

Out On The Rim

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by Kyle Eggleston

More Than A Lifetime Ago

Nokev piloted his ship in The Rim. He wasn't sure where he was going or what he would find out there, but it held a certain interest for him. In this journey he had one regret and it ate at him. That regret was leaving his wife and unborn baby behind. He should have taken them with him, but The Rim was no place for a pregnant woman and her unborn child. Was he protecting them by not allowing them to come along? He did not know. It was too late to do anything about that now. Now that Nokev was out on The Rim, he was too far away from Shuka to do anything really. He could head home, but then would lose out on the experiences that awaited him.

Piloting along, Nokev noticed a ship following him. He opened a channel to try and communicate with them. "Hello, unknown ship following me. My name is Nokev from the Shuka home world. May I ask your intentions?" It was a straightforward message, Nokev thought it would work.

"Shuka vessel, markings Rocket Three. You have entered Buigardi space. You will turn around now or will be fired upon. Respond." A female's voice came over the communications line.

Nokev sighed. He had no weapons to speak of. There was no way he could win in a firefight. He acknowledged their demands. "Understood, retreating now." Nokev reversed his engines and turned his ship around. The other vessel fired a warning shot across Nokev's bow, a warning not to come back indicating they were serious about firing on him. He would have to find another way around. This adventure was not starting the way he wanted it to.

Three hours into his retreat, Nokev came upon a small world. From the looks of it, they seemed friendly. There weren't any ships in orbit. He took his rocket down to investigate further.

On landing, Nokev was met by a woman, an alien of course, but a woman. Stepping out of his cockpit, Nokev approached her. "Hello," He said "I am a stranger to your world, am I welcome here?"

The woman nodded her head. “We welcome all travelers. You have settled down on the mining colony Omega. Have you come to trade or...” Her voice trailed off as she looked at his ship. “I have not seen your ship here before, where do you hail from?”

“Shuka” Nokev said. “Roughly three thousand light years from here. It has been a long journey, do you have a place to rest? I have jewels to pay for rent.” He added.

The woman looked back in shock. “Three thousand light years? And you traveled that far in... this ship?” She was both surprised and amused at his accomplishment. She had seen ships of less quality get crushed by such a journey. How he was able to make it was beyond her. “You must have quite the FTL drive in that vessel.”

Nokev shrugged. “Maybe.” He said. “My name is Nokev, what is yours?” He inquired.

The woman smiled. Of course, pleasantries. She had almost forgotten. “Hello Nokev, my name is Berta, and yes I believe we have a room for you. Your jewels is of no use here. We do not use money, only trade things as currency. We mine all the ore we need to suit our monetary needs.”

“I see.” Nokev said as he thought. “The only thing I have are spare parts for my FTL drive and some food cubes. I’m sure there is something we can agree upon.”

Berta smiled at Nokev “Yes, I’m sure there is. Come, follow me. I will find you a place to rest for the night. We can discuss payment in the morning.” Leading the way, she took Nokev deeper into the mining colony.

Looking around as they walked, Nokev was in awe. It was unlike anything he had seen before. Tall buildings with smoke stacks on top of them lined the streets. Shuka’s streets were small compared to this, nothing as extravagant.

Shortly they arrived at what appeared to be a hotel of some sort. It was a place to stay for the night. Berta checked Nokev in and handed him what looked like a key.

“Here you are, it’s good for the night. We shall meet in the morning.” Berta said as she walked away.

Nokev smiled. “Thank you.” He called out after her.

She raised a hand in response as she continued to walk.

Nokev went up to his room. It was on the small side, but served its purpose. Taking his flight suit off, he climbed into bed and as soon as his head hit the pillow he was out.

Berta walked back out to Nokev’s ship to snoop around a bit. She wanted to get to know their stranger a little better. Climbing into the cockpit of his ship, she fired up the main engine. It purred like a kitten. She thought, whatever a kitten was.

"He made it out this far in this piece of... junk?" Berta asked herself. Turning around, she looked at what Nokev kept in storage. He wasn't lying, there were some food and spare FTL parts.

Picking up a food cube, she bit into it. It tasted sour and tangy at the same time. She wondered what it was called. Berta then looked through the FTL components. There were a few things she could use, a small power converter could go a long way down in the mines. She would have to talk with Nokev in the morning. Stepping out of the cockpit, she headed to her own housing unit to try and get some sleep. It was always exciting to meet new people from other star systems.

The next morning, Nokev woke up early. Heading downstairs he met up with Berta who appeared to be waiting for him.

"Have a good look inside my ship?" Nokev asked.

Berta didn't say a word, how would he know what she had done? Did she trip a silent alarm or something? Her mouth dropped open.

Nokev laughed. "Figured you would. As you can see, I wasn't lying about what I'm carrying. Just food and supplies. Nothing else."

Berta nodded. "Yes, I saw." She said. Berta didn't apologize for going through Nokev's things though, she had been known to do it with other ships. Most ships had a security alarm that scared her off unlike his. "Those food cubes have an odd flavor to them."

Nokev smiled. "Yeah, my wife thinks so too." He said. "So, see anything you like besides the food?"

Berta smiled, right to business. She could accept that. She folded her arms across her chest. "Yeah actually. You have a power converter, we could use one." The mines had been without a decent power converter for a little over two years. Nokev's was a little outdated, but it would work perfectly for what they needed.

"The power converter for the room, is that it?" Nokev asked. He wanted to know where they stood.

Berta hesitated. "Well no, not the room." She said. "The room is spoken for, booked as you might say for the rest of the month. The hotel just had it open for a night. It gets very busy during our late mining season, a lot of out of townees you might say." She paused thinking of how to say this next part. "You're more than welcome to stay with me. I live alone, it wouldn't be any trouble at all." She said. "I can understand if you refuse, you have a wife back home."

Nokev smiled at the gesture, he wouldn't do anything to jeopardize his marriage with an affair with an alien. A beautiful alien at that, but still an alien. But if he was going to be

there for a while, he needed someplace to stay. “Sure, I’ll stay at your place. You can show me around while I’m here, I could use a guide. Something tells me I’ll be coming back this way often.”

“Uh oh.” Berta said. “Sounds like you’ve run into some nasty aliens out there. Who were they?”

“They called themselves Buigardi.” Nokev said. “They threatened to fire on me if I didn’t turn around, and when I did they fired a warning shot anyway. At least I *hope* it was a warning shot.”

Berta nodded in understanding. “The Buigardi are a menace. They rarely get along with anyone. Always forcing people out of their space. Their borders change constantly also, what was a borderline one day is a parsec different the next day. It’s ridiculous.”

“I see.” Nokev said. “Well if I’m to get back out there, I need to find another route around their known space, or possible known space.”

Berta smiled “That will take some doing, and some time.” She said. “Come, I’ll see that you get a room in my house. It’s safer there anyways.” She walked out the main entrance to the hotel with Nokev following quickly behind her.

It was a short walk to Berta’s house, more like a mansion. Stepping inside, Nokev whistled. The vaulted ceilings alone dwarfed anything Nokev had seen on Shuka. They said space was big, but never said the houses were bigger. The Rim was definitely something to be seen, you had to be there to believe it. Description alone couldn’t do it justice.

“This is something.” Nokev said. “You and your husband must be very proud.”

Berta giggled. “No husband.” She said. “I work too much to even look for one. Being in charge of a mining colony is no small feat. But thank you anyways.” She gestured to the stairs. “There is a room at the top of the staircase. You may stay there. Um, there should be some clothes that fit you.”

Nokev smiled. “You just happen to keep men’s clothing around your place?”

She shrugged. “You never know when someone wearing only a flight suit is going to show up at your door. Now go get changed, I want to show you around the colony proper. Go on.” Beta said.

Nokev walked up the staircase holding onto the railing. The stairs were made out of some kind of granite or possibly marble. They were slick when he walked on them. Reaching the top of the stairs, Nokev saw a room to his left. He entered to find a set of clothes resting neatly folded on a bed. It was as though she was expecting company, expecting him specifically.

Whatever the case, he was there now and that's all there was to it. Picking up the shirt, he noticed a company logo on it. Pukah City Mining Company. *Well, everyone had to work somewhere*, he thought. Looking further at the shirt, he wondered if it would fit. There was only one way to find out. He removed his flight suit and got dressed. Fit like a glove.

Walking back downstairs, Nokev noticed Berta had changed as well. Earlier she was wearing work clothes, now she was dressed in a more casual attire. She was an attractive woman, but that was not his concern.

They walked the streets of the mining colony, looking at all there was to look at. Berta was recognized everywhere she went. A hazard of being in charge. Everyone wanted to know who this new alien she was with was. She jokingly introduced Nokev as a long lost cousin, some people actually bought it. Others knew better.

They ate at a local cafe, well local to the colony. Nokev found the soup of the day to be quite tasty. He wasn't sure what it was though, and when he asked Berta she suggested against asking more questions about what he ate. Sometimes when eating with aliens, that's just what you had to do and it was a wise decision.

Nokev's time grew long as he stayed in the mining colony for a month. As he got bored he entered the mines and tried to help out there, but found it difficult to do so as he had no previous mining experience. Berta tried to help him learn, but it didn't really take hold.

A month passed, then two months, as the third month passed Nokev was growing impatient. While he enjoyed Berta's company, he wanted to get back out there without running into anymore hostile aliens. But in order to do that, he needed the map Berta promised.

One morning at breakfast, Nokev broached the subject. "So, about that map." He asked. "Any idea when that might happen?" He tried being polite, as polite as he could be. She had put him up in her house for a month, and that month had turned into three.

Berta looked down at her mush in her bowl and frowned. Letting go a sigh, she knew the truth had to come out. "I've had a map prepared for over a month now." She admitted. Pulling a data pad out of her pocket, she fiddled with the controls for a moment until a map came up. She handed it over to Nokev. "I just wanted more time with you. I've grown fond of you."

Nokev looked over the data pad and frowned. "You've had this information for over a month now and you refused to give it to me?" His frown vanished as he understood why she did what she did. He had grown fond of her as well, even though he had a wife back home on Shuka. He hadn't planned it in anyway, but yet it happened. It wasn't a romantic connection, but a deep friendship.

"Yes." Berta said. "I can see how this looks. But it's not what you think. I enjoy your company, your friendship. I just didn't want to see you leave so soon." She admitted. "I'm sorry, it was wrong of me to do so. Now that you have the map I'm guessing you'll leave back out there."

Nokev nodded. He stood from the table. "I'll be leaving immediately." He said. "I would be lying if I said I didn't feel a connection with you as well. But this is my first best destiny, to explore all that is out there. If it helps, I promise to stop back by to catch up with you from time to time."

Berta nodded. She understood the drive to be somewhere. Running a mining colony wasn't all what it was cracked up to be. She figured her life would return to its mundaneness that it was before she met Nokev. "I will look forward to your visits." She said. "Please message me from time to time, so I know you're safe."

Nokev nodded. "I promise." Turning around he walked upstairs to change into his flight suit.

A half hour later, Nokev took off in his rocket ship. Berta went to see him off, she watched as he exited the atmosphere of the mining colony. Nokev kept his promise of keeping in touch with Berta over the years, and he would return to the mining colony from time to time to refuel and catch up with Berta. Their friendship continued on.

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Nokev pressed the button on the captain's office indicating he had a visitor. As the door opened and he stepped inside, he saw Captain O'Brien sitting at his desk looking over data on a data pad.

Upon seeing Nokev, Jack smiled. "Ah Nokev, yes please come in."

"You asked to see me captain?" Nokev asked.

Swiveling his desk monitor around, O'Brien smiled. "I have two people who wanted to say hello."

On the monitor was Obshi and Norev. Obshi's face lit up at the sight of Nokev. Norev was a little confused at the man standing before her.

Nokev was at a loss for words. "How?" He asked referring to Obshi.

O'Brien shrugged. "Yeah, we're pretty unsure how Obshi managed to survive a hundred years ourselves. Your great great granddaughter Norev is a bit easier to explain."

Nokev's mouth dropped open. "My great great granddaughter!" He exclaimed.

Norev covered her mouth and spoke through her hand. "Grandpa Nokev?" She asked. Norev could barely believe her eyes. There was her ancestor standing right before her very eyes. It was exciting.

Nokev smiled. "Yes, it's me." He said. "In the flesh."

"Nokev, you old man." Obshi said. "How the shitack are you? I haven't seen you in well over a hundred years! You look well."

Nodding, Nokev responded. "I am well old friend. I remember the last time we met, I took you down with a staff. I sure hope your skills have improved."

Obshi zoomed in on Nokev's face. There was something different about the man, something he didn't recognize until now. "Is it just me or do you look younger?" He rubbed his chin as he tried to figure it out on his own but couldn't seem to do so.

Nokev's smile widened. "You would be correct. Out on The Rim has done a number on my biology. I found a literal fountain of youth out there Obshi, you should see it." He tried to explain the mechanics behind it all, but it really didn't do anyone any justice.

"I would love to see you, learn more from you than the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation." Norev said. "But there seems to be a ban on ships traveling from Crimson Gamma to Crimson Delta. I don't know why that is. Captain?"

O'Brien cleared his throat. "The current general of Crimson Gamma, General Tague put that ban in place. I'm sure it's to punish me for some reason or another. Unfortunately I can't out rule a general. My hands are tied."

"Five minutes remaining on call." The computer said.

"Speaking of rules," O'Brien added "We have five minutes left for this conversation. Another rule of the general." He sighed.

As they stood there conversing, a ship dropped out of FTL. A Dubor warship.

"We'll have to cut this short." O'Brien said. He closed the channel. "O'Brien to bridge, get that commander of that warship on the screen now! I'm on my way." Standing from his chair he stormed out of his office and onto the bridge leaving Nokev all alone.

Once he reached the bridge O'Brien looked at the warship on the screen. It was something much larger than they had ever encountered before. A tactical review was on the screen as well, she was heavily armed to the teeth. She easily outgunned the station and the Fresno combined.

"Their commander is hailing us." Kate said.

“On screen.” O’Brien ordered as he sat down in his command chair.

The ship and stats were replaced with the face of Ketish. He was not smiling nor in a pleasant mood. “Ah captain, I see they have given you your proper rank.” He said seeing O’Brien’s face. “I trust your whore Grilka is doing well.”

O’Brien clenched his fist. How dare Ketish tarnish Grilka’s good name that way. “Don’t you dare speak of Grilka like that.” He yelled. “Why are you here?!”

Ketish still wasn’t smiling. It was his signature move. Today he was all business. “When you destroyed our warship, the Grindike, many of its survivors evacuated the ship in escape pods and landed on the surface of the planet below. I have come to retrieve them.” He smiled “And if need be, to destroy you if you stand in my way.” Ketish would want nothing more than to destroy an Earth warship and a space station. It would be quite a victory for them.

O’Brien stood his ground. “Fine, you can gather your people. But do not touch the rightful inhabitants of the planet below.” He said. “See this as a peaceful offering, a pause in the war as it were.”

“But only a pause.” Ketish said. “In time, Earth will fall. Mark my words.”

Without warning, Crimson Delta opened fire on the Dubor warship. The station fired its main battery and several missiles at the ship causing little to no damage as her shields held.

Ketish’s warship returned fire on the station destroying several sections and causing major damage to her weapons systems until she could no longer fire.

O’Brien turned to Kate. “Get me the general on the line.”

Kate tried her best, but there was no answer. “No response. He’s not taking my hail.”

The communications line was still open. “Captain, what is the meaning of this?” Ketish demanded.

O’Brien shook his head. “Ketish, I don’t know. I swear.”

“I will blast you out of the sky!” Ketish said. The line closed.

Ketish’s warship began firing on the Fresno. Its shields held.

“Tactical! Return fire! All forward batteries, all missiles, launch Atlantic Fighters.” O’Brien ordered. “Try and extend our shields over the station’s reactor core.”

Kate shook her head. “Shields aren’t extending sir. I’m trying.” A moment later, there was shock and great concern in her voice. “Sir, the station’s reactor is going critical. She’s gonna blow!”

"Get us out of orbit!" O'Brien yelled.

Helm complied with the order. As the Fresno began to leave orbit, the station exploded. The Fresno took the brunt of the blow. Her shields failing. All of the Atlantic Fighters were caught in the explosion and too exploded in brilliant flashes of light.

"Sir, shields are down as are weapons." The tactical officer reported. "We're defenseless." The bridge rocked around them as console exploded.

"Hail Ketish." O'Brien said. "Get him on the screen."

Ketish's face appeared on the main viewer. His fingers were interlocked as he looked at the bridge of the Fresno in flames. That damned smile returned on his face. All of his pointy teeth showing. "Your ship is disabled captain. I can blow you out of the sky with one shot, but I won't. The station that fired on us has been destroyed. I will assume you did not give that order." He breathed heavily. "My shields are holding strong. I will drop them to transport my people off of that planet like we agreed, and then I will leave you so you can limp to your nearest port."

O'Brien was had. There was nothing he could do. The offer not to destroy them was rather generous as it stood. Jack sighed. "We agree to your terms." He looked forward to the helm. "Helm, set a course for Crimson Gamma at full sub light speed and engage the drive."

Helm nodded. "Aye sir."

As the Fresno began turning away from the eighth planet in the Comeki Star System, the Dubor warship closed in on the planet and began firing at the planet's surface. It dissimilated the planet's crust within a few minutes.

O'Brien looked in horror at the scene developing before him. "Open a channel!"

Ketish appeared on the screen. "Problem with your engines captain?"

"What is the meaning of destroying an entire population? Two populations!" O'Brien demanded. "We were retreating as you ordered. Why the attack?"

Ketish simply smiled. "They were disloyal officers." He explained. "Weak officers who abandoned their posts. The others were aliens, that's all you need to know. Now go home!" He closed the channel.

"Son of a bitch!" O'Brien yelled at the bridge crew. He looked to Kate. "If we still had weapons."

She nodded. "I know sir, I know." Kate watched as the stars moved slowly by as the Fresno made its way to Crimson Gamma.

The End