

# Zed's Order

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Summary: Bureau Thirty-Nine was not the only agency with an interest in the space craft that crashed in a Kansas field, and the child contained within.

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"Damn it," the man swore under his breath, as he watched the scene unfold.

His team had really screwed up this time — a rare thing, to be sure, but that hardly mattered. His job had been to retrieve the space craft that headquarters had been tracking — one that had been steadily drawing toward Earth from deep space for some time. How long, no one was quite certain. It had first come to their attention almost a month ago. Predicting where the vessel would land had been time-consuming, as the craft had seemed to constantly readjust its course. When it had finally become apparent that the ship was heading toward Kansas, he and his team had left immediately.

"We're too late. Didn't you check the map?" the man growled as he peered through a powerful set of binoculars.

A man and a woman stood in the light of the fire from the crash site. The woman reached into the craft and pulled out an infant. She appeared to coo over the child before bringing it to her breast in a comforting snuggle. Even from his distance, the man could see that the two were smitten with the child, and that retrieving the baby would be difficult.

"Sorry," his partner apologized for the fifteenth time in ten minutes, as though it could help change things.

The man sighed. He couldn't totally blame PJ. It was *dark* out on those backwoods, barely-there roads. It wasn't totally a surprise that they had gotten a little lost.

"You wanna go in there and neutralize them?" his partner asked.

The man sighed. "Let me call it in, see what they want us to do."

He pulled out his mobile phone — a gift from some *very* out of town friends — and pushed the first number on the speed dial. One day, he knew, this technology would leak and everyone on the planet would have one. In the meantime, it was kind of fun, knowing he held a piece of the future in his hand. He listened as the device rang three times, then, finally, a voice picked up.

"X? It's K," the man said as he heard the click, indicating that the phone had been answered.

"Did you get it?" asked the man on the other end.

"Sorry, no."

"You assured me it would be handled."

"I know," he said, kicking a clod of dirt.

"What happened?" The man, X, sounded annoyed and impatient.

"It was intercepted by a young couple."

"And?"

"From what I can see, the inhabitant is a baby. A perfectly ordinary looking human child."

"You know it's not."

"I know," K said. "Do you want me to proceed?"

X paused. "Do you know who picked it up?"

"PJ ran the plates. Car belongs to a Jonathan and Martha Kent. A childless farm couple. Upstanding citizens. Got into a little trouble marching for the civil rights movement. Nothing serious."

K could almost hear the other man's mind turning the information over. He waited as patiently as he could, but inside, his guts were twisted into anxious knots. He and PJ were still fairly new to the Men in Black. He hadn't yet gone into the field and neutralized anyone. He especially hadn't had to snatch an infant out of the hands of two people who, from their quick research, would likely never have children of their own, biologically or not. He didn't really want to make tonight his first time.

He heard the clicking of a computer keyboard on the other end of the phone. X hummed to himself as he read over what K assumed was the Kent's information.

"Anything suspicious? Weapons and the like?"

K raised his binoculars again. "Nothing. Looks like the capsule held only the child."

"Then leave them be," X finally said. "Pull your men out of there and head back to headquarters. We have a lot of work to do."

"What'd you have in mind?" K asked.

"I want to keep a close eye on the situation. That means getting a team in place to ensure that adoption papers go through if and when the Kents file to keep this child."

"A team." K mused.

"More specifically, *you*," X said, confirming his suspicions. "You are going to make sure these farmers maintain possession of this life-form. Understood?"

K couldn't help the small gulp from emerging in his throat, though he thought he did a commendable job of hiding it. "Got it. We'll be on the first flight back for briefing."

He hung up the phone and slipped it back in his pocket. PJ looked at him, perhaps trying to read his expression.

"So?" he finally asked.

"Everyone, pull back," K ordered. "We're heading back to New York tonight. X's orders."

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"Are you crazy?" Zed asked calmly as X pressed the button to sever the phone connection. As X's future replacement within the Men in Black agency, he'd listened in on the whole thing via speakerphone. "You aren't going to bring that kid in and process him?"

"To what purpose?" X asked, leaning back in his chair a little.

"He's an alien. No alien lands on this planet without coming through us."

"Yes, that's true. But what are we going to do with an infant?" X asked evenly. "We can't question him. An infant isn't going to smuggle in illegal weapons or intergalactic drugs with him."

"Are you really blind enough to think so?" Zed asked, folding his hands over his lap.

"Did you miss the part where K said the ship was empty but for the child?" X asked, his irritation growing. "Or do you believe an infant 'mule' would be allowed to crash land without one of his own waiting for him?"

Zed didn't answer, his face reddening at the chastisement. He shifted a little in his seat.

"What then? We just let some farmers raise an alien as one of their own?" Zed asked after a moment of silence, as though the

pause could wipe away X's admonishment.

"What else *can* we do?" X sighed. "We're overworked as it is. Immigration is up three-hundred percent, what with the refugees from Klaaxis and Pargoth streaming in to avoid the war between the two planets. And then the quarantine from the virus brought in by the prince of Aranos..." He let his voice trail off. "What are we going to do with an infant? We can't raise it here. And we aren't an intergalactic adoption agency. We don't have the resources to find a suitable family. And not knowing where the child is from...how can we be assured we wouldn't wind up placing him with someone from a planet who'd like to see him dead?"

"That's not our problem," Zed firmly said.

"It *is* our problem. *We* are the gatekeepers for alien life on this planet," X argued, poking his index finger down on his desk, hard. "*Especially* when missteps like that could lead to war."

"You're putting a lot of weigh on one child," Zed observed.

X shook his head. "I can't afford not to. You'll learn to do the same, in time. For all I know, this child could be a king, or prince, or other dignitary. No," he said, shaking his head again. "I *won't* risk not treating this child as though he were truly important."

Zed nodded thoughtfully. "So, what then?"

X shrugged. "K will process the child when he sets up the adoption paperwork. We'll keep an eye on things as he grows. If need be, we step in and let him know of the MIB."

"You're not going to say anything now?"

"No. No Earthling outside of those who wear the black can ever know about us. You know that, Zed."

"Yes, but they already know they have an alien on their hands. No normal kid just drops out of the sky like that," Zed said, scratching an itch on his chin.

"Maybe so, but that doesn't mean they need to know that their new child isn't all that unique."

"And what about if the Bureau finds out?" Zed asked. "You know their mission."

"R knows how to cover his tracks. He's out there with K now. Bureau Thirty-Nine will never know about this."

Zed shook his head, his mood darkened by the evil-intentioned Bureau Thirty-Nine. For too long, the zealots in that organization had thought it their sacred duty to destroy any alien life form that landed on the planet. They were nothing more than a mob of would-be-murderers, as far as he was concerned. Unlike the MIB, they sought to destroy what was different, instead of embracing it and all of the wonderful technology that the inhabitants of other planets often brought with them to Earth. Hell, if Edison hadn't landed on Earth when he did, the planet might never have figured out how to harness the power of electricity. They'd still be living in the dark, literally.

"Let's hope that's the case," he said in a soft voice as he stood to leave.

"Oh, Zed?"

"Yes?"

"You've been shadowing me for what? Two years now? Three?"

"Two years, nine months, two weeks and a day," he rattled off as he checked the date on his watch.

"This one is all yours."

"Excuse me?" He couldn't have heard that right, could he?

"You heard me. I'm placing K and his team under your supervision. Oh, don't worry. I'll be checking everything, to make sure no mistakes happen. But the adoption of this kid all happens under *your* orders. You may as well get some practice in."

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"I *knew* this was a bad idea," Zed grumbled as the images covered every news station. "Try another one."

The alien twins manning the control panel of the huge

monitor in the center of the floor pushed a couple more buttons, skimming through a few more news channels.

"Ugh!" Zed cried, throwing his hands up in frustration. "Go back to LNN."

The twins complied, speaking their own, unique language. LNN appeared back on the screen, images of the sabotaged space station spilling across the entirety of the screen. But that wasn't what held everyone's concern and attention. It was the flying man in the garish blue, red, and yellow suit that was the cause for everyone's fear and Zed's annoyance.

"I *told* X, back when that kid first crashed onto this planet that it wasn't a good idea to watch from a distance. I told him we should warn the parents about the MIB's existence. Now look at this mess. Everyone on the planet knows that an alien walks amongst us now."

He looked pointedly at K.

K ignored the look. "Don't look at me. I just did what I was told to do. What *you* ordered me to do back then."

"What X made me order you to do, you mean. We need damage control," Zed said, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "We can't neutralize the entire planet. This Clark Kent guy was *your* responsibility, K. What do you suggest?"

K shrugged. "Leave him be."

"Have you gotten into the Solarian beer and lost your mind?" Zed barked gruffly.

"Of course not. You know I hate that stuff. Listen, I know it sounds strange but, leave Kent be. The population will be so focused on the one alien they know about, they'll be even blinder to the ones that surround them every day. They won't stop to question the quirks of their waiter or cab driver. They aren't flying around in a flashy suit, so of course they aren't an alien."

"You really think that's going to be the case?" Zed asked, raising a skeptical eyebrow.

K shrugged again. "Why not. Up until thirteen minutes ago, no one on this planet would have pegged that reporter — or anyone, for that matter — as an alien. And you know why? Because he blends in. Nothing about Kent stands out as anything other than perfectly ordinary. Just like every other alien on this planet."

"Hmm," Zed said, mulling it over.

"Of course, it's your call. If you want me to bring Kent in, I'll leave for Metropolis right now," K said, his voice betraying no emotion at all. His gaze remained fixed on the screen.

Zed thought about it. On the one hand, he could bring Kent in. He could expose the existence of the Men in Black to what was easily the most powerful alien being he'd ever come across — and that was saying a lot, considering that the list of aliens who'd crossed his path since he'd joined the MIB easily left a million in the dust. He could issue warnings to the man. He could threaten to expose his true identity to the world, if he continued to appear as a mysterious, caped figure.

On the other hand, what was the point? Though the MIB were fully aware of the powers Kent possessed, and though they knew him to be a well-mannered, even-tempered, morally-upstanding citizen, there was no telling what he might do if he felt his identity and life were in danger. With such incredible powers at his beck and call, it wouldn't take much to completely destroy the MIB, if he wanted to. He wouldn't even need to wreck the building, Zed mused to himself. His words as a reporter could and *would* cause far more damage. And that was even *if* he allowed the MIB to bring him in at all.

And besides, he'd been seen already. Whoever this character was that Kent had created and introduced to the world, everyone on the planet would already know about it. News like this always traveled faster than one could imagine. Bringing in Kent would serve no purpose. It couldn't possibly reverse the world's new knowledge that an alien walked amongst them.

Zed sighed as he made his decision.

"We'll leave him be...for now," he said with finality. "But keep an eye on him, K. If he makes one false move...shows himself to be anything but a force for good...or makes anyone suspect that Earth harbors more than one alien..."

"What?" K asked, finally breaking his gaze away from the news footage on the monitor. "There's nothing on this planet that can hurt him, let alone subdue him."

"Nothing we've found *yet*," Zed corrected him. "There's got to be something out there. There always is."

K sighed. "True enough."

Zed knew he was right. There was always some substance out there that could bring down any alien on the planet. An allergy to sapphires, a tendency to melt when hit with salt water, plasma guns, sunlight, blowtorches, even ordinary bullets, in some cases. Clark Kent, though still of an unknown planet, was no different. He would have a weakness. They just hadn't discovered it. Yet.

"You know the Bureau is going to be on this new character Kent's created tonight," Zed grumbled.

"I know," K said flatly. "I'll keep an eye on it."

"Don't step in unless you have to," Zed warned. "The last thing I want is this whole mess to blow up on us and expose the organization to the public's knowledge. The only reason why this planet can function with alien life on it is because the people do not know about it or the people who work to keep it that way. If word got out..."

"Mass panic, rioting, all out war, the end of life as we know it. Yeah, I know," K replied evenly. "Trust me, Zed. I'll keep things under control."

Zed nodded gruffly. Then, "How do you think the world is going to react to knowing that there's an alien flying around out there?"

"Hard to say," K said, putting his hands into his pockets and appearing to consult the floor before speaking. "He's already shown that he's a force for good, by helping the space program." He looked back up into his boss' face again. "I think most people will be okay with him. Some will be afraid, sure. But they'll come around, in time. People like Trask and the rest of Bureau Thirty-Nine will always find an excuse to hate and fear those who are different from themselves. And, if Kent makes a habit out of flying around in what I can only assume is spandex, do good deeds and righting wrongs, the criminal element will come to make him an enemy."

Zed nodded again, thoughtfully. He let the conversation lapse into silence. Then a thought hit him. For the first time all day, he cracked a smile as he looked over at K.

"How long do you think it'll take Lois Lane to realize that she's working next to this new alien hero?" he asked, watching as Kent flew off with the Daily Planet's top reporter in his arms.

K smiled in return. "You know, I think we could have fun with this."

"Yeah? How so?"

"An office pool," K said, his grin widening. "Five bucks a guess, winner takes all the cash."

Zed bit back a laugh. "Very good. I'll even give you the first pick, since it was your idea."

"I'll get back to you on it," K said, "but, to answer your question, it'll be awhile, is my guess."

Zed arched an eyebrow. "She's a damn good reporter, K."

K nodded once. "I know. And that's precisely *why* it'll be awhile before she figures it out. She'll be so wrapped up in learning about the alien that was just revealed to the world, that she'll never look twice at the man standing next to her."

"Perhaps," Zed said in a noncommittal way. "Perhaps. Now, get out there. Monitor the situation. Get the feel of the people."

"Zed, we're in New York. Nothing bothers the people in this town. One of the great things about this city."

"Then go to Metropolis, or Gotham, or Chicago. Just make sure that this doesn't blow up in our faces. That's an order."

K merely nodded. He'd been following Clark Kent for a lifetime. He could follow this as-of-yet-unnamed alien superhero too.

THE END