

LITERATURE

Walshy And Gumbo

A big clown shoe from a big clown foot steps on a little red nose. That clown foot grinds and twists the nose into pavement. The shoe lets up on the foam nose, which, though flattened, springs back into a ball. There's a blood stain only two feet away. A scowl comes from Walshy's crinkled lips, as he turns his head behind him to glare at Gumbo. Gumbo looks like shit, bleeding from the teeth, but stands tall—defiant like a desert cactus. Bigger than the circus, bigger than the Beatles, bigger than Jesus, the “Walshy and Gumbo Clownsperience” sold out some actually pretty big venues a while ago: arenas, stadiums, theaters, water parks. That was when their audience was still kids and families. For four decades Walshy and Gumbo toured together, and now it looked like they were through.

“Our audience skews older now!” Walshy whines with anger, “They have more tolerance!”

“I don't care what their tolerance is! *My* tolerance is going!” Gumbo fights through the stinging pain of opening his mouth to yell back at Walshy.

“Well it looks like we're finished,” Walshy spits out.

“We were finished when you punched me for your right to be an asshole.”

“Well excuuuuuse ME!”

Gumbo chooses his next words carefully, because every syllable feels like a piano falling on his jaw. He points at the ground and says: “Look at that. My clown nose has more integrity than you.”

Prior to this parking lot clown fight, Walshy and Gumbo find themselves in need of a reset. In the times of TikTok and YouTube, regular people act like clowns and make a living, so nobody knows Walshy and Gumbo any more. People these days say, “Walshy and Gumbo? Like Wallace and Gromit?” During the early days of their career, in the eighties, they courted topical controversy in ways that other clowns wouldn't dream of. Walshy dressed up as an older man in a suit and tie, entering a clown-car-limo, while Gumbo acted crazy and pretended to shoot him, with the gun firing a flag that says “bang!” President Reagan wasn't crazy about that routine. It's been a long time since anyone important loved Walshy and Gumbo.

Audiences would clap, and laugh, delighted as Walshy and Gumbo threw bombs of gleeful irreverence into the crowd. This was their specialty. There wasn't a boundary they shied away from treating with the utmost disregard. But their popularity depended on the social climate. Those late weeknights when cable became an addiction, Gumbo would fall asleep on the couch, absorbing the news, hearing stories of people in pain, people feeling under or misrepresented. He started to realize shocking an audience doesn't inspire world peace. One day, he got a letter from a fan in their late 40's, it read, “You're the best.” Gumbo opened his closet, and tucked the letter into his clown suit, then he closed the door.

Walshy had an idea to make them current again—"glue our act to the *now!*"—and Gumbo listened, without much excitement. To talk, Walshy invited Gumbo to their favorite diner.

"You're in costume," Gumbo observed, and they sat down.

"You know, I've started going out like this, every now and then. It gives me a kick when people still know us."

Here was a man with neon frizzled hair, a pink bowler hat, and yellow polka dotted overalls. Sitting across from him was an unexceptional old man with hair going gray, a green raincoat slumped over broad shoulders. The image offended good taste. But just for now, in this small diner, they got to be the center of attention once more.

"So, hear me out," started Walshy. "Cops, right? What's going on there? Black people can't catch a break. They get shot walking to the store!"

"Walshy..." Gumbo's voice trailed.

"We'll have it where I dress up as a cop"—

"No."

"But hear me out," Walshy pled, "I'll go for a handshake, but I zap you, you'll go down. And we'll make a big deal that cops need to do better policing, disarm the police, or whatever, right? And then I'll get my twelve year old granddaughter to come film it—put it on TikTok! She knows this stuff. Boom, just like that, we're back, baby! Back in the mix!"

"Walshy. Absolutely not," Gumbo emphatically declared. "The kids know better now, they deserve better than old guys like us," he added, "even if the message means well."

"I'm not talking about the kids! I mean, sure, them, but this is for the adults! Instant publicity!"

Gumbo winced, "That is bad publicity. Publicity we don't want. Publicity that will make us an even bigger part of the problem."

"Oh, how?" Walshy was exasperated by the lack of enthusiasm.

"Okay, look. Firstly, I'm not black."

"So what?" Walshy wondered, adding with a shrug, "I'm not a cop."

Gumbo ignored this. "It's not just that it would kill what's left of our career. We'd be making fun of a serious problem, Walshy. It wouldn't be funny—it wouldn't be smart."

"It would be funny! You're not expecting to get zapped! And then people would cry, and say, oh look, Gumbo's in pain! And by extension, so are African Americans! We'd be making a point!" Walshy added with sincerity.

Gumbo decided to go. Reaching into his coat pocket, he pulled out a clown nose, and with a wistful glance placed it on the table, and squeezed out of the booth. The door-chime jangled as he left. Walshy ran to give him his nose back, and almost slipped, but he caught himself and took a bow. A couple of diners clapped. Walshy caught Gumbo outside his decidedly un-flashy car.

"Hey, I came to give this back," Walshy outstretched his hand with Gumbo's nose. Gumbo took his hand, and closed Walshy's palm around the red foam ball.

"I'm happy. Go home. You look ridiculous. And old. We can't connect to the kids any more. They've got less tolerance for our antics." Gumbo went to put his hand on Walshy's

shoulder, but Walshy shrugged the hand off with clownish pride and slugged Gumbo in the teeth. Stunned by his own aggressiveness, Walshy doubled down, and threw the clown nose in his hand onto the pavement. He stamps on it. They argue. Gumbo drives home and ices his jaw.

Wouldn't you know it, some kids would pick up on the unusual public scene and film it. A few weeks later, "Serious Clown Punches Old Guy" went viral. That was all it took. And for a few more minutes, Walshy and Gumbo make the whole world smile, without hurting anybody else.

ADVERTISING

DIADEM – Warriors All :30

Fade in tight closeup of athletic young male, applying greasepaint under his eyes

VO: The urge to compete, to conquer, to rise to the occasion...

Cut to: elderly African American woman, applying greasepaint under her eyes

VO: It's universal. No matter who you are.

Cut in on hand by waist, pulling out a glorious Diadem racket, as if unsheathing a prized sword, and then mirror the shot for the other character.

VO: The thrill of a good match needs the right equipment.

Cut to: wide shot on pickleball court, our athletic young male is playing another athletic young friend, the court next door, the old lady is playing an elderly friend. Athletic kid wins and lets out a howl, raising his Diadem racket high in the air, old lady stops her game and notices

Closeup—Old Lady: I'll take you on, *sonny*.

Closeup—Athletic kid: Didn't know you played pickleball, *grandma*.

Wide shot—old lady and kid now on same court. Old lady has back to camera, takes out her cherry red Diadem racket and ball, and looses a beautiful serve to the athletic kid across the court. Scores.

Old lady: I thought you'd put up more of a fight.

Athletic kid: You offer lessons?

VO: The DIADEM Warrior Edge. For the warrior in all of us.

THEATER (More samples from any category available on request)

Space Panda Protocol (Scene 1)

written by

Jason Krause

Our Characters

MYRNA—Human. Handily manages a space-truck rental outpost on the moon. Tougher than she appears.

HOSS—Three armed humanoid. Intergalactic drug smuggler. Dresses in leather. Surprisingly sensitive.

RUDY—Human. Excitable, a good guy, naive but not stupid.

GARRETT—Space panda. Panda head, with a red suit jacket and a shirt with a panda face on it. Mean and vicious at first, but tilts on the edge of being taken seriously.

Our Setting

Myrna's truck rental on the moon. Similar to a Budget Rent-A-Car for spaceships and space trucks. The world feels a little like what if Buck Rogers met The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. To the characters, space is nothing out of the ordinary.

Purple and green colors, with a dash of blue. Red for emphasis.

Our Time

They're in space—it's the future.

Notes

- Inside a line, a word might be italicized and bold. This means your voice gets higher. Kind of like being surprised. Like so: "You mean my ***voice*** needs to be ***higher***?"
- // Cross slashes indicate overlapping dialogue

SCENE ONE

(Lights up on Myrna, center stage behind a desk that's lit up in the front. The wall behind her is like a sheet moving around a right side up conveyor belt (basically a diorama). Right now, the sheet is painted like a logo in the center that says Myrna's Truck Rental, with windows looking over the moon and the stars either side of it. Myrna is on the phone.)

MYRNA

Your first day of rental is going to be 75 Aldrins. A week is three-fifty. *(Pause.)* Yeah, you can just do a day rate and pay the rest, but it's a 15 Aldrin charge for every half a lightyear. *(Pause.)* Oh yeah? First time? Nothing to it. It's like driving a regular ship but it's bigger. *(Pause.)* We have insurance, but that's 50 more. *(Pause.)* Hey, I don't make the policy. Okay so, I'm just going to confirm a rental for your Econoline Galaxie Cruiser truck and—

(Myrna stops as a lumbering brute comes out of the wings, walking slowly but with oddly graceful gait. Myrna cups her hand over the receiver to address him. Our big new friend is HOSS and HOSS is very, very mean at first.)

MYRNA

Hey, come on, I'm just about to sell this guy.

HOSS

No.

MYRNA

Don't do this to me, Hoss. Just let me—*(Pause. Myrna picks the phone back up.)* Hey, I'll be right with you in just a second, thanks for your patience.

HOSS

Second time this month I've had to come here in person, Myrna.

MYRNA

(Cups receiver.) Yeah, well I don't have any trucks available right now. *(Picks phone up.)* You know what? Come here with your credits and we'll have one waiting. Thanks, now. Bye.

HOSS

I counted three, out front.

MYRNA

Those are all reserved at this *moment*. I know that sometimes it's not always—

HOSS

(inching closer to her, he puts two of his three hands on her desk.) I WANT A TRUCK, MYRNA.
WHEN I COUNT//TO THREE—

MYRNA

//Hey, now, hey. Cool it, you're scaring me. *(Reaches behind her desk to pull out a laser. Quickly aiming, she shoots Hoss in the shoulder. One of his shoulders.)* You know, they say you catch more flies with honey.

HOSS *(More surprised, but also hurt)*

What the fuck, Myrna?! You have a gun? Ow... Shit.

MYRNA

I told you we don't have anything for you right now.

HOSS

Yeah, but like. oww, remember when we started doing this? Me, pedaling drugs in your trucks? You, not having a gun? When did you buy a *gun*?

MYRNA

First time you came out this month. Right after that.

HOSS

If you had a problem, why didn't you just tell me?

MYRNA

I dunno. *(Beat.)* You seemed scary.

HOSS

Well, yeah, that's the point. I'm an intergalactic drug smuggler! You know the kind of savage beasts I have to deal with? I didn't expect you to be one of them. Not all of them are humanoid! *(Pause)* One of them—oh yeah, that reminds me—one of them looks like, do you remember seeing those pictures of Pandas the Chinese have on their moon bases?

MYRNA

No, but I know the ones painted on the World Wildlife Fleet.

HOSS

Okay, I've got a client that looks like that, but instead of their belly, they just have another head. Ears and everything! It's not right! I deal with a lot of space dwellers, and I don't try to discriminate, but sometimes it creeps me out, and that reminds me—

MYRNA

You're awful talky today, Hoss.

HOSS

You ever been *shot*??

MYRNA *(Indulging him and enjoying herself)*

Well, the one time... Just kidding—No. How's it feel?

HOSS

It feels like my zargoflex is curling back into my reefograf! Like my frawntoons are trying to jump out of my epidermis! It hurts! I'm on fire! When I get up, I'm gonna—I'm gonna, well, I don't know what I'm gonna do...

MYRNA

Remember. I have a gun.

HOSS *(mocking her)*

I have a gun. You space broads all talk alike. Well, if you're not worried about me, let me tell you what you should be worrying about.

MYRNA

I have bad hair days without my helmet on sometimes—how about that?

HOSS

Myrna, I'm being chased by that Panda alien.

(Myrna stifles a laugh)

HOSS

No. It's not funny. That alien is the most vicious gang boss in the whole 32nd Quadrant.

MYRNA

Yeah.

HOSS *(scared)*

Can I get a truck, **please**?

MYRNA

It's a **panda**, Hoss.

HOSS

No, it's a terrifying and demented mobster kingpin that happens to look like a panda. It wears a red suit. But the suit was **originally** white.

MYRNA

And?

HOSS

And it turned the entire planet of Jupiter-2 into a Fleezium addicted wasteland. The whole planet was *already* full of gas—and because of Garrett, everyone's bombed out, high on Fleezium. I sold those drugs for him, but it was Garrett who pretty much destroyed that planet.
(Hoss considers his role in selling drugs, then blames Garrett).

MYRNA

Hey, Hoss—your lack of personal accountability is showing... *(Beat. Then, unimpressed:)* Also, Garrett? His name is—

HOSS

Myrna, just pretend like—

(At that moment we hear a sound like a space engine, and then we hear the engine wind down, and something that sounds like a spaceship landing. Then we hear a small crash, then the sound of a metal wheel rolling around, and then we hear the sound of a truck backing up. The truck backs up for 7 seconds.)

HOSS

Myrna, hand me my gun.

MYRNA

Hoss, it's on your belt.

HOSS

It hurts to move my arms! But I **can** use my fingers. So hand me my lazer-gun!

MYRNA

How do I know you won't try to shoot me?

HOSS

Because you're not what I'm worried about right now. Also, **you** shot **me**. I don't want you to do that again. Soooo, lazer-gun?

(Myrna takes the gun from Hoss' belt and hands it to him. Hoss sits up and steadies himself up against the desk. We hear the sound of a door sliding open and in walks...)

RUDY

Hey there, I'm the one who called about the space truck—

(Hoss shoots RUDY out of fear. Rudy lands on his back and has been shot in the leg. Rudy lays, holding his leg.)

HOSS

Space trucks? Aren't any.

RUDY

Wait, ow. What the **fuck!** You shot me!

MYRNA

Oh, you must be Rudy. I'm so sorry. He doesn't work here.

RUDY

I would get up and leave, but oh yeah, right, you shot me! In the **leg!** What kind of business is this? I came here for a space truck and I got shot!

HOSS

Stand in line and join the club.

RUDY

Dude, **you shot me.** (*Whimpering*) My first time renting a space truck and Buzz Lightyear with a leather fetish shoots me.

HOSS

I am not!

MYRNA

Sir, I can still process your order. I know the timing isn't ideal, but if you want a truck//we can get you—

RUDY

//No. No I don't want a truck.. because I can't drive.. because I got **shot!**

MYRNA

Well, if there's anything I can do—

RUDY

No, there's nothing you can do. I swear, this is terrible. Your customer service is terrible//, like actively hostile, terrible.

MYRNA

//Hey!

RUDY

And your boyfriend over there is a real cupcake//and shoots me just for walking in the joint!

HOSS

//Hey! I only shot you because you could have been a cutthroat gang lord! I didn't know! And also, we're not boyfriend and girlfriend.

RUDY

Dude, I came here for a **truck**. What are you **talking** about? I needed a truck to move some chairs from my nephew's space bar-mitzvah. If the rental company had just showed up on **time**, I wouldn't be—wait, why is everything **red**? Is it because I'm shot? Is it just me?

(At this point, an intense red light envelops the stage, radiating out of the wings. We hear a massive space engine, booming overhead. Slowly, we hear the engine wind down, like a really big spaceship is landing. Then we hear the sound of a truck backing up. The truck backs up for 5 seconds. We hear a crash, and the sound of a metal wheel rolling in circles and resting on the ground. Beat. Then a little more backing up. As this is happening, Hoss is freaking out, Myrna is steeling herself, and Rudy is laying on the ground, flailing, and experimenting with painfully moving his leg.)

MYRNA

Is this—?

HOSS

Yeah.

MYRNA

Got a plan?

HOSS

I was going to say we shoot him.

RUDY (*sarcasm doesn't even come close*)

Great idea.

MYRNA

What's he want from you anyway?

HOSS

We make it out of here alive, and I'll tell you. Got your gun?

RUDY

Wait, what is *happening*?

HOSS

Garrett. Scourge of the 32nd Quadrant. Currently my enemy.

MYRNA

Looks like a panda.

RUDY

His name is *Garrett*?

HOSS

Dude. (*Pause.*) Yes, his name is Garrett.

(*Sound of a sliding door opening slowly.*)

HOSS

Myrna, get your gun. I'm ready.

MYRNA

He's dead.

(GARRETT walks onstage.)

GARRETT

3407 lightyears. 4 different galaxies. My ship needs gas, is this the right place to—*(Turns to see Hoss.)* YOU. Hoss, I have come here to collect your debt, and kill you.

HOSS

Come on, buddy. We can reason. Myrna, now!

(Myrna aims straight for his head and kills Garrett.)

MYRNA

And that's how you make a panda, pan-dead.

HOSS

Myrna, thank you.

MYRNA

All in a day's work.

(Right after this, a groan emits from Garrett and a small panda crawls out of his dead and lying body. This can be a puppet, or whatever you feel like. But this panda has to move.)

MYRNA *(scoldingly)*

Hoss...

HOSS *(scared)*

(Rapid fire:) Shoot it again, shoot it again, shoot it again, agh! Please, Myrna, just one truck!

MYRNA

Take Rudy's.

RUDY

Guess who's not gonna be a repeat customer?

GARRETT

You son of a bitch.

HOSS

Oh no—*hey*, she shot you.

GARRETT

You're in for it now, Hoss. I will stay here until my people come and find me.

HOSS

Doesn't mean we have to.

MYRNA

I can't just leave. You have to go.

GARRETT

Muahahaha. Oh, right. You want to leave. I just wish you could. It seems my ship had a hard landing, leaving four trucks *accidentally* destroyed in the process.

MYRNA

Hey you little panda scumbag—I only have three trucks// right now.

RUDY

//MY CAR!

MYRNA

I'm so sorry, sir. I know this isn't the kind of service you expect from us. If we didn't have to deal with an intergalactic crime lord, I'm sure you could have had a smoother experience.

HOSS

If we have to kill that panda's crew to leave, that will officially make this my *(looks at watch)* 32nd worst Thursday. (End Scene.)