

THINKING OUTSIDE THE (LITTER) BOX

A short comedy by
Bradley Walton

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

FLUFFY, any gender, a cat who hosts an online video chat group.

MELVILLE, any gender, a cat who lives with two English professors.

MEOW 9000, any gender, a cat whose human is a major nerd.

DREAMSICLE, any gender, a cat who is snippety and easily annoyed.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Staging: The play is written to be performed online. Alternatively, it could be performed onstage with each actor pretending to be in front of a computer and exiting the stage when the cats leave their screens.

Costumes: Cat ear headbands.

Sound Effects: Cats digging in their litter.

(FLUFFY, DREAMSICLE, MEOW 9000 and MELVILLE are on a video chat already in progress. Everyone looks a little bored.)

FLUFFY: Is it just me, or do we have the same conversations every time we get together?

DREAMSICLE: You asked us that last week.

MEOW 9000: When I was in the litter box earlier, I had a great idea for something we could talk about, but now I forget what it was.

FLUFFY: Same here.

DREAMSICLE: I get all kinds of ideas in the litter box, but they go away as soon as I climb out. I blame Karen.

FLUFFY: You blame everything on Karen.

DREAMSICLE: Because she adopted me. That makes her my property.

MELVILLE: I do my best thinking in the litter box...sort of like my humans do in their bathroom. They keep a notepad handy so they don't forget things. I would too, but I can't write.

MEOW 9000: Y'know, I'm pretty sure Neal made up an entire alien language while he was playing with the bidet last night.

MELVILLE: I'd give anything to be ingeniously creative all the time and remember my ideas.

DREAMSICLE: You'd get sore after a while.

MELVILLE: No! I'm talking about freeing my mind from the constraints of the litter box.

MEOW 9000: You should've met my stepbrother.

MELVILLE: I didn't know you had a stepbrother.

MEOW 9000: He's kind of an awkward topic. *(Beat.)* Can we forget I mentioned him?

DREAMSICLE: No.

MEOW 9000: (*Sighs:*) Fine. Neal called him "Stormtrooper."

FLUFFY: He's no longer with us?

MEOW 9000: Gone to the great catnip lounge in the sky.

FLUFFY: I'm sorry.

MEOW 9000: He lived a happy life on his own terms.

DREAMSICLE: But...?

MEOW 9000: He never used a litter box.

FLUFFY: Did he go outside?

MEOW 9000: No.

(*Beat.*)

FLUFFY: Oh.

DREAMSICLE: Ew.

MELVILLE: Really?

MEOW 9000: When nature called, he answered. No matter where he was.

MELVILLE: So to him, the litter box was a state of mind, rather than a place or an object?

MEOW 9000: Pretty much.

MELVILLE: Was he a tortured genius?

MEOW 9000: Let's just say...nooooo.

MELVILLE: But his attitude about the litter box – that showed real creativity.

MEOW 9000: Leaving fresh surprises in random places every day is not a sign of creativity. Neal originally named him

"Charlie" but started calling him "Stormtrooper" when it became obvious that he was never going to hit the target.

DREAMSICLE: I'm soooo glad we've all spent countless hours watching movies while our humans are at work, so we've all seen *Star Wars* and know that Stormtroopers have notoriously bad aim.

MEOW 9000: You told me you'd never watched *Star Wars*.

DREAMSICLE: That's right. So you described it—in excruciating detail.

MEOW 9000: At least you know what I'm talking about now.

DREAMSICLE: Not by choice.

FLUFFY: Maybe Charlie would've eventually hit the target if Neal hadn't started calling him "Stormtrooper." Like, the name encouraged him to keep doing what he was doing?

MEOW 9000: Or maybe he was just stupider than humanity before the Monolith.

DREAMSICLE: I'm soooo glad that we've all spent countless hours watching movies while our humans are at work, so we've all seen *2001: A Space Odyssey* and know exactly what you're talking about.

MEOW 9000: Dreamsicle, I can't help that I live with a raging nerd. Science fiction movies are his life, so by extension, they're my life too. And anyway, you were the one who asked why I was named "Meow 9000."

DREAMSICLE: All you had to tell me was that it's a play on a computer named "HAL 9000" in a movie! You didn't have to explain *every...single...frame*.

MEOW 9000: I was trying to give you a sense of what the movie is like.

DREAMSICLE: Well, you failed, because I didn't understand the ending at all.

MEOW 9000: That means I explained it perfectly.

MELVILLE: I love the novel version of *2001*. I took the most wonderful nap on it once.

DREAMSICLE: Melville, do *not* turn this into another book talk.

MELVILLE: Fine, I won't. Because I want to talk some more about Stormtrooper.

MEOW 9000: There's nothing else to say. He lived. He pooped. Everywhere. The end.

DREAMSICLE: Should've called him "Stormpooper."

MEOW 9000: I'd be lying if I said the thought never crossed my mind.

MELVILLE: I think Stormtrooper had more going on than you gave him credit for.

MEOW 9000: Are you going back to the tortured genius thing?

MELVILLE: I am.

MEOW 9000: However far Mars travels in an orbit around the sun, that was the distance between genius and my stepbrother.

MELVILLE: In other words, so far away from genius that it circled all the way back around to being genius?

MEOW 9000: Exactly. Wait—no! That's not what I said!

MELVILLE: It's what you implied.

MEOW 9000: Don't you go inferring things from my implications!

MELVILLE: I live with two English professors. Inferring is as much a part of my life as Boba Fett action figures are a part of

yours. I have also learned to value creativity, and I think we should consider following the example set by Stormtrooper.

DREAMSICLE: That's disgusting.

MELVILLE: Not like that.

DREAMSICLE: Then how?

MELVILLE: Humans have an expression—"thinking outside the box." It means dreaming up ideas that go beyond the norms and conventions of everyday life. We should learn to think outside of our boxes. Specifically, our litter boxes. That's where our brains are at their most creative, but it's all wasted because the sudden flood of imagination seems to wash away the very ideas it generates. If we could learn to conceive of the litter box not just as a place, but also a state of mind, like Stormtrooper did, we might learn to harness our creativity—control it—and unlock potential that we never dreamed we possess! With that newfound brilliance, we could use the power of the Internet to bring real change to the world!

(Pause.)

DREAMSICLE: That's a stupid idea.

MELVILLE: Why? We can all use computers! Doesn't that seem extraordinary to you?

(Beat.)

DREAMSICLE: No.

MEOW 9000: Not really.

FLUFFY: Seems perfectly normal to me.

DREAMSICLE: Our humans are friends and they video chat with each other. We learned how to do this from watching them. There's nothing extraordinary about it.

MELVILLE: You're selling yourselves short.

DREAMSICLE: Even if you're right, there's still one very important detail you've overlooked.

MELVILLE: What's that?

DREAMSICLE: We're cats!

MELVILLE: So?

DREAMSICLE: We're too self-absorbed to change anything. We don't engage with people. We use them for whatever we want right at that moment, and then we ignore them! It's in our genetic programming.

MELVILLE: Not all of us are like that.

DREAMSICLE: Are you seriously telling me that you've never begged for attention and then walked away when you got it?

MELVILLE: I'm allowed to change my mind. It's not the same thing.

FLUFFY: Assuming we did try to change the world...what kinds of things are we talking about? Cat treat dispensers in every kitchen? Rooms carpeted with oat grass?

MELVILLE: You're thinking like a cat.

FLUFFY: Well, yeah.

MELVILLE: I'm of the opinion that the first stage of thinking outside the litter box might be...thinking like a human.

DREAMSICLE: Oh, no way.

MELVILLE: And once we achieve that, then we can go...beyond!

FLUFFY: Humans are a mystery. Nobody understands them. They complain about their weight but then sit around eating junk food. They apologize for the house being a mess, but never clean it. My human has over a hundred neckties in his closet – but what's the point of a necktie?

MEOW 9000: Neal spends huge amounts of money on old comic books.

MELVILLE: Reading old books is an admirable pastime.

MEOW 9000: He doesn't read them. He just...collects them.

DREAMSICLE: I would never willingly force myself to think like Karen. Not in a million years.

MELVILLE: What about your other human? Could you bring yourself to think like Scott?

DREAMSICLE: Scott married Karen, and I don't want to know what he was thinking.

MEOW 9000: What's so bad about Karen?

DREAMSICLE: Nothing.

MEOW 9000: Then why do you hate her so much?

DREAMSICLE: If you lived with two humans, you'd understand. You have no choice about who gets your affection. I do. And I love the feeling of power that it gives me.

FLUFFY: I love everybody.

DREAMSICLE: And your life is so much emptier for it.

FLUFFY: Melville, how exactly would we use the Internet to change the world and achieve the lofty goals that we apparently don't have yet?

MELVILLE: That's another thing we'd need to figure out!

FLUFFY: By thinking outside the litter box?

MELVILLE: Exactly! Imagine Stormtrooper!

DREAMSICLE: I'd rather not.

MELVILLE: Stormtrooper did things no normal cat would do.

MEOW 9000: That we agree on.

MELVILLE: So imagine doing things that no normal cat would do.

MEOW 9000: Like what? Skydiving?

MELVILLE: Yes!

FLUFFY: Opening a checking account?

MELVILLE: Yes!

DREAMSICLE: Slashing the tires on Karen's car?

MELVILLE: Think beyond your little world!

DREAMSICLE: Slashing the tires on Karen's car...with a helicopter blade?

MELVILLE: That's the spirit!

FLUFFY: Okaaay. So...your turn, Melville...throw out an idea.

MELVILLE: Shelving books in a library...without taking a nap on them first!

FLUFFY: Yeah, that's definitely not something I can see you doing.

MELVILLE: Now, we have to go bigger. Those were all very human ideas. Move beyond them! Think thoughts no human would ever think!

MEOW 9000: Okay...buttering waffles with fish oil. On the sun.

FLUFFY: Shopping for Amish handcrafted furniture in a Nicaraguan pharmacy.

DREAMSICLE: Painting murals of black rainbows and burning station wagons on the walls of preschools with clown makeup and yogurt.

MELVILLE: Octogenarian scrutinization of transubstantiation countermanded by divine intervention in the form of

domesticated *Lepus* coordination with a McDonald's parking lot as its source of origination!

(Pause. Everyone looks at Melville.)

Just go with it.

FLUFFY: Okay...

MELVILLE: So much brilliance!

DREAMSICLE: Glad you think so.

MEOW 9000: Um...what do we do with all that?

MELVILLE: We turn it into viable action!

DREAMSICLE: How?

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