

It's The Company You Keep Kracken

Wu Fei Chang:

Secure channel: Justice: 42.7000° N, 23.3333° E- 1300 hours. Supply list: old mission specs, yellow squash. Merry Christmas.

Wu Fei glared at the transmission on his screen in disbelief. "Winner has lost his mind... again!" he grumbled. "What sort of mission requires old mission specs and yellow squash? If this is one of Maxwell's jokes—" He growled at the prospect, but after checking the source code Wu Fei had to admit that it was from Winner.

Christmas? Wu Fei checked the date. It was three days away. If he left now he would just make it to Winner's coordinates. He checked them on his computer even though his mind had already supplied him with the information that it was somewhere in Bulgaria on Earth; Sofia, Bulgaria to be exact. It was a hot bed of insurgency at the moment. There was sure to be plenty of conflict to deal with. It was rumored that Oz had resupplied their base there with sophisticated new mobile suits. A concentrated attack by more than one Gundam pilot made sense.

Wu Fei checked his proximity scanners. Wrapped tightly against the cold and warm breath making 'smoke' in the air, he turned in his pilot chair to check a metal supply cabinet in the tight space. He had been attacking Oz guard outposts in space and doing major damage to Oz equipment and suits. His position had become hot as a consequence. Running with few systems at full capacity had kept him from detection so far by the wide net of Oz pursuers. He couldn't keep the air at minimal and the heat in the minus for much longer, though. It was definitely beginning to affect his health. Even snowy Bulgaria in winter would feel warmer and more welcoming than a Gundam cockpit that was beginning to seem more like his tomb.

In the supply cabinet he found a stack of blue mission spec readouts and a bag of the yellow squash a grateful woman had given him when he had saved her from an Oz attack. Her small ship had wandered into a firefight and Wu Fei had taken a hit on Shenlong to keep it from being vaporized by Oz fire. Her warm, wrinkled, old smile and the offered bag of squash had seemed surreal after bitter months hunting Oz in cold space. He had oddly felt the need to add it to his mission status report that he had sent to Winner, as if the gift had needed concrete acknowledgement. Now Winner wanted the squash along with old mission specs. Wu Fei took them out and flipped through them, wondering not for the first time, who had decided that they should be printed on a Robin egg blue paper. What Winner wanted, Winner got. As long as there was more fighting in the offering, Wu Fei would comply.

Trowa Barton:

Secure channel: Fun Time Clown: 42.7000° N, 23.3333° E- 1300 hours .Supply list: Apples, Beef soup. Merry Christmas.

Trowa winced. Quatre was the light of his heart and he would do anything for the young man, but asking Katherine to make her less than stellar beef soup was not a request that he looked forward to complying with. The soup didn't seem fit for human consumption on one of her good days and he had joked, more than once, that she might have mixed up the animal feed with their dinner. Still, actually asking for the dish would make her happy.

There was little to be happy about, especially in the war torn area where their circus had set up business. Smoking ruins were more the norm than unscathed buildings and the people seemed shell shocked. The manager of the circus had felt so sorry for them that he hadn't even charged admission the last few nights. A grateful farmer had offered them free access to what was left of his apple orchard. Trowa had mentioned how good they had been in his last transmission to Quatre.

Now Quatre wanted soup and his apples. Trowa thought he understood, but the location of the rendezvous would mean that any meeting there would be fraught with danger. Two hard days travel would get him there on time, Trowa thought and began preparing Heavy Arms in case Quatre was preparing a battle with Oz instead of a dinner between lovers.

Heero Yuy:

"Where is he?" Heero asked anxiously as he unhooked his weapon belt and hung it on a coat hook,

It had taken days of space travel and a harrowing fast re-entry through enemy suits, to get him to that place on Christmas day 1300 hours. Burned along one arm from an electrical short in his Gundam, bruised from impacts to Wing, and starving, because Quatre had asked him to bring all of his carefully stocked 'Meals ready to Eat ', Heero was ready to hear several explanations. He hadn't been prepared to follow instructions to a homey, if battle scarred house and to find Christmas preparations in full swing.

"Duo will be here," Quatre assured him as he finished wrapping a box in old newspaper and adding a shredded newspaper bow. "I told him there would be food and gifts. He won't miss them for the world."

That was true enough, but Heero had found his concern for the pilot of Deathscythe to be an all-consuming thing, lately, growing along with his feelings for the young man. Duo was a strange mixture of fool, dare devil, and expert pilot and he was very close to stealing Heero's heart.

Wu Fei was studiously making ornaments for the dilapidated pine branch that had been set up instead of an actual tree. It was shaping up rather nicely, even though the man had used old mission reports to make origami peace doves and strips of metal and different colored explosives wire to make the rest of the ornaments. He glared at Heero as if to dare him to comment. Heero didn't, too busy unloading his own burden of military rations onto a banquet table covered in camo netting as a table cloth.

Heero sniffed the air and then leaned to look into a bomb-blasted kitchen that was still miraculously cooking a meal on the warped stove. Heero recalled passing empty market stalls and abandoned store fronts. "Where did you get ingredients to make anything?"

"We managed, Strong Man" Quatre replied, using Heero's code name. "Though it's not a great deal."

"Hot applesauce for desert," Trowa chimed in as he stirred a food-splattered pot.

"I smell soup," Duo said in trepidation as he came into the house unexpectedly. "That's not Katherine's soup, is it?"

"It hasn't killed anyone... yet," Trowa assured him as Heero helped Duo off with his coat and weapons.

"This is ridiculous!" Wu Fei suddenly exploded. "A war is going on outside of this very door and we are in here... celebrating! It's madness. I am not a Christian and neither are you, Quatre Winner!"

They could all hear distant gunfire and the sounds of mortar fire. Quatre took a steadying breath and then replied, "The war can wait a few hours, Fei. Christmas may be about the birth of Jesus, but it can also be a wonderful time to be together, to be with friends... and lovers." He exchanged a look with Trowa and Duo turned to grin at Heero. "Traditionally in war, both sides in a conflict try to have a cease of hostilities at least for a short while. Sometimes it happens, sometimes it doesn't." They listened to the gunfire continuing.

"This time it isn't," Wu Fei said triumphantly.

"Then we must make that moment of peace ourselves," Quatre insisted. "We will: here and now."

"In this bombed-out shell in the center of a fire fight? Heero replied skeptically. As much as he loved seeing Duo, unharmed and close enough to touch, he was finding himself just as bitter and cold as Wu Fei.

"It's the company you keep, not where you are," Duo told him with his heart in his eyes as he slid a hand along Heero's arm. "That's what a nun once told me. She was right. "We can celebrate if we insist."

"And then we'll blow the Oz base?" Wu Fei persisted with a fine, arched eyebrow.

"Of course," Quatre assured him. "Death can take point." He promised using Duo's code name.

"All right!" Duo crowed excitedly.

Heero felt suddenly warmer, suddenly more hopeful, and he saw a small smile of acquiescence on Wu Fei's lips. "We'll have peace, at least for today," Heero promised. "I'll make sure of that."

Duo pulled a large folded piece of white paper from his pocket. He chuckled at Quatre as he waved it and showed that one side was decorated with peace doves and said Merry Christmas. It said from Quatre Winner as well. "You knew I kept this in my Gundam from last year."

"I also remember a certain talent you showed me last year," Quatre laughed back. "Care to demonstrate it again?"

Duo spread out the paper and quickly folded it until it made an angel covered in peace doves. With an air of importance, he placed it on top of the tree. "Let's celebrate guys."