

## Snow Games and Backyard Diplomacy

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8/26 - 8/27/96

"Come on guys, hurry up" Chris urged to his friend and younger sister as they pulled on their winter clothing, looking eagerly out the window at the yard covered in a fresh blanket of snow. Sara Johnson, their mother, looked on with a slight smile on her face, watching them wriggling into their snow pants and boots. They'd been up early enough, as it was the weekend, and with Chris having had John sleep over the night before, they had been wide awake and needed no second calling to breakfast.

In fact all three of them were all excited over the new snowfall, the first substantial one of the season, and had been hurrying through breakfast when the neighbors arrived. Beth had been the first to see them coming up the walk, and her excited little giggle had them all looking out the window to greet their guests, even before they rang the doorbell.

When Yenda and Keethar had showed up, breakfast was pretty much finished. The kids had wolfed down the remainder of the food, eager to get outside and romp in the fresh snow. While they were throwing on their winter clothes, the two rrakith cubs watched expectantly, quietly munching the blueberry muffins Sara had given them.

"Well, are you two all set to try out the snow?" Sara asked them, a cheerful tone to her voice, seeing the adorable expressions on their fuzzy feline faces.

"Yes Mrs. Sara," Yenda, the older of the two answered. "It was so great when we got up this morning and saw it everywhere... We played some on the way over here and it's neat!" The cubs had never seen snow before in their lives, and it was easy to see their excitement, as they stood there with their eyes sparkling, their ears perked up and tails twitching eagerly behind them.

They'd been here for about seven months, so they'd just missed last year's winter, and from what they'd probably been hearing from the other children, it was easy to see why they were so eager about it.

How much the world had changed in these past few years, Sara thought. Ever since humanity had met the Rrakith, things had changed so fast. Now there were some rrakith working at the university, and they even had a family of the newcomers living next door. Things had been strange, and even a little awkward at first, remembering meeting the three parents and their two cubs for the first time, but over the last few months, it had been nice getting to know them.

The kids had been very happy with their neighbors, as both the rrakith cubs were about the same age as her children, Yenda being maybe a year older than Chris, and Keethar matching up with Beth almost perfectly. They all got along splendidly, and that had helped the parents bridge the gap too.

Now watching the two familiar aliens, dressed in their warm winter clothes, her smile widened a little. Their outfits did look just slightly out of place on their feline form, most notably their boots, which were specially designed for digitigrade feet; the gleams in their eyes and the small smirks pursed on their muzzles was very cute indeed. No matter how different the two races

were, seeing the excited look of a child on the cubs' faces reminded her that they weren't so different after all.

When the three human children had finished donning their snow gear, quickly zipping up their jackets, they rushed out the door almost as fast. "Come on Keethar," Beth called, "I'll show you how to make snow angels."

Standing behind in the kitchen, Sara watched them running and playing in the snow, smiling at their youthful abandon, and the vigor with which the rrakith cubs explored the new marvel of the weather. She stifled a giggle as Yenda practically dove into the snow, rolling around in it, coming up her mane and face dusted with the powder, then tossing handfuls of it up in the air to gently fall back down on her. John caught her off guard with a loosely-packed snowball, she was quick to catch on and retaliate, the five of them breaking out in a free for all, their laughter audible even inside the house.

She had watched them for a few minutes, then gone back to her own things, looking out and checking on them from time to time. A little over an hour had passed when her attention was drawn toward the window by the yelling outside. Throwing on her jacket and walking out on to the stoop, it was pretty easy for her to see what all the ruckus was about.

The last time she'd looked out at the kids, Chris had been showing Yenda how to make a snowman, while John, Beth and Keethar had been working on a fort, perhaps in expectation of another snowball fight. Now it appeared as if the snowman was finished, but not to Chris' satisfaction. Apparently while he'd been briefly distracted, maybe helping work on the fort, or stocking up on his own supply of snowballs, Yenda had taken it upon herself to add the remaining touches to their creation, but instead of the traditional smooth face, she'd added a muzzle shaped out of a small snowball to it, as well as two slightly-pointed ears on top of its head.

The scene was almost comical, if not for all the yelling, even so Sara felt a brief twinge of humor. Chris wasn't too happy with Yenda's modifications, and was arguing loudly with her, while she stood her ground and gave him a defiant look.

"You did it all wrong. It's not supposed to look like that," Chris accused her loudly.

"No I didn't. How's it supposed to look?"

Acting quickly to break up the situation, Sara walked up between them, just as the other children were becoming interested in the showdown.

"Mom, look at what she did to the snowman. She ruined it," Chris had just the slightest hint of a whine to his voice.

"No I didn't Mrs. Sara. It looks good doesn't it?" was Yenda's rebuttal.

Stifling a nervous giggle, Sara took a couple of moments to formulate the correct reply. "Yes Yenda it does look good... it's different, but you did a good job with it." Pausing she added, "I just think it wasn't exactly what Chris had in mind... neither did I."

Then turning to her son, "Chris, of course she'd make a snowman that looks like her. Come on now, you and Beth have been friends with Yenda and Keethar since this summer, you shouldn't

be fighting now." Thinking quickly she finally added "why don't you make another snowman, a more traditional one, so the two of them can be friends, just like the two of you are, okay?"

His disposition changing quickly, he smiled at the idea. "Okay, that'd be great!"

"Now say you're sorry to Yenda."

"Awww Mom."

"Chris..." the tone of her voice just dropping slightly.

"Alright, I'm sorry Yenda. You made a good snow-rrakith, now let's make a snow-human."

Yenda was just as quick to forgive and forget as she smiled at him, her ears flicking with delight. The two of them set to work rolling up another giant snowball. Paul joined in to help them as Beth and Keethar went off to entertain themselves with something new.

Seeing the situation back in control, Sara surveyed the scene for a few moments more before returning to the warmth of the house. Thinking about it, she let a couple of giggles escape her, pondering the unexpected situation which had just confronted her. Very different indeed she thought to herself, and then she realized the truth to that idea. Just how different were the rrakith, and what other situations were bound to come up as the two races became more familiar neighbors?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the door opening, with Beth and Keethar coming in, both looking like they'd had enough of the weather and decided that the warmth of the house was more inviting.

"You guys cold?" Sara asked, noticing Keethar shivering just slightly, still not used to the cooler weather, even with her body's light covering of fur.

"Yeah," the rrakith cub nodded, pulling off her coat.

"Okay, how about some hot chocolate then?"

Keethar tilted her head to the side enthusiastically in affirmation as Beth gave a delighted nod, then surprising their hostess, the cub bounded over to give her an impromptu hug. Smiling down at her in pleasant surprise, Sara returned the hug, reaching out for her daughter, who joined her friend in their warm embrace, sharing the quiet little moment between them.