

Nokev

121

by Kyle Eggleston

A Lifetime Ago

Nokev held Norev's hands in his. They were standing in front of Nokev's latest invention. He called it Shuka One. It was Shuka's first FTL capable space ship. Thanks to the strangers from the sky, he was able to build it using donated parts from their own ships. Spare parts were hard to come by, he was grateful when they were able to give him most of the parts he needed to create this masterpiece.

Here he was, ready to leave on a long range ship and his wife was there to see him off. Well sort of, she was plenty mad at him for wanting to leave.

"And what of the baby?" She asked as she rubbed her belly. Norev was very pregnant, almost ready to burst. "When you crashed your first rocket ship in the mountain range, it took you over a year to come back to me. What if this time you just never come back? This isn't some orbit around the world. You're going far away at a crazy speed." Norev had every right to be concerned. "And when you took off in that second ship claiming to have FTL drive, the Dubor came and conquered us. Luckily Obshi saved us from that war."

Nokev leaned down and kissed Norev's belly. He felt the baby kick as he did so. Nokev couldn't wait until she was born. He was the most lucky man in the world.

"I met Obshi the other day." Nokev said. "He is a very kind and gentle man. He wondered how I managed to live so long. Don't worry I didn't tell him a thing." Nokev spoke of course of the secret they held about rejuvenating their youthful appearance. It didn't always last that long, hence when Nokev met Obshi he looked like an old man. But being back on the treatment, Nokev was back to his youthful appearance. He made a note not to run into Obshi again, it would be quite confusing.

"I'm going back there." Nokev said. "I'm going back to the fountain of youth world to resupply our stock. Without it, we won't survive another hundred years." He smiled at Norev. He was doing this for her and their baby. He and Norev were already pushing one hundred and fifty years of age. What was another fifty in the grand scheme of things?

Stepping away from Norev, Nokev blew her a kiss. "I'll be back before you know it."

“You better keep that promise Nokev.” Norev said. “I mean it.” She caught the kiss and blew a kiss back to her husband. Norev was terrified that she would never see her husband again. All of these trips, these defying the religious council. At times it seemed too much for her. What was she to do at the end of the day? She loved her husband and would do anything for him. Including waiting for him to go on this latest adventure. She rubbed her tummy and hoped her daughter would get to know her father.

Stepping onto the platform that would take Nokev up to his cockpit, he waved to the city below. The ship was on a mountain, it was the safest place to start the FTL engine without vaporizing anyone below. The FTL capable ship had two main rocket looking engines one on either side of the cockpit and to the aft a little bit. They were spaced far enough apart as to not fry the person in the cockpit. That was a very important part of the design Nokev came up with. He had no wish to die on his voyage.

As the platform rose into the air, Nokev took one last look around the city. If he didn’t make it back, at least he had final memories to look back on. A wife with a baby on the way, and a city and world that was free of oppression.

Norev watched as her husband’s space ship blasted off into space. She shed a tear at the thought that she really might not see him again.

“He’ll return.” A man said “He will always return.”

Norev turned around to see Obshi standing behind her. “Obshi” she said. “How long have you been watching?” She asked.

“Long enough.” Obshi said. “To know that he is in love with you so deep that he would move the heavens if he could. Maybe that is why he travels the stars, to move the heavens for you.” He paused. “He gives me strength you know, the courage to do something I’ve never done before. During the war, all I had was the urge to win. Now that it’s over, I’m finding I’m losing myself. I don’t like that thought. I need to be up and doing something.”

Norev looked up, her husband was now just another speck of light out there in the cosmos. When Nokev activated his FTL engine and shot off, it looked like a shooting star. So majestic, so beautiful. She wished she could be up there in space with him, but Norev didn’t want any harm to come to the baby.

“Go to the stars, Obshi. Go to the stars.” Norev said as she pointed to those tiny flecks of light. “That is where you are needed now. To help bring Shuka into a new era, one we haven’t really explored before. You need to be that beacon of light for us.”

Obshi looked to the sky where Norev pointed. He too watched as Nokev’s ship flew out of sight and into the unknown. Obshi stood in awe. He started building a plan in his head. A ship much larger than Nokev’s, yet it would have FTL capabilities. What he needed was a

warship. Obshi didn't plan on going to war, no that was against his wishes. He had seen enough of war in the past years. No, he wanted to be able to defend himself if needed. But he also needed a crew. There was one problem with his plan, he had to convince the religious council that it was the right move for the Shuka people.

October 2246

Captain Jack O'Brien sat in the commanding officer's office aboard the U.S.S. Franklin. He wanted to be back aboard the Fresno, but due to equipment malfunctions that just wasn't possible yet. So he was in command of the Franklin for now. The Fresno was on the far side of Shuka orbiting a small moon. She was in capable hands, Kate Monson was the finest first officer he ever had the privilege of serving with. They didn't always agree on things, but whoever did in this day in age.

Seated across from O'Brien was Nokev. Jack was waiting to understand how a Shukan could be over two hundred years old and still alive and kicking. So far, Nokev hadn't been able to give any answers that were believable at least.

O'Brien thought that maybe the FTL drive on Nokev's ship made it so he didn't age. But then he remembered something Obshi had said about meeting Nokev when he was much younger. Nokev looked to be an old man, yet still pretty spry for his age. He had handled himself with a staff quite well. No, the FTL drive couldn't be the answer.

"Why is it important of how old I am?" Nokev asked. He chewed on the ice in his water glass. Shuka didn't have ice in the traditional sense so whenever they came across it, they would savor it and eat it like candy. "I do not come to you asking how it's possible for you to be, what forty Earth years? No, I don't do that. I am respectful." He poured himself another glass of ice water.

O'Brien smiled. He meant no disrespect, not the way Nokev was taking his line of questioning. "The war between your two peoples, the Shuka and Dubor was fought over two hundred years ago."

Nokev nodded. "Yes I know, I was there. The occupation of my world lasted for a little over one hundred years. It was a very dark period for us captain. One we wish not to repeat, and yet because of you and your people we seem to be having to do exactly that." He chewed on some more ice trying to calm his temper down before it got out of hand.

Standing up, Nokev walked around the room admiring the wall paintings. Ships and other scenery were depicted. He especially enjoyed the one of O'Brien's home world, Earth. Earth had one moon and one sun. It was a strange concept coming from a star system with two suns and two moons. But not every star system was created the same.

“My age doesn’t matter captain.” Nokev said. “The fact that I have returned to my home world after all of these years does. Unfortunately it would seem I came over a hundred years too late. My mate is long dead, so is my child.” He frowned. Not being able to bring back the de-aging drug in time hurt Nokev’s heart. If only he had been able to get back faster with the medicine, his wife and child might still be alive. But Nokev had to do what he always did. Explore what was out there, get side tracked by things that didn’t matter to most people. But it mattered to him. What a fool he was!

O’Brien poured himself a glass of whiskey. He had offered Nokev a glass, but after smelling the bottle he had declined and chose water instead. Tasting the whiskey, O’Brien relaxed. It was so smooth, it was perfect.

“Actually you might be surprised to learn that I know your great great granddaughter.” O’Brien said. He counted the number of greats on his hand to make sure he got it right. Which he did. “Her name too is Norev, in honor of your mate.” He said. “She is an ambassador aboard Crimson Gamma and a member of the religious government, what you used to know as the religious council.”

Nokev was happy and sad at the same time. Happy that his bloodline continued to live on, sad that she was part of the government. Governments were made to fall apart and quick. They never managed to survive longer than ten years in his experience. That’s why the religious council was formed. It wasn’t as corrupt as a government. He stopped walking the room.

“I want to meet her.” He said excitedly. Nokev had many questions for his descendant and he was sure she had questions for him as well. He couldn’t wait to answer those questions.

O’Brien smiled. “I can arrange that for you.” He said. “I can get you a meeting with her. I’m sure she would be excited to know you are still alive as well.” He paused. “If I guess your age, will you tell me your secret?”

Nokev laughed. Folding his arms, he nodded. “Fine captain. Guess away. No one has been able to guess it yet.”

“Two-hundred and forty-seven.” O’Brien guessed.

Nokev laughed even harder. “Sorry captain, today is just not your day.” He looked O’Brien in the eyes, the man really wanted to know his age. Unfortunately, Nokev wasn’t about to give up that information to just anyone. They had to be rather important to learn that secret.

“Tell me captain. You say the station below is in charge, run by this General Tague.”

O’Brien nodded. “That’s correct.”

“When I hailed the station, no one answered. I read life signs onboard, a breathable atmosphere, and signs that people were actually moving around. So, why did your General Tague not answer my hails?” He asked. “I almost resorted to using my signaling light to try and send code, that’s when I notice your ship in orbit as well and decided to try my luck with you.”

O’Brien shook his head. Placing his hands on the desk, he answered. “I don’t know Nokev.” He said. “I’m sure the general has her reasons. What those reasons are? I do not have a clue. When I can reestablish communications with the station, that will be my first question.”

“You cannot contact them?” Nokev asked. “Intriguing.”

O’Brien confirmed the statement. “Right. We don’t have any way of contacting the station right now. I have my best people working on it though. Hopefully we’ll be in contact with them in no time.” He paused for a moment deciding whether or not to divulge some more information. Jack finally decided why not, what harm could it do? “There is another one of your acquaintances onboard Crimson Gamma. His name is Obshi, I believe you know him.”

Nokev laughed. “Obshi is here.” He repeated. “That is wonderful news! I haven’t spoken to him in, well a very long time. I must catch up with him for sure as well. Tell me, is there anyone else onboard I should know about?”

Jack shook his head. “No, just those two. I think two is enough, don’t you?”

“Perhaps.” Nokev said and left it at that. Sitting back down he stared at O’Brien, there was something about him that was different. Nokev couldn’t quite place his finger on it. But when he would learn of it, he wouldn’t forget.

O’Brien decided to keep his knowledge of the prophecy, the one where he was supposed to unite the Shuka and Dubor people ending some great war, to himself. He wasn’t sure if it would even happen. Why bother with possible nonsense that might or might not come true.

Standing from his chair, O’Brien gestured to the door. “Well Nokev, I’m sure you are hungry after such a long journey. If you’ll allow me, I’ll escort you to the mess hall where I’m sure there’s something to your liking.”

Nokev nodded. “I would very much appreciate that captain.”

The two men left the office and headed towards the aft transport tube on the bridge. The bridge was still quiet as ever. It was an eerie feeling not being manned by anyone. The ship’s computer was keeping it in a stable orbit on auto pilot until someone came and took the controls and switched them over to manual.

Travel through the transport tube was quiet. The two men barley talked to one another. Before long they were at the mess hall. Sitting down at a table, O'Brien pulled up a transparent menu from which he could order some food. Nokev followed suit. They decided on the steak and potato dish with green beans on the side. It seemed like a good idea.

* * *

"Commander's log, October 31, 2246." Kate Monson said into a dictation device she held in her hand. "The captain has been temporarily reassigned to the Franklin to oversee her shakedown cruise. He left me in command of the Fresno for the time being. I don't mind being in command, but we're basically sitting here doing nothing. There's nothing for us to do. I don't want to jinx us, but I wish there was something exciting happening out there. End Log."

Careful Kate, you might get your wish. Monson thought. She didn't want to go into battle, the ship deserved to have her commanding officer onboard for that.

"Is that how you record a captain's log?" A man said exiting from the transport tube entering the bridge.

Kate turned to see Lieutenant Jeff Killpack standing there. She laughed at the joke and allowed a smile to form across her face. There wasn't much of that going around these days, war had taken its toll on most of the crew. Moral was at an all time low. Kate wished there was something she could do to lift the crews spirits, but hadn't found that magical way quite yet.

"Lieutenant as I live and breathe. What the hell are you doing here? I thought you had more important things to do aboard Crimson Gamma." Kate said offering a hand.

Killpack shook her hand and smiled at the commander. "Oh I had some leave coming, so I decided to come and check out how you and the captain were doing. Clearly I missed him." He looked around, nope no sign of the captain in sight. "In command of the Franklin huh? Madison got that rust bucket back up and running? Good for her."

Kate nodded. "Yeah, it took a few weeks, but the Franklin is back up and running. Not a moment too soon either. We can use all the help we can get out here. The Dubor keep ramping up their attacks. Now they're sending warships."

Sitting down in the command chair, Kate gestured to a chair next to the command chair meant for the first officer. Jeff sat down next to her. "Yeah, I've noticed their attacks are becoming more aggressive. I am not a fan commander. I don't like it."

Kate shook her head. She didn't like it either.

Checking a locator pad, Kate nodded at the information. "Doctor Allen is in Med Bay Two, and Madison is in engineering as usual. If you wanted to drop in and say hello to them." She said. "If not, that's fine too."

Jeff frowned. "Well commander, I actually came to see you personally." He looked around the bridge. Several crew members were trying not to eaves drop on their conversation, but it was a small bridge. You couldn't not listen in on a conversation. "Is there a place we can talk privately?"

Kate nodded. Looking to a young lieutenant, she smiled. "Lieutenant Greenboro, you have the conn." Kate stood from the command chair and walked towards the captain's office. Jeff Killpack followed her.

Kate unbuttoned the top button of her duty jacket allowing herself to breathe easier. Whoever designed these uniforms must have been nuts. She thought. Either nuts or they wanted people to suffer while on duty. She couldn't tell which one foot the bill more. She sat down on the couch, Jeff followed suit and sat down next to her.

"What can I do for you lieutenant?" Kate asked.

Jeff stammered for a moment. He wasn't quite sure how to ask his question. Figuring it would be best to start from the beginning, that's where he started the conversation. "I've been hearing people talk, commander. They're talking about the captain. How he's different now that he left Crimson Gamma. That he has some kind of destiny ahead of him." He paused. "I know the captain, he's not like that. He would never see himself above others, ya know?"

Clasping her hands together, Kate nodded. She noticed her left leg began to twitch. Forcing her leg to keep still she looked up to face Jeff's gaze. He wanted answers, and it was his right to have those answers given to him. But Kate didn't know if she was the right person to give those answers.

Killpack nodded his understanding. Kate wouldn't be able to give him any answers at all. At least he had put it out there. Maybe one of these days she would find the courage to actually answer his concerns. But today was not that day.

Kate leaned forward. "Jeff, do you know what's going on Crimson Gamma? I've tried hailing them for the past twenty-eight hours and have had no response. No one from the command staff is taking calls, hell I can't even get through to the dock workers. Do you know what's going on?"

Jeff nodded. "General blackout." He said. "General Tague's orders. I was lucky to get out on a ship when I did. She locked down any incoming or outgoing vessels for the time being. I don't know why that is. Some say it's just a training exercise, others say it's something more. Either way? I don't like how she's keeping us all in the dark."

Leaning back, Kate thought over what Jeff had just admitted to. Tague was up to something. Something not good and only she knew what it was all about. Kate didn't like the sound of it. It was too strange of a thing to worry about right now. If an attack happened, she would need to coordinate her efforts with someone in C&C. With a communications blackout, that would be rather difficult to do. Without being able to coordinate an attack, both the station and the Fresno could fall to the enemy. They had to conduct themselves in a single stance against the enemy. To do otherwise was suicide.

"Thank you lieutenant." Kate said. "I'll see that you're assigned some quarters while you're with us. At least until you are able to return to duty aboard Crimson Gamma."

Jeff stood from the couch and nodded. "Thank you ma'am." He said. "Perhaps I will go see Doc Allen and Madison. I'm sure they wouldn't mind seeing a friendly face." He exited the office.

"What are you up to Tague?" Kate asked thin air.

The computer being the computer, replied. "Insufficient query. Please rephrase."

Kate smirked. "Disregard."

The computer beeped once in acknowledgment.

* * *

As they finished their lunch, O'Brien took Nokev on a tour of the Franklin. She was about a half mile bigger than his old ship, the one he fought on during the Civil War. O'Brien didn't mind the sheer size of the ship, she was a beauty. He just didn't like how she wasn't very maneuverable. In a dog fight, you needed to be able to quickly evade your enemy. He supposed that's why they had Atlantic Fighters assigned to the ship with a full pilot compliment ready to man those planes.

"And you have artificial gravity plating on all decks?" Nokev asked. "That is quite an accomplishment. I have dabbled a little bit with artificial gravity in the past, but haven't been able to crack that code yet. If you don't mind, I would love to see the schematics."

O'Brien smiled. He made a note to hand over any information Nokev might have questions about regarding the technical specifications of the ship. He wouldn't give away anything like weapons. That was a forbidden topic to even broach. But the rest seemed to be okay to share with an ally.

"Come with me, I'll show you the engine room." O'Brien said. Boarding a nearby transport tube, O'Brien called for the lift to take them to the heart of the Franklin.

The engine room took up three stories of the ship. In the center of the massive room was a gigantic sphere. Two circular rings revolved around the sphere in opposite directions. The main engine glowed a bright red color.

Nokev shielded his eyes from the brightness of the engine. “Impressive.” He said. “And you say this engine runs on both matter and antimatter?”

O’Brien nodded. “Yes, it’s a newer design. Our older ships run on a nuclear fusion device. It was found that kind of power wasn’t really safe or cost efficient. ColdFusion was just out of the question as it was too unstable. So they settled on a mixture of matter and antimatter. Like I said it’s a newer technology. We’re still trying to figure out all of the bugs. But for the most part, it seems to work.”

Nokev stood in awe. “If I had a fraction of this power in my ship, I could go way faster than I have been going. This is amazing.”

O’Brien noticed Nokev brought up his ship yet again. He liked to bring it up whenever he had the ability to. Maybe that was his way in to get to know the man better. People liked to talk of their accomplishments. An FTL ship was quite an accomplishment.

“Here, I’ll show you how it works.” He walked over to a compartment and opened it up. The main engine shut down as he did so. A safety precaution. “The matter comes in from the left here, and the antimatter comes in from the right over here.” O’Brien said. “They collide and cause an explosion of power that gets pushed out into the main engine and powers the ship.” Closing the compartment, the engine started up again. “It’s really quite simple.”

Nokev was astonished. “To think you have the capacity to harness both matter and antimatter and make them work together. It’s astounding! So many leaps and bounds have occurred since I left my home world.”

Here was O’Brein’s chance. “Speaking of your travels, where exactly have you been for the past two hundred years?”

Nokev nodded. Yes the captain had him. He had to talk now. “Oh I’ve been here and there. Mostly out on The Rim. I try to avoid the deeper parts of The Rim as possible, but get in just close enough to conduct some research. I am a scientist after all.”

Holding onto a handrail, O’Brien continued the line of questioning. “What kind of research?” He was genuinely curious as to what Nokev had been up to all these years.

“Oh studies on space madness.” He said. “I ran into some folk who say the deeper into The Rim you go, the more mad you get. You start to lose a part of yourself. People have simply gone mad by being out so far without the relaxing comforts of home. Sure you can build a ship to have those comforts, but in the end they are not your home world.” He looked up at the giant sphere and smiled. “Luckily I didn’t fall prey to that possibility. I played it safe.”

“How?” O’Brien asked. “How did you keep safe from going mad like those people you talked about?”

Nokev shook his head. He really didn’t know. All he had were theories about how it all worked out best for him. “To be honest captain, I haven’t the slightest idea. I just kept to myself, kept my nose clean as it were. I wouldn’t stay out in The Rim for long periods of time. There’s a mining colony I would visit here and there just for a change of scenery is all.”

O’Brien nodded. He wasn’t sure if he understood what Nokev was explaining fully, but he did know that it made some kind of sense. They continued to walk around the engine room for a bit until Nokev began to yawn. O’Brien noticed the man was getting tired. He was surprised it didn’t happen sooner. Being cooped up in a cockpit for who knows how many hours he had to endure to get back to Shuka space was over the top.

“Come, I’ll show you to some quarters so you can rest. We can continue the tour later.” O’Brien offered.

Nokev nodded and agreed. “Yes, that would be nice, thank you captain.” He said.

They exited engineering to find Nokev someplace to rest.

* * *

The next day, it was business as usual. Crimson Gamma was no longer under lock down. As soon as the ban was lifted, General Tague contacted Captain O’Brien on the Franklin. She was stressed as usual and didn’t want to talk about it. What she wanted to know was information that Jack just happened to have.

“You found him where?” She asked.

Jack nodded. Of course she would want to know about Nokev, it wasn’t every day a man of his fame came back from the dead as it were. Jack decided to be careful of how he answered the general. He didn’t want to give away too much information and would keep it simple.

“He contacted me from his ship.” Jack answered. “Your station was under lock down of some kind, and no one answered him, so he contacted the Franklin. We weren’t under lock down and took him aboard.” There really wasn’t more to the story than that. Jack hoped the general would accept it at face value. Of course she wouldn’t because that’s just the kind of officer she was.

“I see.” Eve said. “Have you told anyone else about this man’s appearance? I mean he was missing for over two hundred years now, and you just happen to find him.” She was suspicious of everything the captain had told her so far.

“There are some people aboard the station he wants to meet with.” Jack continued. “I told him that I didn’t think it would be a problem.” He smiled at the thought of Nokev meeting Norev for the first time. To meet ones descendant must be quite the experience.

General Tague thought otherwise. “Absolutely not!” She exclaimed. “We can’t have this man, a legend by Shuka standards, moving about the station. Look what happened when Obshi did that. You allowed him to attack the Dubor home world in his warship and the three of you were captured, not to mention his crew committed suicide.” She paused. “Need I continue?”

O’Brien shook his head. “No ma’am.” He said. “You have made your points perfectly clear. One question, what do we do with him?”

The general tapped her chin for a moment before responding. “Send him home.” She said. “Let his own people deal with him. He is not our problem. Do I need to make that an order?”

Jack frowned at the thought. The man couldn’t even reunite with family and friends he once had. His rebellious nature inside told him to disobey the order. To take Nokev to Crimson Gamma himself and make introductions. But he couldn’t bring himself to do that. Jack wanted his command back, disobeying orders was sure to get back to the president and he would never get his command back at any rate.

“No ma’am.” Jack said. “No order needed. I will inform Nokev to head down to the planet surface at once. If that’s all?”

Tague smiled. She liked it when people followed her orders. Seeing no further point in the conversation, she switched topics. “How is your inspection going? I want you back aboard the Fresno as soon as possible. You’re needed back at Crimson Delta.”

The truth of the matter was since the Franklin was back in working order, the Fresno was free to go back on patrol. Tague wanted O’Brien and his crew out of her sky, that was the real reason she wanted his ship back on patrol.

Jack’s frown deepened. “Aye sir.” He said. Seems he wouldn’t be seeing Grilka after all like he had hoped and planned for. Jack would have to plan some leave later on, then he could visit Crimson Gamma when he wished and see Grilka who he missed dearly.

“Good. Tague out.” The channel closed.

Jack noticed he had been clenching his fist the entire time he was on the call. Hate was a strong word, but he really did not like that woman. Releasing his clenched fist, Jack let go a deep sigh. He had to tell Nokev that he wouldn’t be seeing Norev or Obshi. How was he going to do that? Jack would find a way, that was certain, he just didn’t want to was all.

Nokev entered the bridge of the Franklin looking for Captain O'Brien. He found him sitting in the command chair. Sitting down in the first officer's chair, Nokev smiled at Jack. "I thought I might find you up here." He said greeting the captain.

O'Brien returned the smile. Then the smile dropped, he wished he had better news for Nokev. "How did you sleep?"

Nokev shrugged. "It was okay, I'm used to sleeping in a weightless environment. So it was a little bit different for me. But it was okay. Thank you for asking. I was hoping to get your permission to leave the ship and head to the station, if that's okay."

Jack shook his head. *Damn orders.* He thought. "Unfortunately it is not okay. I have orders to send you back down to the planet's surface. You are not allowed to visit the station, at least not at this time." He cringed as he spoke the words to Nokev.

"That's absurd." Nokev said. "Do you even know what I've been through? I can't return to the surface of Shuka. The new religious government won't even speak to me. Trust me, I've tried to make an appointment. They don't want me down there. I have no place to go. Trust me, I've tried everything. You're my only hope."

Jack was bound by an order. An order he couldn't refuse or disobey. Return Nokev to the surface of Shuka. But what if his vessel couldn't make the trip? Jack had an idea begin to brew in his mind. Leaning forward, he thought it through some more.

"I've got it. The U.S.S. Fresno is on the other side of Shuka orbiting it's third moon. Pilot your ship over that way, and then fake an engine failure. Send out an SOS to the Fresno, they will pick you up. I will meet you in an hour aboard her." Jack said. "It'll work, trust me."

A half hour passed, Nokev did exactly as Jack instructed. Soon he was aboard the Fresno meeting the first officer, Kate Monson. Monson looked at Nokev with suspicion.

"The captain gave you instructions to fake engine trouble so you could board our ship?" She asked.

Nokev nodded. "That's right." He said. "He told me to meet him here a half hour from now." He scratched his head. "It's been a half hour already I believe, so yes another half hour and the captain should be back."

Kate couldn't believe what she was hearing, yet she actually could believe it. It was Jack's idea after all. He could come up with some of the most harebrained ideas this side of the verse. True she had only known him a year, but she had read his official profile and unofficial logs. Good thing Jack didn't know about her breaking into his personal database.

Another half hour passed. Kate and Nokev waited in the docking bay to greet Jack back aboard his ship. As the captain's Atlantic Fighter docked, Nokev's heart rate rose. They really

were going to pull this off. There was no doubt about it now. He looked across the bay where his own ship was docked. It looked pretty rough. Time out on The Rim could do that to a ship.

Jack exited the fighter. He looked behind him and invited three other people to follow him. He had brought guests of a sort. Jeff, Matt, and Madison stepped out of the fighter's aft section. They all approached Kate with smiles on their faces.

Kate looked at the three of them in disbelief. "Captain...what's going on here?" She asked Jack.

Jack smiled. "Well, I took matters into my own hands and transferred some officers over to the Fresno from Crimson Gamma. The general wasn't too pleased with what I've done, so it's best if we don't stick around." He said. "Plot a course for Crimson Delta and engage the drive, Kate."

Kate nodded. "Aye sir." She turned around to leave the docking bay, when she remembered Nokev standing there. Turning back around, she addressed the captain. "Oh, he's here for you."

Jack smiled at Nokev and shook his hand. "I'm glad to see the plan worked. We'll get you situated until we can figure out the next steps of the plan."

Nokev scratched his head. There was more to this plan of the captain's? Nothing ceased to amaze him these days. Ever since he got back from The Rim, he had to keep on his toes. Something told him not to get too comfy here on this ship. Something told him to be prepared to run at any given time necessary. Nokev always listened to his gut feelings and those feelings were singing out loud strong now. He would have to be patient and see what would happen.

The End