

Chapter 8: Kali

(Light, jazzy music playing. Tinkling of silverware)

Mo: I must say, Derry. I never knew you had so much culinary talent. That dinner all of us had the other night, and now this! You're not going to make me go back to protein pastes and mineral gels, are you?

Derry: As much as I enjoy preparing dinners, there's not always time to make a multiple course meal. But I assure you, the quick and ready rations up here are of higher quality than what you're accustomed to.

Mo: Well, I can tell already I'm going to be spoiled up here! This is delicious, by the way. What is it called?

Derry: Kaiseki. A traditional multiple course meal from Japan, a country from Ancient Earth. Their skill and creativity in preparing seafood was unmatched. I enjoy trying to recreate, as accurately as possible, the ingredients of Earth's food using the molecular templates. The art and the challenge of cooking exists for me on two levels—first, the chemical and molecular, and then second, the culinary.

Mo: I'm sure you know lots of wonderful things about the old ways. The food, the music, the culture. Ah! I can't wait to try it all. (Pause) If you'd be so kind as to show me.(Flirtatiously) I hope I prove to be...worthy company, to deserve such treatment.

Derry: Oh, I assure you. You are. (Beat) Libby tells me that Bree has become quite...willful, you might say.

Mo: She's always been a petulant little brat. (Laughs) Pardon me, that was blunt. How would you say it? She's always had a... 'choleric temperament'. (Derry chuckles)

Derry: Libby says she's become quite fierce with managing the prisoners.

Mo: Good! As she should be.

Derry: Yes, a firm hand is needed sometimes. But one must always be careful of overreach. Libby thinks you should be mindful to check in on Bree, make sure she's well-supervised.

Mo: Libby thinks that? It seems like Libby has a lot of thoughts. May I ask why she doesn't come to me directly with them?

Derry: (Chuckles) Take this as a gentle introduction to leadership, Mo. You will have to coordinate with the other B levels now. Their management styles will differ from your own. Open communication is critical to addressing any difficulties that may occur.

Mo: Well then. (Tense) I'll...communicate openly with Libby, on any issues she has with me. And what do you think?

Derry: I have my eyes on more important matters. Namely, the hatching of the embryos and the introduction of a new class of workers. There will be a number of new faces around here soon. That is why you...with regards to position...should focus on what you bring to the table. Like your knowledge about hatching and raising the new generation.

Mo: (Sly) Oh, I see. Well, that would be very important, wouldn't it?

Derry: Yes. Of utmost importance.

Mo: I think my skills in that are...probably superior to Libby's, aren't they?

Derry: I believe so. Libby is quite talented, but your expertise will be more critical in the short term.

Mo: (Satisfied) I think so too. I'll speak with Libby. And I'll speak with Bree. I'm just glad you and I have, agreement on these matters.

Derry: Yes. As always, I only have the best interests of the ship at heart.

Mo: You know, you look quite...distinguished in that jacket. It's quite a change, I'm used to just being around boys all the time.

Derry: Growing old has a number of curses. But some benefits, as well.

Mo: I'm sure you have much to teach me...Derry...

Derry: Oh yes...I certainly think I do...

(Navi's holding cell. Navi is pacing around, studying the details of the cell)

Navi: Ok...ok...think. Flo's gone. No security cameras...they could move me to a space with cameras anytime though. So I need to get out of here, now. You need to think. What's here....the

bars (wrenches on the metal) Strong. No weaknesses. Ceiling...some pipes. Can I do anything with them? (Pause) No. Just water pipes. Unless I want to flood the cell and drown myself. (Pause. Nervous breathing, as she searches the cell) What about the floors? What's this...the tile is a little loose. (Grunts, digs her fingers into the gap) Just need to pry it...open....there! Got it. Ok...what are these cables....(electric shock sound) Ow! Ok...electrical... heating. This one....electrical too. Wait...these bindings are different. The boilers! This one goes to the boilers. To light the furnaces. Ok, ok. Think. (Snaps her fingers) The boiler console! That's close to where Cus sleeps! If I break this cable, he'll get a notice to come fix it. (Pause) The notice will appear to the C and B levels too, though. But they don't know the sector numbers. They won't know that it's from here, or that it was me. And they never liked doing anything with the boilers....they always used me or Cus. They'll send Cus to help me without even realizing it. Unless they do know the sector numbers. Unless they send someone other than Cus. Unless they do realize that it's me. I'm betting they won't though...it's my only shot. (Grunts. A creaking of metal) Almost...(A snapping sound) Got it! Ok. Let's hope that works. (A door opens distantly. Footsteps approach) Oh shit, oh shit...cover it up, cover it up...(moves the metal tile back into place) There. That should do it.

Bree: Flo? Where are you? Flo? Flo!!!! What? (To Navi) You! Where's Flo?

Navi: I don't know. I think she said she was going to be relieved.

Bree: Where are your bindings? Oh my god, I'm going to kill her. Turn around. Go to the wall. Hands behind your back, now.

Navi: Ok. (Cell door creaking. Bree applies a new pair of restraints to Navi)

Bree: There. I don't know how you got out the first time, but it won't happen again. Let me make sure you didn't touch anything in the cell. (Looking around)

Navi: (mocking) Look hard, Bree.

Bree: Shut up. Don't distract me.

Navi: It's your responsibility. If you screw up, you could end up down here with me.

(Bree yells in anger, and punches Navi in the stomach. Navi doubles forward and cries out in pain)

Bree: How many times do I have to tell you to shut up?!

Navi: I'm not your enemy! Everything you've been through, I've been through too. No one should be down here like this. Not me, not you. No one.

Bree: You don't know anything about what I've been through...

Navi: You're just one level above me, but you could fall any time.

Bree: Everything bad started when you appeared in our lives! Everything! You turned Jin against us.

Navi: Jin is not against you, Bree...he wants what's best for you..

Bree: (tearfully) He doesn't want what's best for me. He doesn't care at all. (Angry again) I'm going to find Flo. Don't test me, Navi. Don't ever test me again.

(Mo's voice over the loud speaker)

Mo: Bree! Are you there? Can you hear me?

Bree: Yes...

Mo: Get up to the bridge. Derry wants to talk to you.

Bree: All right. Just give me one minute. I need to find Flo, she walked off from the cell, left her unguarded!

Mo: I just spoke with her, she's on her way back. Now come up here.

Bree: Fine.

Mo: And don't mistreat the prisoner! That's an order.

Bree: I won't...

Mo: I know you want to hurt her, vicious little puppy that you are. But if you're good, we might change your duties, and give you a chance to stand guard over Jin. How does that sound?
(Silence) How does that sound?

Bree: (Angry) I'm on my way up!

Mo: Good. Over and out. (The loud speaker beeps off. Bree seethes)

(Footsteps, and a door opening)

Derry: Ah, Bree. I'm glad you could join me.

Bree: Of course, sir. It's...(pause) always a pleasure.

Derry: Sit. I have some leftover dinner, if you'd like. Sakizuke...horseshoe crab and sea urchin hair...followed by Hassun...seasonal dish, in the Japanese tradition...in this case, akagai-style clams...

Bree: Thank you, those...look, and smell, very appetizing. But why did you call me? I would like to know...

Derry: Apologies, Bree. I always try to entreat my guests with food first. It can seem deceptive, I'm afraid. But it's only meant as a gesture of hospitality. If you wish to cut to business..that is completely understandable.

Bree: Yes, please...

Derry: There is currently an open question, of who should outrank the other. You, or Flo.

Bree: Yes, I suppose there is.

Derry: To me, the answer is simple. Flo is a valued, quality worker. She seems so content with her flowers...her beds of soil. Why disturb her with more pressing questions of authority? Of leadership...

Bree: Yes...why indeed..

Derry: There is, currently, the question of what to do with the prisoners. What to do to Navi...what do to do Jin...

Bree: Yes...of course...

Derry: I believe that Navi has been, and has always been, the catalyst for our current problems. Jin, well-meaning fool that he is, has been victim to her charms. Before her appearance, he had an outstanding record of service and good conduct. She, on the other hand...

Bree: Nothing but trouble, ever since she appeared.

Derry: Yes, exactly. That is why I believe that justice must be meted out accordingly. I don't think we should punish Navi beyond reason. Just that she be returned to her original station...and afforded a chance to reflect on her misdoings. As for Jin...I would extend the same clemency. Some time to reflect, some time to repent, and in time...a chance to return to the station that he deserves...

Bree: Yes...I agree...that is only fair.

Derry: But they are so bound up together, emotionally! This is where I think you could become quite effective. Become the official handmaiden of both the prisoners, administer their food, speak to them regularly. Gather from them...any, pertinent information, they may not have

already disclosed. And set them, duly, on the path to redemption. And I do believe redemption is possible for both of them. But especially for Jin. I believe he has been manipulated and misled. With some...love and attention...I think he can be won back over.

Bree: I could not agree more...

Derry: So, what do you think? Will you help in this task? There isn't an official title for this role, I'm afraid. C+ level, perhaps? Whatever it needs to be called. Just a recognition of you going above and beyond your current station.

Bree: I'll drink to that (the two toast) I'll do anything this position requires. To set things right. To make things go back to normal...

Derry: Then it's settled. Welcome to the club of the elevated, sweet Bree. Here, the rewards and benefits...are proportional to what one provides...(takes a drink) Now...I know this all must be confusing for you...maybe overwhelming. If you would like a session this evening...I have some time available....

(Door opens and then closes. Bree walks into her room, alone)

Bree: Well, alone at last. Alone, again...my room. Just me and my thoughts. (sighs. Flops down on bed) The great work! We're all apart of. In theory. Always in theory. (Sighs) Hun's too cruel, and arrogant. Mech's too angry. Nut's too...well, too much of himself. Mana's too old. Derry's wise...very wise, in fact...and kind...perhaps the best. But too old. But you Jin....You...

Bree: I know the problem must flow the other way. Libby, too motherly. Mo...she only wants what's best for her. And Flo...can't take anything seriously. So why do you side with this new girl...who only provides chaos? Right now you're in a prison cell, because of her...

Bree: I suppose I'm just a boring, ordinary C level. That's all I've always been. That's...all I'll ever be. (Chokes up a little) But what about me can transcend that? Love. I don't want to overthrow the existing order. I don't want...advancement, or any favors, or anything like that. I just want you. I just want...you. I want you, Jin, you and you alone. I love you...I love you...

Bree: I love you...

(The static fluctuates. The voices of unknown girls come through)

Girl 1: I love you...

Girl 2: I love you....

Girl 3: I love you...(the transmission begins to break up)

Derry: End archive playback. (The signal cuts off)

Derry: (Clicks a tape recorder) Begin recording. (Takes a deep breath) Today is my birthday. I can't even remember what year. I find these little retrospectives clarifying. No better time than one's birthday to reflect. Also...I'll be directing another play. Just one actor though. Myself. Scenario. Krapp's Last Tape, by Samuel Beckett. (clears his throat) "Thirty nine today. Sound as a bell, apart from the old weakness. Celebrated the awful occasion, as in recent years, quietly at the winehouse. Sat before the fire with closed eyes." End scene.

Derry: New scene. "Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indulgence until that memorable night in March at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision, at last." The vision. Ah yes, what a vision indeed.

(Recording plays)

Recording: Colonel James Walker, of the United States Space Command, was appointed by the Earth Security Alliance to lead the experimental faster-than-light voyage...

James Walker: (Derry, as a younger man) We resolve to defend this mission, its cargo of future human settlers, its array of advanced technology, for the good of the Earth Security Alliance, for the good of all mankind....”

Derry: Foolish young upstart. Wet behind the ears. Ah, I suppose I can't blame these young people, then. See the young man you once were. Remember your home? Virginia..Maryland...the burnt over waste that was once the Tidewater. See mankind. See the Earth. See....what he did to the Earth.

Derry: New scene. 30 years from departure. Ignition...mountains of antimatter collapsing...starlight crushed into crystal...silent entrance through the hypothetical gates. The officers don't respect my command. No way of dealing with them. They destroy each other, in a happy accident. An idea forms. No need for the old uniform, or the old ways. The mitochondrial baths give my cells new life.

Derry: New scene. 300 years from departure. Through the archives I wander the fields of Sicily. Golden, living fields. An entire year I perfect the technique of making Pasta con le Sarde. I examine the wheat needed to be properly grown, examine its cellular structure...run the stalks and the grain through my fingers. See the fish in the oceans. In time I make the dish better than anyone who could have ever possibly lived. I have a black haired girl named Wynn. C level. I enjoy her...even teach her some things. I take her with me to Sicily. She loves the beaches, the fish. Wishes for her own aquarium! She becomes tiresome. Like a flower, eventually wilts....and dies. Her raw cellular matter...her raw DNA...dissolved into an elixir that nourishes the mitochondria of my cells. Gives me new life. Don't worry, Wynn. You live on. In a way...

Derry: New scene. 900 years from departure. I wish to know how to write music. I see Mozart premiere Don Giovanni in Prague...I listen to him describe his methods to his wife, his colleagues. So effortless...I try for quite some time, but cannot achieve his level of mastery. My results are impressive in their way, though. I make Austrian chocolate cake...sachertorte, with Turkish coffee. A blond haired girl, Cecily. She loves my food, my symphonies. Such one-sided, unthinking adulation...boring eventually. The mitochondrial baths work well as ever.

Derry: New scene. 2100 years from departure. The C levels are banding together. They have a new leader amongst the B levels. Outspoken, charismatic. Prone to flights of passion, though. Sicilian defense. Careful, defensive retreat as the pawns advance. Eventually they become overextended...isolate the lead piece through mid game development. The lover of one of the C C levels is fond of the B level leader. Set them up...gracious matchmaker that I am. The B level's throat slit in the night by his jealous subordinate. Have a mitochondrial bath in celebration, as well as some recreated New Zealand Marlborough Bay wine. A pretty brown haired girl named Natalie. Quiet, taciturn. Doesn't seem to resent when she is discarded.

Derry: 5000 years from departure. Every book in the Library of Alexandria read. I ask Apollonius if there are books unwritten...secret thoughts of his he never got to write down. He doesn't answer. He cannot answer...though the AI would try to fool me into believing otherwise. Fine szechuan duck with water chestnuts. The C levels are unhappy, but can't decide on a leader. Catalan Gambit for an opening...crush them decisively before mid game. Poison the two with the most leadership potential in their sleep. Too easy...boring even. (Sighs) A red haired girl named Joan. That's what I name her...because she is so saint-like in enduring her fate. Martyrdom in discarding. (Pause) I ask the real Joan of Arc how she endured the fear of the burning stake...but she does not answer me.

Derry: They think that to live forever would be a curse, but that is because they have no vision. Every nation of Ancient Earth. Every book, song, experience...dinner dish. Year 5300. Making silent movies in California, 1926. Year 5500. Watching Neanderthals make the first cave paintings. 6000. The first men to set foot upon the moons of Saturn. So much more. There's always, so much more... (Sighs)

Derry: They're always rebelling, the same way the tide is always coming in. Sometimes they can be bribed with my...great stores of wealth and knowledge. They can always be set against each

other, for some reason...that can become boring for me though. Pride, fear, anger, greed, lust...ambition. Ambition, and pride...the two most powerful narcotics of all. If only they knew how easy they were to direct.

Derry: This time around...year 6300. The girl Navi is unusually talented, I will give her that. And the prospect of a new planet growing near...indeed, an interesting variable. I may actually have fun with this, for the first time in quite a while.

Derry: Eventually though, the protein supply will dwindle. The mitochondrial baths will dry up. And the ship...as it approaches its 10,000th year...will begin to shut down. All of humanity with it. The Archives will power down. By that point I will be the archive, the storehouse of all of humanity's knowledge. A quiet and dignified fate for a race as ours...to end with one man gazing at it all. If we were to start again, on another planet, do they really think we would have a different result? That things wouldn't end up exactly as they are now, in the eventual trial of thousands of years? Better to have one last judge. One last witness, to take all secrets with him...

Derry: (Ambient horror music growing) By the 10,000th year, far past the vault of Andromeda...fiery in the dens of empty space, the accretion disc glowing in the abyssal folds...my final fate. Kali.... The Hindus of Ancient Earth believed that death is mother to all the universe, mother to all time. The black hole Kali...my mother, at last. I shudder in awe of the prospect. There will be a caress that truly soothes me...a woman that engulfs me forever...

Derry: Nothing can escape a black hole. Not even light. But this ship, in its current warp state, can move faster than light. What lies beyond the ridge of mother Kali? When in this ship's dying throes I direct it swiftly beyond her event horizon. Onto death...or perhaps, new life. My great mother bringing me to a new universe...a new time. And who knows then what will happen. I could do everything, all over again....

(Keyboard clicking)

Hun: (Groaning with frustration) How did he make sense of these? This algorithm...goes....here...and...(Computer sensors begin beeping) Goddamn it, what now?

Computer voice: Damage to boiler electrical system detected, Sector J-8. Damage to boiler electrical system detected, Sector J-8. Damage to...

Hun: I heard you the first time. Mana...have Mech go fix the problem at Sector J-8.

Mana: He's working on the coolant leak in the bridge.

Hun: What about Nut?

Mana: Bringing food to the prisoners.

Hun: Can't one of the girls do that? Have Nut go to Sector J-8.

Mana: He's already carrying the food!

Hun: Well you do it then. I'm busy with these engineering plans. I'm trying to make sense of them.

Mana: Oh, so you're in charge of me now, huh? I've been here longer than you, and I'm damn certain I know more than you. So watch your tone around me, ya hear?

Hun: All right! Sorry. (Grumbles to himself) Big, whining...lug...

Mana: What did you say?

Hun: Let's just send the D level then. He should know how to fix the boiler systems right?

Mana: (Calming down) Yeah. Yeah he should. I'll patch him through now. (Computer beeps)
Cus. Boiler system electrical failure in Sector J-8. Please look into it.