

Kate Orr

“Export”

Character Development Short Story – SciFi Action

*The war continues, but we're already in the aftermath, already resigned by greater powers to be left behind. We're the spoils of a war that continues to be fought, and we ended up on the wrong side.*

*Yet, hope remains, and most of humankind remains free - Earth's defenses have remained strong and intact. Out here on the colony, we hear a little information . Someday we'll be home again.*

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I move through the streets, dodging broken pieces of buildings, upraised chunks of concrete, and metal sheeting. The bombs and the damage left a perpetual puddle on the whole of Port City. By Earth standards, not much of a city, but it was the closest thing the colony had to one. We built homes and stores and naturally, were bombed first. It rains constantly, and the runoffs and channels we built as we colonized, have been mostly destroyed or clogged. It washes nothing clean but adds to the sodden desolation.

Occasionally, The Invaders still come by and bomb. They don't wipe us out completely, though. They can't afford it. Any place that ceases production, or has started to rebuild too much, they'll reduce down to rubble. They don't patrol on foot anymore, no more inventories on the people, and the only ships that land are for collection. They keep us going for our use as workers, and to make an example of us to opposition. We're bombed if we do, and we're bombed if we don't.

I remind myself to slow down and walk carefully. I shouldn't let my excitement make me noticed. Discretion right now will make the difference between success and failure.

Some of us weren't left to continue harvesting, just transported to other planets to work in other areas of servitude. The scientists from here on Centaur work in the labs of Orion now. That's where they took my brother. Centaur's colony was key in processing raw material and crops for Earth before The Invasion. We continue, but for Them now - depressed, but existing.

I must have been letting these thoughts seep into my movements because I'm now stomping through the debris. These boots used to be part of my uniform as a Centaur Justice Enforcer, though now they are a part of my daily uniform to help me survive. Colony tours were supposed to be three years, I've been here for seven. The Invasion happened a month before I was to complete my second tour, and finally go back to Earth.

I duck under a twisted girder, bringing my thoughts back to the present and the reason for my urgency. I check my pocket and feel the two small devices. “It's a good thing I trust you, Curtis.” I think, as I double check their security.

I break free of my thoughts as I round the last corner of debris before I reach my first stop: Eddie's Diner. After the rations building was established, Eddie was put in charge of preparation and distribution of rations to our section.

I swing open the door and am greeted with a gust of warm air that smells like –

“Chicken Soup?” I say to no one in particular as I tap my boots on the doormat, knocking the street off.

A bald burly man behind the steel counter looks up and smiles. “Hey, Justice! I've been telling everyone all day about the food surplus!”

A couple people nod in greeting, I smile and nod back as I make my way to the counter. Only those finished with their shipment quotas can afford the luxury of sitting and eating at this hour. The next shipment is expected tomorrow. Seeing so many here is a good sign, as it means there's plenty processed. An even better sign for my mission, as a full ship will increase my odds of success.

“Hey, Eddie.” I say as I step up to the counter.

“Hey, Justice. Come sit down and let me get some soup for you.” He gestures at a nearby chair and looks back at me, a little closer. “You taking care of yourself, Annie? You look a little pale.”

“Just a little tired, lots to do for the new shipment.” I reply. Not entirely a lie.

“Alright, Justice.” He picks up a rag and begins to polish the counter. He looks up with a crooked smile. “So what can I get you? I recommend the chicken noodle. I thought it might be nice, seeing as how it's rainy and cold out there, and it also happens to be The Special of the Day.”

I smile back and feel my throat get a little tight. Eddie's one of the few people who still looks on the bright side of things. It's always rainy and cold, and the rations never have much variety, but he makes it seem like he's just humoring the rules. As though that's exactly what he intended all along.

“Well, is it chicken-chicken or that ‘chicken’ stuff?”

“Oh, it's chicken-chicken. There was a surplus of them so we got to keep some.”

“Well, I'll take two to go then!” I say as I get out my ration chit bag. I handed him two chits, then two more. “Tell you what, I'll take two more besides. I can heat up tomorrow's rations at home.”

“Coming right up, Madam Justice.” He says as he starts bundling up containers of soup from the giant vat behind him.

Eddie is really the one who gave me the idea for the way out, but he didn't know it. I told him once that I didn't know how he could stay so optimistic, and what he said next would change my life.

“It's hard to see, and I can understand that, but I consider myself fortunate. My wife and I lived through the invasion of Centaur, my kids are safe on Earth, and I know that I will live long enough to see them there again. I'll tell you something else. Those Invaders are not that smart. They're brutal and violent and don't give a damn about human life, but they are not so clever. All of their spacecraft are built by another culture altogether. They barely know how to fly the things. I saw it during an inspection, and I know that I will live to see the day that we are able to defeat them. Perspective, Annie. Doesn't matter how full or empty the glass is, it's what you're going to do with it.”

And that's what stuck with me. The sense of hope that he had, made me realize how much I had stopped fighting, how resigned I had become to defeat. More importantly, there were others out there, more clever and technologically advanced than The Invaders, perhaps as subjugated as us. Maybe we could work together to be free again. It was worth a shot, but I would have to find them first.

“Here you go, Justice.” Eddie says, as he sets two sacks on the counter.

“Thanks. Hey, there's more in here than I asked for – Eddie, I don't want to take something that someone else needs.” I say, as I look up from the stuffed sacks.

“Now how did all that get in there? Well I guess you'd better take them. I don't want to hear anything about it. I hear tomorrow might be a long day for you.” He says, meeting my eyes.

“Curtis.” We both say. He must have let Eddie know about our plan.

It occurs to me that this might be the last time I see Eddie or anyone else here. If I fail to get to Earth, I would fail them too.

“Hey, Eddie, I don't know the next time I'll be in. Could you hold on to my ration chits for me? If I'm not back to pick them up, see that they go to someone who needs them.” I say, just loud enough for him to hear as I pick up the sacks.

“Of course. I'm glad you stopped in, Annie - didn't want to have to make a house call to drop off your rations.” He says, as I walk to the door. “Have a safe trip home.”