

<SALUTE>

Sirs,

At the last minute, I present my submission for the fiction bonus comp titled "A Moment's Peace Among the Clash". Enjoy!

Admiral Plif sat at the otherwise unoccupied conference room table aboard the ISDII *Warrior*. On a screen on the far side of the room, Raise the Flag scores were being displayed and the *Warrior's* total was increasing regularly. A warm cup of tea sat on its saucer to his right. Plif was holding a datapad displaying evaluations from the fighter squadrons, with a small stack of pads on the table waiting for review.

Outside the large viewports that filled one side of the conference room, Aurora Prime bustled with starship traffic. The capital of the Emperor's Hammer, Aurora was home to billions of beings that were all either part of or protected by the fleet. The fleet had undergone many changes in recent history, with a drawdown in forces meant to avoid attracting the attention of the New Republic. The Republic was focused on its member worlds, effectively ignoring any systems still content to be governed by the Empire. Most of the Imperial forces had retreated to the Unknown Regions after the Battle of Jakku, but many systems maintained their Imperial affiliation and dedication to the principles of the New Order.

In previous training events, the fleet had been dispersed throughout Emperor's Hammer territory and made to play a cat-and-mouse game. Now, all the fighting took place in the massive simulator rooms contained on each ship. While not as satisfying, the simulations allowed the fleet to avoid unwanted attention and put their pilots and their ships at far less risk. Several expensive fighters had been lost to collisions each year, which the admiralty felt was not an expense the fleet should continue to endure.

The simulations also allowed pilots to participate in operations that would not have been possible with real ships. There were no more Rebel convoys passing near Hammer space, no more pirates able to amass fleets of any significant size, and no more raids being conducted against Republic worlds. The fleet had been permanently assigned to guard duty in the Alpha and Beta Sectors, which had been quiet for the longest time in decades.

Some of the programs put the pilots at the controls of alien craft unlike any that had ever been built. One particular simulation had dozens of different fighters grouped into several classes. There were frigates and destroyers, but nothing like the grand scale of ships like the *Warrior*. But their small size allowed them to be piloted by individuals and possessed far more firepower than a standard fighter, which made them an interesting change of pace from the TIE fighters they piloted normally. Gaining experience in a simulator wasn't the same as practicing in a real fighter, but allowed for the *Warrior's* pilots to maintain a state of high readiness in a galaxy that wasn't offering many opportunities for action lately.

As Plif completed the document he'd been working on, namely the ship evaluation for the previous month, he sent that off to the the Command Staff. Evaluations weren't his favorite part of the job, but he recognized them as an opportunity to recognize outstanding officers through promotions and awards. There would be many more to recommend after the competition, based on the obscene number of mission completions streaming across the

briefing room's screen. Now that he'd completed his administrative task for the day, he relished the opportunity to switch gears.

"Time to get back to work," Plif said to himself as he put the datapad down and stood to leave the conference room and return to the simulators.