

Wormholes And Such

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by Kyle Eggleston

Bert McDuff sat in his shuttle waiting to be allowed to leave the Moon base he had been staying on. He looked out the shuttle's window to see Alyssa O'Brien and Alice Shannon standing there wishing him safe voyage. If what he had in store worked, Bert would be back at Earth in no time. He hoped it would work out for the best, but there was only one way to tell. He had to try.

Locking down his power source, a rare form of crystal that had unique energy properties, Bert closed the engine compartment. He wouldn't need to open that back up unless something went terribly wrong which he prayed it didn't. The last thing he needed or wanted was to go up in smoke trying to get home.

"Earth Shuttle Omega, you are cleared for departure. Safe journey." A woman's voice came over Bert's headset.

"Thank you dock control." Bert said. "Acknowledged. One third thrust." He pressed the combination of buttons that would make the shuttle accelerate to the desired speed upon which he could take off and gain altitude.

As the shuttle left the Moon's gravitational pull, Bert looked back on what was his temporary lodging. The house was large enough to see with the naked eye. He was going to miss his time there, but it was time to get home. Flipping a switch, Bert activated Alice's "Wormhole Sniffing Device." That's what he called it at least. He was sure she had come up with a more sophisticated name for it, but he didn't care. Wormhole sniffing Device seemed more up his alley.

Bert's only regret was that he couldn't warn Earth he was coming. He would just have to appear out of nowhere and hope *not* to be shot down. That was the last thing he wanted. To be shot down on his home coming day. He couldn't wait to see his friends aboard the Fearless again. Their time in Ketish's prison camp had been rough, but as far as he knew, they all managed to escape.

What Bert didn't know was the Fearless had been destroyed with all hands after making an attack run at Earth. All under the watchful eye of Ketish. Ketish had kept Bert alive for some sick twisted reason though, hence why Bert ended up on The Rim of space. The edge of space as it were wasn't all that it seemed to be cracked up to be. Bert missed home.

As Bert thought about home, the Wormhole Sniffing Device, or WSD for short, began beeping. Bert locked onto the coordinates of the possible wormhole starting to open and navigated towards it. A reddish wormhole opened up before him and then abruptly closed before Bert's ship could enter it. If he remembered, the wormhole he had gone through was blue. Bert wasn't sure if there was a difference in the colors of wormholes, just that led to different parts of space.

"Well at least the WSD works." Bert commented. Looking at his star charts, Bert fed in Earth's coordinates into the WSD hoping that would make the device give a more accurate route. He wasn't sure *that's* how it worked, but well here's hoping!

Another wormhole opened up in front of Bert's shuttle. This time he had time to navigate towards it, and *into* it. The wormhole swallowed him up and he was gone. Vanished without a trace.

The ride was rather bumpy. Tunnels upon tunnels going to different places as Bert zipped passed them. It was like a whole network of tunnels and mazes. Bert held onto the shuttle's controls to stabilize himself. He was getting queasy. Bert's back was pressed hard against the cockpit chair. He felt like he was going to throw up.

"Computer." Bert said. "Are we anywhere near the coordinates I entered into the WSD?" Bert asked the computer. He wasn't sure it would give him any accurate information as this had never been tested before, but it was worth a shot.

The computer analyzed the data for a moment and then made a beeping noise. "Affirmative, coordinates located at thirty-five by sixty-two by eight. Locking on coordinates, changing course."

Bert nodded. *Good, good.* He thought. *Just keep doing what you're doing and we'll be home free!* He checked his readings and smiled. Bert would be home in no time. He couldn't wait to eat some of his mom's home made cooking. If she was still talking to him that was. Bert hadn't seen his mother in a long time, something he had to correct. Work had always managed to be an escape for him. Being held captive on the Dubor home world didn't help matters.

Exiting the wormhole, Bert looked around at the stars. None of Earth's constellations could be seen. His ship locked onto a lifeless planet. A moon was orbiting it. The sun shone bright over the third planet in the star system. Bert engaged his thrusters towards the planet and found a landing spot. As his shuttle descended in the atmosphere, he took readings. It was an oxygen nitrogen atmosphere similar to that of Earth, but there were no civilizations present on the surface of the planet. It looked like a nuclear explosion had gone off and no one saw it coming.

As Bert's shuttle landed with a soft thud, he prepared himself by gearing up in a hazmat suit. There was no way in hell he was taking any chances on the atmosphere even though it read as clean. A nuclear winter had come and gone. It appeared to be cleared up now, but there could still be debris floating about in the atmosphere that could be lethal to him.

Stepping out of his shuttle, Bert looked around. There was no grass. The ground was barren. There was no running water from what he could tell either. Everything was just ... dead. Pulling out an oxygen reader, Bert checked the levels. They read exactly as what the shuttle had reported. No change.

"Computer." Bert said. "Is this atmosphere breathable for me? Am I safe?"

The computer beeped in his helmet. "It is safe for you to breathe." The computer reported.

Bert removed his helmet and took in a deep breath of fresh air. It was an odd sensation considering how barren the planet was. The air was clean. Bert checked a radiation patch he wore, it was showing green. If it turned black, he would be in some serious trouble.

As he walked around the landing area, Bert somewhat recognized it. It had once been a park, he had been to that park on numerous occasions. The posts where the dugout had been still stood for the baseball diamond. He paused. He was on Earth. But ... when? What year was it? He didn't have a clue.

A man approached Bert. He looked him up and down. The man didn't recognize Bert, and Bert didn't recognize the man. They were strangers to each other. Each man stared each other down, unwilling to initiate contact with the other. This was no way to start a conversation. The alien, or non human, decided to speak.

"Hello, my name is Nokev." The Shuka resident said. "Who are you?"

Bert couldn't believe his ears. "Nokev?" He asked.

Nokev nodded. "Yes ... as I said *that* is my name. You are ..."

"Commander Bert McDuff, first officer of the U.S.S. Fearless." Bert finally managed to blurt out. "You're Nokev!" He exclaimed. "How are you here?"

Nokev sighed. "I've lived a long time." He said. "To be honest, it's growing quite boring. Whatever I did out on The Rim, it changed me."

Bert nodded. "Right." He said. "Um, I'm a little confused. Is this Earth?"

Nokev smiled. "Yes, you are standing on the planet once known as Earth. Sol III if you'd like. Either is fine with me. It hasn't been inhabited for a long time."

Bert was confused. "So ... what year is it exactly?"

Nokev chuckled nervously. "Ah ah ..." He said. "Three thousand forty-seven." Nokev looked to the sky. It was neither blue nor green, not even a brown color. It was just meh. A gray color at best.

Bert sat down on the ground. "I've been transported eight hundred *years* into the future?!" He exclaimed. "This is not good! Not good at all."

Nokev shrugged. "Funny thing those wormholes, commander." He said. "They're hardly ever predictable. So many things can happen when you enter a wormhole. Sounds like you entered an *unstable* wormhole. It's my best guess at least." He looked around. This part of the planet was always depressing. He preferred the mountains. There was snow in the mountains. One of the very few places it even snowed or rained anymore.

"So ... if I go back into the wormhole, will I return to my own time?" Bert asked cautiously.

Nokev didn't have an answer to the question. He had never traveled anywhere in a wormhole. He just had the misfortune of living for a very long time. It was really a curse more than a blessing. But it was life and that's all he knew about it.

"I've learned a lot about life over my many years of existence." Nokev said. "One of those things is don't get caught up in the thing you cannot change. You'll have plenty of time to make mistakes as time moves on."

"Okay... so that really doesn't answer my question." Bert said.

Nokev chuckled. "Perhaps you asked the wrong question." He said. "But what does it matter? The important thing now is that you're here and you are alive. What more can you want from this life?"

"Uh, to go home." Bert said. "This is my home, but it's not *my* home. Do you understand that concept?" He hoped Nokev could understand or at least grasp what it was he was trying to tell him.

Nokev nodded his head in agreement.

"What are you even doing here man?" Bert asked. "Shuka is in a different star system. Why are you on Earth?"

Nokev sighed. "Waiting for this moment." He said. "I was told a long time ago that you would be coming to Earth at this moment at this time. Don't ask me where I learned this information from, just know it came true."

Bert paced around. "And you're here to send me back to my own time? Is that it?"

Nokev shook his head. "No, that's not part of the deal I'm afraid. Sorry."

Bert was shocked. "You kidding me man?" He asked. Bert was taken back. Surly the man who was there to greet him would also have time to figure out how to get him back home? It seemed only logical. But it had been eight hundred years, maybe logic was just tossed out the window these days.

"So you're me, you've waited all this time to meet me and you can't even get me home." Bert clarified.

Nokev nodded. "Yes. I've built a shelter, stocked it with food that won't go bad for hundreds of years. It has all the comforts of home." He smiled. "I hope you'll like it. Come, take a walk with me."

So the two walked and walked for roughly an hour. They talked about life, what the past eight hundred years had covered. Bert's enemies were all dead now. There was nothing to go back home to as there was no home.

They came upon a small shelter. Nokev stepped through the door first. "Come on in, I'll show you around." He said. Bert followed Nokev into the shelter.

Inside, the shelter was rather spacious. Food supplies, weapons, beds, all the comforts of home. A home eight hundred years into the future. Bert sighed. He was grateful Nokev had gone to the trouble to make a place for him to hopefully feel at home, but he still wanted to see if there was a way to actually get home, to *his* own time and place. Earth.

"I hope this is suitable." Nokev said. "I've had years to prepare it for you." He looked around. "The food is still fresh, the process to keep it preserved is quite advanced. We've learned a lot over the past eight hundred years." He sat down on a couch.

"Can I ask you a question?" Bert asked as he too sat down on the couch.

Nokev nodded. "Yes, please do. I'm sure I'll probably have an answer to whatever you ask." He had been around for a long time after all.

Bert frowned. "How long ago was Earth basically destroyed? I mean the vegetation, the water etc."

Nokev tried to remember, it had happened over so many years go. He finally came upon the year. "Over four hundred years ago." He finally responded. "The oceans boiled and dried up first. Then the planet's vegetation came next. The animals were quick to go as well. All until it ended up like its current state." He paused. "I don't even think there's a cockroach alive."

Bert sighed. To learn of his planets destruction was terrifying. "Who's responsible? Was it the Dubor?"

Nokev shook his head. "No. The Dubor and Earth have been at peace for over seven hundred years. It wasn't them. In fact there are some ancient ruins of Dubor settlements all over Earth. No malice or harm came to Earth from the Dubor. They're clear." He paused. "Before you think it, it wasn't the Shuka people either. No, they've been at peace with Earth even longer than the Dubor."

Bert was confused. "So, who was it?"

"An alien race known as the Vrikesh." Nokev said. "No one knows why they were attracted to Earth to begin with. But they were hell bent on destroying it, and destroyed it they did. They killed over ten billion people in a matter of days."

Bert was in shock. "But what about Earth's defenses? Surely there must have been *some* kind of defense. What about Earth's Star Ships? Didn't any of them come to defend the planet?!"

Nokev nodded. "Yes, there were several star ships that came to aid Earth. They were all destroyed." He paused. "Once the deed was done, the Vrikesh left Earth's Solar System and haven't returned. I don't think they'll be back anytime soon."

Bert looked around the room for a moment. He couldn't stay there. He had to go back. "I have to go back." He said. "I need to go back to my time and prevent the Vrikesh attack on Earth. I have to warn people of the danger."

Nokev sighed. "A danger that won't take place for four hundred years. They'll think you're crazy."

Bert held up a finger. "Not if we make first contact with them and become friends. They won't have a reason to attack Earth in four hundred years if we are allies." His thought process made sense, at least to him. He wasn't sure Nokev bought the idea at all.

Nokev shook his head. "No, that won't work." He said. "If you are able to go back and make friends with a race Earth's not meant to meet for four hundred years, you will cause an imbalance in the universe. The space time continuum will unravel and that could cause catastrophic events all across the quadrant." He continued to shake his head. "That is *not* a good idea." Nokev paused. "I'm actually here to prevent that from happening."

Bert froze. If Nokev was there to prevent it from happening, then Bert must have made it back to the past and tried to change events. Why else would Nokev be here at this very moment trying to convince him otherwise? It was all making sense now.

"I changed something, didn't I." Bert said.

Nokev nodded his head. "Yes, and it caused catastrophic failure all over the multiverse. There's no way in hell I'm allowing you to make that same mistake twice. You are not to look

up the Vrikesh, do you understand? You must allow history to play itself out the way it's *meant* to be played out." He folded his arms for emphasis. "Do you understand? Do I make myself clear?"

Bert nodded. He had no choice but to understand. "Alright, no funny business." He paused. "But I somehow make it back though right?"

Nokev sighed and nodded. "Yes, you manage to find a wormhole that takes you back. I don't know the specifics of it, just that you make it; and then all hell breaks loose. Trust me, it's not pretty."

Bert laughed. "You have the english language down pretty good." He said.

"I spend a lot of time at the library, well what's left of it. Your literature is quite informative." Nokev responded. "I enjoy it. It's funny, out of all the things that got destroyed, your books were unharmed." He gestured to a room down a long hallway. "I have stocked a library full of books, you will never get bored."

Bert sighed. "Who's to say I'm staying here?" He asked. "I want to get back to my own timeline. I have unfinished business there. On Earth. *My* Earth. What do you think will happen? That I'll be happy to live out the rest of my life *here*, by *myself*?!" Bert's voice elevated.

Nokev nodded his head. "Yes, I've been here for several cycles myself waiting for you. I've been okay so far. I've kept myself busy by reading. There are literally thousands of books that *you* can immerse yourself in. Like I said, you will not get bored! Trust me."

Bert shook his head no. "I can't do that." He said. "I will find a way back to my own time. I'm sorry you wasted yours." He turned to leave the shelter.

"If you walk out that door." Nokev said. "You will know only sorrow. Mark my words."

Bert turned to face Nokev once more time. "I'll take that chance." He walked out of the shelter. He ran down to his shuttle and opened the door. Bert didn't care what the old man said, he *knew* in his heart that sorrow wouldn't follow him if he didn't stay. That was just something Nokev was telling him because *he* was alone. Bert was not like Nokev, he had a home, he had a place to go back to.

Taking off his hazmat suit, Bert prepped the shuttle for launch. He checked his power levels, he had enough to try his wormhole trip again. Firing up the shuttle's engines, Bert laid a course for Earth orbit. He lifted off quickly to get away from Nokev as fast as possible.

Nokev stepped out from the shelter and watched the shuttle take off. "Take care kid and good luck, you're going to need it." He waved to Bert goodbye. Stepping back inside the shelter, Nokev walked towards the library. He scanned the shelves for a book to read. He

frowned. Nokev had read just about every book on the shelf. He came across one that he hadn't read yet, A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. He picked it off the shelf and dusted it off. "This should be a nice read." He said sitting down on a sofa and relaxing.

Bert established a standard orbit around Earth as he plotted his next course. Turning on the WSD, Bert read a readout. It wasn't picking up any wormholes in the vicinity. He frowned. "No!" Bert yelled. "There *must* be a wormhole somewhere!" He switched his coordinates, obviously the last ones flung him into the far future. Something he did not wish to repeat.

The WSD beeped and then went silent. All power readings went offline. The machine was lifeless. Bert shook his head. "Oh no you don't" Grabbing a wrench, he whacked at the device several times. "Come. On. Now!" The device came back to life.

"Warning." The computer said. "Wormhole appearing, bearing zero-six-two mark four. Brace for impact."

Bert sensed heightened. That was right on top of him. The shuttle rocked back and forth as a wormhole engulfed it. There was nothing he could do. It swallowed his shuttle up without a trace. Bert was knocked unconscious as he made the travel to ... elsewhere.

The End