

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Chapter 17: News of the World.

By Joe Fisher

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SFX: THE HUM OF THE NANCY SINATRA.

BERTBERT

(In speakers.)

As you can see from the dilapidated buildings behind me, the draconian trade policies of the Ted Empire have decimated the small cities and towns here on Lemmonier. To keep up with the high fees associated with their active warp gate, every citizen of this planet must work at a water treatment facility for a minimum of 5 years so that they can prepare shipments of fresh water to the Teds as payment for their active warp gate lease. When the lease was first signed by the Lemmonians a generation ago, it was seen as a great boon to their planet. But now, with their freshwater reserves depleted by 20% globally, and environmental disasters looming, the Lemmonians are desperate to escape their lease with the Teds that is not set to expire for another generation-

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Believe it or not, that badass is now this...

BERTBERT

(In speakers.)

Coming up next on Earth 2 "The Metaverse", watch millions of Earthlings convince themselves that it's gong to be an actual thing-

CASPAR

How did that happen?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Ted Ticks. Nanobots that can grab a hold of your frontal lobe and turn you into a directionless shill. They're all over the place on Earth by the way, mostly on local news stations.

CASPAR

That explains a lot.

THE EX

How are we going to rescue her?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Not sure yet. We're coming up on the Ted home world now, we're going to sneak in a grab her.

CASPAR

What system is it in?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Bethany Elliot.

CASPAR

Okay.

THE EX

Wait, what?

CASPAR

The name of the solar system is Bethany Elliot.

THE EX

The Ted home world is located in a solar system called The Bethany Elliot System?

CASPAR

Yeah.

THE EX

How?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

The international star registry.

CASPAR

Yeah, you know those "Name Your Own Star" kits you can buy on Earth? Where you can name a star after your kid or whatever?

THE EX

Yeah.

CASPAR

They're real. Those names are binding.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

And they're everywhere.

CASPAR

Yeah, they're all over the place. There's the Bethany Elliot system, the Ronnie Loves Becky system, The Sara Bergenholtz system, The Happy Graduation Jimbo system.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

The worst is Justine Burbank.

CASPAR

Oh God, Justine Burbank is the worst.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

That's where I lost my arm.

THE EX

That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

CASPAR

Well, it's a human thing and you're trying to become more human so the joke's on you, Lady.

THE EX

Whatever, how are we doing this?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

She's a high value target so they move her every couple of weeks. Luckily I have it on good authority that she's currently at Earth Portal Headquarters and they just moved her there so we've got plenty of time to plan.

SFX: PANEL BEEPS.

EVEN OLDER LEIF (CONT'D)

Shit.

CASPAR

What?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Turns out when I heard they just moved her, what I should of heard was, they're just ABOUT to move her. They're moving her in two hours, we're going to have to wing it. Everybody hang on!

CASPAR

Leif!

SFX: THRUSTERS FIRING.

SFX: THE BUSTLING INTERIOR OF THE EARTH PORTAL BUILDING.

BERTBERT

Welcome to Earth Portal. The number one source of entertainment in the triad. Be sure and tune in for our newest hit show "Who Did Henry Kissinger Outlive THIS Time?"

VOICE

Gar Dal calling.

SFX: BEEP.

HARSTEEN

Gar, Boo Boo, here's the problem. You should be calling me about production wrapping up but you're not calling to tell me that, are you?... Uh-huh... Uh-huh... you don't say?... Gar... Gar... let me just stop you right there. El Salvador just adopted Bitcoin as their national currency, you're telling me you CAN'T find the humor in that? Because I think it's hilarious... Sure... Sure... Yes, Gar I understand that it's sad FOR THEM but what do I always say? If it's sad on Earth it's hilarious for the rest of us. Right? Are we together on this? Good. Don't fuck this up, Gar.

SFX: DOOR SLIDING OPEN.

ASSISTANT BOT

Good Morning, Sir.

HARSTEEN

Good morning, Debra.

ASSISTANT BOT

Your Hour Nine meeting is in your office.

HARSTEEN

I have an hour nine meeting?

ASSISTANT BOT

Schedule reads hour nine meeting.

HARSTEEN

Alright, fine. Everybody wants a piece of me, Debra.

SFX: DOOR SLIDING OPEN.

HARSTEEN (CONT'D)

Good morning! Am I late? So sorry if I am. It's non stop fun here at Earth Portal. What can I do for you today?

CASPAR

I'm sorry?

HARSTEEN

What can I do for you today? I apologize I'm not prepared for this meeting, whatever it is, I didn't realize you were on my schedule until just now. Are you pitching something?

CASPAR

Uh... Yes. Yes that's why I'm here.

HARSTEEN

Great. Go ahead.

CASPAR

Go ahead with?

HARSTEEN

Your pitch, let's hear it.

CASPAR

What am I pitching?

HARSTEEN

Sweetie. How did you get this meeting?

CASPAR

Honestly, I'm not sure.

HARSTEEN

Alright, this meeting is obviously some sort of glitch in the system. I apologize for wasting my time. Debra! Can you escort whoever this is out of my office please?

CASPAR

Wait, I'm sorry. I'm just a little confused.

HARSTEEN

You and me both, Pal.

CASPAR

I'm from Earth. I'm a little overwhelmed by all this.

SFX: DOOR SLIDES OPEN.

ASSISTANT BOT

Please follow me.

HARSTEEN

What did you say?

CASPAR

I'm from Earth. I'm still getting used to all this crazy space stuff. I mean, until last week I didn't even know there were aliens.

HARSTEEN

Is this a joke?

CASPAR

I'm sorry?

ASSISTANT BOT

Please follow me.

HARSTEEN

Never mind, Debra.

SFX: DOOR SLIDING SHUT.

HARSTEEN (CONT'D)

You're really an Earthling?

CASPAR

I am.

HARSTEEN

So if I gave you a cup of coffee, it WOULDN'T kill you?

CASPAR

Nope.

SFX: BEEPS. A COFFEE CUP FILLING UP. COFFE CUP BEING SET ON TABLE.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

I'm supposed to drink this, I'm assuming?

HARSTEEN

Please.

SFX: SIPPING.

CASPAR

Still here.

HARSTEEN

Well, look at you.

CASPAR

What do you mean?

HARSTEEN

I'm sorry I've... I've never met an Earthling before.

CASPAR

I'm jealous.

HARSTEEN

How'd you get off world?

CASPAR

Is it really that hard?

HARSTEEN

It is for Earthlings.

CASPAR

Right. I uh... I made a deal. I made a deal with the Ted Empire.

HARSTEEN

Really? We offered you a deal?

CASPAR

Yes. Because I invented something.

HARSTEEN

You did?

CASPAR

And they didn't want Earthlings to have it so they offered me a deal.

HARSTEEN

What was the deal?

CASPAR

One-way trip to space. And... And a meeting with you.

HARSTEEN

Oh! I see. A top secret thing. No wonder I didn't know about this meeting.

CASPAR

Yes, sorry about that.

HARSTEEN

What'd you invent?

CASPAR

A... flying... car?

HARSTEEN

Oh yeah. We'd never let you have one of those.

CASPAR

Right? I mean, why though?

HARSTEEN

Well, I'm not in the Earth monitoring department but our approach to scientific advancements on Earth is always: when science advances, make sure it's also disappointing. We can't just let you have flying cars, it would be too much fun. We CAN let you have the airline industry, which takes the majesty of flight and turns it into a really miserable experience.

CASPAR

I see.

HARSTEEN

The misery of Earthlings is really our bread and butter here at Earth Portal.

CASPAR

And what do you do here?

HARSTEEN

Right. Forgive me, I forget you're starting from scratch. Welcome to Earth Portal, the number one entertainment portal in The Triad. Throughout three galaxies, the number one source of entertainment is your home planet.

CASPAR

You watch our television shows?

HARSTEEN

Well, don't get me wrong, your television shows aren't that bad. But none of them really come close the true nuclear-grade idiocy that you folks get up to down there.

CASPAR

That's hard to argue with!

HARSTEEN

You know what? It's all becoming clear to me now. I have been begging to have an Earthling on staff here at Earth Portal and it looks like my begging has paid off! They've sent me an Earthling!

CASPAR

Here I am!

HARSTEEN

I have to say. Big fan. I love your planet. I love how on-fire everything is all the time.

CASPAR

Everything?

HARSTEEN

And I've really been watching, okay? I'm not a casual viewer, I've been watching since the "Tom Cruise on Oprah's Couch" days.

CASPAR

Tom cruise on Oprah's couch, was that you guys?

HARSTEEN

Oh, Tom Cruise is all us, baby. You think an Earthling would act that way?

SFX: ALARMS BLARING.

HARSTEEN (CONT'D)

Oh, great. What is this now? Debra!

SFX: DOOR SLIDES OPEN.

ASSISTANT BOT

Hello boss. There is a high security risk asset entering the building for an exclusive interview. Your presence is required in the lobby.

HARSTEEN

Ooh. Haven't had one of these for a while.

CASPAR

What's happening?

HARSTEEN

Exclusive interview. We're going to have to go into lock down for a while, we'll finish this up later. Get comfortable.

SFX: DOOR SLIDING SHUT.

CASPAR

Ex? Ex are you there?

THE EX

(In earpiece.)
Yeah, I'm here.

CASPAR

Are you in position?

THE EX

(In earpiece.)
I mean, I guess so? I thought a rescue attempt would involve more planning than this.

CASPAR

Yeah, I don't really appreciate the free-jazz improv version of this rescue attempt either but were we really expecting a long thought out plan from Even Older Leif?

THE EX

(In earpiece.)
Are you in position?

CASPAR

Yeah, sure. I don't know what I do next though. He just said he made me a fake appointment with some guy. Now there's alarms going off and the guy left. And the door's locked. What was your job?

SFX: THE EX SIGHS.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

What?

THE EX

Take out the guards.

CASPAR

Okay. That sounds easy, what's the problem?

THE EX

I've been doing a lot of violence, Caspar.

CASPAR

Yeah, I know.

THE EX

So, I don't really like it.

CASPAR

You don't? You're incredibly good at it, though.

THE EX

I know.

CASPAR

So, stop being good at it and people won't ask you to do it anymore. Nobody's asking me to take out the guards.

THE EX

I know.

CASPAR

I'm the "locked in a room for no reason" guy. How many guards are there?

THE EX

Looks like just two.

CASPAR

Should be fine. Try and go easy on them.

THE EX

Fine. When do I do it?

CASPAR

He said to wait for the power to go out, but I don't know how that's happening.

THE EX

Maybe I can convince them to lay down their arms peacefully, do you think that'll work?

CASPAR

Sure, people lay down their arms peacefully all the time.

THE EX

Okay.

CASPAR

You know what happens before they lay down their arms peacefully?

THE EX

What?

CASPAR

TONS of violence.

THE EX

Goddamnit.

CASPAR

Unless you're the French, am I right everybody?!

THE EX

Seriously, a French joke?

CASPAR

Always make fun of the French, they're the last acceptable target.

SFX: THE LOBBY. ALARMS STILL BLARING. SEVERAL TEDBOTS MARCH INTO POSITION.

HARSTEEN

Alright everyone, looking good, looking very formidable. Let's remember, this man is very dangerous, any false moves and just go ahead and shoot him, no complaints from me.

SFX: CARGO BAY DOORS OPENING. A MAN IN CHAINS SLOWLY APPROACHES.

HARSTEEN (CONT'D)

Well, well, well. Leif of Midnight Burger. Of all the gin joints in all the world.

EVEN OLDER LEIF
Earth Portal. You know, I've had dreams about this place.

HARSTEEN
Is that right?

EVEN OLDER LEIF
Of course, in my dreams I'm blowing it up.

HARSTEEN
Leif, as a condition of your surrender you will be granted one interview, live on Earth Portal. After which you will be put into deep-cold storage, your sentence in deep-cold storage will be open ended. You may never be unfrozen. Do you understand these terms?

EVEN OLDER LEIF
Sure do.

HARSTEEN
Well, then. Are you ready for your close-up?

EVEN OLDER LEIF
Oh yeah. It's showtime.

THE EX
I mean, what am I doing with myself?

CASPAR
(In earpiece.)
Are we seriously doing this right now?

THE EX
I'm sorry, are you busy?

CASPAR
... No.

THE EX
What am I doing?

CASPAR
Can you narrow that down for me a little?

THE EX
I don't know. I mean, look at me. I'm indestructible and incredibly powerful, most of the time I can travel through time and space. I'm probably immortal.

CASPAR
True.

THE EX
And not to be that girl, but I look great while I'm
doing it too.

CASPAR
These are all true things.

THE EX
So what the hell am I doing?

CASPAR
I'm sorry, are you asking for a raise or something?

THE EX
No I'm just saying-

CASPAR
Wait.

SFX: SCRATCHING NOISES AT THE DOOR.

THE EX
(In earpiece.)
What is it?

CASPAR
Someone's trying to open my door.

THE EX
Is it Leif?

CASPAR
I don't know. Hang on. Hello?

SFX: DOOR SLIDING OPEN. ROBOT ARM WAVING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
What the fuck?

THE EX
What is it?

CASPAR
It's Leif's robot arm.

HARSTEEN
So, tell me. How'd you lose an arm?

EVEN OLDER LEIF
Lost it in a fire fight in the Justine Burbank
system.

HARSTEEN
Ooh, rough territory in Justine Burbank.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

The roughest. This was before the embargo, too.

HARSTEEN

Most people would get a prosthetic or a synthetic.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Not me. I prefer to keep it au natruale.

HARSTEEN

You're much older than we expected. Our reports don't have you this old and they don't have you with one arm.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You saying I'm an imposter?

HARSTEEN

Would you consent to a DNA scan?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Knock yourself out.

VOICE

Scanning DNA.

SFX: DNA SCANNER.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Confirmed. High Value Target 6365. Leif of Midnight Burger. Known aliases: Leafy, Leif-a-reno, The Leif-miester, Jerry. Wanted for 359 violations of galactic and systemic laws. Warning: target highly adept at technological improvisation and deception. Deep connections to organized crime and terrorist organizations throughout The Triad. Loves cats.

HARSTEEN

That's quite a rap sheet. Hearing that, one might think that you turning yourself in is part of some sort of plan.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I admit there's a frog and the scorpion vibe to all of this, but what are you going to do? Turn me away?

HARSTEEN

I suppose we could.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

No you couldn't. It's against policy. And you and I both know that the Teds follow the rules.

HARSTEEN

Nothing wrong with following the rules. The Ted Empire is the most powerful force in The Triad because we follow the rules.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Sounds like you've got some "post hoc ergo propter hoc" problems there, Buddy.

HARSTEEN

Excuse me?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

After it, therefore because of it. Everybody follows the rules and the Ted Empire flourishes and you all say "Well, good thing we followed the rules." Completely overlooking the fact that the Ted Empire really flourishes because of the draconian stranglehold it's had on The Triad for generations. But that's classic empire building for you: Law and order at home, total chaos everywhere else.

SFX: LEIF'S ARM SCURRYING DOWN A HALLWAY.

THE EX

(In earpiece.)

So, his robot arm is autonomous, or something?

CASPAR

It keeps scurrying down the hall and then gesturing for me to follow, so I guess so.

THE EX

Where are you going?

CASPAR

I don't know, I don't speak "arm". Where are all the guards?

THE EX

I think I'm seeing Leif's plan coming together. There's a monitor up here. I can see him in the lobby. He surrendered to the Teds and he's giving a live interview. All the guards are on him except for the two up here. He's the distraction.

CASPAR

Well, how are we going to save him after we save her?

THE EX

I don't know dude. Trust the plan, I guess.

CASPAR

Whatever.

THE EX

If he's the distraction and I'm getting BertBert, I guess that makes you the "shut off the power" guy.

CASPAR

I guess so. I hope the arm knows where it's going.

THE EX

Can we get back to me for a second?

CASPAR

Ex, are you serious?

THE EX

I'm kind of in crisis here.

CASPAR

Ex, I cannot believe you are doing some sort of "Eat, Pray, Love" bullshit while we're in the middle a dramatic rescue mission.

THE EX

Y'know there are like 19 movies about an android trying to become human and you picked a shitty Julia Roberts movie. Sexist much?

CASPAR

I'm sorry, I can't believe you're doing some sort of "Ex Machina" bullshit while we're in the middle of a dramatic rescue mission. Oh hey, "EX" Machina. Look at that.

THE EX

Very funny.

CASPAR

Hang on.

SFX: LEIF'S ARM JUMPING UP AN DOWN.

THE EX

What is it?

CASPAR

Goddamnit the arm is pointing to an air duct. Seriously? We really have to go in there? There's seriously no other way?

THE EX

Are you talking to Leif's arm now?

CASPAR

I am. Let's never speak of this again.

HARSTEEN

So I know what we're supposed to be doing right now is talking about what a dangerous criminal you are, but can we dish about Earth for a minute?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Why not?

HARSTEEN

I'm a big fan. I was raised on Earth Portal.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh yeah? What was your first? The show the really hooked you?

HARSTEEN

Without a doubt: Florida.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh yeah. Great stuff.

HARSTEEN

Is it really like that? It seems fake.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It definitely seems fake, but that's all real. From the mesh t-shirts to the meth labs.

HARSTEEN

Amazing.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You've got some stuff on Earth that's completely manufactured by the Teds: Competitive Yacht racing, The Eurovision Song Contest, John Mayer. But Florida is 100% grade A Earth shit.

HARSTEEN

It's funny you mention that. To hear you tell it, you turned to a life of crime after you discovered that that Teds were deliberately manipulating events on Earth, is that right?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

No, that's not quite right.

HARSTEEN

Explain.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I discovered that you people were deliberately keeping Earth a hot mess because it made us more entertaining for the rest of The Triad. Not a good day for your boy. My first reaction was "Hey. I gotta tell people. I gotta let them know it's all a sham!" That's when it hit me.

HARSTEEN

That everybody already knew.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

That's right. The only one who wasn't in on the joke was me. Three galaxies not caring that one planet was being put through hell on purpose. To everyone out there, the most important thing was to have something to watch at the end of the day. I didn't just start hating the Ted Empire on that day. I started hating everybody. We were suffering and nobody cared. Actually, I take that back. One person cared.

SFX: LEIF'S ARM MAKING IT'S WAY DOWN AN AIR DUCT WITH CASPAR FOLLOWING.

CASPAR

You know, I'm trying to be more of a yes person these days, but maybe venturing into the heart of darkness to save an old friend of Even Older Leif is a bit beyond the pale.

THE EX

(In earpiece.)

Oh, I'm sorry. Are you discussing your feelings during a rescue attempt? I thought we weren't supposed to do that?

CASPAR

Oh, Goddamnit. You know what, fine. We're stopping. Hey, Lefty. Hold up for a minute we have to help Ex with her identity crisis.

SFX: LEIF'S ARM STOPS.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

Oh shit, it actually listened. What a team player. Okay. Ex. That's the problem?

THE EX

... Well now you've put me on the spot, I can't remember what I was going to say.

CASPAR

Oh my God.

THE EX

No, I remember... Humans are always at war. With death, with helplessness, with loneliness. And it's when you go to war that you find yourselves. I can't die. I can't imagine a situation where I would be helpless. I... I may be the most powerful person ever created. That can't be meaningless.

CASPAR

Well... It is. It is meaningless. Power is meaningless. People are born into amazing amounts of power for no reason all the time. They convince themselves that power is purpose, but it's not. It's just power. So they use their power to try and get even more power but that's not purpose, that's just a game of Hungry Hungry Motherfucking Hippos. Nothing is born with meaning. Nothing. You have to give it meaning.

THE EX

How do I do that?

CASPAR

Fuck if I know. Look, how about for now it's this: Someone's in trouble. Let's go get them.

THE EX

Okay. That'll work for now. Go shut off the power so I can beat the shit out of these guards.

CASPAR

Okay. Lead on, Robot Arm!

HARSTEEN

What have you got against the Ted Empire, Leif? I mean I know you just said, you hate everybody, but let's be honest, you save a lot of your ire for our planet, don't you?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh yeah. You guys are the worst.

HARSTEEN

See, but I'm looking around. I'm seeing planets connected to each other in ways they never would be without the TedTubes. We made interstellar travel possible. We paved the roads between planets, we connected three galaxies for trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

"Trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange." You know every Ted says that line when you pull on their string.

HARSTEEN

Am I wrong?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You know what. Since this is my last hoorah I'll admit this to you right now: the Ted Empire is not all bad.

HARSTEEN

Breaking news.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Interstellar travel is great. I've spent my life among those stars, sneaking through one of your warp gates with a cheat code. Look at in the right light, my life wouldn't have been possible without The Ted Empire.

HARSTEEN

You're welcome.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

But here's where it all comes crashing down. Nothing is ever one thing. The Teds connected three galaxies to each other. People stopped wondering if they were alone in the universe. You gave people freedom. And the only price of freedom was slavery. The slavery of debt, the slavery of scarcity, the slavery of monopoly.

HARSTEEN

Well maybe we should just pack up our warp gates and go home then?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You can't. You and I both know there's no natural resources left on your home planet. All these star systems where you've got your thumb on the scale, I wonder if they have any idea that you need them as much as they need you? I wonder if they know that now, because you idiots decided to broadcast a live interview on your most popular entertainment channel.

HARSTEEN

You really think people are going to listen to a criminal like you?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh, hell yeah. People love criminals.

CASPAR

Okay, this is going to sound crazy but I think I'm beginning to understand what the arm is saying.

THE EX
(in earpiece.)
What's it saying?

CASPAR
Well, we're in some sort of control room. There's
to levers to pull, I think I'm supposed to pull one
and Leif's arm pulls the other.

SFX: ARM JUMPING UP AND DOWN.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
And now it's jumping up and down like I just won a
round of Pictionary, I'm taking that as
confirmation.

THE EX
Okay, cool. Let's do this.

CASPAR
Are you in position?

THE EX
Caspar, I've been in position this whole time.

CASPAR
I'm just checking. Okay, let's do this, Leif's Arm.
3...2...1... Lights out, Ted Empire.

SFX: TWO LEVERS BEING THROWN AND THE ENTIRE BUILDING POWERING
DOWN. AN ALARM STARTS GOING OFF.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
Wow. That is serious darkness. Ex, how's it coming?

SFX: THE SOUND OF THE EX BEATING THE CRAP OUT OF TWO TEDBOTS
IN CASPAR'S EARPIECE.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
Is that-

SFX: MORE SOUNDS OF ROBOT BEATING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
Are we-

SFX: JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE ROBOT BEATING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)
How are we doing?

THE EX
(In earpiece.)
We're good.

CASPAR

Okay!

THE EX

I'm assuming she's being held behind these big doors. Looks like it's can opener time.

CASPAR

How can you see anything, it's pitch black?

THE EX

Stop being surprised that I'm an android.

CASPAR

Sorry. I hope Leif is doing okay.

HARSTEEN

Hello? Hello can we get the auxiliary power on please? I can't see a thing.

SFX: FLOOD LIGHTS CLICKING ON.

VOICE

Auxiliary power activated.

HARSTEEN

... Where is Leif?

SFX: PLASMA RIFLE POWERING UP.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Showtime.

HARSTEEN

He's got a gun!!

SFX: IN CASPAR'S EARPIECE, THE SOUND OF LEIF YELLING AND SHOWERING THE ENTIRE LOBBY WITH GUNFIRE.

CASPAR

Okay, Leif's earpiece is back on and he's apparently making a John Woo film in the lobby.

SFX: RHYTHMIC BEEPING.

THE EX

Yeah, I can hear.

CASPAR

(In earpiece.)
Where are you?

THE EX

I found her. I mean, I found a woman with a bunch of tubes sticking out of her so I either found her or the Bride of Frankenstein.

SFX: HIGH SPEED SCROLLING THROUGH SEVERAL PAGES ON A COMPUTER SCREEN.

CASPAR

(In earpiece.)

Well unplug her and and throw her over your shoulder. Looks like Leif's arm is taking me to the roof, I guess that's our exit strategy.

THE EX

Yeah, I don't think I should do that.

CASPAR

Why not?

THE EX

Because I'm reading the instructions.

CASPAR

Not a lot of time here, Ex.

THE EX

It's okay, it's only a thousand pages.

SFX: SCROLLING STOPS.

THE EX (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm done. We have a problem.

CASPAR

What?

THE EX

She should've woken up when we cut the power. She's still unconscious.

CASPAR

What does that mean?

THE EX

It means she doesn't want to come out of it.

CASPAR

Well, tough shit, bring her anyway.

THE EX

I can't, she has to bring herself out or she could have permanent brain damage.

CASPAR

Why?

THE EX

I don't know, it says so in the instructions.

CASPAR

Well then what the hell are we supposed to do?

THE EX

I have an idea, but it's a little wacky.

CASPAR

All of our lives are in danger so it's a great time for something wacky.

THE EX

I'm going to go inside her head.

CASPAR

You can go inside her head?

THE EX

I've been inside your head more times than you've been inside a bathroom, of course I can.

CASPAR

What are you going to do in there?

THE EX

I don't know. Pull the fire alarm?

CASPAR

Fine. If this is our only move then here we go. I'll be up on the roof with Leif's arm. Meet us there.

THE EX

Okay.

CASPAR

Minds can me messy places, Ex. Don't get stuck in there.

THE EX

Don't worry about me... Okay... Knock knock, BertBert. Anybody home?

SFX: EVERYTHING GOES SILENT. WE HEAR THE FAINT SOUNDS OF A TELEVISION.

THE EX (CONT'D)

Hello?

SFX: THE EX WALKS DOWN A HALLWAY. THE TELEVISION GROWS LOUDER. WE HEAR LIQUOR BEING POURED ONTO ICE.

THE EX (CONT'D)
BertBert?

BERTBERT
Who are you?

THE EX
I'm Ex.

BERTBERT
What are you doing here?

THE EX
I'm here to rescue you.

BERTBERT
I find that hard to believe.

THE EX
Why is that?

BERTBERT
Because we're in my head, and that's not where rescue missions happen.

THE EX
That's a fair point.

BERTBERT
So you're a figment of my imagination or some new torture device from The Teds. That's what you are.

THE EX
I promise I'm not that.

BERTBERT
Oh yeah? Dazzle me with your backstory, then. What are you?

THE EX
Hm.

BERTBERT
What?

THE EX
I've never really had to explain what I am to someone, and I'm realizing now how ridiculous it sounds.

BERTBERT

Really? Well now you have to tell me.

THE EX

Okay. I'm an android that can crawl inside people's heads.

BERTBERT

Really? Well that doesn't sound THAT ridiculous.

THE EX

I'm also indestructible and can travel through time and space.

BERTBERT

Okay, that's more ridiculous.

THE EX

I was created by someone's ex-wife to track her husband down and confront him about leaving her.

BERTBERT

Okay, yes, that does sound ridiculous.

THE EX

See?

BERTBERT

Did you ever find him?

THE EX

Many times, yes.

BERTBERT

And you are somehow here to rescue me.

THE EX

Which I guess makes it sound even more ridiculous.

BERTBERT

Yep.

THE EX

I really am though.

BERTBERT

How are you going to rescue me?

THE EX

I don't actually know. I kind of just jumped into your brain, I'm making it up as I go along.

BERTBERT

Okay. Good luck.

THE EX

Where are we right now? Is this your childhood home or something?

BERTBERT

We're in a scene from a movie.

THE EX

What movie?

BERTBERT

Broadcast News. It's an Earth movie.

THE EX

That feels kind of random.

BERTBERT

It was the first Earth movie I ever saw. It made me want to be a journalist. In this scene, a very qualified journalist is sent home during breaking news because they don't look good on camera. So they have to sit on their couch, in their robe, drinking, while the world goes on without them. I think because I'm in this weird purgatory, this is how my brain interprets it. The most depressing scene from my favorite movie. Drink?

THE EX

No thanks.

BERTBERT

More for me, then.

THE EX

BertBert, you're not actually in a scene from your favorite movie. You're a prisoner of the Teds. They're using you to spout propaganda all over the place.

BERTBERT

Yeah, I know.

THE EX

So... So that's bad.

BERTBERT

Sure sounds bad.

THE EX

So... Let's get out of here.

BERTBERT

Why?

THE EX

So you can... not be a prisoner anymore, it's weird that I have to explain this.

BERTBERT

Completely overlooking the fact that you have no idea how to get me out of here. What's the point?

THE EX

Freedom is good. Also weird explaining that.

BERTBERT

There's no freedom out there. I fought against the Teds my whole life, look where it got me. Sounds like a frying pan into the fire situation to me.

THE EX

You know I heard one of your old broadcasts. You sounded like a very passionate person, not a "drinking in your robe on the couch" person.

BERTBERT

"Drinking in your robe on the couch" comes for us all one day, kiddo.

THE EX

You know, things are changing outside your head. People are starting to rebel against the Teds. There's this broadcast called The Undersignal where they talk about it.

BERTBERT

The Undersignal has been around since I was a baby. They never make any difference. It's the most efficient form of fascism out there. People can say whatever they want and it doesn't make a difference.

THE EX

You know, I would kill for the sense of purpose you used to have. I've been having a hard time finding that for myself.

BERTBERT

It's overrated. Trust me. People let you down. Civilizations let you down. Pretty soon you find yourself traveling through a beautiful universe and all you feel is disappointment. It's better in here. At least I don't have to face my failures in here. I can just sit here on the couch. Like Charles Grodin in Broadcast News.

THE EX

Okay. I'm going to go with some tough love now,
BertBert.

BERTBERT

Uh oh. I doubt you can make it any worse for me.

THE EX

I have a really unfortunate skill.

BERTBERT

Juggling?

THE EX

You may prefer being in stuck in here. But let's
see if you prefer being stuck in here with your
most significant Ex-Boyfriend.

BERTBERT

What?

SFX: THE EX TRANSFORMS.

LEIF

Whoa. Really?

BERTBERT

Leif?

LEIF

Oh! "Old friend". I get it now.

SFX: BOTTLE SMASHING AGAINST THE WALL.

LEIF (CONT'D)

WHOA!

BERTBERT

You fucking bastard! My most significant Ex?!

SFX: GLASS HITTING THE WALL.

LEIF

Jesus!

BERTBERT

We were never even in a relationship!

LEIF

Well tell that to your brain because here I am!

BERTBERT

Fine! Hold still!

SFX: SOMETHING ELSE BEING THROWN AGAINST THE WALL.

LEIF

Berts, calm down!

BERTBERT

I hate it when you call me "Berts"!

SFX: YET ANOTHER THING THROWN.

LEIF

Stop throwing things!

BERTBERT

There is nothing more infuriating than a good person who refuses to be good!

LEIF

So you're saying I'm a good person.

BERTBERT

Motherfucker!

SFX: ANOTHER THING.

LEIF

Berts! Listen to me! You've got to get out of here, you owe it to everybody in the Triad.

BERTBERT

Don't you lecture me about responsibilities!

LEIF

Look around. Look at this place, this isn't where you belong.

BERTBERT

"Nobody belongs anywhere", that's what you always said. "Corks in the ocean just bobbing around, going with the flow." That was you. Tell me more about where I belong!

LEIF

I was wrong, Berts. I found a place where I belong. It feels weird to say it, but it's true. Because of that I can't leave you someplace where you don't belong.

BERTBERT

I don't belong out there. Everything's moved on without me.

LEIF

That's bullshit and you know it.

BERTBERT

Years of banging my head against the wall and for what? They turned me into a fucking Weather Girl.

LEIF

BertBert, I know it sucks. Look, forget about all that. Forget about the Teds, forget about The Triad, forget about all of it. The number one reason you need to get out of here is this... You've become your worst nightmare: Me.

BERTBERT

... Oh God.

LEIF

That's right, soak it in.

BERTBERT

What the fuck?

LEIF

Any second now you're going to start collecting baseball cards.

BERTBERT

I have to get out of here.

LEIF

There we go.

BERTBERT

How do I get out of here!?

LEIF

Honestly...

SFX: LEIF TRANSFORMS INTO THE EX.

THE EX

I think you just did.

SFX: THE ROOF OF THE EARTH PORTAL BUILDING.

CASPAR

Leif, how's it going down there?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

(In earpiece.)

Ted Empire, I am your waiter! It is time to pay the check! I have added gratuity!

CASPAR

... Okay... Y'know what, Leif's Arm? I know the Teds are the bad guys, but looking out over this metropolis I have to say, they have amazing city planning skills, I mean, look at the flow of traffic, it's beautiful.

SFX: ROOF DOOR BEING RIPPED OFF THE HINGES.

THE EX

Caspar!

CASPAR

Yeah, we're up here!

THE EX

I've got her!

CASPAR

Such an MVP, Ex.

BERTBERT

I don't feel good at all.

THE EX

How are we getting out of here?

CASPAR

I don't know, Leif's arm just brought me up to the roof.

THE EX

Why?

SFX: THE NANCY SINATRA DE-CLOAKING.

CASPAR

Oh. Look at that. A ship.

BERTBERT

I know that ship. I hate that ship.

CASPAR

Rescuees can't be choosers, BertBert. Everybody on board.

SFX: THEY RUN UP THE GANG PLANK AND INTO THE SHIP.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

I cannot believe we're actually about to pull this off.

THE EX

Wait, how are we getting Leif?

BERTBERT

Leif's here?

CASPAR

Not really.

THE EX

We can't leave without him.

BERTBERT

Gonna vomit...

CASPAR

Bathroom's around the corner.

SFX: BERTBERT RUNS AROUND THE CORNER. NANCY SINATRA LIFTS OFF FROM THE ROOF.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

What's her deal?

THE EX

Oh my God, there's like a whole thing going on between them.

CASPAR

Oh my God, seriously?

THE EX

Wait, where are we going?

CASPAR

I don't know, The Arm's driving.

SFX: THRUSTERS FIRING.

CASPAR (CONT'D)

WHOA!

SFX: THE LOBBY OF EARTH PORTAL. CIRCUITS BUZZ AND THINGS ARE ON FIRE. EVEN OLDER LEIF IS OUT OF BREATH AS HE THROWS HIS EMPTY GUN TO THE GROUND.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Now that was cathartic. This place looks much better when it's full of holes.

HARSTEEN

(Behind a barricade.)
You're out of ammunition, Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Yeah. All good things come to an end.

HARSTEEN

So, let's review. What have you accomplished here today other than destroying our lobby?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I was never one for racking up accomplishments. Just experiences. And this was one hell of an experience.

HARSTEEN

I'm glad we could oblige. Any last words before you're frozen in a block of chemical ice?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I think I'll pass on deep-cold storage, if you don't mind... These boots were made for walkin'.

SFX: THE NANCY SINATRA COMES CRASHING THROUGH THE LOBBY. TOTAL CHAOS. DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

CASPAR

Is this the drive through?

THE EX

Leif, let's go!

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Looks like my ride's here. Better luck next time, Teds. Just a parting thought: all empires last roughly 250 years. The Ted Empire built its first warp gate 248 years ago. These next two years are gonna be wild!

SFX: THRUSTERS FIRE AND THE NANCY SINATRA TAKES OFF INTO THE SKY.

HARSTEEN

Oh my goodness. That. Is. FanTAStic television! Alright people, I want to see everyone's footage in the editing bay. Ratings gold, baby!

SFX: THE HUM OF THE NANCY SINATRA.

THE EX

He was crawling though the air ducts with your arm!

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Amazing.

CASPAR

We were a good team, the arm and I. Leif, I don't even know who's running the show anymore. Is it you or the arm?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I don't even know myself.

THE EX

So I fell ass backwards into a whole lot of backstory when I was in BertBert's head, Leif. What's the hot goss? Who was BertBert?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It's a long and complicated story.

CASPAR

I've got time.

THE EX

I'm immortal, he's 173 years old, we've got all the time in the world.

CASPAR

Oh, hey, BertBert.

BERTBERT

I'm done throwing up now.

CASPAR

Congratulations.

BERTBERT

Who the fuck are you people?

CASPAR

Right. Well, um, we run a diner.

BERTBERT

What?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Hard to know where to start with this one.

BERTBERT

You're not Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Uh...

BERTBERT

This is Leif's ship but you're not Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I'm his dad.

BERTBERT

His dad?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Leif was a little occupied so he gave me the keys to his ship and me and my crew came and got you.

BERTBERT

Leif's parents run a food co-op in Eureka, California.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Shit. I forgot about that memory of yours.

BERTBERT

My what?

CASPAR

You know what? Let's just embrace some honesty here. All we're doing now is waiting around for a signal from the diner so let's all gather around the campfire and share some stories.

SFX: TERMINAL BEEPS.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Hang on. Avast, I see the great white whale.

CASPAR

Is it the diner?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

We found it.

THE EX

That's great!

BERTBERT

What are we talking about?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Outer rim of Triangulum, weird. There's nothing out there.

CASPAR

Doesn't matter, can we get there in time?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It's going to be tight but we can make it.

BERTBERT

Did you say, outer rim of Triangulum?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Yeah.

BERTBERT

Let me see... I know where that is.

THE EX

What's out there?

BERTBERT

Wind chimes.

CASPAR

Wind chimes?

BERTBERT

Where's your comms terminal?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It's-

BERTBERT

Never mind, I know where it is.

CASPAR

What are you doing?

SFX: VERY FAST TYPING.

BERTBERT

Filing some breaking fucking news. Leif, or whoever you are, get us to the outer rim of Triangulum. The rest of you start talking.

CASPAR

I can't believe we actually found it.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Alright, then. Who's in the mood for a Monte Cristo?

SFX: THE NANCY SINATRA FIRES HER THRUSTERS.

THE END