

Epidemic

103

by Kyle Eggleston

Lieutenant Commander Kate Monson stood at her station in C&C. She observed as transports left, transports docked. Watched as security issues came up in the back lot sectors of the station. Crime was usually rougher in those areas not touched by the normal alien residence. There weren't really any living areas in those spaces, no those spaces were maintenance hatchways and other similar access points. Someone always managed to get an innocent down there by promising to show them something they haven't seen before, and before they know it they're dead and pick pocketed.

Crime was to be expected in these parts of the galaxy. Far enough away from what one would consider normal traffic lanes set by Earth. The back lot was a breeding ground for smugglers or those down on their luck. Trying any way to get money even if it meant killing someone in the process.

"Transport Four-Six-Seven, you are cleared for docking on Port Six." Kate spoke into a small microphone hanging around her neck. She watched the monitors as a ship passed in front of them heading to Port Six as directed. Another satisfying docking procedure. Nothing out of the ordinary. Kate liked it when things went well, it made life easier.

"O'Brien to Monson." Jack's voice came over the comm unit. Kate pressed a button on her console.

"Yes major?"

"A Shuka transport just docked with the station. Please meet Delegate Norev down at Docking Port Twelve to greet them." Jack said.

Kate rolled her eyes. Good thing the major couldn't see her doing that. She hated greeting visiting dignitaries. They were always a hassle. Always demanding things go a certain way. She never could get used to it, but it was her duty to follow orders.

"Aye sir. On my way." Kate said as cheerfully as possible.

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Down at Docking Port Twelve, two guards entered the station. They looked around to make sure it was safe for their leader to come aboard. Using primitive scanning devices, they determined it was safe and waited for their leader to exit the docking tube.

Norev waited the leader's arrival. She watched as Kate exited a transport tube and ran up to stand next to her. "Sorry delegate," she said "I was unaware this transport carried a dignitary from your home world."

Norev shook her head. "No worries Kate." She said. "I was only informed of their arrival recently myself. It is as much of a surprise to me as it is to you." She waved a hand as if to dismiss the apology. It made no difference to her if command staff were present or not. The truth of the matter was she didn't care. She was more concerned why a leader of their religious government was visiting the station.

A Shukan female exited the docking tube. She walked up to Norev and bowed. "Delegate Norev, it is an honor to see you again."

Norev returned the bow. "Your eminence. It is good to see you as well. Had I known you were coming I would have prepared a more fitting welcome for you." Raising her head, she looked the official in the eyes. There was something odd about them, they were redder than usual. Shuka females had red eyes, it was genetic. But it was a pale red, not the deep dark crimson red that was present in the dignitary's eyes.

"Are you feeling alright your eminence?" Norev asked. "Your eye color."

The woman nodded. "Oh I'm fine. Just tired from traveling is all. Sometimes I wonder if we were not meant to go into space as our forefathers predicted. Then again, I wouldn't be able to visit this massive station if that were the case." She smiled. "It will pass. I'll be fine."

Norev gestured towards Kate. "May I introduce you to Lieutenant Commander Kate Monson your eminence." She looked to Kate. "Lieutenant Commander, this is First Prime Shaniki. Our glorious eminence of the Shuka Empire."

Kate bowed slightly. "It is good to meet you your eminence. My understanding is your world is governed by a council of twelve, a religious council is this not the case?"

Shaniki nodded. "Yes that is true. All twelve could not be in attendance at the same time, so they sent me to speak for the religious government. It is our way." She looked around at her surroundings. "This is a very impressive station you have here Lieutenant Commander. You must be proud to command such a facility."

Kate smiled. "I am the first officer. Our commander, Major Jack O'Brien couldn't make it he was otherwise tied up. He will want to meet you of course. But thank you, I'll pass along your compliment to the major."

Shaniki nodded. "I see. I can appreciate how busy life can get, especially for those in charge. Heaven knows I've been busy from time to time." She felt dizzy for a second and grabbed onto the wall to regain her balance. "If you could direct me to some quarters, I would like to lie down."

Kate gestured to her left. "Of course, we have quarters arranged for you Level B Section Four-Seven Echo. If you'll follow me."

The guards took Shaniki's arms and they followed Kate towards a transport tube. Norev followed behind them all. She looked behind her as a third guard exited the docking tube and stood guard. He would stay there until Shaniki returned to go back home. Norev smiled at the formality. When she was first offered the position, the religious government suggested she take guards of her own. But she declined stating how could the humans trust her if she was constantly surrounded by guards. Obviously the thought didn't get very far as there were guards present on the station now.

Moments later the transport tube deposited the group onto Level B. It was a level designated for visiting dignitaries and delegates of different worlds. They were kept away from the residential section of the station for safety purposes, and most governments required it.

Kate got confused of which protocols to follow for which dignitary. They all had their own sets of rules and none of them seemed to match up with each other. There were too many things to keep straight in a given day. With each world having their own set of rules, and the station having it's set of rules. It was just too much for her to keep up with. You almost had to have a constant watch on a book of regulations in order to keep it all straight and in order.

"Here we are." Kate said as they approached a door. "Your quarters." She gestured to the door panel. "If you'll please provide your retinal scan, we can get you access."

Shaniki nodded. "Of course." She leaned over and allowed the computer to scan her eyes. Once complete the door opened. The guards stood on either side of the door. They would watch over her until they were needed to go somewhere.

Norev looked to Shaniki "I will take leave of you now. When you are rested we can meet with Major O'Brien and go over your...agenda."

Kate wondered what *agenda* the religious government of Shuka had with the major. What possible business could they have with the major that wasn't already known. Only Shaniki knew, that much was certain. She couldn't help but wonder if Norev knew something as well. She did seem to know...something.

Shaniki smiled at them both. "Thank you for your hospitality. Tell your major I look forward to meeting him. I just need to lie down for a bit. It was a tiring journey. If you'll excuse me." She left the main living compartment and headed towards the bedroom.

Kate and Norev exited the quarters. Once outside, Norev asked Kate a question. “Do you have time to go and sit for a drink lieutenant commander?”

Kate nodded her head. “Yes. Let’s go, I know a place. It’s new.”

The Open Market was busy as usual. It was between the Main Galley and the restaurant district. Humans and aliens could be seen making deals on different food stuffs the market had to offer. As they made their way through the Open Market, Kate stopped at a small stand selling flowers.

“Oh I love the smell of these.” She pulled out her credit chip and handed it to a man. “I’ll take a dozen.”

The man running the stand took her credit chip and placed it in a scanner. Once the transaction was complete he returned it to her. He handed her a dozen red roses. “Here you are ma’am. Thank you for stopping by.” He continued onto other customers.

“What is the name of this *new place* you discovered?” Norev asked.

Kate pointed to a small place near the end of a great hall. “It’s a Shukan restaurant. Something KorteZ.”

Norev’s eyes lit up. “Are you talking about the Falling KorteZ?” She asked. “I have heard about that place, I’ve been looking forward to visiting it myself. Haven’t found the time.

Kate nodded. “That’s the one. Well you have the time now. Let’s go.” They continued down the hallway to the restaurant. The hallway smelled of so many different foods. Some smelled delicious while others were a little on the rough side. Kate wouldn’t say pungent, but well they were.

Arriving at the small restaurant, the two women seated themselves at a small table in the corner. A waiter soon arrived handing them menus.

Kate looked for a drink menu. From the looks of things, the restaurant tried to cater to both Shukan and Earth delights. She wondered what a Shukan chocolate cake would taste like. She would have to try it a different day. Today was just drinks.

“Mineral water.” Norev said. “With a hint of Calsme.”

Calsme, a flavor native of Shuka. It was as close to a lemon as you could get. It tasted like a cross between a lemon and a lime with a bit of a kick to it. Clearly a desired taste the Shuka enjoyed in their food and drinks.

Kate looked over the menu. There was nothing that resembled a tea on there that she could tell, or coffee. She finally gave up and ordered the same as Norev. The waiter bowed to both of them and went to retrieve the drinks.

“There’s a reason I asked you here lieutenant commander.” Norev said.

“Kate.” Kate said indicating it was okay for Norev to use her first name.

“Kate.” Repeated Norev. “I have a feeling my quarters are bugged by my government. I did not wish to speak there. Here we might be able to speak freely, well freely enough not to be disturbed by prying ears.”

Norev had Kate’s attention now. Whatever was running through her mind was gone. The delegate was talking about something serious. Serious enough not to want to be eavesdropped on.

“Go ahead.” Kate said. “You can confide in me.”

“I believe my government is hiding things from its population.” Norev said. “I’ve tried doing some research recently and it’s all coming up as classified or not found. It’s hard to tell which is the truth and which is the lie.” Her light red eyes glistened as tears silently rolled down her face. “I am not used to being in this position, Kate. My government has always been open with its people. But now, I’m not so sure.”

Kate placed a hand on the table. This was serious news. If a nations own delegate couldn’t trust her own people, who could she trust.

A moment later the waiter brought the two mineral waters and placed them before the women. “Here you ladies go, please let me know if you need anything else.” He walked away from the table.

Kate took a sip of her water. The Calsme opened her nostrils with a force. It wasn’t uncomfortable in the slightest. It was a unique taste to be sure. Possibly an acquired taste that Shukans were used to. Norev also took a sip of her water. Having eaten Calsme before, it didn’t phase her. She tried not to smirk at Kate trying not to gag on the drink.

“What kinds of things have you been searching the archives for?” Kate asked.

Norev took a quick look around as though she was being watched. “Specific things about different alien races. Races in general, that sort of thing.” She frowned. “Like I said nothing has come from it.”

Kate pondered Norev’s words for a moment or two before responding. She knew governments liked to keep *some* things from their citizens. But wasn’t sure how deep that would go on the Shuka level. “I see. Have you tried asking through official communication channels? I mean you’re a delegate, you should be able to see some things I would imagine.”

Norev nodded her head. “At first I did try that. I was told that my inquires were against the religious rules of my order and not to continue further. After that, I was sent a cease order

from the highest level of government. I stopped searching immediately. It's been weeks since my last query into the system. I don't know who I can trust right now."

"Surely you can go to Shaniki, can't you?" Kate asked.

Norev shook her head no. "No, I do not believe I can. True we grew up together, but I am not sure I can trust her at this juncture. Until I can trust her, I will need to be quiet on the topic."

Picking up a bell off the table, Norev rang it. The waiter soon appeared with another menu in hand.

"Yes ma'am? What else can I get you?" He asked offering the menu to her.

Norev smiled ignoring the menu in his hand. "I would like a rack of Supornea with the usual seasoning. My friend will share the plate with me."

"Of course." The waiter zipped off back to the kitchen.

Kate searched her brain. She had heard of Supornea before but couldn't quite place it. Somewhere in her research, she had looked it up. Quite possibly the first day she had been stationed to Crimson Gamma. It was a way of getting to know the culture. It was deemed a favorite dish among their people.

"Forgive my ignorance," Kate said. "But what can I do for you?"

Norev shook her head. "I don't know Kate. I just needed to talk to someone about this. With the major being busy, I figured you were the next best person to speak with." She looked over her shoulder making sure no one was there that shouldn't be there. Once satisfied, she returned her gaze to Kate. A plea of help was clearly written across her eyes.

"I see..." Kate's voice trailed off as the waiter came back with the food.

A rack of Supornea was sitting on a platter in front of them. Norev smiled at the food almost expecting it to smile back. "Be careful Kate, this has a little bit of a...how do you humans put it. A bit of a kick?"

Kate nodded. "Yes, that's the correct phrase. What is it exactly?"

"The Supornea is a wild boar like creature on my planet. We hunt them in times of famine, never sport. Mostly during the winter months. But since food preservers have been invented, it is okay to eat them during the summer months as well." Norev said. "Try it, I think you'll like it."

Kate picked a rib from the rack and bit into it. The flavor was overwhelming. It sure did have a kick to it. If she were to compare it to Earth standards, it was hotter than a Ghost Pepper. It tasted like chicken.

Kate grabbed her water and drank quickly from it. Norev muffled a laugh. She did not mean to be rude, it was just amusing to see a human eating Shukan food. She had never seen that before. It was quite a sight.

“Thanks for the warning.” Kate said. “I shouldn’t have taken such a big bite.”

Norev nodded. “Of course. It takes time, but you will get used to it.” Picking up her knife and fork she cut a piece of meat off of a rib and ate it.

Kate remembered something about the Shuka race. They didn’t handle meat with their hands. To do so was to cast shame on the animal that had given its life to serve as food. She respected that aspect of their religion, but she wasn’t Shukan and didn’t have to deal with that rule. Kate took another bite of the rib. It didn’t burn as much as the first bite. Either she was numb from the first bite, or it was just easier to eat. She wasn’t certain.

Norev looked at the knife and fork. Such human utensils. She had grown accustomed to them since moving to Crimson Gamma three years ago. But they still seemed a little off considering what she was normally used to back home. She was used to a spoon like contraption that poked, cut, and scooped all in one. It was nothing that Earth had ever given her to use to eat food. For now the knife and fork would have to do.

“I appreciate your concerns delegate.” Kate said.

“Norev, please.” Norev said. Dropping the formality between the two of them. Kate had already done so, so why not return the favor.

“Security to Lieutenant Commander Monson.” Kate’s comm unit sounded. “Please respond.”

Kate took a device out of her pocket and pressed a button. “Monson here, go ahead.”

“Commander, we have a situation with the security guards posted to Shaniki’s quarters. They’re dead.” The security officer said. “Is delegate Norev with you?”

Kate gave Norev a concerned look. “Yes, brief the major, we’re on our way.” She wondered what the hell happened. They were just with the security guards. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

The women stood up and headed for the door. “Put it on my tab!” Kate yelled across to the waiter.

A few minutes later, they arrived at Shaniki’s quarters. The two security guards were indeed dead. They laid on either side of the door. Doctor Allen was examining them and making notes on his med scanner. Major O’Brien was hovering over the doctor.

“Report.” Kate said as she approached the scene.

O'Brien looked to Kate and shook his head. "Seems to be poison of some kind. The doc can fill you in."

Matt Allen looked over his initial findings. "It's definitely poison. Something normal scanners wouldn't pick up unless you knew what you were looking for. I had a hunch, and found it deep in their central nervous system. It seems to be a quick acting nerve toxin. I'll know more once I do an autopsy."

"That cannot be allowed." Norev said. "Our religious views prohibit autopsies of any kind. It is forbidden. It is against our ways."

Allen looked to O'Brien. "Sir, if I'm not allowed to do an autopsy, I can't give you any further information." He exchanged looks with Norev and frowned at the thought. He wanted answers to the poison that was used. Who would murder two innocents in cold blood.

O'Brien folded his arms. "I'm sorry doctor, my hands are tied. We can't cross that line. We don't have the authority." He hated the law, but rules were rules. O'Brien wanted to help Allen out any way he could, but he couldn't do a damn thing about it. "Doctor, if you could have your men remove the bod.. these people from the hallway. I would appreciate it."

Matt sighed. "Yes sir. Right away." He looked to two of his medics. "You heard the man. Let's move." They got stretchers ready to transport the bodies. Moments later, they were on their way to Med Bay.

"Security to O'Brien." Jack's comm unit beeped. It was Security Chief Killpack.

Jack sighed. "O'Brien here. Go."

"Sir, can you come down to security for a second. There's something I need you to look at." Lieutenant Killpack said.

O'Brien nodded. "I'm on my way." Looking to Kate, O'Brien continued. "Commander, check in on the First Prime." He said. He too left the area to go take care of other matters.

Kate looked to Norev. "It's just you and me." She said. Kate pressed a button on the door panel. It would ring the bell alerting the occupant that someone was there.

Norev bowed in agreement.

"Come in." A voice could be heard from within the quarters. The door unlocked.

Opening the door, Norev walked in first followed by Kate. "First Prime, forgive our intrusion." Norev said. "Your security guards are dead." She looked at Shaniki, who was seated on a couch.

Shaniki looked back. Her eyes were completely red now. There were no white spots to be found. "I know, I ordered their deaths." She said calmly without remorse. It was difficult to

find good security guards these days. These two men were okay at best, but they weren't what the First Prime was looking for. They had been assigned of course, not hand chosen by her. "I didn't trust them." She said.

Kate was speechless. Who in their right mind would order the death of their own people? Hell, not only order it but carry out the order. Was this how all Shuka was? She never read anything about it in the write-ups of their culture. It would seem some races had a past no one was meant to know. "So you killed them?" Kate asked.

Shaniki nodded. "Of course. It is our way." She said without excuse.

Norev looked to Kate. "There are several things about our culture you do not know about. I will try to fill you in another time." She said. Looking at Shaniki, she frowned. It was true killing your enemies was all fair and well, but those sworn to protect you? That was an entirely different matter. She looked at Shaniki in the eyes and gasped.

"You're infected with something sister." Norev said. "You've contracted a disease."

Shaniki nodded. "Yes, my eye color gave it away hasn't it. I'm told I have a few weeks to live. The humans on the other hand." Her voice trailed off as a smile grew on her face. She exhaled loudly. "Well, let's just say they have a less amount of time."

Kate and Norev exchanged glances.

"You're talking about an..." Norev said.

"Epidemic." Kate finished the sentence.

Shaniki smiled at the realization. "I am only a carrier of the disease. Sure some of it has infected me, I will die. But the humans will suffer a much worse fate." She laughed at the thought. "Yes soon they will all be dead and Shuka will be free again."

Folding her arms, Norev frowned. She had heard of movements like this before. There were many citizens of Shuka who didn't want humans around them. They didn't want to be controlled by humans, didn't want to be imprisoned by them. It was a false thought as the humans, to her, meant no harm. But not everyone felt that way. She had hoped such things were in the past that they had moved on from such nonsense as a people. Apparently she was wrong.

"You want to commit mass murder." Norev said. "Do you even hear yourself right now?" She was beside herself. The thought of killing people had never crossed her mind before. That is, it wasn't something she would consider doing herself.

Shaniki laughed. "Is that such a bad thing? Shuka belongs to its own people. Once the human population is gone from this space station. We will be free from our oppressors."

Norev cocked her head back. Oppressors. What was she even talking about?! “The humans mean us no harm! First Prime, have you gone mad?”

“No, I haven’t. For once I am seeing things clearly.” Shaniki said. Why did they look at her the way they were? Maybe they were the mad ones. In her mind everything was as it should be. Taking care of business as it were. Humans did not deserve to orbit Shuka let alone visit it. She wanted the all gone, exterminated from the galaxy if possible. Her own death was but a small inconvenience at best.

Kate felt dizzy, she stumbled around for a second before collapsing to the deck.

Norev rushed to Kate’s side and checked her pulse. It was weak. Her breathing was labored. “I need to get her to the Med Bay.” She said.

“And so it begins.” First Prime Shaniki said. “Soon the rest of the humans will fall.”

Norev walked over to the computer terminal and activated it. “This is delegate Norev to C&C, you need to teleport Commander Monson to the Med Bay. Instruct them to put her in a bio containment room. She’s been infected with some kind of airborne pathogen.”

“Understood, standby.” A man’s voice could be heard over the comm unit.

A moment later Kate’s body vanished with a bright blue glowing beam as she was teleported to Med Bay.

Shaniki sighed. “Oh that’s touching. You’re concerned about your friend. Your *human friend*. Makes me sick.”

Norev looked at Shaniki and frowned. “You have an antidote I presume. To get rid of this sickness you’re inflicting on them all.”

Shaniki shook her head. “No, no I don’t. Why would we create such a thing?”

We. Why would we? Norev thought about the words. “Who else is in on this?”

“Oh most of the religious government my dear. All of us voted on it. It was seven to five in favor.” Shaniki said. “Speaking of the virus, I don’t have much time left. It’s breaking down my system as we speak. I won’t be here much longer. There is something you have to know.”

Norev had tears going down her face. The thought of her own people killing off humans was unthinkable, no matter what Shaniki had to say about it. It was her own government causing this pain and suffering that was about to take place.

“Look, I don’t have time for this. I need to get to Kate.” Norev said.

Shaniki frowned. “Looking after their kind Norev? You were so different back in the day. Remember how we vowed never to be taken by another alien race? Remember that promise we made to each other?”

Norev sighed. It was a promise made a long time ago. They were kids who didn't know any better. Kids with imaginations that would take them places. Sometimes those places weren't better than the places they should go.

"Don't believe them, don't trust them." Shaniki said. "Whatever you do, do not believe them." She slumped over on the couch and died.

Three Days Later

The human population of Crimson Gamma were dying. Slowly one by one. Even though Kate had been teleported to the Med Bay in a containment field to protect the others, the virus still managed to spread. A station wide lock down was put in place as well as a curfew. Those who didn't have a place to be were ordered to stay in their quarters. Ships were told to stay put, no one was allowed to leave. The Main Galley was empty like a ghost town. The restaurant sector was empty as well.

In Med Bay, Matt Allen was working as fast as he could to make things better. He performed an autopsy on Shaniki even though it was against the religious beliefs of the Shuka people. He had to find a cure to this sickness. He had sent communiques down to the planet below with no success. The Shuka religious government refused to take his calls, and why would they? They were bent on destroying the human race it would seem.

Matt doubted they would stop at the station, soon enough they would go after Earth. The station was only a test bed for their experiment. If it succeed, they could go after the rest of the humans in the known galaxy. It was a very messy business to be dealing with and Matt hated being in charge of fixing it all.

"Attention station personnel." The computer said over the loud speakers. "A curfew is set in place. Please be in your quarters until this current crisis is over. This message will repeat in twenty minutes."

"Yeah yeah yeah," Matt said. "I've heard it before." He stood over a microscope as he worked. "Come on now. Make it work." He said as he injected a sample with some kind of medication. It had no effect on the sample before him.

"Negative reaction." The computer said.

"Doctor." The labored breathing of Jack O'Brien's voice came over the comm unit. "Status report."

Matt sighed as he reached for his comm unit. "We have over two thousand dead humans. None of the other aliens seem to have been affected." He paused. That was some good news at least. "Kate is in a coma. Her breathing is less labored. But she's still in danger of death."

O'Brien took a slow breath in. "I understand. I've been trying to contact the religious council down on the planet. Haven't had any luck, yet."

Matt nodded. "I know, me too. I've set a continuous message to go out every half hour. If anything they might get irritated enough to respond."

O'Brien sighed. "Understood. Keep me informed. O'Brien out." The comm line went dead.

Matt continued his analysis of the sickness. There had to be something he could do. "Test forty-seven." He said. "Introducing something new into the mix, maybe I can re-sequence the DNA to help it fight the infection."

Norev wandered into Med Bay. She stood over the lifeless body of Kate and cried silently. She said a prayer for the lost and wondering. Hoping it would help Kate come back to the land of the well and living. This coma the doctor said she was in was a scary thing. To her knowledge once the body stops moving and there's no reaction, death was soon to come. She hoped this wasn't the case with Kate.

Matt approached the delegate. "There's been no change." He said. "The coma seems to have slowed the progress of the sickness, but that's it. I'm sorry."

In C&C there was a skeleton crew. Minimal officers to keep the station running. O'Brien stood at the main control console watching the monitors. A ship dropped out of FTL. He stared at the ship in disbelief. He double checked the maintenance buoy he ordered to be launched to warn ships entering the system. It was currently broadcasting as instructed.

"Computer, open a channel to that ship coming in." O'Brien said.

"Channel open."

"Attention incoming ship, this is Major Jack O'Brien in charge of station Crimson Gamma. We are under quarantine. State your purpose for entering my sky." Jack said.

After a moment the response came from the Earth starship. "This is Captain Edward McDonald of the U.S.S. Hudson. Our orders are to destroy your station making it so the sickness cannot spread."

O'Brien couldn't believe his ears. They were here to exterminate him? Like hell was he going to allow that to happen. "Hudson you don't want to do that." O'Brien said. "There are women and children aboard, not to mention over a half million aliens *and* humans. Are you ready to commit mass murder captain?"

"I have my orders." The captain responded. "I hope you have made peace with whatever God you believe in major, and may he have mercy on your soul. For what it's worth, I'm sorry." The captain was indeed sorry. Sure he had his orders, he didn't have to follow

through with those orders. But to him orders were orders. Either you follow them or you go against everything you believe in, and he was sworn to uphold the Galactic Accords.

O'Brien was having flashbacks of the Civil War. Ship against ship. Brother against brother. He was living the nightmare all over again. Jack didn't like war, he liked the thought of dying even less. He understood the order, understood Earth's reasoning behind the order. Jack didn't have to like it, but he understood.

"You do understand I will defend this station at all costs." O'Brien said. He wouldn't go down without a fight.

McDonald scoffed at the thought. "Major, think what you're doing. If you allow this sickness to survive, you will be killing more than your twenty thousand crew members. You risk contaminating Earth and killing off its entire population. Do *you* want the death of billions on your hands?"

O'Brien frowned. "My chief medical officer is working on a cure." He said. "If you can give me twenty-four hours, at least give me a chance to survive this thing."

McDonald thought about it for a few seconds. "No. I can't. My orders were clear."

"Then you give me no choice." O'Brien said. He looked to his weapons officer. "Ready the main battery."

The weapons officer nodded his head. His hand shook as he keyed in the command sequence to activate the main battery. Outside the station, the main gun came to life. It moved into position. "Weapons ready." He said. "Main battery ready, ship to ship missiles armed."

O'Brien nodded. "Target their weapons systems only. I don't want to leave them stranded out here without a way to get back home."

"Aye." The weapons officer confirmed. "Targeting main battery and other weapons systems."

"Major, have you lost your mind?!" McDonald yelled across the view screen. "You can't be serious. Disengage your weapons lock. We are on a mission of mercy!"

O'Brien turned to his weapons officer. "Mute that ship." He ordered. "What is the status of their shields?"

The weapons officer checked his readouts. "Their shields aren't raised yet sir." He continued to press buttons on his console double checking things. "They do have a weapons lock on our main battery."

Why didn't they raise their shields. O'Brien wondered. If you're going into battle that's the first thing you do. Raise shields, make sure the enemy can't blow you out of the sky first. *Well, they're in my sky now.* He thought.

“Get a teleportation lock on their captain.” O’Brien said. “Beam him directly to C&C.”

A moment later, McDonald stood on the other side of C&C. Edward looked around confused. A moment ago, he was seated on his bridge. Now he was standing in an unfamiliar place.

O’Brien turned around to face the captain. “Captain McDonald welcome aboard space station Crimson Gamma. You’ve been infected.” He turned around to face the main viewer again. “Now tell your ship to stop their attack before it gets started.”

McDonald was furious. “How dare you major!” He yelled while walking up to the front of C&C to stand next to O’Brien. “I will have your command for this.”

Jack laughed at the comment. “As you know, space stations don’t have the ability to generate shields. Thus all we have are our main battery and missiles. Your ship does have an advantage over us for the moment. So I doubt my command will make any difference after they’ve swept the floor with us.”

McDonald turned to face the O’Brien. “Open that damned channel.”

O’Brien gave the order to un-mute the channel. “It’s open again.”

“This is Captain McDonald aboard Crimson Gamma.” He said. “Do not fire. I repeat, stand down Commander Donaldson. Do not fire.”

Commander Donaldson approached the captain’s chair. “I’m sorry captain. You’ve been infected. The extermination order must be carried out. I am assuming command of the Hudson in your absence. Ready the main gun. Raise shields.” The comm line went dead.

“Bastards.” McDonald said. “I tried major, I tried.”

* * *

Down in Med Bay, Matt worked furiously on a cure. He was close, he could feel it. He was working on trial number sixty-two. “Computer, what’s the status of the sample?”

The computer worked through some calculations. “Sickness has been put in an inert status.”

Matt couldn’t believe his ears. After hearing so many attempts fail, he was unsure how to take the news. “Confirm computer, this latest batch worked?”

The computer beeped. “Confirmed.”

“Hot dog!” Matt yelled out. “Release the compound into the air vent, sixty parts per million. Full impact.” He ordered. “Do it now.”

“Working.” The computer said. The vents began to push the cure out to the entire station population.

Matt grabbed his comm unit. “Allen to C&C, major come in please.”

Up in C&C, Major O’Brien heard the call come in. “Go ahead Matt, what do you have?”

“A cure! I have a cure! It’s dispersing throughout the station right now.” Matt said excitedly.

O’Brien slammed his fist against the console in front of him. “Thank goodness!” He yelled. “Open a channel to that star ship!”

“Channel open.” The weapons officer said.

“Commander Donaldson, this is Major O’Brien. Do not fire, we have a cure, I repeat do not fire.”

The communications channel came to life. Donaldson appeared on the screen. “Captain?”

McDonald nodded his head in confirmation. “It’s true commander. A cure is currently being dispersed throughout the station. It will be safe here in I would assume twenty or so hours. There is no need to destroy us.”

“Sir, they’re shutting down their weapons.” The weapons officer said. “Their shields are coming offline.”

O’Brien breathed a sigh of relief.

Commander McDonald looked at O’Brien. “Teleporting me over here to infect me was quite the gamble major. I should report this incident.”

O’Brien shrugged. “Yes it was a gamble. Do what you need to do captain. I doubt it will change a damned thing. The main point to be had from all of this? We’re alive. That’s all that matters. You, me, the rest of the half billion people on this station. We are alive.”

One Week Later

Norev and Kate sat in Norev’s quarters drinking tea. Norev enjoyed the tea, it was an Earth blend Kate had introduced her to. Something called mint. It had a unique taste to it that much was certain.

“I am glad that you made it through that sickness Kate.” Norev said. “I am sorry that my government tried and exterminate your race from this station. I had no part in it.”

Kate took a sip of tea and nodded. “I know Norev, I know.”

A transmission came through to her computer terminal. Norev stood from the couch and walked over to it. "Onscreen." She said. "Access Norev Tulip Blue."

"Access code accepted." The computer said. "Retrieving message."

A man appeared on the screen. "Delegate Norev. Due to unfortunate circumstances with Shaniki, we are giving you the opportunity to serve on the religious council. You are given the blessing of ambassador if accepted. Let us know of your answer."

The screen went blank.

Norev turned to Kate with surprise. Ambassador? There were few who claimed that title. This was certainly something new and good for her. She transmitted a small message back to the planet with two words. I accept.

Kate grinned from ear to ear. "Well ambassador. Congratulations." She said standing up to shake Norev's hand.

Norev accepted the handshake. "Thank you my dear. Thank you. Of course all this means is more paperwork for me. But I will have a voice on the ruling council for once. No longer a lowly delegate but an ambassador. I do like the sound of that."

Kate picked up her teacup and raised it to Norev. "Agreed ambassador. Agreed."

The End