

Ridin' Out the Storm

A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 3

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Weather Report: 3500-03

I'm beginning to regret snapping at Central Command over the repair video. I think we're being punished for it.

CC sent us to a star system so far away it took an entire fortnight to get here. Do you know how many things there are to do on a ship like this, and how fun it is to do all of those things for an entire fortnight? Rex and I are *really* getting tired of checkers. (We tried chess. We read the rules, set up the pieces, and just stared at them for a while. Then we went back to checkers.)

Other star systems were closer, but we were ordered here. Someone's eager to find an enemy outpost or scout ship. Too eager. But of course, they wouldn't admit that, even if we had the nerve to question orders. Which we don't.

Emperor Diaper-Rash should concentrate on colonizing worlds and accumulating the resources he needs to build an empire. Instead, he's gone hunting, because he needs instant gratification. Easy for him; he's not the one in the unarmed scout ship.

Rex says I'm engaging in armchair psychology. I say I'm stating the freaking obvious. Doofus can't even run an empire right. If he's gonna take us to war, can we at least have a leader who knows what he's doing so we can be on the winning side? Is that too much to ask? Maybe we can surrender to the first enemy we meet. I figure, one look at our emperor and they'll take pity on us. Hell, I would.

Rex and I both feel it: we're being thrown to the wolves. I guess that's why we felt a little reckless. Coming into the system, Rex took the ship in close and buzzed a couple of the outer planets. It was

dangerous and stupid, but I didn't care. I felt the same way.

Then we passed a gas giant with magnificent rings. We saw this planet's sunrise from space, with three of its moons coming into view, and the sunlight sparkling off its rings in all kinds of different colors. Rex and I both just stared. We were overcome with emotion for moment, in the silence of our little ship. It was...beautiful.

But we had to leave the ringed planet behind and search for the little rocky ones. I was glad to leave it behind. Something that beautiful should remain untouched by our ugly little war. Sparkle on, big guy!

And the kicker? No enemy outpost. No enemy scout ship. No enemy fleet. Not even an enemy restaurant. A complete lack of any enemy in a system which yields only two PV per fortnight. Ha! Serves 'em right. It really does.

And, of course, CC got upset with us for delivering the bad news. Because obviously, it's all our fault.

Their response? Another system so distant that we'll barely get there in a single fortnight.

Rex and I just looked at each other. Neither of us said a word.

The other scout ships are exploring worlds close to the home system. We're the only one being sent in a direct line as deep into space as we can go.

While we were setting the course, Rex said, "Boy, Admiral Brighton *really* hates you!"

"Everybody loves me," I said. "It must be you."

"I. Don't. Think so."

“Look at it this way,” I said. “Since the galaxy wraps around on itself, with no center and no edge, if we keep going in a straight line, we’ll get back home.”

“And that’s a good thing?” Rex asked.

I didn’t really have an answer to that.

We punched the hyperdrive and pulled out the checkerboard.