Malika and Kristoph’s Peace Mission - I

“They are absolutely sure it was just an opportunistic thief?” Kristoph asked when Malika Dúccesci related the clutch bag incident reported to him by Avery Ferron.

“Marion said it looked that way,” Malika answered. “She knows more about crime on her own planet. There are warnings about that kind of thing in the hotel where they are staying, but they were all caught off guard. Ferron thinks three ladies in very expensive gowns was too much temptation to the thief. We could suggest that they dress down a little in future, but neither of our wives, nor Hillary Bar Dey are likely to take notice of that. We just need to trust Avery Ferron to keep them out of mortal peril.”

“He will need a medal by the end of the trip.”

“He can have one,” Malika affirmed. “Now… what of this delegation from Ratania and their claim over the mineral mines on the outlying Arusian planets?”

“The claim is dubious in the extreme,” Kristoph answered. “As for the delegation, there is an Earth expression ‘I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them’ – and that still stands even though we’re meeting them aboard a space platform with ten percent less gravity than we are accustomed to.”

The platform was in orbit above the outer planet of the Arus system, frozen giants with no sunlight and a barely breathable atmosphere where nobody could live without artificial habitats. Their mineral deposits were valuable enough for thousands of Arusians to have braved the conditions to extract the ore, first as free people, but in the last century, as bound serfs under the Ratanian Convex which conquered the Arusian home planet. A counter revolution had brought freedom to the most densely populated inner planet, but the Ratanians refused to give up their mining rights or their sovereignty over the miners who were still little more than slaves.

Which was just one of the many arguments to be settled.

The Ratanians were not a handsome species by most definitions of the word. They were directly evolved from a Piscean lifeform not unlike a shark from Earth oceans. They had bulging eyes like hard boiled eggs set very high up the face where a hairline would be if they were not completely bald. Their skin was grey-blue and glossy from constant perspiration which required them to drink salted water almost as constantly. They did this by sucking with thick, rubbery lips on tubes attached to huge tanks carried by servants who stood behind them as they sat at the conference table.

It hadn’t escaped the notice of the two Gallifreyans that the servants were Arusians, distinguished from their masters by leathery red skin and eyes that were dark brown without any white. They were tall and stick thin with long, lugubrious expressions and said nothing.

Which was a blessing, since the Ratanians never stopped making noises – a slurping sound as they drank and an odd noise in the back of the throat when they paused from drinking and before they spoke in a way that could only be described as glutinous, though Kristoph felt sure that wasn’t quite the word. The thesaurus lacked an exact description of a sound that made him feel slightly sick.

As a diplomat he knew he had to look past his personal prejudices, especially those about the merely physical. He had long ago learnt to look beyond cultural perceptions of beauty and ugliness. He had friends in the diplomatic world who looked like mould-covered compost heaps but were amazingly cultured beings who sang like angels and wrote epic poetry to rival Homer.

But if the Ratanians wrote poetry, it was probably as terrible as that of the Vogons in a science fiction book he had read for amusement when he was living on Earth.

No, he couldn't see anything redeemable in the Ratanians – and he was really trying.

“This IS very unusual,” Malika said to the two delegates as the introductions were made and the Ratanians slurped in comfort-form seats that ‘formed’ around them as they sat. Chairs of that sort were standard in diplomatic meetings where delegates came in all sorts of sizes and shapes.

“Unusual?” Delegate Maersik responded curiously. “In what way?”

“My colleague and I are here as go-betweens, to steer your people and the Arusians towards peaceful co-existence,” Kristoph added. “It is rather unusual in these cases to have a meeting with only one side.”

“There is nothing to discuss with the ‘other side’,” slurped Delegate Archins with a disdainful tone in the last two words. “The ore planets are Ratanian. They have always been Ratanian….”

“Well, that’s not quite true,” Malika told him. “The ore planets didn’t belong to anyone until two centuries ago when both societies developed space travel and explored those outer planets. I have read a very interesting dossier. The Arusians established the first habitats and opened the ore mines…..”

“That is Arusian propaganda,” Delegate Maersik snapped. “It was Ratanian technology that enabled the ore to be mined. Arusian technology is…..” Marseik struggled for a word he didn’t use often. “A… frudteie….”

Malika looked puzzled. The word did not translate into Gallifreyan at all.

“Oxymoron,” Kristoph explained. “When contradictory terms appear in conjunction – like bitter-sweet. He is apparently telling us that Arusians are stupid.”

He looked at the two servants holding the water containers. Neither registered an expression. He didn’t think it was because they were stupid. More because they were accustomed to knowing their place in the social order.

Emancipating Arusian serfs was an issue for another day, and it wasn’t a discussion Kristoph was looking forward to. He had negotiated peace treaties between implacable enemies who have come to the brink of annihilation, but at least they admitted, however grudgingly, their enemy’s position. The Ratanians still considered the Arusians as a sub-species just slightly more intelligent than beasts of burden.

“The historical records show that both Ratanians and Arusians developed interplanetary travel at much the same rate and colonised the outer planets more or less in agreement to share the resources,” Malika said.

“That is not correct,” Maersik snapped.

“Are you sure?” Malika queried “I have studied the dossier carefully.”

“That is not the true historical record. It is Arusian propaganda designed to back up their claim for equal spoils. The true historical records show that the Arusians were only brought to the outer planets to work – as miners. Manual labour, only, of course. They were not capable of managing the mines. That role fell to the superior Ratanians.”

“The rest of the galaxy has a word for that,” Kristoph remarked. “Slavery.”

The Ratanians had a word for it, too, but they didn’t see any problem with it. Arusians were there to work, for the betterment of the Ratanian Convox. The Arusians were meant to be grateful that they were ruled by wise and intelligent masters.

According to the Ratanian version of history.

There wasn’t an Arusian version. Education for Arusians had been banned two centuries ago. Books and libraries were only for Ratanians. An Arusian historical record was another oxymoron.

A version compiled by the Shaddow Proclamation in preparation for these negotiations, insisted that the Ratanians had used interplanetary travel to conquer the Arusians and enforce rules that would have shocked supporters of Segregation and Apartheid on planet Earth, though possibly not Nazis. The Arusian space programme was dismantled and the only people of that world who travelled after that were the indentured serfs who were sent to mine the ore planets.

For ‘serfs’, both Kristoph and Malika read ‘slaves’. The caste system of their own world was not above criticism. But Caretakers had never been forced to work for no pay while basic food could be withdrawn from their families if they didn’t make their quotas.

“Arusa was never supposed to be an independent planet,” Marseik explained. “Their planet has been a part of the Greater Ratanian Convox since records began. There have been attempts to create a breakaway ethnic state, but they are quite incapable of self-government. It was necessary to re-absorb them into the Convox each time.

Again, Kristoph thought of similar situations in Human history. The British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came to mind, as well as Russia’s behaviour towards the Ukraine at the time Marion and her friends were currently visiting Earth.

He also kept thinking of Cardassians and Bajorans, but they were fictional.

The point was that even one small planet had examples of how a large, powerful section of people could so easily suppress a smaller one, and how such oppression should never be accepted, never appeased.

He had resisted that kind of tyranny all over the galaxy in his former life as a Celestial Intervention Agency operative.

So why were they talking to these awful people about any kind of compromise, of power-sharing with the oppressed people. The Ratanians, the whole nasty population, not just its government, should be sanctioned.

If it were up to him, he’d have them all prosecuted for war crimes.

Except there hadn’t really been a war. The Ratanians had walked over the Arusians and dispossessed them, made them slaves by any word you chose to disguise the true situation, starved them of not only food and basic necessities of life, but education, freedom of movement, any sort of self-dignity or national identity.

And that was before they’d even seen the labour camps and ‘relocation centres’ that were in the independent report from the Shaddow Proclamation.

THAT would have been his first choice to begin the proceedings, but the Ratanians had insisted on this settlement of terms about mining rights, and made it clear that the whole peace treaty rested on this settlement.

“No!” Kristoph said, rising from his chair. Malika wasn’t sure what he was going to do. He had followed his thoughts telepathically, including some horrific images from a place called Belsen, and he had felt a change in his colleague’s disposition – from a calm, diplomatic, neutral observer of the Ratanian case to something much more involved, much more emotional.

“No… to what?” asked Delegate Marseik, looking Kristoph in the eye, defiantly at first, then with a sense of doubt that made him choke on his water tube.

“To any of this until we have fully observed the situation here in this system. Not only the position now, but retrospectively. And I can tell you right away that it will NOT be your warped and biased historical record that we will rely on. We will have the truth.”

Malika seconded the motion, though he did wonder how far beyond the bounds of a diplomatic mission they were going to go, and how long it might take.

How much trouble were they in?

And how much trouble could his wife get in while he was gone?