

Futures

The fortune teller of Kepler Station

It's written in the stars. **By Alice Towey**



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

I was just packing up the crystal ball when the Klem rang my doorbell.

I love helping new customers; so even though I was running late for dinner with Dad, I smoothed my skirt and smiled. "Please, come in."

The Klem oozed across the threshold, cilia rippling. One of its pseudopods clutched a cheap translator box, the kind that speaks all in a rush.

"Hello I would like to know my future are you still open?"

"Of course!" I gestured to the low table in the back of the shop and followed as the Klem flowed over the rug. This was a first; Kepler Station gets a lot of traffic, but most of my customers are humans, like me. I wondered what had brought the Klem to my door.

It drew its mass into a pear-shape next to the table. *"I saw your sign can you really tell the future?"*

Straight to business. "I read fortunes, yes." *"How no one can know the future."*

"I know a few different techniques. I do crystal-ball visioning and takip-seed scatter, but my speciality is reading tarot cards."

The cilia waved rapidly. *"I do not know any of these things."*

"Let's do tarot then. The cost is five standards credits." I gathered my deck from its silk-lined box and sat across from the Klem. "What's your name, friend?"

"Gearcut Brom."

"Welcome, Gearcut." As I shuffled, I tried to remember what I'd learnt about Klem culture in school. The first name was something trade related, and the last name referred to the home planet. "You're a long way from home."

Gearcut didn't respond. This was going to be tricky – with humans, I can usually guess why they've come into my shop and offer some advice or encouragement; but I had no idea

what would cause a Klem to visit a fortune teller.

I set out the first card. "Three of Planets. This suit represents family. It means separation from loved ones."

Gearcut didn't respond. Didn't Klems reproduce asexually? I hastened to lay the next card: the Red Dwarf. "This card signifies health. You seem to be ... all good there? All your cilia intact? Right, let's move on."

I placed the Ten of Ships. "You've been travelling a great deal recently. Too much."

This provoked a response; Gearcut shifted its bulk. *"How did you learn to do this thing?"*

"My grandmother taught me."

Gearcut swayed, and a wave rippled its cilia like a breeze over water. *"A family business, then. This must be an honourable human profession?"*

"Not exactly." My father was probably at this very moment pacing in his kitchen, arms

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crossed, annoyed by my lack of punctuality. He had long since given up on me taking over the *real* family business.

I pulled out the next card, an art nouveau illustration of rocks hurtling through space. “The Asteroid Belt. This card represents work, professional opportunities.”

Here, the Klem drew itself up into a slender, gelatinous tower, waving vigorously. It seems I had hit a nerve, if Klem had them.

“Did you come to Kepler Station looking for a job?”

The cilia began to lash. “*Yes I need a job no one will hire me though I am a skilled mechanic.*”

I blinked. “A mechanic? You don’t say.”

“*Yes I came to Kepler because I read that the station needed mechanics, but the trip took five weeks and now all the positions have been filled.*”

I winced in sympathy, but the gears in my own mind were already turning. An idea hit me. Glancing down, I flicked through the deck looking for a particular card. When I found it, I set it down on the table with a flourish.

“The Hangar! Huh. You know, this looks like the commercial hangar here. No really, it does! See that blue flooring? It’s just like the stuff in

Kepler’s hangars.”

Gearcut shifted its bulk closer to the table. It occurred to me that I didn’t know if Klems had vision, exactly, as I couldn’t see any eyes.

“This ship looks familiar,” I tapped the card. “I think I saw it yesterday, in Berth 33. It’s a sign! You should go there tomorrow morning and ask about a job!”

“*I should go to Berth 33 ...*”

“Yes!”

“*... tomorrow morning ...*”

“First thing!”

“*... and ask for a job?*”

I couldn’t read Klem body language, but I was familiar with disbelief. “Absolutely.”

Gearcut sank back into a blob. A small appendage held out a credit chit.

“Trust me,” I said.

After the Klem left, I turned off the lights, locked up, and took a public elevator down to the main commercial hangar.

Dad was docked at Berth 33, spending a few days on station between cargo runs. His shipping business took him all over the system, but we made a point of meeting up whenever he passed through the station. As expected, when

I walked in, he was pacing in the tiny galley.

“Hi, Dad! It smells delicious!” The aroma of spiced grains and grilled protein greeted me.

Dad wrapped his arms around me. “You’re late.”

“Sorry about that. I had a client.”

“Hmmpf.” He pulled a plate from the cupboard and handed it to me, gesturing at the pots on the stove. “Another fool separated from his money.”

“Dad, not again.” I lifted the lid from a pot and sniffed: green sauce with lots of garlic, my favourite. I scooped sauce and grains onto my plate. “Actually, I have a little favour to ask. Remember how you said you needed a new mechanic?”

He cocked his head at me and raised one bushy eyebrow. I grinned, already feeling the satisfaction of helping another customer find their destiny.

Alice Towey is a writer of speculative fiction and poetry. Her work has appeared in *Asimov’s* and *Little Blue Marble*. She is a graduate of the Viable Paradise writing workshop.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Alice Towey reveals the inspiration behind *The fortune teller of Kepler Station*

When I was a teenager, I bought a deck of Tarot cards for fun. Friends and I would play with the cards during slumber parties, or over late night conversations fuelled by adolescent drama. Decades later, a friend who is an artist created her own deck, and her beautiful illustrations reminded me of giggling with my friends at 1 a.m. as we tried to read the cards.

It got me to thinking about how a tarot deck might evolve in the future. I often wonder what an alien species would make of different aspects of human cultures; would they think it’s weird that we have pets? How would they react to the Internet? On a deeper level, I wonder how they might view fundamental questions of fate and free will. I thought it would be fun to imagine how someone from a different planet might react to having their fortune read, and how one would go about doing such a reading.

