

# To The Stars

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## Devices

Jordel worked in her father's workshop on the planet Ashlea Prime. She always worked late after hours, it was when she was able to work on her own projects. The Dubor had a curfew, she never listened to it. As far as she was concerned, she was inside and not out on the street. She was following the letter of the law which was expected of her.

Her father had warned her that the new prefect wouldn't approve of what she was doing. Technically she hadn't left the house, the shop was attached to the house. So she was within her fair rights to work on whatever she wanted to work on. Well, as long as it wasn't a weapon or anything like that.

Jordel was working on a way to escape the planet and the hold the Dubor had on her home world. Her father wouldn't go with her of course, he would stay out of principle. If there were enemies to fight, fleeing was not an option. Jordel had to go to the stars, she just had to. She was not of the old ways, Jordel was of a newer generation. She had her own beliefs.

The door opened, Jordel's father walked into the shop. "Jordel, don't forget to keep the light dim in here while you work. No need in catching the Dubor's attention." He warned. Her father was always on the lookout for his daughter. After his wife had been killed as an example of those who defy the law, he was all Jordel had.

"I will papa." Jordel said, she dimmed the light more. Being under the oppressive hand of the Dubor was no laughing matter. Everyday was a struggle for life or death. Jordel hated this life so much. Why did they have to pick on her world to begin with? It made no sense. She let go a frustrated sigh.

"What are you tinkering with tonight, anyways?" Jordel's father asked.

Jordel smiled at her work. "It's an engine." She said. "You remember how I made the formula last week to fuel my probe?" Her father nodded. "Well, I'm working on an engine that will take that fuel and make it usable." She stated proudly.

Her father looked over her work. He was no scientist, but if she knew what she was doing, she could reach out to another planet. Ask them for help perhaps. If that was her intentions at least. He didn't know for sure. The probe she had worked on was rather small. It could carry no occupants. She didn't have enough material to create a full sized vehicle.

"What do you plan to accomplish with this ... probe?" Her father asked.

Jordel's smile dropped. What *did* she plan to accomplish? "I'm not sure." She finally said after a moment of thought. "I know there is an alien space station in orbit of Shuka. They fought off the Dubor over a hundred years ago. Maybe if we contacted them, they would come to our aid?" It was wishful thinking at best. Jordel knew this. But she had to try something.

Her father kissed her forehead. "My precious child." He said. "If the Dubor saw your probe launch, they would destroy it in a manner of minutes."

Jordel smiled. "I know. I'm cloaking it."

Her father gasped. Cloaking technology was forbidden to posses after the Dubor arrived. They had confiscated all of such tech and destroyed it. How Jordel had that technology was beyond him. "How? All cloaking tech was destroyed and banned!" He said. "If they catch you with it, you will be killed."

Jordel's smile dropped. "I have it hidden away papa. Don't worry about it. It's safe. They will never find it." She sounded sure of herself. But deep down inside, she wondered if she had hidden the technology well enough so the Dubor *didn't* find it. She wasn't sure.

"Well I'm going to bed." Jordel's father said. "Don't stay up too late. You're in charge of opening the shop tomorrow morning." He kissed her on the forehead again and exited the shop.

Jordel got back to work on her probe. She needed to record a message, one the Shuka people and the aliens orbiting their planet could understand. Jordel wasn't sure if they possessed technology like a universal translator or anything like that, but she hoped they did. If not, then her entire plan would have been for nothing. She regretted not finding more metal to make the probe large enough for her to fit inside. But the breathing requirements alone would have been a nightmare. This way she didn't need to worry about oxygen. All she had to worry about was that the radio would broadcast her message, and hopefully they would receive help because of it. She crossed her fingers.

## Star Hopping

Bert McDuff exited yet another wormhole. Again he was in orbit of Earth. He looked at the moon, there were cities on it. At least he was close to his present timeline this time, he hoped. Bert couldn't tell for sure. His instruments didn't tell him jack squat about anything.

Looking down at the Earth, Bert could see it looked much worse than it did the first time he exited the wormhole and met Nokev. That Earth had been through a nuclear winter of some sort. This Earth looked like it was melting with molten magma. It was clearly not safe to land on Earth. He looked back at the moon. No wonder there were cities on it, people had fled to the moon to escape whatever hell had happened to the Earth. Setting a course for the moon, Bert hoped to get some answers and find a way back to his own time.

Landing his shuttle at the entrance of a large hanger bay on the moon, Bert waited for the bay to pressurize. He didn't want to be breathing in the vacuum of space. That would be dangerous. As he waited, several people walked by in space suits. *They came prepared.* He thought.

Then he saw *him*. Nokev. Bert sighed. Why did he always have to show up at the oddest of times? Couldn't he just travel in space by himself without worrying about who he was going to run into? This Nokev guy was really starting to get on his nerves, and Bert showed it plain as day.

Finally the bay pressurized. Opening the cockpit door, Bert hopped out of the shuttle. He walked up to Nokev who removed his helmet. "You son of a bitch!" Bert yelled.

Nokev put his hands up. "Not my doing." He said. "I offered you a nice place to relax and enjoy the rest of your life. But no, you didn't want my help. What did you do? You scuttled off as fast as you could without looking back." He pointed at the Earth. "Things got worse after you left Bert. It's now one thousand years into your future. Oh things got way worse."

Bert was shocked. *All of this happened in a mere two hundred years?* He pondered what it all meant. "How could so much damage occur in that space of time?"

Nokev shook his head and shrugged. "I don't know Bert. I don't know. But I do know that if you had listened to me, you would have lived another sixty or so years free of any worry about anything. Now look at you. You're worried about the Earth, aren't you."

"Duh." Bert said. "The Earth I knew wasn't like this. It was peaceful. Green. Lush. You could go for a walk and not get burned by working on magma!" He was clearly upset. "I need a wormhole that will take me *back* in time, not *forward*." Bert said. "Can you help me do that or not?"

Nokev thought about it for a moment and sighed. "I can help you do that." He said. "But it will likely cost you something. Might even take ten years off your lifespan. There's no way of telling what will happen. Time travel is so unpredictable you see. I cannot tell the future, I can't say what will or won't happen to you. You just have to live it and find out for yourself. But I can help you get to the past." He paused. "I've been working on a device since we last met just in case this happened. Come with me."

They exited the hanger bay. Bert pulled out a device from his pocket and pressed it. The shuttle beeped. Nokev turned in surprise. "What was that?"

"Car alarm." Bert chuckled. "Come on, let's go."

Nokev shook his head as they continued walking.

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The Starcaster Tavern was unusually empty for a Friday night. Nokev and Bert found a table quite easily. A waitress soon appeared.

"What can I get you?" She asked.

Nokev smiled "Hey Gertrude, I'll have a draft beer." He said.

Bert nodded. "That sounds nice."

"You'll love it." Nokev said. "I found out about it about a year ago, been hooked ever since. They grow the ingredients in our hydroponics bay. Which is against regs, but I guess they slide the government money from time to time and that covers it." He shrugged. "What do I know though. I'm just the *alien*." He shook his head.

Gertrude smiled. "I'll be right back with those drinks."

Picking up a pretzel, Bert ate it. It was salty, just like a pretzel should be. "At least some things don't change." He smiled at the thought. Looking around, he saw other humans enjoying their time. Nokev was the only alien in the tavern.

Moments later Gertrude brought two glasses and a pitcher of draft beer. "Here you go." She said. Setting the glasses and pitcher down on the table, she smiled. "Let me know if you need anything else." She walked away.

Pouring beer into the two glasses, Bert smiled. He tasted the beer. It was a little on the bitter side. But he enjoyed it. "Woah, what's the percent of alcohol on this?" He asked.

Nokev shook his head. "I have no idea. But it sure does give me a good buzz." He drank from his glass as well. He looked around the tavern. In the corner were a group of guys who just got off work from the mines. It was amazing, the things they found in the moon.

"So," Bert said between drinks. "What exactly happened to the Earth? Don't tell me you don't know. You were here!" He exclaimed. Bert waited for an answer.

Nokev took a sip of his drink. How could he get out of this question? It was the last question he wanted to answer right now. But there didn't seem to be any way around it.

Looking into the bottom of his glass, Nokev looked for the answer that he was supposed to tell Bert. He could have just told Bert to look up the archives and find out for himself. But he was asking Nokev directly. Nokev could do nothing but answer his question. He sighed.

"Okay, look. It's like this." Nokev said. "A large meteor collided with a comet that was on a direct course for Earth. The comet made the meteor light up on fire, like hot magma. It hit the Pacific Ocean and just spread hot magma everywhere all over the Earth." He sighed. "It is not a pleasant story to recount. I hate it."

"Whoa ..." Bert said. "That is crazy talk right there. Who knew the Earth could go through so much more turmoil than it already had." He paused. "Hey, wait a second. If there were still people living on the moon, why did you build a shelter in the middle of nowhere on Earth?!"

Nokev coughed. "Yeah, not my best work." He said. "I was working with limited resources you see. I didn't stay long there myself, I've been living on the moon for one hundred and fifty years."

"... And this wormhole device you're working on." Bert continued. "You say it will take me into the past, right? Like I could be home tomorrow."

Nokev nodded. "Yeah, that's how it works. In theory." He said. "I haven't had time to test it yet. I don't know if there's a way to come back to my own time to be honest. It could be a one way trip." Nokev frowned. "It comes with no insurance."

"I see." Bert said. "Well, hand it over. I'm willing to give it a shot. I *have* to try and get back home, to my own time." He was desperate to get back to Earth. *His* Earth. Bert was tired of Earth hopping, going from Earth to Earth through time, forward in time. He just wanted to go home. Was that too much to ask? Bert didn't think so.

"I can't do that." Nokev said. "Not yet at least. I am putting together a time capsule of sorts, I want you to take it back in time and give it to me. It'll help me out more than you will ever know." Nokev smiled.

Bert was confused. How would giving Nokev's past self a bunch of ... items? Help him out? Yeah, he was completely confused. "Run that by me again? What's in this so called *time capsule*?"

Nokev shrugged. "Just some odds and ends." He said. "Nothing dangerous I promise. You're welcome to go through all of it if you wish. I just want to help the Earth not become ..." He waved his hands around. "All of this." Nokev paused as he reflected on it all. It was a good plan. He had lived among humans for a long time. The last thing he wanted was for their race to become extinct. "When you live among so many people for so long, you come to respect them. You come to understand them. Shuka is not my home anymore, this is."

Bert nodded. "Alright, I'll let you gather your materials." He said. "But as soon as you do, I want that device. We'll have to find a way to make it compatible with my shuttle. I'm not sure if it will just plug and play, ya know?" He drank the rest of his beer. The pitcher was empty. They had been talking for over an hour.

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Two months later, Nokev and Bert were seated again at the tavern. Nokev had just finished gathering all of the materials for his time capsule he wanted Bert to give his younger self. Bert didn't know if younger Nokev would understand what the time capsule was all about.

Bert looked over the contents of the time capsule. Nokev wasn't lying. There was nothing dangerous in it. No weapons. Some news articles about the end of the world, things like that. But nothing bad.

"Okay." Bert said. "I will take this back in time with me and give it to younger ... you." He looked around. "So, when do we get the wormhole device and put it in my shuttle?" He asked. Bert didn't mean to sound rude, but he had waited two whole months for this moment. Bert felt he deserved the technology that would get him home, and he wanted it now.

Nokev nodded his head. "We do have that agreement." He said sipping on a glass of whiskey. "I apologize that it has taken this long to gather all of my materials. To be honest, I was not expecting you to show up when you did. I thought I had another six years. Boy was I wrong." Finishing his whiskey, he stood from the table and picked up the time capsule. "Let's go." They headed to Bert's shuttle to install the time travel device that would take him back to his own time.

## The Probe

Back in 2247, Jordel was prepping her probe for launch. Oh how she wished she could fit inside of it, she could escape her world and be free. But that would be leaving her father behind. She couldn't do that to him. Jordel owed it to her father to make sure he got though all of this alive.

Opening the sky roof, Jordel looked up into the night sky. It was a beautiful night. Well, *was* a beautiful night. A Dubor warship loomed overhead. Jordel sighed at the sight. She frowned. That damn warship orbited her world. Why did it have to orbit so low in their atmosphere? She was sure the exhaust from it was ruining their ozone. But the Dubor didn't care about that. They were in charge, they didn't care about her people.

Jordel waited for the ship to pass before she fired up the probe's reactor core. It hummed a low humming noise. She smiled at her accomplishment. Picking up a remote control device, she fired the main thrusters. The probe lifted off into space beyond her home world and towards Shuka.

"Come on Shuka." She said. "Hear my plea and help us out."

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The probe made its way through space towards Shuka. As it neared Shuka's moon it began broadcasting its programmed message. The message was in Jordel's voice. She figured it would be best if it was a person's voice instead of some robot.

Nokev was sitting in his living room. He was reading the sacred scrolls of his people. Pausing at a passage from the scroll, he turned his attention to the beeping noise of his subspace scanner. A message was coming in scrambled.

Walking over to a simple machine, Nokev tuned the frequency to clear up the incoming message. It helped make the message loud and strong. He listened to the plea from a young woman. She was afraid of the Dubor finding out about her message. She was afraid of being found. His heart crushed for this woman whoever she was.

He couldn't just sit there and do nothing. If Obshi had taught Nokev anything, the Dubor had to be stopped from whatever it was they were up to. Standing up, Nokev exited his dwelling where a small space craft was waiting. Entering the craft, Nokev activated its control thrusters. The craft lifted up into the air towards the probe.

Minutes passed and Nokev was in orbit of Shuka. With the probe in his sights, he activated a small tractor beam on it and pulled it inside his craft. Nokev examined the probe. It was crude by Shuka standards, but it did make it to another planet in the star system, so there was that.

Nokev had to tell *someone* about the plea for help. Shuka wouldn't do anything. They didn't have the support craft to travel to another planet. He would have to go to the humans. That was Nokev's only choice.

## Coming Home

Bert's shuttle exited the wormhole. He was in orbit of Shuka. "What the hell?" He asked. "This isn't Earth!" Bert exclaimed. He was expecting to exit the wormhole near or at least close to Earth. Seems that wasn't the case.

Looking out his window, he watched as Crimson Gamma came into view. Bert smiled at the sight of the station. It wasn't Earth, but it was just as good. At least he was in somewhat the right time. If only he knew for sure, Bert wished he could just tell what year it was. He hoped it was 2247, but there was no way of telling.

"Unidentified craft." A voice came over the wire. "You are way too close to my station. state your purpose for being here."

Bert recognized the voice. "Damn." He said. "Major O'Brien." Bert laughed.

Opening a channel, Bert answered the hail. "Jack! It's me! Bert McDuff!"

O'Brien's voice was shaky. "Bert?" He was shocked. It wasn't that long ago that the Fearless was lost with all hands *including* Bert McDuff. "But how? Your ship was destroyed, all hands lost."

"It's a long story Jack. I'll fill you in over drinks." Bert chuckled. "Permission to dock, sir." He said.

"Granted." Came the reply.

Bert sighed a breath of relief. He was back in his own time. It wasn't home, but it was dang close and he could handle that. Bert watched as Crimson Gamma's tentacles grabbed hold of his ship and guided it towards a docking port. He was safe.

So the end came, one man came back to where he belonged and another man, an alien, had a responsibility to a world he did not know. Everything was coming together. It had been one hell of a year, but there was still more to come.

The End