

Home - A Tallakora Short Story

By Stargazer

"I don't know, Ronnie, are you sure about this?" The young hyena asks her friend, looking back down the corridor behind them. "What if we get caught? You know what our parents would do if they-"

"Your parents maybe." The maned wolf responds. Her brown-gloved hands fidget at the console beside the door and soft beeps emit with each tap. "And besides, we're not going to get caught. I know what I'm doing."

"It's not that I don't trust you-" The hyena starts to speak, but is quickly shut down by a fierce glance from the girl next to her.

"Just keep a lookout, Erin, people don't usually come down these halls this early."

"Yeah, because most people here are in *class 'this early'.*" the younger girl protests, crossing her arms as she continues scanning the hall for any sign of activity.

"You know you didn't have to come. You were more than welcome to stay back and deal with Mr. Vintas' *dreadful* lect- ah-ha! Got it, come on!"

The girl quickly pulls her hyena friend in through the now open door, before it shuts again.

The room is dark at first, but once the systems detect their presence, the lights flicker on. Surrounding them is row upon row of what Erin can only describe as system servers? Or maybe some other piece of computer hardware... She wasn't quite sure. Her friend, however, navigates the rows of machines with the focus of a hunter honing in on her next kill.

"What are these things?" The hyena asks, running her fingers along the sleek metal housings and over the small protruding LEDs that pockmark the surface.

"Control servers. These are what all the system commands for this section run through before they're authenticated and performed... or something like that." She quickly shrugs as she walks. "What I do know for sure is that if I can find the right one... It will let us get somewhere very special."

"Wow, like... even the-"

"Yep. That's my plan. Just look for the one labeled Z11LN-5."

"How do you know all this?"

The maned wolf taps one of her ears. "I hear things... and my dad isn't exactly discreet when he talks about work stuff at home."

"Uh... Ronnie, I think I found it." Erin says, pointing at the engraved label.

Turning around to look, Ronnie smiles, patting her younger friend on the back. "Good work, Detective Cormier."

The hyena shudders at the title. "Oh gods, I'd never want to be a detective... Archeologist maybe, but-"

Pulling the console pad down and powering it on, the maned wolf just laughs, "Archeologist, huh? What's so interesting about that stuff, anyway?"

"What do you mean? Seeing all the super cool stuff that people built ages ago? Learning how people had to live, the culture they developed? It's so fun." The hyena practically beams with enthusiasm, and her friend simply shakes her head as she works at the console.

"I think I'll stay up here, with *modern* luxuries and ways of life... Anyway, this should just... about... do it!"

With a final tap, the screen floods with commands, and a green flashing message mirrors onto her small tablet. Waving the device proudly, she just nods her head to get Erin to follow her. "This beautiful little piece of metal is now our ticket to just about anywhere we want to go on this section of the station... at least until the systems reset tomorrow. But hey! I know just where we should go."

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A short while later, the two girls are once again standing at the threshold of a room. This time, the doors are much larger and at the end of a wide hallway. The large red words embossed into the doors speak to the locked area's importance.

"Are we really about to do this?" Erin asks, turning to look up at her much taller friend.

"Unless you don't want to see the coolest view that exists in all of the Likawan System."

The hyena looks back at the door, nodding. "Let's do it."

With a quick wave of her small tablet, the red lights on the door flash green, and the door's slowly slide open with a whirr. As they enter, the two girls make their way past the offline control consoles, and around the corner. Passing into the larger area, the vastness of the observation deck works its way into view of the two girls. Extending outward both above and below them for several meters, impressive windows are crisscrossed by diagonal support beams. The deck reveals a more than 180 degree view of the planet above and ring structure

as it disappears past the horizon. Wispy clouds swirl over the blue-green orb above their heads, and their home star, Li'kawa, is barely visible over the edge of the ring as it passes behind the ring. Coronal tendrils extend into the blackness of space as an automated filter is projected onto glass to protect viewers' eyes from the intense light of the star. From their vantage point, you can very clearly see the Rolat Spaceport, with its constant stream of traffic back and forth. These ships are the ones responsible for most of the planet-station commerce for this section, as well as the major transportation line for the politicians and diplomats to Le'atol, capital city down on Akaya. That's the route that Erin took when it was her turn to attend school on the station. A trip she remembers very intimately- It was the last time she'd seen her parents in over two years.

Tears begin to well up in the young hyena's eyes, and her friend speaks up, "I know it's beautiful, but I didn't expect ya to start crying!"

Erin simply wipes her face, and just nods, "Yeah, uh.. It's really cool."

Noticing the demeanor of her friend change suddenly, Ronnie reaches over and grabs her shoulder, "Is- Is everything alright? I was just teasin'..."

"No you're fine... It's just..." She sits down on the metal floor of the platform, the vast blackness of space mere inches away. "I miss it. Well, not just it. I miss my parents."

"Oh, well, don't you see them during vacations? Between semesters?" I thought you traveled back down then."

The hyena shakes her head. "No.. I always want to, but with my parents' jobs, they don't ever have time to stop back home during the vacations. They're always busy. It's almost like they dumped me off up here and forgot about me."

"I didn't know that, Erin... I'm sorry.." The maned wolf sits down beside her, wrapping an arm around the young hyena.

Leaning into her half-embrace, Erin continues. "You know what the last thing my father said to me face to face?"

"I'm guessing it wasn't exactly loving?"

"See you in the spring, kid. Make us proud up here." She shifts her gaze up to the brilliant planet above them.

"And that didn't pan out, huh?"

"That was two years ago." Her eyes flick back and forth, scanning the surface for recognizable landmarks. "Sure, we've, like, video chatted and they've sent care packages and

stuff, so they didn't *literally* forget about me. But like... It still hurts that their work seems more important than spending time with their only daughter."

"I'm so sorry, Erin..." Now it was her turn to shift her gaze. Looking up to the planet, she continues. "You know, I've never even been to the surface."

"Really? Not once?"

"Not once." She closes her eyes for a moment, picturing the images she's seen of the world her people usually call home. "It probably sounds crazy to say, but I don't even know if I will ever really *want* to either. Like I've seen the pictures and videos and stuff. But it.. I guess it probably would feel to me the way this station feels to you. Alien. Foreign. Scary? Maybe not scary, but definitely not comfortable. I like it here. It's what I know. And I'm *really* good at figuring out how to do things here that I'm not supposed to."

The girls share a light laugh, but then the room fills with silence for a short moment.

"Thank you." Erin suddenly says.

Her ears perk up, confused, and Ronnie asks, "For what?"

"Being my friend. Even though you're older than me and hanging out with someone like me is probably pretty lame."

"Look, we've both been through a lot of the same classes together, and you're definitely not some lame kid. Besides, someone has to look after you."

The hyena punches her. "I save your butt just as often, you know."

"Ow, jerk!" A shove back, and the girls are laughing once more.

Eventually, a beep from Ronnie's tablet startles them back to attention, and she exclaims, "Shit! If we don't get back like now, we're 100% gonna get caught here. Let's go!"

"That's probably a good idea."

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