

Ridin' Out the Storm

A Galac-Tac Chronicle – Episode 9

Douglas Neman

Weather Report: 3500-09

By the way: have I mentioned that neither Rex nor I can cook?

We were trained to plot star charts, target missiles, survey planetary mining data, and – occasionally – buff shoes. The closest I ever came to cooking was nuking pizza pockets. Rex actually made hot dogs once.

“So...is this a teaspoon?” I asked.

Rex shrugged. “If it isn’t, I can’t imagine the difference being important.”

A private entered the kitchen with boxes on a dolly. “Where do these go?”

I shrugged. Two more food deliveries followed thirty seconds later.

Rex and I spent the afternoon figuring out where it all went. We think we got the cheese into the walk-in refrigerator in time. If we’d known it was cheese, we certainly wouldn’t have let it sit on the dolly that long.

(It did say “cheese” on the box. We have no one to blame for that but ourselves.)

We didn’t realize that using up our afternoon like that meant we weren’t going to fix dinner on time. It was our first meal on our new assignment, and we blew it.

Have you ever had 516 people want to tear you limb from limb? It’s definitely something you should check off your bucket list. At the very least, it makes you appreciate the rest of life that much more. Personally, I think a dinner of mashed potatoes and chocolate chip cookies is pretty kick-ass. Rex and I leveled up

magnificently to make that happen, and we were completely unappreciated.

It earned us an order to report to Captain Jefferson. Rex and I snickered when we learned that was her name. As we stood to attention in front of her, it took all of our willpower to resist making Jefferson Starship jokes. I consoled myself with the thought that she had probably heard them all, anyway.

“Well, you two have had quite a first day,” she said. “Welcome aboard, by the way.”

I let a moment go by to see if she wanted a response, then said, “Thank you, ma’am. It’s sort of a pleasure to be here.”

“Tonight’s mistake will not happen again,” she said. “Tomorrow morning we will have our standard fare of bacon, eggs, sausage, milk, juice. The usual things that any reasonable five-year-old considers breakfast. If you pass that test, we’ll move on to lunch.

“You two need to realize that I have a lot on my plate. No pun intended. I’m trying to keep this crew alive in the middle of a horrible war. The last thing I need to deal with is my cooking staff, and we will never have this talk again. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Rex and I both said.

“If I may ask, ma’am, what happened to the previous cooking staff?” I asked.

She gave me an odd look. “And why should that concern you?”

"We're trying to figure out why we were reassigned, ma'am," Rex said.

She raised an eyebrow. "Oh, good. Sounds like you have a mystery to solve. Everyone needs a hobby. When you find the answer, clue me in, because I'm dying to know, too."

"We figured you were the one who reassigned us," Rex said.

"I am not."

"Well, knowing what happened to the previous cooking staff might help us solve our mystery, ma'am," I said.

"They were promoted and reassigned to other duties."

"And you didn't have any replacements in mind for them when you did that?" I asked.

"I didn't promote them, and I didn't reassign them. Your presence on my ship was orchestrated entirely by central command."

Rex and I actually broke attention to give each other baffled looks.

"Good look solving your mystery, gents," she said. "Dismissed."

Back in our cabin, we just stared at the wall. Neither of us knew what to say.

"This is gonna keep me awake all night," I finally said.

"It better not," Rex said. "Cooking staff gets up at 0400. Every day."

"WHAT?!" I shrieked.

"Oh. Four. Hundred. We're the first day-shifters in action."

I groaned. I almost said something about wishing I was back on the scout ship, but the thought of what happened to our

replacements put an end to any desire to joke about that.

"We might as well get up at 0300 and find some instructional videos," I said. "An extra hour won't kill us. Not knowing how to scramble eggs definitely will."

"We need to make friends on this ship ASAP," Rex said. "Somebody's got to know something about why we were transferred."

"Making friends should be easy," I said. "Everyone loves chocolate chip cookies, and we control the supply."