

Scouring the Galaxy

A Submission to the Competition:
[Excursion] Long Fiction



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The Cocytus system was destroyed. Having been attacked by the Iron Fleet, the members of Scholae Palatinae had taken refuge aboard their medical station the *IMS Tipoca II*. However, they all knew that it was only a temporary home. They needed to find something more permanent, a new place which they could call their own.

Reiden had boarded one of the clan's *Delta-class JV-7* Escort Shuttles and set out into the galaxy. They traveled far, not knowing what they would find. But they had a goal, and it had to be met. As part of his crew on the mission, Reiden decided to bring along someone with whom he had worked before, a Major Warner. The Major had accompanied Reiden when he had went out to visit one of Scholae's trading partners about a month prior to the attack on the Cocytus system. Reiden worked well with the man and trusted in his abilities. Major Warner had recommended the rest of the men on the mission, personally vouching for them. Given the Major's history, his word alone was enough for Reiden.

After a few days of finding nothing but unsuitable and sometimes outright inhospitable planets, Reiden was beginning to lose hope. But he refused to give up entirely. He knew there must be something out there in the infinite expanse of space. He was thinking on this one day while staring out the viewport absentmindedly when chirping alert from the ship's systems grabbed his attention.

"What's that thing signaling this time?" Reiden questioned the officer manning the station.

"It appears that we're approaching a planet, sir. Should we stop and check it out?" the scanner operator asked.

Reiden nodded, "Yes, we should. We've been given a mission of the utmost importance, so we should check out any potential worlds that can be used."

The shuttle dropped out of hyperspace and a planet appeared in the viewport. They were still a ways out, but the orb grew larger as they approached. Reiden ordered the crew to perform a scan of the planet once they were within range, not wanting to waste any time. When the results came back, Reiden looked at them. He had finally found a planet that could suit their needs. There were signs of life scattered about the planet, but there didn't seem to be any indication of high levels of technology.

They proceeded to draw closer to the planet, making their way to land on its surface. The results of the scan indicated that the air was safe to breathe. They had decided to land within a short walking distance from one of the larger settlements. It may not have amounted to much by the standards they had been used to, but if the natives of the planet were primitive, it could have been considered rather expansive.

Reiden and his men headed to the village on foot. He had decided to leave the flight crew aboard the shuttle in case they received any transmissions or on the off chance that they needed to make a quick escape. It never hurt to be prepared, just in case. When they arrived at the entrance to the village, they were greeted with a sight unlike any they had expected.

The entrance itself was a great arch constructed of intertwined sticks and branches. Reiden couldn't help but be impressed at the craftsmanship standing before him. Once they passed beyond that, he noticed that the buildings seemed to favor bright colors and domed roofs. He also made note of a recurring crescent moon motif, clearly an important symbol in the culture of the natives. The further they progressed into the village, the more they discovered about it. There were pools of water, like primitive fountains, scattered throughout the place. Aside from the obvious benefits of water to living organisms, it may be another important aspect of the native culture. Another repeated feature was an arch. Not only did it stand over the entrance to the village, the doorways of each building were also arched.

Natives could be seen outside. They appeared to be humans, but their skin tone was wrong. Instead of the normal range of colors Reiden was used to seeing, the natives had a touch of blue in their pigmentation. Some stood in outdoor markets as they shopped and traded their wares, others milled about the village. However, one thing was certain: they were scared of the newcomers. As soon as they spotted Reiden and his men, they all ran for the safety of the nearest structures. While they meant no harm to the natives, Reiden could understand the reactions. He ordered his men to lower their weapons in the hope that it would put the natives at ease, even if only a little.

Reiden stood his ground and raised his arms in a non-threatening manner, "We're not here to harm you. We're just exploring planets in the galaxy, that's all." He hoped that they at least understood Basic.

Curious heads poked out of windows, doorways, and around corners. They still seemed wary, but at least this was a good first step in terms of beginning normal discussions. Reiden sent the men to go check out the rest of the village while Major Warner remained with him. A small, wide-eyed child peered around a nearby corner. She cautiously approached Reiden before taking his hand, leading the Warrior into the village, wearing a big grin on her small face. Reiden looked at Warner and gave a shrug as he allowed the child to show him her home.

While Reiden was given his little tour, he learned that the girl's name was Lanea. He decided to take advantage of the situation, and introduced himself to her. He asked the girl if she knew how many other big villages there were.

The girl had paused for a moment, her brow furrowed in concentration. She then displayed a hand with three fingers raised. "This many villages," she said, giggling.

Reiden smiled at her, "Wow, that's great. And are there a lot of other smaller villages around?"

Lanea thought hard again, slowly shaking her head. "No, I don't think so... I don't know."

"That's okay. You don't need to worry about it if you don't know. Do any of the villages have big machines that fly through the sky like birds?" Reiden questioned her.

Her eyes grew wide at the thought, "No. But have you seen anything like that before?"

Reiden couldn't help but laugh, "Why yes, I have seen flying machines before. In fact, that's how my friends and I got here."

"Wow, really?" the girl looked up at him, barely containing her excitement. "Could I maybe see it, pretty please?"

"We'll see, little Lanea. But my friends and I are here to do an important job first. The people that sent us wanted us to explore places that we might be able to make into our new home. The world we came from was attacked, so it isn't safe there anymore," Reiden explained.

"We can keep you safe then!" Lanea said, nodding her head emphatically.

Reiden smiled, tousling her hair gently, "I appreciate that, Lanea. But the guys in charge still want plenty of options. I'll be sure to let them know what you think though." A chirp came from his comlink. Reiden separated himself from his young tour guide and moved out of immediate earshot before answering. "What is it?"

"Sir, we've heard back from the men that had separated from you in the village," the voice of Major Warner came through from the other end of the connection.

"What have they found?" Reiden inquired.

"It appears to be a rather simple village, sir. I doubt that it would be much trouble if we were to choose this planet to rebuild the Empire, but..." Warner's voice trailed off.

"Yes, I think I know what you're thinking. There wouldn't be trouble, but the rebuilding would be substantial due to how primitive the native society is. Simply put, it may not be worth the effort," Reiden responded plainly. He had thought as much the moment their ship had scanned the planet and the results had only come back with a small scattering of settlements. But he still felt the need to investigate further; he didn't want to miss anything by accident.

"What are your thoughts, sir?" Warner asked.

"Contact the men. Have them regroup at the village and we'll head out. We've gotten what we came here for. It's now time for us to move on from here," Reiden replied.

"Roger that. I'll let them know we'll be moving out," Warner said, ending the communication.

Reiden let out a quiet sigh and returned to Lanea. "Sorry about that, my friends wanted to talk to me about something. So, do you think we could go back to the market where you found me?"

The girl nodded, "Sure! Follow me!" Lanea grabbed his hand once more and led him back to where they had left Major Warner.

When Reiden arrived, he found Warner standing alone. It seemed that the rest of his men had ventured further into the small village than he had, perhaps even beyond it. He knew that they would return shortly, so he wasn't worried about their absence. He spent the time catching up with Warner, informing him of what he had seen while Lanea had showed him around. It hadn't been much though, as everything was similar to what they had seen upon entering the village.

Before long, the rest of the men arrived. Upon their arrival, they informed Reiden and Major Warner of what they had seen. As with Reiden's own experience, they also found more primitive structures. There was nothing that would be of much use to Scholae in their efforts to find a place in which to rebuild their Empire.

Reiden thanked the Lanea and the other villagers for helping them and said his goodbyes. Then they took their leave of the village. When he reached the arched entrance, he turned back and spotted Lanea. The little girl had broken away from the rest of the villagers and closed about half the distance to where Reiden stood. She was waving at them, with a big grin on her face. Their visit must have been one exciting experience for her and for the other villages as well. Reiden doubted that they had many visitors from off-world, if any. He smiled and waved in return before facing away once more, heading to the shuttle.

Once everyone had boarded, the shuttle lifted off from the ground and made its way back into space. Reiden ordered the crew to make way to the next closest planet that could serve their needs and then took his seat beside the pilot. It had been a long journey in search of a good planet that would suit their needs. But their work was not yet complete, and Reiden refused to give up the search just yet. There was certainly a world out there for them, just waiting to be discovered.