

Wherever You Go ...

216

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Departures

Major Jack O'Brien stood at Docking Port Sixteen. Sam, the telepath, stood at the docking port doors. Jack was there to see her and the others off. Sam's friends had already boarded the transport, she was the last one left.

"So, where do you think you'll go." Jack asked.

"End of the line." Sam responded. "We plan on taking this transport as far as it will take us. Rumor has it it's headed towards The Rim. But well that's just a rumor. I was unable to read the captain's mind. Either they have training to block telepaths, or their species block telepathic readings naturally." She paused. "I do not know which is the case."

Jack frowned. "I wish I could convince you to stay longer." He said. "I'm sure there is more in my mind that I am unable to retrieve at this time, memories that is."

Sam shook her head. "I'm afraid I can't do that major." She said. "As I told you earlier, the information I have already given you is too much for one man to know of. No one should know *that* much of their origins. I am truly sorry."

She of course spoke of the fact that the man standing before her was a clone. He was not the original Major Jack O'Brien, that Jack was still being held captive on Dubor by Ketish, with Ketish doing who knows what to the poor soul in captivity.

Jack was sure to go after himself and mount a rescue operation. Time was on his side, Ketish didn't know that he knew the truth. Jack planned on using that to his advantage for as long as he could.

Sam looked to Jack. "You could go with us." She proposed. "I mean you don't really belong here now do you."

The offer was tempting, Jack had always wanted to go see The Rim. See what exactly was out there, but no he couldn't. His place was here on Crimson Gamma. He had a job to do and only he could make sure that job was taken care of.

"I'm sorry, I can't." Jack said.

Sam frowned. “No, I suppose you can’t.” She read his mind one final time. Looking for anything that might help the major in his cause. Anything at all. “Your sister is still alive.” She said. “She’s out there.” Sam pointed to space. “Somewhere. You’ll find her, just give it time.”

Jack nodded. He figured that was the case. Alyssa had left for The Rim so many years ago. He hadn’t spoken to her in years. Jack hoped she was doing well, and wished he could just contact her one more time to say he was sorry. But that didn’t seem possible, not at the present moment anyways.

“Last call.” A man said over the PA system. “Last call to the outermost planets, Docking Port Sixteen.”

Sam shrugged. “Guess that’s me.” She said. She gave Jack a quick kiss on the cheek. “See you around, sir.” She said as she parted ways. Sam walked through the docking port doors that would take her to the transport. She didn’t look back.

Turning, Jack walked out of the Docking Port, he was headed to C&C to perform his regular duties. As he walked, Jack couldn’t help but wonder what the real him was up to on Dubor. Had he incited a prison riot yet? Was he still be tortured by Ketish? Was he planning an escape? Only time would tell.

Surgery

Ketish sat at a desk. He was looking over the reports of Jack’s last interrogation session. He was pleased with the progress he was making. Between the occupation of the fourth planet underway, and his torture of the hafling, Dorf Jack O’Brien, Ketish couldn’t be more pleased with himself. He was winning as it were.

There was a knock at his office door. “Yes come in, come in.” Ketish said.

A female surgeon stepped into the room. “You sent for me, my lord?” She asked.

Ketish nodded. “Yes, Nirfja. Good you came. I want you to begin stage two of the procedures. Operate on the hafling again. This time replace his liver with a more suitable specimen. I want to see just how effective our poison really is.” He waved his hand and shoed her away. “Now go, I have work to do.”

“Yes my lord.” Nirfja said as she walked out of the office.

“Before long my friend, you will know what it’s like to be full Dubor.” Ketish grinned. He watched Jack on a nearby monitor. He was still in his cell pacing back and forth with what little movement he could muster.

Jack paced around his cell. The guards had loosened the slack on his restraints so he was able to move about more freely. He supposed it was because he didn’t fight them last time

they let him out to be tortured. Or it was a trick Ketish was playing on him. He couldn't be sure which was the case. Whatever the case, he was glad to be able to move a little more freely.

He looked at a bowl the guard had placed down for him. It was supposed to be supper, it smelled like weed killer. Jack dared not touch it. He barely ate anymore unless it came from Ketish during an interrogation session. Jack didn't trust the guards. But Ketish, even though he was being tortured by him, he could be trusted for some reason. Jack couldn't even begin to explain it. Ketish hadn't lied to him *yet*. Everything he told him had been the truth.

Jack flinched as the door to his cell opened. It was the guard, he had a woman with him. The woman leaned forward with a medical scanning device. "Your liver seems healthy." She said. "So do your kidneys. But Ketish wants your liver. The kidneys can wait." She looked to the guard. "Bring him."

Jack struggled as the guard released his restraints. They already had his heart, now they wanted his liver? Were they mad? He forgot who he was thinking about for a moment, of course they were mad. They were Dubor.

As the guard placed a hand on Jack's arm, Jack gave in. There was no use in fighting it. They were determined and bound to do whatever it was they wanted to do with him. He was their guinea pig. Just another test subject ready for another round of testing. Jack was getting used to it, he had been in there over a year now.

Jack was surprised his people hadn't mounted some form of rescue yet. Were he on the station and someone from his staff went missing, he would have sent an all out assault on whoever was in charge of the evil endeavor. But nothing. No one had come for him. Jack was starting to feel like no one cared about his well being. Not even his own government.

Entering an operating room, Jack looked at the table. It was cold. He didn't want to have the procedure done, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"Lay down." The woman said.

Jack did as ordered.

She placed a mask over his face. "Ketish suggested I avoid the gas mask, but well I don't think you have the pain receptors to withstand the pain level I am about to inflict on you. Pleasant dreams."

Jack was out like a light.

Six hours later, Jack woke up in recovery. He was hooked up to several monitors that measured his heart rate, to his blood pressure, to his fluid intakes. Anything they could measure, they were measuring. Why not? He *was* their lab rat after all.

Jack tried to move, but was restrained by two large straps that went across his chest and legs. He couldn't move. On a tray next to him was a pile of bloody instruments. His blood. They didn't even bother to clean up after themselves. Jack felt like he was going to be sick at the sight of all the blood.

Nirfja smiled at him. "Oh good, you're awake. How are you feeling?"

Jack shook his head. "Groggy." He said.

Nirfja nodded. "Yes the sedatives will wear off in about twelve hours. I'll keep an eye on you until you are fit to return to your cell." She said. "Might as well get some shut eye while you wait, no telling when you'll be able to sleep again." She laughed.

Jack followed her instructions and fell back asleep.

The Secret

Grilka sat in a restaurant in the Main Gallery on Crimson Gamma. She was attempting to eat some shrimp. It was a funny word, *shrimp*. She chuckled to herself. Grilka might have also had a shot of whiskey. She couldn't tell for sure, but she *though* that's what the bartender called it.

Taking a piece of shrimp she dipped it in something called cocktail sauce and bit into it. She immediately spit it out onto her plate. It was disgusting. *How could humans even eat food like this?* She wondered. Reaching for the plate in front of her, Grilka picked up a piece of steak on her fork and ate it. *So much better*. She thought as she smiled.

"This seat taken?" Jack asked as he stood there.

Grilka looked up and smiled. "It's reserved, for you." She said. "Have a seat."

Jack smiled as he sat down. "Shrimp and steak eh?" He asked. "I'm betting you didn't like the shrimp."

Grilka looked at Jack and frowned. "Was it that obvious?"

Jack placed his hand in Grilka's. "Well when you have teeth like that, you're bound to like meat." He shrugged. Jack thought about what he had just said and cringed. Putting his foot in his mouth came naturally. He began to apologize. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that..."

Grilka cut him off. "You're fine Dorf." She said. "I know my teeth are quite sharp. They're meant to tear meat apart, not meant for fish or shrimp." She explained. "You're fine. Besides, the shrimp tasted ... weird to me. I don't think I like it."

Jack nodded. "Yeah I get that." He said.

Grilka nudged the plate over to Jack. "You're welcome to it."

Jack smiled. "Thank you, I'm famished. Haven't eaten anything all day." He picked up a piece of shrimp and ate it. It tasted delicious, just like how his mother used to make it. There was something missing though, he couldn't tell what it was. The synthesizers hardly ever did his mom's recipes justice.

That's when it hit him. *His* mom. Was she really his mom? He was just a copy of a man who actually had a mother. He was bred in a test tube. He didn't have a mother or a father even if he had memories of them.

"There's something ... I need to tell you." Jack said.

Grilka set down her fork. "Go on." She said, all of her attention was focused on Jack.

Jack sighed and then breathed in and let it go. "I am not Jack O'Brien." He said. "Well, I'm not the *original* Jack O'Brien." He said. "It's complicated."

Grilka tried to keep up. "Go on." She said.

"I'm a clone." Jack said. "I was made in a test tube. You have fallen in love with a fake, a copy, an impostor." He paused. "I don't know how else to put it." He looked down at the shrimp before him.

Grilka reached out and held Jack's hand. "I didn't meet the *real* Jack O'Brien, whatever that's supposed to mean. I met *you*." She said. "I fell in love with *you*." Grilka smiled. "You're the only one for me Dorf. Not some other Jack O'Brien. I want *you*."

Jack was shocked. "So ... this ... I mean my existence doesn't bother you?"

She shook her head. "Not at all Jack." She said. "We will of course have to go after the real you. Find out where he's being held. It's only the right thing to do."

Jack nodded, he agreed wholeheartedly. "I understand that feeling." He said. "I bet he's on Dubor under Ketish's watchful eye. Probably being tortured. It would be against our current treaty. All human prisoners were to be released. If he went against that ..."

"He's still at war." Grilka finished Jack's sentence.

Jack sighed. "Yes, yes he is." He admitted. "He's at war and we have to stop him." Jack thought about how difficult it would be to go after Ketish now. A trip to Dubor was not on his list of fun things to do at the moment, it would take some extreme planning. A mission briefing with his senior staff and the like. He would have to request to take the Fresno into Dubor space. There was a lot of red tape to be dealt with. Jack wondered if now just wasn't the right time. Then again, he thought about the *real* Jack O'Brien out there being tortured like he had been. Jack wouldn't wish that on anyone, especially himself.

But *something* had to be done.

“We’ll figure it out.” Jack said.

Grilka nodded. “I want to go with you when you *do* end up going to Dubor.” She said. “Some of my security codes might still work. I could be of help.” She smiled as she squeezed Jack’s hand.

Jack neglected to tell Grilka about the brain implant. He didn’t want to scare her. There was no telling what that implant did to him, he wanted to know more about it first. Then he could tell Grilka about it. The doc was sworn to secrecy, so there wasn’t any problems there about it getting out.

Looking at his watch, Jack stood from the table. “We’ll have to discuss this at a later time.” He explained. “I have a meeting to get to.”

Grilka nodded. “Of course. I was almost finished anyway.” She watched as Jack stood and left the restaurant. As he walked away, she couldn’t help but feel the love she had for him.

Hallucinations

Jack walked down a corridor that led to his office. “Jack.” A familiar voice said from behind. Jack turned to see Ketish standing there. Jack rubbed his eyes. He couldn’t really be there on the station, *could he*? Jack reached out to Ketish, his hand went right through him. “A hologram?”

“I’m not really here Jack, I’m in your mind.” He tapped his own head for emphasis. “I need you to listen to me.”

Jack stared at Ketish, or rather the hallucination that was Ketish. “And if I don’t?”

“Then this will be a very short one sided conversation.” Ketish sighed. “I really don’t want that, do you?”

Jack stood firm. “What’s with the chip in my head?”

Ketish chuckled. “Oh that.” He said nervously. “It’s just a way for us to communicate. I’m on the Dubor home world actually. I’m communicating to you from there. It’s harmless I assure you. No ... what’s the human phrase ... ah yes, no funny business. Being inside your mind is bringing all sorts of new phrases into my vocabulary. I rather enjoy it.”

Jack shook his head. “Well I do not!” He watched as people walked by him, they were staring at him. To them it looked like he was talking to thin air, which he was. Jack made a beeline for his office, there he could have this conversation in private. Once inside his office, Jack closed and sealed the main entrance. No one could get in without his authorization.

“Alright, we’re alone.” Jack said. “You can say whatever you want.”

Ketish grinned. That’s exactly what he was waiting for. “Good.” His voice was grainy with disgust. “So, you found out you’re a clone. A shame. I was hoping to hide that information for a little bit longer. Oh well, what’s done is done.”

Jack crossed his arms. “What of the original Jack O’Brien. Where do you have him?!” He asked. Jack really wanted to know where the genuine article was. There was no use to pussyfooting around the subject, he got right down to the point.

“Oh him.” Ketish said. “He’s safe. Don’t you worry about what’s happening with him. He’s in *good* care.”

Good care. Jack thought. Sure he was. Ketish probably had him in some laboratory turning his life upside down and inside out. Jack didn’t trust Ketish no matter how *good* his intentions were. The man had a hidden agenda, one Jack was yet to figure out exactly what it was.

“But, don’t worry about that for now.” Ketish said. “What’s that phrase you humans say? Let’s table that discussion. Yes I believe that’s it. Anyway, I do not wish to discuss *that* Jack, I want to discuss *this* Jack.” He pointed to Jack’s chest.

Jack could almost feel Ketish’s finger pressing against him. It was unreal. “Oh.” Jack responded. “What do you want to talk to me about? Will you leave me alone after that?” He could only hope Ketish would leave him alone, but something told him he wouldn’t be so lucky.

“What indeed.” Ketish said. “I just wanted to check in on you. See how you are doing with the transition. Just like how old friends do with each other.” He paused. “I hope that’s okay for you.”

Jack stammered. “I’m not sure ...” He said. “We’re not friends Ketish. I don’t know where you got *that* thought from.” Jack scoffed.

Ketish laughed. “Oh of course we are. You just don’t see it *yet*.” He said. “In time you’ll see all of the things I’m doing for you Jack. Don’t you worry about that though. It will come in its own due time.”

Jack was confused. But he would unravel that another day. “I’m fine Ketish.” He confirmed. “There’s no reason or need for you to check in on me.”

Ketish smiled. “Well I can’t say I won’t be back.” He vanished.

Jack rubbed the back of his head. If this was the new normal? He did not want any part of it. Talk about an annoyance. If he had to deal with Ketish popping up whenever he damn well pleased, Jack was in for some serious trouble.

The Drug

Grilka opened a small compartment next to her computer console. Inside was the drug that kept her going. Without it, she would go into convulsions and other nasty side effects. Taking a small amount of the drug, she put it on her finger and snorted it. As the drug entered her system, she felt a great deal of ecstasy. She smiled at the feeling.

Walking across the room, Grilka laid down on her couch. As Grilka drifted off to sleep, she hoped she would dream of Jack. Something on the spicy side, she didn't have a preference. Just as long as it was with him. She began to snore loudly.

Grilka dreamed, and dreamed deeply. She was walking in a forest. Trees everywhere as far as the eye could see. Coming upon a clearing, she rested. There was a small pool of water nearby, Grilka dangled her feet in it. So refreshing. Looking up to the blue sky, Grilka wondered what planet she was on. It was unlike anything she had ever seen before.

Forbidden Zone

Norev sat in her quarters. She was watching a news broadcast from her home planet, Shuka. She sighed at the news.

"Two Dubor civilians were found dead this morning in the Kerta Mountain Range. They had been hiding behind a holographic blind which our soldiers managed to seek out and destroy, killing them in the process. We have reached out to Ketish of the Dubor home world for an explanation of why there were still Dubor on our planet, but have received no word as of yet." The newscaster said in a monotone voice. "The Kerta Mountain Range has been deemed off limits to anyone outside of the Religious Government until it can be determined what these people were up to."

Norev froze. "Pause recording." She said. The screen froze. Norev gasped. Toff and Coff, they were dead? She looked across the room at a recording device they had given her. It was a record of heritage they had come across. Badly damaged, they believed it not to be able to be played back. Norev, with some tinkering, managed to fix and repair the device.

Walking over to the recording device, Norev activated it. On it was Jack's long lost relative. A human had stepped foot on Shuka. As he spoke, Norev listened intently. She had listened to the message several times before but found nothing new from it. It was always the same message over and over again. Norev didn't know *why* she was listening to it again, but she wanted to.

She figured the recording should belong to Jack. But she wasn't willing to give it up, not yet. It was too personal to her to let go of. Jack's DNA wasn't just a mix of Dubor and Human,

it was also a mix of Shuka in there as well. She didn't know *how* that was possible, but it was true. Jack was more than a hybrid. More than a half ling. He was so much more and he didn't even have a clue. Norev knew she should go to him with this information, but she wasn't certain exactly how to proceed with it. That was why there was a prophecy between the Humans, Shuka, and Dubor. Only a member of all three races could combine them all into one and find peace.

Norev turned the device off and frowned. Someday Jack would learn the truth. Someday. But today was not that day.

The End