

Planet Flippers

Act 1

A dramatic voiceover narrates the future of humanity: *As our population grew, we were forced to flee to the stars. Trillions of humans required thousands of planets to house and sustain. The real estate market grew to galactic scale, and celestial bodies were bought and sold with increasing abandon. What trials and tribulations await those who take up the profession of Space Real Estate?* Smash cut to an auction house. Neil Parsimon sits at a table on stage. The items up for sale are moons, previously held by Neil's company "Interstellar Estates". An auctioneer standing at the center of the stage notes each moon's proposed value before starting the bidding. In each case, the moon is sold for far less than its true value. As the auction draws to a close, the auctioneer notes that Interstellar Estate's debt to the Orion Republic has been paid. Neil reluctantly signs a contract placed in front of him, authorizing the sales of each of his company's moons.

Neil meets up with his business partner Laura Barringer outside the auction house. While Neil laments the loss of several profitable ventures, Laura remains optimistic that they will stumble upon something good soon enough. Neil is not feeling nearly as positive, however. He blows off Laura's suggestion to check out some of the other auctions happening around the building, preferring to go meet up with a couple of his old business school friends. On the way to the meetup, he is accosted by Sturmund Drang: Space Bureaucrat. Sturmund is an agent of the Orion Republic's Environmental Protection Agency. Over the course of the conversation, it is revealed that Sturmund is the one responsible for Neil's recent troubles with the Orion Republic.

Stumund chastises Neil for his rash and greedy behaviors, citing these as the reason he keeps landing in hot water with the EPA.

Neil meets up with his old friends at a nearby bar. Their lives had diverged shortly after school, when they all took corporate jobs and he decided to start a business with Laura. His friends are supportive of his decision, claiming to envy his proactivity, but it's clear that they wouldn't trade their cushy office jobs for his constant struggle. As Neil bemoans his company's recent money troubles, one of his friends suggests planet mining as a quick and easy way to make a profit. Neil pushes back on the idea. He's only worked with asteroids and moons before, so a planet is a pretty big step up from him. Besides, Laura doesn't like the whole "destroying a planet from the inside out" thing. Neil's friends are quick to voice their annoyance with Laura and her over-sentimentality, but Neil is even quicker to defend her. Suddenly, he receives a message that Interstellar Estates has bought up a planet without him, and he runs off to investigate.

Neil reconvenes with Laura at the auction house and confronts her about the purchase. With so little money left, they can't afford to go buying up celestoids willy-nilly, let alone a whole planet! He rattles off the various reasons they aren't prepared to tackle a project of this scale, and how dare she make such a big purchase without consulting him in the first place! Laura asks him to relax for once, and think about things beyond their value as a sellable product. Neil demands to know what planet it is that Laura bought, not that she wants to hide it. Pulling up information, she notes that this particular sale was hidden way in the back. Nobody was

paying attention to this dinky little planet one of the bigger corporations was unloading in an annual asset cleanse. She shows him the planet she bought up and - it's Earth!

Neil is blind to the significance of the purchase, and Laura has to inform him that Earth is where humans first came from. It's been so long since humanity took to the stars that almost everybody has forgotten where they originated. Laura explains that she was the only one who noticed that it was humankind's native planet for sale while she was in the auction, and she just had to buy it because, well, it's Earth! The conversation is interrupted by Sturmund Drang, who has just been notified of Interstellar Estate's purchase of such a historically important piece of land. He passive aggressively threatens Neil with the promise of financial ruin should Earth be mistreated in any way. Laura, seemingly oblivious to the threat, affably assures Drang that she'll be keeping a close eye on Neil.

Neil remembers that, as chief shareholder of Interstellar Estate, he has the power to cancel the acquisition of Earth. Neil tries to convince Laura that it's in their best interest not to buy Earth. She remains steadfast, believing that they can do some real good with the planet if they just give it a shot. Suddenly, he gets a call from one of the friends he had met up with earlier, Larry Fucus. Larry congratulates Neil on the sweet catch with Earth. Larry says that a whole bunch of companies, his included, are pretty incensed that they missed snatching up Earth at such a large bargain. He admits that even he himself had passed by that auction without realizing what it was. There's a lot of opportunities afforded by a planet like that, especially given the historical value. This conversation gives Neil an idea, and he finally agrees to purchase Earth,

on the condition that they only keep it long enough to flip it for a profit. This satisfies Laura, and the two depart in a space-sedan to go check out their new asset.

Central Question:

Will Neil make a profit off Earth, and can he learn to appreciate things by their intrinsic value?

Act 2.1

On the way to Earth, Neil and Laura watch a video on the history of Earth. The video seems to be trying its hardest, bless its soul, but it seems that the finer details of Earth life have been lost over the millenniums. As such, the video is hilariously inaccurate, mixing and matching historical periods with reckless abandon and failing to understand concepts such as “houses” and “countries”. Neil and Laura, themselves not very knowledgeable in the daily life of millennia past, take the video completely seriously. They are filled with optimism regarding their new planet, which is swiftly quashed when they actually arrive. The Earth is not looking good. Whoever had it last left it in a very poor condition. It’s nothing that a good terraformer blast couldn’t fix, Laura notes, but Neil remains overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task ahead of them.

Neil and Laura have a lot of work to do if they want to fix Earth up. But first, it’s time to have a little fun. The two of them do all the goofy stuff you do when you buy a new place, except on a global scale, like calling dibs on all the continents. While messing around with the planet, the two are shocked to discover that there’s someone else here. Somebody has been inhabiting Earth for quite a while, it seems. They track down this vagrant, Samuel Auctor the Terra Squatter. He explains how he woke up on Earth one day in a drunken stupor, his ship’s hyperdrive broken. But when Neil and Laura offer to give him a ride off the planet, he refuses. He says he’s grown accustomed to Earth, and would prefer to stay. They can’t even kick him off

the planet because he's been around long enough for tenant laws to apply to him. Until they can deal with him, their plans for renovation are halted.

Eventually it is Laura's good nature which saves the day, as she is able to get Sam to open up and help them. He agrees to help facilitate their renovation of the planet...on the condition that they sign over a patch of land to him exclusively. Neil is none too happy about the deal, but is willing to agree so that they can get a move on. With Sam in full ownership of California's sunny beaches, he is ready and willing to help Neil and Laura on their quest to flip the Earth. He brings them to all of his favorite places on the planet to spark their imaginations. They visit the great pyramids, only to discover that they are mere inches tall. Upon further examination, Laura discovers that they are just mostly hidden under the sand. They visit an amusement park, which is mistaken for a holy site of some sort. They visit Stonehenge, where Neil fails to understand how incredible it is that some guys moved some rocks. Ultimately, none of the Wonders of the World can shake Neil from his cynical sensibilities.

The business partners discuss ways they can make Earth a valuable piece of real estate. Laura wishes to go with a restorative approach, and suggests terraforming the planet for agriculture. By using a powerful space beam, they could alter the molecular structure of the air and soil, making it once again suitable for plant growth. This isn't Neil's favorite idea, but seeing how much Laura loves the Earth, he decides to hold off on the strip planning suggestion for now. They rent out a terraformer for the day, and since the company is short on cash, Neil springs for a cheaper model. As Neil, Laura, and Sam sit at the helm of the massive device, counting down

the operation, Sam asks if Neil had accounted for the greater levels of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere. But it's too late. The thick layer of CO₂ reflects the terraformer's ray, redirecting it towards Mars. The Red Planet is instantly turned Green. Our heroes are forced to return the terraformer immediately, having violated their contract by using it on a different planet.

The three return to the planet's surface dejected. Suddenly, Neil notices something different on the readout of the surface. There's a small patch down in South America which is suddenly...green? They race over there and find a tiny oasis of vegetation hidden in the desert. It seems that the terraformer managed to pierce the atmosphere in this one small area alone. They wander the micro-jungle, marvelling at the first sight of natural beauty this planet has offered. Unfortunately, Neil says, they can't sell a planet based on one nice looking jungle. With that comment, Laura finally snaps. She goes off on Neil for the whole "cynical businessman" schtick, asking him why he can't just appreciate one thing without making it about money. Neil retorts with jabs at her naivete, and notes that they wouldn't be having money troubles if she hadn't bought up a whole damn planet. Sam interrupts to mention something he's been putting off having to tell them.

The Earth has an infestation. Not of termites or of ants, but of nanobots. Solar powered self-replicating robots which use the Earth's natural resources to produce more of themselves. Sam doesn't know where they came from. Possibly a single one floated there from another planet over hundreds of years. After all, only one is necessary to start a whole outbreak. They are super bad news, and until they're stopped, they will keep eating away at the Earth. Laura is ready to

help figure out a solution, but Neil is still mad at her, so he leaves to figure out the program on his own. He devises a hasty scorched-Earth policy for resolving the whole thing, rigging up a massive electromagnetic pulse designed to disable all technology across the entire planet. But he ends up miscalculating, and when he finally sets off the device, it causes a massive explosion. The explosion triggers global earthquakes, leaving massive cracks all along the planet's surface and destroying (amongst other things) that small patch of land which they had previously been able to terraform. The nanobots are gone, but with the Earth in even worse condition than when they started, it seems the possibility of ever selling this rock for a profit is disappearing very quickly.

The Midpoint

In an act of desperation, Neil spelunks down into one of the earthquake faults, looking for some way to repair the surface. Instead, he finds a massive cache of Cibucite hidden thousands of miles beneath the surface. Cibucite is an obscure mineral, undetectable to the primitive humans who lived on the Earth's surface all those years ago. But in modern times, Cibucite is what fuels all modern spacecrafts. A cache of this size is worth billions, if not trillions of dollars. It seems Neil has hit the jackpot.

Act 2.2

Neil rushes to tell Laura about the incredible discovery he has made, only to see starships on the horizon. It's the Space EPA, here to strangle him in red tape. Leading the charge is Sturmund Drang: Space Bureaucrat. Sturmund and his goons are here to make Neil pay for the damages caused to the Earth's surface. Neil and Laura try and sort the whole thing out with Drang, but he makes it clear that he intends to bury Interstellar Estates. But like god from the machine, who should arrive to save the day but Larry Fucus and the rest of Neil's old college buds. They threaten Drang with the promise of lobbying against him in the next election should he make a move against Interstellar Estates. The fear of losing the support of their SuperPACs is enough to ward Drang off temporarily, and the EPA fleet retreats. Larry invites Neil and Laura to a bigwig dinner, and for once Neil is excited and Laura is skeptical. Neil tries to convince Laura to dine with him and the corporate types, but she declines, still mad at him for the damage he's done to Earth.

Neil has the time of his life at Space Benihanas, eating and drinking like a king. He rollicks and makes merry with his old friends, and they toast the government drones, may they all die in a fire. Back on Earth, Laura is intercepted by Drone Extraordinaire Sturmund Drang. Supposedly, he has a proposition for her. Neil's friends have a proposition for him as well, it seems. They already know about the cache of Cibucite hidden within the cracks in the Earth. Yes, they did bug his phone. Call it a harmless bit of corporate espionage. The point is, they know Neil's caught the big fish, and they want to help him gut it. They've got the resources to

get in and out with that ore as fast as possible. If he signs over the rights to Earth, they can promise him 50% of the profits from the Cibucite harvest. It will be much quicker and cheaper than if Interstellar Estates tried to go it alone. Meanwhile, Drang presents Laura with a counter offer. If she hands the Earth over to the Orion Republic, they can protect it and begin to repair the damages left by Neil's bomb. Ultimately, both Neil and Laura say that they'll think about it.

Neil returns to Earth and meets back up with Laura. The both of them have a proposition for each other. Laura lets Neil go first. He explains how he found the Cibucite cache hidden in the Earth's cracks. He goes over his meeting with Larry, and the business deal they suggested. Laura is naturally horrified by the idea of further tearing Earth apart, and is now hellbent on her idea to donate the planet to the Orion Republic. This is an equally disturbing proposition to Neil - Laura wants to throw away all their hard work over a stupid piece of rock? Not only that, but she's been colluding with that scumbag Drang! Laura argues that the whole point of this crusade was to fix Earth up, not ruin it even further! It's Neil's get rich quick mentality which caused all this damage in the first place, and now it's time to atone for his mistake. Neil disagrees, and figures that since he's the chief shareholder, it's his decision to make on what happens to Earth. He whips out his cell phone, calls Larry, and agrees to sign over the Earth's rights to his company.

Soon, Larry and the boys arrive with an armada of construction workers and prepare to begin strip mining. Larry asks if there's anything else he needs to know about Earth, and Neil mentions the piece of land they had to sign away to Samuel the Terra Squatter. Larry assures

Neil that he can deal with that, and he dispatches two of his lawyers to speak with Sam. Soon enough, the wily suits have tricked Sam into forfeiting his plot of land by deluging him with confusing legal jargon. Laura is horrified by this series of events, and even Neil is left feeling a little guilty about what he's done. He goes to tell Sam that he can make this right, but he is having none of it. Sam is escorted off the planet, leaving him homeless once more. With the Terra Squatter out of the way, the demolition efforts on Earth can finally begin. Neil is given a finder's fee check, a large sum of money which he is assured is nothing compared to when the profits start rolling in. Ultimately, Laura is fed up with the whole thing and tells Neil that she is resigning from Interstellar Estates.

Act 3

Neil has finally achieved the financial success he so desires. But as he is led through the destruction of the planet and handed the contract which will make it all legally binding, something feels off. This reaches its peak when, though all the activity, Samuel's old home is demolished. Neil speaks up, telling Larry that he's changed his mind. Out in space, Laura is driving away in the space-sedan when she hears the news that Interstellar Estates has cancelled the Earth sale. Immediately she turns the craft around, and begins to dial a phone number. Back on the planet, Larry is seething that Neil would throw away such a big opportunity for the both of them. He demands the finder's fee check back, but Neil is glad to rip it up himself. Larry threatens to do everything in his legal power to screw Interstellar Estates out of the planet. But who should arrive but Laura and the rest of the Space EPA. Using evidence of Larry's dirty dealings, Neil is able to help Sturmud Drang enact a restraining order keeping him from ever interacting with the planet again.

Sturmud thanks Neil, both for helping the Space EPA ward of Larry and his corporate goons, and for deciding to donate Earth to the Orion Republic after all. But Neil says he isn't giving away Earth to anyone. Not to Larry, and not to Strang. Instead, he decides to open a private museum dedicated to Earthen History. We cut to six months later, when the Museum is up and running. Apparently there are enough people interested in the old rock to keep the whole operation profitable. It's not Planet Mining money, but it keeps the bills paid, and there's just enough money left over to begin restoration on the more damaged parts of the planet. The

nanobots are being cleaned up, the cracks in the surface are being filled in, and the Great Pyramids are being dug up. Neil looks over the financial parts of the business while Laura keeps an eye on the managerial side. Samuel has become the new Head of Earthen History, and finally has a job and a bed he can call his own. Everyone is finally happy. Although now that you mention it, the rest of the solar system could use a tune-up as well.