

Freespace: The Great War

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Chapter 11: Armageddon

It was yet another packed house. The main briefing room of the Bastion was full, every seat taken, every inch of floor space occupied. Not that it really mattered, the Command Briefing was being broadcasted throughout the ship via the ship's internal television system. Pilots out patrolling around the great ship were even linked in. Joe was more privileged than most, he was sitting in the front row along with the other members of the Freespaceers.

"Attention!" screamed the ship's Executive Officer. "Admiral on deck!"

As one, the everyone in the briefing room stood up. From one of the main doors came Admiral Shima in her best dress uniform. She walked up to the podium and carefully placed her ledger pad down. "Command Briefing for March 29, 2335 will commence now. Be seated," she said in a clear voice. "Current intelligence indicates that the Shivans have determined the location of the Sol system. The Lucifer has moved into position in Sirius for the jump to Delta Serpentis. From there she will likely make her way to Sol and attack Earth."

The crew went into a frenzy of mumblings with that. A sense of panic began to fill the room. "People, let the Admiral finish," Spook cried out. The room dropped back into silence.

"Thank you captain," Shima said. "Information gathered from Altiar, however, has given us a ray of hope. As you know, our shielding systems don't function in subspace. Until recently, we didn't have any indication that this was true about the Shivans. However, we now know that the same problems we have are experienced by the Shivans, and especially the Lucifer. What's more, the information from Altiar also has given us the ability to track Shivan warships into and through subspace itself. If we can follow the Lucifer into subspace, Command believes that a small strike force may be sufficient to destroy it."

Eishtmo chuckled quietly. "What's so funny?" asked Joe. Eishtmo simply placed his finger to his lips then pointed toward Shima. Joe looked at his friend for a moment, then returned his gaze to Admiral Shima.

The Admiral now took on a very serious look, more serious than usual. "We have been assigned the task of destroying the Lucifer. The Bastion will intercept the Lucifer at the Sirius/Delta Serpentis node. We will then attempt to provide close cover while a wing of Ursa bombers deliver a payload of Harbingers. From information gathered about the Lucifer, we have determined that the destruction of the Lucifer's five reactors in quick succession will start a chain reaction that will destroy the ship."

"I wonder where they got that information," Lucy whispered to Joe.

"Yeah, me too," he said with a chuckle.

"The 6th Freespaceers have volunteered to lead the attack on the Lucifer," the Admiral gestured toward the Freespaceers. "We wish you all the best of luck. Report to your stations immediately after this briefing. Dismissed."

* * *

"No sign of the Lucifer. We'll have to proceed to Delta Serpentis," said Lucy.

“Just great,” said Roach. “Now we’ll have to fight the Lucifer on the doorstep to Sol.”

“Freespacers,” Command boomed. “Escort the Bastion and the Gladiator to the node and jump out with them. You’ll rendezvous with them in subspace.”

“Roger that Command,” Wolf said. “You heard them people. Beta, cover the Gladiator, Gamma the Bastion. Alpha, stay with us.”

“Not a problem,” said Joe. He pulled his Herc up behind the small wing of Ursas. The massive bodies of the bombers dwarfed even the mighty Hercs in size.

“What do ya know?” Coyote said. “Were all dressed up and our date stood us up.”

“And how many times have you done that yourself?” asked Fox.

“Two or three, I think,” Coyote responded.

“Bullshit,” Hound coughed.

“Ha ha, very funny,” said Coyote.

“It’s only funny cause it’s true,” said Lucy.

“And how would you know, Babe?” Roach teased. “You haven’t been seeing our little Coyote on the side, now have ya?”

“Shut the fuck up!” Lucy yelled.

“Cut the chatter people,” Joe said. “You can settle your differences after we destroy the Lucifer.”

“All fighters, enemy fighters on approach vector,” Command said.

“Alpha, intercept those fighters,” said Wolf.

“Let’s go people,” said Joe. He peeled away from the group and tore off towards the newly arrived Manticores. He locked on to the first one and readied a Hornet swarm when Lucy cried out in panic.

“Large enemy jump signature detected. It’s a Demon!”

Joe turned in time to see the massive body of a Shivan Demon appear. “Shit,” he said as his finger landed on the fire control for his secondaries and a cluster of Hornets flung themselves at his target.

“More enemy fighters,” Command said. “Protect the Bastion until she reaches the node.”

Joe finished off his target and swept around, back toward the mighty Orion. His missile warning suddenly went off. He dove away dropping a couple of counter measures as he went. A quick flick of his targeting switch locked on to the attacking Manticore. “Who the hell had Krishna two?” he yelled.

“Sorry Player,” said Roach. “I’ll get him now if you want.”

“Forget it,” said Joe. He out turned the Shivan and began pumping laser fire into him. Shortly there after, the fighter exploded.

“Command, do we have enough Harbingers to take out this Demon and the Lucifer,” Wolf asked.

“Roger that Delta one,” said Command. “But your priority should be to escort the Bastion.”

“Understood,” said Wolf. “Alpha, get back here and cover us, we’re going to attack the

Tantalus.”

“Copy that,” said Eishtmo. “Are you guys coming?”

“Give me a second,” said Roach. “Where the fuck did all these fighters come from anyway?”

“All give you three guesses,” Joe said. His fighter suddenly rocked with enemy fire. “And the first two don’t count.”

“I do not understand,” said Rock.

“Don’t worry about that,” said Fox. “Nobody else does either.”

Joe rolled his eyes. “Forget it,” he said in disgust. Joe pulled up behind Wolf’s bomber finally. “I got you covered, Wolf.”

“Thanks,” he said. “By the way, launch bombs!”

With that, a cluster of bombs shot out of the bombers of Delta, barreling toward the Shivan destroyer. Joe followed Wolf up and away from the target. He looked back to see another wing of Shivan fighters pour out of the Demon’s hull and charged toward the bombs. “They’re going after the bombs!” he yelled.

“We are on it,” said Rock. Joe watched as the four Ulysses of Beta wing threw themselves at the Shivan fighters.

“Beta get out of there,” Eishtmo cried. “You’re going to get spanked when those bombs go off.”

“We are handling it,” said Rock.

“Ten seconds ‘till impact,” Coyote announced.

“Get out of there Beta,” Command yelled.

“Beta wing,” Rock said with a calmness only a translator could provide. “Get away from the Tantalus.”

Joe swept up behind a loose Basilisk and began blasting away. He looked up in time to see the first impacts of the Harbingers. The blue shock wave rippled out and away from the Demon and slammed itself into the unlucky members of Beta wing. Joe turned away as the screams of those pilots echoed in his head set.

“Beta wing report,” Wolf said.

“This is Beta one, I have taken heavy damage and am requesting assistance,” said Rock

“Where’s everybody else?” asked Roach.

“They didn’t make it,” Joe said sadly. He fired a double shot of Hornets into his target, destroying it totally.

“This is the Bastion, we are at the node, jump out and meet us in subspace,” said the Bastion’s comm officer.

“Roger that Bastion,” said Eishtmo. “We’ll be there in a minute.”

Joe turned and watched as first the Bastion, then the damaged, but still kicking, Tantalus jumped out.

* * *

The rec room was a quite place. Sitting where ever they could, the members of the 6th Freespacers enjoyed a few moments of peace. Somehow, Joe could sense that this would be the last time they would all be together on board the Bastion. He took a sip of the Repellent Eishtmo had poured for him. The strong taste bounced it's way down his throat, yet it didn't really hurt, though it still made him give a slight cough.

He looked around the room. It really didn't belong to the Freespacers, theirs went down with the Galatea. Joe thought back to the first moment he had seen the Galatea, how beautiful the ship had been back then. His eyes made their way around the room, locking on to each of the pilots. He knew them all, by name at least. Yet, he didn't really know all of them, especially the replacement pilots for Beta wing, a group of Terran's who had volunteered for the job. There just simply wasn't time to pick up Vasudan replacements.

Joe took another sip of his drink. He held it up, staring into the glass. A thought now came to him. "Hey Eish," he said. "Who created this stuff?"

"One Lt. Commander William 'Ghoul' Snipes," Eishtmo said proudly. "The best damn sim pilot ever to live."

Joe preformed a spit take at the remark. "Snipes?" he said in surprise. "That was my instructor!"

"You're kidding," said Wolf. "You had Ghoul and didn't realize it?"

"I flew in a sim against him once," commented Fox. "He wiped the floor with me."

"I don't know," said Joe. "I didn't think he was to tough."

"Kid," said Eishtmo. "You don't understand. When he gets in a simulator, he cheats."

Joe looked at Eishtmo for a moment. "He cheats? I wonder if he was doing that when he flew against me."

"I thought you would have guessed that the first dozen times he shot you down," said Coyote. "From what I hear, he doesn't fly in a sim without cheating."

"He couldn't have been," said Joe. "I shot him down three times during training."

All the Terrans stared at him in awe. "Well then," said Eishtmo. "That means he's lost four times now."

"I said three," Joe replied.

"I took him down once myself," said Eishtmo. "Of course, I had to cheat to do it."

"Damn Player," said Roach. "You're one bad ass pilot!" Roach promptly slapped Joe on the back.

"That's why Ghoul resigned," Spook said. Joe turned to see the squad commander standing in the doorway. "Well, that's what I hear anyways."

"You're kidding," said Eishtmo. "He loved that job."

"I'm just telling you what I heard," said Spook. "Apparently, in early January Ghoul resigned from Saturn and got shipped off to who-knows-where." He walked up to the bar and climbed up onto it. "But that's not why I came here. I came to tell you that you guys have about thirty minutes before you go. I want you all to know that if you need help, the Hammerheads will be on the deck ready to back you up."

“How bout you guys fly the mission for us?” shouted Hound. Everyone laughed.

“Nah,” said Spook. “Remember, you guys volunteered.” He looked toward Ma’ka. “There is one other thing. Ma’ka, you owe me.”

“Owe you for what?” Ma’ka asked. The rest of Gamma put it’s drinks down in preparation to defend their commander.

“I managed to convince the Admiral to let you guys fly the Thoths we picked up at our last port,” Spook replied.

“Thoths?” Rock said in astonishment.

“Thoths,” Ma’ka said with pride. “Finally, I will fly a decent fighter.”

“Well, I hope they’re as good as advertised,” said Lucy. “We’ll need all the help we can get.”

“Don’t worry people,” said Spook. “They are.” He hopped down from the bar and made his way towards the door. “I’ll tell you when you have ten minutes left. Oh, and Eishtmo, you owe me a drink when you get back.”

“Damn right I do,” said Eishtmo.

The Freespacers watched as Spook left the room. An eerie silence now enveloped them all. That feeling Joe had earlier came again. This was it, the last great meeting. Yet, he wasn’t scared. Maybe it was the Repellent working it’s magic, or that sense of immortality that a teenager has, but whatever it was, Joe felt it throughout his body. He was not afraid. He examined his squad mates again, and somehow, he knew they would all make it out alive. Roach, Lucy, Wolf, Fox, Coyote, Hound, Ma’ka, Rock, Eishtmo and the others. They were all going to make it back, no matter what.

“Let’s go Freespacers,” Spook suddenly said. “Time to save the world.”

* * *

“There’s the Lucifer! It’s powering up to leave the system,” Command cried.

“Hot damn,” said Roach. “We’re right on it’s ass this time.”

“Carve us a path Alpha,” said Wolf. “We’re headed for the node now.”

“Alright people,” Joe said. “Let clear out these enemy fighters as quickly as possible.” Joe swung around and targeted the first of several Shivan fighters.

“Hold on to your missiles,” said Eishtmo. “We’ll need them for the Lucifer.”

“Roger,” said Joe. He began pelting the black and red fire with fire. His Banshee lasers sent a scream throughout his Herc’s hull with every shot. In no time, the Basilisk exploded. Joe quickly flipped the targeting controls and locked onto another.

“There she goes,” said Hound. Joe looked up and watched as the Lucifer disappeared into subspace.

“Command, the Lucifer has jumped out,” said Wolf.

“Freespacers,” said Command. “We estimate that you have roughly 10 minutes to reach the jump point. Beyond that you will not have enough time to defeat the Lucifer.”

“Great,” said Lucy. “Now we’re playing against the clock.”

“And we don’t get any timeouts,” muttered Coyote.

Joe's Herc blazed a trail across the sky, in hot pursuit of yet another Shivan fighter. "Where the hell are they all coming from?"

"Damned if I know," said Wolf.

"Keep your shirts on people," said Eishtmo. "This is easy so far."

"Easy he says," Roach said.

"I'm picking up another jump signature," said Lucy. "It's a Typhon!"

"Just what we need," yelled Fox. "More 'friends.'"

"Crap, we've only got eight minutes left," said Hound.

"Gee, I didn't know you could tell time," said Joe as he dropped a countermeasure and kicked in his afterburners.

"Ha ha, very funny."

"It's no use! The Bastion will never catch up with the Lucifer," Command suddenly said. "Freespacers, you'll have to go after it yourself."

"What about the Bastion?" Lucy said in a worried voice.

"Don't worry about the Bastion," Spooks voice suddenly came over the comm. "We've got her covered. All right Hammerheads. Let's plow the field!"

"Let's get going people," said Wolf. "We have a world to save."

Joe peeled off his target and made for the nearby jump node. He flicked through his targets and watched as a dozen new Terran fighters entered the field. "We'll see you guys when we get back," he said.

"Remind me," said Eishtmo. "I don't owe you a drink, I owe you a whole case!"

"Damn straight," said Spook.

"Let's go people, we've only got seven minuets," said Hound.

"I suppose that he is the time keeper now," said Rock.

"I guess so," said Joe. He entered the node, a pair of fighters hot on his tail. With a quick flick of the controls, a subspace vortex opened and he slipped into a whole new world. The blue and black swirls of subspace twirled around him at a dizzying speed. Joe shook the dizziness away.

"Ew," Lucy said. "I think I'm gonna be sick."

"Well, don't puke on the controls," said Eishtmo. "The ground crew hates it when you do that."

"And how exactly would you know?" asked Lucy.

"Alright people, that's enough," Wolf interrupted. "Shift all your energy from your shields to engines and weapons."

"Yeah, like we didn't know that already," said Fox. Joe gulped as he realized he had forgotten about that. He quickly shifted the energy.

"Hey, some of you may have forgotten," Wolf said. "I'm just here to remind you."

"Alright fearless leader, what do we do next then," teased Coyote.

“On a mission of this importance, I would think you would have more self-restraint,” muttered Ma’ka.

Eishtmo chuckled. “If we did that, we’d all be puking.”

“Just like Babe,” Roach interjected.

“Shut up Roach!”

“All right, everyone, we don't have much time,” said Wolf. “We’ve got to take out those reactors ASAP. Alpha, you hang back with Delta and keep us covered. Beta, take out the Lucifer’s weapons. Delta, take out any fighters she throws at us, understood?”

“As you wish,” said Rock.

“I am more than happy to do your bidding,” said Ma’ka.

“You’re just happy ‘cause you got those fancy fighters,” Beta three said.

Ma’ka didn’t say anything. Joe could just imagine the smile on the that Vasudan’s face.

“Holy shit, there it is,” Lucy shouted.

Joe looked up to see the Lucifer dead ahead of him. He quickly realized that he was now officially in the history books, he had seen the Lucifer at least five times and lived to tell the tale. Of course, the day wasn’t over yet.

“Alright people, let’s get to it,” said Wolf.

Joe watched as Wolf’s Ursa pulled away from him, afterburners glowing. He quickly activated the match speed and kicked in his own afterburners to keep up. He looked to the left in time to see Beta wing’s Ulysses fighters shoot ahead toward the waiting super destroyer. A quick look right showed the same scene with Gamma, just with Thoth fighters instead.

“Okay Dogs,” said Wolf. “Hound, take reactor two, Fox reactor three, Coyote reactor four and I’ll take reactor one. Whoever’s finished first, take out reactor five, you got it?”

“Charge,” yelled Coyote.

“I expected that much,” said Wolf. “Let’s go!”

“Enemy fighters inbound,” said Lucy.

“We have them,” said Ma’ka.

Joe watched as a battle erupted near the Lucifer. They seemed almost to inch over to the Lucifer, the slow Ursas leading the way. Joe’s finger clicked the targeting control, just waiting for one of those Shivan fighters to lock on to Wolf. He wasn’t disappointed. A Shivan Dragon charged head first toward the bomber wing. Joe casually doubled up his Hornets and after a short lock time, launched eight of the missiles at the oncoming enemy. The Dragon didn’t even know what hit him.

“Nice shooting, for a Terran,” said Gamma two.

“Didn’t even break a sweat,” Joe said proudly.

“I’m launching my bombs now,” shouted Coyote.

Joe glanced over to see a pair of Harbingers dart out of Coyote’s bomber and slowly make their way toward the Lucifer. He then watched as one of the Lucifer’s many turrets began firing towards the bombs, as if it knew the danger they posed. The firing stopped. Joe shifted his glance over to see the final explosion of the turret and a Ulysses pulling up and away from it.

Suddenly his warning light began flashing. Instinctively, he dove down, under Wolf's bomber and back around to face the Manticore attacker. Before he could fire off a shot, a Thoth strafed the fighter, scaring it off. "Thanks," Joe said.

"It is my duty," said Gamma four as she pulled away.

"Bombs away," Fox said indicating that yet another pair of Harbingers were on a collision course with the Lucifer.

"This thing sure is easy to kill," said Beta two. "Are you sure we're fighting the right Lucifer?"

"The one and only," said Eishtmo.

"Say good bye to reactor four," said Coyote. "I'm headed for number five."

"Man," said Hound. "Look at the pretty explosions."

Roach chuckled. "Yes, pretty explosions."

"Gee, I'm getting behind," said Wolf. "Time to catch up!"

Joe watched as another pair of bombs made their way towards the Lucifer's reactor. He quickly flipped his target display to reactor one. He glimpsed out the window and waited for the detonation of the Harbingers. The blue sphere of the shock wave radiated out from the target. Joe quickly turned to the target display and noticed the reactor was all but gone. "Just shoot it a few times, it'll be gone."

"Already on it," said Wolf. He pulled his bomber around and began pelting the reactor with his lasers.

"All of the Lucifer's fighter defenses have been destroyed," said Rock. "We will now assist against the fighters."

"I believe I could take them all on myself," said Ma'ka.

"Was that a boast I heard?" asked Joe.

"No boast," said Ma'ka. "The truth."

"Yeah, I bet," said Beta four.

Joe's fighter shook with a final shock wave. "Reactor one is gone," said Wolf. "Dogs, report."

"Reactor two is gone," said Hound.

"Three is right out," said Fox.

"Four is gone, and give me thirty seconds, so will five," said Coyote.

"You need any help Coyote," said Wolf.

"Hell no," said Coyote. "Just pound on the Lucifer some more, I'm almost done."

"Mind if I get some kills in," said Joe.

"What?" said Wolf. "Didn't you already get one?"

Joe put on a sad face. "But it was only one."

Roach laughed out loud. "Ah, yes. The kill king of the Freespaceers."

“Yeah go on,” said Wolf. “Not like I’m in much trouble here.”

“Thanks.” Joe pulled away from Wolf’s bomber and shot out towards the battles around the Lucifer. He spun around and targeted the nearest fighter, a Dragon. He pulled up behind the agile fighter which bobbed and weaved against the swirling background. Joe got a feeling in the pit of his stomach. “Whoa, I could get sick doing this.”

“Well don’t bother,” said Coyote. “Reactor five is history.”

“Well that didn’t do shit,” said Roach.

Lucy got a worried look on her face. “I’m picking up some strange readings here.”

“Freespacers,” Commands voice boomed. “The Lucifer is thirty seconds from Sol, finish her off.”

“Holy shit,” yelled Wolf. “She’s going up!”

Joe turned to see explosions flash around the Lucifer. Balls of yellow and orange exploded along the surface of the black and red ship. Joe was so enthralled by the sight, he didn’t note the Manticore coming up behind him.

“Player,” said Ma’ka.

Joe turned and saw the fighter. He hit his afterburners and dove away, just dodging the fire from the Shivan. “Thanks.”

“We’re at the other end of the node,” said Wolf. “Let’s get the fuck out of here!”

Joe pointed his fighter forward toward the now opening portal of the Lucifer. He hit his afterburners and headed for it as fast as he could.

“Get these bastards off me!” screamed Coyote.

“I’m coming,” said Eishtmo.

“No,” said Ma’ka. “I will get him.”

“Summer, assist him,” said Rock.

“Copy that,” said Beta two.

“I’m not letting you die yet,” said Fox. “You still owe me money.”

“Damn it Fox, get out of there,” said Roach.

Joe pushed through the opening. He looked back to see the Lucifer, still in flames, forcing itself through the vortex. “It just doesn’t know when to give up,” he exclaimed.

“All fighters, peel out of there now!” Wolf shouted.

“We’re going as fast as we can,” said Coyote. “This thing handles like a pig.”

“She’s gonna blow!” screamed Lucy.

Joe looked back to see the Lucifer sneak its front end through the portal. Then, the portal just shut, cutting the front end of the Lucifer off. The front end floated there for a second until it exploded with enormous force. Joe was thrown forward in his seat as his fighter bounced off the shock wave.

He was stunned for a second. Joe shook his head, trying to clear it, and then looked up. There, behind the grey and white surface of the moon, was the Earth, its blue color alone in the sky. “I’m home,” he said.

Epilogue

“Yo Player, get over here,” Wolf yelled.

“One second,” said Joe. He turned back to man he was speaking to. “Excuse me Mr. President, my squadron needs me.”

“But of course son,” said the President.

Joe walked across the ball room. A thought now came to him: He had just blown off the President of the GTA. Joe smiled at the thought.

“Scoring brownie points with the Pres, eh Player,” said Roach.

Joe just smiled. “So, what’s up?” he said as he sat down.

“We’ve got a toast to make,” said Hound.

“But we already did that about a dozen times tonight,” complained Roach.

“But it hasn’t been for us,” said Wolf. He held his glass up in the air. “So, what should we toast?”

“How ‘bout we toast Fox and Coyote?” suggested Lucy.

“Nah,” said Hound. “I say we do the Galatea.”

“What about Bull and the others?” said Roach.

“If we did the Galatea, we’d be doing all them too,” Hound said.

“I think we should remember Ma’ka’s bravery,” said Rock.

The four now began to argue, until Wolf stepped in. “Hold on people,” he said to quiet the group. “Player, what do you think?”

Joe looked at each one of them. He looked over and noticed that Eishtmo wasn’t at the table, but sitting in a seat along the far wall with a forlorn look on his face. Then in a move he thought was both brilliant and fitting, he raised his glass. “To all our fallen comrades,” he said. “May they never be forgotten.”

The others looked at each other, smiled and raised their glasses up. “Here, here!” they shouted as the glasses clanged together.

“Now,” said Wolf. “One last thing.” He looked at Lucy, Roach and Joe. “I think you guys have earned new callsigns.”

“Finally,” said Lucy.

“Now,” Wolf said. “As per tradition, the person who originally gave you your callsign gets to re-name you.” A sad look appeared on Wolf’s face. “But since Coyote isn’t here anymore, we’ll all give you a new callsign, Lucy. Any suggestions?”

“Rose,” said Roach. Lucy looked at him with astonishment. “She pretty on the outside, but a thorny bitch on the inside.”

Lucy smacked Roach. “Bastard,” she said.

“I think it fits you rather well,” said Joe.

“It’s settled then,” said Wolf. He raised his hands up as he had done to Joe so long ago. “I, Captain Steven “Wolf” Dobbs, place the callsign of Rose upon this young Lieutenant.” Everyone gave a shout of congratulations.

Lucy blushed. “Stop it,” she said.

“Now as for you Joe,” Wolf started.

“Actually,” said Joe. “I think I’ll stick with Player for now.”

The rest looked at him. “Are you sure?” asked Wolf. “I remember you not caring for that name too much.”

“I didn’t,” said Joe. “But it’s grown on me.”

“Alright then, you will remain The Player, for now,” Wolf replied.

“Now how ‘bout me,” said Roach.

“Oh come on,” said Hound. “No other name could ever fit you.”

Roach nodded smugly. “Oh, you’re so right.” Everyone laughed.

Joe got up out of his chair. “Well if you excuse me, I have things to do.”

“Hey Rose,” said Roach. “You wanna dance?”

“You want your nose broken,” Rose said bitterly.

Joe chuckled. Eishtmo had been right, common bickering was better than them killing each other. He walked over to Eishtmo. The old soldier was sitting there, a glass of Reliant Repellent in his hand. Joe sat down next to him. “How’s it going?” he said.

Eishtmo cocked his head. “Just thinking.”

“About what?”

“About the war,” Eishtmo said. “You realize that the even though the node is closed, the war is still going on.” He took a sip of his drink. “The Shivans are still out there, and one day they may rebuild the node and find their way here.”

“If they come, we’ll beat them back,” said Joe proudly.

Eishtmo shrugged. “Maybe,” he said. “Maybe not.”

Joe looked at his friend. “You are the most depressing drunk I’ve ever met.”

“I’m not drunk,” Eishtmo said flatly.

“Bullshit,” said Joe. “I’ve watched you down at least seven of those things. I’m surprised you’re not unconscious on the floor with a lamp shade on your head.”

Eishtmo smiled. “It’s non-alcoholic.”

“What?” Joe asked, trying to make sure he heard him right.

Eishtmo now began to laugh. “This,” he said as he held up his glass. “Doesn’t have a drop of alcohol in it.”

Joe’s jaw dropped. “You mean I attacked the Lucifer sober?”

“Come on kid,” Eishtmo said. “Do you really think they’d let us fly with alcohol in our system. That’s why Ghoul created the Repellent, so we could get all the punch of a drink and none of the booze.” Joe continued to stare at him. “Just don’t tell the others, it works better if they don’t know.” Joe nodded.

“Hey,” shouted Roach. “What’cha guys doing?”

“Nothing much,” said Eishtmo with a smile.

“Well, then,” said Roach. “We’re going to this place I know downtown, you want to go?”

“You sure I could get in?” asked Joe.

“Doesn’t matter,” said Roach. “I’ve snuck into this place dozens of times. If they won’t let you in, I’ll get you in.”

Joe turned to Eishtmo. “You want to go.”

“Sure, why not,” said Eishtmo.

“Alright,” said Roach. “I’ll meet you guys out front in ten minutes.” He then turned and left.

“Come on kid,” said Eishtmo as he got up.

A thought came to Joe. “Hey Eish,” he said as he stood up.

“Yes.”

“When are you gonna stop calling me kid?”

“When you stop acting like a kid, kid,” Eishtmo replied. Then a smile came across his face. “I’ll race you out there.” And with that, he ran for the door.

“Hey!” Joe shouted. “Wait up!” And the two of them ran out into a night filled with stars.

The End

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