

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: Ted in Exile.

Joe Fisher

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SFX: HUM OF A STARSHIP.

VOICE

Begin Report.

TED

Survey Asset 3649 in the Billius System. We are about to begin scans of Planet 3. Visual scans detect no signs of sentient life so far.

SFX: SCANNER BUZZES.

ENGINEER

So... how do you like the new job?

TED

It's fine.

ENGINEER

You get used to it. When I first got my assignment I thought it would suck but, I don't know, I kind of like it. Lot of downtime. I watch a TON of Earth Portal. Do you watch any Earth Portal?

TED

No.

ENGINEER

Yeah, I hear you. I'll admit it's pretty stupid stuff but I get addicted. The Hilary Clinton show was hilarious, I was so pissed when they cancelled it. I thought for sure it was going to run for a few more seasons.

TED

Lot of people did.

ENGINEER

What?

TED

Nothing. How many probes do we have left?

ENGINEER

Uh... three. Should be enough to cover this planet, right?

TED

We'll be fine.

ENGINEER

This assignment's weird right? They already started building the Ted Tube, they're going to block out the sun before we're done making sure nobody lives here.

TED

It's a very important assignment. This is a high-priority system because of the star.

ENGINEER

What's the big deal about the star?

TED

It's a different kind of star, it's incredibly powerful. When we block it out and harness its power we'll be able to build the biggest warp gate we've ever built.

ENGINEER

Then what?

TED

Then... then we'll have a really big gate. It's important.

ENGINEER

Okay.

TED

Launch Probe 1.

ENGINEER

Bomb's away.

SFX: PROBE LAUNCHING.

ENGINEER (CONT'D)

There are different kinds of stars?

TED

Yes. What?

ENGINEER

They all look the same to me.

TED

How long have you been doing this assignment?

ENGINEER

Since I got out of assessment. It's all I've done.

TED

And you never noticed that stars are different?

ENGINEER

No. In my defense you're not supposed to look right at them. They told you that right? Not to look at them-

TED

They didn't have to tell me to not look directly at the sun. Everybody knows that.

ENGINEER

I mean... I didn't get the memo. It was a rough first year, I almost went blind.

TED

No one in your life has ever told you not to stare at the sun?

ENGINEER

Yeah, I guess. I just figured in space it was okay, like it wouldn't be as bad.

TED

It's way, way worse.

ENGINEER

Well, yeah, man. I know that now.

TED

Did they tell you to not go outside without a space suit on? You got that memo, right?

ENGINEER

Okay, very funny.

TED

Launch probe 2.

ENGINEER

Bombs away-

TED

Can you not say "bomb's away" please?

ENGINEER

Yeah... sorry. Launching Probe 2.

SFX: PROBE LAUNCHING.

ENGINEER (CONT'D)

I heard a rumor about you... Want to hear what it was?

TED

No.

ENGINEER

I heard you got reassigned from a top secret mission, is that true?

TED

That's none of your business.

ENGINEER

C'mon. We're going to be out here for a while.

TED

If it was a top secret mission, I can't tell you about it.

ENGINEER

If it was a top secret mission, how did I hear about it?

TED

...

ENGINEER

I heard the whole thing went tits up... Tits up is an Earth term. I heard it a lot in the last season of The Hilary Clinton show-

TED

I know what it means.

ENGINEER

... Look it's not a big deal, okay? A lot of people get re-assigned here after they screw up their job, there's no shame in it.

TED

I didn't screw up my job, okay? And it is a big deal. I was in charge of an entire top secret mission and now I'm in charge of a two man skiff in the middle of nowhere. It's a big deal.

ENGINEER

I knew it! It's all good, man-

TED

No it's not. It is, in fact, all bad. This is a punishment. I'm being punished. This is the crappiest job in the empire that they reserve for failures and here I am.

ENGINEER

Hey, watch it! I'm good at this job.

TED

You spent the first year staring into the sun.  
Doesn't that give you an idea of the skill level  
their looking for?

ENGINEER

Was your top secret job being dick?!

TED

Launch Probe 3!

ENGINEER

Bombs away!

SFX: PROBE LAUNCHING.

TED

I'm sorry.

ENGINEER

I like my job. I was just telling you I like my  
job.

TED

I know, I'm sorry. I apologize.

ENGINEER

We're going to be out here for a long time, maybe  
figure out how to not be an asshole.

TED

I will, okay?

ENGINEER

Do you want to tell me what your top secret project  
was as a way of apologizing to me?

TED

Keeping it a secret is the only part of it that I  
didn't screw up, so no.

ENGINEER

Bummer.

TED

...

ENGINEER

...

TED

Anything good on Earth Portal these days?

ENGINEER

Oh, man, where do I start? I watch everything, right? But I always have that one show that I don't miss, but they cancelled the Hilary Clinton show so I had to find something else. And then last week I found it: The Elon Musk Show. Hilarious! This one time this guy saved a bunch of kids from drowning and Elon called him a pedophile! Like randomly. For no reason. And everybody was like, "Wow. Look at this guy. So smart."

TED

Yeah, I know who he is.

ENGINEER

Aha! So you DO watch Earth Portal! I knew it!

TED

I really don't.

ENGINEER

Oh yeah? Then how do you know Elon Musk? What? Were you an Earth Expert in your last gig?

TED

...

ENGINEER

Oh my God.

TED

I can't talk about it.

ENGINEER

You were an Earth Expert? Nobody gets that assignment! I thought it was a myth.

TED

It's not a myth.

ENGINEER

Is it a dream? Do you just watch Earth Portal all day?

TED

Look, I can't talk about the specifics, okay? But actually when you're an Earth Expert you're not allowed to watch Earth Portal.

ENGINEER

Why not?

TED

That's the policy.

ENGINEER

Is it not real? Elon Musk isn't actually like that?

TED

No, he definitely is. But we're not allowed.

ENGINEER

I have SO many questions. Can I ask you questions?  
I promise I won't ask about the top secret stuff.

TED

Yeah, sure, go ahead.

ENGINEER

Where do I start? Oh, okay, is it true that there's  
a place called Illinois and to be the leader of  
Illinois you have to commit crimes?

TED

No, that's not true. It feels true.

ENGINEER

Is it true they used to have slavery, but all the  
slaves were freed by a giant?

TED

What? No, that's... He was just really tall.

ENGINEER

What is the deal with that ceremony where they get  
together with a bunch of people they hate, eat a  
bunch of food and then a month later give those  
same people a bunch of gifts?

TED

That's two separate holidays, Thanksgiving and  
Christmas.

ENGINEER

It's not part of the same thing?

TED

No, again, it feels that way but it's not.

ENGINEER

And how do they make beer out of light?

TED

No, that's not what it is, it's not made out of  
light. It's just lighter beer.

ENGINEER

Why do they make it lighter?



TED

Because they really like it and they say to themselves, "Hey, if I make this less enjoyable maybe I can drink more of it."

ENGINEER

Why would they drink more of it if it's less enjoyable?

TED

Honestly, I studied the planet my whole life and I still don't understand it.

ENGINEER

It's so much fun though, man.

TED

Yeah, you do a fun thing long enough it just becomes a job.

ENGINEER

...

TED

...

ENGINEER

Was there anything you liked about it?

TED

Yeah.

ENGINEER

Like what?

TED

In the middle of the planet there's a huge forest. Massive. Like the ones we used to have on Ted. It makes most of the oxygen in the atmosphere. In the middle of that is the biggest river you've ever seen. Three million different species of animals live in that one forest. Twenty-five hundred types of trees. There are trees there that, when they get tall enough, they can make their own clouds. Out of thin air. Some of the trees are so big that an animal can spend its whole life in just one tree.

ENGINEER

That's sounds amazing.

TED

They're chopping it all down for fuel. Idiots.

SFX: ALERT.

TED (CONT'D)  
What's that?

ENGINEER  
Probe 1 has touched down. It's sending back audio.

TED  
Let's hear it.

SFX: STRANGE, ALIEN SOUNDS.

ENGINEER  
What the hell is that?

TED  
Analyze the audio.

ENGINEER  
Hang on.

TED  
Sounds like giant crickets.

ENGINEER  
What's a cricket?

TED  
Never mind.

ENGINEER  
Oh shit.

TED  
What?

ENGINEER  
Analysis says it's sentient.

TED  
No way.

ENGINEER  
It's sentient!

TED  
You've got to be kidding me.

ENGINEER  
Pattern analysis says "reads as complicated language".

TED  
Motherfucker. Are you serious?

ENGINEER

I'm serious!

TED

Well that's just great. Fantastic!

ENGINEER

It is fantastic!

TED

No it's not, they're going to have to abandon this entire system. They can't black out a system that has sentient life, that's the first protocol! Jesus, what kind of fucking bad luck do I have?!

ENGINEER

Buddy, you don't get it do you?

TED

What are you talking about? What's there to get? I've gone from one doomed assignment to another. They're going to have to shut down this entire project and abandon the system.

ENGINEER

Seriously?

TED

Yes!

ENGINEER

Aw... you're adorable.

TED

What are you talking about?

ENGINEER

I'm going to shut of this noise and I'm going to teach you something...

TED

What's happening?

ENGINEER

Friend of mine, let me break this down for you. We spend our lives in these tiny ships surveying systems for alien life. And our home planet always hopes we don't find it, because if we do, then they can't build a warp gate. But every once and a while they jump the gun and start making a warp gate before we're done surveying. And when they jump the gun, we secretly wait for the perfect storm.

TED

What's the perfect storm?

ENGINEER

The perfect storm is when you find alien life in a system where they've already started building.

TED

I don't understand how that's the perfect storm, they're going to have to abandon this system after half the work is already done.

ENGINEER

You really think our home world is going to waste all the resources it's spent on this system. You said it yourself, this star is special right?

TED

Well then, what are they going to do?

ENGINEER

Listen, all we have to do, is our job. We report the alien life to the home world like we always do. And then... we wait.

TED

We wait for what?

ENGINEER

Reassignment.

TED

They're going to reassign us?

ENGINEER

Oh, not just a reassignment, my friend. We're going to get to choose our assignment.

TED

Choose? Nobody get to choose their assignment, that goes against everything.

ENGINEER

I know. But they really need a warp gate in this system and they really need us to keep quiet about whatever we just found on that planet. So they're going to give us whatever we want. I learned about this on Earth Portal, it's called "Corruption".

TED

But they're going to destroy this solar system, there could be a whole civilization down there.

ENGINEER

Hey, listen, that's not up to us we're just doing our job. It's our job to report any alien life we find. Everything else is up to someone else. That's the glory of the Ted Empire, man: everything is always someone else's fault. That's another thing I learned from Earth Portal, it's called "Bureaucracy".

TED

This doesn't sound right to me at all.

ENGINEER

I know. But let me ask you this: Your last job, the one you screwed up so bad, don't you want a chance to go back and do it right?

SFX: STRANGE, ALIEN SOUNDS.

ENGINEER (CONT'D)

You seem to be having a moral dilemma over there, Pal. Here's the thing, there's no moral dilemma right now. You know why? 'Cause we're Teds. Teds are supposed to just shut up and do our jobs. Most of the time that sucks. But every once and a while... perfect storm.

TED

...

ENGINEER

...

VOICE

Begin report.

TED

This is survey asset 3649. Scans of Planet 3 in the Billius sector have confirmed alien life. Please advise on next steps.

ENGINEER

...

TED

...

ENGINEER

How do you feel?

TED

I don't know.

ENGINEER

Don't worry about it. You'll get use to it. I think I'll ask for an assignment at Earth Portal. Do what you love, y'know? That's what the Earthlings say.

TED

Sure.

ENGINEER

What about you? Are you going to go back to your old job?

TED

Yeah. Yeah, I think I'll go back.

SFX: STRANGE, ALIEN SOUNDS.

END