

MIDNIGHT BURGER

Interlude: Vela

By
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THE HUM OF THE NANCY SINATRA. BEEPING.

BERTBERT

This is BertBert broadcasting on The Undersignal. I am... safe. It's hard to describe to you where I've been these past few cycles. At this point I don't even know how long I've been gone. I promise a full explanation just as soon as, well, as soon as I have one myself... I've returned to the world both encouraged and frightened by recent events. I now count nine systems in open revolt against the Ted Empire, and while I feel this is long overdue, I do worry for the people of The Triad and I'm deeply concerned for how The Teds will respond to the first challenge to their authority in recent memory. More on that soon.

I feel the more pressing issue is this: I am currently on a ship headed for the outer rim of Triangulum, to what I believe is a secret experiment being conducted by The Teds involving Time Crystals. For those of you who don't remember, a generation ago the people of Vapus 10 were conducting very ill-advised experiments with Time Crystals. They were warned repeatedly by the scientific community that these experiments were dangerous but the warnings fell on deaf ears and the entire Vapus system was obliterated by what was the first artificially created black hole. I don't yet know what The Teds' intentions are with this very dangerous experiment but whatever it is, it can't be a benevolent one... and I'm headed right toward it. I'll have more to report soon, but for the time being if you are traveling anywhere near Triangulum's outer rim, change your flight plan. Right now. This is BertBert, broadcasting on The Undersignal.

BEEPING.

BERTBERT (CONT'D)

Oh, hi.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Can't sleep?

BERTBERT

Feel like I've had plenty. You?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I abandoned my circadian rhythms a long time ago.

BERTBERT

Right, I remember. So, the girl... Ex? She's back there pretending to sleep? She said she's working on it?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Yeah, she's a hoot, isn't she?

BERTBERT

Where is she from?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

She's an android.

BERTBERT

I've never seen one that lifelike before.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

She's not lifelike, she's alive.

BERTBERT

I thought sentient androids were a myth.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Me too.

BERTBERT

Where'd you pick her up?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

She came with Caspar. They have an interesting history together.

BERTBERT

... I remember this feeling. Never knowing where to start with the explanations.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It's been a pretty inexplicable life, Berts.

BERTBERT

... How much time do we have?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

About 12 more hours.

BERTBERT

...So if you're from the future does that mean you know how this all plays out?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Afraid it doesn't work like that. Would be a simpler life if it did.

(MORE)

EVEN OLDER LEIF (CONT'D)

In my world The Teds never built whatever this contraption is that we're headed towards.

BERTBERT

What's the point of time travel if you don't know what's going to happen?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It hasn't been half bad. Got to check a few things off the list that I never got around to. Remember Menlor?

BERTBERT

Oh Jesus, the robot cowboys?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

They were real. I told you. I believe you owe me some credits on that one.

BERTBERT

I'm a little strapped for cash at the moment.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Also, I got to this timeline and I saw Leif hadn't busted you out yet. Thought I'd help him out, bat a little clean up.

BERTBERT

Your ability to get me into trouble was always perfectly balanced by your ability to get me out of it.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You got me out of plenty of trouble.

BERTBERT

Not enough. Fucking pirate.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I know. You couldn't have stopped me. At that point, they way things were going in The Triad... yo ho, yo ho, the pirate's life for me.

BERTBERT

... I can't ever forgive you for working for Låfftrax, Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I wasn't asking you to. If you did, you wouldn't be you... you call your folks?

BERTBERT

Not yet.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

They're going to be worried.

BERTBERT

I probably shouldn't tell them I'm okay until I know that I am. I don't know what we're headed for right now, I should probably wait until we all make it through this.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Fair enough. Tell them I said hi.

BERTBERT

... it was so infuriating how much they liked you.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I know. I can't help it, I'm likeable.

BERTBERT

What was that horrible music you played for my dad?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

The Stooges.

BERTBERT

It was terrible. He played it so much after that.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

C'mon. It's not that bad. It's the music of being pissed off and not know where to go with it all.

BERTBERT

That doesn't describe my dad at all.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

We've all got a little bit of that in us. Everybody's at least 1% punk rock.

BERTBERT

... It's so weird talking to you. It's like I'm talking to you but not really talking to you.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I imagine it'll be satisfying and disappointing all at the same time.

BERTBERT

... She got into my head, that android of yours.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Yeah, she does that.

BERTBERT

She said she transformed into my most significant ex.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

She does that too. It sucks. Let me guess. She turned into Evon.

BERTBERT

Oh fuck you. No.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Well that's the only one I remember of the long string of Little Lord Fauntleroy's that you entertained.

BERTBERT

She transformed into you, Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

... Really.

BERTBERT

Yes. Thing is, we were never in a relationship... not in my world anyway... were we in yours?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

No.

BERTBERT

Well then why did she do that?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

... Sometimes a thing is a thing without you calling it something. I met your parents, that makes it a thing a little bit.

BERTBERT

I met your parents.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh shit, you did?

BERTBERT

Yeah. You didn't take me to meet your parents?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

No, did he?

BERTBERT

Yeah, for that holiday. With the big bird.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I took you home for Thanksgiving?

BERTBERT

Yeah. What?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

That's a big move.

BERTBERT

It is?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Yeah. Bringing a girl home for Thanksgiving, that's huge.

BERTBERT

He didn't tell me that.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Oh you thought it was some random holiday. Like Flag Day or something.

BERTBERT

Why do you have a day for flags?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

He snuck one in on you. Did something serious without telling you it was serious.

BERTBERT

He was so casual about it. "Yeah no big deal, we just eat a big bird" and have something called a casserole?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

He probably got a kick out of you not knowing.

BERTBERT

You're both assholes.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

It's true. What? You taking me to meet your parents, that wasn't a big move?

BERTBERT

It wasn't exactly on purpose, if you recall.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Right.

BERTBERT

You were on the run for pirating an ice hauler.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You know, technically I wasn't a pirate back then I was just a criminal.

BERTBERT

Thank you for making that distinction.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

A subtle difference but an important one.

BERTBERT

You really think-... what am I doing? You weren't there, you're not him, you're a stand in.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Go ahead, get your frustrations out.

BERTBERT

You're a punching bag in the shape of Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Hey, Berts. You're not wrong. We could be sailing into certain doom. If you've got something to get off your chest, now's the time.

BERTBERT

... I don't know. I don't even know what to say, with you suddenly here I'm like the dog that caught the car, but also, it's the wrong car.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

...

BERTBERT

...

BERTBERT (CONT'D)

What was I like in your timeline? How was I different? I didn't cut bangs did I? I was always tempted but always felt like it was a mistake.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

...

BERTBERT

What?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I never saved you, Berts. In my timeline you're still a prisoner of The Teds. I tried and I tried. Turns out what was missing from the equation was an indestructible android and a former employee of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

BERTBERT

I was on your bucket list?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

That's right. You were the last item on the list. Not sure what to do with myself now. Zebulon used to call it "the agony of everything completed"... You want to know what was different about you? Nothing. I've been to a lot of different versions of this universe... you're always the best part in it.

BERTBERT

... People shouldn't have to get to your age to be this honest, Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

That's true. Better late than never.

BERTBERT

...

EVEN OLDER LEIF

...

BERTBERT

I may be more scared of making it through all this than I am of dying.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Why's that?

BERTBERT

Because then what? The Triad's a mess, people may think I'm a traitor, and if they don't I'm going to be hunted by The Teds for the rest of my life.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

All that's probably true.

BERTBERT

Great.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

I have every confidence that you can find a way out of it. And if you can't, I'm sure there's some Leif from some timeline somewhere who'll be willing to get you out of it.

BERTBERT

I'm not going to lean too hard on that if that's alright with you, Leif.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Alright... just remember what I told you about the heart of the Milky Way.

BERTBERT

The what?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

The heart of the Milky Way.

BERTBERT

You've never told me anything about the heart of the Milky Way.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

You're kidding me.

BERTBERT

I am not.

EVEN OLDER LEIF

Goddamn. Your Leif is really falling down on the job, you know that?

BERTBERT

What is the heart of the Milky Way?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

C'mere.

SCANNER BEING ACTIVATED.

EVEN OLDER LEIF (CONT'D)

At the center of the Milky Way is a supermassive black hole. But that's not it's heart. This is its heart...

THE SOUND OF THE VELA PULSAR.

BERTBERT

What is that?

EVEN OLDER LEIF

A few million years ago a star died. And when it died it left behind a gift for us all: Vela. A Pulsar. It sends out a magnetic pulse into the cosmos more reliable than anything I've ever seen. It's so reliable that you can use it to navigate. So whenever I get lost in the stars, I set my scanners to magnetic and I listen close. She's always there, leading me wherever I want to go. Vela's no different from you or me. Just a beating heart sending out a signal to anyone who'll hear it. You're never lost as long as she's there. The Milky Way has a heart, Berts. It beats for you...

THE END.