

## Rivals

by Ian Mallett

“It's still not very fair.”

“What?”

“This whole thing. I mean, flying into the system, stationing yourself a light-minute out, firing lasers and then moving before their lasers reach us. Wash, rinse, repeat.”

“No. Obviously it isn't fair. That's the whole point. They can look at us in their telescopes and shoot back, but we'll be long gone by the time their photons get there. Maneuverability is an asset in relativistic warfare. They should have thought of that before they decided to be a planet. What I'm asking is—why are you questioning my orders?”

“Sir, each of our shots could annihilate a city, but at this distance we can't target any particular spot. And sir, we've been bombarding them for *six hours!*”

“Yes. And we will continue to do so until they surrender.”

“ . . . ”

“ . . . ”

“Captain?”

“Yes, Commander?”

“Seeing as we're dodging their beams, maybe they can't ask?”