

The Journey

105

by Kyle Eggleston

Crimson Gamma orbited the Shuka home world. According to the Shuka sun, it was night for most of the planet. Only a fraction had sunlight hitting it.

Norev enjoyed this time of night. With her government officials asleep, there was no one awake to bother her. Most of the station followed the Shukan calendar. That is most, but not all. There were some alien races that did not follow it. Those who chose not to follow the time table were awake when all but security were sleep. Someone had to keep an eye on them.

Walking along the Main Gallery, Norev took in the peace and quiet. A low rush of wind could be felt against her exposed skin. She was trying out a pair of shorts. Norev had heard some humans talking about them and she decided to try some out. Naturally an ambassador wouldn't be caught out in public wearing such clothing, but given the time she figured it was safe to disregard the ceremonial robes of her office.

"Norev." A voice called out from behind.

Almost safe.

Turning around, Norev saw the station commander walking towards her. She allowed a smile to form across her face. "Major O'Brien. What are you doing up at this time of the night?"

Jack returned the smile. He was dressed in what would be considered comfortable clothes. It was a side of him she hadn't seen before. Jack's appearance showed he was normal. As normal as possible for a human.

"Couldn't sleep. Figured I would go for a jog." Jack said. "I'm headed back to my quarters." He smiled. "Do your people go for a walk or a run when you can't sleep? To help take your mind off issues I mean."

Norev returned the smile. "In a manner yes. We call it a mind walk. It helps us relax our minds as we commune with the spirits."

Jack didn't have a clue what Norev was talking about, but it sounded interesting. Possibly a form of meditation. If that was the case it sounded most relaxing.

A thought crossed Norev's mind. She wondered if humans could endure a Shukan mind walk. To her knowledge no human had ever attempted such a thing. It would be an interesting experiment.

As though reading her mind, Jack showed interest. "I would like to try a mind walk sometime." He said. "If you're willing to teach me."

Norev simply smiled in response. "I will let you know when the time is right." She walked away.

As Jack started jogging again, a Red Alert sounded. "O'Brien to C&C, what's going on?" He spoke into his comm unit.

A shaky voice of a younger officer responded. "A heavy cruiser just dropped out of sub light. They have a weapons lock."

O'Brien sighed. There was always something going on. This was clearly a first contact situation, one that begins with death.

A moment later, Jack entered C&C to take control over the situation. "Report." He said walking up to the main control area.

An ensign stepped away from the command console. "Sir, we noticed them entering the system a little over an hour ago. I didn't see their weapons lock until they got closer. All attempts to communicate have failed."

O'Brien let go a sigh. This was not how he wanted to start out his morning. "Acknowledged. Any idea where they came from?"

"No sir." The ensign said. His blonde hair messed up from the frantic situation. "Their ship doesn't match anything on record. I'm having the computer run an analysis on the markings to see if we can get a match. So far, no luck."

"Very well." O'Brien responded. "Open a channel." He stared at the ship on the main viewing screen.

"Channel open." The ensign said.

"Attention unidentified vessel, this is Major Jack O'Brien of the United Earth Force. Why do you have your weapons trained on my station?" First contacts were a bitch sometimes but someone had to do them. It wasn't easy when you were looking down the barrel of a loaded gun.

The communications line crackled for a moment or two. Finally the ship on the monitor was replaced with the image of a Shukan male. A very ticked off member of the Shukan race.

"You are unknown to me, yet you speak my native tongue." The man said. "I come home from a long voyage to find you orbiting my world. I did not fight off the Dubor to be ruled over by the likes of you!" He folded his arms.

Holding up the black orb Norev had given him, O'Brien explained. "This translation orb allows us to communicate. We orbit your world at the request of your religious government. In fact we have an ambassador of your religious government living on board the station.

O'Brien watched as the Shukan thought it over.

"I cannot believe the religious council allowed this. I will meet with this ambassador at once. Any tricks and we will destroy you." The Shukan said.

"That's fine." Major O'Brien responded. "You can dock at port thirty-six. Ambassador Norev and I will meet you there." The comm channel closed.

Leaving C&C, O'Brien rushed to his quarters to get changed into something more official. Namely his uniform.

A half hour passed. Major O'Brien and Norev waited at the docking port airlock for their guest to arrive.

As the airlock opened, Norev did a double take as she watched the ships commanding officer enter.

"Minister Obshi" Norev said calling him by name.

Obshi looked back at Norev. He did not know her, but that didn't matter. She was one of his kind. He simply bowed his head ever so slightly. "Yes ambassador, I have returned just as the sacred scrolls of the religious council predicted."

Turning to Major O'Brien, Obshi continued. "Major it would seem you were telling the truth about having a Shukan ambassador aboard. I will keep an open mind at what you have to say."

Putting a communications device up to his mouth, Obshi contacted his ship. "Obshi to bridge. Stand down weapons for now, I will be in touch."

O'Brien breathed a sigh of relief and allowed a smile to form on his face. Not being blasted out of the sky was a good sign. Now if he could only determine why this man was here. What was his purpose? He would soon find out.

"Major it has been a long journey. Perhaps a place to sit and talk is in order." Obshi suggested.

"Of course." O'Brien said. "My office is available." He gestured to a corridor and led the way.

O'Brien's office felt dark and creepy with the lights off. Usually the computer would detect him approaching and activate the lights. Today it did not. That surprise gave Jack the willies.

"Lights" O'Brien said as he entered the office. "Full illumination."

The computer beeped as it lit up the office.

Obshi cringed. "Half illumination please."

The computer beeped again and lowered the light level.

"My apologies" O'Brien said. "I didn't know you were sensitive to light." He sat down on a couch, the others did the same.

Obshi waved his hand dismissively. "Nor should you." He said. "I've had issues with bright lights since I was a child. But that has nothing to do with our current situation."

O'Brien frowned at the thought. He could sympathize. If there were an alien space station parked high above Earth orbit, he would have some cause for concern too. It was up to him to help Obshi understand.

"The Shukan government requested our presence here over ten years ago." O'Brien explained. "It took some doing, but Earth finally agreed and built Crimson Gamma in orbit of your world."

Obshi shook his head and raised his hands. "I do not believe it. The religious council would never allow such a thing. Never in a million cycles!" He said. "To do so would be a disgrace to everything we believe in."

"Norev" O'Brien said looking to the ambassador.

Norev took a deep breath in. "It is true, the religious council wouldn't but the new religious government did." She explained. "Times have changed Obshi."

Obshi shook his head. What was this religious government they were talking about? To his knowledge it was the religious council in charge of Shuka's environment and choices that were made regarding policy.

"The religious council was disbanded and replaced with a government eighty cycles ago." Norev explained. "How long have you been out of the world?"

Obshi took a moment to think. It had been a long journey, that much was true. "A least one hundred cycles." He said.

O'Brien exhaled sharply. "One hundred years?"

Obshi grunted and glared at O'Brien. "That's what I said, isn't it?!"

"We expected change to occur but not this kind of change." Obshi expressed disappointment. "As I said before I did not drive the Debora away to be ruled by someone else!"

Norev looked shocked. "Who did you say?" She had to make sure she heard it right.

"The Dubor." Obshi said with a puzzled look on his face. "Surely the history scrolls have a complete story and timeline of events regarding the occupation that lasted a hundred years before I liberated our people." He looked Norev in the eyes hoping for some sense of recognition.

Norev shook her head. "Our history is fragmented at best from those times. The official record states the Dubor to be made up to scare children into going to sleep at night." She paused for a brief moment. "None of it is considered true."

Obshi looked at Norev in disbelief. She had recognized him at the airlock, something must have made it into the history scrolls regarding him. Leaning back on the couch he wondered how his people had forgotten their history. It would seem he came back eighty years too late. Accepting what was, Obshi was determined to get his people correct with history again. This would start with educating Norev on the truth.

"Our troubles began with the scientist called by the name Nokev." Obshi began.

Norev nodded in understanding. "Nokev was my great great grandfather." She said. "I am named after his wife. It is well known he disobeyed the religious council on a number of occasions."

Obshi smiled. Perhaps not all history was lost. There might be some hope after all for this new generation of Shukan inhabitants.

O'Brien listened intently. To his knowledge this was the first time the Shuka people had opened up about their history. It was fascinating to listen to.

"As you know, Nokev's first manned space flight grabbed attention of a neighboring world. They came and visited our planet." Obshi continued.

"The strangers from the sky." Norev chimed in.

"That's right" Obshi confirmed. Looking to O'Brien he explained. "That is what we call off worlders unknown to us. Fortunately the first ones to make themselves known to us were friendly. We shared stories, technology, and other knowledge." He said.

Norev had heard of the encounter. Some stories had been passed down through the generations. This was one of them. Nokev had built a space ship and left Shuka's atmosphere. He orbited the planet once before crashing in a distant mountain range. It had taken him over a cycle to get home. Norev, her great great grandmother, waited for him to get back.

Clasping his hands together, Obshi looked thoughtfully. "The religious council forbade any citizen to leave the borders of the city. To do so enacted the death penalty on the unjust. Not only did Nokev disobey that sacred law, he went into orbit which was most definitely outside Shuka's city limits."

O'Brien was on the edge of his seat now. "What happened to Nokev? Was he put to death?"

Obshi scoffed at the thought. "Do you not see the ambassador sitting here before you major!" He exclaimed. "No he wasn't killed. He lived to an old age and died peacefully in his sleep."

"Ah" O'Brien responded. At least part of the history lesson had a good ending. It gave him warm fuzzies. Earth had its own share of wars, not all of them ended in a nice way wrapped up with a perfect bow.

"Go on." Norev said noticing the silence going on for more than she was comfortable with.

Obshi continued his retelling of history. "Nokev had some pull with the leader of the religious council. Her name was Kerta. She allowed him to manufacture another rocket based on some of the technology left behind from

the strangers from the sky. He built a vehicle capable of faster than light travel. It would end in sorrow."

Standing up, O'Brien crossed the room to where a pitcher of water was and glasses sitting on a tray. He brought it back over to the couches and set the tray down on a table. Pouring three glasses of water he picked one up and drank from it. Obshi eyed the water glasses with suspicion and would not partake. Norev also picked up a glass and took a sip.

"Nokev's second flight took him beyond the solar system." Obshi said.

This history was news to Norev. It was something she hadn't heard of before. She figured not all history was worth repeating. Taking another sip of water, she listened carefully to what happened next.

Obshi continued with his history lesson. "No one knows where he went after that. Some think he went to the outer rim and went mad before returning home. Others believe he simply turned around and made the journey home. Naturally those are the opinions of my crew. The truth is we don't know what happened, only what happened next."

Obshi stared blankly at the water glass sitting before him. If it didn't poison Norev, it probably was safe to drink. Taking a small sip he examined the contents in his mouth. It was cool and refreshing. He drank the rest of the water in the glass and smiled. The Shukan people also drank water, just a little bit differently. They ate small pebble shaped cubes that refreshed them. It was basically the same thing, just two different delivery methods.

"Nokev's second trip caught the attention of a nearby planet in the Comeki Star System as he passed by them." Obshi said. "They are called the Dubor. They traced back where he came from and visited our planet." Obshi paused as he remembered the history to the best of his ability.

"The Dubor began establishing settlements on Shukan soil. At first they built in the far off mountains. It didn't take long for their settlements to surround our capitol city. In the end we were surrounded, trapped." He said. "It didn't take long for them to enslave our people."

Norev gasped at the thought. Why hadn't she known about this sooner? Whatever the case, Ketish had been right. How could she dismiss him so easily? He had only been trying to help her, to warn her.

Norev looked into Obshi's eyes. They were gentle. Understanding. Some would even say caring. "Excuse me for staring. I am not sure how to feel about all of this information."

Obshi reached out his hand and placed it on Norev's hand. Norev jumped slightly at the physical contact. It was considered taboo to do in front of outsiders.

Obshi recoiled with apology moving his hand away. "My apologies." He said. "Being away so long has changed my thinking on certain cultural taboos. Please forgive me."

Regaining her composure, Norev shook her head. "Think nothing of it. It caught me off guard is all. No forgiveness necessary."

"I was born late into the occupation." Obshi said. "When I was old enough to hold a spear, I knew the Dubor had to be sent away. We had to fight back. I decided it was up to me to begin to fight. The religious council forbade it of course. They had simply given in to their new masters. I could not idly stand by and watch our people die. It took me twenty cycles but in the end, we won."

Obshi rested his hands on his legs. "As soon as it was over, we dismantled their settlements engulfing our land. Feeling I had lost my usefulness I set out on a newly constructed warship. Vowing to return, I gathered a crew and we left Shuka to explore." He said. "I suppose you could say I was inspired by Nokev and his ambitions."

Norev shook her head. No wonder she didn't know about the Dubor. That history had been cleaned up and possibly hidden from the population. She had a strong feeling it was the governments doing. They were always changing things out from under her people's feet without warning, and now she was part of that system. Norev was ashamed of it all and angry at the same time.

"I never knew we had such a terrible experience." Norev said. Then with urgency added. "I have reason to believe the Dubor are planning another invasion. Soon."

"What?!" Obshi exclaimed. "They cannot come back, we drove them away!" He was obviously upset. "I will not stand for this. We must go on the offensive."

Norev nodded in agreement. "Yes we must."

O'Brien let go a sigh. When he took over the station he had been given strict orders not to interfere with the natural development of the Shukan society.

This included not siding in any wars. Earth had its own problems. They could not be bothered with the problems of outsiders even though the Shukan people had requested the station be put in orbit.

Obshi could tell O'Brien's thoughts simply by looking at how uneasy he looked. "You claim to be allies but you do not wish to be a part of this confrontation. How cowardly of you." He stood to leave. "Norev, take me back to my ship. We must go down to the planet and speak to the religious government at once."

Norev stood up. As they walked towards the door, O'Brien called out after them.

"If the Dubor attack this station in order to get to you, we will be under obligation to defend ourselves by any means necessary." O'Brien said standing his ground. He meant every word of it too. He had a duty to the station and those who lived and visited there.

Obshi turned and glared at O'Brien. If looks could kill they would have. "I fear that will not be enough major." He turned and walked out with Norev following close behind.

All O'Brien could do was watch them leave. He felt helpless. He needed to talk to someone before contacting Earth's government for help on the matter. Reaching into his pocket he retrieved his comm unit and activated it. "O'Brien to Doctor Allen. I need to see you."

Obshi and Norev walked towards the docking port where Obshi's shuttle was waiting. As the day was getting later, the area was growing more crowded.

"How can you trust these people Norev?" Obshi asked. "They will not side with us in battle."

Norev shook her head. She wished Obshi could see the humans as she did. But it would take cycles for that to happen. Norev didn't have cycles to convince anyone of that. Obshi was weary of outsiders and had every right to be considering the era he grew up in.

She could not say why Obshi just spent the last two hours telling a human of the secret history of their race. He had to of had his reasons that was certain.

"In time, you will see they have good intentions." Norev tried to explain.

Obshi would hear none of it. His mind was made up about the matter. There was nothing anyone could say that would change it. One could say he was

as stubborn as a mule but he believed otherwise. He believed in a free Shuka, a Shuka not bound by chains of oppression. A whole Shuka.

As they reached the airlock and entered the short range vessel, Obshi activated his communications device. "Obshi to bridge." He said.

"Bridge here." A male voice said in response.

"I have the ambassador with me. We are heading to the planet's surface." Obshi said. "Keep an eye on the station. If they show any signs of hostility, destroy them. Obshi out." The communications channel closed as he deactivated the device.

The docking portal detached allowing the shuttle to move freely away from the station. It wouldn't take long to reach the surface. Soon they would be face to face with the religious government. Soon they could make their case heard.

The old council chambers was quiet. The eleven religious leaders waited for Norev and Obshi to arrive. They were seated around a large stone table. There were spaces in the table wide enough for a person to walk through to the hollow center so they could be seen and heard by all.

Various tapestries lined the walls totaling twelve in all. One tapestry for each council member. Even though the name had changed from council to government the purpose of the room stayed the same.

The great council doors swung open with an echoing thud as they hit their doorstops Obshi and Norev entered the council chambers. Obshi walked with urgency. Norev with respect. Upon reaching the center table, Norev took her seat.

Obshi walked through an open space in the table and stood in the middle of the table and room. He looked at all of the unfamiliar faces around him. This surely was a different time than what he was used to. He was going to have to play catch up if he wanted them to take him seriously.

So that's exactly what Obshi did. As he did with the major and Norev, Obshi shed light on the forgotten history of the Shukan people. During his testimony, some of the council members interrupted him asking questions like what did a Dubor look like or where was their home world located. Things of that nature. Obshi answered their questions to the best of his ability.

After he was done speaking, Obshi listened as there were hushed voices and whispers echoing throughout the chamber. He couldn't tell what was being

said, only that there was talking and a lot of it. As the deliberation ended, Meltek, the government leader stood up and addressed Obshi.

“Obshi, oh great deliverer of our people, we have come to a conclusion of your request.” Meltek said in a rather passive tone. His voice was un-moving like that of a robot.

Obshi already didn’t like what he was hearing and not much had even been said yet. He had a feeling they were going to reject his plan of attack on the Dubor. He had been through his share of council meetings to know when he was on the losing side. The council had voted against him the first time he took on the Dubor, now felt no different.

“We are a peaceful race.” Meltek continued.

Here we go. Obshi thought.

“Since we have not heard from the Dubor in over one hundred cycles, we cannot condone an attack on their home world.” Meltek frowned at the thought, but peace was their way. “You will return your warship to our care and submit yourself and your crew to a full debrief. We wish to know what you observed over the past one hundred cycles. This matter is closed for debate.”

A bright light shown down on Obshi. He squinted so he could bear the brightness. One by one the government leaders stood and left the chambers leaving Obshi and Norev alone.

Obshi grunted. “Has the universe gone soft since I’ve been gone? First that major of yours and now this.”

Norev sat in disbelief at what just happened. She thought it absurd for the government to choose to be slaughtered instead of defending themselves in a preemptive strike against the enemy.

“I don’t understand it myself.” Norev said. “They are obviously blind to the truth.”

Stepping out of the light, Obshi walked over and stood before Norev. “You and the major are the only ones who believe me and I can’t count on Earth to help me.”

Norev felt helpless. Here she was part of a governing body and she couldn’t even help her own people because they were being stubborn. It really was quite a mess.

"What do you plan on doing?" Norev asked.

Obshi shook his head. "I do not know." He frowned "I am not going to submit my crew to a debrief. I do not trust this government to treat them well."

Norev held up a finger. "As the major for sanctuary. He should be able to grant that for you and your crew."

Obshi folded his arms across his chest in disgust. "You would have me give up so easily. I will not surrender." He said. "Mark my words." Turning, Obshi stormed out of the council chambers.

Norev followed quickly behind him.

On Crimson Gamma, Jack O'Brien sat in on a conference call with the Earth Force Alliance government. Personally he hated being on calls with this many people on it. It all felt like a waste of time. Jack figured their answer would be no, it usually was that when something important came along.

"No Absolutely not!" General Gilmore said. "You are not to bring Earth into an outside conflict. We are still recovering from the Civil War!"

Jack breathed in deeply. He had prepared a response just for this occasion. "You would have me turn down an ally. That is absurd."

General Gilmore frowned. It wasn't him turning Jack's hand, his orders came from the president. "I'm sorry Jack, the order stands." The screen in Jack's office went blank as the comm channel died.

"Can you believe the nerve of that man?" Jack said to his Chief Medical Officer Matt Allen.

Matt was sitting on a couch out of view from the monitor's camera. Jack wanted someone to witness if things had gone badly and they did.

"He's just following the orders he was given." Matt said. "As will you."

Jack leaned back in his chair. He hated when Matt was right and he usually was right most of the time. Why did he have to be right today?

"Lieutenant Commander Monson to O'Brien." The voice of the station's first officer called.

Pressing a green button on his desk, Jack replied. "Go for O'Brien."

"Major" Kate said "The Shuka warship is turning away from the station and are moving away at sub light."

Jack bolted up in his chair. "Can you tell where they are headed?"

"Yes sir, straight for the Dubor home world." Kate said.

Standing up, Jack rushed out the door. The call transferred to his comm unit. "Get me an Atlantic Fighter ready. Now!" He barked into the unit.

Jack hurried down to the fighter bays.

On the bridge of the Shukan Warship, Obshi readied himself for the attack. He didn't care what the religious government said. They were wrong and he was going to prove it to them. It hadn't taken much convincing to get his crew behind him. They were loyal officers willing to carry out his orders.

Norev stood by Obshi's side. He had given her the opportunity to return to Crimson Gamma but she refused stating that he might need an ambassador on this mission. Her goal was to hopefully get the Dubor to talk. If she could prevent bloodshed, she wanted to try that first.

Obshi didn't share Norev's optimism. He had seen what the Dubor were capable of first hand. Obshi wasn't about to let his world experience a repeat of that.

"We are approaching Dubor." Norev said as she read a terminal read out.

Obshi nodded "Take us out of sub light, ready the main battery."

The warship dropped out of sub light. Its main battery came online and locked into place, ready to fire.

Obshi waited for Norev to make what he was sure to be a futile attempt at communication. Looking out the main window, Obshi observed what appeared to be orbital weapon platforms. From the looks of things the planet appeared to be heavily armed.

"Open a channel." Norev said to a member of the crew.

"Channel open." The crew member replied.

Norev cleared her throat. "Attention Dubor planet, this is the Shukan Warship Kotosh. We know you are planning an attack on our home world. We have come to talk."

Silence.

Nothing but silence.

Norev and Obshi exchanged glances. Silence was not a good thing.

The orbital weapon platforms came alive. They fired missiles at the Kotosh causing heavy damage to her propulsion system. Making it impossible for them to escape.

On the bridge, Obshi fought hard to keep his balance. "Return fire! Blow them out of the sky!"

The main battery fired bursts of red beams at the weapon platforms. It was causing minimal damage due to how old the warship was.

"Continue firing!" Obshi ordered. "Fire all missiles."

He watched as missiles left their housing and found their targets. It didn't take long for the enemy to disable the Kotosh's main battery. It exploded in a brilliant flash of light.

Obshi panicked. He could tell he was in over his head. Without reinforcements and the main thruster offline they were a sitting duck. Or in the Shukan language a sitting Quashvah. Either way they were toast.

"Sir" the first officer yelled over the confusion of battle. "We are being boarded!"

Obshi shook his head. How could this be happening? They had the element of surprise. The Dubor didn't know they were coming and yet they were losing.

The first officer gasped. "Weapons are offline." He reported.

The Kotosh continued to rock under weapons fire.

Obshi nodded to Norev. She knew what she had to do.

"This is the Kotosh. We surrender."

The weapon platforms ceased firing allowing the crew to breathe for a moment before the intruders arrived on the bridge.

A Dubor soldier arrived. He was flanked on either side with other soldiers. Each of them carried guns of some kind and were wearing black helmets.

The Dubor leader removed his helmet and stepped towards Obshi and Norev. Norev gasped. It was Ketish who stood before her. The one who had warned her about Dubor's plot to attack Shuka.

"You!" Norev yelled.

Ketish laughed. "You played right into our hands. Consider yourself prisoners of war."

Twenty minutes after the fight began, it had ended. The remaining survivors were escorted off the Kotosh and onto Dubor prison transports. The Dubor left the warship in orbit. A sign to anyone stupid enough to attack them. In a way it was a trophy of sorts. To the victor go the spoils.

A few minutes later, O'Brien's fighter came across the wrecked ship. Scanning for life signs turned up nothing.

"Computer go to stealth mode." O'Brien ordered. The interior lights dimmed.

O'Brien whistled. "What the hell happened here?"

"Unknown" the computer replied.

A small scout ship approached O'Brien's location. It began scanning the area.

O'Brien held his breath. The stealth technology was something pretty new. He wasn't sure how effective it would be against alien ships.

A tractor web pulled the fighter in.

Cursing under his breath, O'Brien sighed. It obviously wasn't good enough. Readying his sidearm, O'Brien breathed in. He wasn't about to give up without a fight.

The End