

ORIGINS

Book One of the Eclipse Collection

G R E G K R O J A C

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Please note that this book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2022 Greg Krojac

All rights reserved

Language: English

1

Eclipse fidgeted in her chair. She never enjoyed visits to the doctor — and there had been many such visits in her short six-and-a-half orbit lifespan. Her parents had done their best for her, she knew that. They'd taken her to various clinics and hospitals but the result was always the same. She was deaf — completely deaf — and nobody could help her. She looked around and saw her mother, her father, and the doctor in deep conversation but she heard nothing as they were facing away from her. She giggled silently as she imagined the three as goldfish with mouths gaping. As long as people were facing her head-on, she could lip-read what they were saying but her parents were facing slightly away from her and the doctor had his back to her, making her lip-reading skills redundant.

Written nouns, verbs, and adjectives filled her brain, swirling around like a word tornado until they settled and arranged themselves into fully-formed sentences. The doctor was explaining something to her parents.

“I believe your daughter's problem is down to psychological reasons. Physically, the components of her hearing system — the outer, middle, and inner ears — should function

perfectly but she remains profoundly deaf. It's my opinion that, for some unknown reason, Eclipse's brain is not translating the sound waves into audible information. It's the same story concerning her speech. I can find no reason why she can't make even rudimentary sounds. Her larynx appears to be in perfect condition."

Eclipse didn't understand all the words — some of them were too big and too complicated — but she knew the doctor was saying something important. Then she watched her father speak but she had no idea what he was saying. She could only receive telepathic messages from one person speaking at a time and it took a lot of concentration.

Her father looked concerned. Eclipse wished she could hear or even see what he was saying.

Turn around, Daddy. I want to see your lips.

The doctor started talking again and more text poured into Eclipse's head, danced around for a moment, and then settled into a recognizable sentence.

"I know it's not ideal but the only course of action I can suggest is to take a look at what's going on in her brain."

She watched as her mother asked a question but Eclipse had no idea what the question was. She'd have to rely on the doctor's response.

“I need your permission to perform exploratory surgery on your daughter’s brain. Unfortunately, there’s no non-invasive alternative. We need to cut into her brain and find out what’s going on.”

Eclipse’s mother turned to look at her daughter, tears in her feline-like eyes.

The words ‘cut into her brain’ sprinted back into Eclipse’s consciousness. She screamed silently.

Her fingers were a blur as she wrote furiously in the notepad app on her smartphone. She thrust the phone into her mother’s face.

I don’t want anyone cutting my head open.

Her father took the phone from his daughter’s hand and read the message aloud.

“I don’t want anyone cutting my head open.”

The doctor froze.

“How does she know what I said? She’s deaf. She can’t have heard me. I was facing away from her. She can’t even have read my lips.”

He paused and pointed at Eclipse’s parents.

“You knew.”

Her mother looked shocked by the accusation.

The doctor continued.

“You knew she’s a telepath. And you didn’t tell me.”

Eclipse's father responded.

"Would you have seen her, if we had?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Of course not. I don't want to lose my license."

He went to take his phone out of his coat pocket but Eclipse's father grasped him by the wrist.

"What are you doing?"

The doctor snatched his arm away.

"I'm reporting the presence of a telepath, of course."

The girl's mother rushed over to her daughter and held her close.

"Why? Why do you have to report her?"

The doctor's finger hovered over the call icon.

"You know very well why. All telepaths are to be rounded up and confined in a secure unit where they can't do any harm. I have no choice."

Eclipse's father spoke through gritted teeth as he tried to control himself.

"What harm can she do? She's six for scrag's sake,"

The doctor was not to be deterred. His finger moved closer to the call icon.

"She invaded my privacy. That's why she has to be interned, They all do."

Her mother pleaded with the medical man.

“She’s just a child. She doesn’t mean anyone any harm.”

“That’s what they all say until the child realizes how to take advantage of its ability.”

The doctor put his phone back in his pocket.

“Look, I’m not a monster. I’ll call them first thing tomorrow. At least you’ll have one last evening together before she’s taken from you.”

Eclipse was confused. The lips were moving too fast for her to interpret, causing her to lose her focus on the doctor's thoughts. She could see her parents were upset. She wanted to know what was going on. She typed a message and showed the phone to her parents.

What’s going on? What did I do wrong? Why is the doctor angry with me?

Her mother held her hand.

“It’s not your fault, honey. You didn’t mean to, but you read his mind. And it frightened him.” Eclipse typed another message.

Yes. I didn’t mean to. I was frightened.

“I know. And I understand. But you know using telepathy is against the law, don’t you? Remember, we explained it to you? Now the doctor wants to report you to The Authority.”

What will they do?

Eclipse's mother looked at her husband. He didn't need to be a telepath to know what she was thinking. He took his daughter's hand.

"They'll take you away from us and put you in prison."

But I want to stay with you. I want to stay with you. I want to stay with you.

A piercing whistling sound filled Eclipse's head. She stared at the doctor.

Blood started to seep from his nostrils and ears. He turned deathly white as if the bleeding had already exhausted the blood supply in his body. One could almost see his life leaving him as the blood flow quickened and became more intense. Finally, tears of blood streamed from his eyes and down his face and he collapsed in an exsanguinated heap on the floor of the consulting room.

Eclipse's father grabbed his family and ran out of the consulting room, not giving a second glance to the reception staff who tried to attract his attention.

Outside the building, he hailed a cab. As the three of them clambered inside, Eclipse's mother whispered breathlessly.

"What are we going to do, Neil? She killed the doctor."

Her husband settled in his seat.

“We’ve got to get Eclipse out of here. There’ll be a warrant out for her arrest within the hour.”

“But she’s only six orbits old, Neil.”

Neil turned in his seat to face his wife.

“Did you see what she did back there?”

He turned a little further so his back was facing his daughter and pretended to read a tourism pamphlet.

“She killed someone, Julie. What if she does that to someone else? What if she does that to us?”

He bit his bottom lip, not wanting the words to leave his mouth.

“She has to go. For her own safety.”

Eclipse showed her phone to her mother.

Has Daddy forgotten I can read his mind too, Mommy? Where do you want to send me? I don’t want to go. Please don’t make me.

2

Eclipse slept soundly on the back seat of the car, as soundly as any child would if it too had been given a tranquilizer dose. Not even the Road of Bones with its uneven surface could jolt her awake. Julie looked back at her daughter, knowing that this could be the last time she ever saw her. She'd promised herself she wouldn't cry but wasn't convinced that she could hold up her end of the bargain. She imagined Eclipse waking up, all alone, wondering where her parents were. She'd be lonely. She'd be afraid.

Julie turned back to face the front of the vehicle, a tear forming in the corner of her eye.

"I don't think I can do it, Neil."

Her husband kept his eyes on the road. To look at his wife might have weakened his resolve.

"We have to, honey. We have no choice."

"Can't we just keep her hidden?"

"It's too risky, Jules. And I've heard what they do in those internment camps. They experiment on the inmates. I'm not going to let that happen to our daughter."

Julie looked at the road ahead but only vaguely saw it.

"Six orbits six moons and seventeen days."

“What is?”

“Eclipse is. She’s six orbits six moons and seventeen days. And we’re about to leave her on her own. In the desert. A six orbiter. On her own.”

She wiped a tear from her eye.

“What kind of monsters are we, Neil?”

Neil sighed.

“If she stays with us, she’ll never be safe.”

Julie’s voice rose.

“And you think she’ll be safer in the desert?”

Neil nodded.

“I do, actually. There’s too much risk of her exposing herself in the city. Too many eyes looking out for telepaths. Too many people willing to sell their grandmother for a few thousand fi-creds.”

Julie glanced back at Eclipse again.

“But to leave her alone. What’ll become of her? She could die of exposure.”

“I’m sure she won’t be alone for long. Somebody will find her and look after her.”

“Who, Neil? Who?”

“I don’t know. The desert’s full of people.”

“So, let me get this right. We’re abandoning our only daughter in the hope that someone will find her? That’s the great plan is it?”

“You know that if she stays in the city,

someone's bound to turn her in. One hundred thousand credits can buy a lot of... well, anything. That's the reward for telepaths these days."

He paused to let his words sink in.

"Look, there's nothing I'd like more than to have her at home with us but we both know that's impossible. She wouldn't be safe."

Julie knew her husband was right but it didn't mean she had to like it. Eclipse wouldn't be safe in the city. Eventually, somebody — maybe even a friend — would tell The Authority about her. No, it would be too dangerous to keep her at home. They'd tell their friends that she was staying with an aunt in another city. Kids do that all the time. Nobody would think it odd.

Neil pointed to a small building on the horizon.

"Look. There's a house over there. Let's go check it out."

It was hard to miss, really. There was nothing else around for miles, save for a few half-starved trees and some boulders strewn haphazardly around. Other than that, it was sand, sand, and more sand.

Neil stopped the car about a hundred yards from the structure. He got out of the car, closed the driver's door, and poked his head back through the window.

“I’ll check the place out. Make sure it’s safe. Maybe we can leave Eclipse here.”

As he got closer, Neil could see that the building wasn’t so much a house as a shoddily constructed shelter. He knocked on the door.

“Hello? Anybody home?”

No answer.

He looked above the door and saw a familiar carving. That made him feel a little more comfortable.

He tried turning the door handle. It released the catch. The door wasn’t locked so he stepped inside.

From the somewhat neglected appearance of the outside — patches of discolored wall where whitewash had succumbed to the burning suns and dropped off — he wasn’t surprised to see that the interior was very basically furnished. A table with a fruit bowl containing three dwarf Jallow fruits and one place-setting of a knife, a fork, and a dinner plate. A green curtain separated the room. He pulled it back and saw a bed with a mattress that had clearly seen better days yet appeared to be clean. That was noticeable about the whole place. It may have been poorly furnished and with no home comforts but it was spotlessly clean — quite an achievement considering the house was in the

middle of the desert.

He walked back to the car and opened the rear door, intending to bundle his still sleeping daughter up in his arms.

“Somebody is living there — they’re not there at the moment — but there are definitely signs of habitation.”

Julie had reservations.

“What’s it like?”

Neil thought for a moment as to how best to describe it.

“Basic. That’s the best way to describe it. No frills but it has the basics. Y’know table, chairs, cupboard, bed, bathtub —“

So far, Julie was not impressed.

“Running water? Toilet?”

Neil shook his head.

“Honey, it’s in the middle of the desert. How’s it going to have running water?”

“So no sanitation then?”

“No. No sanitation.”

“And how do we know if this person — whoever they are — will look after her?”

“We don’t. We need to put faith in the gods. We have to trust that Suncé and Sunon will look after her. I did see a carving of the overlapping suns above the door, so whoever lives there is obviously a follower.”

Julie felt a little better for knowing that they would be leaving their daughter in the care of a fellow disciple but she still had reservations.

“What happens when Eclipse wakes up? I mean, what if she wakes up before the homeowner gets home and she panics? She might come looking for us. And when she can’t find us, she could get lost and die of starvation.”

She stroked Eclipse’s hair.

“I can’t do it, Neil. I just can’t abandon our little girl. Take us home.”

Neil leaned into the car and took Eclipse into his arms.

“And I’m not taking her home to die, because that’s what will surely happen if we go back with her. The Authority won’t care that she’s only a child. All they’ll see is a Path, a killer Path. If we take her back home we’ll be signing her death warrant.”

Julie’s eyes welled up, the tears somehow accentuated by the transformation of her pupils from a vertical slit to a circle.

Neil continued.

“Our doctor’s appointment will have been documented in the system. They’ll know we were there. They’ll test us to see if we’re Paths. When they see that we’re not, there’ll only be one other possibility — that Eclipse did it. And

there's no way she's going to fool a Path test.

“We have two choices. She stays here and she stands a chance of living. She comes home with us and she almost certainly dies.”

He looked into his wife's eyes.

“What's it going to be?”

He didn't wait for an answer. He knew that what he was doing was right.

3

The old woman nudged the door open, her hands occupied by the large basket of Jallow fruit she was carrying. It was possible to survive in the desert if you knew what you were doing, and she'd had decades of practice. Any doctors would probably have scolded her for her monotonous diet — not that she ever visited any doctors — but Jallow fruits were the only thing that grew in any numbers within a five-mile radius.

She never locked her door for she had no need to. Her closest neighbors lived about eight miles away and she and the Korkov family had an unwritten agreement that they wouldn't encroach on each other's territory.

She shuffled inside the ramshackle building and headed straight for the table. She stopped suddenly and looked at the fruit bowl on the table.

"I could've sworn there was three Jallow fruits in that dish when I went out."

Although there was nobody else in her house to hear her, she always spoke her thoughts out loud, believing that if she never used her vocal cords they'd seize up and render her mute.

She placed the basket of fruit on the table.

"Maybe one of them Korkov boys snuck in

and stole one.”

She shook her head.

“Nah. There’s two of them lads. There’s only one Jallow fruit missing. They’d’ve stolen at least two. Probably all three.”

She turned around to see if anything else was missing. All looked in order.

She chuckled.

“Nothing much in here to nick anyway. More likely to take pity on me and leave something behind.”

She drew back the green curtain, wanting to lay down on her bed and relax.

“What the scrag?”

On the bed was a child, sleeping. A child who couldn’t have been any older than six or seven.

“Who the scrag are you? Blimmin’ Goldilocks?”

When the humans first left Terra — Earth to you and me — they’d brought their culture, including fairy tales, with them to Duoterra.

The old woman went over to the bed, unsure as to how she should react. She shook the child who simply turned over and carried on sleeping.

The woman went back to the kitchen, murmuring to herself.

“She can’t have come here on her own. Too young for that. Someone must’ve dumped her

here.”

She left the curtain open so she could see when her uninvited guest woke up.

“Who would do something like that? Abandon a young child in a stranger’s house? S’pose they must’ve had their reasons but I don’t know why anyone would want to leave a child with me. I mean I’m eighty-six orbits old, I think. Or is it eighty-five?”

She paused, trying to remember her exact age.

“Don’t matter really. I’m old, that’s all I’m sayin’. Too old to bring up kids, anyways. I’ve done my bit.”

She sat down on one of two wooden chairs, helped herself to one of the two remaining Jarrow fruits from the fruit bowl, and bit into it. It had a curious taste to it, a flavor that belied its appearance. It looked like one of the sea urchins that lived in the planet’s oceans but its green spines were soft and mushy and could be swallowed with ease. She’d read somewhere that Jarrow fruit tasted like strawberries — whatever a strawberry was.

There was movement under the cover that the woman had put over Eclipse before retiring to the kitchen. The child was waking up.

Eclipse’s eyes suddenly flashed open and she

sat bolt upright on the bed. She blinked as the daylight entered her eyes. She hadn't been blessed with the vertically slit pupils of her parents and so it took a second or so longer to get acclimatized to the sudden influx of daylight. She fumbled around on the bed, looking for her cell phone.

A very old woman was standing in the room. Eclipse looked at the woman with eyes full of panic.

*Who are you? Where's Mom? Where's Dad?
Where am I?*

Of course, the old woman couldn't hear a word that Eclipse was thinking. She picked the phone up from the table and waved it at the child.

"Is this what you're lookin' for?"

Eclipse thought of running over and snatching the phone from the old lady but didn't want to risk the phone being damaged or broken. It was her lifeline to the outside world. She nodded frantically.

The old woman shuffled over to the bed. She handed the phone to Eclipse.

"There you go. I weren't gonna keep it. I even charged it for you. I used to have a phone — don't have one now though. No point. No signal. But I do have a solar charger so I charged it for

you. Just in case, like.”

Eclipse snatched the phone from her and tapped the touch screen rapidly. She showed the screen to the old woman, who took an old pair of glasses from her apron.

“What does that say? Oh, now I see. Who am I? I’m Mayane but folks call me Auntie May. Well, when I see other people that’s what they call me. Auntie May. At least that’s what they call me to me face. Dunno what they call me behind me back.”

Eclipse wrote another question.

Where am I?

“That’s easy. You’re at my house. In my bed, actually. But don’t worry, I don’t need it yet, No idea how you got here, though. That’s a mystery. D’you know how you got here?”

Eclipse shook her head.

Auntie May nodded.

“Nor me. That makes two of us then.”

Eclipse’s initial panic dissolved quickly — there was something about Auntie May’s tone that was soothing and comforting. The old lady smiled at her guest.

“Who are you, then, love?”

Eclipse showed her the screen of her phone.

My name’s Eclipse.

Auntie May smiled again.

“Eclipse? That’s a pretty name.”

Eclipse tapped the screen again and held the phone up so that Auntie May could read it. The old woman cleaned her glasses on her apron, returned them to the bridge of her nose, and peered at the new message.

“You’re six? That’s nice. And I’m guessing you can’t speak, eh?”

Eclipse shook her head.

“But you can hear though?”

Eclipse shook her head again.

Auntie May looked at the child with pity.

“That’s too bad. But you must be a smart girl ‘cos you obviously read and write very well.”

Eclipse looked sad as she typed a new message.

Can you take me home to my mommy and daddy?

Auntie May felt terrible having to say no.

“I don’t know who they are, love. Or why they left you here. Do you?”

Mommy is Julie and Daddy is Neil. We live in the Blue City.

“Do you know why they left you here? At my house?”

I think it’s because I killed someone.

Auntie May’s expression changed from a friendly smiling face to a look of concern.

“Who did you kill, Eclipse?”

I killed a doctor. I didn't mean to. It just happened.

Auntie May looked at the child before her. She thought to herself that it must have been an accident. That sweet face couldn't hide a malicious soul, surely?

Eclipse showed her the phone.

Yes. It was an accident. I heard a noise in my head and then the doctor collapsed. He was covered in blood.

Auntie May looked at the girl.

"I didn't say anything."

Eclipse's fingers tapped on the screen's keyboard.

The doctor said I was a tele something.

"A telepath?"

Yes. A telepath.

Auntie May turned around to compose herself after this revelation. Eclipse couldn't stay at her house. Not for long. And now she understood why her parents abandoned her. Not necessarily the right thing to do in her book, but she did understand.

Eclipse started to cry. She pointed a tear-moist screen at the old woman who had turned back to face her.

But I don't understand. Why did my parents throw me away?

"They didn't throw you away, love, but

telepaths are prohibited in the Blue City.”

What does prohibited mean, Auntie May?

“It means that they’re banned. Not allowed. The Authority puts them in prison.”

That’s horrible. But they let them go home again soon, don’t they?

“No Eclipse. They don’t. And some...”

The old woman wasn’t sure if she should continue.

Please tell me. If you think it, I’ll be able to read your thoughts anyway so you may as well tell me.

“Sometimes they kill telepaths. Your mommy and daddy must love you very much to bring you here so you won’t get caught or killed. They were saving your life.”

Auntie May took Eclipse’s hand.

“You can stay here tonight but tomorrow I’ll take you somewhere safer, somewhere where people are like you.”

Can’t I stay with you, Auntie May?

“Sorry, love. I’m way too old to be raising a child. But these people will look after you. And they’re much younger than I am.”

She took some Jarrow fruits from her basket.

“Do you like Jarrow fruits?”

Yes. I love them.

“That’s good ‘cos that’s all I’ve got to eat.”