

MARSFALL

SEASON THREE
EPISODE FOUR

J.S. Bot

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ACT ONE

1.1: EXT. MARS SNOWFALL - DAY.

Act One is from Jacki's POV. JACKI and CHIP are both wearing EVA suits. Jacki's voice reverberates inside her helmet. The outside environment sounds filter in through her external suit speakers while Chip's voice comes over the comms.

Wind blows occasionally on this blissful Martian snowfall. The fresh powder crunches as CHIP and JACKI make their way over to the bot.

JACKI: Hey, Chip!

CHIP: What?

SMACK! A snowball hits Chip's suit.

JACKI: Bullseye!

JACKI cackles.

CHIP: Really? You're gonna hit a guy while his back is turned?

JACKI: C'mon, you can't seriously expect me to go outside in this and not throw a couple snowballs around.

CHIP: I thought we spent all that time digging so we could check out the bot.

JACKI: It's called multitasking! I never thought I'd see the sol when Chip Heddleston didn't want to have a little fun.

JACKI's playful mood is infectious.

CHIP: Are you kidding? Mysterious robot shows up after a blizzard, this *is* my idea of fun!

JACKI: I think you're too scared to take me on.

CHIP: Oh-ho, famous last words.

JACKI laughs and runs away from him.

CHIP bends down and scoops some snow. JACKI scrambles to get some herself.

WHACK! Chip's snowball hits her visor.

CHIP: One to one!

CHIP takes off running. JACKI chases him.

JACKI: (laughs) Hey! Get back here!

JACKI and CHIP run, throwing snow at each other while laughing. Jacki hits him with another snowball.

JACKI: Two for two!

CHIP: That barely hit me-

OOF! Jacki hits Chip again with a snowball.

JACKI: Three for three!

CHIP: Hey! I was still talking!

JACKI: You didn't call "time out!"

CHIP: (laughs) You're lucky I'm so focused on our mission, otherwise you'd be flat on your back making snow angels.

JACKI: (laughs) Sure. Truce, truce!

CHIP: (coy) For now...Come on, I think it rolled down this way.

CHIP and JACKI walk down the slope.

JACKI: I'm just glad that thing didn't land anywhere near those evil plants.

CHIP: I made sure to bring the injections and duct tape if they turn out to be mobile.

JACKI: Mobile dart plants? Why did you have to put that thought into my head.

CHIP: Revenge for that last snowball.

JACKI and CHIP chuckle.

JACKI and CHIP finally get to the bot, both taking a breath as they examine it.

CHIP knocks on the metal.

CHIP: Ah, it's a builder bot.

JACKI: Doesn't look like anything from Sequoia.

CHIP: Probably came to lay out a foundation for some other colony.

JACKI: You think you can boot it up?

CHIP: (rolling his eyes) Please. I could boot up a clunker like this in my sleep. Here, uh, help me dig this out.

JACKI and CHIP work on digging it out of the snow.

JACKI: You know, it's just the right size to make into the base for a snow person.

CHIP: If it turns out to be useless, be my guest.

JACKI and CHIP clear enough snow to reveal the bot's main control panel. CHIP brushes it clean, scraping ice off the buttons.

CHIP: Now, let's see what we're working with.

With the bot now free of snow, CHIP gets to work, unscrewing, shifting, trying to get the cold metal to give.

CHIP: That shooooould do it.

Nothing happens.

JACKI: Um...Chip?

CHIP: Give it a second.

A second passes. Nada.

CHIP sighs and gives it a good smack.

This does the trick as the bot powers online. A few beeps and boops and whirring.

CHIP: Told ya.

The bot finishes beeping. A soft whirr inside as its processor runs.

JACKI: Okay, what now?

The bot's processor whines a bit and the console chimes once.

CHIP: Looks like it's running its start up routine smoothly, which is a good sign. We actually might be able to cannibalize this for parts for the buggy.

JACKI: Ah! And here I was thinking this vista would be our new permanent residence.

A new string of beeps from the bot.

CHIP: Hey there little buddy. (BEAT) Hm.

JACKI: What?

CHIP: Nothing. Just...this thing's still working after fourteen centuries, it's kind of incredible. I almost feel bad that we're gonna rip it apart.

JACKI: Hm, well, at least it's not like ANDI, right? These things are only Narrow Intelligences, they're not... you know what I mean.

CHIP's not totally convinced but this isn't the time for misgivings.

CHIP: Uh, you're probably right, but even if it has a 'lace, no two AI are alike.

JACKI: Hm.

The bot shifts in the snow.

CHIP: Whoa there, take it easy. You've been out a while.

CHIP clicks another button. A beep of acknowledgement and the bot stills.

CHIP: Uhh, movement is a very good sign, but that leg will need a little reinforcement.

JACKI: Any info on its home colony?

CHIP: That's gonna take more time, ah, I can't guarantee we'll even find anything.

JACKI: But if this is from another colony, that means there might be more survivors out there!

CHIP: Fine, uh, gimme a minute. I might be able to dig around for the data.

CHIP works on the bot, inputting commands. An error beep sounds several times.

CHIP: Well, uh... the twenty-year self destruct's definitely mucked with its data.

CHIP closes a panel.

CHIP: Gonna try a reboot, see what happens.

CHIP presses a button and the bot powers down.

JACKI and CHIP perk up as it reboots.

The bot powers back up. A stream of data displaying.

CHIP: Oh. Our little buddy was a construction bot, designed to excavate and build. Which makes sense given the arms on this thing.

(to the bot)

You been working out?

JACKI: And its home colony?

CHIP: Still working on it but...

CHIP trails off, reading the data.

JACKI: What is it?

CHIP: Location of shutdown looks like it was near Olympus Mons.

JACKI: WHAT?!

CHIP: The data doesn't lie, at least not in a Narrow Intelligence.

JACKI: Then let's get going! Take what we need from this bad boy and we'll get on our way in no time!

CHIP: I thought you wanted to find out about its home colony.

JACKI: You said they landed near Olympus Mons - it must be close!

CHIP: Jacki, you're doing the thing again.

JACKI: What thing?

CHIP: The obsessive thing!

JACKI: I'm not obsessed. Olympus Mons is the whole reason we came out here in the first place, Chip!

CHIP: I know that, and I'm with you, but you keep skipping over all the steps that will get us there.

A small antenna extends from the bot and small beeps sound, reminiscent of sonar.

JACKI: I can't help it, I mean when you're the only one who can actually do the steps in front of us. I mean- I was trained to run Sequoia, not to take care of-

A DING from the buggy interrupts their argument.

JACKI: Oh, is that supposed to happen?

CHIP: It's trying to ping its colony.

JACKI: That thing is putting out a signal?

The wind picks up a bit and the air takes on a soft hum.

CHIP: Bots like this are programmed to contact home base for instructions when they're rebooted. This might be a way to find th-

Snow shifts. Far off but it's there.

JACKI: Wait, shut up.

JACKI and CHIP breathe for a few moments.

The wind increases. Like the rush of cicadas pierced with orcas clicking and wailing, the shadows move toward them.

JACKI: Chip? Run.

HARD CUT TO COMMERCIAL.

ACT TWO

2.1: EXT. MARS SNOWFALL - DAY

Act Two is from Chip's POV.

The comms unit continues to ding as the chittering grows louder.

JACKI sprints through the snow a few moments until--

CHIP: Jacki wait, the bot!

JACKI: They're coming!

JACKI stops running.

CHIP: We need the bot if we wanna fix the buggy.

JACKI: Ugh-!

JACKI turns round and runs back to CHIP, who quickly scoops more snow away from the bot's legs.

CHIP: Uh, grab him there!

JACKI: Lift on three! One. Two. Three!

JACKI and CHIP lift the bot but it's not exactly light. They make some headway, but it's not long before it slips from Jacki's grip and drags on the snow.

JACKI: It's slipping! I don't think we can get this up the slope in time.

CHIP: Okay, new plan, new plan.

JACKI and CHIP set the bot down.

CHIP whips out his drill and quickly removes the communications unit.

CHIP: If I can just get this...

Chip activates the bot's motor systems. It stands, but one leg buckles.

JACKI: He's tipping!

CHIP: Give me the tape!

Jacki tosses him the duct tape. He tapes up the leg as the shadows scurry closer.

JACKI: What the hell are you doing?

CHIP: Getting the comms!

CHIP punches in some commands to the bot. The bot stands and starts moving up the hill.

CHIP: It'll draw them way!

JACKI: That's risky!

CHIP: There's no time! Just lead the bot back to the buggy!

The shadows let loose another cry, even closer.

The bot dings an affirmative response and takes off, it's one leg, a little wonky.

JACKI: You better come back.

CHIP: GO!!

JACKI runs after the bot. CHIP turns and runs in the opposite direction.

The shadows crackle and snow POOFs in small explosions around Chip.

CHIP: Shit, shit. I am NOT gonna die here.

CHIP puts on even more speed, the landscape whipping past as he pushes his enhancements.

CHIP: Where are those little bastards?

A shadow burbles and squelches as it approaches CHIP. It swipes a clawed tentacle inches away from him.

CHIP: AH! Shit, I felt that...

CHIP's foot hits the ground and a spine shoots out.

CHIP: Oh-oh...!

He crashes into the snow, just barely dodging.

The shadow yells as a spine hits it.

CHIP: Ooh hey!

CHIP runs behind a low shrub.

CHIP: Spiny plants? Meet the shadows. Shadows? Spiny plants! Hope you enjoy each other's *company*.

On that last word, CHIP chucks the comms unit into the plants and turns to run again. The spines shoot out at the disturbance. The shadows erupt in pain and retreat. Clearly something about these plants is able to deter them.

CHIP cries out as some of the spines find their way through the shrub and into his suit, but he's okay.

CHIP: OW! Argh...!

CHIP moves away from the bush, putting some distance between himself and the shadows as they move toward the plants. He struggles, slamming himself into a snow bank.

CHIP covers himself in snow and tries to regulate his breathing. The shadows swarm the comms unit, and the plants shoot spines in all directions. Even with a few pinging the snow around CHIP, some spines seem to find their mark.

A shadow screeches, and the chittering bursts and flies over CHIP's head.

CHIP: (regulating breath/shivering) I fucking hate this planet.

A shadow moans in an isolated chilling howl as the wind picks up.

CHIP shivers and sighs.

FADE OUT.

2.2: INT. BUGGY - DAY

The door opens and CHIP steps inside. JACKI immediately runs over to him.

JACKI: Chip! Oh, I thought you'd- it's been over an hour.

CHIP takes off his helmet.

Chip and Jacki speak without helmets on.

CHIP: I wanted to wait it out, make sure they were really gone.

JACKI: I'm just glad you're back.

JACKI hugs him.

CHIP: Careful of the spines.

JACKI steps back and laughs in relief.

JACKI: They got you too huh?

CHIP: Apparently the hedgehog look is really in season right now.

JACKI: Do you need an injection?

CHIP: Not to brag, but I'm *not* allergic.

JACKI: Oh! That is so unfair! Just sit here and I'll help get the spines out.

CHIP obliges and takes a seat. JACKI grabs the pliers and a tray, and sets to work taking out the spines.

JACKI: It's okay, it's alright. It's not too many. Your hand reminds me of that time that Katie caught a cactus.

CHIP: (laugh-wince) Did you throw a cactus to her?

JACKI: (smile) No, of course not.

JACKI continues pulling spines as CHIP continues wincing.

JACKI: We were moving into our first apartment, she bumped a table knocking over my favorite cactus, and 'cause Katie was such a champ, she caught it. Bare hands, full of spines, but she healed up okay.

CHIP: Nice of her to make that sa-AH-crifice.

JACKI: Yeah. She used to put up with a lot from me.

After a moment.

JACKI: (sigh) You know, Melissa would be proud of you. Keeping calm, taking charge, keeping us both alive. Whenever we see them all again, I'm gonna have to brag about you so hard.

CHIP: If they survived.

JACKI: They did, Chip. I know they did.

CHIP: Another one of your feelings?

JACKI: You and I both know that Mars couldn't take out Melissa even if it tried, and it has tried. A lot.

JACKI continues dropping spines onto the tray.

CHIP: It'd be nice if it stopped trying so damn hard.

A chirp from the corner. The bot.

CHIP: Glad the bot made it back in one piece.

JACKI: Oh, I named him Johann.

CHIP: Johann?

JACKI: Johann Sebastian Bot, to be precise.

They both laugh at the bad joke.

CHIP: Now who's getting attached?

JACKI: We had plenty of time to bond since someone took a while getting back.

JACKI places the tray full of spines on the table.

CHIP: I'm still gonna have to gut him to fix the buggy.

JACKI: I know. But in the meantime I finally had someone else to talk to.

JACKI pops the cap off a bottle of anti-bacterial gel and scrubs her hands. CHIP stands and stretches.

CHIP: All right, may as well get started on making sure the bot and the buggy are compatible.

JACKI: You weren't sure?

CHIP: I mean, it's made by a different company. I can get it to work, it's just a matter of how long it's gonna take.

The wind gusts hard, shaking the buggy.

JACKI winces.

CHIP: You okay?

JACKI: Yeah, I just. It's like there's something on the edge of my hearing. I'm- I'm fine, it's probably just stress. (quick beat) Hey, Chip, I'm sorry about all that.

CHIP: What do you mean?

JACKI: The way I've been acting these past few sols, and when the shadows showed up, I haven't been exactly level headed. (awkward laugh) I just keep thinking about what happened with the Sound Tunnel and I just--

CHIP: You've got nothing to apologize for. We're alive, and that's all that matters.

JACKI: Thanks. (big sigh) We've gone through that med kit a lot more often than I like, so I'm going to take some inventory.

CHIP: And I'll get to my date with Johann.

JACKI chuckles.

CHIP: Can you toss me a snack?

JACKI: Sure.

JACKI tosses CHIP some food so he can eat while he works on the bot.

JACKI grabs the med kit. She sorts through, making notes on her tablet. A companionable silence.

In the background, we can faintly hear the wind blowing.

JACKI places items forcefully, the irritation at what she hears returned.

CHIP sets down a tool. He sighs, leaning back.

CHIP: Good news, bad news. It's not gonna take me forever but it's not gonna be quick either.

JACKI: Yeah?

JACKI continues trying to focus on inventory as the wind increases.

CHIP: Yeah, there's a few options of how to go about it, just gotta figure out the best approach--

JACKI slams down some tubes and shoves the kit away.

JACKI: Ugh! I thought we were done with this storm.

CHIP: Jacki?

The wind picks up again but now it holds a faint melody, flutelike.

JACKI: Do you hear that?

CHIP: The wind?

ENGINEERING AND MUSIC NOTE: The music picks up again with the wind.

JACKI: No, that... right there. It's...it's music.

MUSIC NOTE: The melody continues like a siren calling to a sailor at sea.

JACKI: It's... reminds me of the Sound Tunnel.

CHIP: Yeah, I- I hear it too.

JACKI: We need to go investigate. It might be a clue, something to help us.

CHIP: Or... it could just be calling the shadows again.

MUSIC NOTE: The music swells then grows quieter.

JACKI: It's worth the risk.

CHIP: That's the obsession talking. You just told me how much the shadows scared you.

JACKI: I know!

JACKI paces a bit before continuing.

JACKI: I know, they do but this could be a part of why we're here. And this music, it's... I can't get it out of my head. I need to go. You don't have to come with me. You can work on the buggy and Johann and /I'll be fine-

CHIP gets up, already in.

CHIP: /I'm not gonna let you go alone.

JACKI: (realizing what he said)Oh? Oh, thank you, Chip!

CHIP: You can thank me when we get back in one piece.

JACKI: Then we better get going!

JACKI and CHIP head out, the wind and the music swelling again as if beckoning them outside.

END EPISODE.