

# THE BULBSQUAD CHRONICLES

A SERIES OF SHORT-STORIES

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## EPISODE ONE: DARKNESS COMES

The Blue Planet. 3000 AN\*. Winter.

Saying that it's winter, though, is somewhat of an exaggeration, as the Earth is by now really just a big ball of tropical heat all year round. The only ones who use the terms normally associated with seasons is the fashion industry.

The earth's landmass has long since sunk into the rising sea with the sole exception of Norway. Home of the moose. Land of the fjords. Of course, it's a long time since anyone called it Norway. More precisely, the birthplace of black metal was renamed to Really Tiny Continent in 2046. Already way back when the human race still existed, they could see this happening. No one seemed to notice, though, except for the five people who read the tiny article in some obscure Norwegian newspaper in 1993 AD. Exactly WHY Norway rose from the sea instead of sinking into it like the rest of the earth's landmass isn't really known, which probably has something to do with the fact that nobody cares why. They've got something so much cooler now.

Stretching all the way around the Earth is a long belt-like station. Earth Station is a galactic way-point. A last place to make sure you have an updated supply of underwear catalogues and paper tissues before you set out on that long journey to the next galaxy, the Sodomite Dwarf<sup>ck</sup>. It's filled with bars, most of them with bits of anatomy in their names. You can always be sure to see at least one specie you haven't seen before if you go to the Khoroma Fleeg\* Bar any night of the week, and the five-level Duty Free Shop is always packed with travellers desperately in need of cheap DeathSticks and perfume.

The whole station is run from the control module all the way up north.

Here, around 300 scientists and engineers constantly watch over Earth Station, making sure nothing unexpected happens. Lights are constantly flashing, and alarms are regularly going off every second or two. People are running to and fro saving the lives of everyone on the space station on a daily basis. And in the midst of all this, is one very small Captain. Captain Hause von Schtankenfarten. Though small is not an entirely correct term for the Captain, standing 7 feet tall, but compared to the relative hugeness of the space station and the population of staff present, he's really quite tiny. There isn't a situation over which this man doesn't have control. He practically oozes control. Nothing could throw this man off his balance. Except maybe what's about to happen any second.

You know how it looks when a lightbulb goes out, don't you? First, it emits a slight -bzzzzzt- sound while it goes almost completely dark. Then it brightens up again briefly before it goes -bzzZAP- and flashes brightly for a nanosecond to make the plunge into total darkness even MORE startling. All that's left is a faint glow in the middle of the bulb growing weaker and weaker until, finally, it is no more.

Now, imagine that and enlarge it to, oh, say one million times the size of Earth. That's roughly how it transpires when the sun goes out. Apart from the fact that there is no -bzzzzzt- sound. But we'll use some artistic licence and say there was, just for the dramatical effect of it. And if we're going to be dramatic about it, let's heighten the sound level by about one gajillion billion times the sound a regular lightbulb would make. And don't forget the short flash. Now picture that.

Needless to say, von Schtankenfarten gets quite a start from this. Looking directly at the sun, even through the special dark glass in the windows, as something like that happens, would make a bat see spots.

"WHAT THE RUDDY HELL WAS THAT?!" His startled voice shouts. No one answers. It is as if the entire station is holding its breath, waiting for something to happen. Waiting for the sun to come back on, or maybe waiting for-

Power gone. Not a single light. Now, the soundlessness is absolute, as all sounds of machinery are dumbstruck. Still, everyone is completely quiet as if

waiting. Waiting for...

A fair voice sounds through all the modules and decks of Earth Station as if it were a message from some higher being. "Emergency power: Activated" it says, and as if it were performing a spell, everything blips back to life. The lights fade in, the computers reboot, and the sound of the oxygen generator, like the buzz of a bee, flies back into the room. The people start moving and bustling about instantaneously at double the speed and intensity they had before the blackout.

The first one to actually open his mouth in the control bay is the Captain; "Alright! I want to know WHAT the hell just happened to the sun, and I want to know it five minutes ago!"

"But sir, we can't afford to spend our energy on timetravel now! Not with the sun out an' all!" says a squat shape beside Hause. "You can't possibly be ser-"

"Idiot! Of course I'm not serious, Shadron! I said that to put emphasis on how quick I want it, and to prove myself as a man who knows what he wants. But now you've gone and ruined it." He puts his hands to his face

"Oh, sorry, sir. Didn't mean to, sir."

"Juz... just leave it, okay?" The captain waves his right hand in a dismissive maneuver.

"Right, sir. Leaving it, sir."

Hause looks up, his face a variation of purple "Oh, Shadron? Could you do something else for me?"

"What's that, sir?"

"FIND OUT WHAT THE BLOODY HELL HAPPENED TO THE SUN!!"

Shadron, and everybody else in the room, can distinctly hear a vein in their captain's forehead pop, and so quickly continues doing what they were doing. Shadron gives a small hiccough and scurries out of range.

After having retreated to his living quarters, Captain Hause is trying to relax. Carefully, and quite shakily, he's pouring his bottle of Swai\*\*\*\* into a large beaker, trying hard not to spill anything, which is proving difficult, as this is his third beaker-full. He's just settling back into his comfy scree-leather chair as a

blue blurr zips into his quarters.

The blur screeches to a halt right in front of the captain and as it focuses, the round shape of Shadron appears to be standing there with his right hand raised in salute. As always, this gives the captain a good amount of shock, and especially in the state he is in right now (that's the state of Really Drunk, by the way), and the captain apparently believes an appropriate way to react is to spill half his beaker of Swai all over his uniform.

"Bloody hell, Shadron! Is that really necessary?!" He exclaims quite irritably as he stands up as straight as he can in his state and makes brushing movements with his hands.

Shadron leaps forward with astonishing speed compared to his small, rounded body. It may be that his six legs has something to do with his general briskness, but you can never be too sure.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, sir! Here, let me help you with that."

"No! That's okay! I'll be fi-"

"Nonsense! I have to get you out of these. Now, bend over and stretch your arms over your head."

The captain groans and does as his servant says. He might be Captain of Earth Station, and he might wield supreme power over the others there, but when Shadron sees something that needs cleaning, there's not much von Schtankenfarten can do to argue. Shadron drags his captain's uniform jacket off and chucks it absentmindedly into a hole in the wall as he says "Teleport to cleaning room.". The jacket quickly disintegrates into a million shiny little molecules that fade away into nothing and after this whole, rather impressive, show of pretty colours and light is over, the fair voice of the station says "Teleportation complete."

"So, did you come here to scare me to sobriety, or did you have something useful to say?"

"Legs-" Hause lowers his pantswaist to below his bottom and sits down legs out. "- well, I came here to report about what happened to the sun. Teleport to cleaning room"

"Well, what did you find out?"

Dazzling lights fade. "Teleportation complete."

"There was a man sent to the sun to check it out. He just got back. I've

sent for him to come here as soon as he was ready.”

“You mean he’s on his way? But my clothes! I’m the Captain of this ship, I can’t parade around in my underpants!”

“Don’t worry. The clothes will be ba-”

“Incoming teleportation from cleaning room.”

“Ah. There you are. Nice and clean.” Shadron says lightly.

“Well give them to me, man! I have to get dressed!”

The captain hurriedly gets into his clothes while not at all avoiding sticking his oblong head half-way through the arms of his jacket in the process. Fortunately, his head is not much wider than his arms, so he doesn’t get VERY stuck, and in the end, he manages to just do up his fly as a sturdy, square-beaked man marches into the quarters and stops with an almost impossibly square and military stomping of feet and saluting of hands. Considering this particular man has what looks like odd tentacles with hands haphazardly stuck on the ends as arms, saluting that squarely is indeed a great feat.

“Quark Nodgers reporting for duty, “ he inhales for the finale “SIR!”

“Right. At ease... guy.” the captain says and waves his hand in a bored fashion. Nodgers slaps his back with his hands and stomps his right foot to the side.

“I was informed that you’ve been-” the captain starts

“To hell and back, sir! To hell. And. Back.” Quark Nodgers finishes.

“What? Seriously? Were you ambushed or something?”

“No, I was in no real danger, sir.”

“Then why did you just-”

“Melodrama, sir. Mark of a good soldier.”

“But you’re not a SOLDIER. You’re a- pfah. Never mind.” You don’t get to be captain without meeting at least a few hundred guys like Quark Nodgers. It’s best to just leave it if he wants to get any further this century. “What do you have to report?”

“When I laid out on this mission, I had no idea what was in store for me.” Quark starts, and the captain nudges Shadron for his Swaï. If he’s going to go through this, he’s going to need some serious drugging.

“As I strapped myself up in the cockpit of my trusty ship, Caramella (I call her that because she’s really sticky), I immediately could sense something

was not quite right.-” As Shadron comes up to the captain with the bottle and beaker, his hand is relieved of the bottle in a swift stroke. A second later, he can see his master glugging down the Swaï like water. He couldn’t blame him.

“But like a proper soldier, I had to go on like normal. The mission must go on!”

Thirty minutes later, as the intrepid Space Buccaneer/soldier/whatever Quark Nodgers has just reached the surface of the sun, explaining in wide form the aesthetics of being face to face with something so fantastically huge and whatnot, Captain von Schtankenfarten has had enough. It is time to put this story to an end.

“Skip to the end?” he says impatiently.

“The rows upon rows of- WHAT?” Quark says, notably irritated that he has been sidetracked in his fantastic story. Never mind who it was who actually sidetracked him. Be it captain or king.

“I’m quite frankly getting quite tired with your story. Give me the short basics. The conclusion, if you will.”

“The... conclusion, sir?” By the look on Quark’s face and the sound of his voice, you’d think the word wasn’t in his vocabulary. Probably wasn’t either.

“Yes.” A look of exasperation seems to have frozen to the Captain’s face. “in one sentence.”

“The sun is really a giant ball of lightbulbs and now they’ve all gone blank, sir.”

“Really?”

“In short, sir... yes, sir.”

“Blimey.”

\* Anno Nusmag. To make it easier for the common reader, the first year of the reckoning of Nusmag landed roughly on 500 000 AD.

\*\* Originally named the Sagittarius Dwarf by the humans, it was renamed due to the circumstances around the first encounter with a being from that galaxy.

\*\*\* Fleeg is the foulest-smelling and strongest drink ever created. One glass

will render you sightless for at least two days while at the same time giving you hallucinations of being attacked by asteroids shaped like armadillos. Naturally, fleeg is the single most popular drink in the entire universe.

\*\*\*\* Something With Alcohol In It. A very exclusive drink made for no other reason than to get rich people really drunk really fast when they REALLY need it.



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