

***TOD GARBER!***

***INTERSTELLAR BARBER!***

*by*

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***TOD GARBER – INTERSTELLAR BARBER***

FADE IN

NARRATOR: Space. An interstellar community of nearly infinite life forms. Galactic Mediation Vessel #7 - a mobile neutral zone providing safe, comfortable surroundings for treaty and trade negotiations.

(zooming in on space station)

Of vital importance to the ambassadors of the various races and species who must represent their planets and themselves in the best possible light is the Central Grooming Station, where we meet "Tod Garber! Interstellar Barber!"

INT. THE GROOMING CENTER

Two grotesque aliens (I'm not going to describe them because I don't know what our budget is – use your imagination) face to face and ROARING at one another.

At their feet (tentacles? fins?) cowers young innocent KARIN (human female) fear writ across her face.

The aliens stand toe-to-toe (?) in an antiseptic room furnished with mirrors, oddly padded chairs, computer screens. Their blistering BELLOWS ECHO off the tile walls.

TOD GARBER, mature human male, appears between the two snarling visages.

TOD

Entities! Entities!

Both aliens spin and growl at him.

STRONG BREEZE (the larger alien)

Grah grahh gra gra grah grah!

Zh-ZHOON

Spli spla splig splik spla splash!

TOD

Cripes! Xzrilla! Kick the translator!

Across the room XZRILLA (pronounced "ZRILLA – the "X" is silent) a gorgeous (kind of a combination of Cate Blanchett and Sofia Vergara – only, you know, really gorgeous. And blue. Lovely shades of blue all over. Hire the babe from "Farscape.") humanoid looks up from the sentient ball of hair (Prime Minister LOPISHIA) that she is trimming, grins, and bangs the side of a computer console.

STRONG BREEZE

Grahh grat grah and it is a poor excuse for an argument. Sad? Pathetic!

Zh-ZHOON

Spliti spla splag not even fair and a big, stupid waste of our time at the...

TOD

Entities! Entities! Please calm down. This isn't helping anyone.

STRONG BREEZE

This is unacceptable! I have the right...

Zh-ZHOON

I shouldn't have to deal with...

TOD

Please!

He says it loud enough to get their attention.

TOD

Do you both breathe?

Both aliens wiggle their heads(?) in some fashion.

TOD

Does that mean "yes?"

Both aliens wiggle their heads(?) in some fashion.

TOD

All right then. Take a deep breathe. Let's just relax a bit. We're frightening my assistant here.

He reaches down and helps Karin to her feet.

TOD

Are you all right?

KARIN

I'm fine, I think. No harm done.

Zh-ZHOON

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. I was just upset.

STRONG BREEZE

Upset. You lost your mind.

Zh-ZHOON

At least I have a mind to lose...

TOD

Now, now. I can see that we're off to a bad start. Perhaps my assistant...

(to Karin)

You are my assistant, correct?

KARIN

Yes sir.

TOD

Well, perhaps you can tell me what I've walked in on.

Karin takes a deep breath, collecting herself.

KARIN

A plasma storm, sir. Shuttle service has been disrupted across the system. Delays. Cancellations. Both of the ambassadors and myself arrived on the same shuttle, at the same time.

TOD

Oh my. That is a problem.

STRONG BREEZE

It's unacceptable! It's bad enough that I have to sit across a table from this...this...

Zh-Zhoon bristles and starts to respond, but TOD cuts s/he off.

TOD

And you are the Com Bover representative?

STRONG BREEZE

I am.

TOD

And you the Po-Oh?

Zh-ZHOON

Yes. But it isn't...

TOD

I have read about your negotiations and today's conference. It is unfortunate that our schedules have been disrupted, but I think that we can handle both of you if we all just keep calm.

KARIN

I'm so sorry, sir. I should have...

TOD

It's your first day. Karin, isn't it? You come highly recommended, but this is not a very good way to start one's first day, is it?

KARIN

No sir.

TOD

Why don't you take Ambassador...  
(to Zh-Zhoon)  
Zh-Zhoon, isn't it?

Zh-Zhoon wiggles his/her head (?) again.

TOD (cont)

Take Ambassador Zh-Zhoon to Station Four, right next to Xzrilla, all right?

KARIN

Ex-zrilla?

TOD

The "X" is silent.

XZRILLA

Over here, Karin. I'll help you set up.

Karin offers her arm to Zh-Zhoon (or whatever might be helpful to get the alien to cross the room).

TOD

Is Treeskit in yet?

TREESKIT, human but sort of down into the hobbit range, ENTERS from the Supply Room door. His swarthy face twisted into a leering grin.

TREESKIT

Morning, Boss. Quite a to-do, eh?

TOD

You could have been a bit more help.

TREESKIT

Nah, let 'em blow off some steam, I always say. Some of these buggers bite!

STRONG BREEZE

Wait. What? Did that translate correctly? What did you say, small ugly person?

Treeskit grins broadly.

TREESKIT

Let's test out the translator, o.k?

TOD

Treeskit, don't...

TREESKIT

You're Ambassador Strong Breeze, am I correct?

STRONG BREEZE

That's correct. Well, perhaps not quite correct in the implication of hereditary...

TREESKIT

It's such a challenge for the machine, Your Excellency. Each of us speaks, the machine analyzes our words and intent, does it's best to translate, and then with directional fractal audiophonics, lets each of us hear what the other is saying in our own tongue. Amazing, isn't it?

STRONG BREEZE

Tongue? I don't...

TREESKIT

Let me just test it out a little. Strong Breeze, correct?

STRONG BREEZE

As I said before...

TREESKIT

Blow Hole.

TOD

Treeskit!

STRONG BREEZE

Yes, that's correct. Now will you...

TREESKIT

Gas Bag.

STRONG BREEZE

I sense a slight tonality shift, but...

TOD

That's enough! Take the Ambassador to Station 8 and set up. And no more experimentation, is that clear?

TREESKIT

Got it, Boss. Just parameter checkin'. Always good to know.

TOD

I will be seeing to you personally, Ambassador. Just give me a moment to make sure everything is in order.

STRONG BREEZE

All of this will figure largely in my report.

TREESKIT (giggles)

Gaseous Report.

STRONG BREEZE

Interesting. That didn't quite translate as my name, but you caught a bit of my mother's familial intonation.

Treeskit has a hard time controlling his laughter.

Tod steps into Xzrilla's station. She smiles (rather radiantly) at him.

XZRILLA

The whole confrontation had really just started when you stepped in.

Zh-Zhoon has settled into his/her couch/chair.

KARIN

I managed to keep them separated until we got through the door. I was just surprised and stumbled. They were loud.

Zh-ZHOON

My apologies, again.

TOD

Thank you for your patience, Ambassador Zh-Zhoon. Do you have your information packet?

Zh-Zhoon hands over a small disk that Tod places in a computer drive. The screen instantly springs to life with much complicated data and a hologram of Zh-Zhoon.

TOD

(to Karin)

For conferences this sensitive, we use bio-encrypted data personally delivered by the representatives.

The seat Zh-Zhoon sits on adjusts a bit, the color of the wall changes from light yellow to soothing pink, soft sounds emanate from a speaker.

Zh-ZHOON

That's nice!

TOD

Your comfort is very important to us. Please us know if...

STRONG BREEZE (o.s.)

The chair moved! What are you...oh! I see. But I prefer one of those new argohyde recliners.

TREESKIT (o.s.)

Of course you do. I'll see if we have one on file.

TOD

Treeskit! A sound absorbing screen would be nice.

TREESKIT (o.s.)

Yes sir!

A panel slides out of the wall, isolating Treeskit and Strong Breeze on one side, everyone else on the other. Before it extends fully, Zh-Zhoon shouts out:

Zh-ZHOON

Stop whining!

STRONG BREEZE

Mind your own business, you...

The screen blocks the rest of the comment.



Tod and Xzrilla exchange an amused look and she goes back to trimming the luxuriant hairball.

Zh-ZHOON

That creature is really annoying!

TOD

Let's concentrate on getting you ready for your conference. As you are aware, we have a new assistant working with us today. With your permission, Ambassador, I would like to let Karin handle your grooming. She's been very well trained and I will closely supervise.

Zh-ZHOON

(to Karin)

Do you have any -BEEP- little fish cracker thingies?

The BEEP came from the computer. Karin looks puzzled.

TOD

Whenever the computer has trouble translating a concept it alerts you with a tone. In this case you can check the Ambassador's data readout for a better definition.

Karin turns to the screen and taps it a few times, calling up information.

KARIN

Here they are. Yes, Ambassador, they are available. How many would you desire?

Zh-ZHOON

Lots! I love them! And can I have some salty water as well?

KARIN

Yes sir, I saw that they were usually served together, so I took the liberty...

A wall panel opens and a nicely arranged tray of little fishy cracker thingies and salt water appears.

Zh-ZHOON

Yay!

Karin sets the tray on a stand and stands back as the Ambassador's rather odd eating habits make crumbs fly.

KARIN

We used these systems in training, but that was very fast. Your equipment here is amazing!

Tod and Xzrilla exchange a glance, an apprehensive glance.

XZRILLA

Yes. Amazing is a good word.

The tray holds a large wet sponge and the Ambassador uses it to clean food off of lots of his/her body, then throws it to the floor. Karin turns to pick it up, but Tod touches her arm and nods to the computer screen. Karin reads a note there and straightens up.

KARIN

(to Zh-Zhoon)

The food was satisfactory?

Zh-ZHOON

I am most pleased.

Karin nods, steps on the sponge, pours a bit of salt water on it, and then kicks it away. She looks for approval to Tod, who nods.

TOD

We try to keep our database up-to-date on all customs, needs, and courtesies required to put our clients at ease. You can begin grooming now, Karin.

KARIN

(half reading from cues on the monitor)

Ambassador, today has been a bit stressful for you, what with the transportation delays and scheduling conflicts. If you would like I can supply you with a hydro-comb suffused with soothing compounds that you can...

Zh-ZHOON

A head-scratcher? You have a head-scratcher! I love the head-scratcher!  
Give me the head-scratcher!

Karin pulls an odd device out of case and Zh-Zhoon snatches it up and lays back with what seems to be a sigh.

Tod and Karin step away, giving the Ambassador some privacy.

TOD

How do you feel? You've had a somewhat rough start.

KARIN

I'm very nervous. I could use a head-scratcher myself.

TOD

Good. Keep your sense of humor. It will come in handy. Keep close to the Ambassador, do a little reading on the monitor to see if you can anticipate any more requests. If you need anything, XZrilla is right there. She's a pro.

XZRILLA

Glad to help.

Back to her precise snipping.

KARIN

Thanks. Both of you.

Tod walks past the sound absorption barrier.

STRONG BREEZE

No! I don't want another beaker of savor. What do you think I am?  
A -BEEP- easily suggestible swamp creeper?

TOD

Treeskit! No need to respond. Ambassador Strong Breeze, I do apologize for the confusion today. How can we best prepare you for your upcoming conference?

STRONG BREEZE

Oh, I need little preparation. Those up-starts...

TOD

The Po-Oh.

STRONG BREEZE

So-called. Interlopers. Invaders. The Youz-A System is clearly the property of the Com Bover Oligarchy and...

Treeskit applies a salve to a bare pink spot on the Ambassador, who shivers a bit.

STRONG BREEZE

Well, that's rather nice.

TOD

As you know, Ambassador, the staff and crew of the Mobile Neutral Zone Station are here to aid in your negotiations and we do not take sides.

STRONG BREEZE

Of course you do. I know that you can't say it clearly, translator or no, but the Po-Oh have so clearly violated...

Zh-ZHOON

That is not true!

Zh-Zhoon and Karin are walking past Strong Breeze's cleaning station.

KARIN

I'm sorry, sir, but Ambassador Zh-Zhoon requested to use the facilities.

STRONG BREEZE

Of course it's true, you impertinent little -BEEP- chrysanthemum!

Zh-ZHOON

You overbearing -BEEP- hibiscus. It's your race with your filthy -BEEP- poinsettias that have to be stopped.

TOD

Entities! Please stop. This is unseemly and unproductive. Karin, please, get the Ambassador into the refresher cabinet.

KARIN

Of course.

Both aliens are muttering and spluttering.

COMPUTER

Addendum: Various non-verbal uncommunicative exhalations.  
Noted for the record.

TREESKIT

Thunderous Puffball.

STRONG BREEZE

Yes? What? Why do you keep repeating my name?

Karin takes Zh-Zhoon to the door marked "Principle Inter-Species Safe Emissions Refresher" in several languages. There is also a large red button labeled "Purge" beside the entrance.

KARIN

The facility is fully equipped. If you need anything there is a call button.  
I'll answer immediately.

Zh-Zhoon enters the room and closes the door.

RUNNING GAG: Whenever an alien is in the P.I.S.S.E.R., various rumblings and noise occur. Different with each species. Lots of sound FX. Be creative.

KARIN

I'm so sorry, sir, but he said it was urgent.

BOOM from the P.I.S.S.E.R.

Karin jumps a little, but Tod ignores it.

TOD

It's not your fault. It's against all protocols to have two ambassadors in a Class A aggressive situation in close proximity, but with Chambers 4 and 5 inoperable and the fact that both of our current clients requested grooming facilities, we had little choice.

A WHISTLE and a THUMP from the P.I.S.S.E.R.

STRONG BREEZE

Disgusting.

TREESKIT

In fact, it's a Noisy...

TOD

Treeskit! That will be enough!

TREESKIT (grinning)

Yes sir.

KARIN

I have a question, Captain Garber.

TOD

Please, call me Tod. We have to observe so many formalities around here, I prefer that we keep our own relationships rather informal.

KARIN

Yes sir. I mean...

TOD

Oh, the occasional "sir" never hurt anyone.

But he smiles to let her know he's kidding.

KARIN

It was the Computer. All of a sudden...right in the middle of...

TOD

The flowers?

KARIN

Yes! The flowers. What was that?

TOD

My predecessor, Orron Phylis, was not only a Senior Grade Master Stylist, he was also a computer programmer of some note. Left the service under something of a cloud. Lots of accusations and little proof. But he was bitter about the situation and re-programmed the core code of the computer.

KARIN

Flowers.

TOD

Evidently he was something of a botanist as well. Whenever the Universal Translator detects a word or a phrase that it considers sexual in nature, it inserts a randomly chosen flower name.

KARIN

Really?

TOD

Try it.

KARIN

Should I?

XZRILLA (laughing)

As nasty as you want to be.

Karin takes a deep breath.

KARIN

-BEEP- Daisy.

She jumps a little and shakes her head.

KARIN

Oh, for -BEEP- cornflower sake.

Everyone laughs except, of course, Strong Breeze. He snorts.

COMPUTER

Untranslatable vocalization.

Another BOOM, WHEEZE, and THUD from the Refresher Room. And then the light above the door comes on. Tod nods at Karin.

She steps to the door and, with a bit of trepidation, opens it.

To the sound of a large exhaust fan and gurgling water, the door opens and Zh-Zhoon emerges.

Zh-ZHOON

That was great.

KARIN

Very good, Ambassador. Let's go back to our station.

Karin presses the "Purge" button. The door hisses shut and the floor rumbles with the force of the room being cleaned.

As they pass Strong Breeze's station:

Zh-ZHOON

-BEEP- Zinnia

STRONG BREEZE

-BEEP- Gladiola.

Karin and Zh-Zhoon make it back to their area with no more incident.

Xzrilla sets a slow-blow dryer on the hairball and walks over to the P.I.S.S.E.R. She looks inside.

XZRILLA

Tod. Come look at this. Bring the hand scanner.

Tod grabs a small device and they both look inside the room. Inside the doorway we can see a pristine white wall that has been scratched with alien letters and symbols. Tod aims the scanner at the graffiti and then shows the results to Xzrilla. They both nod and head to a computer monitor.

TOD

Maintenance. We need a buff job at Grooming Station 3. Thank you.  
Control. We need an immediate second-level clearance for both  
Youz-A System representatives. Thank you.

Tod and Xzrilla read the screen, look at each other and nod. Xzrilla heads to Zh-Zhoon's station and Tod to Strong Breeze's.

TOD

Translator: Station privacy mode please.

They both speak quietly and directly to the Ambassadors, with Karin and Treeskit listening intently.

Strong Breeze sits back for a moment, thinking, pulls off several grooming devices that Treeskit has placed on him/her, and heads to Zh-Zhoon's station.

The two Ambassadors look at one another for a moment.

STRONG BREEZE

Ah...I feel we have begun poorly. We are in opposition, but it is our duty to find a way to speak to one another and to find...uh...

Zh-ZHOON

A middle ground. I have been rude. That won't solve anything.

STRONG BREEZE

(to Tod)

Is the Conference Room ready?

TOD

(consults computer screen)

It is, Ambassador.

STRONG BREEZE

(to Zh-Zhoon)

Are you ready?

Zh-ZHOON

I am. Our negotiations are going to be very difficult.

STRONG BREEZE

Yes they will. I will not be gentle. But that is why we are here. We must both work tirelessly for our peoples.

TOD

Treeskit, will you escort the Ambassadors to the Conference Chambers?

TREESKIT

Yes sir.



TOD

Professional, Treeskit.

Treeskit nods. He understand things have changed and he will behave properly.

TREESKIT

Yes sir.

The three EXIT.

Tod and Xzrilla clasp hands and sigh in relief. Karin stares at them in amazement.

KARIN

What just happened?

XZRILLA

Did you notice what our clawed friend etched into the ‘fresher room’?

Karin shakes her head.

Tod holds up the scanner.

KARIN

(reading)

“Flush twice, it’s a long way to Andromeda.” What?

TOD

It turns out that the Po-Oh, Zh-Zhoon’s people, have an interesting method of choosing their ambassadors.

XZRILLA

They evolved as a highly predated race so their young are born very physically mature, able to move with the pack almost at once. Mental development is very quick, as well.

TOD

The Po-Oh choose well-educated, intellectually capable young as negotiators. What the young lack in maturity, they make up for with blunt honesty and an unusually high sense of...

XZRILLA

Fairness. To the young of almost all species, “fairness” is highly important.

KARIN

Ambassador Zh-Zhoon is a child!

XZRILLA

Quite young, as a matter of fact.

KARIN

And Strong Breeze?

TOD

A childless elder in a race that values parenthood highly.

KARIN

You guys are good.

A BEEP from Xzrilla's station. The hairball's grooming is complete. As Xzrilla detaches the various equipment, she narrates the process to Karin.

XZRILLA

Prime Minister Lopishia is noted for her lustrous coat. She is speaking today to a council of trade leaders and needs to look her best. Trimming for just the right profile is a skill you will need to learn, but for now...

Suddenly Lopishia rolls off the couch, flipping over. She has been upside-down the whole time. Her hair falls into clumps and disarray. She looks like a furry Xmas tree.

XZRILLA

Prime Minister! I'm so sorry. I didn't realize...

LOPISHIA

(sighs)

Every time. Every -BEEP- tuliping time.

She EXITS.

Tod and Xzrilla exchange a look, and smile helplessly.

KARIN

Do you mind if I ask a personal question?

TOD

Go ahead.

KARIN

Are you two...um...married, mated, an item, or something?

They stare at her for a moment and then look at each other and LAUGH UPROARIOUSLY.

KARIN

I didn't mean to...

TOD

No, no, it's all right. You couldn't know. In fact, we're...

An ALARM SOUNDS and the door to Grooming Center OPENS.

A SCORCHED, SMOKING ALIEN steps in.

TOD

Emergency stations! We've had another Transporter malfunction!

FADE OUT

NEXT WEEK: Wolf people, a molting slug, and some strawberry ice cream (or is it?).

Wait!

There's more!

Turn the page for an exciting preview of

***TINA FARLEAP!***

***INTERSTELLAR BARKEEP!***

***TINA FARLEAP: INTERSTELLAR BARKEEP***

INT. LARGE DARK ROOM

Two terrifyingly vicious-looking aliens (I'm not going to describe them because I don't know what our budget is – use your imagination – they seem like really top-of-the-heap predators) loom as if ready to pounce forward. Talons extended, rows of teeth, tentacles, whatever, at the ready.

We move around them to see TINA FARLEAP, a Native American woman with a been-there-and-back kind of maturity about her. Despite the massive aliens threatening her, she leans right over the bar to talk to them.

Oh, we're in a bar! It's an odd looking place and we can see other alien forms in splashes of light around the room.

TINA

I'm sorry. I can't find it in the database.

As we near Tina, the growling of the super-predators FADES and the translated version of their cacophony COMES UP.

PREDATOR #1

Grr arrgh noight soo much as a clue about what we want?

PREDATOR #2

Sss thiss iss nuts. All we want in some simple...BEEP... construction powder adhesive with overtones of shipboard romance.

Tina smiles a little.

TINA

Yeah, see, there's the problem. When you hear that beep, that's the translator not finding the right words and making some substitutions. Let me repeat what the auto-translator just gave me and see what it gives you. Ahem... construction powder adhesive with overtones of shipboard romance.

Both aliens jolt back as the translation growls in their ears.

PREDATOR #2

That's horrible! What's wrong with you people?

PREDATOR #1

(to #2)

Now, now, ...BEEP... sugar-plum passion mate. We are brand new to this sector. Maybe we should have filled in the questionnaire more thoroughly.

While the talk is going on, IGOR, a tall, stringy Earthman carrying a broom, has sidled up. He doesn't comment, but has been listening closely.

TINA

You know, I might have an idea...

She looks at Igor, who nods sagely.

TINA

Ambassadors, how does your bio-system tolerate oxygen di-hydride, sucrose, and carbon dioxide, the latter in gas form and very low quantities?

The Predators glance at one another, baring teeth, snarling, gnashing... basically shrugging in the style of their species.

PREDATOR #1

Those chemicals are not a problem.

TINA

Great.

Her hands disappear beneath the bar and she comes up with two vessels (shape these to whatever appendages the Predators have) filled with murky brown bubbling fluid.

TINA

Try these.

The Predators hesitate a bit and then throw the vessels, liquid and all, into their mouths.

A brief moment as their eyes (however many) widen and they gasp and stare at one another.

PREDATOR #1 and #2

Furgerlargo that's the best liquid ever!

PREDATOR #2

I'd love another! It's the nectar of the creators! Is it precious, rare, unobtainable?

PREDATOR #1

Hang the cost! We're on an expense account.

Tina smirks at Igor.

TINA  
(to Igor)

“Expense account.” The translator never has trouble with that phrase, no matter what the language.

(to the Predators)

No, as a matter of fact, it’s inexpensive and easily acquired. I can give you a couple of large bottles and you can take them to a table and enjoy it as much as you like.

BOTH PREDATORS

Yes! Yes! Please!

TINA

Here you go.

She sets to 2-liter bottles of Coca-Cola on the counter. The aliens snatch them up and scurry for a table.

TINA

97% success rate among all oxygen-breathing races. Amazing. Igor, get them about 14 of the disposable edible gluten-free cups. Each.

He grins, gives her a thumbs up, and heads for a cabinet.

TINA  
(shouting to the aliens)

I’ll start a tab for you!

FADE OUT

Coming Soon:

***Vinnie Jett: Interstellar Vet!***