

# Crossing The Line

116

by Kyle Eggleston

It had been thirty-six hours since Earth accepted that they were at war with the Dubor government / planet. Thirty-six hours and cities were still on fire from the attack of the U.S.S. Fearless and her crew, brainwashed into the unthinkable. Thirty-six hours and pure chaos was erupting all over the place. Earth had gone to hell. No one had seen such terror since the Civil War over five years ago, and that had ended badly for both sides.

Day after day the Dubor sent ships to Earth in order to try and conquer its defenses. Day after day, Earth patrol ships destroyed the incoming vessels. The Dubor ships were small scout ships not really equipped for long range tactical missions, but if you poke at the same spot enough times, that defense weakens and finally degrades to nothing. It was a long thought out process by the Dubor, something they were good at. The Dubor weren't really ones to strike hard, they liked to test defenses.

At the far edge of the frontier, Earth Force Alliance Space Stations Crimson Gamma and Crimson Delta were being attacked by similar forces. Scout ships sent to test weaknesses in the station's structure. Any hope to destroy them at all costs, that was Dubor's mission. Without shields, each attack though small was painful enough to cause damage.

During a lull in the storm, O'Brien called a senior staff meeting. It had been a few days since they last met, since things got heated between Norev and Grilka over the Dubor attacks. O'Brien hoped things were able to cool down a bit so they could have a rational conversation, but he wasn't sold on the idea himself.

Norev and Grilka entered the major's office. They were already bickering at each other.

"Your people need to back off." Norev said. "Attack Shuka, that's fine. That's what you're good at. But leave these humans alone. They did nothing to you!" She walked with determination to win this battle of words between the ambassador and delegate.

O'Brien approached the warring women. "Ladies, this meeting is for command staff only. Your presence isn't needed."

Norev frowned at him. "Major, who better to tell you about our peoples than us?" She said. "We stay."

Grilka nodded in agreement. "I agree, you do not know the Dubor like I do major, my help is needed."

The women sat down on a couch next to each other continuing their not so polite conversation. O'Brien decided if they reverted to name calling he would throw them out of the room asap. He didn't need that added stress to the meeting he was trying to conduct.

As Kate Monsone arrived, she apologized for being late. "Sorry sir, was caught up in something in C&C, it's taken care of now."

O'Brien nodded. "Good, since we're all here we can get started." He paused looking around the room. Jack felt he needed an aide to keep track of all of these meetings that were bound to be incoming. Someone who could keep his schedule straight for him. At least someone who could keep the coffee pots filled and water bottles stocked, maybe some pretzels set on a tray? He shook his head as he got his head back in the game. "Madison, where do we stand on the Franklin?"

Madison sighed. It had only been three days since the major asked her to start work on the Franklin. They hadn't made much progress other than analyzing what was wrong with the ship. "We're working on her sir." She said. "On track for a three week turnaround. Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Gamma shifts are working around the clock getting little sleep to get her up and running again."

O'Brien nodded. "Good. Keep up the work." He looked to Kate. "Commander, status."

Kate Monson stirred her tea in her hand. It was the only thing she had time to grab before the meeting. "As you know, the fleet has been recalled to Earth. We won't be expecting reinforcements anytime soon. We're out here alone." She said. "I've been in contact with my counterpart on Crimson Delta, they're hanging in there. I think we can spare a few fighters to help protect their station. Maybe five or six, a squadron at least."

"Make it work." O'Brien said.

"Killpack." O'Brien said looking to the chief security officer. "What's the morale on the station. Any fights?"

Jeff chuckled. "Fights." He said. "Remember New Years a year ago." He stopped, no the major wouldn't remember. He wasn't there. "Anyway, our latest crisis is making New Years look like a tea party. I've got my men patrolling the station twenty-eight hours a day. We're breaking up fights and confused worried people left and right, it's not pretty. But we're on top of things."

"Good." O'Brien turned in his chair to face Doctor Allen. "Any casualties doctor?"

Allen smiled. "Not really sir. A few bumps and a sprang here and there, but nothing I can't handle. My staff is ready for more to come. Heaven knows there's more to come if they keep attacking the station."

"Speaking of attacks." Madison spoke up. "If we can borrow a shield generator from the Franklin, we could establish an actual shield grid around the station." She suggested. "Since Earth Force Alliance ships carry two shield generators, one is a backup, we should be able to snag it and convert it to our systems." She paused. "While the Franklin's main shield generator is undergoing repairs, we can extend our shields around their ship to help protect them."

O'Brien considered the proposal for a moment. It would be nice to have defensive shields in place around the station. He didn't know if the shield generator would be strong enough to encompass the six mile long station as it was designed to cover a ship over a mile in length.

Madison could see the wheels in Jack's head turn. "I can make it work sir." She said. "We have energy supplies running from back lot twenty-six to thirty-two. Trust me, I can integrate the shield generator and make it work."

"Alright." O'Brien said. "Get that set up, borrow any other engineering crews you need from other departments. The station's protection is our primary concern."

Madison nodded. "Aye sir."

Looking over to Grilka and Norev, the two women were still bickering over something. O'Brien didn't want to interrupt their "conversation" but as they had been adamant about, he needed their valuable input.

"Ladies." O'Brien said trying to grab their attention. The two women kept talking over each other. "Ladies please." He walked over and stood in front of them. Placing two fingers in his mouth he whistled as loud as he could.

Norev and Grilka both stopped talking and looked at O'Brien in disgust, he had just interrupted their in depth conversation. How dare the human do that.

"What?!" They both shouted in unison. Looking at each other, the two women burst into laughter. Norev placed a hand on Grilka's shoulder. Grilka didn't move the hand, indicating she didn't mind it being there.

O'Brien smiled. "Glad to have your attention, welcome to the meeting." He said. "Do either of you have any information that could help out our current situation?"

Norev looked up and spoke. "My government offer their services. We plan on construction warships, after the manner of Obshi's, and plan on sending them to help in the

fight against the Dubor.” She explained. “Unfortunately it will take three months for the first wave of ships to be finished.”

Kate sighed. “Earth could be wiped out in three months.” She said. “But the help is appreciated.”

O’Brien chimed in. “Yes, the help is greatly appreciated. But I thought your people were pacifists?”

Norev shrugged at the thought. “When there is a need, there is a way.” She simply said.

Grilka spoke up. “I’ve been monitoring the Dubor News Net, the scientists Coff and Toff down on the Shuka surface haven’t made any substantial improvements in whatever it is they’re working on. The news just reports they are alive and well on Shuka’s surface.”

Norev groaned. “They are a danger to my people.” She said. “Eventually they will branch out and make settlements. It will be a slow burn.” Norev frowned at the thought. Aliens on her home world. It didn’t sit right with her. “We will eventually find a way to force them from our world, it only takes a matter of time.”

“And what do you hear from Obshi?” O’Brien asked.

Norev hesitated for a moment. “Obshi hasn’t been seen or heard from in weeks. He has locked himself in his quarters and won’t accept visitors.” She said. “It is frustrating to say the least.”

O’Brien matched her frown. The man who had defeated the Dubor in the first war was unavailable to help them defeat the Dubor in this war? Something didn’t sit right with that thought. He felt Obshi would at least be willing to help them plan an attack against the Dubor race at any cost. Maybe he was wrong. Jack would have to investigate further.

“Alright.” O’Brien said. “I have a status meeting with General Landry at Oh Nine Hundred. I will update him then. Dismissed.”

As the room cleared out, O’Brien let go a sigh of relief. At least some things were going right. He wished he could say it was all going to go right. That was the thing about war, everything was unexpected and that was nerve wracking.

The thought of an aide revisited Jack’s mind. There was that ensign who was eager to go back out and fight, what was his name? Travis something. Sitting down at his desk, he called up the kid’s service record. Being an ensign, there wasn’t much to go through.

“Come on Travis, impress me.” O’Brien said as he scrolled. Then something caught his eye. The kid’s first assignment was at Earth Central Archives, during that time he uncovered a conspiracy to destroy the archives. The saboteur was caught in time and Travis had been awarded some medal that isn’t even handed out anymore. He was transferred to the Franklin

shortly after due to his handling of the situation. He hadn't seen much of battle, he was still at the academy during the Civil War so there wasn't time to gain any actual field experience. His posting on the Franklin out on The Rim was his first taste of action, but he managed to pull through alright. His psych evaluation came back clean as a whistle, which was a relief. The kid could handle a tough situation.

O'Brien sighed. He didn't want to be working with an ensign, a change would have to be made. "O'Brien to Ensign Copperfield." O'Brien said. "Come to my office please."

A few minutes later, Travis turned the corner and walked into the major's office. His arm was in a sling but his face showed a cheery disposition. He was happy to be aboard Crimson Gamma, more happy than he had been in a while.

"You wanted to see me sir?" Travis asked.

O'Brien turned from his wall monitors to see the ensign enter. "Yes, ensign. Come in, sit down."

The ensign did as requested. Sitting down, his legs began to shake. He was nervous for some unknown reason. Meeting with the station commander that early in the morning could bring about undesired consequences. He would soon find out one way or another.

"I've never been one to beat around the bush." O'Brien said. "I need an aide, and I've selected you. It comes with a promotion and a raise." He looked at the ensign in the eyes and smiled. "How does it sound Lieutenant Copperfield?"

Travis grinned from ear to ear. How could he turn such an opportunity down? "Aye sir." He said. "I mean yes, I accept." He stood and shook the major's hand. "When do I start?"

O'Brien nodded. "Good. Good. Tomorrow morning bright and early. I'll have some things for you to do then."

Travis smiled. "Thank you sir." He turned around and walked out of the major's office with a spring in his step. It wasn't everyday you got a promotion and a raise. He wondered how much more money he would be getting. He would be getting his own quarters, that much was for sure. No more sleeping on the bottom bunk. His bunkmate snored and when she snored it caused the whole bunk to shake. Yeah, Travis wouldn't be missing that at all.

\* \* \*

Outside the station, Madison was performing an EVA on the Franklin. She was repairing one of the bulkheads that had been destroyed during the attack. Her welding technique was something of her own making. She found it more efficient than the standard

put in place by the regulations. There were things that were just more easier to do her own way, and they were stronger than what the regulations required. Madison figured if they worked better then why not use them? It made sense to her. After about an hour of working, the bulkhead was secured in place and ready to go. Activating a small field, she tested the bulkhead and watched as it stayed in place. Pleased with her work, she moved onto something else.

“Rodriguez to Park.” Her communications line came alive. Madison jumped as the incoming transmission. She had been so focused on her work that any slight noise startled her. Madison didn’t typically startle easily, but today she was just on edge for some reason.

“Madison here, go ahead Rodriguez.” She said into her helmet’s microphone.

“I’ve disengaged the secondary shield generator.” Rodriguez reported. “The primary shield generator has been fixed and is in working order.”

“Wow,” Madison said. “That was fast. Good work.”

Rodriguez chuckled at the comment. Fast. Fast? He didn’t think it was fast. Efficient maybe, but certainly not fast. Rodriguez wished it had been quicker actually. The station needed this shield generator online asap before another wave of scouts came in causing more havoc to the station. He wondered how Crimson Delta was holding up. Without shielding in place, she would be the first station to fall. He had thought of sending them the Franklin’s main shield generator, but then thought what would the Franklin use for protection? If only there was a third shield generator out there they could implement. Maybe Earth could dispatch a ship and send one, that is *if* they could spare a ship to send out that far. The Comeki Star System wasn’t just a quick jog to the store.

“I wish we could get one of these over to Crimson Delta.” Rodriguez admitted. “They don’t have a shield generator to speak of, and only a handful of fighters. I hope those fighters the major sent will get there soon.”

“Agreed.” Madison said. “Get that shield generator down to docking port thirty-four. Engineering can take it from there. Then report back here.”

Rodriguez nodded. “Right.” He continued to load the shield generator onto an antigravity sled that would take the unit to where it needed to go.

Madison got back to work, her next task was to fix the gravity plating in that section. It had been acting up a bit after some other changes she had made to that deck. No one wanted to be floating unexpectedly during a firefight. That could lead to some undesired consequences. There was a time and place for being weightless in space, during a battle was nor the time or the place. One had to have their boots firmly planted on the deck at all times in order to keep control of the situation.

\* \* \*

Norev and Grilka sat in the Moonwalk Cafe. Norev had wanted to go to the Shukan restaurant while Grilka wanted some food she had prepared in her quarters, some homemade Duborian dishes that she had been anticipating for weeks. They settled on a compromise, an Earth restaurant that had greasy food to offer.

Their bickering had subsided for the most part. Talking about border disputes and taking over worlds had been exhausting. Talk of the war had been even more exhausting. Both women thought the Dubor would have attacked Shuka first. Earth wasn't even on their radar.

Looking over the menu, Norev wondered what half of the items on it were. She had never heard of Mac and Cheese or a Cajun Stir Fry. She was curious to try either though. Expanding her palate on human food had become an interest of hers since she had come to the human run station over a year ago. Looking around for a fork, she couldn't find one. Instead, Norev found two sticks. She was puzzled at what to do with them.

In the center of the table was an appetizer. The waiter had suggested it to the ladies. Whatever shrimp was, it looked interesting. Grilka picked up the chopsticks and placed them in her hand. She proceeded to pick up a piece of shrimp and dip it in cocktail sauce. Placing the shrimp in her mouth, she savored the flavor.

“Mmmmm” Grilka said. “I have been wanting to try shrimp for a while now.”

Grilka watched as Norev tried to mimic what she saw Grilka do with the chopsticks and fail at it. Finally taking one chopstick in each hand, she managed to grab a piece of shrimp and ate it. She too enjoyed the taste of the shrimp.

“So” Norev said in-between bites. “Do you wish to continue our petty bickering or just let us realize there are some things we won’t agree on.” She took a sip of seltzer water and giggled at the bubbles that went up her nose.

Grilka looked at the seltzer water and sniffed her own drink. It did not contain bubbles, thankfully. “I would prefer not to bicker as you put it. I fear we have crossed a line that are in danger of not uncrossing.”

Norev agreed. “Truce?” She asked.

Grilka nodded her head. “Truce. You were right, my people were responsible for the attacks. It is so unlike them to be so aggressive like that though. My people prefer a methodically thought out plan of attack. We move slow as to not disturb the race we are attacking. These attacks were quick, swift even. Faster than we normally move. I mean look at how we took over your planet in the first war. It took years of execution before we had fully

taken over.” Grilka said. “An unfortunate occurrence on both counts.” She admitted. “I know my people are in the wrong. Attacking those less fortunate than us is not honorable.”

Norev laughed. Honor. What did the Dubor know of honor? How was it honorable to attack unarmed civilians? Even during the first war, the Shuka people were unarmed and the Dubor *still* attacked. She stopped laughing and stared Grilka in the eyes. Here she was enjoying a meal with the enemy, yet Grilka wasn’t the enemy. She was considered a friend.

“What keeps Obshi locked away in his room?” Grilka asked. “I thought he was a great warrior of your people. Should he not be out leading the charge against the Dubor?”

Norev didn’t respond at first, she just stared blankly at the shrimp in front of her. Finally she looked back to Grilka. “He has his reasons. I do not know what they are.” It would be inappropriate for Norev to pry into Obshi’s personal life. For all she knew, he could be mourning the loss of his crew still and just wanted to be left alone. It was not her place to question. To do so would be crossing a line.

“I see.” Grilka said.

As the waiter brought their food, the ladies began eating. They ate in silence the rest of the meal as there was nothing else to speak about. Everything that had to be said had been addressed in Norev’s eyes. If Grilka wanted to speak of something else she was free to do so, but that would be on her.

As they finished eating, they parted ways on better terms than when they came in the restaurant.

Grilka approached a transport tube. Once inside, she turned to face the control panel. Pressing a button, she spoke to the computer. “Please take me to Obshi’s quarters.” She said. “At once.”

The computer beeped and responded. “Section G Forty-Seven Baker. Commencing.” The lift began moving towards that direction. As the lift moved, Grilka wondered what she would say to the man. She knew what she *wanted* to say to him, but didn’t know exactly how to do that.

Walking down the corridor, each step became more determined. Grilka wanted to kick Obshi’s ass. She didn’t quite know what that human expression meant but she was determined to make it happen.

Approaching his door she noticed it was cracked open a bit. Grilka peeked inside, Obshi was in some kind of trance. Grilka noticed it was a form of meditation. She had witnessed several Shuka prisoners perform such a ritual. It must be part of some ceremony she thought. Only those Shuka ended up killing themselves.

“Shit.” Grilka said. She rushed into Obshi’s quarters and took a blade away from him that he was about to plunge into his abdomen.

“How dare you!” Obshi yelled. “You have interrupted a most sacred event!”

Grilka tossed the knife away into the corridor. “Killing yourself is not sacred, even though you are a food animal it is not considered sacred.” She hissed at Obshi in disgust. “You would dishonor the memories of your people if you killed yourself.”

Obshi cried out in anger. “I should have killed myself in that damn prison instead of helping you out.” He continued to cry out. “I should have killed myself before any of this war could have happened. I am responsible for it, it is my doing. I am to blame.”

Grilka spat on the floor of his quarters. “You are not to blame Shukan. You are only what you are and nothing more. There is nothing wrong with that. But to kill yourself because you believe something is your fault? Who taught you that way? That is wrong. You need to reconsider your thought process on that my friend.”

*Friend.* Obshi thought. *What does she know of the meaning of friendship? What’s it to her?* He wondered what Grilka had learned from these humans that he had not. It was possible she had picked up something from them that had eluded him. But what that was, he was not sure of.

“You should have allowed me to complete the ritual.” Obshi said. “Now my shame and dishonor will be known among my people. I allowed my crew to commit suicide while I survived the incident. Don’t you see? I should be dead alongside the rest of them!” Putting his head in his hands, he wept like a child.

Grilka felt sorry for the man. He clearly thought he was doing the right thing. *What a backward culture they are.* She thought. Placing a hand on his back, she felt his sobs run through her fingertips. For a brief moment, she understood what it was he was crying about. For a brief moment she had achieved perfect clarity. Then it was gone in an instant.

“Listen Shukan.” Grilka said. “You are not lost. There is still work for you to do among these people. I promise you that. Your people need a leader especially now during this new war that has come upon us all. You cannot hide from that fact.”

Looking behind him, Obshi’s tears dried up. “She sent you here, didn’t she.” He said. “Norev told you to come and check on me.”

Grilka shook her head. “No Obshi, I came of my own accord and a good thing I did too. You would be dead now if I hadn’t.”

Holding out a hand, Grilka helped Obshi back to his feet.

“You are good cattle.” She said. “Wouldn’t want to waste good meat.”

Obshi chuckled at the thought. He understood what she was referring to even if it was in an unconventional manner that she spoke it. Her people were a sworn enemy of his people, and yet he did not see her as an enemy or a foe. Obshi saw her as something different. Not quite an equal, but something very close to it. He was sure the term would come to him at a later time.

Grilka looked to the corridor where the knife had been thrown. She wished she could will it into non-existence, but it looked rather fancy. Some kind of family heirloom. Something that shouldn't be destroyed or damaged. Retrieving the knife, she handed it back to Obshi. Obshi accepted the blade with gratitude and put it away in its sheath and then into a drawer, possibly for later use. Much later use down the road when his life was nearing its end of usefulness.

"I was about to go for a walk in the garden." Grilka said. "Would you care to join me? You can tell me all about your time aboard that warship far away from your home world. You must have some fascinating stories to tell."

Obshi nodded. He did indeed have some interesting tales to tell of his one hundred year journey back to Shuka. It had only taken them a hundred years because their FTL drive malfunctioned leaving them to use their sub light engines which weren't shielded. This caused them not to age and remain young. In actuality, Obshi was well over two hundred years of age. He didn't look a day over fifty. Grilka was jealous. She wanted to live a long time yet only age a handful of years in the process.

"Let's go." Obshi nodded. He held out his hand and watched as Grilka grasped hands with his. Two enemies walking side by side as equals. It was a sight to behold.

\* \* \*

O'Brien stood in C&C. He was going over logs in the computer. A glitch had made its way past the security sub system and into the main computer somehow. He was trying to help engineering track it down. They had their hands tied up with the Franklin repairs, it was only fitting that he try and lend a helping hand. Sometimes he wondered if he made the situation worse than it already was. But no matter, he was helping nevertheless.

Scanning files one by one was tiresome. The computer couldn't do all the work, it was infected by the virus and was of no use at all. No, the files had to be scanned manually. After each successful scan, Jack placed the file in a holding bin for safe keeping. It kept them free and clear of any possible virus they might come in contact with. He wasn't sure if it was actually going to work but it was worth a shot.

“Major.” A lieutenant said on the other side of the room. She was stationed at a command console. “I have an incoming transmission for you. Unable to determine who it’s from.”

“Route it through to this station lieutenant.” O’Brien said. “I’ll just take the call here.”

Ketish appeared on the screen. “Ah Major O’Brien, good to see you’re up and well. No lasting illnesses from prison I see, good.”

“No thanks to you.” O’Brien muttered. “What is it you want Ketish?”

“Right to the point, I like that about you humans. Never wanting to beat around the bush I believe you call it. Very well, I can do that. Five days ago I made a statement that I would purge this star system of any human outposts. I stand by that statement. If you think the scout ships are annoying, be prepared for something bigger.”

O’Brien rested his hand on the control console ready to cut the transmission at a moments notice. “Why are you warning me of what’s coming Ketish.” He said. “That doesn’t seem very smart of you.”

“All in good fair fun major.” Ketish said smiling playfully. “I am giving you and your people a chance to leave this area of space free and clear. If you leave we won’t chase after you. We will let you go. You can even leave the station in orbit, we will find use for it I’m sure.” He grinned an evil grin that would give a child nightmares for weeks.

O’Brien shook his head. “When you attacked Earth and the Franklin you made it personal.” He said. “Our people don’t frighten easily and we don’t take threats lightly. We aren’t going anywhere, it is you who will in fact stand down. So you attacked one measly small space ship, big deal. Will you be able to withstand one hundred of our heavily armed warships?”

Ketish dropped his playful smile. “Can you withstand ours?” He asked. “I doubt you have a hundred warships major. I doubt you even have fifty. I think you are bluffing. Not a wise move in this type of game we are playing mind you. But have it your way.”

The line went dead.

O’Brien felt sweat beading down his brow. He hoped Ketish hadn’t noticed it, but was certain he did. Jack got back to work cross examining the files he had quarantined from the other files in the system.

Kate Monson approached the major. “Sir.” She said. “I didn’t think Earth was sending us any ships, let alone any heavy cruisers.” She watched as the major performed his work.

O’Brien shook his head. “They aren’t. It’s just a big game of chess right now.” He said. “I have to see what we’re up against, and right now the odds don’t look too good in our favor.”

Kate nodded. "I see sir." She said. "Remind me not to play chess with you, like ever." She walked away leaving the major to his work.

Leaving C&C, Kate descended down into the Main Gallery for a quick bite to eat before retiring to her quarters for the evening. It was getting rather late and she had an early morning shift she didn't want to be late for.

As she sat drinking her gin and tonic, Kate overheard two men arguing about the Civil War and who was right. She listened in to see how the conversation was going. It wasn't anything new, she had heard both sides fight over the politics of the war for five years now. Nothing was ever new when it came to that. Yet she still enjoyed to listen to the points brought up. Sometimes it seemed fascinating.

"President Cain was in the right, clear and void of any wrong doing." One man said.

The other man shook his head. "Cain was a puppet placed by those who were really in charge. His policies were not his own. You could tell by the way the man spoke to the people. He was a puppet, someone else was pulling the strings."

The first man stood up and walked over to the second man. Placing his drink down on the man's table, he stared him down. "You want to repeat that to my face?" He asked.

Kate rolled her eyes, here it was about to go down. Standing up, she drew her gun and pointed it at the two men. "Either you two get along or Betsy here is going to have a field day with the two of you. I'll pump you both full of so much lead you'll be setting off metal detectors from here on out." She threatened. "The fracking war is over, give it a rest. We have bigger fish to fry." Kate pointed at a nearby vidset where the news was replaying Ketish's demands to the people of Earth regarding the Comeki Star System. "See that guy?" Kate said. "He's the one we should be worried about. Not who was right in some Civil War that will be long forgotten after our current war kicks into high gear. Get over it."

The men looked at each other and then the gun in Kate's hand. She made a very good point and not only because she held a gun in her hand and was about to shoot both of them if they didn't shut the hell up. Both men walked away from the Main Gallery.

The bartender looked to Kate. "I hope you're paying for their drinks. You ran them off before they had time to pay."

Holstering her sidearm, she walked up to the bartender and smiled. "Of course." Handing him her credit chip she paid for the drinks. It was quite a hefty sum of money she had to fork over, apparently the two men had been drinking for over two hours and arguing the same points over and over again. The bartender was growing tired of it, he was glad Kate showed up when she did.

“Hey, listen commander.” The bartender said. “Do you think we’re in real danger here?” He asked. “I mean I stayed because this bar is my only source of income and I’m not about to try and sleep on my brother’s couch again. That didn’t turn out so well the first time I had to stay with him.”

Kate shrugged and pointed to the vidset behind the bar. “It all depends on him I suppose.” She drank the rest of her drink and walked away.

The bartender called after her. “Hey! Commander! You forgot to pay for your drink!” He cursed under his breath. It wasn’t that what she ordered was expensive, it was just the principle of the thing. He was trying to run an honest business here. If people kept stiffing him, he wouldn’t have a business to run.

\* \* \*

Jeff Killpack walked down to customs where he was hoping a shipment he had been waiting for had come in. Walking up to the counter, he waited as a blonde woman was helping another customer. As she finished up with the customer, she turned her attention to Jeff.

“May I help you chief?” She asked. Her long fingers tapped keys on the keyboard in front of her as she looked up any packages for the chief.

“Yeah, I’m expecting a package. It was shipped via Space EXpress like three weeks ago.” He said. “I was wondering if it came through here yet.”

The woman checked her computer records and shook her head. “No, sorry Jeff. No packages came through here for you. Except mine that is.” She ran a finger up and down her side. Amanda had been trying to bed Jeff for over three years now. He turned her down at every opportunity for some reason. She didn’t quite understand, but she was a very patient woman who always got what she wanted; and she wanted him. “Why don’t you come by my quarters later and we can play peek-a-boo.”

Jeff smiled and turned down the invitation as usual. “Sorry Amanda, you know the answer to that one.” He continued to smile. “thanks for checking. I’ll probably be back tomorrow to see if it came yet again.”

Amanda blew Jeff a kiss. “I’ll be here waiting for you tiger.” She turned around and began working on another shipment order that had just came in.

Jeff shook his head and walked away. *When will she ever learn.* He thought.

“Security to Chief Killpack.” Jeff’s radio sounded.

Jeff reached for his comm unit. "Yeah, I'm here. What's up?"

"We have a Lieutenant Miranda McDuff in custody. She's demanding an open comm channel be made so she can speak to her brother? Thought you should know."

Jeff sighed. When it rains it pours. "I'm on my way."

Rushing down to security, Jeff walked into the main security office out of breath. He saw Miranda sitting in a chair with irons on. He frowned at the situation. She didn't need to be in irons. They weren't necessary.

"Take those blasted things off her." He said. "For fracks sake. She's not a prisoner."

The eager ensign who had called Jeff apologized. "Sorry sir, I thought they were necessary. She seemed hysterical."

Miranda rubbed her wrists and looked up at Lieutenant Killpack. "Thanks." She said. "I was just angry that I haven't been able to get in contact with my brother. He's in rehab, I know they have strict rules, but they don't cover communication with family members. In fact it's encouraged to speak with family often." She said. "I just want to speak with my brother!"

Jeff paused. Oy, was he really going to have to be the guy to tell her? He took a deep breath and let it out. "I'm sorry ma'am." He began. "Your brother was onboard the U.S.S. Fearless when it attacked Earth and was subsequently destroyed by Earth's defense grid. There were no survivors."

Miranda collapsed in her chair from shock.

Jeff sighed. "Killpack to Med Bay, better send someone down here. I've got a woman passed out in my security office."

Matt responded. "On my way."

\* \* \*

Back in C&C, O'Brien was almost finished scouring through files for his hiding virus when another call came in for him. This time it was from a Heavy Cruiser that had just dropped out of FTL near the station. O'Brien whistled to himself. The sheer size of the cruiser was massive, almost half the length of the station itself. He couldn't help but wonder how she would handle in FTL. She obviously made it there in one piece so maybe that wasn't a valid question.

"Sir, the Victory is hailing us." A female lieutenant said.

“Open a channel.” O’Brien ordered. “This is Major O’Brien of the Space Station Crimson Gamma. Welcome to the Comeki Star System.” He said. “Forgive me for being blunt, but I thought all fleet ships were protecting Earth.”

A signal came through. “Crimson Gamma, prepare to receive General Tague and company. Out.”

Behind Jack, three teleportation beams activated. Jack turned around to see who was being teleported aboard. A female general and two of her aides materialized right before his eyes. He recognized the woman as General Eve Tague, one of the most highly decorated generals this side of the Naomi Star Cluster. He didn’t recognize her aides, but that didn’t matter.

“General.” O’Brien said as he stood at attention. “Welcome aboard.”

General Tague stepped forward and saluted. “At ease major. Note in the station’s log that as of this date and time, I am taking command of Crimson Gamma.”

O’Brien’s mouth dropped open. His blood boiled. This woman had just crossed the line.

The End