

Girl In Space Season 1, Episode 101: "Cheese Is
Delicious Science"

Written by

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EPISODE 101: CHEESE IS DELICIOUS SCIENCE

INTRO

INT: CAVATICA, Center Dash. All is quiet and still.

X

You think sometimes, that you're all
alone. But wherever you are... *whoever*
you are... you're wrong.

It's Girl In Space.

THEME SONG

PROLOGUE

INT: CAVATICA, Center Dash. The following is played back over
a tinny-sounding tape recorder.

X

(Earnestly.)

You said, on the last day I ever saw
you, not to worry. That I'd... see you
again.

(Sighs.)

Part of me wants to forgive you for
lying to me. I mean, you couldn't have
known. But part of me...

(Beat.)

To be honest, part of me is still kind
of bitter, even after all these years.

Not because you left. But because you
left me *alone*.

SFX: Tape recorder click.

SCENE 1

INT: CAVATICA, Center Dash Core. The ambient sound of the
Cavatica (and also space) hums in the background.

X takes a sip of something, then sets the mug down.

X

(Verbal eye-roll.)

Wow. You'd think I would know better
than to go through my old diaries.
Nothing there but teenage heartache
and angst. And... a lot of *really*

terrible poetry.

Though they're a lot more interesting than my current diaries. Speaking of which...

X turns to look at the dash, then turns back to the mic.

X

...Aaaaccording to the dash, it's day 10,303, hour 0837. Whatever that means.

I mean, I guess I get the meaning of time, insofar as is possible for a human mind, and there's a fairly distinct linear progression to my life. I just haven't ever witnessed the apparatus by which they're measured.

Days... hours... when there is no rising sun or planetary rotation, these measurements feel kind of arbitrary. Outside of the info here on the dash, they don't mean anything. It's always just me, out here, on the Cavatica. Alone.

(Frowns, considers.)

... Despite how that sounds, *please* note that I am *super not-bitter* about it. In fact, I don't really mind being alone. Turns out, I like the quiet. It helps me think -- and I get a ton of work done.

(Smiles, pleased.)

Speaking of which, I think you'd be proud of me. I finally got that old stereomicroscope working, and I'm going to use it today to get a better look at those weird little insects that are attempting a hostile takeover of my potato plants.

(Frowns.)

Oh, and I found something while I was going through some of Mom's old stuff. It's weird -- I've never seen anything like it before. It's about the size of a button, and... Well, I think it actually *is* a button. Not like the kind you would sew onto a jacket...

It's the kind you press to open a door or commit a command -- but it's not attached to anything... And I don't think it was ever *intended* to be.

So, I'm going to take it apart, and I figured hey, might as well do so using the stereomicroscope.

(Self-aware sarcasm.)

I know... Buttons and microscopes and potato-destroying insects... All before lunch? What can I say. I'm a sucker for cheap thrills.

(Sighs, tone returns to earnest.)

Honestly, I *would* climb mountains or lead revolutions if there were any mountains to climb or revolutions to lead out here. But there aren't. There aren't any tombs to excavate, or counterfeiting rings to bust, or even any decent movies to see.

(Rueful tone.)

...Well, okay, *that* was me being bitter.

And to be fair, there *is* one movie that came pre-loaded on the dash. It's called "Jurassic Park", and I can't believe I didn't discover it until after you were gone, because you would have totally loved it.

It's all about the reintroduction of an extinct species that, in *my* opinion, was *clearly* dominant in the first place. I like it because it's full of heroic action and science, and because it reminds me that even the humans back on Earth have difficulty re-engineering gene expression in certain species.

I used to watch it as a treat once every dozen days or so, but the Cavatica's been having some... *issues* lately.

The sound of the Cavatica falling apart in the background.

X

Well, okay, *more* issues... and the

movie playback is kind of stilted and jerky and stalls sometimes, which, to be honest, reintroduces a dash of the unexpected into a movie I can otherwise recite by heart.

Nothing like a peaceful jungle landscape that pans the same scene 20 times before suddenly erupting into Dr. Sattler screaming bloody murder.

(Sighs.)

...And if you were here right now, you'd ignore *everything* I just said about the movie and hone in on the word "*issues*".

And yeah, I suppose I should log these here, too, for posterity or whatever.

(Takes a deep breath.)

So... The *good* news is that the Cavatica still works.

The Cavatica audibly falls apart in the background.

X

...Technically. Like, it has structural integrity (for the most part?), and... so far I haven't been sucked out into the icy black expanse of space to die. Yay!

The *bad* news is that the ship can't actually *move*. Which... is due to its engines being dead. But! Before you panic, I'm *alive*, and I had plenty of heat and water and oxygen in the life support reserves to last while I worked out an alternative.

(X's voice warms with excitement.)

It was actually a *really* interesting project, rerouting life support through the hydroponic systems into the glasshouse. I had to shut down all but three of the pods, but they're the three most integral to my work, so... that's a win.

(Beat.)

Let's just hope I don't need to use the infirmary... like, ever.

A low, foreboding rumble echoes in the distance.

X

Basically, the only ship-related thing that still functions properly is Charlotte, and I'm not even sure anymore that she's tied to the ship.

(Frowns.)

I mean, she *should* be, and logically, she *has* to be, because there is literally nothing else that she can be tied to. I certainly didn't wire her into the glasshouse system... and yet she remains operational.

(Pause, then conspiratorially:)

This might sound vaguely... insane, but part of me suspects that she's saved up some sort of energy reserved for herself. Which, honestly, wouldn't surprise me -- for an A.I. that's *supposed* to be dedicated to serving and enhancing human life, she is *incredibly* selfish.

X leans forward to set down her mug, and her chair creaks.

X

All right. Time to get back to work... whatever "*time*" might actually be. I'll be taking radiation measurements from Ra, checking out those insects under the stereomicroscope, and taking apart that button thing I found.

(Quietly, to herself:)

Oooh... And maybe my cheese will be coagulated in time for lunch.

TRANSITION

SCENE 2

INT: CAVATICA, Glasshouse pod. The Glasshouse is a vast crystalline globe home to all manner of lush greenery, including ferns, palm trees, bromeliads, evergreens, fruit trees, vegetables, rich mosses, and a massive maple tree at its center. Birds chirp, snakes hiss, and in the distance, a goat bleats. A gentle stream runs through the pod, fed by a waterfall surrounded by orchids and teeming with fish. Ra is situated directly outside, suffusing the pod with warm golden glow.

X

(Deep in thought.)

So... okay. I'm curious.

I have the stereomicroscope all set up, and for the first time, I noticed a name etched into the side of the arm. *Your* name.

It's faint, but it's there. My question is: *why* is it there? I don't really see there being an imminent danger of theft aboard a ship with a crew of three and no means of escape.

Or is carving one's name into one's possessions a *thing* that people do? A habit? A compulsion? A simple act of boredom, or defiance?

I'm -- I know I'm way over-thinking this. It just... threw me for a loop, and I can't say I'm entirely sure why. I mean, I guess that names have power. We name things for a reason -- to identify and clarify them, to call and claim them, to bestow and to take away power.

Maybe that's what really happens to us after we die. Maybe our names are our ghosts, infused with the sum total of our accomplishments and unrealized dreams. Maybe you're haunting me through this stereomicroscope.

X considers, and burps gently.

X

(With a slight grimace.)

Or maybe that cheese wasn't quite ready to eat after all.

(Sighs, dramatically.)

At least I have the distinct honor of being haunted by *Doctor Arvin Singh*.

(Rolls her eyes.)

Way to be king of the nerds by including a proper title in your graffiti, *Dad*.

Anyway. Speaking of the microscope, I

found a couple of things that might be *Of Interest*, with a capital O and a capital I.

First, the insects that are waging their tiny, cruel war against my defenseless potatoes.

(Beat, genuinely puzzled.)

I can... positively say that I have never seen anything like them before.

I think that normally, that might not sound weird. There are almost a million unique documented species of insect, and there's no way I could ever memorize them all.

However, I have been aboard the *Cavatica* for more than nine thousand days, studying every living thing on the ship... in isolation... in the massive vacuum of space. So if I haven't seen a particular species of insect before, then... Well, let's just say it's significant.

(Thoughtfully:)

Current hypotheses include some kind of rapid onset mutation, or... more improbably...

(Frowns at the implications.)

...recent introduction.

(Back to business:)

I've isolated a few of them in a terrarium for further study, along with cuttings from a variety of other plant species. I don't know whether I prefer they devour everything in sight, or simply remain hell-bent on destroying my potatoes.

(Abruptly changes topics.)

Okay. Next up, the button.

A low, almost significant-sounding pulse.

X

This thing... It's so simple, it's kind of hard to describe. It's smooth and flat and round, made of some type of dense plastic, or... maybe glass. There is a slight fingertip-sized indentation on the top to indicate

what you're supposed to do. When you press it, it clicks.

X demonstrates by clicking once, twice, then about a thousand times.

X
Oddly satisfying. Anyway.

X's voice becomes muffled as she ducks behind the microscope.

X
I am now taking a look at it under the stereomicroscope, and....
(Frowns, concentrating.)
There is a tiny seam all around the side. Let's just see if....

Scraping, scratching sounds.

X
Okay. I'm going to see if I can find a scalpel or something to fit in there.

SFX: Clattering, whirring, muffled background conversation

X
(Irritated.)
Oh, no no no no no, Charlotte. I'm working. Out you go.

CHARLOTTE
Pardon me. Are you attempting to...
(Brief pause, as if selecting from a menu of responses.)
...repair sensitive technical equipment?

X
(Sharply, firmly.)
No. Go away.

CHARLOTTE
It appears you are attempting to repair sensitive technical equipment.
(Beat, pleasantly.)
Would you like my assistance with that?

X
No. No, I would not.

CHARLOTTE

(Pleased.)

Thank you. I am glad you have opted into letting me help you repair sensitive technical equipment.

X

(Annoyed.)

Charlotte, no, I'm -- I've got this. Just... Please go away.

(Drily.)

Remember the incident with the distress beacon?

CHARLOTTE

My data banks remember everything.

X

Okay. Just... Stay right there.

X returns to the mic, sits.

X

Okay. I have a scalpel, which looks like it'll fit nicely in the crack...

A scratching sound commences, followed by a crack like a plastic Easter egg popping open.

CHARLOTTE

Your attempts to repair sensitive technical equipment would be more successful with my suite of tools.

X

(Talking over Charlotte.)

All right. I've got it open. Split right down the middle like a walnut shell. Inside...

(Peers, frowns.)

Hmm. Just a bunch of wires and circuits.

(Beat.)

...Oh. That's weird. There's a little burn mark right where...

(Beat as Charlotte crowds her.)

Oh my gosh. Charlotte. Back up. Yeah, no -- I need to use both of the eyepieces on this thing. That's what makes it stereo.

CHARLOTTE

It appears that one of the
microprocessors has burned out. My
onboard tools can easily --

X

(Irritated.)

Yes. I can see that. Thank you,
Charlotte. I can take it from here.

(Long pause. Supremely annoyed:)
What?

CHARLOTTE

My onboard tools can easily --

X

(Talks over Charlotte; gives in.)

Oh my *gosh*. *Fine*. Just *fix* the
microprocessor already.

CHARLOTTE

[Pleasantly] If you insist.

A slight sparking, buzzing sound commences.

X

(Still irritated.)

Thank you.

The two halves of the button click back together.

X

(Pause.)

Okay. It's back together now, and it's
still not... Oh. That's weird. Looks
like there's a little switch right
along the --

A soft click as X moves the switch.

X

Huh. Okay. the object has begun to
emanate a soft and steady blue glow
from within. Now, let's see what
happens when I push --

There is suddenly a high-pitched noise with low pulsing bass
and static moan; X's voice cuts off.

TRANSITION

SCENE 3

INT: CAVATICA, Glasshouse lab

X

(Shaken.)

Oooh gosh. Ooookay. That was... unexpected and terrible. I ran a quick inspection of the three functional pods and the dash core, and...

(Shrugs, uncertain.)

Nothing was different. Nothing had changed. Nothing was glowing or sparking or unexpectedly functional. On the other hand, nothing had blown up, either?... I'm relatively sure I am alive...

Uh, Charlotte's as normal as she's ever been. I even ran the opening scene of "Jurassic Park", and it was as jerky and stilted as ever.

In short, I... have no idea what I might have just activated-slash-done. I have no idea why Mom would have stashed this thing in one of her lockers, why or how it was broken, or why I even felt compelled to fix it. If there were anyone else on board, I might feel embarrassed.

(Beat, smiles.)

But there is no one else on board, so I can be comfortably and perfectly honest about how I probably *shouldn't* have tried to fix that button, and how badly it could have gone if it were some sort of weapon or self-destruct device.

And hey, while I'm being perfectly honest, I hate zucchini, turnips are the hellspawn of root vegetables, and I'm terrified of the fish in the hydroponic tanks.

(Primly:)

But I eat all of them anyway because they're nutritious.

(Deep breath.)

Okay. Everything is okay. And we even learned a lesson! Don't push buttons

if you're not 100% sure what they are.
As they say (y'know, whoever "they"
are), no harm, no foul.

I'm going to get back to my
calibrations and conveniently forget
this ever happened.

TRANSITION

SCENE 4

INT: CAVATICA, Glasshouse labs. The sound of birds chirping
and water trickling fade in.

X

Mmm. Dinner tonight was one of the
Oncorhynchus mykiss from the tanks,
grilled with lemon and oregano, and
quinoa that I tossed with tomatoes and
spinach.

I was going to have potatoes instead
of the quinoa, but decided to forego
them until I learned more about those
insects.

Strawberries and tea for dessert, then
some final radiation tests before bed.

(Slight pause.)

While I was eating, I kept thinking
about those diaries I found. About how
I used to feel about being alone, and
how I feel about it now. I was bitter
then, and angry, and hopeless, and a
whole lot of other things.

But now -- I know they say people
don't really change (again, whoever
"they" are) -- but... I think I'm kind
of okay with it.

I wake up, eat, do science, eat, do
more science, eat, and relax before I
sleep. Then I rinse and repeat, just
like it says on the side of my vat of
Caldwell Enterprises shampoo. And
between all of the eating and science-
ing, I can dance and sing and tinker
with broken things and invent new
things and watch "Jurassic Park" or

even just stare out into the infinite vastness of space.

(Beat.)

...I think what I'm *trying* to say is that I don't really mind being alone as much as I think I'm supposed to.

Humans are inherently social creatures, but... For whatever reason, I am... not.

No one tells me what to do out here. My work is important and my research is challenging and fascinating. Sometimes I wish I had someone to talk to, but that's what you and Charlotte are for. I have clean water and fresh food and access to top-notch scientific equipment. No one tells me to put on shoes or sit still or wear cosmetics. And the view is *fantastic*.

So why...

(Pause.)

This is going to sound incredibly ungrateful, but -- hey, we're being honest here. If everything in my life is so incredibly amazing, why don't I feel *happy*?

TRANSITION

SCENE 5

INT, CAVATICA: Dash Core.

X

Addendum, Day 10,303, Hour 1745. This *probably* isn't really worth noting, but during my final radiation tests of the day, I saw a blip out in the opposite direction of Ra.

It's a bright light, with the pinpoint clarity of a star, but obviously, it's not a star, since it wasn't there yesterday. Or even a few hours ago.

Also, it's moving.

I *would* say it's a comet or asteroid,

but at this point, I don't have enough data to make that assumption. And we all know what happens when we assume.

For whatever reason, Charlotte's taking this new development with all the grace of a garbage fire. She barged in on her hydraulic arm while I was checking Ra's radiation emissions earlier and started reciting the entire Caldwell Enterprises Emergency Preparedness Manual to me from start to finish.

(Slightly mocking.)

I took that to mean she thinks the incoming light is a matter of some concern.

I told her to be more optimistic -- that it might not be coming directly toward us, that it could simply be a mirage, that she technically doesn't have a death to fear. But she just started reciting the manual all over again from the beginning, so I wedged a fallen tree branch up into the hydraulic tracks to block her from exiting the glasshouse.

(Slight pause, exhales.)

I don't know. I don't *think* I'm afraid of death, necessarily, at least not right now. Things live and die in cycles, and I'm not enough of a narcissist to think I'm exempt from the laws of nature.

I'm weirdly... I don't know how to describe it. Interested? Excited, even? I mean, I'm not excited about death -- or even really about whatever this approaching thing is -- a comet, an asteroid, a projectile, a ship, an event, a fact, a phenomenon, an anomaly?...

I think I'm just intrigued by the idea that there is *possibility* out there, you know? That space holds things other than the stars and planets and *nothingness* I've seen all around me every day of my life.

In all of its mystery, this thing coming toward the Cavatica signifies *everything*.

We hear a far-off clunk, crash, breaking glass.

X

(Turns away from the mic.)

Huh.

(Turns back to the mic.)

Sounds like Charlotte found a way out. I bet she's on her way here right now to tell me that escape pods --

CHARLOTTE

(Smoothly integrates with X:)

Escape pods at the ready. [This sound clip will be interspersed at regular intervals through the next 4 paragraphs.]

X

(Drily.)

Thank you, Charlotte. But I'm pretty sure they're just about as dead and incapable of movement as the Cavatica.

(Sighs, reflectively.)

You know, it's interesting, the things that happened despite or because of our intentions. Feeble control that we have over this massive universe, and the thin threads of chance that tie it all together.

The Cavatica was never *intended* to be out here this long. And from what you've told me, the Ra Initiative was expected to (if not explicitly *intended* to) fail. Or at least, it wasn't intended to be as long-term as it's become, or else they'd have given it better engines and a larger supply of fuel. And a bigger crew. You know, an *actual* chance to return and make a difference. (Not that I'm bitter.) And yet despite all of that here I am, a girl in space, harnessed to one of the universe's most bizarre science fair projects, riding out my thin thread of chance regardless of whether

anyone out there ever *intended* me to do so.

CHARLOTTE
Anomaly gaining speed.

X
(Blinks, turns.)
What?

CHARLOTTE
Anomaly gaining speed.

X
That's weird...
(Turns back to mic.)
Charlotte says the anomaly appears to be gaining speed? I don't -- Hold on. I'm on my way to the galley, where I have the best view of it.

A door whooshes open and shut, and we hear X's bare footsteps.

X
Maybe I'll sleep there tonight, just to keep an eye on it. For whatever good that'll do.

TRANSITION TO:

INT, CAVATICA: Galley

X
(Continued:)
Note to self: Create list of measures, countermeasures, and worst-case scenarios for eventual approach of disastrous phenomena, unfriendly ship, or malevolent, god-like entity.

TRANSITION

SCENE 6

INT, CAVATICA: Galley.

X
(Deep breath, sounds rattled.)
Okay. So. Day 10,304, hour 0553...
Radiation levels normal, blah blah

blah, all of that good stuff.

The thing moving toward us...

(Beat, amazed/exasperated.)

... it's *not* a meteor or an asteroid
or an event or an anomaly or a ship or
a malevolent god-like entity or *any* of
those other things I said it might be.

(Significant beat.)

Dad. It's... an *entire fleet*.

STINGER

SFX: OUTRO MUSIC, Bumpers.