STARSHIP DOMINATRIX

A DEADLY LITTLE CRISIS

By Dustin J. Craig

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Trigger Warning

For Those Who Live in La-La-Land

This story dives into some heavy shit.

Expect Violence, death, combat, war, childhood trauma, grief, alcohol abuse references, strong language, parental loss themes, depictions of armed conflict, and aggressively graphic depictions of Christmas branding taken far beyond what any reasonable graphic designer should tolerate.

This is a standalone story set in the Starship Dominatrix universe, an unapologetically queer space opera series by Dustin J. Craig. If a starship captain with a profound hatred of Christmas accidentally discovering its true meaning during a raid on a pirate encampment sounds like your kind of story, then welcome aboard. Buckle up, cupcake. You're in for a badass, no-holds-barred, muthafuckin' ride!

Acknowledgments

This story is for everyone who has faced the difficult choice between punishment and mercy, especially when anger felt justified. Thank you to the people who interrupt inherited cruelty, protect those who cannot protect themselves, and refuse to let another person's worst act become the only thing that defines them.

And to everyone who has somehow held a holiday together while the surrounding world descended into chaos: your decorations may be crooked, your family may be complicated, and something may presently be on fire—but you made it through.

For those on Santa's naughty list.

You know who you are.
Santa knows who you are.
Frankly, you've made it pretty obvious.

THE FIRST OH HELL NO

Jack sat staring at his vinte decaf double-shot pumpkin spice extra mocha cappuccino with whipped cream and cinnamon sprinkles. The big bold words of 'We Won the War on Christmas' plastered on his BlackHoleBucks Café coffee cup taunted him. It featured Baby Jesus in a Santa hat riding a missile, gold glitter garland around the rim, and Santa and his elves firing candy-cane rifles at nondescript protesters.

Jack rolled his one good eye at the absurdity of the label while his cybernetic ocular implant in his other eye socket glowed red. He reluctantly sipped his coffee from the tacky cup, harboring a profound hatred of Christmas. For him, Christmas wasn't hope. It was a brutal reminder of trauma.

Talonor was Jack's massively muscular minotaur-like alien husband. He decked the Galley aboard the Dominatrix II with improvised decorations. Broken plasma coils as garlands, jury-rigged emergency glow sticks as lights, and a broken antenna array as a tree with plasma grenades for ornaments decorated the room.

"Nothing says 'peace on earth' like explosives on a dead antenna. You're really pushing the limit with that one, Cowboy," Jack muttered before taking another begrudging sip. He smirked bitterly. "One spark and your Christmas tree turns this whole galley into roasted chestnuts."

Talonor placed a crystalized Aetherium core on top of the 'tree' as he swished his tail. "It's about the holiday

spirit, Jack. Family. The light in the darkness. Doesn't any of that matter to you?"

Jack snorted. "Last time I had Christmas spirit, it came in a bottle labeled one hundred five proof, and I can't even have that anymore."

"C'mon, Jack. Where's your holiday cheer?"

"There is no holiday cheer in a galaxy this fucked. You can sing carols, stuff stockings, and wish each other a merry fucking Christmas, but leave me out of it."

IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL CRIME OF THE YEAR

A raider encampment that once housed an old mining facility on the moon of Eisgait was covered in snow and ice in the cold dark dead of night. Frosnik 'Krampus' Volzen trudged through the snow through the encampment. He earned that nickname because of his relentlessness and cruelty. It didn't help that his alien features were goatlike. He could never play that down—so he owned it.

He opened the door to his cabin, where a fire was waiting for him. He took in the usual comforts of home, glad to be back…and alive.

"Branel? Bran, I'm home!" he called out.

A boy the same species as Frosnik came barging out of his room. "Dad!" the kid said enthusiastically, running up to Frosnik with his arms outstretched.

Frosnik dropped his sack and opened his arms wide. He crouched and hugged his son, then kissed his forehead. "Ah, it's good to see you, my boy! Just in time for Christmas."

"Where did you go, Dad?"

"I went to go get you a Christmas present."

Branel cocked his head. “For three days?”

Frosnik laughed. “It’s a very—“ He booped Branel’s nose. “—special present.” He opened his sack and fished out a Holographic Entertainment Arts Device and handed it to his son.

Branel’s eyes lit up. “Whoa! For me, Dad?”

Frosnik chuckled. “It’s the latest model. I thought you’d like it.”

Branel brushed his fingers reverently across the polished device. He slid it over his head, and holographic displays flickered on. The device booted up with a cheerful chime, and a dialog box appeared.

“It…it’s asking for a password,” Branel said. “Dad? What’s the password?”

Frosnik winced. “Uh…it’s…complicated. I’ll figure it out later.”

Branel took off the device. “Dad, did you…steal this?”

The fur on Frosnik’s neck bristled. “Don’t talk like that, son. It’s for you. That’s all that matters.”

Branel stood perplexed as he stared at the device. “I…I don’t want it.”

“C’mon, son. It’s your Christmas present—“

Branel shoved it back into his father’s hands, his eyes welling with tears. “I said I don’t want it!” He bolted from the room, leaving Frosnik alone with the toy as useless as his lies, torn between his raiding lifestyle and his fatherhood.

IT’S BEGINNING TO LOOK LIKE DISTRESS

Jack entered the Bridge, and the AI auxiliary crew were busy at their stations. He carried a DataPad with him to do

some late-night crew evaluations for the end of the year.

Alistair, the AI acting captain, sat in the captain's chair.

Jack approached the chair. "You're dismissed, Lieutenant."

Alistair immediately yielded the captain's chair and walked a few steps as Jack sat down. Alistair glanced back at Jack and gave a small smile and a nod. "Merry Christmas, Captain."

Jack scoffed with a quick exhale through his nose and a soft grunt. He turned on his DataPad.

Jack's sister and first officer, Yvonne, walked onto the Bridge. She crossed the room and sat down in her chair as she addressed Jack. "Merry Christmas, bro."

"Yeah, whatever," Jack said.

"It's about time we spent at least one Christmas together."

Jack rolled his eye upward as he plunked his DataPad on his lap with a sharp huff. "Number Two, I don't want to hear it." He sighed. "Everyone's been wishing me a 'Merry Christmas' all day. I don't celebrate it, I don't exchange gifts, and I certainly ain't gonna wish them great tidings of comfort and motherfucking joy."

"Why do you hate Christmas so much?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Is it because of what happened when we were kids?"

Jack tapped his DataPad screen, trying to distract himself from his sister's comment.

"Jack, you have to let that go. Yes, it was horrible, but things have changed for the better, haven't they?"

Jack continued his work in silence.

"Haven't they?"

Jack ignored Yvonne's desperate attempts to reach her

brother's heart. It was as cold as the vacuum of space.

"Captain," an AI officer called out from the comm/ops station. "We're getting a distress call from the moon of Eisgait. Raiders have ransacked their colony, stolen all their BioGel and supplies. The colonists are requesting immediate help."

"Not our jurisdiction," Jack said as he continued to evaluate crew members.

"Jack!" Yvonne snapped. "How can you be so heartless?"

"Look, if we ran out and saved every single person from their problems, we wouldn't be able to do our jobs."

"And our job is to protect people, Jack. People are starving without their BioGel. They're probably cold and helpless without their supplies. I mean, what else are we doing other than just cruising around in space?"

"Patrolling The Sphere."

"And that includes taking care of any distress call. Give the order to investigate."

Jack felt a migraine coming on. It was harder to ignore than his sister. "Fine, fine. You win." He called out to the pilot. "Lieutenant, open a wormhole to Eisgait. Low orbit."

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS MY SON'S RESPECT

Frosnik sat in front of the bonfire outside in the middle of the encampment. He pulled his fur cloak around him to stave off the cold from creeping up his back. He turned the H.E.A.D. around in his hands, trying to figure out how to bypass the password. He ignored the roughhousing and shouting around the encampment from the drunk, rowdy raiders wearing Santa hats. His mind turned over with the

sight of his son breaking into tears over something he thought would bring Branel a bit of the magic of Christmas in his eyes.

A big, burly man on crutches hobbled over to the log Frosnik was sitting on. He had lost a foot that still bore the cauterization from a stray plasma bolt from many years prior. The man had a bald head and a black beard, wearing the orange pelt of a Jasger dire wolf.

"Hey, Krampus," the man said, standing over him. "Mind if I sit here?"

The interruption broke Frosnik from his thoughts. He glanced up and recognized the man. "Oh. Hey, Cookie." He scooted over and dusted some snow off the log.

Cookie lumbered next to Frosnik, sat down, and leaned his crutches against the log next to him. He held his hands out in front of the bonfire to warm them up, then glanced to the H.E.A.D. in Frosnik's hands. "What's that?"

"It's a gift I gave my son."

"Didn't Bran like it?"

Frosnik's fur bristled. "He said he didn't want it." He relaxed and sighed. "I risk my neck with every raid to provide for him, and this is the thanks I get."

Cookie snorted. "Bah. Kids don't get it. They don't care if you bled for it, so long as it ain't theirs. You drag back shinies, food, liquor—whatever—and they just see another thing stolen. That's what they'll always see."

Frosnik turned the H.E.A.D. over in his hands. The holographic interface caught the firelight. *Another thing stolen, he thought.*

Cookie went on. "Truth is, Bran will come around. The boy will learn the same as we all did—nobody gives you anything in this galaxy. You take it, and keep what you can

carry. That's the only way any of us live past winter."

Frosnik's jaw tightened as he stared at the dancing flames. He remembered the look on his son's face—the tears and the disappointment. It didn't look like a boy learning a lesson. It looked like a boy losing faith in his father.

"Yeah," Frosnik muttered. "That's what I'm afraid of."

RAIDERS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

Jack zoomed his ocular implant in on the entrance to the encampment. The two guards were oblivious to him, Talonor, and the AI crew members who were lying prone in the snow.

"What do you see, Jack?" Talonor asked.

"Well, from the heat signatures through the walls, I gather about twenty, maybe twenty-two humanoids," Jack said. "Can't tell you their gender, or how old they are."

Talonor thought for a moment with a quizzical look on his face. "So, what's the plan?"

"I say we gun it. Since there's little cover between here and the entrance, the element of surprise is not on our side."

Talonor continued to think. "We could dress up as carolers…"

Jack shot Talonor a look.

"What? Maybe they'll be more willing to talk if we show mercy. Otherwise, we'll become the monsters we fight."

"I highly doubt that raiders will care if we're humanitarian or not. We are only marks to them." Jack continued to scope out the encampment with his implant.

"Well, what's our goal?" Talonor asked. "Just kill them all? There's got to be a better solution. It is Christmas after—"

"I don't care if it's Christmas, Easter, or losing a goddamn tooth. Our job is to eliminate the threat to the colonists so we don't have to do this again."

Talonor rubbed his broken horn. His thoughts raced for any possible solution, and then he nodded. "Alright Jack. I'm behind you all the way."

DO YOU FEAR WHAT I FEAR

"Bran?" Frosnik said as he rapped on his son's door.

"Go away!" Branel called out from the other side.

"Bran, I need to talk to you. Can you please open the door?"

Silence met his plea.

"Bran, I…I get why you're upset with me. I fucked up. I want to make it right. Can you please open the door so that we can talk?"

Frosnik stood by the door, hoping to get an answer. The door opened, and Branel sighed. Branel trudged to his bed, then sat cross-legged at its head.

Frosnik was trepidatious as he slowly entered his son's room. He inched closer. "Bran. What I did…it was wrong. I betrayed your trust, and for that, I owe you an apology."

"Dad, you shouldn't apologize to me. You should apologize to the colonists you stole from."

Frosnik sat at the foot of Branel's bed. "It isn't that easy, son. You don't understand."

"I don't like it when you raid, Dad."

"Bran…"

"I want to hear it from you. That you won't raid again."

Frosnik was at a loss for words. He had to tell his son what he wanted to hear, but he couldn't lie to his flesh and blood.

"Dad? Are you going to raid again?"

Frosnik opened his mouth, but no words came out. He didn't want to fail him.

Before he could answer, plasma bolt fire rang through the encampment from outside. Raiders scrambled for their weapons and barked orders, and they heard the screams of agony in the throes of death.

"What is it, Dad?"

"Hide under the bed. Don't come out until I tell you it's safe."

"But Dad—"

"Go. Now." Frosnik hurried out the door, but before he left, he stopped, turned around, and said, "I love you, Bran." He locked the door from the inside. He left the room then closed the door behind him.

VIOLENT NIGHT

Jack and Talonor led the charge with the AI crew close behind. They had stormed the gates and laid waste to a dozen raiders. The duo hid behind sandbags and barrels for cover. Talonor alone had gunned down eight by himself, while Jack had taken out only four.

The AI crew had all but taken out the rest, and Jack inched through the encampment, searching for any sign of life.

"Do you see any more, Jack?" Talonor asked.

"Damn. I can't see anything out of my implant. They

must have activated an EM field around here to block its signals.

Out of the corner of his good eye, he saw movement inside a cabin. He raised his plasma bolt rifle and slowly crept toward the structure.

I SAW DADDY SAVED BY SANTA CLAUS

Frosnik was prepared to fight back. He raised his plasma bolt rifle at the door, waiting for death to come knocking. He looked through the sight of his barrel, but his gaze turned inward and saw the same man, still a raider. He looked toward the door to his son's room, but teetered toward holding the barrel tighter. He glanced out the window and saw all his friends had been slaughtered. Cookie's body was lying in full view, charred from plasma bolt fire. It seemed like he was the last one standing. If he had died, Bran would be without a father.

Tears welled in his eyes, and he pointed the barrel downward. He threw it on the floor, got on his knees, and raised his hands behind his head, waiting for the end.

The door burst open, and Jack had his rifle pointed directly at Frosnik's head. Jack was about to pull the trigger.

"Dad!" Bran yelled as he ran out of his room.

"Get back in your room, Bran!"

Jack's breath caught. A child on the premises was the last thing he expected.

Bran ran between Jack and his father, shielding Frosnik as best he could.

Frosnik grabbed Bran and held him tight. He stared at Jack, not wanting to go in front of his son. He looked up at

Jack with pleading eyes, begging for mercy.

Jack's aim wavered, and a tear fell from his cheek. He saw himself in the eyes of Bran. The same scared little boy he once was. Jack lowered his rifle and walked toward Frosnik and Bran, staring at them. He stood above them for a moment, and the father and son winced, waiting for the end.

Jack reached out his hand, offering to help Frosnik to his feet.

Frosnik looked into Jack's eye and saw something he had never seen before. Compassion. He looked at Jack's hand, then back at Jack's unwavering gaze. He reached up, took Jack's hand, and Jack helped him stand up.

Jack swallowed his pride as he shook Frosnik's hand.

"Merry Chrismas," Jack said.

Jack turned and walked out the door with his rifle at his side, rubbing his temple.

Frosnik and Bran were perplexed by the strange interaction, and Frosnik held Bran close to his side.

Outside, a random raider charged Jack, and Jack lazily shot the raider, blowing his head clean off. The body fell with a sickening thud, and Jack motioned for the crew to make their exit.

DECK THE LOGS WITH BUREAUCRACY

Jack sat at his desk, writing a report of the incident in his Captain's Command Chamber on the Dominatrix II. He got to the point where it came to recounting his altercation with Frosnik.

Yvonne entered the room. "So, how did raiding the raiders go?"

Jack placed his elbows on his desk and rubbed his hands. "I finally found something worth saving in this shitstorm."

"And what's that?"

"Christmas. It's not about giving cards or exchanging gifts. It's about giving a damn to the people we love. It's about protecting each other even while death is staring you in the face. It's about hope when all hope is lost, and about courage to stand up against those who have wronged us. And above all, showing mercy to those less fortunate."

"Wow," Yvonne said, leaning back with wide eyes.

"What? What is it?"

"Oh, I'm just shocked you actually learned a lesson…for once."

Jack grunted and rolled his eye.

Yvonne smiled. "Merry Chrismas, Jack."

Jack looked into his sister's big, beautiful blue eyes. "Merry Christmas, Number Two."

Yvonne left the room, and the door hissed shut behind her. Jack sat back in his chair, placing his arms across his chest.

He shook his head, selected the entire bit about the father and son. He deleted it and then hit submit.

HARK! RETURNED STOLEN PROPERTY

A sleigh carrying months' worth of ransacked BioGel and supplies sat in front of the colony's door. People opened the gates and were shocked to see all their belongings back in their possession. People passed out supplies and BioGel, including a few H.E.A.D.s.

Frosnik and Branel watched from a distance behind the

trees to see their excitement.

Branel tugged at Frosnik's cloak and looked up to his father. Frosnik could see the joy and pride it had given his son, and to Frosnik, that was the greatest gift of all.

Author's Note

This story is set on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2600 CE, after the events of *Starship Dominatrix: Flesh and Steel,* Book Three of the *Starship Dominatrix* series. It's an unapologetically queer space opera series by Dustin J. Craig. Jack and Talonor's journey—and all the laughter, heartbreak, triumphs, and wormholes that come with it—is waiting for you.

About the Author

Dustin J. Craig is a science fiction author, comic creator, illustrator, and professional worldbuilder from Utah. He spends his time creating sprawling universes filled with strange aliens, impossible technology, and deeply human stories. His work explores love, identity, freedom, and the people caught between them.

Thank You!

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Meanwhile…

'Twas three winters later on Eisgait's cold sphere,
When Branel lay sleeping with Christmas now near.
The snow drifted softly outside through the night,
While stars shone above in the pale moon's light.

Then a rustle awoke him from dreams warm and deep,
And he sat up in wonder, no longer asleep.
For there, by the wall in a festive display,
Were presents and treasures all stacked in a way.

A HoloConsole in its box bright and new,
With board games and gadgets with drones that flew.
A DataPad waited along Christmas cheer,
A stocking with candy hung proudly so near.

But what startled Branel and widened his eyes,
Was the jolly old elf standing there in disguise.
For Santa himself, from a sack broad and red,
Placed a brand-new H.E.A.D. by the side of the bed.

"Whoa!" Branel cried in delight that's so bright,
As wonder filled his heart that magical night.

Santa turned quickly and jumped with surprise,
The glow of a nightlight reflected his eyes.

One eye shone organic, the other burned red,
A strange cybernetic glow in his head.
Then Santa just chuckled and, smiling, arose.
He laid a warm finger aside of his nose.

He nodded once kindly to say his farewell,
Then opened a wormhole that shimmered and swelled.
Through swirling blue starlight he stepped out of sight,
And the portal snapped shut in the stillness of night.

“Dad!” shouted Branel as he leapt from his room.
His excitement exploded and banished all gloom.
“I saw him! I saw him! That Santa is real!
He brought me these presents—I saw the whole deal!”

Poor Frosnik emerged with a yawn and a groan,
Still wishing, perhaps, to be left well alone.
“Bran, you are old now, you gotta see,
Santa Claus isn’t real and you cannot believe.”

Branel grabbed his dad’s hand and insisted with pride,
So the father reluctantly trudged by his side.
Beneath the glow of the nightlight so small,
Sat presents and treasures still stacked by the wall.

Frosnik blinked shock. Then he blinked once again.
He searched for an answer but found none within.
For the gifts all were real, every ribbon and bow,
Though who brought them there he did not really know.

Branel laughed with delight as he opened each prize,
While wonder and joy danced bright in his eyes.
And Frosnik stood watching, his doubts set aside,
As happiness swelled in his heart like the tide.

A miracle happened that cold winter's night,
Not of magic alone, but of hope burning bright.
Though Branel never learned who came that night's way,
The memory stayed with him every warm Christmas Day.