

From the Desk of LT Gian Webb. 31 ABY

Raise the Flag 2023 Fiction Competition #2

Author's note: This fiction is in no way related to my first RtF fiction. However, it does reference the canonical Legend of Valin Tusk ([1694751643-602f5592.pdf](#) ([emperorshammer.org](#))) though knowledge of that tale is not necessary to enjoy this one.

Navigating the Past

High Admiral Plif was not happy with the progress of discovery. While valuable new information was coming back to the *Hammer* every day, they had yet to make concrete headway in the location of the rumored 'navigators' that might be in the area. The fleet was in unfamiliar space, and it put the High Admiral on edge. All eyes were on him to deliver answers, and those were in short supply.

The hill of reports that obscured Plif's desk did not bode well either. So far, the reports had been largely fruitless, at least in the means that the TCCOM was worried about. The squadrons which had been deployed to nearby systems sent in regular sightings of strange new phenomena. The Unknown Regions held all sorts of great, and dangerous, wonders, but troublingly few answers about the mysterious navigators, or what might have happened to the imperial colony.

Some squadrons had found valuable leads though. There are other spacefaring peoples in the area. A number of pilots had reported encountering crafts crewed by blue humanoids which they liken to Battlegroup I's commander, Rear Admiral Genie. If those reports were to be believed, then the fleet has encountered the Chiss, who are expected in this area of space. While our pilots have only encountered minor hostilities, there seems to be a general anti-Empire sentiment throughout the surrounding systems. Most other ships tended to steer clear of the TIE squadrons, and if contact was made, the other crews would clam up at the mention of navigators.

There was, however, one report that filled Plif with hope, addressed from Epsilon squadron. Nearly twice as long as the others, it seemed to be the only lead to go on. The High Admiral also knew that Epsilon had a shuttle scheduled to arrive in mere hours, perhaps the report would shed light on what the *Hammer* could expect. Plif massaged his temples before leaning back and opening the report.

Epsilon's report told a tale far different from any other the TIE corps had brought back so far. Rather than coldness and hostility, they had found comradery among the Unknown Regions. Yes, the space was still dangerous, and the squadron reported many oddities and hazards, but the people were a different manner. Most notable was the recounting of an interaction with a Chiss freighter. At first they moved to turn away, but after Epsilon hailed the vessel and introduced themselves, the freighter turned around. Over comms they responded. The freighter knew of Epsilon squadron. In fact, they knew a lot more than that. The captain of the other vessel inquired about individual pilots, many of whom had been retired for nearly a decade. Somehow, somehow, traders on the other end of the galaxy knew intimate details about an aspect of the TIE corps that had never been in this part of space before.

Through this mysterious connection, Epsilon was able to open further diplomatic ties with the freighter's home spaceport belonging to a small Chiss shipping company. While there seemed to still be a level of distrust shown towards the TIE pilots, Epsilon had the opportunity to speak with the crews of several cargo ships. They discovered that several years ago a certain Valin Tusk had come through the area. He was once Epsilon's own barkeep, and the founder of Epsi-Cola, before mysteriously departing on an extended sabbatical to seek out "the final ingredient" for his beverage. Little more than unsubstantiated rumor had been heard since then, but this seemed to be a solid lead. Valin was before most of Epsilon's pilot's time, but a few hardened veterans had known him, and they had all of course heard the name. It turned out that in his journey Valin traveled alongside these Chiss as they navigated the Unknown Regions. He spoke highly of his old friends back in Epsilon, and that must have stuck with these salty space freighters. The company was willing to discuss navigational services. It would be expensive, and take quite a

bit of convincing, but there was a chance. They just first had one request, something that Valin had left them wondering about.

And that brought the Hammer to where it now was, waiting expectantly for a Chiss trader delegation to arrive. Squadron Commander Nova Discordia had called ahead and advised that an official reception not be conducted. There would be plenty of time for niceties and business, but first the squadron needed to attend to something. As such, the hanger was relatively empty, there was no reason to have rumor spread about mysterious visitors until there was concrete news.

For the time being, TCCOM Plif and Lieutenant Colonel Narven Task -the commander of Wing I aboard the Hammer- stood in a control tower overlooking the hanger. Battlegroup I Commander Genie stood alone in the hanger below, ready to welcome back the tired pilots and greet their new visitors. Before long, the trader's bright blue T-1 shuttle was entering the hanger, flanked by the eleven proud ships of Epsilon. The shuttle landed, its gangway deployed, and out walked two Chiss figures. A woman, and with her a small girl, maybe only ten years old by Plif's estimates. If they were surprised by being greeted by one of their own, they didn't show it.

Joined again by Epsilon's pilots, the small delegation moved into the ship's passageways. As they traveled towards the pilot's quarters the women took in the *Hammer* with curious eyes, while the young girl followed alongside, clutching to her hand. The leisure quarters were quieter than normal. All pilots were either scouting nearby sectors or resting after experiencing the ordeals of the Unknown Regions. The group eventually reached the Epsilon squadron bar and entered. Each pilot found their familiar seat and invited the Chiss guests to sit as well.

After a brief word with Commander Discordia, the Epsilon barkeep exited back to storage. He quickly reappeared with a glass in hand, and a cold can of Epsi-Cola. He placed the former in front of the Chiss women and opened the can, filling her glass. The gathered pilots' mouths were watering. After a draining mission in the field there was nothing that they would like more than a tall glass of Epsi-Cola. The woman considered the drink for a

moment, before lifting the glass to her mouth and drinking. Every eye was intently focused on her as she swallowed and paused to consider, before outstretching her hand with a single thumb up. The drink lived up to Valin's description, and business could now commence.