

## The Stars Above

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Jessica looked up to the stars and the sights the sky held far above. "I love the New Year." Her eyes focused on a tiny dot far away, clearly a great distance from the Earth. Her friend, and fellow pilot Jordan, looked to where her attention was held. "It's not a bad plan this year, but it won't do anything for the war." Jessica pulled a white scarf from where it was tied to her leg and waved it furiously at a low flying craft as it rushed by. Jordan held his cap on as the wind blew strongly against them both, and muttered curses at the dust as it flew into his eyes. He wasn't too taken with the idea of watching the festivities from a landing strip. Jessica however, knew how much fun could be had. "It's a great plan this year Jord, one that'll look even better from this strip."

"How can that be? It's straight above us!"

Jessica held her arms out and spun on the spot, taking in a deep breath of fresh air. "Because it's so clear and relaxing out here."

Jordan let himself fall carefully to the ground, and lay facing upwards. The cold grass was indeed relaxing, a point he wasn't intending to argue against any more. He lay silently for a moment, the figure of Jessica a blurry vision on the edge of his sight. He was sure she was still dancing. "You're right, it is peaceful here. I don't know though, sometimes I just like the boring greys of a station." The figure of Jessica suddenly jumped into focus as she hung her head over his face, blocking his view of the stars.

"You're lying to yourself again." He blew at her hair as it dangled over his face. He was amazed at how perceptive she could be. He was joking himself, holding onto the past when he really should be letting go.

"Has anyone ever told you how beautiful you are?" Jessica smiled, obviously in deep thought.

"Yes." Jordan coughed at the response. It wasn't at all what he was expecting.

"Figures."

"You know Jordan Michaels, flattery like that will get you nowhere." Jordan knew that. He enjoyed the friendship he had with Jessica, a rare thing as pilots in such a dangerous game. The two of them knew that they would only go further if they could both survive the war. There was a slim chance of it happening, but they knew if it did, they were meant to be together. It was something they were both happy to understand.

Jessica fell to her side and looked into Jordan's eyes. "You know what that dot is?"

"You mean, have you told me? Not yet."

"They're going to announce what it is at 11:55, but I have the inside scoop 'cos we're out here."

Jordan looked up to the grey speck in the sky. "Go on then, spill the beans."

Jessica smiled and looked towards it herself. She put her hands behind her head as support from the dirty ground and rolled completely onto her back. "It's a Shivan vessel, Cain class."

Jordan laughed. "So that's what they're going to nuke."

“That’s right. I doubt the Shivans will care, but the GTA thinks it’s the perfect thing to send them a message. Frankly, I’m just in it for the explosion.”

Jordan pulled his cap over his face as another low flying craft drifted overhead for a landing. “It’s gonna kick ass, that’s for sure.” The two young pilots smiled and knew that this was exactly what Earth had been crying out for. Thousands had perished in the war, and the spirits of a once strong world were a great less stronger than years past before. Jordan pulled his arm up and rolled down his sleeve, looking deeply into his watch. “Be nice if these standard watches had glowing bits on them. I can’t see a thing.”

Jessica tapped at the watch on her arm and held it above Jordan’s face, a little under his own. “That’s your problem. I spent some extra on mine and got the ‘glowy bits’. No matter what the time, I can see it on my watch. It’s always worth the extra cash.” She put her watch arm back behind her head. There was a long silence until she realised Jordan was waiting for an answer. “It’s 11:51, by the way.”

“Thanks. Cain class is it? I thought they’d use something a little bigger.”

Jessica twisted her head in an attempt to focus on the dot. “Nah, it’ll do. They’ve packed it with fireworks and stuff so it’ll go up like a rocket. I wouldn’t worry.”

Jordan continued, almost as if he hadn’t heard the comment. “So where’d they get it from?” Jessica patted him on the stomach and sat up. She grabbed a hold of her white scarf once again and waved it in the air. Though Jordan couldn’t see the craft as it flew past, he could certainly hear its engines, almost a full thrust. Jessica beat him to the comment. “He sure is moving fast.”

“Maybe he wants to be on the ground for the explosion?” Jessica saw the sense in the comment, and looked towards her watch, impressed with how well it glowed in the dark.

“Yeah, he’s only got about two minutes.”

“So tell me young lady, where’d they get it from?”

Jessica turned around to see Jordan had followed suit and sat up as well. She sat in confusion for a moment until her mind clicked back into the previous conversation. “The Cain class?” She smiled and pulled a pose. “That would be my squadron that brought her in. Picked her up with a small fighter escort making a run for it. She wasn’t hard to get.” Jordan shook his head.

“So that’s how you got the scoop on what it was.”

“Yep. When she goes up, I’m gonna be mighty proud.” The two friends lay back down, almost in the exact way they had been a short time before, and sat quietly for a while. Jessica suddenly became anxious and checked her watch once again.

“It’s 11:58, so everyone should know about ‘the dot’ by now.”

“Don’t worry about that, you just listen for the countdown.”

Jessica smiled and saluted the stars. “Yes sir!” She fell into laughter only to be silenced by Jordan who could hear a few voices in the distance. He put a hand over her mouth and smiled, sincerely.

“Shhh. I can hear something.” Even though Jessica wasn’t making any noise, he could tell she was still giggling. He put his finger to his lips in a last, desperate attempt to hear what was being said. “Shhhh, it sounds like someone on a mike.” Jessica nodded, and had the hand lifted from her mouth. She was quite interested now too. There wasn’t meant to be anybody out near the strip, especially someone with a microphone. Jordan could hear what was being said, though only just. It sounded like a presentation of some kind only with background cheer from a supporting crowd. “I guess they’re having a party at the base.”

Jessica smiled. “I’m glad you can hear that. You sure that’s what it is?”

Jordan listened once again. He could hear a little clearer now. “Six, five, four…” He threw his arms around Jessica and spun around to focus on the small dot, high up in the sky.

Jessica panicked and began looking in random directions. “What? What? What is it?”

Jordan pointed up towards the stars and looked to see a squadron of fighters fly in formation across the sky. It was the most glorious sight he had ever seen. “Happy New Year Jessica.”

The explosion from the Shivan ship lit up the night sky, with a range of colours and fireworks like nothing anyone on the Earth had ever seen. For that brief moment, every human on the Earth felt invincible, sure that there was nothing that would ever conquer them. They would enter the New Year with an amazing strength, one that would never be conquered, one that lifted everyone’s heart in a way not felt in a very long time. For that brief moment, Jordan and Jessica felt they might both make it back alive and the war would one-day end. One day, they would be together. Jordan looked up to the stars above, and smiled. He knew it was something he would survive.

He whispered quietly under his breath, something he knew she would one day hear.

“Happy New Year Jessica, my love.”