

Oz 9 episode 31.5

[door opens]

Spotty Bosh: What exactly do you think you're doing? Summoning me? I am not of the summonable classes.

Southers: And yet, here you are.

SB: You sent *goons*.

Southers: So, you are one of the goonable classes, then. I do apologize for the heavy hand, Spotty Bosh.

SB: My *friends* call me Spotty Bosh. "Lord Bertram" for you, I think.

Southers: Son, I'll dub you "Lady Gwendoline of the Rose-scented Wonder Melons" if I decide to, and you'll still come when I call, *capische*?

SB: What is it you want, Southers? I believe I've made clear, I'm not ... in a position to pay you back just yet.

Southers: Well, now you see, that's where you're mistaken.

SB: For the last time, Southers, I am not giving you my dog.

Southers: That's just mean, Bertie. I already promised him to my wife. She's going on a loooooong journey, and she could use the company.

SB: The world is full of dogs, Southers; find another one. Perhaps some oily little cur would be more her taste?

Southers: That sounds like an insult to my wife.

SB: I ... no ... I ...

Southers: Oh, don't get your frilly knickers in a twist, I insult her all the time.

SB: [relieved] Oh, yes, well, she is rather-

Southers: I said / insult her all the time. I didn't say you could. "Oily little cur," huh? I'll give it to you Brits, you do some fine insulting.

SB: Look... why am I here? I was just setting out for Wiggy's "Scrummy Nuns and Dodgy Deacons" do.

Southers: And you chose to be a nun?

SB: I already had the habit.

Southers: I'd certainly like to hear that back story, if I didn't want to punch you in the mouth every time you opened it. Maybe someday you can write your memoirs.

SB: How funny you should say so! I've just bought myself the most adorable journalette for precisely that purpose. It has a likeness of my dog on the cover, you see? Sweet Waggles. I'm quite devoted to him. I'm sorry, but we'll have to figure out another way to repay my debt.

Southers: To be honest, I'd forgotten about the dog, but I'll take him too. Now, don't cry into your embroidered pocket hankie, there; you don't have to part ways.

SB: I really don't understand any of this.

Southers: That's because you don't shut up and listen. You've been yakking away like a slumber party at the Lucky Charms factory.

[pause]

[pause]

SB: And?

Southers: See what I mean? You yap more than your Bichon Frise. Give your jaws a rest, and sit, Bertie. We need to talk.

Narrator: The year is twenty-one forty... one. The launch of the Oz 8000 fleet is still a few months away. Crews are swarming the ships, stripping away everything that might be useful for long-distance space flights and replacing the parts with cheap but shiny 3D reprints. Workers are busy gluing factory-reject FitTech pods to the floors of their holds, and unwanted aromatherapy canisters are being hastily offloaded, tucked into every available corner of the ships to avoid haz-mat disposal fees. Most of the "work" being done on the Oz ships happens in the dead of night, when inspectors are tucked into their beds, dreaming of sweet piles of cash, or folded into suitcases and heaved into the ocean, depending on their level of cooperation. And at Gated Galaxies' HQ...

SB: You're mad.

Southers: That's not the first time someone has lobbed that particular claim my way, but I think you'll find there's a whole lotta good sense being made here.

SB: Surely you're rich enough. Why do you need to do this?

Southers: Hang on, you mumbled a bit there. What were those two words in the middle of what you just said?

SB: I ... I said you're rich enough.

Southers: Nope, still didn't catch it. Once more?

SB: Rich. Enough.

Southers: Nnnnnnnnope. I got nothing. You don't smell toast, do you?

SB: I'm perfectly sound. This scheme isn't, however. It'll never work. Far too many people are in on it. How do you expect to keep it a secret?

Southers: Son, there are two mighty effective ways to convince folks to keep a secret. You seal up their mouths with money or duct tape. Long as mouths stay sealed, I'm not particularly partial to one or t'other. [pause] I lie. Duct tape's cheaper.

SB: All right, let's say I go on this outer space journey. What possible use could I be? I can't pilot a ship or fix anything more complicated than a martini, though I do make a splendid martini. I cut quite a figure at the student bar at Uni.

Southers: Bertie, my boy....

SB: Yes?

Southers: *Fermez les bouches*, you should pardon my French.

SB: Is that what that was? My god.

Southers: Now, here's the thing. My wife and your dog will be hitching a lift aboard the Oz 9. A few of my smarter scientists designed a handful of pods to survive just about anything, including the Apocalypse devices I told you about.

SB: Now, listen, Southers; this is mass murder! I want no part of this!

Southers: [undeterred] My Gracie'll be cozied up, shiny as a pearl in an oyster, her personal pod tracking the seed pods to the nearest terraformable planet. I need someone on that ship to keep her safe until she's away.

SB: I won't do it. It's ... evil.

Southers: Son, I know you live in an ivory tower full of servants and bon bons and stiff upper lips, but even you can't be completely unaware this planet is getting a mite unliveable. I'm offering you an opportunity to start over. Debt free and with a brand-new planet, ripe for the pillage.

SB: But what of my life here? My friends?

Southers: You have friends? Huh. Well, take 'em with you. Can't be more than a handful, right? I've got a bunch of my ... more durable pods slated for the ... hang on [papers rustle] ... Dolce and Gabbana wing of the 9.

SB: I like the sound of that. Fashionable, but understated. Never crass or showy. That's where your wife will be?

Southers: Good lord, no. You keep your diamonds in the compost pile, do you? Don't you worry, my Gracie has a place of her own, away from the common rabble.

SB: I hardly think my friends and I qualify as "rabble." How am I supposed to protect her if I don't know where she is?

Southers: I'm having a special pair of night vision goggles added to your pod. With those, you'll be able to see the markings on the walls. Lead you right to her.

SB: Goggles? One of my class and position never wears galoshes, bolo ties, or *goggles*. Why can't you just tell me now?

Southers: Once you've spent an hour or two on an Oz, you'll understand the futility of me giving you directions. Those ships were designed by Hieronymus Bosch on a bad trip, I'm pretty sure.

SB: Now see here, this has gone far enough. You're proposing... you're *planning* to kill, what, 20 million people? Why? Why not just send up empty ships?

Southers: Huh. Frankly, I never thought of that.

SB: You really are mad.

Southers: Boshie, one way or another, those boats are setting sail. You can be on one, or ... well, that's it, really. Your time for choosing is over, I'm afraid.

SB: One moment. I never agreed to go.

Southers: You borrowed a great deal of money from me to escape a pretty unpleasant and potentially fatal situation. You have so far proven unwilling to recompense me for that loan. And now you're in another pretty unpleasant and potentially fatal situation.

SB: Mr. Southers, I fully intend to repay you every penny, plus interest. I told you – I am temporarily... financially...embarrassed.

Southers: Son, you're broke. Your trust fund might once have been a proud and mighty pile of cash, but it's looking a bit small and limp now, you catch my drift.

SB: No one could mistake you for a gentleman.

Southers: Says the fellow in the habit and wimple. Why stay here? You're broke, you've got no family, no prospects, you're up to your monocle in debt, and I've already got your dog...

SB: What?

Southers: Dog walkers are notoriously underpaid, I find. You can take your friends with you. Easiest job in the world has got to be keeping my wife safe from a bunch of sleeping people. The hardest part's gonna be keeping the idiot crew from knocking her pod over or tripping on her power cord.

SB: I suppose I'm up to the task. What does one wear for such a job? My gray suit might be nice, authoritative without being binding... Soothing and yet quietly powerful....

Southers: Dear god, I'm about to knock the cheese off this cracker.... When you land, you help Gracie with the terraforming, and within six months, your job is done and the new world is your oyster.

SB: And what do I do then?

Southers: What do you mean?

SB: Exactly what I asked: What does one do on a newly terraformed planet?

Southers: Do I look old enough to have been on Earth at the time? 'Cause after 15 minutes with you, and I'm starting to feel it.

SB: I must admit, I'm intrigued. An entirely unformed world. My every idea would be new and novel. Everything I do would be being done for the very first time. I could invent gauchos. I'll make millions.

Southers: Now you're starting to see the light. Not entirely sure what "gauchos" are, but they sound delicious. Sign me up for a half dozen.

SB: Will you be there?

Southers: That's the plan. Send the wife first to set up the household, so to speak, then I follow along once all the beds are made.

SB: That's... unfortunate. Still. I imagine it'll be a big enough planet for the two of us.

Southers: I have yet to meet the planet big enough for me alone, but we'll find a way to make it work.

SB: So, how do we do this? If I go into a pod like everyone else, how do I wake up when I'm needed?

Southers: All righty, now, that's the spirit. I'm way ahead of you, which comes as no surprise, I'm sure. One of my ... let's say, "ethically unfettered" scientists, Dr. Flounder, will gap the ship's AI just before launch.

SB: Gap? What does that mean?

Southers: It means... Is there really any point explaining this to a fellow who has a valet? I mean, are you up to date on how to operate a zipper?

SB: I think you'll find you've underestimated me, Mr. Southers. Carry on.

Southers: I sincerely doubt it, but let's give it a go. By "gap" I mean Dr. Flounder will take the ship's Artificial Intelligence offline for just a fraction of a second. Long enough to introduce the idea of creating an emergency right after launch.

SB: What emergency? You're creating an emergency?

Southers: Calm your ruffle, son, not a real emergency. We want the AI to have a reason to bust open a few pods to wake up the crew. We can include your pod on that list. No one – including the AI – will ever know the difference.

SB: I see. So once I'm awake, I ... I... What do I do then? Join the crew? I suppose I could disguise myself as one of them.

Southers: My crews are engineered to be thick as arctic ice in the early 20th century, but even they wouldn't fall for that. No, there's plenty of space for you to make yourself a nice nest and stay hidden.

SB: Right. How does one dress NOT to be seen? I need to make a list: clothes for skulking, the proper terraforming wardrobe...

Southers: You have the weirdest set of priorities, bar none. You won't have to hide for long. When you get the high sign that Paco's about to blow, you hightail it back to your pod, and you and your mates get a free ride to a shiny clean planet and a shiny new future.

SB: Do you know, I rather think I will do it!

Southers: I like that you think it's your decision, son. Shows spirit. Get on the horn and gather yer troops while ye may and what not. I've got the pod map here somewhere. Pick your pod, and I'll make sure it's on the open list.

SB: Oooooo! Which one, which one? Is that... a window? A view might be nice, but I don't want to be in the common section. Away from the door, in case there's a draft.... These are all a bit close, aren't they? Huddling is so gauche.

Southers: Son....

SB: 19. That looks perfect. The feng shui of 19 looks ideal: power position, commanding view, yes. 19 will do nicely. Wiggy! Boshie here. Fancy going for a bit of a ride?

Southers: Note to self: be sure Gracie is well armed to take this idiot out before I arrive...

Narrator: As it turns out, Gracie was off the hook. In the loading-in process, the number plate on Spotty Bosh's pod came loose and flipped upside down, and he was assigned space 61. In the sort of bizarre turn of events that happens only to very lucky people or very poorly written scifi characters, the number plate on number 61 also flipped upside down, and so the two pods were swapped and no one was the wiser. Spotty Bosh melted down with the rest of the Dolce and Gabbana wing, and former pod 61 occupant, Horace McRory, stepped out and into his new life – as Colin Smith.

You've been listening to:

Eric Perry as Mr. Southers

Kevin Hall as Spotty Bosh, and

Me, Richard Nadolny, as your narrator

Our theme music was composed and performed by John Faley; our artwork is by Lucas Elliott. Oz 9 is written and produced by Shannon Perry.

Until next time, space monkeys, Narrator out!