

Faux Freedom
By Ehinowen Uwa

(Translated by Ronald T.)

I'm writing from the "Ulindin Banks." I'm also working as a miner there. I've been captured for seemingly no reason, just wanted the good life, you know. The life of a human, the life where there is no discrimination; a life where I'll get food and water and be just fine.

Didn't know humans didn't like my type, though. My name is Shankien Jduinper, to anyone who finds this. I rode the stars in my ship, looking for a place where I could live well.

Oh, forgot to explain my story. I came from the planet Obulon, a barren place with nothing but torture and misery. When I grew up there, I went to a horrible school. The teachers never actually taught in class. The teachers, instead, just sat around in class while everyone was being harassed, no matter who they were. My grades were absolute garbage, so were everyone else's. College didn't exist on Obulon, so the best job you could get was a lead janitor at MeekRoanolds. The mayor got assassinated, and the voters were so lazy that they never elected another.

I decided I had to escape. That wasn't a good place to live. My father had the same idea and built an entire starship to escape Obulon. Luckily I got to it before him. I stole my dad's ship and rode off into space, ready to find a new home.

The ship had enough food to last me a full year, maybe more. It was a bit gross to eat, but I knew I had to do it or I wouldn't live to see the new planet I'd find.

In the ship, there was an advertisement. I checked it out a few days after lift off. The advertisement said: "See new planets, new wonders, more imagination!" I was elated! I put coordinates into the ship's computer and traveled far and wide, hyperspeed breaking through the emptiness of space, nearly ripping a hole in spacetime.

I reached the planet soon enough, the food left in the ship almost completely depleted. I landed on the odd, new planet and walked out the ship feeling like a new man.

I looked around, seeing a sign.
Earth....

Population: nine billion.

I was excited and I was ready to explore the strange realm to start a new life. There was so much of this green stuff, sharp edged and taller than upright mice. I ran through the green stuff, feeling it tickle my ankles. It felt great, like I was alive for the first time in many years.

I had high hopes for this new world in which I could live. Maybe I could finish my education. Maybe I could start a family with one of the inhabitants of this planet. Maybe I could get a great job. Maybe, just maybe, this would go well.

As I walked, everything seemed well. The cricking of bugs, the crinkly slosh-like sound of my steps. I saw the largest thing right ahead of me.

A tan-colored, weird looking inhabitant, holding a pitchfork. I threw myself back, fearful. I didn't understand their weird gibberish, but they sounded very angry, pointed at me and called at me.

I backed away before running away. Before I knew it, there were many other tan-colored, weird looking inhabitants chasing me. They were wearing scary outfits. Everything frightened me at that moment, the only thing I could think about was finding a place to hide from them.

My legs were getting tired as I could feel my knees wobbling with every long, painful stride. My vision went blurry as I felt something stab me in the back. I took my last steps as I, shortly after, collapsed.

I woke up in this metal place. There was just grey metal everywhere. I felt so alone, even being on Obulon would be better than this. I just had to steal the ship, didn't?

I wonder what my father is doing now. He's probably worried about his ship. Not like he really cared about me. No one cares about anyone there.

Maybe no one cares about anyone here, either. Maybe Obulon is just as bad as Earth.

Deep in thought, I didn't even pay attention to the strange creatures calling for someone to get into my cell. I looked at the entrance, seeing a being of my own race.

What a coincidence, I thought. I walked towards them and greeted them. They said to me, "Oh god, they got one of us already? I thought I was the only one wanting to escape."

I could hear low mumbling ahead. The stranger said, "What's going on over there?"

"Be quiet," I replied, "I'm trying to hear what they're saying." They were talking about this.."pri-zan" thing. I was a bit frightened by the word alone. Prizan. It sounded like a bad place. I didn't want to go there. I knew they would force me there either way, so why even resist the inevitable?

I told him about what they were talking about. "Oh, what's priz-an?!" I told him I didn't know. He wanted to find out what this weird place was, but I didn't. I wanted to stay here, where I could at least keep to myself. He encouraged me to come with him, and I gave him an aggressive:

"No!" I yelled, potentially driving the creatures towards us. He kept on persisting and I was about to outburst just as they showed up behind the gate. We didn't notice and he kept on telling me stuff like,

"It'll be okay, it's probably not all that bad." Just as I was about to reply, he was brutally electrocuted. It was horrifying to watch. The amount of tasers that flew at him at that moment were so numerous I couldn't even count them. The security guard warned me that if I made any noise, I'd meet the same fate.

I gulped with trepidation. I stared at his charred corpse. I was shocked that people could be this barbaric and shoot first, ask questions later.

I was sleeping for a few hours and I heard the gate open. I was put in handcuffs and taken to a hovercar and pushed in. The drive was long and boring, filled with silence. No music, no

outside noise, just silence. There was nothing but my own thoughts. The driver didn't speak at all. It was almost frightening.

I was filled with confusion. These... things would kill you if you made any noise. I can't imagine how they live so expansively.

I wondered how this would all end. That guy was annoying, but he didn't deserve death. It's awful to kill someone for that reason-these people are insane. I tried to get the images of his dead, still moving body out of my head and move on.

After three hours of driving through a city filled with high buildings and beautiful skies, we finally arrived. We were in front of a very large building. I wondered if this was prizan. It was brown and brick-like. It had a big clock in the center of the high tower structure. I remembered it now, it was like one of those...what are they? Courthouses.

Oh no.

The driver pulled me out of the car and literally dragged me through double doors. He threw me to the ground and I was thoroughly searched for any weapons or items. They pulled off my clothes and searched through those too.

I can't seem to find a name for these species. I'll just call them babarins. That's what my classmates called me at school. I followed a well dressed babarin who was told to take me to the inside of the courthouse.

I saw more barbarians around me. It was a little scary to see all of them in one place. I was wondering if all "nine billion" of the barbarians came to see me.

I wandered through the room, uncomfortable with all these things staring down at me. Knowing that this was a courtroom-where people are taken to andol-really frightened me and made me nervous.

I was roughly escorted towards a seat. I sat down with no questions. The one dressed in a black robe smashed a tiny hammer on his table and a babarin across from me got up and walked towards the platform directly in front of me.

They talked about how I was a complete stranger to this world and that I didn't belong here. That I was an invader, an alien. That I would strike fear into the eyes of their kin.

I wasn't a bad person, I knew that. I wasn't an invader. I just wanted to be free from the suffering of my homeland, to go somewhere where I could live in peace and have people who really care for me.

After a lot of barbarians walked up behind the stand and spoke about me-though I had never seen them before-I was finally brought up there.

I tried to reason with them, tell them that I was a good person and I only desired freedom. I looked them in their eyes.

They held deep spite and contempt, hatred for what I was and not what I had done. I could practically read their minds.

I shook my head. They must've known what they were saying wasn't right. No being, no anything should think this way.

But I knew they were serious about how they felt. They felt it in their soul, burning like the sun they revolved around. Burning like all the stars in one gigantic hypernova. And that hypernova was intended to kill me.

I wanted to cry, knowing what would happen to me. I held back, realizing that doing so would give them an even better reason to insult me: being weak.

I wanted to make a run for it. I wanted to go back to Obulon. Obulon wasn't even as bad as here. At least you wouldn't get arrested on the spot, stabbed in the back and taken to a courtroom.

The babarin behind me smashed his tiny hammer over and over again as if he was crazy, then looked down at me. I looked back up, the tension shown in my eyes.

He smiled with content, realizing that I had no chance of success. He yelled at me in his strange tongue as guards came behind me and dragged me away once again. I was knocked out on the street and I woke up in another metal room.

I looked to the side, seeing nothing but more of the metal room. I looked to the other. Nothing. I sat down and looked into the ceiling.

I didn't care anymore. What was the point? There's no purpose to my life anymore if I'll just be held here.

I sighed and laid down. I thought about my planet. All those mean people...then you have my father. My father was one of them. He was bad and abusive. He constantly harassed me, physically and emotionally. He hit me, insulted me and sometimes even said that he hated me. Can you imagine your father hating you? Well, I see why he treated me like that now. I was a different kid, wasn't I? That explains why I'm here now. I'm too different. People don't like different. I deserve to be treated like this, no one who's different deserves to be treated normally. I see so in their eyes now.

Whatever isn't you, must be bad. Because whatever is you makes you comfortable. My father was right all along.

The metal door cracked open and a man came out with a translator. He spoke to me, saying: "You were found guilty. You're coming with us."

I was grabbed and taken towards a secret door that was right in front of me and I found myself screaming for help. Behind those screams laid a silent, near dead Shankien who only wanted to go home. Why couldn't they just send me home?

Why can't they take me home?! I don't understand these people! I felt so angry at the time.

I was taken underground through a tunnel in the hidden door, seeing the last of this crazy place for a long time.

Six years later and I was kept in an underground prison for probably the rest of my life. I still didn't understand, but what is there to understand?

They're good, we're bad. Nothing to it at all. I found out that this place was filled with aliens, some even being my kind. I learned from them that the reason they were taken here was because the surface level prisons were already full of aliens. Every single one. The people on surface level actually worked the worse jobs. Garbage and disease work.

I later found out (and the worst part) that the magazine was just a ploy so they could take escaping aliens and keep them on their horrible planet for the rest of their miserable lives. It all made sense now. Advertise your planet as another option, drive people to your cause.

Then, keep them as slaves for the rest of eternity. I am Shankien Jduniper. I have been imprisoned for seven years.