze lands on the gift cards in the trash. He drags the tinfoil hat from his own head. Awareness... then relief creeps over him. He has been embarrassingly far down the rabbit hole. And his friends, true friends, have rescued him.

BEN

God... It's not like I've got the money to replace a motherboard, huh?

LUKE

C'mon. There's pizza.

Luke walks out of the room. Maya pats Ben on the shoulder.

MAYA

Don't beat yourself up about it. Same thing happened to my grandma.

They follow Luke.

BEN

Your grandma gave money to an intergalactic sentient being?

MAYA

There's forty dollars on the
fridge you can have til payday.

FADE TO BLACK

CREDITS

CUT TO

INT. - JAIL CELL

The strange, desolate landscape of the planet Nyxara unfolds beyond the portal of a small detention chamber. The alien NAXOR bends over a makeshift computer he may be trying to conceal.

Naxor focuses on the screen in front of him, to block out the prison's EERIE MECHANICAL HUM¹ as well as more disturbing SOUNDS in the distance where jailers employ ZAPPING TECHNOLOGY to incite pain and prisoners respond with inhuman SCREAMS.

The computer's monitor flashes an error message in Naxor's language. Desperate, the alien snaps, succumbing to an angry, demonstrative tantrum.

NAXOR
(in its native
language,
translated in
subtitles)

Fuck! A hundred more dollars! I
only need a hundred more dollars!

A shadowy jailer approaches the cell's force field. Little of the creature is visible - with the exception of a tentacle wrapped around what is obviously a weapon.

¹ In another part of the galaxy, this same sound might be mistaken for a refrigerator's compressor.

JAGGER SKORN
(in its native
language,
translated in
subtitles)

Poor Naxor. Let me guess. Your
imaginary human friend ran out of
Steam credits?

Naxor howls mournfully in the way of his species.

JAGGER SKORN
Funny. The same thing happened to
my grandmother.

Energy sparks at the tip of the weapon.

CUT TO BLACK

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