

Flame Race

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Flame Race: Good Night's Rest

Lyra Sector; GTA Command Space; GTD Insurmountable

"Coffee, sir?" someone piped cheerfully from behind. Admiral Gregory Larisle turned around to find a young cadet awaiting Larisle's response and holding a tempting cup of steaming coffee in his right hand. Larisle smiled and nodded to the crewman and took the coffee from his hand. The man then briskly went off to do whatever other tasks he was assigned at this ugly hour.

Larisle cursed to himself as he eyed a nearby chronometer. The clock read two in the morning, earth time - a time, while docked at Command, that was usually spent fast asleep in his quarters or on-planet, spending leave hours. But increased Shivan activity forced the crippled Insurmountable and her four thousand or so surviving crewmen out of dry dock as soon as all of her engines were working. A front line relief station barely got her engines and fighter bay back into the green before she was hauled into subspace again.

The tired old destroyer was now clinging to a docking arm of the massive GTA Vega Command Outpost, as workers continued patching her back together. The three remaining cruisers of the Insurmountable's assigned escort squadron had been immediately assigned to perimeter defense duty as soon as all of their guns were repaired. Larisle occasionally could see the torn metal hulks boldly steaming around the station, five clicks out. Of course, the three cruisers weren't alone.

GTA Command stations are amongst the most heavily armed and defended outposts in the galaxy. Other than a hundred plus turrets and heavy batteries bristling the outer hull of the station, sometimes up to twenty major capital ships served duty at one time in the surrounding space. Serving alongside the Insurmountable's GTCES in the current perimeter watch was the Vasudan flagship, the PVD Hope, fresh from bold service in the Cygni sector. Along with her complement of Aten-class escort cruisers, hundreds of fighters took turns making patrols along various orbits surrounding the station.

And hundreds of thousands of miles below the station, the massive blue sphere of Vega IV sped along its three-earth-year orbit around Vega. One of the most populated GTA planets in the galaxy; the orb was a beehive of war production facilities. Lying smack dab on the front lines, the planet also served as a huge r&r facility for tired soldiers, both Vasudan and Terran. The planet also boasted the defense of powerful orbiting antimatter pulse guns that would magnetically direct streams of antimatter particles at approaching enemy ships - enough to keep enemies at a distance until help arrived.

Surface-side, on the ever-active streets of demi-paradise Vega IX, the streets were lined with various shops and commercial building serving both Terrans and Vasudans. Humans always had to look when passing by a Vasudan structure or recreational facility...Although such structures bore the strangely warped and arched metal architecture that is now associated with Vasudan, no human knew what exactly was going on inside. They avoided any awkward inquiries, though, happy that the Vasudans were just doing their job as allies.

Larisle could tell that the GTA had warmed up quickly to the Vasudans following initial Shivan encounters. Why else would the Vasudans budget out their mighty flagship to the Vega sector, a sector out of the way of their homeworld (but quite on the way to the Solar System)? He still felt shaky about being in such close proximity to what used to be sworn enemies, against which he once took oaths of loyalty to destroy. But now, several months after the Vasudans and Terrans signed the cease-fire, Larisle felt very secure around Vasudan warships. Allies, proven in combat against Terrans only months before, that were determined, along with the humans, to fight back a

common enemy threatening both races.

As the waterline in Larisle's mug slowly decreased, he watched his busy bridge crew run about, doing their little things to make the Insurmountable work a little better. The crew was completely temporary as repairs were conducted; the original Insurmountable's crew was granted shoreleave to recuperate from the recent battle. Dozens of unfamiliar faces popped in and out of the bridge exits every few minutes. They often carried new orders for certain bridge officers, but sometimes they carried engineering kits to work on the structural damage the bridge had suffered in their last battle. 'Too damn busy for two AM,' Larisle concluded to himself as he took a relaxing slurp of his refreshing coffee.

A transmission warning began chiming on Larisle's command console. He flipped on his communications vid. "Larisle here."

The stony face of Rear Admiral John Holwin, second officer aboard the Insurmountable and Larisle's best friend since they served fighter duty many years before, wavered into focus on the small vid. The rear admiral was currently serving relations aboard the station. "Morn', Greg," he greeted, trying to sound cheerful.

Larisle forced a smile. "I bet yours is better than mine," he retorted, taking a sip of his coffee.

Holwin chuckled. "I doubt it," he replied. "We're out of coffee in here."

Larisle laughed. "What's going on?"

"Well," Holwin began, taking a deep breath, "Command will be shipping us out of here to perform another strike on that shipyard within the next week - once repairs are complete and the Citadel has returned from her reconnaissance missions. Scanning boats still report that those Liliths are far from fully-operational."

'Great...' Larisle said gravely and silently as he drew long streams of coffee to empty his mug. 'How long does it take those damn Shivans to put their pants on?' he then asked himself about the length of time it was taking the Shivans to complete their ships.

Holwin read the worry on his friend's face. "I know how you feel," he sighed.

"I'll bet you do," Larisle quipped. He gestured for more coffee. A nearby deck officer took the mug from the grateful admiral's hand to refill it. "Tell me the good news, John." Larisle shifted in his seat into a more comfortable position to best receive the good news.

"Good news..." Holwin faded as he tried to recall any good news. The rear admiral hesitated in thought, further depressing his commanding officer. "Well, the best I have right now is that the Insurmountable will remain in port until the Citadel arrives. All crew aboard can remain on extended leave until official assignments come in from the Brass on earth."

Larisle grunted. "Except for me, it seems..."

"And me!" the Insurmountable's helmsman interjected loudly from nearby. Larisle smiled wryly at Lt. Wilkins as the officer walked swiftly past. He was one of a few officers that had to remain on board to oversee certain repairs.

Holwin laughed. "The Brass would never let us important officers take some r&r...you two should know that by now."

Larisle nodded slightly in acknowledgment as his fresh cup of coffee arrived. He heaved a big sigh of exhaustion before taking his first large gulp. "What about the GTCES?" he asked between sips.

"They'll continue perimeter patrols here at Vega command until tomorrow," Holwin

answered. "Then it's off to Orionis for some major refitting."

Larisle managed a small laugh before taking a big slurp. "Peter will love to hear that," he said, referring to commanding officer Captain Peter Briggs aboard the GTCES lead ship, Interstellar.

"He sure was when I told him," Holwin responded, grinning. "He went off, rumoring about his planned excursions on Alpha Orionis VII. You know how he gets..."

Larisle raised an eyebrow and threw a grin back. "I sure do. Lord knows the bastard deserves to do what he claims." The two laughed. Then there was a pause as the two warriors both sighed.

Larisle eyed an ensign's hand giving Holwin a set of orders. "Greg," Holwin began, reading off the pad with orders, "Admiral Hendrickson will be coming aboard in five minutes to oversee repairs." Holwin put the orders somewhere out of view. "When she does, why don't you come aboard here? I actually managed to cash in a few of my well-earned leave hours, and I'm taking a shuttle for the surface in half an hour."

The Insurmountable's commanding officer placed his empty coffee mug on his armrest as he dreamt of cruising Vega IX's renowned beaches in a tourist buggy. "It sounds like damn fun, John," Larisle then said, smiling widely. He turned to his friend on his console. "Just promise you'll save me a window seat on that shuttle," he added.

Holwin grinned in reply. "So long as you promise to bring some of that coffee with you aboard station."

Larisle nodded eagerly. "You got it, buddy." And the transmission winked off. The admiral heaved yet another sigh as he leaned back in his command chair. A cadet offered to refill the admiral's mug, but Larisle politely shook his head.

"Admiral on the bridge!" someone then shouted. The whole bridge froze in attention. Larisle turned in his chair to see Admiral Hendrickson had arrived.

"Oh, at ease, at ease!" Larisle barked to the bridge crew as he pushed himself out of his chair. "It's just Katie! For goodness' sakes, get back to work."

The bridge crew returned to its previous beehive state as Larisle reached out to grab hold of his good friend's extended hand. "You're looking particularly nice at two in the morning, Admiral," he told Katie, an aging, but viscerally sharp and confident woman, who sported her crisp admiral's uniform with commanding authority.

The fellow admiral managed a warm smile in the presence of her tired comrade. "Knowing what you've been through, I doubt that's a compliment," she replied sardonically.

Larisle gave her a wry look. "You always take compliments at face value, Katie," he complained.

"That's because that's always the true value, isn't it?" The two admirals exchanged friendly grins.

Larisle then turned to look at his bridge. "Well, I'm sure you'll have fun in here," he said with subdued sarcasm as he turned back to Katie. "Just watch your step - there's a lot of stuff just lying around."

"So I noticed," Katie agreed, pushing aside a pried-open floor panel with her foot. "I'll try and keep it clean until you get back."

"That's all I ever ask of you, Kate," Larisle joked as he put his hand on Katie's shoulder. After a brief pause, he then spun around and began out the bridge exit.

“Admiral...” Katie called. Larisle turned. “You and John stay out of trouble down there.”

“Will do, ma’am,” Larisle retorted as he grinned and turned to continue down to the hangar bay.

“Oh, and admiral.”

Larisle turned around again. “You’re gonna’ make me late for that shuttle, Katie...” Larisle warned as he quickly checked his watch.

Katie smiled like a mother watching her young, adventurous son about to gallivant off with friends. “Do get a good night’s rest, Greg. We got a long, hard day’s work coming soon.”

Larisle nodded and smiled assuredly at Katie. Then he gave a brief salute, turned, and disappeared around a corner.

Katie sighed as she made a small salute back into the spot in the hallway where Larisle once was. She then turned around and carefully made her way to the command chair where she prepared to announce her arrival and command of the ship and her temporary crew. ‘Those damn nuts get to go bar bouncing on Vega IX, while I get stuck dock-sailing,’ she observed scornfully to herself. Nevertheless, the situation made her smile. ‘It’s at least better than fighting Shivans,’ she decided firmly as she reached out and toggled the intercom...