

THE ROMANTIC SWAY OF NEAR EARTH  
OBJECTS

Or

Barry Manilow's Got Nothing on a Death  
Meteor

by

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## CAST

KIM OJEDA

An ambitious, bespeckled astrophysicist.

RAJ PANUK/  
ROGER "ROG" PARKER\*An astrophysicist. Equally as bespeckled  
and ambitious.

\*If ethnicity isn't available in casting, feel free to change the name to some more general.

## SETTING

A deep space observatory in a remote part of the world. Around the 1<sup>st</sup> of February.

A laboratory with two stations opposite each other. KIM at one. RAJ at the other. On either side of the room we also see what appear to be the observation ends of massive telescopes. Both scientists are concentrating on something of great importance. Occasionally each moves to a different instrument, peers into one of them and takes notes or a reading. There is a strong sense of competition to this work as if time is of the essence. They speak only to distract one another. RAJ reaches over and clicks on his laptop and an overly sappy Barry Manilow ballad (or in that style) begins to play. KIM tries to ignore it. This song and others like it continue to play under the action of the scene.

KIM

Any plans for Valentine's Day? Only two weeks to find a girlfriend, confess your undying love, creep her out with your smothering, constant need for validation, and then be rejected painfully as you ask for a second date?

RAJ

None. (Pause). What about you? Got any feral human tied up in that emotional acid bath you call a home?

Silence except for Barry Manilow. Finally, they both look at each other and speak simultaneously.

KIM and RAJ

Got it!

KIM

No, I have it. C-1-7-C-3. It will be called Ojeda.

RAJ

Excuse me. A-1-7-C-3 will be Panuk One. Check it again.

KIM

I don't have to check it again. It's C-1-7-C-3. Comet, not asteroid. And I'm calling it Ojeda One.

RAJ runs to the phone and grabs it.

KIM

Put it down or this, like most of your first dates, will also end in tears.

RAJ

A17C3 is mine. I found it first. I told you two months ago that shadow off of Pluto was something. But nooooo. If Kim Ojeda doesn't spot it then it obviously doesn't exist.

KIM

Remember Tadashi-Levinson 4?

RAJ

Don't even go there. Tadashi-Levinson 4 was a mistake. Anyone could have missed it.

KIM

That was your Panuk One. Too bad they discovered it fifty years ago! Give me the phone! I'm calling it in to verify.

RAJ

August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

KIM

Oh, don't you dare!

RAJ

"Raj! Raj! Come quick. See for yourself. Planet Ojeda Prime. It's beautiful."

KIM

An unfortunate error. But I'd get used to hearing that phrase from the booze-addled harpy that wakes up next to you in the coming weeks. OJEDA One is the real deal.

RAJ

It's an asteroid not a comet, you Medusian taint. It will pass within 300,000 kilometers of the moon. And it will be observable with the naked eye! At it's brightest on February 14<sup>th</sup>. That's why Panuk One will be known as the ... (struggling for a cool name) the

RAJ (cont'd)

Barry Manilow! Ha! I'm naming it after Barry Manilow! Just floating around out there all alone looking for someone. Poets will write about my discovery. Poets, Ojeda!

KIM

That is a terrible name. Did you even take the Moon's gravity into account?

RAJ

Did I take the Moon's gravity into account? What am I – five?

KIM

You didn't calculate that, did you?

RAJ

Did you?

A pause as they both try to mask their mistakes.

KIM

Shut up and crunch the numbers.

RAJ

You shut up, Ojeda. You crunch the numbers. And once you find out I'm right, I'm going to blow this popsicle stand with my asteroid and my name in the books. Poets, Ojeda!

They each head to their individual stations and plug a few numbers into the machines. After a moment, they both release a very long sigh.

KIM

Well, that's just great. Nice knowing you. It is an asteroid. You were right about that.

RAJ

We need to run the numbers again.

KIM

You got the same ones I did. You're right. Two weeks...maybe if we're lucky.

RAJ

There's a chance it will miss us. Five percent maybe, but there's a chance.

KIM glares at him then moves to the phone.

RAJ (cont'd)

You going to tell them Ojeda One will destroy the planet in less than two weeks?

KIM

Nope. I'm going to tell them that Panuk One is going to destroy the planet in less than two weeks. Maybe sooner if Mars gives it a good pull. Probably ON February 14. Valentine's Day. Panuk One kills everyone on Valentine's Day. You kill Love. BARRY MANILOW KILLS LOVE!

RAJ pauses to come up with the perfect comeback. Nothing. He goes back to his computer and begins to type.

KIM (cont'd)

What are you doing? You're emailing? You're going to tell the world that it has less than two weeks before an asteroid wipes out the human race by email?!

RAJ

No. I'm .....emailing my girlfriend. To tell her I love her.

KIM

You don't have a girlfriend, Panuk.

RAJ

Ok, fine. I'm emailing my mom. Just saying good-bye and I love you. You know, without saying it. No reason for panic since there's no way to stop the Ojeda asteroid.

KIM

Look, Dr. Morimoto will be calling in a few to check in with us. We'll tell him what we've observed, give him our calculations and then he'll know protocol.

RAJ

The calculations are correct.

KIM

I know.

RAJ

Well, what do we do with the precious time we have left?

A pause. Then an idea! KIM leaps on RAJ and begins to kiss him with abandon and attempting to remove his lab coat.

RAJ

(resisting)

You're emotional. We're in a delicate situation –

KIM

(continuing to kiss him)

Shut up. I'm not emotional. I have an IQ of 173. Take your clothes off.

RAJ

I wouldn't want to take advantage of your state.

KIM

I'm not Idaho, Panuk. And my bra unhooks in the front. We're doing this. Take 'em off.

RAJ

I always thought there was a chemistry between us, but you know, the competitiveness of astrophysics, the male dominance in the field, the pressures you must be under.

KIM

(still trying to get his labcoat off)

How many buttons do you have on this thing? It's like a Russian peacoat. Panuk, have you ever heard of Newton's Three Body Problem and the new theories proposed by Dr. Marcus LaVichy?

RAJ

My mind is somewhere else right now.

KIM

(still working on his lab coat, tries biting the buttons off as she explains)

LaVichy proposes that the butterfly effect in chaos theory might also be applied to larger systems, planetary. Even on a galactic scale. The smallest increases in energy on any object, no matter how seemingly insignificant, may have large scale effects. ANY type of energy.

RAJ

Wait, you want to save the earth by having sex? With me? We have a five-mile wide space rock set to kill all life on this planet in two weeks and you want to have sex with me? To stop it?

KIM suddenly stops and rushes to her computer.

RAJ (cont'd)

I'm not entirely sold on the theory's validity but what's a theory without some testing?

RAJ moves to her, looks at her computer then puts his hand on her shoulder impulsively. KIM shrugs it off to focus briefly on the calculations.

KIM

Yep. Theoretically, we only need to add a few joules to potentially have an effect.

RAJ

How is that going to change the course of the asteroid?

KIM

Maybe it will speed up or slow down the Earth's rotation around the Sun ever so slightly that we miss the collision point? We only need to change it by one second, a degree, and the asteroid will miss easily, go right between us and the moon.

RAJ

And how many joules does us having sex produce?

KIM

The size of it doesn't matter.

RAJ

It matters a little. We could look it up.

KIM

Or we could have sex, you know, to save the world.

RAJ

To save Valentine's Day! From Ojeda One!



KIM

You know I hate Valentine's Day. Never had a good one.

RAJ

Maybe you hate the idea of dying alone.

KIM

Maybe you hate the idea of dying a virgin?

RAJ

Please. I've had a number of women. A large number of women. A googolplex of women.

A silence. Possibly a lone cricket.

KIM

Ok. I just need to have sex. We just need to have sex.

RAJ

Yes, WE do.

KIM

It doesn't have to be with each other. It's quantity, right? I could have sex with anyone. I could have sex with Ryan.

RAJ

NOOOO. Not Ryan. The lab tech. He has sex with everybody. Debbie. Renee. Dr. Juarez.

KIM

If I need to have a lot of sex, why not do it with the beefcake beaker monkey?

RAJ

(devastated)

Fine. Ryan. Then who do I have sex with if we need to have it right here and now?

A pause as he realizes who is left.

RAJ (cont'd)

Noooooo. Not Beth. I hate Beth. She has a cat tattoo.

KIM

Look, we're doing this for humanity. We need to make sacrifices.

RAJ

What kind of sacrifice are you making with Ryan?

KIM

He's no Neil deGrasse Tyson. He's a hot doofus. We are losing precious energy-making sex time here. Panuk One is getting closer and closer by the minute. There's you, me, the hot lab tech and the receptionist.

RAJ

(Rescued)

It's Wednesday! Ryan doesn't come in on Wednesday! Yes!

KIM

Oh, yeah. And Beth did say she was taking the day off. Getting a new tattoo.

(rising to face him)

It's simple math. We really have no choice.

RAJ

None. The science is right there in front of us.

KIM

Saving the world, Panuk. Take off your lab coat.

RAJ

Pants too?

KIM

Whatever you want. A little thing you should know about me: I'm a top.

RAJ

I don't know what that means.

She shoves him to the ground and starts to leap on top of him. He pops back up with an idea.

RAJ (cont'd)

Hey, maybe we should do it with our clothes on? You know, the heat? The friction.

KIM

Or no clothes. Maybe the contact of our skin, the chemical reactions of our sweat and pheromones working in tandem, the heavy breathing, the animalistic thrusting, you know...all that.

RAJ

Yeah, all that. We should probably get started as soon as possible. And we should probably do it a lot. More than once. It's only logical.

KIM

It's the only thing that makes sense. And afterward, we need to email as many people as possible and tell them to do the same. Sort of a sexual energy capacitor. Can't hurt.

RAJ

But don't a lot of people have sex around this holiday anyway? Are we really increasing the energy output of the planet?

KIM

What if we target people that don't generally have sex? Like nerds, lab rats like you and me, the elderly, hipsters, Scientologists?

RAJ

I don't know if it's the impending doom, the fringe science or the Barry Manilow but I'm really getting into this now.

A moment. Then each darts to a computer and begins to calculate furiously. Papers flying, keys banging as if in a race once again. A sudden stop. They turn to face one another.

KIM

(removing her glasses)

The calculations were correct.

RAJ

(removing his glasses)

Of course they were.

They slowly begin to walk toward one another.

Just wanted to double check.

KIM

Ojeda Prime.

RAJ

When an intellectually superior, surprising limber astrophysicist wants to have sex with you, you want to do as little talking as possible.

KIM

Noted.

RAJ

The phone begins to ring. They ignore it.

KIM

Maybe it's not worth it. Maybe the world isn't worth saving.

RAJ

Sure it is.

KIM

Like what? What's worth saving?

RAJ

This lab. Our reseach. You.

KIM

That's sweet.

RAJ

I can be sweet sometimes.

KIM

I thought you could.

RAJ

Let's save the world.

Lights fade as the phone continues to ring and Barry Manilow soars. END OF PLAY