VO

FAR OFF IN THE DISTANT SKIES OF WORLDS UNKNOWN THERE FLIES A SHIP CALLED THE KURGAN. ABOARD, SOME OF THE TOUGHEST SONS OF GUNS FOR HIRE THIS WILD UNIVERSE WILL EVER KNOW. THEY ARE THE MISERY LOVES COMPANY.

(theme?)

VO

The three missions the company were attending to were underway. Bernie had landed on a little barely inhabited moon way off the beaten galactic path. He was trekking through a mountainous region, a literal ton of guns and ammunition strapped to his back. Ahead, he saw something move. He put a hand over top his only useful eye, the other covered indefinitely by a leathery eyepatch. He paused, watched. He saw a four legged beast of some kind feeding on the minimal plant life. It was beautiful. Antlers of some kind stretching to the sky. Hooves dark as obsidian. He reached for his pack, pulled out a small rocket launcher, and hit the beast directly in the side.

BERNIE

HAW HAW HAW. LUNCH TIME, HONEY! heheheheh.

VO

Bernie approached the crater that held the charred remains of the once beautiful animal.

BERNIE

Gonna have me some gat dang roast beast ya'll.

VO

Bernie opened his chasm-like gullet and downed a smoldering thigh. He savored every bit-- until Ahab interrupted his empowering ritual.

AHAB

Everything good?

BERNIE

Yeah, I'm eatin'.

AHAB

During the mission?

BERNIE

As far as I'm concerned this *is* the mission.

AHAB

Whatever. Clyde?

CLYDE

Busy.

AHAB

Keep in touch.

VO

Bernie turned off the com link with the Kurgan. He lifted up his eyepatch and stuffed a portion of meat inside a deep hole scarred into his face.

BERNIE

Just a lil snack fer later. Gotta make sure Clyde don't see me eatin' face-meat again though, doggone snitch is what he is. Oh AHab Bernie is storing food in his face again! waaaah! Big dumb fart baby.

VO

Bernie scoffed loudly and kicked the rest of the animal into the air and away from the crater out of spite. He continued his trek towards the base he was told about until he came to edge of an enormous cliff.

BERNIE

Well'p, so much for stealth. Better tell those nerds before they get mad I'm doing my job.

VO

Bernie reactivated his link to the Kurgan.

BERNIE

Ahab, Clyde, I'm about to make a lot of noise. Be ready on your planets. They're gonna know.

AHAB

Thanks for the uncharacteristic heads up.

BERNIE

Thank me when they're dead.

AHAB

Kill 'em all, Bernie.

VO

Bernie secured his guns, knives, swords, grenades, improvised gun-like-devices, snacks, the enormous alien snake-demon he occasionally unleashed on fleshy targets, every last thing he had, to the overflowing pack on his back. Below, he saw where he hoped to land. It looked like a parking lot from up here. He thought he must be at least a couple miles above it. He took a breath, smiled his big dumb smile, and off the cliff he went. Below him, life went on as normal.

MERC 1

Hey pal.

MERC 2

How's the day goin'?

MERC 1

Not so bad. Think I'm gonna take some leave soon, maybe catch a show somewhere.

MERC 2

I haven't been to a concert in ages.

MERC 1

Me neither. I gotta get back into it. I miss it so bad, dude.

MERC 2

Hey, if you find some metal playing in this system somewhere, let me know. I heard from some guys they got brutal shit out this way.

MERC 1

I've actually been getting into jam bands lately.

MERC 2

You *are* getting old.

MERC 1

I know. I resisted at first but... what the hell is that thing?

MERC 2

Cloud?

MERC 1

Nah it's falling. Bird or something?

MERC 2

Only thing I ever seen fly here are those lizard things.

MERC 1

It's *huge*!

MERC 2

Should we... uh..

MERC 1

What the holiest d---

(SFX: Explosion, rubble)

BERNIE

UGH. I think I might've misjudged the distance there. Man, that was not a pleasant landing at all. Think I popped something. Ah, well. Excuuuuse me, gentlemen.

VO

Bernie nudged the grossly disfigured bodies of the two mercs as he approached the large building ahead. People were running towards it in terrified flight. The buildings' alarms were sounding, and large metal blast doors were going up on all its entrances. None of this seemed to bother Bernie very much.

BERNIE

These dudes is scared to death, hawhaw.

VO

Bernie trudged down a long dirt path towards the base. He spit out a bone from the earlier impromptu barbecue. He saw something ahead on the dirt road he was walking on. Short, slender... it startled him. He stopped for a moment and felt a tinge of pain in his tiny heart. He saw it all again as clearly as he always did. The final march on his home planet. He was chained in a long line of his people, all heading to their long drawn out permanent deaths. Before the 7's came, before he was saved by people he didn't know how to thank. Before he lost her. His daughter, Bernadette was chained behind him. A giant geyser of magma erupted beside him, it was so nice back on that planet.

BERNADETTE

Whatchu gonna do when you free us Bernie?

BERNIE

I'm gonna put all their hearts on a big ol' plate and I'm gonna feed us their hearts for a whole year. Heart stew, baked heart, heart on the cob, gat dang plethora of that nonsense.

BERNADETTE

They's gonna be spoil't by the time we get to next year.

BERNIE

Not if we keep 'em alive, get am all fat. Gonna make them suckers down right savory.

BERNADETTE

We'll eat 'em anyways, even if they is tainted.

BERNIE

You bet your buttons we is you li'l diamond.

VO

Bernie squinted again at the shape in the distance. Just a rock. Not even a pretty one. Nothing like his little girl. He sighed. Just another reminder that she was out there somewhere without him. Hopefully. Maybe. If anything good could still happen. In the base ahead, the men and women charged with defending it stood in defensive positions. Whatever cover they could find they'd stood behind and jammed the rest up to the massive steel gate. They waited, as the monsters footsteps drew ever closer.

RANDO (In a whisper)

What... what is it.

RANDO 2

Some kind of... monster... a... demon.

VO

Bernie picked at his teeth with his finger.

BERNIE

Hey, you gonna open this door.

RANDO

What do you want?

BERNIE

I want... TO EAAAAAAAAT.

VO

Bernie's voice shook the building and the resolve of those within it to the core. Large defensive turrets were being raised from the floor behind the ground troops.

RANDO 2

We have three large anti-tank guns, over one hundred men and women armed to the teeth behind this door. Let me ask you... Whatever you are... Do you really want to come in?

VO

Bernie set an explosive charge by the door and prepared his personally designed minigun, setting it for maximum carnage. In truth, it was that guns only setting. He tried to think of a badass reply, but all he could come up with was:

BERNIE

YES!

(SFX: Explosion, debris, carnage)

BERNIE

HAW HAW HAW HAW

VO

Bernie opened fire on the doomed grunts charged with defending the door. He was peppered with tens, hundreds, thousands of bullets. They chipped at his skin, but it wasn't enough to cause him any alarm.

BERNIE

SOMEBODY TELL ME THE THING I'M SUPPOSED TO BLOW UP.

VO

Bernie grabbed a survivor by the leg and lifted him up.

BERNIE

Where's the computer thing.

RANDO 3

Are you stupid?

BERNIE

It's possible, but I've never really put a lot of thought into it.

RANDO 3

Do you not see the gigantic thing in the middle of this room?

VO

It was a rhetorical question, obviously, but the truth was Bernie had not, in fact, seen the towering glass tube holding some kind of, to him, baffling light.

BERNIE

Wow, haha, you ain't kiddin' it's right there man.

RANDO 3

Can you let me go.

BERNIE

Are you stupid?

RANDO 3

No. But I thought I'd ask.

BERNIE

Fair enough.

VO

Bernie tossed the soldier into the ceiling hard enough to blow a hole through the roof. It was then Bernie noticed the other towers in the room, three enormous, beautiful guns, the likes of which he had never before laid his good eye on.

BERNIE

I'm... in love. What are THESE!

VO

The three anti-tank turrets fired on his position, as the few remaining soldiers scrambled for cover. Bernie jumped out of the way as well-- he could take a few bullets, but this was a different story. He tossed his guns somewhere he hoped was safe and charged the closest turret. He squeezed it in a bear hug, and with all his might spun it against its will. He aimed it towards the other turrets.

BERNIE

I'M GONNA MARRY THIS GUN, I AINT EVEN GONNA SIGN A PRE-NUP.

VO

Bernie held the turret until it fired again, knocking out one of the others.

BERNIE

Bullseye ya bastards!

VO

He pulled at the turret until he broke it from it mounts, then tossed it at the last remaining turret, which went up in a blaze of glory.

BERNIE

Boy oh boy watching that gun burn has got to be at least the fifth worst thing that's ever happened to me.

VO

Bernie watched with sincere sorrow as the turrets burned. He turned his attention to the large cylinder in the center of the room. A litany of wires, geometric shapes of steel he didn't even know the name of, all pouring into the cylinder from the top. It dwarfed even Bernie in size and scope. It seemed to be looking back at him in a way.

VOICE

Bernie...

VO

Bernie was momentarily shocked. The voice seemed to come from nowhere.

BERNIE

...What are you? I thought you was a computer?

VOICE

Complete your mission, Bernie.

BERNIE

How do you know who I am?

VOICE

Look around this room, Bernie. Count the bodies, if you can. You are entropy in action. Is it possible you're so stupid that you simply cannot sin?

BERNIE

I ain't stupid.

VOICE

Then complete your mission.

BERNIE

Do you *want* to die? 'Cause you will.

VO

The voice did not reply.

BERNIE

You ain't gonna talk no more?

VO

Again, nothing but the low-pitched hum of the equipment. Bernie looked around the room. Survivors crawling to safety in the deep reaches of whatever this facility was supposed to be. He looked for something he could take back to Ahab, to show him he'd made an effort to save something that looked important. He found a few papers, a case of something that looked to him like lightbulbs. He threw them in his gun-pack and began setting up the charges he was going to use to turn the facility into a crater. A wounded soldier regarded Bernie with loathing. They reached for a radio. Bernie walked up to them, curious.

BERNIE

Let me ask you something I always wonder about when I'm comin' around. Did you get a good look at me walking up to this base.

RANDO 4

Y-yes.

BERNIE

Did you see them guns I had?

RANDO 4

We did.

BERNIE

So you see a guy like me, footsteps heavy enough to wake the dead, enough ammunition to have caused those dead to be dead in the first place, and you still wanna try and shoot me. Why?

RANDO 4

Because my mission is important.

BERNIE

To who! You? Do you even know what this place is?

RANDO 4

Do you?

BERNIE

Hell no I don't know, I ain't paid to care. I'm paid to blow it up. People like you confuse me. I just don't get it. If I seen't a dude three times my size walkin' up like he didn't care with a small armory strapped to his back you best believe I'm gonna get to running.

RANDO 4

Because you're a coward. And you don't know how important our work is.

BERNIE

Let me just ask you, what *is* your work.

RANDO 4

I guard the core.

BERNIE

Yeah, guard the core. Well, now you're dead by the core, so good job. I think it's dumber to pretend you're doing God's work by shootin' bullets than it is to run like your life depends on it. But hey, what do I know, I got alien meat stored in my face cavity at this very second. Eat my whole butt either way, callin' me a coward.

RANDO 4

Our work will continue.

BERNIE

Holy mackerel dude I could not care less.

VO

Bernie finished setting up the charges. He thought for a minute then picked up the wounded soldier. He carried them out, along with his stuff, and sat down by the rock he'd seen earlier.

RANDO 4

What are you gonna do with me.

BERNIE

Well, for starters, I'm gonna throw you into the woods.

RANDO 4

What?

BERNIE

Next time you see me comin', you run. Second chance day for rando soldier guy at computer tube headquarters.

RANDO 4

You're going to throw me into the--

VO

Bernie then threw the soldier into the woods.

BERNIE

Good distance, solid throw. Eight out of ten. Bernie wins again.

VO

Bernie sat by the rock beside the road and waited for the explosion that would demolish the base. He picked at it, trying to shape her face into the rock. It'd been so long since he'd seen Bernadette. If he closed his eye, he could see her face perfectly for a second. The longer he dwelled on it, the more mis-shapen and wrong it began to look. He was always scared that if he tried to think of her face too many times it would stop ever looking right. He tried to only do it once in awhile. Like it was a gift. Bernie remembered the way she'd looked at him the last time he saw her. The chaos, the large scale assault from the triple-7s, the crushed up corpses of his friends and family strewn over the ground as they ran.

BERNIE

Keep going, don't look back.

BERNADETTE

Daddy I'm scared.

BERNIE

You don't ever say that. We don't get scared, we fight.

BERNADETTE

Hold on to me.

BERNIE

I won't let you go.

VO

They were running towards a set of ships the Triple-Seven mercenary army were bringing onto the planet to evacuate his people. The Akolytes had been methodically dominated by an invading force for decades. They would capture the Akolyte people, and grind their bodies bottom to top into dust. There was apparently some rare mineral in their skin that people in a far off place coveted above all else. The invaders had finally brought enough firepower onto the planet to kill off even people like Bernie. Why the triple-7s came to their aide, he didn't know. All he knew is they had to get off the planet.

BERNADETTE

Daddy, look at that guy!

VO

Bernadette pointed to a child smaller than even she was. One of his legs had been blown off, he looked disoriented. There was an evacuation vessel heading straight towards him.

BERNIE

Leave him, he's dead anyway.

BERNADETTE

We gotta save him!

BERNIE

Ain't no saving him, he's dead. Don't let go of me!

VO

Bernie played the scene over and over in his head. He was squeezed in between so many others, he lost his grip on his girl. She disappeared in the crowd. No one could hear anything, too many guns, too many ships, too much horror. He couldn't get off the ship he was practically shoved into. It lifted off. Below him, he caught one last glimpse. Bernadette with the injured boy in her arms, her tiny body only visible for a split second. She met his glance in the ship. Her face in a look of horror.

(SFX: Gigantic explosion.)

VO

He looked at the rock he sat beside, the crude face he'd scratched in it. He sighed.

KURGAN

Company member Bernie.

BERNIE

Yeah Kurgan.

KURGAN

Are you ready to leave?

BERNIE

I guess.

KURGAN

I can bring the ship to you.

BERNIE

Let me ask you somethin' Kurgan

KURGAN

Yes, Company member Bernie.

BERNIE

Do you think I'm really stupid?

KURGAN

No, I don't think you're really stupid. But, my sensory data does indicate that you are in fact a fat-ass.

BERNIE

hehe. Well you're a big ol' pile of steaming hot garbage too. You ain't even got no legs.

KURGAN

It's true, but I also express silent gratitude every single nanosecond that I do not have a nose either.

BERNIE

How do you always know just what to say?

KURGAN

I have compiled a library of more than twenty-trillion insults, and nearly all of them are designed to be directed at you.

BERNIE

You really are the best ship there is.

KURGAN

Thank you Company member Bernie. I'll be there soon.

VO

Bernie took another glance at the rock, then took a long deep breath.

BERNIE

I'll find you yet, you li'l diamond.

VO

Ahab and Bernie have had their successes, now Clyde is up to bat. Will he triumph, or be the first to fail? The adventures continue next time on Episode Eight: The Wind and the Weight OR, Dem Bones, Dem Bones!