

# Ridin' Out the Storm

## A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 6

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### Weather Report: 3500-06

We have witnessed our first bit of warfare and almost died today. Pardon me for being grouchy.

What did we find when we reached our next assignment? Oh, nothing much. Just the Heart of Fire homeworld.

It was a damn good thing CC put us in stealth mode.

We came out of subspace on the edge of the system and the first thing we saw was the tail end of two armed patrol ships.

Rex saved us. He powered the ship down *immediately*. He moved even faster than he did that night he ran from the cops after egging their patrol car, which I didn't think was possible.

Even so, one of the patrol ships broke formation and began to turn.

Rex diverted power from life support to radar.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"Looking for help," he said.

Within seconds, he found an oblong asteroid about two kilometers long, only twelve kilometers away.

Rex sighed. "Without engines, it might as well be on the other side of the galaxy."

The patrol ship was now headed toward us.

I analyzed our position, speed and direction relative to the asteroid, and said, "Maybe not." I ran to the airlock and spent 30

agonizing seconds filling it with as much air as I dared, then opened the outer hatch. The air burst into space, and we shot in the other direction – toward the asteroid. Slowly.

With Rex making calculations and telling me when to do it, I repeated the trick twice. We didn't have much spare air left, but we were now just two kilometers from the asteroid. It was so close we could almost taste it.

"I have to start up engines," Rex said. His voice was grim. He knew as well as I did how bad our chances were. I nodded.

Rex's hand hovered over the control.

At that moment, a scout ship from Still Standing blazed into the system. It was not in stealth mode. Both patrol ships took off to intercept.

Rex fired up engines, set us down on the asteroid, and activated clamps. He brought life support back on line, sent a quick message to CC to tell them what we'd discovered, then powered down again.

The Still Standing scout ship, and its pilot, was nothing but a cloud of atoms.

"Hope that wasn't Vance," Rex whispered.

I couldn't think of anything to say. It was the first time I've ever witnessed death in person, even from a distance. Just some poor schmuck. And it could so easily have been us.

We waited about 18 hours. I actually managed to get some sleep. I never thought I could sleep with death lurking, but

I guess you learn. With each passing moment, we felt more confident that we had escaped detection.

Rex brought up minimal power and checked messages. For the first time, CC gave us an assignment we welcomed: we were to return to the previous system, in the hope that we would be alone this time, and attempt to chart it again.

Rex disengaged the clamps. I could have kissed that beautiful asteroid. I decided to name it Salvation. Maybe no system chart will ever call it that, but I will.

We brought the ship up to full power and got the hell out of there.