

Travelers

102

by Kyle Eggleston

Norev stormed down the hallway towards O'Brien's quarters. In her head she was preparing what to say, no. What to yell at him. Arriving at his quarters, Norev punched the door chime with her fist twice.

"Yes? Who is it?" O'Brien's voice could be heard over the comm unit. He was groggy, sleepy even. It sounded like he had just woken up. Good, she wanted him to be awake. There was no point in talking to a half awake man, or a fully asleep man. Hell there wasn't a point in talking to a man at all. But here she was facing the truth.

"It's Norev." She said in a somewhat calm voice. She didn't want to startle him, not yet. If she sounded upset now, he might not answer the door. Norev tried to control her breathing for the time being. Being outright angry had its negativity as well.

"Come in." O'Brien said. The door opened.

O'Brien watched as Norev entered his quarters. He could feel tension rise in the air. *Uh oh*. He thought. *Here we go*. Jack braced himself for the incoming blow.

"You arrested my people?!" Norev screamed.

Ah, there it was.

O'Brien stood from his seat. "Yes, yes I did. I also arrested my people and a number of other aliens."

Norev put her hands on her hips. "Listen to yourself. *Aliens*. How dare you speak of other races like that. How dare you. Do you know what you've done? It's illegal to arrest Shuka's citizens. I don't care about the other aliens as you put them. I care about my people."

Raising a finger, Jack shook it in Norev's face. "Illegal. What do you know about what's illegal? Both of our people were injured in the fight. Everyone involved will be held until I determine otherwise. You forget, this is a United Earth Space Station. You don't dictate rules here."

"In orbit of *my* planet major!" Norev said. "You are here as our guests. Don't you forget that."

Jack looked down for a moment. He wasn't going to get anywhere arguing over politics about who the station belongs to. Who's right it is to be here etc. Taking a deep breath he looked back up to Norev. She hadn't moved an inch.

"Shovock!" Jack yelled. He couldn't say why he said the word, only that it felt right. He usually refrained from swearing in a different language as English was his native tongue. This was one of those rare occasions where it was necessary.

Norev looked shocked. "You swear well in Shuka major. I would suggest you don't call me that ever again." Slamming her translation device down on a nearby table, she stormed out of Jack's quarters.

Jack stared at the table for a moment. Walking across the room he picked up the translation device. Did she mean to leave it? Was it his now? Why did calling her a bitch in her own language make her just leave like that? He had too many questions running through his mind. Jack knew one thing though, this was not how he wanted to begin his first day as station commander.

* * *

Down in security, Lieutenant Killpack watched the brig video feed. It had been a number of hours since his security force had arrested the aliens and humans after the incident at the cafe.

"Next" Killpack said. He watched as the next video feed appears on the screen. "There you are." He whispered.

On the monitor was Commander McDuff. He was yelling something at the camera. Killpack decided not to listen to the feed. He didn't need to hear someone yelling at him. He was about to ask for the next feed when a thought crossed his mind. "Killpack to medical bay."

"Medical bay." A man's voice came through the line.

Killpack nodded at the familiar voice. "Doctor Allen, Mathew. Good to hear you man. I didn't know you were back. How was your vacation?"

"What can I say, it was the Moon. But you didn't call to catch up. What can I do for you?" Mathew asked.

Killpack nodded again "Yes, I have a prisoner here that I think could use some of your attention."

"Medical or psychological?"

Killpack laughed. "You choose."

You could hear Mathew smiling back through the channel. "I'll be right down."

Twenty minutes later Doctor Allen showed up in security. He carried with him a medical case like the doctors used to carry back in the eighteen hundreds. Looking to Killpack, he gestured. "Which one?"

"Cell three." Killpack said. "Good luck, you're going to need it."

Doctor Allen headed down the hall towards the brig cells. Coming upon the third one, he found McDuff still yelling at the security camera.

"If you don't let me out, I'm going to sue!" McDuff's voice trailed off as he saw the doctor approach. "Oh hey doc, what are you doing here?"

Matt smiled "Hi Bert. Long time no see. I was told you were in here. Figured you could use a listening ear." He set his medical bag down on the floor and pulled a chair over to sit down.

McDuff sighed. A listening ear. Just what he wanted. Not really of course, there was nothing he wanted more than to get out of the brig. Typical drunk charges only meant he would be there for twenty-four hours. He had been there before, it was nothing new. "Listen, I just want out. Are you here to do that?"

Matt shook his head. "No. I'm just here to talk." He paused, how best to continue the conversation he thought. "I'll be blunt, you have a problem." He looked McDuff square in the eyes.

McDuff looked to the floor. He didn't want to match Matt's stare. His problems were his own, he didn't need some doctor telling him otherwise. "If it's about the drinking,"

Matt scoffed "I don't care about your drinking Bert. What you do on your own time doesn't matter. But your xenophobic views of aliens is something else. You can't wear that uniform have hold those views. Those views were of a corrupt president, ones which you don't have the luxury of holding anymore. We are in a new time, you need to change with it,"

McDuff shook his head and looked at Matt. "That may be the case, but I doubt I'll ever change my mind on the matter." Placing his hands on his hips he started to pace around. "You don't know what it's like out there. We're constantly up against new species we've never encountered before. Species who don't respect us."

Clasping his hands, Matt smirked at the thought. "Well when you don't give them a reason to respect you, why would they? I've looked over your file, you've gone rounds it seems with this issue. I'm revoking your command status under Article Forty-Seven of the charter. Your commanding officer will be notified asap."

McDuff couldn't believe what he was hearing. They couldn't do this to him. How could they do this to hi? "You have no authority." He asked in disbelief.

Matt frowned. "Article Forty-Seven covers my ass. Does it cover yours?" While it was true Article Forty-Seven did cover the doctor's butt in this situation, he had the authority to recommend an officer unfit for command. He just wasn't sure if what he was implying was the truth, he had only skimmed the article before meeting with Bert, nothing more. "Don't try me, I will carry out the order."

Bert sighed. He was the one locked up, there was no place he could go. At the end of the day the doctor had him. There was nothing he could do about it. "Alright, submit your report. Will it get me out of here?"

"I don't see why not." Matt said. "You'll surrender yourself to your security chief when you get back to the Fearless. The admiralty can take care of you from here." He stood and walked down the hallway back to the security office.

Upon arriving at the security office Matt looked to Killpack "He's all yours. He'll surrender his command to his first officer as soon as you let him go."

"Oh is that all." Killpack said. "What did you promise him?"

"A swift ass kicking." Matt joked. "No, no. I just threatened him with Article Forty-Seven. That's all. He'll carry out my instructions. Where he goes from there is up to him."

Killpack nodded "Alright, I'll contact the major and let him know. Thanks for taking a look at this for me."

Matt smiled "What are friends for. We're even by the way." He of course was referring to the many times Killpack had helped him out when he needed something. It was always good to have security as a friend.

* * *

On one of the lower docking bays, An alien stepped off a transport. He was roughly six foot in height, blue eyes and a goatee. Where his hair should be, well on a human at least, was a series of horns.

Where he was headed was only known to him. Looking around he noticed they were rather lax on security. It was a good thing, he didn't want any trouble. Looking behind him he beckoned two women to follow him.

"This place will suit us nicely." He said. "Aleria, Alexia, come. Let us find refuge for our tired souls."

Aleria hesitated. "My Lord Ketish, we do not know these people and yet we wish to live among them? I do not understand."

Ketish turned to his wife and smiled. "You do not need to understand my dear. It is not important for you to understand, only that you follow my guidance."

Aleria bowed her head and nodded. "Of course my lord. Forgive me."

Ketish placed a hand on her shoulder. "No forgiveness needed, you are new to this. I understand. But it is our way. It has been for over a millennia. In time you will grow accustomed to thinking the way I do. Come, let's go." They left the docking area heading towards the residential part of the station where they would find a place to stay.

As the three made their way through the station, the women kept close to Ketish. They didn't trust anyone not of their kind. There were so many different aliens in any given section. They were walking through a section known as the Main Gallery, there were shops and just more people. Ketish looked at everyone in awe. It was an amazing place to be seen for sure. People of all kinds getting along and working together for some unknown purpose.

Stopping at what appeared to be a fruit stand, Ketish picked up a melon of some kind. He gestured to the shop keeper. "What is this?"

The shop owner looked at Ketish and then the melon. "That is an Argugla fruit. It is quite pleasant to the taste. Some species have known to use it in their mating practices. But I wouldn't know about that sort of thing." His third nostril flared a little as he spoke.

Ketish was surprised. Mating fruit? The man could not be serious could he? Surly not. They had to be joking. Ketish didn't understand the kind of humor the man was gesturing to and he didn't find it amusing.

"Five credits." The man said. "Or two pieces of gold. Whichever you prefer."

Ketish nodded, a handsome price he thought. "That's a fair price. Perhaps I will be back." He placed the melon down and walked away.

The show owner didn't care, he simply turned to another customer waiting in line. Customers were a dime a dozen these days, or if you're from one of the outlier worlds, it was a gold a galpshun. Either way it didn't matter.

Gold was the preferred currency among the shop keepers. Most everyone carried it, if they didn't credits worked too. Credits just weren't as good as gold. Electronic money versus the real object, that sort of thing.

As Ketish's group continued walking they found the section designated for residential compartments, visitors section. They didn't know how long they would be staying, they were merely travelers after all.

Coming upon the residential office, Ketish stepped inside, his entourage waited outside for him. A woman was seated at a desk surrounded by security monitors. She looked up at Ketish and smiled. "Hello, may I help you?"

Ketish nodded in return. "Yes, I need a room capable of holding three people."

“Certainly!” She replied. “We have a few options available. Some more expensive than others, but all accommodating.”

Ketish smiled. “We have no money, at least no gold or credits. Nothing you are accustomed to.”

The woman’s cheerful disposition dropped as she frowned. No money. That was the last thing she wanted to hear today. “If you can’t afford a place, we can’t offer a place. It’s that simple.” She pointed to a sign. “You have to pay in order to stay.”

Taking a small bag out of his vest, Ketish opened it. He poured some small gems into his hand and offered them to the woman. “We have these? I know they’re not very pretty and to some worthless. But I came across them while trading on another station near the rim.”

She looked at the gems, picking one up he examined it. “Near the rim? You’ve been places huh?” Taking a looking glass out of a drawer she examined the gem closer. “Looks like a ruby if I didn’t know any better.” She paused then admitted “I like a beautiful ruby. Like this one.”

Ketish smiled. Good. He did have something to offer these humans after all. “Keep that one for yourself, and take whatever gems you need to make up the difference for the room.”

Pocketing the ruby, the woman put the looking glass away. She counted out some gems and nodded. “This will do nicely. I’m assigning you to a more quiet section. No one should bother you. I know how your kind like to keep their privacy.”

Ketish’s mouth dropped open. His kind? She knew of his kind? In all his years of traveling, no one had known what or who he was. Yet somehow this human earthling knew something about him. He wasn’t sure how to take that.

“Don’t worry, your secret is safe with me. Your eminence.” She looked past him out the door. “I take it those are your wives?”

Ketish slightly nodded. “One is my wife, the other my mistress. We get along happily.” He paused for a second. “How long will we have the room for?”

Checking her computer, she looked up the information. “You’re good for three months. Do you need a longer stay?”

Ketish shook his head. “No, three months will be fine. Thank you.”

She handed him a security card that would allow him to access the room. “Here’s your room key, and here’s your food card.” She handed him another card. “This card is good for most of the establishments on the station. You can refill it with money at anytime. I think that’s about it. Your room is R45 Delta. It’s ready whenever you are.”

Ketish reached out a hand and shook the woman’s hand. “Thank you for your help.”

“My pleasure.” She said. She watched as her visitor exited her office and continued about her day. Everyday there was something new to be explored on Crimson Gamma. Never a dull moment, that was for sure.

Rejoining his company, Ketish gestured towards the R sector of the station. “Let us check out the room.” He said. They followed.

Once they found the room, Ketish unlocked the door and they entered. It was small but adequate. There was a small living area with a kitchen with two bedrooms off on either side of the living room.

The women went to check out the rooms as Ketish walked over to a nearby computer console. Placing his hand on the console it registered him into the system. A menu came up, he tapped the help relay.

“Computer can you tell me where Major O’Brien is?” Ketish requested.

The computer beeped for a second and responded. “Major O’Brien is in his office.”

Ketish nodded. Good the general was onboard the station. “Arrange a meeting with the major.” He commanded. “I don’t care when, just make sure it’s before the end of the week.”

“Working.” The computer responded. “A meeting has been scheduled for tomorrow at oh nine hundred.”

“Good.” Ketish said. “Close connection.” The computer terminal went blank. Soon he would meet with the station’s commander. Soon the truth would be told. He only hoped O’Brien would listen to him. Would accept what he had to say. Time would tell.

* * *

The next morning, Ketish woke up and got ready. He let his wife and mistress sleep in. There was no point in rousing them. What he had to say to the major didn’t concern them in the slightest.

As he made his way towards the major’s office, Ketish kept to himself. He didn’t make eye contact with anyone. Ketish didn’t wish to cause attention to come to himself. To do so might put his companions in great danger. His people were known among the galaxy as watchers. Supposedly they had the ability to see things. He wasn’t sure if the myth was right or now, sure he saw some things but not as complex as others would believe.

Upon arriving at the office, two security guards greeted Ketish. “State your name and reason for being here.” One of the guards said.

“Ketish. I am here to see the major of a great emergency. We have a meeting.” Ketish replied.

The security guard checked a list. "Yes you're early. The major can see you now."

Ketish bowed slightly and entered the office.

The major's office was brightly lit. A couch was set in front of a large oak desk. In the corner was a small bonsai tree set on a table. There were no windows in the office. A bank of monitors was behind the major's chair on the other side of the desk.

Major O'Brien sat at the desk doing some paperwork. Most of it was day to day operations of the station. Security requests, shipping complaints that sort of thing. Then there were the complaints of the delegates that lived onboard the station. Those could get annoying at best. They each wanted to be treated like royalty. Even though they weren't kings or queens of their respective home worlds.

Looking up from his work, O'Brien saw Ketish standing in the doorway. "Oh yes, my nine o'clock. Please come in, sit down. It's Ketish, isn't it?"

Ketish sat down on the couch across from O'Brien and nodded. "Yes major."

Closing a folder in front of him, O'Brien turned his complete attention to his guest. "What can I do for you Mister Ketish?"

"Oh, it's just Ketish." Ketish responded. "I am here to warn you of an upcoming invasion."

"Whew." O'Brien sat back in his chair. That wasn't something you heard everyday. An invasion was the last thing he wanted to deal with. "Tell me more."

Ketish nodded. "Of course. I come from the fifth planet in the Comeki star system. This system. Shuka is the third planet. My planet's name is Dubor. Roughly two hundred of your years ago, our people had enslaved the Shuka race after one of their citizens made contact with our planet. They were the first Shukan we had ever seen. Before meeting them, we thought them to be a rumor." He paused. "Led by one of their spiritual leaders, Obshi, Shuka fought us off their planet and forced us back to our own home. We've lived in pace for over one hundred years."

O'Brien took it all in as fast as he could. He heard other planets in the Comeki star system were inhabited, but there never had been concrete proof. At least that Earth had known about. Shuka's history wasn't talked about much. He just assumed it was due to some cultural or religious aspect that they didn't want outsiders to know about.

"I don't know all the details, but the Dubor plan on attacking Shuka again. Soon." Ketish said. "You must be ready." He stood up.

Major O'Brien held up a hand. "Now wait a minute, you simply can't leave."

Ketish laughed. "Oh major, I have no place to go. I am not leaving. Trust me. I have betrayed my world by telling you this information. Telling you of things to come."

O'Brien sighed. "Why did you come and tell me this? You've threatened your status, whatever that is, on your home planet." He couldn't understand why someone would betray their own home world like Ketish was doing now.

"I am known as a watcher. On my planet my job is to see things before they happen." Ketish explained. "This knowledge came to me in a dream, a vision if you will, a week ago. I have sat on it since then. I had to tell someone. Your Earth Government seemed to be the best place to start, considering you are orbiting the target."

The target. It seemed such a simple phrase to cover over a billion people. Innocent lives to be taken over and restrained. If what Ketish was saying was true, O'Brien had to warn the Shuka government. Someone had to be made known about it all.

"I need to confirm your story of course." O'Brien said. "Please don't leave the station until I've done so. After that, you're free to go."

Ketish shook his head. "As I have already explained major, I have no where to go. I will not be leaving."

As Ketish walked out the door, O'Brien called after him. "I'll keep in touch!"

O'Brien ran his fingers through his hair. A war was coming. Just great. They had just gotten out of a Civil War, what more could Earth handle at this point in time. He wasn't sure he wanted to know. It was his duty to protect Shuka as they didn't have much in the way of weapons as it was. No stellar vessels to speak of. They were quite primitive as a race went. No wonder they asked for Earth's protection. They had an enemy no one knew about.

"Computer, locate Delegate Norev." O'Brien said.

"Delegate Norev is in her quarters."

O'Brien sighed. The day hadn't started off good between the two of them. He doubted this news was going to help make things better. "Inform her I'm on my way."

"Message sent."

* * *

Matt Allen sat in his office down in Med Bay, in front of him was an arm he was studying. It had been severed from an alien species that regrows limbs. They allowed him to take it for study since they didn't need it anymore. The hand had three fingers, not the usual five of a human. That was okay of course, not every alien was built the same.

“Computer begin dictation. Med Bay report, Doctor Allen reporting. I have in my possession an alien arm from a species known as the Draka. I believe their blood can be used to help create an anti venom serum. Further research is needed of course, but it’s a start.”

He was interrupted by a knock at his door.

“Computer pause. Come in.” Matt said.

McDuff entered the office. “Hey Matt, I just got released. Came by to say thank you.”

Matt smiled. “Of course Bert we’ve known each other for a long time. I’m glad I could help you out.” He paused for a second. The worst wasn’t over yet. “Of course you have a long ways to go to recovery.”

Bert smiled. “Yes I do. Let’s hope they don’t do a mind frag on me.”

The mind frag. Matt shook his head. The worst thing Earth ever thought up. You’re basically taking a healthy mind and rearranging it so memories aren’t remembered. You remember who you are, where you grew up, what you did for a living etc. but the bad parts were all replaced with whatever who in charge wanted you to believe. It was a unique form of brainwashing that, according to some, hurt like hell.

Matt frowned. “They won’t brain frag you my friend. You’re not that far gone.”

“No, I suppose not.” Bert said. “Apparently there’s a transport headed for Earth in the morning. I’ll be on it. I was wondering if you wanted to grab a bite to eat in the cafe.”

Matt laughed. “Man, you aren’t allowed in the cafe after what happened. You’ll have to figure out a different venue if you want to eat something.” He placed a clipboard down finishing his current task. Picking up the arm, he walked out of the office into the biofreeze section where it would be stored until he needed another look at it. Bert followed.

“After looking at that arm, maybe I don’t have the stomach to eat after all.” He placed a hand on Matt’s shoulder. “Maybe we can go out to lunch after I get out of rehab.” He said. “I’ll see you around.” He held out a hand.

Matt shook Bert’s hand. “I’ll be here.”

* * *

Norev sat in her quarters with a teacup in her hand. She stared at O’Brien. The look on her face was that of shock. She hadn’t heard of the Dubor in years. Mostly stories told to her as a child to prevent what had happened once before.

“The Dubor are from stories long ago major.” She said. “Nothing more. Even our sacred scrolls do not mention them.”

O’Brien leaned forward in his chair. “Stories.” He repeated. “Nothing more?”

Norev shook her head. “Nothing more. I’m afraid he has taken you for a fool. That’s all. I’m sorry to say.”

O’Brien rubbed his chin. “I see. Well it might be a good idea to pass this information along to your government. Just in case.”

Norev nodded. “I will do that, but I assure you they will simply laugh at me. They will say the bogymen has gotten to me. That’s what the Dubor are, bogeymen. It’s nonsense. Stories to threaten small children into going to sleep at night.”

“And what of Obshi, another bogymen?” O’Brien asked.

Norev froze for a moment. No outsider had spoken Obshi’s name, not that she had ever heard of before. “Obshi was one of our most revered religious icons.” She explained. “He lived over one hundred years ago. One of our finest generals as well, but he never fought a race called the Dubor.”

“A general that never fought in any war.” O’Brien repeated. “Are you sure about that.”

Norev scoffed. “Of course I’m sure. Wouldn’t you think I would know if another planet in our system was inhabited? It’s pure nonsense. There are no other lifeforms in our solar system. Shuka is the *only* inhabited planet.”

“Well I have a man who says otherwise.” O’Brien said. “I’m not sure who to believe now.”

Norev nodded. “I know we haven’t known each other but a day major. But I would hope you’d believe me. I am the delegate to Shuka after all. If you can’t believe me, who exactly can you believe?”

She had a point. O’Brien thought. He had to start trusting these people if he was going to be in command of a space station in orbit of their planet. Standing up, O’Brien began to pace back and forth. Here he was trying to warn Norev that danger was coming and she didn’t believe him. If this was some arrogance on her part, he wanted nothing of it.

“Alright” O’Brien said. “I’ll believe you. I’ll file a report to my government as required, but I will leave it as a mystery. The old man is not to be believed. I will make that recommendation in my log.” He stopped pacing and looked to Norev waiting for a response.

“That will be fine.” Norev finally said.

O’Brien walked towards the door and watched as it opened. Taking one final look at Norev he smiled. “Have a good day delegate.”

Norev nodded in return. “You as well major.”

O’Brien exited the quarters leaving Norev alone with her tea.

It was true, Norev and O'Brien had their differences. The past day and a half hadn't been easy for either of them. But that didn't keep her from second guessing herself. Come to think of it, she never did a computer search of the Dubor. As she had told O'Brien she thought they were just stories. But what if... her thoughts trailed off as she walked over to the computer terminal.

"Computer, link to the central archive on Shuka." She said.

"Working. Link established." The computer replied.

"Search term, Dubor." Norev hesitated for a moment, but she needed to know.

"That information is classified." The computer said.

A chill ran down Norev's back. Classified? There was something she didn't know about her own people after all. If that were the case, someone would have had to go to great lengths to modify the sacred scrolls, the history books, everything that had to do with them. She turned the terminal off. She would have to speak to this supposed Dubor herself.

The End