

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: Interview with the Empire or Whatever Happened to BertBert?

By Joe Fisher

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SFX: RECORDING DEVICE CLICKS ON.

BERTBERT

Okay, this is BertBert, I'll start this the way I always do. These recordings are not for public release, they are for my personal notes and for my edification only. Which means, if you're hearing this you are committing some sort of crime or something has happened to me, hopefully the former.

SFX: DOOR SLIDES OPEN.

TED

Hello.

BERTBERT

I'm sorry, who are you?

TED

You requested an interview?

BERTBERT

From someone in the Ted Tube division, I've never seen you before.

TED

Well, I'm what you're getting. Would you like to cancel?

BERTBERT

... No, I appreciate you speaking with me. Whoever you are.

TED

Uh-huh.

BERTBERT

Won't take long, I promise.

TED

Okay.

BERTBERT

So I guess my first question is, who are you?

TED

I'm afraid that's classified.

BERTBERT

Seriously? You guys are amazing.

TED

I apologize for the inconvenience. My personal classification is top secret.

BERTBERT

They sent a classified officer to talk to me so that I couldn't quote anyone.

TED

That's correct. That reminds me, you're not recording this are you?

BERTBERT

Of course not.

TED

Great. So you're not recording and you can't directly quote me because you don't know who I am. I feel like this is going to be a very productive interview.

BERTBERT

I feel like this isn't going to be an interview at all.

TED

This isn't my division. I had to take two separate shuttles to get here and it's a massive waste of my time. I decided it should be a massive waste of time for you as well.

BERTBERT

This is ridiculous.

TED

I know, right? All of the information you will get in this interview will be totally useless, but why don't we do the interview anyway? Just for fun?

BERTBERT

Oh, for fucks sake. Fine. My questions basically center on the Ted Tube system and specifically a few systems that are currently under development.

TED

The Ted Tube system, you're of course referring to the series of warp gates throughout the system, created by us.

BERTBERT

That's right.

TED  
You got to this interview by taking a Ted Tube is that correct?

BERTBERT  
Yes, it was very convenient.

TED  
How was the ride?

BERTBERT  
Smooth as silk.

TED  
Great. It's an amazing thing isn't it? Without these warp gates we'd all still be stuck on our home worlds.

BERTBERT  
And the Ted Empire wouldn't control anything, isn't that right?

TED  
I'm sorry?

BERTBERT  
That's something that comes along with the Ted Tubes: the Ted Empire controlling all of the travel in three galaxies?

TED  
Somebody's got to do it.

BERTBERT  
Assuming that's true, that somebody has to do it, CAN anyone do it?

TED  
What do you mean?

BERTBERT  
The technology is completely owned by the Ted Empire. Other planets can't develop their own warp gate technology, can they?

TED  
They're certainly welcome to try, but that's a lot of resources and a lot of research time. Meanwhile our warp gates are here right now. So why bother?

BERTBERT  
You wouldn't feel a bit uncomfortable if a foreign power was controlling your commerce?

TED

I'd feel uncomfortable if it wasn't The Ted Empire controlling it, but guess what? It is.

BERTBERT

So your stranglehold on the system-

TED

Whoa whoa whoa. Stranglehold?

BERTBERT

Excuse me. Your... complete control of intergalactic travel shouldn't be alarming because it's your empire that's doing it and the Ted Empire is... what? Nice?

TED

We have a shared concern with every planet in the three systems.

BERTBERT

Shared concern, that's the term your going with?

TED

We are working for every planet in The Triad. We are here to help them achieve their dreams as a people.

BERTBERT

For a hefty price, right?

TED

Well, yes. The Teds expend a lot of resources creating this intergalactic system, it's only fair that planets should pay their share of the burden.

BERTBERT

Some planets reportedly have to give up two-thirds of their exploitable resources in order to become a member of the Ted Tube network.

TED

That number sounds a little high to me. But look, think of the opportunity it opens you up to when you become a member of this network. You can now trade with any other member planet in the entire system.

BERTBERT

Trade with what? You just gave up two-thirds of your resources.

TED

...

BERTBERT

Let me move on-

TED

What's your home planet again?

BERTBERT

I'm sorry?

TED

Where are you from?

BERTBERT

Sigius.

TED

Right. Of course. You know we've been very tolerant of Sigius and its dedication to journalistic integrity, don't you think?

BERTBERT

Tolerant?

TED

When was the last time someone from your planet had anything nice to say about The Ted Empire?

BERTBERT

I don't know, when was the last time you did something nice?

TED

You're very critical of The Teds but your planet is also a member of the Ted Tube Network.

BERTBERT

That's true. Luckily we could afford it.

TED

And you have made a killing selling your geo-thermal technology to several planets, am I right? The Ted Empire has been vary good for your people.

BERTBERT

You seem to imply that we should somehow be compliant to the Ted Empire.

TED

A little gratitude wouldn't hurt.

BERTBERT

Why do you need our gratitude when we've paid your exorbitant fees?

TED  
Can we move on with the questions, please?

BERTBERT  
Sure. There's been some criticism lately of the Ted Tube network.

TED  
There's always been criticism.

BERTBERT  
The criticism has gotten pretty loud, wouldn't you say?

TED  
Loud criticism is something we can handle.

BERTBERT  
A lot of people travel though your network of warp gates without even knowing how they work, isn't that right?

TED  
"Isn't that right?" Is a great way to turn a statement into a question, isn't that right?

BERTBERT  
We conducted a poll on our planet and found that 76% of responders don't know how your gates work.

TED  
This information is available to anyone.

BERTBERT  
When they're told that you have to destroy an entire solar system to make one, their opinion of the Ted Tube system drops precipitously-

TED  
We don't destroy a solar system.

BERTBERT  
How would you describe it?

TED  
What we're doing is creating a stable wormhole. And that requires a lot of energy. There's only one place in the universe where we can get energy like this.

BERTBERT  
You black out an entire star to make one gate.

TED

No, the star remains intact.

BERTBERT

You build a structure around the star, though. You capture the entire star and black out that entire solar system.

TED

Do you have any idea how many stars there are in the universe? We can lose some stars.

BERTBERT

And what happens to the planetary bodies in this solar system?

TED

Okay, can we just stop for a second and marvel at what the Ted Empire has accomplished here? We completely envelope a star and capture its energy. It's beyond imagining.

BERTBERT

It was imagined on Earth several years ago and the Earthlings are a primitive race-

TED

Don't talk to me about Earth, okay? They're all ideas no execution. Anybody can imagine something.

BERTBERT

You just said it was beyond imagining-

TED

What I'm saying is, why can't we rally around this? Why can't we celebrate this idea?

BERTBERT

What happens to the solar systems? You completely cover their star, what happens to the planets in that system?

TED

We take very good care to make sure that any system we mark for development has no sentient life on it.

BERTBERT

Of any kind?

TED

Zero.

BERTBERT

What about simple life forms? Microbial life?



TED

Hey, it's crowded out there. There's a lot of life in these three galaxies, I'm pretty sure we can lose a few microbes and fungus.

BERTBERT

We're losing microbes and fungus and suns all because you decide it's okay.

TED

As we've said before, when a solar system has been flagged for development we do a comprehensive survey of every planet and moon to make sure it doesn't harbor any sentient life. These aren't usable solar systems, they can't be colonized, they're just sitting out there waiting for us to do something with them.

BERTBERT

Let's talk about Billius.

TED

Billius is very exciting. It's a very powerful star, a very rare star.

BERTBERT

And you're going to destroy it.

TED

Again, we don't destroy anything.

BERTBERT

So sorry. You're going to cover it up completely and harness its energy.

TED

Yes.

BERTBERT

I have two separate reports from two separate expeditions saying that there is intelligent life in this system.

TED

We can't listen to reports from every fly by night expedition putting a skiff together to go play scientist.

BERTBERT

These are very well respected scientists.

TED

We disagree. Our process of surveying for alien life is very thorough and we plan on doing a comprehensive sweep of the system before we begin building.

BERTBERT

Will we be allowed to see the data you collect?

TED

...Sure.

BERTBERT

Sure, okay, thanks for that.

TED

Well, this has been fun-

BERTBERT

What are you building outside of Triangulum?

TED

... I'm sorry?

BERTBERT

On the outer rim of Triangulum you're building something. It's not a warp gate, we don't know what it is. I've seen the images, it looks like wind chimes.

TED

...

BERTBERT

...It looks a LOT like wind chimes.

TED

It's not wind chimes.

BERTBERT

Well I sure hope not because there's no wind out there.

TED

...

BERTBERT

I hear it's an experiment with time crystals.

TED

...

BERTBERT

Do you have any idea how dangerous it is to experiment with time crystals?

TED

You're not here about the Ted Tubes at all, are you?

BERTBERT

Oh, no, I am. But I'm multi-tasking. You see, when will I get another chance to speak with anonymous sources within the Ted Empire? That's how I'll be describing you, by the way. "Anonymous sources in the Ted Empire", I'm sure your bosses will love it.

TED

There are no bosses-

BERTBERT

Right, there are no bosses in the Ted Empire, sure, that's what you say but in my experience every Empire who says they're the new world order just turns out to be Genghis Khan with a paint job. Genghis Khan was an Earthling-

TED

Yeah, I know who Genghis Khan was.

BERTBERT

Really? That's interesting. That's pretty obscure Earth knowledge, I'd only expect an Earth Expert to know something like that.

TED

... you know, I just don't understand you people. Do you have any idea how much The Ted Empire has changed things? I guess nobody remembers what it was like before we came along. Three galaxies filled with people looking up at the sky and wondering if anyone was out there. Nobody remembers how lonely all that was. Because the Ted Empire came along and told people they weren't alone. We told people that if they chipped in and played their part, we could transform this entire corner of the universe. And we did. People were able to travel to new planets, new galaxies, it transformed everything. Now look... now all people can do is complain about us. Now all of a sudden every star and every planet is sacred. Progress requires a little destruction, don't you get that?

BERTBERT

I think we all get that. I think what we have a problem with, is your definition of progress.

TED

And what is our definition of progress?

BERTBERT

A whole heck of a lot of progress for the Ted Empire. And very little for the rest of us.

TED

Hm... agree to disagree.

SFX: WEAPON POWERING UP.

BERTBERT

... you're pointing a weapon at me.

TED

Breaking news.

BERTBERT

Killing journalists would be a new low for the Ted Empire.

TED

Don't worry, it'll just incapacitate you.

BERTBERT

And what happens after you incapacitate me?

TED

You'll be part of a new initiative in The Ted Empire.

BERTBERT

And what is that?

TED

Don't win over the press. BE the press.

SFX: WEAPON FIRING. BODY FALLING.

VOICE

Begin report.

TED

Final effort to neutralize BertBert, the journalist from Sigius, went over like a lead balloon. She's been incapacitated. By the way, I was right about her knowing about our time crystal experiments, if I hadn't intercepted her and conducted this interview instead of the usual dum dums you guys foist onto the press she could've blown the lid off the whole thing. This was an excellent choice on my part and I'm sure that I will get zero credit for this.

VOICE

Please reduce sarcasm levels.

TED

Anyway. I'm having her transported over to  
Operation: Murdock. She'll be a perfect candidate  
for reconditioning. Let's make BertBert the new  
voice of the Ted Empire.

**END**