

Moments In Time

206

by Kyle Eggleston

Two Lifetimes Ago

Kerta of the Religious Council of Shuka sat in the council chambers among the rest of the Religious Council. Nokev stood in the middle of the room, a circular table surrounded him, it was split in parts allowing people to walk in and out of the circle with ease.

Being the chief leader, Kerta spoke for the group.

“Nokev of the Southern Province, you have been found guilty of leaving the city limits. One of our sacred laws has been violated because *you* felt you were above the law.” Kerta said. “Because of your failed trip around Shuka, you have brought Strangers From The Sky to our planet. A most distasteful consequence of *your* actions.” She hissed the words at Nokev.

Nokev didn’t flinch. He had heard such words before from the council when others had breached the city limits. They weren’t banished or anything. Just put quietly away somewhere. Possibly to a labor camp of some sort to do their time. After a few years they came back and lived a productive part of society once again. He wasn’t afraid. Nokev was certain most of Kerta’s speech was for show. They were good friends after all.

He knew Kerta secretly liked the thought of visitors from distant worlds to come visit their planet. It was a chance to grow and learn as a people. They weren’t alone in the universe as some of the old timers thought. No, that notion had long since passed. It was time for Shuka to grow as a planet, as a race. Nokev always thought it odd that a huge planet like Shuka only had one city on it. What was the point of all the other land if they weren’t using it?

“Yes.” Nokev said. “I brought strangers here. They are good for our people. I have met with some of them. They have advanced medicine and other technologies that we can benefit from!”

Kerta nodded her head. “Yes, the medicine is badly needed. Ever since the sickness came upon our people we have been looking for a cure. I have met with the Strangers From The Sky and have gone over their medical research. It looks promising.” She paused. “For that reason alone, you will not be punished for your crime. A lighter sentence will be placed upon you. You will assist our scientists in developing a cure for the sickness that plagues us all.”

Nokev nodded his head. "I understand." He said. "I assume you have arranged a meeting with their scientists?"

Kerta smiled. "Yes, for this afternoon. This hearing is closed." She slammed a ball looking device down on the council chamber table. Her associates exited the room leaving Kerta and Nokev alone to talk.

"That was quite generous of you." Nokev said. "I was expecting a much harsher sentence. I should thank you."

Kerta smiled. "Yes you should."

"Thank you." Nokev said.

"Tell me Nokev, what was it like to orbit our planet? What did you see while you were up there among the stars?" Kerta asked. Her question was genuine. She really wanted to know what was beyond the confines of their planet.

Nokev gazed up through the glass ceiling of the council chambers. "I saw our twin suns. Not through a telescope like we do down here, but with my own eyes. Fortunately for the blast shielding on my rocket, I was able to view them with the naked eye and not go blind. I saw planets, our sisters in the solar system. There is one that is not too far away. I wish to visit them someday."

Kerta shook her head. "You know I can't allow that." She said. "Any further rocket development will be met with high scrutiny. The Strangers From The Sky have a method of travel that is far superior than what you have developed. So I'm told." She hinted. "If you happen to speak with one of them, I cannot stop that from happening. Maybe while you are researching a cure for the sickness?"

Nokev did a double take. Was she giving him the green light to go ahead and continue his research? To make another vessel? His first rocket had crashed in a far away mountain range, it had taken him a year to walk back to the City of Shuka.

"Such wonders." Kerta said. "You have seen more than any of us have ever witnessed. I envy you Nokev. But you did crash, and your walk back to the city. How was that?"

Nokev shuddered at the thought. "I was alone Kerta. How do you think I felt about that? I had to make the journey alone with no one to talk to. My radio was broken upon reentry I couldn't even contact my wife to let her know I survived the crash!" He paced in a circle around the inner chamber.

"And when your wife found out you were still alive..." Kerta began.

"She was relieved." Nokev said. "I had put my work before our relationship. I will not make that mistake a second time. I will make my relationship a priority."

“I see.” Kerta said. “Well, I for one am glad you have returned. There are only a handful of scientists in our community as you are well aware. To lose someone of your caliber would be a waste. Welcome home.”

Nokev watched as Kerta left the council chambers. He was looking forward to working with the scientists and learning from them. Nokev believed they were from the fourth planet in the star system, but wasn’t sure. He would have to find out for certain. He too exited the council chambers on his way to meet with the Strangers From The Sky and further his research.

One Lifetime Ago

Obshi was at the young age of fifteen when he first held a staff weapon. It was the mark of becoming a man. Shuka was under Dubor rule, he had been born into it. It was all he knew. There were too many rules under Dubor rule. One of them was a curfew. All Shuka citizens were to be in their dwellings no later than the twentieth hour of the day. Anyone caught outside after that would be lined up and executed.

It was twenty hundred hours and one when Obshi returned to his family’s dwelling one evening. His mother was waiting for him at the door.

“Where have you been?!” Obshi’s mother demanded. “Do you know what time it is? You are past curfew young man!”

Obshi shrugged. “One minute late.” He said. “It’s not like I was a half hour late like some of my friends tend to do. They manage to stay alive. I think this whole idea of a curfew is stupid. The Dubor just need to leave us alone and go back from where they came from.”

“By Nokev’s name!” Obshi’s mother exclaimed. “If your father were still alive. He would have given you a lecture about coming home late, and disobeying the law. Agreed they are not *our* laws, but we are under an occupation. We have to abide by them or we will be killed. Do you want to die Obshi?”

Obshi shook his head. “Of course I don’t mother. You know I want to see us liberated from this occupation. I don’t like it anymore than you do.” He paused. “I just want to live a normal life. I am considered an adult now. I should be able to make my own decisions. Not be held by some alien rule over me.”

She placed her hands on her hips. Her son had a point. Who was she to squash his dreams of freedom when so many others like him who had been born into the occupation knew nothing but grief and sorrow. She too was born into the occupation. It was the only life she had ever known as well. They were closing in on one hundred years of the Dubor control over their planet. If no one had the courage to fight them now, she feared no one ever would.

Obshi's mother missed her husband. He had been executed for arriving home only thirty seconds late. An armed squad had been patrolling the street they lived on. One of the guards noticed her husband walking home in the dark after curfew and pulled him aside. She watched as her husband was killed by the guard's blade. It was something she would never forget.

Obshi couldn't remember his father. He was only two years of age when he was killed. But he had heard stories from his mother on countless occasions, it was as though he had known his father all of his life. His mother had done a good job raising him, but when it came to fighting he had to learn that from other places. Obshi had several mentors trained in the arts to teach and guide him in the ways of his people. He was grateful for them. But what good was it to learn the ways of the staff if no one was willing to use it to fight back? It always confused him.

"You should stay out past curfew some night." Obshi told his mom. "Even if it's just one minute. You can show these evil monsters that their rules don't matter. We need to take back control in our lives. Any kind of statement we can make, we need to make it." He was serious about that, Obshi wanted to take control back at any cost.

Two nights later, Obshi's mom did just that. She came home at 20:05. Greeting her son at the door, he smiled big. "See mom? You did it!" Obshi said. "I knew you could find that inner courage and be the person you want to be."

Obshi's mother smiled a great big smile back. "Yes I did it. Only one problem. I was followed by a Dubor guard. I think I ditched him though." She said. "I didn't see him when I approached our dwelling."

Obshi froze. "You were followed." He said. "You were followed?" It was as if he couldn't comprehend what was going on. To be followed by a guard was some heavy thought provoking consequence. "I hope you really did ditch him."

There was a knock at the door. Obshi and his mom exchanged glances. A knock at the door this late in the evening could only mean one thing. A guard was on the other side of that door. A Dubor guard who was going to take justice into his own hands.

"Maybe it's nothing." Obshi's mom said. "Yeah, it could be nothing."

Obshi shook his head. "It's not nothing mom." He said. "You broke curfew, they're here to take action against you. Listen, I'll try and protect you. I'll try anything to protect you."

Obshi's mom shook her head. "No, don't Obshi. I can take care of myself. I'm a big girl." Turning around, she walked towards the front door of their dwelling and opened it.

A guard was standing there, sword in hand. "I understand you were out past curfew." He said. "You know the punishment." The guard raised his blade. "Eyes open or closed. Which do you prefer?"

Obshi's mom shrugged. It didn't matter to her how they executed her. The point was they were there to kill her. There would be no escaping this. She held her head high. She had spit in the face of the occupation and lost. So much for listening to her son. It was probably the last thing she would do, and that was terrifying to her.

"Doesn't matter. Open, closed, you're going to kill me either way. Just do it." Obshi's mom said.

The guard nodded. "Very well." Plunging his blade into her chest she fell to the floor dead. Obshi watched in horror as his mom dropped to the floor. Pulling his staff weapon out, he aimed it towards the guard.

The guard laughed. "I wouldn't do that boy." He said. "You aren't even holding it right." He slapped the staff out of Obshi's hands. As the staff fell to the floor, it echoed throughout the dwelling. "You are no match for me. Don't pretend that you are." The guard said as he turned to leave. "Clean up this mess, I will check back in an hour. If it isn't cleaned up, you will suffer a similar fate." He left Obshi's dwelling back out into the night.

Obshi dropped to his knees at his mother's dead body and began sobbing uncontrollably. His mom was dead. He was supposed to be there to watch out for her, to protect her. Why did he have to challenge her to go out past curfew. That was the dumbest thing ever and now she was dead. It was his fault that she was dead.

At that moment, Obshi decided the Dubor needed to be driven from his planet. He was going to be the one to make it happen. The Dubor would pay, their leaders would pay, their entire race would pay. He was going to make sure that would happen. Looking to the ceiling, Obshi screamed out into the night.

December 2238 Earth Civil War

Captain Jack O'Brien sat in a bar on Earth. On the vidscreen the newscast was talking about President Cain's approval ratings. They were followed by President Wilcox's approval ratings. They were neck and neck. Having a war on Earth's soil was so disturbing words couldn't even describe it.

Taking a sip of a pale ale, Jack frowned. The news was disturbing to him. All it talked about was the war that was taking place. A pause in the war was happening due to the holidays. A truce didn't take place the previous year during the holidays, but the two presidents had found some common ground at least for Christmas.

The next day the temporary truce would be over and the fighting would start all over again. Jack didn't look forward to that. In the morning, he would be back aboard his star ship attacking other star ships full of other humans. The thought was almost unbearable.

A woman sat down next to Jack and ordered a drink. "Scotch, neat." She said to the bartender.

The bartender nodded. "Coming right up." He grabbed a glass and poured the scotch into it. Sliding the glass over to the woman, he smiled. "Here you are."

The woman looked to Jack. "Captain." She said.

Jack looked at the woman's uniform for some hint of her- rank. He guessed major, but didn't quite recognize the uniform itself. *She must be playing for the other team.* He thought. "Major."

She smiled. "Not many people get the rank." She said. "But it took you a moment, I take it you're backing Wilcox in this fight?"

Jack nodded as he took another sip of his ale. "Yeah, and you're fighting for Cain."

She nodded. "Major Danielle Cain." The woman said. "Daddy wouldn't have it any other way."

Jack about choked on his ale. The president's daughter? He couldn't believe his ears. "You do realize your father is a fool and a madman right?" Jack said, his words were cold as they were meant to be.

Danielle sighed. *Here we go again.* She thought. "Yes I've heard all of the newscasts about my father. They don't portray him in the most positive light. They don't know him like I know him. He's kind, warm, generous."

Jack shook his head as he set his ale down. He was ready to walk away from this fight, it served him no purpose. Yet he chose to stay for some reason. "His orders have killed over half the fleet. His tactics are sloppy at best and yet he's winning this fracking war."

Danielle again smiled. "Well, dad always knew how to back the winning side." She said. "Maybe you should consider switching sides. Who knows what you might find. Or are you one of those pro alien movement hacks. What a shame."

Placing his hand on the bar, Jack stood to leave. "I believe every alien has rights to go where they please. Earth included. Your father would have you believe otherwise. My how the brainwashing must go deep in your family for you to follow such a misguided soul" He turned his back on Danielle.

"See you on the battlefield captain." She called out after him as he walked away. "Typical, running from a conversation and the truth." Looking to the bartender she ordered

another drink, it was going to be a long one. There wasn't enough scotch in the world to make her headache go away.

2239 The Australia Campaign

General Eve Tague sat in her office in Sydney Australia. She was reading over casualty reports that were coming in. She had barely taken over the small country a month ago. Here she was trying to defend her takeover the best she knew how.

Her assistant entered the office. "Ma'am." He said. "A Kangaroo Sanctuary is on fire. We believe rebels are trying to cause a diversion so they can make an attack run on us directly. If we're too focused on the damage being caused elsewhere, we don't be able to keep tabs on what's really going on."

"Understood lieutenant." Tague said. "Now, get more men on the front line and tell them to attack back!" Her tone was cold and demanding. Eve had every right to be demanding, it was her people out on the line. She wanted them safe and to take action the best way they could. "I'll be damned if they come in here and take over our ground."

The lieutenant nodded his head and stood at attention. "Yes ma'am." He exited the office.

Eve continued to look over the casualty reports. She had led men into battle before, it was nothing new. But the amount of casualties was something else. Sure there were to be *some* expected deaths, but not on this scale. Taking over Sydney had been relatively painless. Eve thought she had conducted herself and her men with the utmost respect to those on the opposing side. Apparently they didn't seem to care about life the way she did.

Of course running a small country was one thing, but Eve wanted to be among the stars. She wanted to be up in space where the actual fighting was happening, not behind some desk job where all she would do was read reports of other people putting themselves on the line. She wanted to be in the fight. There had to be a way for her to get in command of a ship or a space station, something that was out there instead of flying a desk.

In the end, if she didn't manage to fully control the country Eve planned on blowing it up. One couldn't control something if it no longer existed. She didn't care about the alien lovers, they could all go to hell as it was.

2221 Dubor Home World

Grilka sat down to eat dinner with her family. Her father had just returned home from being on patrol for who knows how long it had been. It was his job to patrol the borders of

Dubor space. He was charged with keeping Dubor safe against any aliens who crossed their borders. Grilka was proud of her father and his work. He was an honest man, a hard worker, and when he set out to achieve something he did it.

“Grilka my dear,” Her father said. “How are your studies coming along at the university?”

Grilka took a bite of food and chew it as she thought about how best to answer. She had a feeling her father would be upset if she told him the truth. Yet that’s what he always said, tell the truth no matter what. You’ll be happier that you did. Swallowing her food, she responded.

“About university, father.” Grilka began. “I have dropped out in favor of joining the military. I want to follow in your footsteps and become an officer.” She waited for her father to respond. Would he be upset? Angry? Mad? Would he lash out? She didn’t know. Most of the time her father had a gentle way about himself, but there was always a first for everything.

Her father stared at Grilka. “Dropped out.” He repeated. “You dropped out? All because you want to follow me?”

Grilka nodded her head. “Yes father.”

He looked to Grilka’s mother. “Did you know about this?”

Her mother nodded her head. “She told me this morning. I think it’s wonderful.”

“I thought you wanted to become an artist.” Her father reminded her. “It’s been a dream ever since you could crawl from what I can remember.” He said. “What’s changed?”

Grilka’s lower lip trembled. “Are you not pleased with my decision?” Tears formed in her eyes.

Grilka’s father shook his head. “Of course I’m pleased. You are walking in my footsteps. Why wouldn’t I be happy for you? I think it’s wonderful! To have another line officer in the family is a great announcement and journey. I couldn’t be happier.”

Grilka smiled big. She was relieved her father was happy for her. Hell, she was excited that her family was happy for her. Her older sister had moved out of the dwelling years ago. No one had heard from her since she left. Grilka was worried about her sister. She loved her dearly. Grilka knew her parents worried about her sister as well, they didn’t say much about it but they worried. It was easy to tell that they did.

“I can still do art.” Grilka said. “It’ll just have to be a part time, hobby sort of thing. In the military I can actually be of help to people of our world. My art can’t do that.”

Grilka’s father gave her a hug. He knew she would go far in her career in the military. Might even farther than he had gotten. There were always opportunities to grow beyond what

you were currently capable of becoming. He knew this, he hoped his daughter knew this as well.

“That’s my girl.” Her father said. “You will go far in this life.”

2239 Crimson Gamma

Major Kimberly Hansen stepped from her shuttle and into the docking port. As the doors opened she was met by an honor guard. They came to attention as she boarded the station.

“Attention on deck!” An ensign called out, it was followed by a whistle. “Now entering and taking command is Major Kimberly Hansen.”

Kim smiled at the ensign. She didn’t understand the pomp and circumstance, but she would accept it. To her, Crimson Gamma was just another duty assignment. She didn’t understand why she was assigned to a station so far away from Earth with a Civil War going on, but who was she to argue with her superiors. The Shuka people had requested an Earth presence around their planet. Earth obliged the request and sent her to oversee the station.

Looking around at her officers, Kim raised and lowered her hands. “At ease everyone.” She said. They stood at ease and waited to be either dismissed or given further instruction. There was not to question why but only do as they were told.

“When I was first told I would be taking over command of Crimson Gamma, a new space station on the edge of the frontier in orbit of a strange planet, I thought to myself what the hell? Why the frack are we doing that?” Kim said to the assembled crowd. “But now that I am here, I kind of understand my purpose. It is to bridge the gap between our two peoples. The Shuka and the Human cultures will learn to get along with each other and grow from each other.” Kim said. “I’m not one for speeches, so this will be brief. I expect you to do your jobs. If you do your jobs we’ll get along well. Dismissed.”

At her command, the assembled crew went their ways to their various duty assignments. Kim was relieved that it was over. She could go about the rest of her day and get to know her new command. Kim walked down the Main Gallery towards a transport tube that would take her to her office.

Once inside her office, Kim pressed her hand against a hand scanner on her desk. The computer woke up. “Enter command.”

Kim cleared her throat. “Recognize Kim Hansen, Major. United Earth Force Alliance. I hereby take command of Crimson Gamma.”

The computer beeped. “Crimson Gamma now under the command of Major Kim Hansen.”

Kim sat down in her chair. She smiled. The station was under her control now. Kim wondered what her first course of action would be. She was surprised there wasn't a Shukan representative waiting for her at the airlock. She figured someone would be along shortly, eventually.

Just as she was about to access her computer terminal, a man appeared at her doorway.

"Excuse me major." The man said. "The computer told me I would find you here."

Kim smiled as the man entered her office. She held out a hand. He stared at her extended hand confused. Clearly not understanding why she had her hand out. She reached out with her other hand and placed his hand in hers. They shook hands.

"It's an Earth custom." She said. "Usually when people meet, they shake hands which is what we just did. How may I help you?"

The man smiled. "Ah I see. Thank you." He said. "My name is Mentech, I am the Shuka delegate assigned to Crimson Gamma. I thought it would be good to introduce myself to you major."

Kim returned the smile. "Good to meet you Delegate Mentech, I'm Major Hansen. I think we will do some good together." She looked out the window at the planet below. Yes, it was good to be in the position she was in. She was going to enjoy this new assignment.

January 2247 Earth Orbit

The Fresno and the Dubor warship dropped out of FTL on the far side of Earth. They quickly hid behind Earth's moon. Captain Jack O'Brien sat in his command chair. The two days had gone by rather quickly, he couldn't believe they were in the Sol System.

"Incoming transmission." An ensign said.

O'Brien nodded. "Open a channel."

The forward monitor switched from the view of Earth to that of Ketish. He smiled. "Captain, we have arrived at your home world. From what I can tell, there are three ships in orbit waiting for our attack. What do you recommend our course of action be?"

Jack smiled. "Yes we are, and I see them. This is what I plan on doing." He looked to the ensign in charge of communications. "Open a split channel with Earth and Ketish's ship."

The ensign's fingers flew over her control panel. "Channel open sir."

"Thank you ensign." O'Brien said. "This is Captain Jack O'Brien in command of the U.S.S. Fresno. President Cain I order you to stand down. Your days in office are over. You will surrender to us."

To Be Continued...