Dual Universe Fanstories



Serious Spaceship Drama

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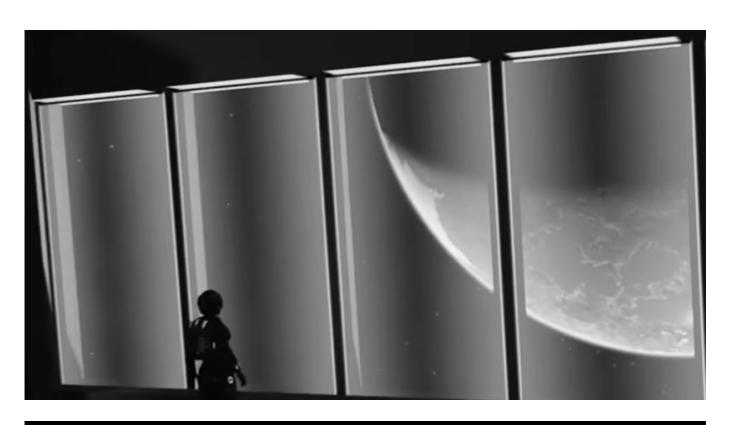
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Hedgehog Dilemma

by Kurock



The ship salesman said that the ship would take her places as he slapped the bulky machine's roof. He had no idea. Mainly because he was stuffed into a nearby trash receptacle, to wake up later with a throbbing headache to match the sucker punch that caused it. She kindly left him a message that the Crimson Rogues, her pirate crew, had commandeered his scrappy frigate. After a quick paint job that misspelled the ship's name and left the crew one member short, the *Red Rouge* departed Tortuga on their mission for booty.



"Hey, Rob."

"Hi, Tax. What kind of a pirate name is 'Tax' anyway?"

"Because nothing is certain but Death by Taxes."

"I'm not sure that's how it goes."

"And taxes are basically theft. It's the perfect pirate name."

"Ooh. Nice social commentary there. And would you look at the time: it's beer-o-clock."

"You know it's always time for beer. And that's my beer."

"Didn't see your name on it."

"Also don't get the gunnery controls sticky again, beer spillage is the worst kind of waste, and you know how the captain hates it when they get all gummed up."

"Yeah, what's she going to do?"

"The captain likes to take people out."

"What do you mean, Tax? For lunch?"

"No. More like she makes them unconscious. Permanently."

"I'm not sure which is more attractive."

"That's why we are here, Rob. That's why we are here. Another beer?"

"Sure as taxes."



The captain of the *Red Rouge* sat in her command chair, absentmindedly flicking one of the pointy protrusions of her disturbingly adorable hedgehog figurine. The hedgehog stood on its hind legs, one arm extended, leaning against a non-existent wall like a little prickly mime.

"Captain, extra small ship detected. 10 K. Coming up quickly on our six."

The captain continued to flick one of the hedgehogs' more prominent spikes which protested with short sharp vibrations. With a sigh, she rested her head against the head cushion, feeling the coarse stitching of their logo: the red skull and matching red crossed cutlasses.

"Callsign: 'Jin & Vinegar'," the navigator continued, "it's the same one that's been following us since Eingang Station."

The captain struck the leaning hedgehog a bit harder than intended, sending it spinning across the bridge to lodge into the side of the navigator's helmet.

"Shoot it down," the captain said coldly.

"But," the navigator began.

"Do it!" the captain snapped. Before her last syllable was uttered, the rear gunners pointed their eager cannons at the little ship bearing down on them. A single discharge from the *Red Rouge*'s weapons exploded against the gnat's

cockpit.

The blip on the navigator's screen turned from red to grey and then disappeared.

"Target destroyed. No signs of life," the navigator's report was punctuated by the hedgehog dislodging from his slightly more perforated helmet and falling onto the dark hex-patterned floor with a thunk.

The captain breathed a relieved sigh, "Scrap that ship. No sense wasting good parts. Hop to it." She cracked her order like a whip. As one, the crew scrambled into action. While she scooped up the hedgehog from the holey deck and strutted back to her quarters, the *Red Rouge* was brought alongside the *Jin & Vinegar*'s smoking remains. It was swarmed by the eager crew, and dismantled piece by smoldering piece.





"Lookie here, Rob! A button."

"What does it do, Tax?"

"Nothing. The whole ship is broken. You know that's how salvaging works, right? Once we blow up the core it all stops working."

"I know that. What did that button used to do then?"

"Light switch."

"That is hardly worth mentioning, Tax."

"I can wire it up to close your door when I am trying to sleep and you insist on watching those stupid crime dramas."

"It's called 'the news', Tax. Last night a thief calling himself Q-pin stole a statue from the UEF Institute of Earth History. A whole big statue. They said it was worth a billion quanta because it's fancy art, you know, from Earth."

"I know, Rob. I couldn't help but overhear because you had the damn thing on so loud. And the thief's name is Lupin, which is cringey as all hell. Also the 'massive' statue is about as tall as your hand."

"I thought it was bigger, Tax. To be worth a billion quanta, it has to be."

"Rob. It's an artifact from Earth. They said it's priceless and in the same breath said it's worth like 50 mil. What did it look like?"

"Statue of a hedgehog in a tutu, balanced on one foot with one outstretched little arm held up into the air and the other like a teapot handle. Didn't know a hedgehog ballerina counted as an artifact, Tax."

"What did you think it counted as then?"

"Dunno. Artifacts are supposed to be all technological and stuff. The ballerina is more like a tacky ornament."

"Speaking of tacky ornaments, grab that sink. It will look good next to the urinal back on the Rouge."

"Did you know Rouge means 'Red', Tax?"

"Yup."

"So our ship's name is 'Red Red'."

"Captain made sure that person never made that spelling mistake again."

"Oh?"

"He remembered it for the rest of his short life, Rob. Don't get on the captain's bad side."

"Which side is that, Tax?"

"Rob. Just get the sink to the Rouge."



The captain bursted into her private quarters and jabbed the button to close the door. The door slid shut with a small sigh.

A thumping noise pulsed in her ears. It happened every time she was angry. Very angry. She slammed the hedgehog onto the fine-grained wooden tabletop. Even though her space suit protected her from the spines of the hedgehog, it was still enough force to bruise her hand.

Why was she so furious? That annoyance was dead and dealt with. She should be relieved. Frustrated, she lashed out, kicking over the table made from the hated trees of Alioth. The leaning hedgehog and a potted plant that

had rested peacefully on the table both flew into the air. The pot smashed to the floor, spilling its loamy soil over her carpet. The additional stain, one she knew she would not bother to have cleaned, frustrated her even more. She left them where they fell.

"Captain Bonny?"

The hesitant call was followed by an equally weak tap on her door. Captain Sarah Bonny. Not her real name, of course, but one she chose from a short list of 18th century pirates. Maybe she should have researched her name a bit more but she didn't feel like being called the more common 'Mary'. Also 'Mary' had too high a chance of sheep related quips from the crew.

"Sarah?" came the call again.

"What is it, Schmee?" she snapped at her first mate a bit more forcefully than she meant to.

"We are done salvaging, Captain," said Schmee patiently. Loyal to a fault. Loyalty that has grown over the years, matched by the growth of his unruly grey-white beard.

"A good haul for such a small ship," Schmee continued, "in fact, there is something we haven't seen..."

"Carry on!" Captain Bonny interrupted the old man, "Carry on to the ambush site. We don't have time to waste on chit chat."

"But..."

"It can wait. Carry. On."

"As you wish."

As Schmee's footsteps receded, Captain Bonny allowed herself a short sigh.

"There is no need to coddle me any more, you old codger," she whispered affectionately.



"We've been over this before but I'll repeat myself for those that have forgotten already," Captain Bonny announced to the crew as she stood in front of her seat on the bridge. Her voice echoed throughout the ship on the communication system, "SilverLight Industries has a convoy of transport ships, thick and fat with gold, headed from the gold mines of Feli to their processing plant on Alioth. Our reliable source says they are swinging by Madis to try to fool any intercepts."

"We will have our light fighters tantalize the front of their column, and let them blow their load of defenders. Once we tease them out they can be wiped up and discarded like the expended refuse they are. Then, with our transponders set to look like we're friendly, this ship will hit their rear hard. We get in and out before they know what happened. Before the end, we will be showered in Feli gold. Pilots to your fighters! Gunners to your turrets!"

The crew gave eager shouts, loaded cannons, and scrambled to their fighters, that were haphazardly strapped to the sides of the Rouge.



"Hey Rob, have you heard of the hedgehog dilemma?"

"What dilemma could a hedgehog possibly have, Tax?"

"It's when a mummy hedgehog and a daddy hedgehog love each other very much..."

"I think I have heard this somewhere before..."

"And they want to get together..."

"I have definitely heard this somewhere before..."

"But they keep poking each other with their spines..."

"I was expecting something else, strangely enough, also involving poking."

"And so the hedgehogs end up not getting together. The end."

"That is a sad story, Tax."

"Not as sad as we're going to be if we screw this up."

"Hehe. You said 'screw'."

"Shut up, Rob."



The small rocky moon lurched into view as the *Red Rouge* exited warp, its hazy pale planet looming ominously behind it. The small squadron of fighters launched from the *Red Rouge* and flew in a haphazard formation to wait in silence on the other side of the moon.

On the Rouge, anticipation filled the air as navigators checked their radars and gunners triple checked their weapons. Rob was clutching his turret's controls in a white knuckled grip.

"Tax, I'm so exited!"

"You mean 'excited', Rob."

"That's what she said."

"Shhh. We're supposed to be waiting quietly."

"But I'm being silent. You're the one making the noise."

"Shut up, Rob."

The trap was set. They waited.

3

Bulky haulers warped out next to the rugged moon, the cost of the warp cells a mere fraction compared to the price of the rare metal they hauled, even more so once the precious ores were processed into advanced spaceship electronics. The green and silver SilverLight Industry logo emblazoned on the ship's sides announced that they were the convoy Captain Bonny and her crew had been waiting for.

The pirate fighters, already in position at the head of the column of haulers, started firing their weapons. Small explosions rocked the frontmost SilverLight vessel, leaving a series of pockmarks on its hull. Not much damage but it served its purpose: As if following a well rehearsed script, the SilverLight haulers launched off their own contingent of fighters which the pirates expertly lured away with a slow baiting retreat. Free of annoyances, the SilverLight convoy waddled slowly past the uneven moon.

On cue, the *Red Rouge* orbited in neatly behind the convey.



"Wait for it," Captain Bonny ordered as the *Red Rouge*, now displaying SilverLight signals, slowly slid into position behind the rearmost transport, "Wait until we can see the raised hair on the back of their necks."

"Captain! New contact just dropped out of warp behind us. It's one of Empire's War-class destroyers: The Azure Sentinel. They are still out of range but they are training their weapons on us," the navigator announced, failing to hide the nervous excitement in his voice.

"Vark!" Captain Bonny swore and the quickly bellowed orders, "Abort mission. Evasive maneuvers."

Standing at his position next to the captain's chair, Schmee calmly chimed in, "Azure Sentinel? I thought we lost those boys on the other side of Jago. How did they track us all the way out here?"

Before Bonny could answer, a loud haughty voice cracked over the intercom, "What a pleasant surprise, Captain Sarah Bonny of the Crimson Pie-rats."

"Always so formal, Mitch," Captain Bonny answered snidely.

"That's Admiral Mitchell Armstrong to you! I was tracking that Lupin thief and happened to find you. Congratulations on your increased bounty, by the way. I will capture you and make you mine!"

"Sorry, I am not interested in egotistical, muscle headed men."

"No," he spluttered, "I mean you will be put to work in the natron mines."

"We have a firing solution," Tax and Rob announced simultaneously on the ship's local comms.

"I know what you meant," Bonny told the Admiral, "Please accept these packages of my most sincere and heartfelt feelings."

With the captain's nod, Rouge's antimatter missiles erupted on the hull of the Sentinel. Armstrong's comms were cut off with a half muffled explosion.

At that moment the Rouge shuddered from an explosion of its own.



"Damage report! Did they hit us?" Captain Bonny asked Schmee.

Schmee held a hand to his ear and replied, "Cargo hold C has taken damage from the inside. Someone has set us up the bomb. Security is checking now." "Retreat!" Captain Bonny commanded, "Hopefully our missiles were enough to give us a little breathing room."

The nimble *Red Rouge*'s engines flared and it shot off into an orbit around the moon leaving the slower destroyer behind.

"Looks like we have a stowaway, captain. Bastard blew up a container inside hold C and got away from security. A real slippery one."

"I thought we checked for stowaways," Bonny grumbled.

"We did, Captain, back at Eingang Station. He must have got on after that."

"That Jin and Vinegar ship. Where did we store that ship's parts?"

"Containers in cargo hold C."

"Well, that solves that mystery."

"Security says he disappeared."

"How? This ship isn't *that* big. The personnel trackers should be picking up everyone."

"Unknown, captain. No airlock has opened and the outer hull is undamaged. Security is checking the rooms visually."

Captain Bonny got a sinking feeling in her gut quickly replaced by anger. She heard thumping in her ears. It's *him*. She just knows it's *him*.

"Captain? Are you feeling alright?" Schmee asked with quiet concern in his voice.

"Tell security to kill the stowaway on sight. Pick up our fighters and let's get out of here. I want to be half way to Sicari before Admiral Mitch's ears have stopped ringing."

"From comm calls?"

"No, from our explosions."

"Ah."



"Tax! Did you see that, Tax? I popped the Admiral a good one. Right on the side of that stupid exposed bridge."

"Not bad, Rob. I got a lucky shot on their engines. Good thing we are getting away now while they take the time to repair."

"Why didn't they shoot back, Tax?"

"Because we have skill, Rob. So many tons of skill. We are like a pair of neutron stars."

"Are they heavy, Tax?"

"And dense. Very much like you."

"Thanks. You are a great friend, Tax. Are you still playing with that button?"

"Almost got it all fixed and wired up so that I don't have to listen to your dramas anymore."

"I told you, it's news, Tax. And it's on now. The UEF forces found Lupin's calling card and a riddle. What do you think it means?"

"I wasn't listening, Rob."

"He left a message on a screen that said 'The dancing hog is kept by a pair of pigs'. What's that mean?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, Rob."

"The hoverbike is by the police?"

"The what?"

"That's my guess: 'the hoverbike is by the police'."

"I take back what I said."

"What did you say, Tax?"

"Your guess cannot be placed anywhere near the same star system as mine."

"Thanks, Tax."

"No problem, Rob."



Captain Sarah Bonny strode into her room and flopped down on her bunk. It had been a long and very messed up day. A day in which she saw him, not once, but twice. Ok, she didn't actually see him, but she just knew it was him. Her gut hasn't been wrong before. Her gut was bothering her now, but she couldn't quite place it. Something was wrong. She looked around her quarters and noticed the table she kicked over had been righted. Nothing strange about that; Schmee liked to spoil her. But what was on the table she found a little disturbing. A pirouetting hedgehog figurine of the same size as hers, but dressed in a tiny tutu. She scanned the floor for her own leaning hedgehog but couldn't find it. It was gone.

She just knew *he* was in her room and he had taken her hedgehog! She started hearing the thunder in her ears again. It almost masked the sound of her door silently swinging shut. She leapt at the door, angrily shoving it open and spun her head about to check both sides of the corridor. A blur of a figure rounded the corner silently, but not fast enough to go unnoticed. She would have recognized that wiry build anywhere. It was *him*.

"Jeff!" she shouted after the fleeing figure, already hidden around the corner. She drew her clunky blaster that always rested on her hip and sprinted after him.

"Schmee!" she said into her comms linked directly to the old man, "Found the stowaway. He's heading towards the engine room. Send security immediately. Shoot to kill."

The *Red Rouge* shook under her, making her stumble, followed by a low reverberating boom.

"Captain," Schmee's voice crackled in her ear, "Your presence is required on the bridge. The Azure Sentinel found us again and are firing their weapons."



"My missile launcher broke, Tax."

"The repair crew is busy fixing it, Rob. Damn that Sentinel has got some big guns."

"How did they find us, Tax? Space is unbelievably big."

"They either got lucky or someone is leading them straight to us."

"We have a traitor onboard, Tax? I bet it's the cook. He's got those shifty eyes."

"Isn't the cook your brother?"

"That's how I know he's got shifty eyes."

"Get ready to rain warheads on them once the repairs are done."

"Tax, his eyes are just like the ones I see in the mirror. Real shifty."

"Shut up, Rob."



"Private line for you from the Red Rouge, Admiral."

"Surrendering already are they? Put them through, petty officer."

"Hi, cousin Mitchell."

"Jeff! What are you doing on the Red Rouge? Did pirates kidnap you?"

"Not this time, cousin. Could you kindly stop shooting. It would be rather inconvenient to die right now."

"Sorry, Jeff. Casualties of war and all that."

With a nod from Admiral Armstrong, the comms were cut and explosions continued rocking around the Rouge.



"Cousin! Mitchell! Vark!" Jeff agitatedly punched the now blank screen he commandeered on the Rouge.

Jeff checked the battery on his stealth suit. Still low, of course. It didn't magically recharge itself when he wasn't looking.

Jeff looked at the tracking device in his hand. It looked like a piece of advanced electronics made especially tough to withstand the rigors of many hostile environments and Jeff was feeling particularly hostile at the moment. He had found it lying conveniently next to the ballerina hedgehog in the container that held what was left of his ship. Sarah's crew could be called

many things and 'efficient' certainly was one of them. How had Mitch got the tracker on his ship? Jeff knew the last job was a little messy when all he could think of was getting that ballerina hedgehog to Sarah. Jeff cursed. He had obviously made a mistake but couldn't think with Mitch's damn warheads going off around him.

Without thinking, Jeff scratched a slight itch he felt tickling his ankle which was followed by a sharp pain. Looking down he saw a burley hedgehog that was very unlike the lithe ballerina hedgehog he had left in Sarah's room. This hedgehog was leaning nonchalantly against his foot, with one of its spines driven into his ankle. He popped off the hedgehog hitchhiker and his space suit sealed itself with a hiss.

He inspected the little leaning hedgehog held gingerly in his hand, "Sarah would like you too," he said to it quietly.

Jeff was interrupted by blaster fire striking the wall near his head, leaving a small dark scorch mark. Varking Mitch's potshots entirely hid the sound of the approaching security. They were large, heavily muscled pirates that seemed like they had a day job as bouncers for the nightclubs of Tortuga. Which they probably did.

Jeff dove into a nearby airlock and flicked the manual override switch. He smiled and waved at the impotently raging pirates through the tiny reinforced window of the airlock. He was safe from them for now but he was stuck between the two doors of the airlock. Outside the Sentinel was trying to burn the Rouge away and inside were a bunch of big boys that wanted to remove

him permanently.

Another face bobbed in front of the airlock window. Sarah. She looked just a little bit peeved and was shouting something at him.

Before Jeff had the chance to flip on his comms, the outside airlock blew open and tore away. In the split second before Jeff was sucked into space, he mouthed at Sarah, "I'm sorry."



"The old Rouge has been taking a hammering, Tax."

"Yup. My launchers are down again, Rob. Where is the captain? She usually gets us out of these crisises really quickly."

"That's 'crises', Tax. 'Cry-Seas'."

"Now is not really the time for corrections, Rob."

"But you correct me all the time, Tax!"

"That's how you learn."

"Learn what?"

"Shut up, Rob."



As Sarah watched Jeff being sucked out of the airlock into space, she didn't know whether to be horrified or relieved. The *Red Rouge* shook her back into the present. No time to be Sarah. The ship needed her. She was Captain Bonny again and started barking short precise orders at the crew through her

comms as she purposefully strode back into the bridge. The finely tuned machine that was her crew started whirring again and the *Red Rouge* sprang to action.

"They have bigger guns, bigger engines and far bigger egos than us," Captain Bonny announced to the crew, "just because they are bigger does not mean they are better. Schmee, is there anything close to us out there within 1SU? Even a small asteroid would do."

Schmee hesitated for a second, "Three nearby space rocks all a few meters in diameter, Captain, as well as two wrecks. One is an abandoned scout ship and another is an abandoned fuel station."

"Set a course for the station."

"Aye aye, Captain."

The *Red Rouge* spiraled towards their destination with the *Azure Sentinel's* rounds exploding around the ship rather than against the Rouge's dented and hole-ridden hull. On the bridge, the damage report screen showed the repair crews hard at work bringing the broken parts from red to a functional yellow.

"Put the station on screen," Bonny ordered. The main screen was instantly filled with the black emptiness of space and a cloud of debris slowly swam into view slightly obscuring the vertical blocked monstrosity of what was left of the space station. The station was riddled with small holes, with a single large jagged void in its center, likely a fuel storage blow-out.

Captain Bonny took one look at the scale and pointed, "Fly through that hole.

Tail gunners, fire at the Sentinel with all you've got."

The Red Rouge rocked from an explosion.

Schmee reporter calmly, "Rear guns have been disabled, Captain."

"Vark," Bonny swore, she double checked that the Rouge was still heading to the hole in the station, "We'll do it the hard way then. Put Mitch on screen."

"What? Hello there, Captain Bonny. Have you decided to give up? We have already scanned the wreck you are heading to. It has already been picked clean by bottom feeders like you. There is nothing for you there."

"Are you sure? There might be some cabin boys that actually want to stay around you."

Admiral Armstrong's face turned a dark shade of red, made worse by a stifled snickering from an officer by his side.

Captain Bonny pushed on, "You know they wouldn't even consider you if you didn't have that fancy title your daddy gave you."

Armstrong's face turned purple has he foamed, "Fire everything we have at them!"

"We already are, Admiral. They are dodging somehow." replied a voice with a squeak.

Not missing the opportunity, Bonny added, "Do you let your good cabin boys onto the bridge?"

"RAM THEM!" the Admiral shouted.

The Sentinel closed the gap between the ships, but too late, a deafening crunching and crackling sound played through the comms into Bonny's ear, followed by a short, "Well played, Captain Bonny. Well played," the Admiral

said before the connection was cut.



"Captain did it, Tax! She actually did it."

"Didn't think we were going to make it there for a second, Rob."

"I also thought we were goners, Tax. Did you see how the Sentinel got all caught up in that old space station? It got swallowed like it was a whale."

"The Sentinel?"

"No, the station was like a whale, doing the swallowing."

"You know the blue whale had a throat opening the size of a tennis ball?"

"What's a tennis ball, Tax?"

"A ball around the size of a watermelon. Apparently it was soft and furry."

"Poor whale. Must have been tough to swallow with a furry throat."

""

"What?"

"I wonder about you sometimes, Rob. Oh look! A space whale!"

"Where is the whale, Tax? I don't see it. Tax? Where did you go? Taaaax!"



Jeff was hanging onto the side of the *Red Rouge*, clutching the little hedgehog that somehow embedded itself on the ship's hull as Jeff was flung from the airlock.

It was all Jeff could do to hold on to that little spiked ball as the Rouge pulled

a crazy number of G's during its maneuvers to escape the Sentinel. A beam from the space station threatened to scrape Jeff off his precarious handhold as the Rouge snugly threaded through the jagged gap left by a long past war through the side of the space station.

Jeff realized he was still clutching the electronic tracker in his other hand. Half reflexively, Jeff threw the tracker into the dark recesses of the wreckage as the station rushed by.



Once through the station, Jeff had a perfect view through the holes in the station of the *Azure Sentinel* bearing down on them at ramming speed. Jeff winced as he watched the Sentinel strike the station's hole along all its edges simultaneously. For a moment, it looked like the Sentinel would push through but the station resisted and instead the Sentinel collapsed in on itself.

Explosions from crushed equipment detonated along all the ruptured sides of the Sentinel. The Sentinel went dark.

At the last moment, the Sentinel fired a final volley at the fleeing Rouge, but every single shell struck the station instead, collapsing the already compromised structure back onto the Sentinel. The *Azure Sentinel* disappeared into a pile of rubble of its own making.

The Red Rouge coasted away into black space.

Jeff knew the Rouge was waiting for the warp drive to be prepared before the jump and he didn't want to find out what warp felt like outside the safety of the hull.

He leveraged the hedgehog off the hull and hauled himself, hand over hand, back to the hollow where the airlock once was. He barely made it inside when he felt the familiar feeling of his stomach dropping away, much like it would on an elevator. Except the elevator accelerated to light speeds.

A quick hack later and he was beyond the inner airlock, with only a minimal amount of air lost to space.



Sarah was fatigued as she loped back to her quarters. It had been a very long day and she was tired of being shot at. But at least they would live to see another day as free pirates. And that annoyance Jeff was gone.

She was sleepy, but not so worn out that she would not notice someone had,

once again, entered her room. She drew her blaster and kicked the door open. Sitting on her bed and smiling at her, as if he did nothing wrong, was Jeff. Sarah leveled the blaster at his head.

"Give me one good reason I shouldn't strap you to the nearest missile and have your insides decorate Mitch's hull?" Sarah asked quietly.

"Sarah, I am Lupin,"

"Anyone paying attention would know that by now, Jeff. And what were you thinking? That is a horrible name for a thief."

"It's better than Jeff."

"Fair enough."

"Could you put that down?" Jeff asked, pointing at Sarah's blaster.

"You abandoned me on our wedding day, Jeff."

"I was running from the Empire at that time. Well Lupin was."

"And when you couldn't make the dates you skipped before that?"

"Running from Hyperion. And Dark Star Imperium. And New Genesis. In that order. Come to think of it, I had to run from the entire Ascendency once."

"And you couldn't have told me?"

"Didn't want to pull you into a life of crime."

"I'm a pirate, Jeff!"

"I didn't know that at the time!"

"Do you think all those trips we took to Tortuga were because it was a nice holiday destination?"

"I thought you had eccentric tastes."

"And the big pirate flag didn't give it away?" For emphasis, she slapped the flag of the skull and crossed cutlasses hanging on the wall.

- "As I said, eccentric."
- "I introduced Schmee to you as my first mate."
- "I thought he was an old ex-boyfriend."
- "He is old enough to be my grandfather."
- "Eccentric tastes."
- "You are an idiot."
- "And the riddle that you, as Lupin, left at your latest escapade?"
- "Something I made up on the spot. 'The dancing hog is kept by a pair of pigs',"

 Jeff shrugged, "The riddle was just saying that the hedgehog was in my ship."
- "The Jin & Vinegar? Why do you always start your ship's name with Jin? And how does that riddle say it's on your ship?"
- "Vinegar is the same as sour wine."
- "Oh no."
- "Take the '&' and put it between 'Sour Wine'."
- "You didn't."
- "'Sour & Wine' sounds a bit like 'sow and swine'."
- "Sounds like?" Captain Bonny exclaimed, her forehead wrinkling in the way that Jeff found so endearing.
- "And that's two pigs," Jeff finished proudly.
- "Who in their right mind would figure that out?"
- Jeff shrugged,"It wasn't meant to be solved."
- "Why did you do it?" She asked.
- Jeff took the two hedgehogs and once they were brought close to each other they magnetically clipped together with a soft clink. Each hog's spines barely missed the others.

"For you." Jeff held the hugging pair of bristling hedgehogs toward Sarah.

"Idiot," Sarah said as she accepted the gift.



Schmee paused with his hand outstretched toward the door to Bonny's quarters. He heard the familiar sound that he had not heard in a long time. She was laughing. With a smile, Schmee dropped his hand, turned, and walked away. His reports could wait. With a skip in his step, Schmee returned to the bridge humming to himself.



"Lately the captain has not been her old mean self, Tax."

"I would hope so. They are getting married after all."

"You think she will punish us like before?"

"We can only hope."

"It's almost like one of those things you get at the massage parlor, Tax."

"What's that, Rob?"

"A happy ending."

"Shut up, Rob."

About the Author

Kurock is one of the more popular authors writing for Dual Universe. Between juggling his children, he lives behind his keyboard in South Africa and says he doesn't want to go outside. Going outside would mean not playing pen and paper RPGs, boardgames, and most importantly Dual Universe. Two time winner of the NovaWrimo Community Vote, Kurock encourages other authors to enter their stories in the next NovaWrimo: Just DU it. You can find Kurock everywhere in the community, most prominently running DICE, the Dual Universe gaming commission. But if you want to know more, you can read Novaquark's Community Spotlight.

Picture Credit

- Page 1: Novaquark Dual Universe Key Art: Fighter
- Page 3: Novaquark One shared universe (Dual Universe beta trailer)
- Page 6: Novaquark This is Dual Universe (Official Trailer)
- Page 14: Novaquark We Shall Fight (Dual Universe PvP trailer)
- Page 25: Novaquark This is Dual Universe (Official Trailer)
- Page 32: Novaguark Dual Universe Key Art: Fighter

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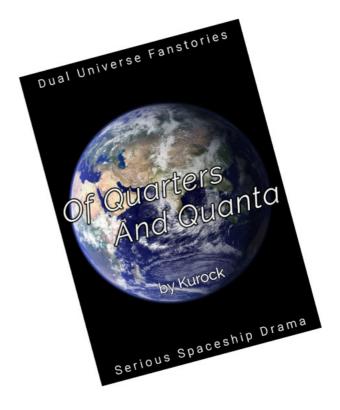
Dual Universe Development Timeline
Community Media
Organization Updates
Making History in Dual Universe
Pride before Cinderfall – A short story
based on true events by Kurock
168 pages, released: 03 August 2020

<u>Dual Universe Fanstories – Issue 1</u>

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Dual Universe Fanstories



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