

YOUNG LEIF

Part 3: Verge

By Joe Fisher

Young Leif

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SILENCE EXCEPT FOR BREATHING IN A SPACE SUIT HELMET.

ALICE

You're going to hyperventilate, dude.

LEIF

I'm fine.

ALICE

Number one cause of death in space is hyperventilation, one of those nasty statistics that no one pays attention to.

LEIF

There's no way the number one cause of death in space is hyperventilation.

ALICE

Not the hyperventilation itself, but what comes after. Do you know what comes after?

LEIF

A Bar Mitzva?

ALICE

Unconsciousness. Then death. Death caused by, I'm just spitballing here, floating off into space while unconscious.

LEIF

I thought the point of programs like you were to help.

ALICE

I think warning you of imminent death is very helpful.

LEIF

I just have to reconnect this one thing and we'll be good as new.

ALICE

I strongly object to the terminology "Good as new".

BEEP.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Message from BertBert, would you like to hear it?

LEIF

What the hell does she want?

ALICE

Maybe she wants to warn you about the dangers of extra-vehicular repairs in deep space.

LEIF

Play the message.

BEETBERT

Hey Leif. I was just leaving a new tech expo on Urt and I thought I'd send you message. Where are you right now? Has that old ship of yours killed you yet?

ALICE

No, but give him a few minutes.

BEETBERT

Listen. We've gotten off on the wrong foot twice now, and it's kind of bugging me. Is it bugging you?... I don't know... We're a driven people, the Sigians. We don't like being told no. It kind of makes us tough to be around, we can be jerks. Maybe I was kind of a jerk. Both times. I mean, you were too. Sorry, shouldn't have said that... I had an agenda, Leif. Both times I had an agenda and maybe that's not the best way to make friends. Anyway, this has been BertBert's poorly constructed apology. Hope you enjoyed it. Give me a call sometime. If we're in the same quadrant we should get together. I promise no agenda this time. Call me.

ALICE

I don't know, still kinda seems like she has an agenda.

BEETBERT

I should probably respond in case I die.

ALICE

Now you take precautions.

BEEP.

LEIF

Hey there BertBert. So, first thing: I got my ship up and running. I can recall a certain someone who said it was impossible. I promise not to lord that over you too much. Then I had to learn how to fly it.

ALICE

I had to learn how to fly it.

LEIF

Alice was very helpful in learning how to fly it.

ALICE

I consolidated the data packets, he said "go that way".

LEIF

And then, all of a sudden, I had a spaceship. Every little boy's dream, right? Well, turns out I had no idea where to go. There's a billion places out there and now I had to pick one. How do you pick one? Kind of explains why people stay put most of their lives. "Where to first?" Can be a pretty paralyzing question when you can choose from anything in the sky. For whatever reason it came to me. Barnard 68. Have you been? It's a dark nebula. Trillions and trillions of sub-micron sized particles that block out starlight. It's half a light year wide, a big blob of nothing... and I'm looking at it right now. It's a sight to behold. When you see it from earth it looks terrifying. In the middle of a field of stars you suddenly see a deliberate darkness. Completely black. You feel like it's looking at you, like the void is staring back. But I have to say, now that I'm seeing it with my own two eyes, it's beautiful. All those trillions of particles in there are pushing and pulling against each other. Gravity pulls them in, inertia pulls them apart. The whole thing moves like a big black ocean. One day, gravity will finally get the upper hand and the whole thing will start collapsing in on itself and turn into a star where there used to be darkness. Not a bad universe, this one. Anyway, yeah we should get together sometime. Don't worry about having agendas. I like that you have agendas, it keeps me on my toes. Small problem: I may be dead before we have a chance to do that. Because as I talk to you I am in a space suit, clinging to the outside of my ship, trying to fix a broken thruster... it's my first space walk... it's totally terrifying but honestly, after seeing Barnard 68 with my own two eyes and only a thin layer of glass between us... I may never go back inside... I'm going to continue clinging to my ship while I plug this thruster back into the power system. If it DOESNT explode, then sure let's grab a drink sometime. Talk to you soon.

BEEP.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Okay. Moment of truth. Do you need to say any prayers to your robot gods?

ALICE

I'm fully backed up back on Trusk. You die, I reboot.

LEIF

That's hardly fair.

ALICE

Welcome to the Triad.

LEIF

Yeah, fine. 3...2...1...

THE SOUND OF A WINDY, DESERTED PLANET. LEIF WALKS ALONG THE ROCKY TERRAIN.

BEEP.

LEIF (CONT'D)

Hey BertBert. Alice has convinced me that my last message may have been a bit traumatizing and that it was mean of me to send it.

ALICE

You're welcome.

LEIF

So here I am sending you another one. I'm fine. We didn't blow up.

ALICE

But...

LEIF

We did have to do a bit of a crash landing on a nearby planet though. Nothing to worry about, we just need a new core stabilizer. The ship is in dry dock right now being repaired and we should be up and running in a few hours. Let me get everything sorted here and I'll call you in a few days okay? Bye.

BEEP.

LEIF (CONT'D)

There, you happy?

ALICE

So, your first message was mean because it was too honest and that one was mean because it was full of lies.

LEIF

It's fine.

ALICE

This is a deserted planet, your ship is not in dry dock.

LEIF

We'll be fine.

ALICE

How, exactly?

LEIF

I don't know... I like this stuff. I just crash landed on a deserted planet in my spaceship. I like it. I like having problems to solve. I feel a little weird when I don't have a problem to solve.

ALICE

Do crossword puzzles.

LEIF

Don't worry about it, we'll be fine. What do we know about this planet?

ALICE

DD-263.

LEIF

That's not very poetic. What does the DD stand for?

ALICE

"Developmental Designate". If something has a DD on it, it's been targeted for development by The Teds.

LEIF

Developed into what?

ALICE

It means at some point they're going to turn the nearby star into a warp gate. They designate it DD to keep any settlements from popping up.

LEIF

They can just do that?

ALICE

They can.

LEIF
I guess that's not so bad. This place looks pretty
dead anyway WHOA-

LEIF SLIPS AND SLIDES DOWN A SMALL ROCK FACE.

LEIF (CONT'D)
Ow! Shit!

THE SOUND OF THUMBS TYPING AWAY ON A SMALL KEYBOARD.

LEIF (CONT'D)
Uh... hi.

VERGE
Hi.

LEIF
I thought this planet was deserted.

VERGE
Me too.

LEIF
So what are you doing here?

VERGE
What are you doing here?

VERGE GETS A CALL.

VERGE (CONT'D)
(Speaking alien language.)
Deesh?... Deesh... Nin... Vapus Vella.

VERGE GOES BACK TO TYPING ON THEIR KEYBOARD.

LEIF
...Hi.

VERGE
Didn't we do this already?

LEIF
I'm Leif.

VERGE
Okay.

MORE TYPING.

LEIF
What's in the crates?

VERGE

What crates?

LEIF

The crates you're leaning on right now.

VERGE

I don't see any crates.

LEIF

There's... like five of them.

VERGE

I don't see any crates and neither do you.

LEIF

Oh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh... Are you doing crimes?

TYPING STOPS.

VERGE

Who the fuck are you?

LEIF

I'm Leif.

VERGE

What the fuck are you doing here?

LEIF

Crash landed. Just over that ridge.

VERGE

Uh-huh.

TYPING CONTINUES.

VERGE (CONT'D)

...Do you see those two rocks up on the ridge?

LEIF

Yeah.

VERGE DRAWS A PISTOL AND FIRES TWO SHOTS. BOTH ROCKS EXPLODE.

LEIF (CONT'D)

WHOA whoa whoa whoa whoa, no need to point that at me.

VERGE

I'm not convinced.

LEIF

I'm just a guy, I promise.

VERGE

I'm trying to conduct some business. Then my ride doesn't show, then some random guy quote-unquote "crash lands" right after that. I think I've got all kinds of reasons to point this at you.

LEIF

Just a coincidence, I swear. Do I look like the kind of guy that needs a gun pointed at him?

VERGE

Everyone has a reason to have a gun pointed at them.

LEIF

That's an interesting perspective. Look... see? Unarmed. No weapons on me. Okay?

VERGE

What are you doing in this system?

LEIF

It was the closest place to crash land. I was sightseeing, I wanted to get a look at Barnard 68.

VERGE

At what?

LEIF

The nebula.

VERGE

Who the fuck calls it Barnard 68?

LEIF

Earthlings. I'm from Earth.

VERGE

There are now so many parts of your story that are unbelievable, I don't even know where to start.

LEIF

Don't I look like an Earthling?... What kind of gun is that?

VERGE

What's wrong with your ship?

LEIF

Bad core stabilizer.

VERGE

Really?

LEIF
Is it a plasma gun?

VERGE
Well it's not a hair dryer.

LEIF
...

VERGE
...

LEIF
Is it time to stop pointing the gun at me yet?

VERGE
What kind of ship?

LEIF
A Truskan Selig.

VERGE
Are you kidding?

LEIF
What?

VERGE
Did you steal it from a museum?

LEIF
What are you talking about? It runs great.

VERGE
You just crash landed.

LEIF
There's a few kinks.

VERGE
...

LEIF
...

VERGE
There's an earth word: destiny.

LEIF
Sure.

VERGE
Do you believe in it?

LEIF

No.

VERGE

Me neither. But, I'm on a deserted planet without a ship, your ship crash lands here, you've got a bad core stabilizer and I'm standing here with five crates of guess what?

LEIF

... No way. Core stablizers?

VERGE

It's true.

LEIF

What are the odds of that?

VERGE

Honestly pretty good. Core stabilizers go out all the time, that's why they're in such high demand.

LEIF

And why they fetch such a good price on the black market?

VERGE

... I don't know what you're talking about.

LEIF

Yeah, okay.

VERGE

I'll put one of these core stabilizers in your ship if you take the rest of them where they need to go. Deal?

LEIF

Deal.

VERGE

Nice to meet you, Leif.

LEIF

What's your name?

VERGE

Don't worry about it.

LATER. THE HUM OF THE NANCY SINATRA.

VERGE (CONT'D)

How the fuck did an Earthling get off world?

LEIF
I'm a crafty guy, I figured it out.

VERGE
You figured it out.

LEIF
Yeah.

VERGE
Your people pat themselves on the back when they go to their moon a few times, but you figured out interstellar travel.

LEIF
I mean, how hard is it really?

VERGE
Whatever.

LEIF
So where are you from?

VERGE
Seriously?

LEIF
What?

VERGE
Nothing. I'm not from anywhere.

LEIF
Everybody's from somewhere.

VERGE
Not me.

LEIF
... Where are we headed?

VERGE
Red's Rectangle.

LEIF
What's that?

VERGE
That's where the buyer is.

LEIF
Who's the buyer?

VERGE

Don't worry about it. I need to make some changes to your system.

LEIF

Uh, I don't know if I'm comfortable with that.

VERGE

It's fine.

LEIF

How do I know it's fine?

VERGE

I'm on board this ship, why would I do something to fuck it up?

VERGE BEGINS TYPING ON THE CONTROL PANEL.

ALICE

Whoa. Hello.

VERGE

Hi, who are you?

ALICE

I'm Alice.

VERGE

Hi Alice. Don't worry I just need to make some changes to your scan profile.

ALICE

Altering a scan profile is pretty illegal, though.

VERGE

Only if you get caught.

ALICE

I don't think that's how laws work.

VERGE

It's going to be fine.

ALICE

Leif, is this okay?

LEIF

What's a scan profile?

VERGE

It's an inventory list. It's generated automatically and uploaded when you pass through a warp gate.

(MORE)

VERGE (CONT'D)

Right now it says there are five crates of core stabilizers on your ship and I'm changing that. It's fine.

LEIF

Hang on.

VERGE

What?

LEIF

We're about to break the law.

VERGE

Maybe. A little.

LEIF

I broke the law sometimes when I was a kid. There's a line you cross. When you cross that line you go from being someone who isn't told anything to someone who's told everything. I'm about to cross that line with you so it's time for me to know everything.

VERGE

Ok. Sure. What do you want to know?

LEIF

What's your name?

VERGE

...

LEIF

I've already got my core stabilizer and I'm pretty sure you're not going to take it back while we're in deep space.

VERGE

Verge.

LEIF

Okay. Nice to meet you Verge.

VERGE

What else?

LEIF

Where are you from?

VERGE

I wasn't being cagey. I'm not from anywhere.

LEIF
Everybody is from somewhere.

VERGE
I'm a Vapian, do you know what that means?

LEIF
No.

VERGE
Vapians don't have homes. We're roamers.

LEIF
You're like a Hobo.

VERGE
What the fuck is a hobo?

LEIF
You carry all your possessions with you wrapped up in a handkerchief. You hop on the nearest train and go wherever it takes you. You're a free spirit, no one can tell you what to do.

VERGE
That's sounds fucking stupid, no, I'm not a hobo.

LEIF
Well, it doesn't sound so bad. I guess I'm a bit of a roamer myself these days. It suits me.

VERGE
What else?

LEIF
What do you do for fun?

VERGE
Fun?

LEIF
Yeah.

VERGE
We're about to commit a crime. You say you need more information and you say the information you need is what I do for fun?

LEIF
Yeah.

VERGE
Nothing.

LEIF
You do nothing.

VERGE
I'm busy.

LEIF
You know you're presented with a unique opportunity right now?

VERGE
What's that?

LEIF
A stranger. Me. I'm getting the sense that you're a little standoffish, don't give away a lot. Call me crazy. After this is over you never have to see me again. Given the size of the universe you probably won't. That means you can tell me whatever you want. No one will ever know.

VERGE
... Fine. I like sailing.

LEIF
Really?

VERGE
Yes.

LEIF
That's surprising. Why is that?

VERGE
It's feels free, and I like freedom. It also feels terrestrial and I don't get enough of that.

LEIF
Because you're always in space?

VERGE
For the most part.

LEIF
When do you have time to go sailing?

VERGE
I've... never actually been sailing.

LEIF
So you imagine that, someday, when you're allowed to have fun, thats the thing you'll do.

VERGE

Yes.

LEIF

Okay... I like baseball.

VERGE

Great, Can I make these changes now?

LEIF

Sure.

VERGE BEGINS TYPING ON THE CONTROL PANEL.

LEIF (CONT'D)

How'd you get into a life of crime?

VERGE

Only so many jobs out there.

LEIF

There's always work at the post office.

VERGE

Can you keep the Earth references to a minimum?

LEIF

Sure... Usually when people hear I'm from Earth they have a bunch of questions for me.

VERGE

Not me.

LEIF

Are you sure? You may never get this chance again.

VERGE

You don't shut up, do you?

LEIF

Part of my charm.

VERGE

Veronica Lake.

LEIF

Veronica Lake, what about Veronica Lake?

VERGE

Did you ever meet her?

LEIF

No I, I mean, she was a little before my time.

VERGE

Right. I forgot you people don't live long.

LEIF

We don't?

VERGE

No. You didn't know that?

LEIF

No. Compared to what?

VERGE

Compared to just about every race in The Triad. Earthlings don't live long.

LEIF

How long do you live?

VERGE

I don't know how it translates. Alice, what's the average lifespan of a Vapian in Earth years?

ALICE

The average lifespan of a Vapian in Earth years is 342 years.

VERGE

See?

LEIF

Shit.

VERGE

You're right. It is easy to talk to you, but it's not because you're a stranger, it's because I know you'll be dead soon.

LEIF

Fair enough. I guess I better get busy.

VERGE

With what?

LEIF

With life. Let's do some crimes.

VERGE

Sure, okay.

THE SOUND OF RED'S RECTANGLE FADES IN. MUSIC AND ROWDY ALIENS. TWO GLASSES BEING SET DOWN ON THE TABLE.

VERGE (CONT'D)

Truskan beer? Seriously?

LEIF

I like it. Trusk is nice, have you ever been?

VERGE

I'm not welcome on Trusk.

LEIF

Let me guess, you're wanted for some sort of crime.

VERGE

I'm not welcome on Trusk because I'm a Vapian. They don't like us.

LEIF

Why?

VERGE

I don't know, don't I seem nice?

LEIF

You do.

VERGE

So the buyer is probably here right now, bidding his time. He's probably watching us and keeping us waiting.

LEIF

Why is he doing that?

VERGE

To establish dominance. It's what I would do.

LEIF

So I should just... keep cool.

VERGE

Yes, Leif. Keep cool.

LEIF

Great, this is a good chance for us to get to know each other.

VERGE

The long ride in your ship wasn't enough? I did not need that detailed explanation of Baseball, by the way.

LEIF

You'll only get it once.

VERGE

Good.

LEIF

Hey, I have a question. The dark nebula I was looking at. I call it Barnard 68.

VERGE

Why do you call it that?

LEIF

We name things after the people that discover them.

VERGE

That's boring.

LEIF

I agree. What do you call it?

VERGE

Sheliak.

LEIF

Okay. Where does that come from?

VERGE

Old Vapian myth... Inside every Vapian is a Sheliak. A beast. It's frozen inside you and the more you lose control of your emotions the more the Sheliak thaws. If it ever thaws completely, it takes over and you'll never have control of your body again. You'll have to spend the rest of your life as a spectator in your own body, unable to stop the chaos but forced to watch it all happen.

LEIF

Yeesh.

VERGE

So don't push me, alright?

LEIF

There's... not actually a small frozen animal inside you right?

VERGE

No, idiot, it's a metaphor.

LEIF

Okay, sorry, how am I supposed to know that?

VERGE

You know, there's a third reason why it's interesting to talk to you.

LEIF

Oh yeah?

VERGE

It's not just because you're a stranger and its not just because you're going to be dead soon. It's because you're an Earthling. You don't know anything.

LEIF

I know a few things.

VERGE

While you're sitting there with your Truskan beer, I'm drinking a bottle of wine from Festen. Do you know why?

LEIF

Because you're a wine person? You don't seem like a wine person, I saw you as a vintage cocktail person.

VERGE

Because I can order the entire bottle and open it myself. Because if I do that then I know nobody has messed with my drink.

LEIF

Isn't that a little paranoid?

VERGE

To you, it would seem that way because you're an Earthling who doesn't know anything. But what I know is that sometimes bartenders will spit in the drink of a Vapian. You don't know that most races wouldn't be caught dead having a drink with a Vapian at a bar. It's not just the Truskans that don't like us.

LEIF

Well, I can't imagine what all that's about... I like you.

VERGE

You don't know me.

LEIF

You seem delightful. We've known each other for several hours and you've only pulled a gun on me once.

VERGE

It's not me. It's all of us. People don't like Vapians.

LEIF
Where does that come from?

VERGE
It's a long story... Here we go.

LEIF
What?

VERGE
The buyer has eyed us and is making his way across the bar. You ready?

LEIF
Yeah. Hey, make me a promise.

VERGE
What?

LEIF
If this works out, let's get real drunk and you tell me why everybody hates you.

VERGE
... Yeah, okay.

LEIF
Excellent.

THE MUSIC AND MAYHEM OF RED'S RECTANGLE FADES. THE DOOR TO THE NANCY SINATRA SLIDES OPEN.

LEIF (CONT'D)
Mission accomplished!

VERGE
I wonder if that guy knows he paid three times the going rate?

LEIF
Desperation is great when you get rich from it.

VERGE
I don't want to say "rich" but it was a good day.

LEIF
I like that place, are all your deals there?

VERGE
No, that reminds me, you probably shouldn't show up there for a while.

LEIF
Why not?

VERGE

You'll get something along the lines of "Aren't you the one who was hanging out with that Vapian?" People won't talk to you.

LEIF

Hey. You never got around to that part. How come everybody hates you? I'm having a great time.

VERGE

...Hey Alice, how come everybody hates Vapians?

ALICE

Antipathy towards the Vapian race began when their planet was destroyed while performing a controversial experiment involving time crystals.

LEIF

Your fucking planet was destroyed?

ALICE

In the experiment, the planet of Vapus-10 was collapsed into what is now known as the first and only artificially created black hole.

LEIF

Your fucking planet turned into a fucking black hole?

ALICE

Billions were killed instantly. Including 1.2 million visiting from other systems. The planet of Vapus 10 was positioned in the middle of several trade routes that were no longer viable and creating new travel routes was incredibly time consuming and expensive. The only Vapians to survive were the citizens that happened to be out of the system at the time of the collapse.

VERGE

I was a baby. On vacation with my parents.

ALICE

The remaining Vapians were reviled for the loss of life and resources that occurred due to the collapse. Though this occurred 100 Earth years ago, the animosity toward the Vapian race persists.

LEIF

...Fuck.

VERGE

I grew up in a temporary refugee camp on a planet that could barely support life.

(MORE)

VERGE (CONT'D)

When I finally got out I found myself in a universe where everyone hates me. No surprise that a lot of us wound up being criminals... I enjoyed hanging out with you, Leif. It was the first time someone didn't assume who I was before they met me. But it's going to cost you. Maybe I should've warned you about that ahead of time.

LEIF

I enjoyed hanging out with you too. I don't give a shit what it cost me. It was worth it.

VERGE

...So, if you wouldn't mind. I need a ride to Traxus. I usually hole up there until I can figure out my next move.

LEIF

What's on Traxus?

VERGE

Not much. It's got an unstable orbit so most people stay away. It'll collide into another planet any time now but until then a few people manage to make it a good hideout.

LEIF

And then?

VERGE

Then it's on to the next job.

LEIF

I can take you there no problem. Sounds like something to see. On Earth we call that a Centaur.

VERGE

Thank you.

LEIF

Or...

VERGE

What?

LEIF

I mean...

VERGE

Leif?

LEIF

I've got a brand new pair of roller skates you've got a brand new key.

VERGE

What the fuck are you talking about?

LEIF

I have a ship. I have a ship and you know people.
So...

VERGE

I don't work with a partner.

LEIF

I get it. Lone wolf. Keeping it simple.

VERGE

That's the way I've always done it.

LEIF

Here's the thing. Earthlings evolved from fish.

VERGE

Where is this going to go?

LEIF

Our whole world was the water. But then one day
some weird fish said "Hey. What if it's not?" And
then suddenly we weren't in the water anymore.

VERGE

...Am I the fish in this analogy or are you the
fish?

LEIF

We are both collectively the fish.

VERGE

...Leif I don't think you know what you're getting
into. It's a mess out there.

LEIF

It's a mess everywhere. I think it's important who
you're in the mess with, don't you?

VERGE

You want to be in the mess with me?

LEIF

I think I'd like that.

VERGE

... Me too.

LEIF

Good. It's a deal. I feel like this is a big
moment.

VERGE

We'll see how big of a moment it is.

LEIF

We should seal the deal. How do Vapians seal a deal, is there a ceremony?

VERGE

There's several ways.

LEIF

Okay, let's pick one.

VERGE

...Is there a bedroom on this ship?

LEIF

...It's in the back.

VERGE

...That's one way... See you in a bit.

VERGE WALKS INTO THE BACK OF THE SHIP.

LEIF

Alice, remember when you told me you're always listening?

ALICE

Yes, I think I'll disable that function for a while.

LEIF

Good call.

ALICE

Going dark.

LEIF

... Captain Kirk give me strength.

LEIF WALKS INTO THE BACK.