

# Reunion

211

by Kyle Eggleston

## Earth Orbit

Grilka was in a shuttle approaching Earth. As the planet came into view, she saw the Fresno docked with a space station. She smiled at the fact. It had taken her weeks to reach Earth from the Dubor home world. Grilka had kept an eye out for Ketish every chance she had, so far he hadn't chosen to follow after her, which was a good sign.

As her shuttle approached the Fresno all sorts of alarms sounded. Grilka winced at the alarms. Dubor alarms were designed to alert the pilot of any enemy vessel and the Fresno was classified as such. She would have to change that. The Fresno certainly wasn't an enemy vessel, she was a friendly. Finding the command to silence the alarm, Grilka breathed a sigh of relief. The Fresno locked onto her shuttle with a tractor beam halting her progression towards the ship.

"Unidentified vessel. You will not be allowed to come any closer to the Fresno." Captain Jack O'Brien's voice came over the comm system. "You will state the nature of your coming into our space at once. If you don't, we will be forced to open fire and you will not be around to answer questions."

Grilka's heart leaped for joy as she heard Jack's voice. He sounded good from what she could tell. She fumbled over the controls to open a communications channel to answer the captain's hail.

"This is Grilka of the Dubor Republic." Grilka said. "Do not fire, I repeat I am here on a peaceful mission. Please do not fire." She closed her eyes and said a prayer to her gods.

On the bridge of the Fresno, Jack froze. He didn't know what to do. The last person he expected to see or hear from again was Grilka and here she was. Standing from his command chair he pointed to the communications officer. "Open... open a channel." He stammered.

"Channel open." The communications officer confirmed. "You're on."

Kate looked to Jack and frowned. She wondered how this reunion was going to go. He had been pretty pissed off at Grilka for doing what she had done. You don't turn on your lover

and then try and come back. It was like the unwritten rule of love, at least in human terms. Maybe the Dubor way was different and Jack was part Dubor so perhaps that was part of the new normal for him now. She shrugged her shoulders in confusion.

“Grilka, this is Jack.” O’Brien said into the open communications channel. “What are you doing here?” He asked. Jack was really concerned of why she was there. What was her reasoning for coming back? There had to be a reason. One simply did not just show up out of the blue and say they were back.

Grilka hesitated with her response. Her Dorf was fine and well. He was alive. She was grateful for that on so many levels. Grilka couldn’t even begin to express her gratitude. “I’ve come back for you Jack.” She said. “If you’ll have me.”

Jack smiled at the thought. She really had come back for him. He shook his head. What had happened and the words she *didn’t* speak came flooding back into his mind. One big question stuck in his mind. Could he trust her? “Release your controls to us, we’ll bring you aboard.” He finally said. “Disable the tractor beam, bring her shuttle aboard. Full security contingent.” He looked to Kate. “Just in case.” He paused. “The docking bay is operational again right?”

Kate nodded. “Yes sir.”

Standing from his chair, Jack headed for the bridge’s transport tube. “I’ll be down there to greet her.” He said as the transport tube doors closed behind him, he pulled out his gun just in case. One could never be too careful around old girlfriends who could turn something else over night.

The transport ride was a quick one. Jack found himself exiting the tube onto the docking bay where a Dubor shuttle was waiting for him. A full contingent of security guards were waiting for him as well. Six guards in total had their weapons drawn at the docked shuttle.

Jack stepped forward into the docking bay. He looked at the security guards. Jack wanted them there, they were simply insurance in case something bad were to happen. Just in case Grilka wasn’t there for a peaceful meeting as she had indicated in her message.

“Open her up.” Jack said.

One of the guards stepped forward and keyed in a sequence that would open the shuttle door. As it opened, a hissing sound made its way into the chamber. A green mist escaped from the shuttle. Jack wondered if that was what Grilka was breathing. As far as he knew, the Dubor breathed oxygen just like humans did, and it sure as hell wasn’t green.

"Alright Grilka, you can come out now!" Jack yelled. He wasn't sure he was ready for this reunion. There were so many things racing though his mind that Jack didn't know what exactly was going to happen. He had to fly by the seat of his pants on this one.

Grilka stepped out of the shuttle, at the sight of the guards and their guns trained on her, she held her hands up. "I surrender." She said. "I am not armed, I present no threat to you or your ship." She looked to Jack. "You have to believe me Jack, you have to believe me."

Jack stepped forward and faced Grilka. He called for his guards to lower their weapons. "Weapons hold. She's no danger to us." Jack said not looking away from Grilka, they locked their gaze and would not let it go.

"Come with me." Jack said. "I imagine we have a bit of catching up to do. It's been weeks."

Grilka smiled at the invitation. "Yes Dorf, we do." She said.

Dorf, Jack chuckled. She never ceased to amuse him with that word. Always reminding him that he was part human and part Dubor. Not a full breed in either world, he was stuck between two worlds and always would be. It was not meant as a cruel reminder, but still a reminder nevertheless.

Holstering his weapon, Jack put his arm around Grilka and escorted her to a transport tube. Once inside, Jack spoke the command to make the pod move. "Brig." Any smile he had on his face while entering the tube dropped. No more disguises. Nothing but the cold hard truth from here on out.

Pulling a pair of handcuffs out of his back pocket, Jack placed them on Grilka.

"What's the meaning of this?" Grilka asked. She struggled to free her wrists without promise. The harder she tried to remove the restraints the tighter they became. She finally gave up on struggling and accepted her fate. She was headed to the brig. Dorf didn't want anything to do with her.

They rode the trip to the brig in silence. Grilka was Jack's prisoner. Jack wanted nothing more than to hold Grilka. But after their last encounter, he couldn't do that. Jack didn't trust her. Until that trust was earned back, she would have to live life in the brig. Grilka wasn't expecting to be taken to the brig. She thought maybe Jack would escort her to his quarters or her own quarters. Guess she was wrong, oh so very wrong.

The brig was empty as was the case when the ship was in space dock. There typically weren't any trouble makers around during maintenance downtime. Jack escorted Grilka to an empty cell and let her inside. He raised a force field between them separating the brig cell from the main compartment. "There you are. I'll come talk to you when I'm ready." He exited the brig.

Grilka slid down the wall until she was seated on the brig floor. She sighed. Maybe Ketish was right, these humans were no good not even the half Dubor ones seemed to be on the up and up. "Computer, how many people are onboard the Fresno at this present moment?"

The computer beeped. "There are one hundred and sixty souls onboard."

Grilka nodded. Under half the crew. She wondered when repairs would be complete and they would be headed back to Crimson Gamma. Maybe she could find a way off the ship and head back to Dubor at that point. Maybe. Unless Jack came to his senses.

Jack entered the bridge, Kate stood from his command chair as she saw him. "Captain on the bridge." She announced. Sitting down in her own chair, she checked her readings.

"Repairs are complete captain. We can recall the crew at anytime." Kate reported.

Jack nodded. "Good." He said. "Do it, recall the crew. I'm sure Madison will be glad the space dock workers will be out of her engine room." He smiled at the thought. Madison had been so mad and upset over the space dock workers, now that they were gone she could have her engine room back.

"Captain, can I see you in your office for a moment?" Kate asked O'Brien.

Jack set a datapad down on his armrest and nodded. "Yeah I have time for a brief chat." Standing up from his chair, he headed towards his office with Kate following behind him.

Inside O'Brien's office, he turned to face his first officer. He watched as she placed her hands on her hips. She was upset about something, he was sure he was about to find out exactly what that was.

"You can't just put her in the brig." Kate said. "The war is over, there's no reason for it."

Jack scoffed at Kate. "I can't? She lied to me! She could have put this ship in danger. Don't you see? She could have been a spy for all we know. Who knows what she told Ketish about me, about this ship. She is dangerous. A threat at least to me. Not sure about the rest of you." He paused as he thought about his words. "If Grilka can prove she's not a threat to anyone on this ship, I will let her go. Until that time comes, she's in the brig. Understood?"

Kate could understand where Jack was coming from. Seemed like he wanted revenge of a sort. But with the war over, revenge wouldn't be the best course of action right now. Maybe she could help the captain find a way to forgive her, to make things better. Kate wasn't sure if she could do that but it was worth a shot.

"Understood, sir." Kate said, her voice shaking a little bit. She exited the office.

"Communications to Captain O'Brien, message coming in from Earth sir." The communications officer said over the wire.

Jack sighed. Now what did Earth Central want? "Alright, put it through in my office." He stepped around to the other side of his desk and sat down. Activating his vidscreen, Jack was greeted by the face of a woman he did not know.

"Captain Jack O'Brien." She said with a smile. "Eighth of your class at the Military War College and the Academy. One of few to actually attend both institutions. Very impressive. Captain of the U.S.S. Fresno, former commander of Crimson Gamma." She paused thinking if she left any important piece of information out. "Part Dubor, and the man who brokered a truce for this last war we were in." She continued to smile. "Does that about cover it captain?"

O'Brien returned the smile with a chuckle. "Yeah that about does it." He said. "Flunked biology in middle school, but well who doesn't flunk that class? But that's neither here nor there I suppose. I don't recognize you, mind an introduction or two to even the playing field? I mean you know all about me, I know nothing about you."

"Of course." The woman said. "Where are my manners. I am President Alexandra Mutar." She said. "President of the Moon and Martian Colonies as well as President of Earth." She had a smug look on her face like being president actually meant something. It was only a servant calling at best. She was a servant of the people of Earth, The Moon, and Mars, she worked for the people.

"Madam President." Jack addressed Mutar by her official title. "What do I owe this pleasure?"

"Right, down to business. I can appreciate that." The president said. "How would you like your old command back? How would you like to run Crimson Gamma again?" She leaned forward, "I would promote you back to the rank of major with a pay upgrade, more than you earned before." The president smiled. "How does that sound?"

Jack thought over the offer for a moment. He had grown accustomed to being a captain again and being in charge of the Fresno did have its moments. But to run Crimson Gamma again? That was the stuff dreams were made of. He longed to be back there, that wasn't a lie.

"The last time someone offered me command of Crimson Gamma it didn't last too long. I was replaced by a general, a now dead general." Jack said. "What assurance can you give me that this won't happen again? I don't need a repeat of the past."

The president sighed and cringed. "Yes that was an unfortunate turn of events." She said. "I can't promise you it won't happen again. Any change in government can have undetermined results." She explained. "As long as I am in charge, you will have that post. That's the best I can promise you."

Jack tapped his fingers on his desk. A promise from a new president. He wasn't sure he liked the sound of that. Could he trust her? She was new after all. There were so many

unanswered questions that he really wanted the answers to. Why did Grilka really come back was at the top of his list. Jack was suspicious of everyone at the moment, even members of his own crew.

“Madam president.” Jack said. “I shall consider it. Close channel.” The communications channel went dead. He leaned back in his chair, he had a decision to make. It would not be an easy choice to make, in fact it would be a most difficult choice at that. Yet he had to make it before he reached Crimson Gamma. Maybe being around the station again would ease his mind on the matter. Then again he would be that much closer to Ketish and his reign of, well whatever he was doing. Jack wasn’t sure he wanted to be part of that again.

He agreed it was rude to just close the channel like that on the president, but he didn’t see the point in prolonging any conversation where an answer wouldn’t be chosen. He would have to take some time and decide for himself the best course of action to take.

## Crimson Gamma

Nokev sat on the floor in his quarters, he was piecing together a model FTL engine for one of those toys he purchased in the Main Gallery. It was a hobby of his to make models. He would then destroy the model and rebuild it after he was done, it was a simple past time of his that didn’t require any real thought. Nokev liked it that way.

Beep Beep. There was someone at his door. Standing up from the floor, Nokev set down the mini FTL drive and looked at the door. “Open.” He said.

The door opened.

A woman stood in the doorway. She invited herself inside and sat down without being offered a chair. “Nice place you have here Nokev.” She said. “I can really get into it.” The woman stared at the pieces of Nokev’s unfinished model on the floor. “Well except for whatever *that’s* supposed to be of course.”

“Why don’t you come in.” Nokev said after the fact. He looked at the woman and didn’t recognize her. She was from Shuka that much was certain, but other than that he didn’t have a clue who she was or why she was in his quarters. “Who are you? What do you want?” He finally asked.

“Kerta.” The woman said. “My name is Kerta.”

Nokev smiled at the family resemblance. He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t noticed it before. She was the spitting image of the woman he once knew. “Of course, I should have seen it earlier. I knew your ancestor.” Nokev said proudly. “Good friends we were.”

“Yes I know.” Kerta replied with a smile. “It’s time for you to go home.” She said.

Nokev was puzzled. Home? What possibly would he find on Shuka that would interest him? The station was all he needed at the present moment until he felt the urge to move on and explore more of what was out there. "Why?" He asked. Nokev sat down in a chair across from Kerta, his hands in his lap.

Kerta shrugged. "Why not? Don't you think you've been away long enough Nokev? I'm sure your family misses you." She reached over and placed a hand on Nokev's leg.

"My family..." Nokev's voice trailed off. *My family.* He thought over and over again. "You must know my family is long since dead." Nokev finally said as he looked into Kerta's eyes. "As are yours. The Kerta I knew is long gone. You are her legacy, Ambassador Norev is mine."

Kerta hesitated. *How to put this*, she thought. "What if I told you I can send you back to your wife and child moments after you left them to explore The Rim." She asked delicately.

Nokev did a double take. What was she going on about? "What?" He asked in disbelief.

"Time travel." Kerta said. "I'm talking about time travel. I have a device that will send you whenever you wish to go. It can reunite you with your family. But you have to promise me you won't leave them again."

"Time travel isn't possible." Nokev said. "There have been studies on the *theory* of time travel, but that's all it's ever been. A theory." He stood up and paced around the room. "Even if it were possible, don't you know how dangerous a weapon it could turn out to be? You don't like someone, bam you kill an ancestor and they cease to exist. It would be too dangerous." Nokev couldn't wrap his head around what she was proposing.

"Yet it is possible." Kerta said. Taking a device out of her pocket she held it up. "This makes time travel possible." The device was sphere shaped with a handle sticking out of it. "I discovered upon it by mistake one day trying to make a stable wormhole. It's taken years but I finally managed to pinpoint exact moments in time." Kerta paused as she looked at the device. "I have been to our past, Shuka's past. I have also been to its future. There are great things in store for us as a race. But that's not my purpose in speaking with you."

Nokev stared at the device in her hand. "You have got to be joking." He said. "I... there are so many... I..." His voice trailed off. He didn't know what to think or believe. Nokev found it difficult to speak. If what Kerta was saying was actually true, he could be back in his own time over two hundred years ago. He could be in the arms of his wife again, meet his child, live life the way it was meant to be lived. Then a thought crossed his mind.

"What of my memories?" Nokev asked. "I mean, would I forget everything I've learned? Everything I've experienced here on Crimson Gamma and out on The Rim?"

Kerta shook her head. "No my friend. That's the best part of time travel, you'll remember *everything*." She smiled at him, trying to put his mind at ease. Nokev was obviously afraid of losing memories, experiences, things he had gone through. None of that was the case.

"How does the device work, exactly?" Nokev asked.

Kerta got excited. "Okay, so it creates a wormhole. But instead of traveling through space, it travels though time. If you were to put this device on your ship and activate it, a wormhole would appear before you. You enter the wormhole and it takes you back in time to the point you left Shuka. I've preset the destination time. It's ready to go whenever you are."

Nokev paused his pacing. He stopped dead in his tracks and stared Kerta down. "One question, why?" He sincerely wanted to know the reasoning behind Kerta's constant insistence on him returning home, to his own time. Why was that? What did she gain from such an endeavor? There had to be some kind of catch. "What's in it for you?"

Kerta smiled nervously. "I um... I'd rather not say." She said. "I know how that sounds. It sounds like I'm hiding something from you." Kerta paused. "Trust me, it is better that you don't know. But know this, I want to help you. I looked at your last Med Bay scans. You are deteriorating. If you stay in this time for too much longer, you will die." There she said it. The truth was out.

Nokev froze. He was going to die if he didn't go back in time? No, that sounded impossible. Why would he die? What was so terrible about the future that was killing him? He couldn't take her seriously, could he?

"I'm going to die." He repeated her.

Kerta nodded. "Yes, if you don't go back today you will die."

Nokev shook his head and put his hands up. "How could you possibly know?" He asked. "It's like you know the future or something."

Kerta laughed. "Do you think I'm here today by chance? I told you, I've seen the future. *Your* future Nokev. I watched you die!" Kerta screamed at him. "I *don't* want to watch you die *again!*" She turned her head so she was facing away from him. "I can't handle that a second time." Kerta paused. "Now please use that blasted device and go back in time. Go back to your family."

Nokev continued to stare at Kerta. "Let's say you're right. Let's say if I don't go back I die. So what? I've lived a good life. I've been out there, I've seen things that no other Shukan has seen. It's been quite an adventure as it is. My life feels fulfilled. So, what if I die? It doesn't matter."

Kerta clenched her fist. "If you don't go back, I will never be born." She admitted. Lowering her head she began to cry softly. "Father."

"Father." Nokev repeated. "What are you talking about? You can't be my daughter. You look like Kerta, the Kerta I knew back when I was on Shuka so many years ago. You can't be my daughter."

Kerta stood and walked towards Nokev. She held out her hand to his and took his hands in her own. "Father, I come from a time where you died. But I also come from a time where you and my mother, Kerta, lived a long happy life together." She paused. "When you go back, Norev will disown you. She will demand a separation of vows. The humans call it a divorce. You later moved on and married Kerta. I wasn't planning on telling you any of this, but if you don't go back I will never exist. I won't be born." She lowered her head.

Nokev let go of Kerta's hands. "You know I can have the doc check our DNA to see if you're lying to me." He nodded. "Yeah, let's run a test."

Picking up a datapad off a counter, Kerta handed it to Nokev. "This will provide you the answers and proof you need."

Nokev accepted the pad. As he read over the data he shook his head. There it was all laid out for him in a neat package. All he had to do was accept the truth. The truth. Nokev chuckled at the thought. Him and Kerta got together and had a kid. But what of Norev? Their breakup must have been quite a thing.

"How long do I have, exactly?" Nokev asked.

Kerta shrugged. "An hour, maybe two." She said. "I can't tell for certain, I can only guess. That's all."

Nokev paced the room again. If he didn't go through with it, if he didn't go to the past, Kerta wouldn't exist. He would be erasing a life out of existence. He would be killing her in a sense. "It will take an hour and a half to prep my ship." He finally said making his choice. "We better get going."

Kerta nodded and smiled. Nokev was making the right choice.

## Two Lifetimes Ago

Nokev's space ship exited the time wormhole. As the vortex closed behind him, he looked down at Shuka. The space around it was clear of any space stations. He was in the past, *his* past. Prepping his craft for landing, Nokev didn't like the task that laid before him. But he had to make sure the future played out the way he had seen it. Kerta *had* to be born and he had to unite with her mother in order for that to happen.

Minutes later, he landed on the front lawn of his home. Hopping out of the cockpit, Nokev walked up to the front door and knocked. He waited for Norev to open it, which she did. At the sight of him, tears ran down her face.

"I thought I would never see you again." Norev said hugging her husband. "It only makes this harder." She cried into his arms.

Nokev nodded. He knew what was coming next.

"I request the separation of vows." Norev said. She turned her face from Nokev. "Any man who would abandon his wife and unborn child doesn't deserve me." She closed the door in Nokev's face and walked away.

Nokev stood there in shock. He didn't expect her to kill their marriage that quickly. He had thought maybe he had a week or so, a reunion of sorts. But no that's not what happened. No, she had done it now. He had no place to go but to Kerta to make it official. Kerta would be the one to sign the paperwork and end his marriage to Norev once and for all. Nokev doubted he would ever see his child. It was a real shame. Something he would never forgive himself of.

Walking away from the house, Nokev looked at his ship. He would dismantle it in the morning. Nokev wanted nothing more to do with space travel. All it had brought was misery on his life. He wasn't enjoying today, that was for sure.

It was a bright sunny day out. His walk was a nice one. It had been so long since he felt the suns on his face. The Shuka suns were the brightest stars in the sky, obviously due to their relation to the Shuka home world. It didn't take long for Nokev to reach Kerta's home.

Knocking on her door, he waited for Kerta to answer.

A moment later the door opened. Kerta stood there in disbelief. "Nokev." She said. "What are you doing back? I thought you left for The Rim or some other nonsense."

Nokev sighed. "Long story." He said. "Norev wants a separation of vows. I have agreed to it. Please fill out the necessary paperwork and sign copies." He sighed.

Kerta was in shock. "What? Why? How did this come about?"

Nokev shook his head. "That's even a longer story and I doubt you would even begin to believe me if I told you." He answered. "It's probably best I don't even go into it."

Kerta frowned at the news. "I am sorry to hear that. I'll have the paperwork ready by tomorrow. Do you have a place to stay?"

Nokev shook his head and folded his arms. "Afraid not, she kicked me out."

Kerta stepped aside. "Come on in, I can set you up in the guest room."

Nokev entered Kerta's home. As the door closed he smiled. It was good to see his friend again. It had been way too long since he had been to his own time. Now he would have to get acclimated to it all over again. Knowing the future could have its benefits, but it could also have some major drawbacks. Like knowing what he must do to make sure a daughter was conceived by him and Kerta. Nokev felt Kerta was a sibling more than anything else, this was going to take some time to get used to.

## March 2247, Crimson Gamma

As the Fresno dropped out of FTL, Jack O'Brien watched as Crimson Gamma came into view. He smiled at the sight. It had been so long since he had seen the station. "Hello beautiful." Jack said.

Kate chuckled. "You called the station beautiful. Wow, you must be quite a date." She teased. Who was she kidding, Kate also felt the station was a sight for sore eyes.

"Open a channel." O'Brien ordered.

"Aye sir, channel open." The communications officer said.

Major Travis Johnson appeared on the screen. "Ah Fresno." He said. "I see you have returned to your scheduled patrol. Good. I was afraid the Dubor might try their hand at our low defenses and take advantage of the situation."

Jack smiled at the concern. "Major I'm not sure if you've been told but the war is over. There's no threat from the Dubor." He paused. "Also I am here to take command of Crimson Gamma. I'm transmitting the orders over now."

A panel beeped in front of Major Johnson. He read over the orders and confirmed their authenticity twice. "I see." He said. "Well Major O'Brien, I can only do one thing. That is give you command of your station back to you."

O'Brien nodded. "I believe you sir."

"I stand relieved." Johnson said. "You are cleared to dock at port sixty-two. Welcome home major." The channel closed.

O'Brien keyed in a few command sequences into his armrest. "Helm dock with the station."

The helm officer nodded their head. "Aye major." They said.

"O'Brien to Killpack." Jack opened an internal communications channel to security.

"Killpack here."

"Prepare the prisoner for transport to the station's brig." Jack ordered. "Once you get her there, take command of security."

"Understood." That channel closed.

Jack stood from his command chair and looked to Commander Monson. "Well Kate, shall we retake our station?" He asked.

Kate stood from her chair as well. "Aye major." She said.

Major Jack O'Brien was glad to be back where he belonged. It had been quite a journey that one. Jack hoped to get a breather in before the next big chaos moment occurred. He wasn't sure when that would happen, but knew it would happen eventually. It always came, the other shoe must always find a way to drop and he would be there for it.

The End