

An Alien Taking a Road Trip Across Lebanon

“Report 116. Touching down in 5 minutes. Location commonly known as: North Lebanon. Permission to land?”

An echoey voice responds; “Permission granted Unit 67. Let’s hope this one isn’t so bad.”

Unit 67 was doubtful. “The other regions were in complete disarray. It’s like the entire species just gave up. I don’t expect much, considering the area here was documented to have had conflicts even between members of a single familial Unit.”

“We all have a job to do Unit 67. Just get it over with so we can move on to the next planet.”

“Alright, I’m making contact. I’ll send the report as soon as it’s over. Unit 67 out. “

The ship landed peacefully and without any resistance, which thoroughly confused 67. The people in other countries immediately reacted with violence and tried to harm it.

Unit 67 started walking along the highway and noted the different houses and architecture it could see in the distance. It didn’t take long for the first local specimen to appear.

The human was riding in what seemed to be a fairly outdated vehicle. He slowed down to a stop near 67 and climbed out of the vehicle.

67 was ready for a barrage of yelling and questions as panic sets in, but instead the human stood a few meters away and stared quizzically.

“What? Are you not weirded out by me?” Unit 67 blurted out, for the first time feeling confused since coming to earth.

“Why would I be? You just look a bit different, maybe too green, and your voice is kind of funny. What are you doing here?” Said the human.

“I’m filling out a report on Earth and its inhabitants and I’m visiting your country now.”

“Oh really? That’s interesting. Why don’t you hop in? I’m going for a long drive either way, I’ll give you a tour.”

67 was even more befuddled, though it couldn’t see a reason why not to join this peculiar human.

As soon as the duo were in the car, the human asked, “Oh by the way, what’s your name?”

“They call me Unit 67, and you?”

“George Khabbaz the 4th. Nice to meet you, 67.”

“You too.”

As soon as George started driving, a melodious and calm song began playing on the radio. 67 recognized the style and a couple of lines in the song, so it started unconsciously humming along.

“Oh, you know Fayrouz too?” asked George.

“Yes, though if memory serves me correctly, this song was released more than 350 years ago. How is it still on the radio?”

“Habibi, no one forgets Fayrouz. She’s a part of our culture, and we Lebanese people have a hard time letting go of the past.”

“I can see that,” said 67, as it pointed to what seemed to be a group of humans having an argument, an argument that they were themselves tired of having. It felt like the conversation itself was an ancient script, made up of lines they had memorized and passed down through the generations.

George looked over to where 67 was pointing, and a knowing smile was painted on his face.

“Ah yes, we sometimes have small quibbles like that, but we also learned to accept our differences and move forward with a compromise.” As if on cue, George said the last word of that sentence and the previously mentioned group were now tightly connected in a bizarre collection of laughs and hugs.

67 couldn’t believe its three pairs of eyes. All over the world, communities were being torn apart by trivial misunderstandings and arguments, and here were the Lebanese completely unfazed by it. In fact, it even seemed like the people were more in sync than before.

George continued, “In the short but not uneventful history since the independence of Lebanon, we had been plagued by a consistent and undeniable rage amongst ourselves. We got to a point where two siblings in the same family would have a fallout, or in some extreme cases kill one another, due to reasons we now know to be insignificant.”

That’s what I said, thought 67. “So, what happened?”

“We realized it wasn’t worth it. End of story.”

“That’s it? Years of fighting just screeched to a halt?”

“Well, yes. We had a few hiccups here and there sure, but we managed.”

George and 67 continued their drive towards Beirut, and as they got closer 67 started noticing the more modern and clearly technologically advanced infrastructure and architecture. This would’ve been a normal sight for the alien if it wasn’t for one thing.

The nature.

The abundant greenery.

67 was used to seeing advanced cities and civilizations around earth, but it was almost never accompanied by this lush and unmistakable sign of life.

It wondered, “How is it that you managed to keep this ludicrous amount of plants alive while still advancing into the next technological age?”

It seemed George was delighted by the question.

“After we as an entire community decided to move on and solve the persistent issues of this country, something similar to a ‘social revolution’ started.” George spoke with pride in his voice.

“You see, there was a time when most Lebanese people wanted to leave and travel abroad to find a stable and reliable foundation to build their futures on. This led to an incredible number of immigrants. People leaving their loved ones, their family and friends, their neighbors, their country, were getting on planes almost every single day. At some point, the opposite happened. Those same people, who have succeeded abroad and achieved wonders in fields ranging from business and commerce all the way to medicine and technology, came back, and with them came their expertise.”

67 was listening intently to what seemed to be an epic tale spanning hundreds of years in the making.

“In no time, entire cities were built. Beirut became a center for humongous scientific and touristic enterprises, as it once was a long time ago. Poverty was almost non-existent as tens of thousands of job opportunities opened, and a blindingly bright future was in reach.”

“But what does that have to do with the environment?” 67 was becoming increasingly engrossed and intrigued.

“Dear 67, do you know what is in the center of our flag? It’s the cedar tree. We value the importance of nature in Lebanon. It’s a big part of what it means to live here, and the immigrants that came back know that. Every piece of metal and every foundation was placed and constructed with the environment in mind. Additionally, nature reserves all over Lebanon, especially the ones that were left without any proper maintenance for years, started receiving widespread care and attention. We realized, though maybe a bit late, that we should’ve been more aware and active in preserving this natural treasure.”

“I see, that is interesting.”

A few hours later, the duo was leaving Beirut and headed towards the South. 67 felt a weird sense of duty to verify what George mentioned earlier, mainly because it seemed too good to be true. On one hand, humanity as a whole kept repeating these standards and slogans of unity and self-preservation while constantly warring with each other over selfish gains, and on the other hand, the people of Lebanon were able to reach said standards in aspects that might appear to be contradictory.

This tiny country on the side of the Mediterranean was capable of achieving peace through variety, stability through experience, modernity through history, freedom through tradition, acceptance through difference, and wisdom through simplicity.

After a lengthy scenic road trip, 67 and George went further inland and traveled up mountains to reach a certain vantage point. The view below included the entirety of Beirut and the vast sea in front of it. The sun was setting, highlighting a myriad of warm colors that blanketed the atmosphere. 67 got out of the car and noticed a humble establishment to the side of the cliff. Inside, humans in all the different shapes and sizes, religious backgrounds, financial statuses, and social classes seemed to be mingling and enjoying a wide variety of Lebanese cuisine.

For a split second, the alien didn’t feel like the alien.

It felt like it could just wander inside and effortlessly join the company and their lively ambiance.

“Well, how was it?” asked George.

67 took a few seconds to respond with one word, “Enlightening”.

The duo stood there wordlessly, looking over Beirut as its lights collectively shone brightly, illuminating and enchanting, as if mirroring the starry night sky above.