

Side Drop

203

by Kyle Eggleston

Nokev and Obshi were hard at work, and by work I mean they were fighting with staff weapons. With each hit the staffs made a loud clanking sound which echoed throughout the workout room.

"You keep dropping your right arm." Nokev observed. "Might want to reconsider your strategy."

Obshi laughed. "Look at you old man, trying to give me advice on fighting. I won the war remember?" He swung his staff. Nokev deflected the blow efficiently.

"How could I forget, you remind me every chance you get." Nokev said as he too swung his staff at Obshi making contact with a rib. A loud crack could be heard as the rib broke. Obshi didn't let the broken rib slow him down, he would tend to his wounds later.

Swinging again, Obshi missed Nokev and overstepped, it took him to the side of the room before he could recover. Nokev came charging at Obshi and landed a blow on his lower leg causing him to fall down to the floor.

Nokev stood over Obshi, his staff in hand pointed at Obshi's throat. "Surrender. I win."

Obshi sighed. "I surrender."

Nokev held out a hand, Obshi grabbed it and stood up. "Good workout old man." He said smiling. "Now I best get to the Med Bay to have a look at my rib, you broke it you know."

Nokev frowned. "I apologize, it wasn't my intention."

Obshi nodded. "I know, my right arm was down. Should have kept it up as you suggested. Maybe next time." He limped out of the room wincing in pain. Med Bay would patch him up in no time, this wouldn't be the first time being seen for similar injuries.

Nokev watched Obshi leave, he felt bad for hurting him like that. But he did try and prevent it by telling the young buck that he was dropping his right arm like he was. Maybe he would learn from the experience, maybe he wouldn't. Time would do its thing on the matter. Nokev exited the workout room and headed to his quarters to change.

Upon reaching his quarters, Nokev saw that he had an incoming transmission from the Shuka planet surface. Walking over to his computer terminal, he answered the hail.

"This is Nokev. Identify yourself." Nokev said.

"I..." A male voice said on the other end "Is this line...secure?" The voice was shaky, distant even. Unsure if contacting Nokev was even the right course of action. "I don't feel comfortable speaking unless it is a secure line."

"One second." Nokev said. A moment later the computer beeped. "Okay, it's secure now. No one can eavesdrop. Who are you?" He waited for an answer.

"My name is Toff." The man said. "I am a Dubor scientist on the planet's surface. I need to speak to you. You are Nokev, the famed Shuka scientist aren't you?"

"I am." Nokev replied. "What is this about?"

Toff smiled. "I am so glad to make your acquaintance. I have been tasked with seeing if my planet's agriculture can survive on your planet surface. I was wondering if you had some time to converse with me about my findings."

Nokev rolled his eyes. "You are a Dubor. We are enemies. Why would I want to even think of helping you?" He sighed out of frustration quite audibly. "I have no time for you." Nokev was about to close the channel when Toff cut him off.

"Your commanding officer. O'Brien I believe is his name. He is part Dubor. You have respect for him and he is of my race." Toff said. "Please hear me out."

Nokev moved his hand away from the deactivation control to the comm system. "I'm listening."

"Actually, I have no interest in agriculture." Toff said. "I am interested in your FTL engine design. I have dabbled in space ship design for several years now. I am in the middle of constructing my first outer space vehicle. A rocket I believe you call them and I could use some help."

Nokev was taken back. Here was a Dubor who had a purpose for being on Shuka and yet they didn't want to be there? What kind of people did the Dubor government send down to Shuka? If they didn't have any plans on conquest, what was Toff's purpose?

"I don't understand." Nokev said. "I thought you were there to conquer my world. Slowly like the last time."

Toff scoffed at the thought. "Oh no. You mistake my purpose for being here. Coff would disagree, but I have been wanting to leave Dubor behind for a long time now. I have heard there are many adventures to be had out on The Rim, and I wish to explore them. Coff can stay behind here and see to whatever the government has in store for her. Let her rot here, I don't care!" Toff said. He wasn't your typical Dubor bent on conquest, he was something different that much was certain.

"I don't understand, you are a Dubor and you want *my* help. We are enemies." Nokev said. "What makes you think I would *want* to help you?" He waited for a response.

Toff thought about the question for a moment. It was a logical question indeed. His intentions were honest and good. All he wanted was help with his FTL drive. He wanted to get away from Shuka. Going back to Dubor wasn't an option right now. "When I try and test my engine, it gets too hot and almost explodes. I'd rather it not explode in my face and live to tell about it the next day."

Nokev thought about the problem for a moment. "Sounds like you have an issue with your coolant system. Your engine is running too hot without the ability to cool it off properly so it doesn't go critical." He finally said. "The key is to keep the engine cool enough so it doesn't overheat, yet hot enough to do its job. It's a delicate balance between the two."

Toff cocked his head to the side. Why didn't he think about that? "Thank you Nokev, I can't thank you enough." He said. "I would love to pick your brain some more, but I don't think I would be allowed to visit your station. As you've pointed it out already, I am Dubor."

Nokev bit his lip. He knew he should be thinking what he was thinking, but he couldn't help it. This man was another scientist. Someone who had the same passions as he did. To seek out what was out there beyond known space, into The Rim. How could he turn him down?

"I know I will probably regret this." Nokev said. "I will come to your location with my research. You can have whatever information you deem interesting." He continued, "And I'll let you ask me questions." Nokev sighed. He was finished in the scientific community if word got out that he was helping a Dubor. Hell, he was already finished in the scientific community, this was just the final nail in the coffin.

"Oh my, that would be wonderful!" Toff said in response. "Thank you so much, you don't know what this means to me." He closed the connection.

"Yep, I'm going to regret this." Nokev whispered to himself. Turning around, he walked to the bathroom so he could take a shower and get ready for the day. He had a long day ahead of him. The trip down to the planet's surface was a good half hour by shuttle as it was. What did he just sign himself up for? What indeed.

An hour later, Nokev was headed down to the planet's surface. Toff had given him his coordinates in a remote mountain range. Nokev was having a rough time piloting the craft he was in. There was a lot of turbulence, more than he was used to piloting out in space. Atmosphere could do that to you though. It was a strange feeling. Nokev attempted to compensate as best he could, but even found that difficult to do. He thought he recognized the mountain range. It looked quite similar to the one he had crashed landed in so many years ago when he first tried to orbit Shuka in his rocket.

Coming to a landing position, Nokev settled his shuttle down with a hard thud. Taking off was always easier than sticking the landing in his mind. Standing from the command chair, Nokev walked to the back of the shuttle. He keyed in a sequence that would open the aft door. As the door opened, Nokev looked outside. He was in the mountains for sure, there was snow present. It was cold.

Stepping from the shuttle, Nokev took a look around. He was in the middle of a Dubor settlement. He cringed at the thought of Dubor being present on his home world. But what could he do about it? They were there, they'd been there for months. There was really nothing he *could* do about it but hope they would go away eventually.

"Nokev?" A man's voice could be heard from the side. Nokev turned to face him.

"Toff, I presume." Nokev said matter of factly.

Toff nodded his head. "Yes, I am Toff. My associate, Coff is running some tests out in the far farmland down the path. She will return in a few minutes. We don't have much time. Did you bring your research?"

Nokev smiled. His research. He was about to hand over years of hard earned, hard working research to a man he barely knew. It sounded odd at the least, but it was what he had to do to help this fellow scientist out.

"Yes." Nokev said. "It's all here." He pointed to his head.

Toff froze. The information and research was in Nokev's mind? Oh no, this was going to take a bit longer than he anticipated. He had hoped Nokev would have brought some papers and other findings, not something that was simply inside his head. "Don't you believe in computers?" He finally asked.

Nokev laughed. "When you're on the move as much as I am? You have to learn to memorize things as fast and efficiently as possible. That's what I've done with my research. It was all destroyed in a fire years ago, so what's left is what's in my mind." He paused. "I hope that's not a problem."

Toff slapped the sides of his legs. "No, not a problem at all. This will just take longer than expected. I can work with that though."

Nokev sighed. Was he really helping a Dubor sustain a better FTL engine than what they already had? Surely the humans were more advanced than what his primitive FTL ship was capable of. Hell they even managed to make it so the world around them didn't age while they traveled. That was a feat in and of itself.

Toff invited Nokev inside his dwelling. There they would talk for hours about FTL theory, and Nokev's design of his rocket. Toff would take notes on what interested him the

most, which was most of it, and he would listen intently as Nokev regaled him with stories of The Rim and the things he found out there amongst the stars.

When evening was approaching and Nokev was finishing up unloading all of his information he had stored inside his mind, He had a question for Toff. To him, it was a simple question. Toff might take it another way, Nokev was about to find out.

"Toff," Nokev began "We've met before. I was here with some companions, one in particular, a Human Dubor hybrid. I believe you call them Dorfs, or something like that. Do you recall this event?"

Timidly, Toff nodded his head. "Yes." He said. "I remember I forced you out of my dwelling before we could even talk about the subject. Your Mister O'Brien was something I wasn't expecting. To see an actual living breathing Dorf, well that was something different. It took me off guard, by surprise you might say." He paused thinking back on the events. "I was unprepared to meet him, so I ushered you out as quick as possible."

Nokev nodded in understanding. "I see." He said. "What was it you wanted to tell him? To tell us?" He asked.

"There is a prophecy among our people, a Dorf would bridge the gap between our two peoples. The Dubor and the Shuka and bring about peace." Toff explained. "I do not believe that time is at hand quite yet. Your Mister O'Brien has a destiny among my people. A destiny that will shake Dubor to its core. I'm sure Ketish knows of it and is very much against the thought. The time is just not right."

Nokev smiled. "I see." He said. "Living side by side with you and not having to worry about you killing me in my sleep would be quite an undertaking. I look forward to it, someday."

Toff too smiled. "As do I. Now if you'll excuse me, I must go find Coff. She gets so caught up in her work that she tends to forget what time of day it is. If you'll show yourself out and to your shuttle, that would be fine." He said. "Is it okay if I call on you at a later time? I mean if I have more questions."

Nokev nodded. "Yes, that would be fine Toff." Standing up from the table they were seated at, Nokev made his way towards the front door of the dwelling. Once outside, he walked back the way he came, back towards his ship that would take him back to Crimson Gamma.

A half hour later, Nokev was in orbit of Shuka entering Crimson Gamma's airspace. "Attention Crimson Gamma, this is Nokev of Shuka requesting permission to dock." Nokev sent out the usual request when trying to come back to the station.

An officer on the command deck acknowledged the request. "Request granted, you are clear for docking port twenty-six. Wecleom back Nokev, safe travel."

Nokev piloted his vessel towards docking port six. Home was always nice to visit, but he didn't want to live there. He belonged out among the stars. That was his true home. That was where he chose to be.

As Nokev docked and exited his shuttle. He came upon the docking port airlock. It opened to a panicked Obshi standing there waiting for him.

"There you are!" Obshi gasped. "I thought you had gone for good. There are things happening on this station Nokev. Things I don't think we should discuss in public. Come with me." Obshi rushed Nokev down the corridor to a transport tube.

Once they reached Obshi's quarters, Nokev walked in and sat down.

"Mind telling me what this is all about old friend?" Nokev asked.

Obshi was too upset to sit down, he paced the floor. "The one called O'Brien has been called to Earth. What his missioin is? I do not know. But I know it's of utmost secrecy and importance. The general who ran this station has stepped down out of her command post and has locked herself in her quarters until further notice. Her first officer is in charge. I found out when I went to call on her in C&C and was informed she was no longer in command."

Nokev shrugged. "It is a human station, there are bound to be changes here and there."

Obshi shook his head. "There's more. Grilka has left with O'Brien to Earth. Why would he take his mate on a top secret mission if she had a role to play in it?" He asked. "It is very suspicious to me, and should be to you as well."

Nokev shook his head. "I believe you are jumping to conclusions and things that probably don't really matter in the larger picture." He said. "Listen old friend, have you spoken to Norev about this? She has been on the station longer than either of us. She understand how the humans work, how they process change and deal with it. She might have an insight or two."

"That's the thing, Norev won't return my calls." Obshi said. "I have sent her over fifteen messages, and none of them have been read or looked at. She refuses to acknowledge my presence. There is something strange afoot. I'm telling you something is quite off."

Rubbing his chin, Nokev didn't know what to think. If what Obshi was saying was true, there certainly was something going on and they were not in the loop. "Alright, let me go visit Norev in person. Maybe she will talk to me." He finally said. Standing up, he walked towards the door. "But honestly I think it's nothing to get upset over Obshi. It's probably just status quo for around here. There's nothing to be worried about."

Obshi smiled. "I hope you're right." He said. "Let me know what she says."

"I will." Nokev said as he exited Obshi's quarters and walked down the hallway.

The ambassadorial wing of the station was less crowded than the officer section. It was always that way as most ambassadors preferred to be out and about among the people of the station conducting business and making transactions. It was the station life that made them interested in the human beings the most.

Upon arriving at Norev's quarters, Nokev pressed the call button. There was no response. He pressed the doorbell a few more times, each time he could hear the chime within Norev's quarters sound, but still there was no response.

"Computer." Nokev said. "Please locate Ambassador Norev."

"Ambassador Norev is in her quarters." The computer replied in a cold crisp tone that only the computer could offer.

Nokev sighed. "What are her life signs?"

"Ambassador Norev's life signs are normal for a woman of her species." The computer said.

Nokev paced back and forth in front of Norev's door. He hoped she was alright, that no harm or accident befell her. He knocked on the door manually.

"Go away!" Norev's voice could be heard from inside her quarters. "I do not wish to speak with anyone!"

Nokev breathed a sigh of relief. *Well at least she's okay.* He thought. But that didn't tell him *why* she refused to answer her door. Nokev could do an emergency override, he had overheard the security chief give that code once and kept it in his memory. He didn't know if it had to match your voice pattern though, probably did.

Nokev decided to try it anyway. "Computer override the seal on these quarters, security authorization Gamma Echo Three Charlie."

The computer beeped angrily at Nokev. "Voice pattern not recognized. This request is being logged and sent to security for analysis."

"Great." Nokev said. "Now they'll have me for sure." Shaking his head, he cleared his mind. Forget that, he thought, I need to get in there somehow and talk with Norev to see what is going on.

Taking an engineering kit out from under his sleeve, Nokev removed the door calling panel from the wall and began tinkering with its insides. A moment later, the door opened. He had been successful.

Stepping inside Norev's quarters, Nokev saw they were dark. Pitch black even. He stumbled over some small boxes that were in the middle of the room. "Norev?" He called out. "I can't see you." Then without thinking, he ordered "Computer turn on the lights."

The lights came up to full brightness. There on the couch, Norev was huddled in a ball under a blanket. Nokev walked towards her slowly. He wasn't sure how Norev would react to his presence unannounced as it was.

Norev didn't move. "I told you not to come in." She said. "Why couldn't you just listen to me?" She peeked out from under the blanket at Nokev, her eyes shined a faint red color. It wasn't her normal reddish color, but something lighter, more pink. This pigmentation color change of the eyes typically happened when a Shuka was sick with some kind of illness. To Nokev's knowledge, Norev hadn't been sick. This was something new.

"We've been worried sick about you Norev." Nokev said. "Obshi has been trying to contact you for quite some time now."

Norev nodded her head. "I know. I've been avoiding his communiques." She said. "I do not know what is wrong with me. Help me, please." Falling off the couch, she collapsed to the deck below.

Nokev reached for his comm unit. "Nokev to Med Bay, I have someone who is in need of immediate attention."

The doctor on duty responded. "Bring her down, I don't have the manpower to send someone right now."

"Understood doctor, I'm on my way." Nokev said. Picking Norev up in his arms, he carried her out the door.

Med Bay was full of sick people. Doctor Jasper had his hands full at the moment trying to triage the more ill patients first and then moving onto the less ill ones. It was a tough job, but someone had to do it and his nurses were busy taking care of the sick ones he had already performed an initial examination on.

As the doctor watched Nokev bring Norev in, he could tell something was wrong. "Take her to bed three, I'll be there in a moment." He said. Nokev did as ordered.

A moment later, Doctor Jasper appeared with a nurse at his side. He performed a routine examination on Norev and checked her eyes. "They're not the usual red color they normally are." He said. "Whatever it is, she is definitely sick. I'm going to give her some antibiotics hopefully that will slow down whatever *this* is." He gestured with his hands at her body. He had never seen anything like it before. It was something new for the books, that was sure.

Nokev tahnked the doctor and sat at the foot of the bed as they wokred on Norev.

"Holy shit!" The doctor exclaimed. "Her lung's deflated. Quick get me a lung stabilization kit, stat!" The nurse ran to the next room over to get the necessary equipment. Once she came back, Doctor Jasper put a tube down Norev's mouth and into her airway. He pressed a button on a small device, it inflated her lung back to where it should be. "Okay, good." He said. "We're not out of the woods yet though."

Norev's heart rate was spiradic afterwhich she flatlined. Jasper climbed on top of the bed and straddled Norev. He proceeded to perform CPR on her. Doing chest compressions as his nurse provided oxygen to her system.

Nokev watched in horror as they performed the necessary procedure to save her life. After a moment she began breathing on her own again, and her heart began to beat normally. Nokev breathed a sigh of relief.

Jasper shook his head. "I don't know what's wrong with her. Why she would go into an arrest like that. It doesn't make sense. I'm worried about her eye color as well. As you know when your people get sick, the females at least their pupils change to a pinkish color like she has now. That can mean she's contagious, but I won't know until I run more tests. If you'll please wait out there." He poitned to a waiting area. "I will get back to you as soon as I know...something, anything really."

Nokev nodded and exited the room. He walked towards the waiting area where there were several other sick patients waiting to be seen. Nokev had heard flu season was on the station, for humans it was a natural occurance that happened every year like clockwork.

An hour passed, Norev was getting restless. Obshi had called him four times during his waiting period. Nokev had nothing new to report but that they were working on Norev and for Obshi to remain calm and just wait it out. Obshi didn't like the sound of that, but would do as Nokev suggested. After all, he was an elder in their community.

Another hour passed. Doctor Jasper emerged from bay three. He walked with determination to Nokev. Upon seeing the doctor, Nokev sat upright waiting to hear the news on the ambassador.

"She'll be fine." Jasper said. "Some damned virus got in her system. I'm ordering bedrest for the next week. After that, if she feels up to it, she can have visitors again and continue her normal duties. As far as I can tell it's not contagious, so you shouldn't be worried about contracting anything from her. Just make sure she drinks plenty of fluids and gets a lot of sleep."

Nokev nodded. "Thank you doctor." He shook Jasper's hand. "Thank you so much, I was so worried about her."

"I'm sure you were." Doctor Jasper said. "You're welcome. Now if you'll please escort her back to her quarters so I can free up that bed for another sick patient and do it all over again."

Nokev nodded. He stood up and walked to bay three where Norev was laying. She was asleep at the moment. Picking her up, he carried her in his arms back to her quarters where she could get some decent rest.

Nokev contacted Obshi and told him everything that was going on. Obshi was relieved that Norev would make a recovery. Possibly not as speedy as he hoped for, but she would recover from this virus. That's all that mattered the most.

Leaning back in a chair, Nokev watched as Norev slept. He wondered what she dreamed of when she slept. His dreams usually included flying among the stars. Mostly to The Rim and through it exploring space that was vast and way out there. It's just what he dreamed about. Nokev didn't pick those particular dreams, but he didn't mind them in the least. He bet Norev had some interesting dreams of her own.

Heading to the door of Norev's quarters, Nokev pressed the button that would open the door. As the door opened, he heard Norev whimper in her sleep. She was dreaming about something, something bad. Walking over to her, he rubbed her head. She had a slight fever. Nothing too serious, but a fever nonetheless.

"Sleep well ambassador." Nokev said as he rubbed her head. "Sleep well."

Standing up from the couch, Nokev exited Norev's quarters and headed for his own. It was past midnight, he had an early day in the morning and didn't want to be late for any of it.

As Nokev reached his quarters, he got ready for bed and about fell asleep standing up changing his clothes. After a moment, he finally was able to get into his pajamas and hop into bed. Turning out the light, he hoped he would dream good dreams and not nightmares. Heaven knew there were enough nightmares to be had running around the station. The Dubor would be attacking soon, he could feel it in his bones.

* * *

The next morning, Nokev was woken up by weapons fire. The station rocked underneath him. A vessel was outside the station's shield grid firing upon Crimson Gamma. Tossing on some clothes, he rushed to C&C to see if there was anything he could do to help out.

C&C was bustling with activity as expected. The first officer in charge was issuing orders to his people. "Get that commline established." He ordered. "Get an dock crew down to sector forteen before that whole area blows!" He yelled at another officer.

Nokev walked up to the officer. "Commander, I offer my services in whatever capacity you might deem fit." He said fully expecting the commander to be pleased with his arrival.

The commander was not. "I didn't call for you Nokev. Go back to your quarters until this is all cleared up. Get out of here!" He yelled.

Nokev looked out the window at the attacking ship. It wasn't Dubor in design, but something from The Rim he had encountered many times. Standing his ground, he confronted the commander. "I believe that is a Bulack Warship. The Bulack see retreat as a sign of weakness. If you fire on them, you're going to have to see it through to the end." He said.

The commander nodded his head. "Understood. Stick around a moment, you might be useful after all." Looking over his shoulder at communications, he gave another order. "Get them on the horn, I want to speak with them. Now."

The officer nodded her head and worked her communications station. After a moment she nodded. "Channel open, she's all yours." She said.

"This is Commander Troy McAdams in charge of station Crimson Gamma. Why have you opened fire upon us? I demand an explaination. Any further force will be met with the most deadly force I can muster." McAdams looked to his tactical station. "Prepare the main battery and missiles."

The tactical officer carried out their orders. When they were ready, he signaled the commander.

McAdams acknowledged the signal. He stared forward waiting for a response from the alien vessel. The ship refused to respond to the hail. She opened fire on the station forcing McAdams to return fire.

C&C rocked with explosion after explosion. Nokev held onto a nearby railing steadyng himself. McAdams wasn't so lucky, he fell down to the deck. Stadning back up, he issued orders for continuous fire. His officers carried out their orders.

As the vessel continued firing, Crimson Gamma took more hits to her primary and only shield generator. The generator was meant for a star ship roughly a fourth of the size of the station. But it seemed to do a good job at deflecting the incoming missiles and blasts from the enemy's main battery.

Nokev looked to communications. "Open a channel."

"Sir?" The communications officer asked looking at McAdams.

McAdams nodded. "Do it, who knows what might happen. Could be better than us being blown to bits."

"Channel open."

Nokev stood tall. "This is Nokev of the Shuka home world, the world below us. I order you to stop your firing at once. I know your race from The Rim." He said. "You are a proud honorable race with hundreds of planets in your realm. It would be a shame for this station to destroy you. What would your membrer worlds think of it? What would they think of you?"

The weapons fire ceased long enough for a hail to come through. "They wish to speak to you." The communications officer said looking at Nokev.

Nokev nodded. "Put them on the monitor."

The view monitor came to life. An alien with two heads appeared on the monitor. "Nokev, I have heard of you. Your name is honored among my people. What are you doing on that human station and why is it orbiting your home world? Have you been conquered by these humans?"

Nokev shook his head. "No, they are here at the request of my government." He said. He almost chuckled. His government. Right. Like that made any sense. His government was the Religious Council from over two hundred years ago. "We are allies. Which means if you attack again, I will have to order an assault on your ship from Shuka. I would prefer not to d that and remain friends between our two peoples."

The alien frowned. "I too would like that, Nokev of Shuka." He said. "We will cease fire, even if it is a cowards way out. We will not harm this station any further."

The shelling stopped.

"Thank you." Nokev said. "Now perhaps you may come aboard and tell us what you are doing so far away from The Rim and your known home territory."

The alien nodded. "I would like that very much."

"Good." Nokev said. "Crimson Gamma out." The channel closed.

Looking to the commander, Nokev smiled. "I believe you have it in your capable hands now commander."

McAdams nodded his head. "Yeah, I'll take it from here. Thank... thank you."

Nokev shook his head. "No tahnks necessary commander. I'm sure you would have done the same had our roles been reversed. Good day." He left C&C hoping to catch his own meeting he had planned on time.

McAdams looked out the window at the warship that had been attacking the station. What on earth was he going to say to these people? First contact missions were always difficult when one side came in firing at the other side. Whatever the case, he had a job to do and was determined to do that job.

The End