

Other Options

by Bryan Schuder

" ... "

" ... "

"I really don't like it when you look at me that way, sir."

"Well, I really don't like when come in with that "he's not going to like this" expression."

" ... "

"I'm not going to like this report, am I?"

" ... No."

"Well, go on. What did they do now?"

"Umm..."

"Let's just go chronologically. That way I may enjoy some of the build up and suspense myself."

"Okay. About two weeks ago, we lost contact with a scouting patrol that was sent out into a mountainous wooded region with reported human rebel activity. The patrol was going normally and no threats had been encountered. They were clearing out an abandoned scrapyard, when a powerful jamming signal went up. After a hour of trying to contact the patrol and attempting to find alternative means to contact them, the jamming signal dropped and we could no longer detect the patrol from their transponders."

"Interesting. And you know how they were captured?"

"Yes."

"Overwhelming force? Superior firepower? Our scouts are power armored and equipped with modest weaponry-"

"They were tarred."

"Tared? With the sticky, black hydrocarbon compound?"

"Yes."

" ... There's another part to this."

"Two, precisely."

"Go on."

"Then, a couple small explosions disturbed the scrap piles nearby, causing an avalanche of shredded scrap iron and steel to temporarily bury the team. They were able to dig themselves out and fell back to the entrance of the scrapyard to reassess the situation at hand... and try to clean themselves up."

"Scrap yard... Tar... scrap iron and steel... Oh no."

"Yes, team noted upon entry of some equipment that seemed to be salvageable, namely..."

"An electromagnet crane."

"Yes."

" ... "

" ... "

"You know, I really miss conquering the other species of this galaxy. The Dzat were so nice and cooperative."

"And they had the best hospitality."

"They respected us and never missed a tribute payment."

"I was so happy when they were admitted as an official thrall race to the empire."

"Service quality is so much better with a Dzat leading a services department."

" ... "

"Well, continue on. After the electromagnet."

"Oh, yes. The scouts were stuck to the electromagnet by the iron scrap that had been adhered by the tar."

"So much for the safety of having non-magnetic equipment..."

"The crane carried them to a remote section of the scrapyards that had been dug out, and then-

"The humans dropped them into the hole?"

"The humans dropped the entire electromagnet head into the hole."

"Oh. ... "

"The data recovered isn't very detailed at this point, but from what I gather, the humans buried the electromagnet of the crane with our scout team at the bottom. They then covered electromagnet with a few layers of dirt and then bulldozed a nearby scrap pile on top."

"So that's why the secondary scout team didn't find them."

"The layers of metal and dirt made it impossible for the scout team to find them. It looked like any other scrap pile and effectively dampened their radio systems. And even with power armor, the electromagnet head was too heavy."

"Best conserve the power for the life support systems."

"Yes. From the logs it seems like the initial scout team was periodically buried for a total of five days."

"Five days?! How did their life support systems- Periodically?"

"Yes."

"Explain."

"It seems the humans checked on them roughly every two days by uncovering the

electromagnet, reattaching it to the crane, and, with the electromagnet on, lifted them up... for air.”

“Strange... there’s a reason I’m sure.”

“Yes, yes there is.”

“ ... “

“You are not going to like it.”

“I figured. Continue.”

“After the sixth day, they were lifted up, dropped from the electromagnet, and then swarmed by a large band of humans. They pinned them down and tied them up with steel cabling. They were then thrown into the back of a garbage truck and taken to a... closed amusement park.”

“An amusement park? The human recreational facility with the rides, games of chance and skill, and those delicious corn dogs?”

“Yes.”

“Why would they take them there? I’ve taken my youngest spawn to those many times in the past. It’s the one thing we’ve found useful to adapt from these humans.”

“Sir?”

“I’m very worried that we have yet made another mistake about the safety mundane human things.”

“Well...”

“Go on...”

“The humans dumped the scout team out into the park, and they were split up and subjected to the various rides on the park.”

“They took them on the rides?”

“Yes. Multiple times. But strangely, they made them walk a straight line after each ride.”

“Walk a straight line?”

“Yes. They eventually settled on one ride in particular to put all the scout team on.”

“Which is?”

“The Spinning Cups ride.”

“ ... “

“It gets worse.”

“I really wasn’t expecting it to get better.”

“After an hour of running the ride non-stop, the humans took notice of some of the scout team's fits of dizziness. They decided to enhance the ride.”

“Oh great elders...”

“The regulated electric motor wasn’t enough, so they brought in the dump truck and attached

the drive train... to the ride. Eventually, after a few hours of the ride running at enhanced speeds, one of our scouts vomited from the extreme motion sickness. The humans abruptly stopped the ride, rushed around him, and put weapons right at his face as the helmet mask opened to allow the vomit the escape.”

“They knew they couldn’t get through the armor occupied by one of our soldiers... so they made the soldier open it against their will.”

“Yes, they gave the member of the scout team a choice: Exit the armor and leave it intact, or stay on the ride.”

“And he complied.”

“Yes. Do you want me to write that scout up?”

“No... That won’t be needed.”

“Afterwards the scout was taken and secured to a bench in clear view of the ride and treated to drinks and as many corn dogs he wanted. They even slowed down the ride to showcase the soldier enjoying not being on the ride.”

“That is just depraved. I’m guessing they all eventually broke.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What was the longest time? I’m curious.”

“Oh, by our calculations the final scout gave up after eight hours and thirty-two minutes. When they started to randomly reverse the direction of the ride, he finally gave up.”

“Make sure that scout gets some extra leave time to recover.”

“Will do.”

“The question is what was the final goal? They have the undamaged power armor. But humans can’t fit in the armor.”

“They used it, somewhat.”

“ ... “

“They managed to extract the transponders from the armor.”

“Not surprised at this rate. What did they do with them?”

“Flush them.”

“Excuse me?”

“Flush them down the biological waste disposal units in our new outpost town.”

“... I know there’s a reason and a strange, baffling logic behind this... Whose pondering I’m going to postpone for now. So, continue on.”

“The transponders were detected and teams were sent out to retrieve them at the main interchange points in the sanitation system.”

“Please. Tell me. You didn’t bring them here to show me-”

“No.”

“... thank you ...”

“This brings us to this morning, where review of activity logs showed signs of unauthorized work on certain sanitation system main interchange points. And, I have sent teams to investigate.”

“Why weren’t we informed sooner?”

“Look at video, sir. It happened in the dark early morning with a heavy fog in the area.”

“Are those power armored soldiers standing watch over sanitation workers? No. Those are humans, but the armor- Is this video looped?”

“No, the movement from the armored units is very repetitive.”

“ ... “

“They used robotics from the amusement park’s animatronic characters inside the power armor.”

“They made PUPPETS out of our power armor?! ... And, used them to make it look official enough for regular night patrol officers to not bother with...”

“Yes, the night patrol reported military work going on, and kept their distance.”

“They’re even using our bureaucracy and power hierarchy against us now.”

“ ... ”

“What they are planning... What are they- Wait, that building in the middle of all the reported points... Is that the new resort hotel?! Oh my Elders, the Grand System Overseer just checked in there last night!!! Get an alert out to them-”

“What was that noise?!”

“There is goes again!”

“What is that sound coming from your lavatory?!”

“Sounds like air being pulled through a vacuum...”

“ ... ”

“ ... “

“Bringing up a visual of the resort hotel-”

“Great Elders... It’s overflowing... from the top floor... and every floor below...”

“I’m getting alerts from the teams I sent out, the sanitation interchanges are pumping at full power and intermediate valves have been reconfigured at the control panels.”

“It’s... everywhere. Just everywhere...”

“ ... “

“ ... “

“ I-I-I... don’t know what to do, sir.”

“Well, take a seat.”

“Yes. That sounds good. What are you- Is that Vorticon Brandy?”

“Yes. Please join me.”

“No objections here, sir. I think it’s appropriate now.”

“Yes. Indeed.”

“ ... “

“Have you given thought about where you would transfer to if given an opportunity?”

“Vela.”

“Really?”

“Vela is the in dead center of our empire, one habitable world, that’s a boring, average agricultural work world.”

“That sounds absolutely lovely. Wait isn’t a-”

“A Dzat colony world. Yes.”

“Ha ha ha! I have a favor to call in. You wouldn’t be against being second in command of simple, boring agricultural world?”

“Absolute no reservations, sir.”

“Are you Ubl player?”

“Used to be a defending champion of the core world bracket.”

“Well, I think we’ll have plenty of time to play.”

“I think we will.”

“Though, I am reminded of a human saying now...”

“Really?”

“Despite their creative insanity and completely inane way they conduct themselves, they are prone to a few strange bits of wisdom. And I feel this one is appropriate.”

“And that is?”

“Rats leave a sinking ship. Smart rats leave before the ship takes on water.”

“Well, sir. I feel like I want to be a smart rat.”

“I do, too.”