

# The Z Gates

*by* Larry Strattnr

Running hard; sweat popped out on his forehead. Trickled into his left eye. Shit. It stung. He blink, blink, blinked. Couldn't rub it carrying all his stuff. Stung.

Told his goddamn wife to get fucking moving, he was going to be late. Good slap got her going. Usually only took one. Lazy bitch. Whaled the kid's ass too. Teach him to yell. Thought he was safe with Mom holding him. He had to laugh. Safe? With your ass sticking out? Kid was lucky he didn't have time to really lay one on him. File it away. Take care of them both when he got back.

He scanned the concourse board as he trotted past. There. Tierra del Fuego. Why they needed him there he had no idea. Hell and gone. Looked it up on Google earth. Translated on Google spanish to english. Land of Fire. Checked the telegram. Tierra del Fuego. Z6. Fucking Z gates now? It had been bad enough getting out to the commuter gates. Now Z gates? He saw the down escalator up ahead, Z Gates.

Commotion in the Z gates. Too many assholes in a too small space. A rat's nest. Names and seats being called. Shoving. Christ. Everybody on a mission. "Hey!" he yelled at a guy banging into him. Shoved back.

Guy snarled at him, "No time to kick your ass right now; lucky for you. Maybe at the other end."

"I'll be there asshole," he yelled after the guy. The PA system crackled out his name and he shoved forward toward the number 6 door amid curses and jostling. Got to the boarding kiosk. "Jesus!"

“No help here,” the attendant said, smiling at him through some ugly-ass teeth and taking his ticket. “Seat number one.”

Seat number one? An upgrade? He hadn't even noticed. Looked at his itinerary as he walked down the ramp to see if an upgrade showed. He'd flown some jerkwater airlines in his time. Always fucked up. Nothing a kick at the dog and a thump on the wife couldn't cure when he got home. Laughed to himself. Came around the corner at the end of the ramp. God! What was that fucking smell?

Attendant said, “watch your step here, sir,” smiled, took his arm, opened a door and threw him into the fire. Called after him; over his screams, “Welcome to the Z Gates bitch!”

