

## YEAR ZERO

Ghosts materialized on a vast glacier. Three to be exact. They were translucent at first, but as time passed the ghosts began to take physical form. The moonlight showed three men. One had a red beard, one a black beard, and the last, a white beard. All around them cold wind and ice swirled. There were no signs of life anywhere. Their only compass was a star directly above them--the North Star.

From a bag he carried, the man with the white beard brought out a sparkling pine cone. Looking directly towards the star above, he moved under it and drove the pine cone into the ice. With this, the now uninhabitable north axis of Earth would one day become a bustling village of warmth and love. A great tree began to implant its roots.

The other two men waited patiently for their white bearded brother. He ran back to them laughing all the way, excited about their mission. The brothers three--white, black, and red bearded--began a journey to give gifts to a special child in a little town named Bethlehem.

## ONE

"O Come O Come Emmanuel..."

The Spiritless threat lay dormant for two days. Christmas Day came without catastrophe or further attempts at stealing the secret Snowball- the magic device Santa uses to slow time on Christmas Eve. Captain Brendan Holly, and the rest of his stellar Tailors, felt the full measure of the wonderful spirit the season and their work provides. They enjoyed Christmas Day at Jack's, the nearly twelve-year-old boy, who helped protect the Snowball from the wiles of the evil Spiritless elves.

Christmas night rolled along and the tree lights shined brilliantly on the remnants of sparkly paper still clinging to gift boxes. One box in particular lay in tatters, a victim of Jack's hasty opening earlier in the morning. A sleek white bullet train was embossed on the front. The Tailors watched while Jack meticulously laid the Glimmer train's track around the Christmas tree. Tonto reported from the bottom of the tree, that the train looked sharp and very fast. There was a large power cord hooked into the outlet behind the tree.

The Tannenbaum Tailors have seen many trains around Christmas trees, but mostly decorative steam engine models, not fast, fun ones.

"Oh, we gotta ride that thing." Steve stared in awe.

"Who's stopping you?" Captain Brendan quipped, "Don't let the kid see you."

"Too late for that," Steve joked.

"Ha! Funny. No, he made a promise not to tell. I believe him, but I just don't want to put us in any unnecessary danger with anyone else in this household," Brendan warned.

"What has you spooked? We are always careful." Steve grinned. The Fire Tailor prepped to rappel from the command center at the tree's top to the bottom tree stand.

"Nothing, nothing. Just be careful." Brendan's response was only partially true. After telling Jack about the Tailors and the Snowball, he felt uneasy and nervous. Something felt wrong. He ignored his feelings and continued with the usual maintenance involved on Christmas night. Tannenbaum Tailors have a job to do. They don't have time to be scared.

"Will do Captain. Will do." Steve knew a lot about being careful. He served as the Team's Fire Tailor and safety always came first in his line of work.

The Fire Tailor used his GlimmerLift, the customary Tailor grappling hook, to maneuver his way down the tree. He felt the rush of air pushing up against him as he descended the tree. The glow of the lights guided him. The smell of pine put a smile on his face. The sturdy branches provided an easy commute. In this moment, Steve felt Christmas all around him.

About halfway down the tree, Steve saw Billy on the end of a branch putting the finishing touches on an old pink ornament. Billy was the Ornament Tailor. His job was to make sure every ornament shined and never cracked. Steve zipped past and yelled, "BOO!" Billy slipped but caught himself. "HEY!"

Steve laughed from below. Billy decided to GlimmerLift after him to scare him back. When Billy wanted to, he could gracefully 'lift around the tree, but he had to remain focused. Billy aimed his GlimmerLift towards a lower branch, so he could zip all the way down instead of rappelling to catch up with Steve. He shot the grappling hook into a strong lower branch, let go of the release, and zipped into and out of the smallest spaces in between the branches. Billy was catching up. The tree's natural shape allowed for more room to maneuver the lower one glimmerlifted down. Billy zipped past

Irene, the Lighting Tailor, who was checking a wire to a blinking blue light. She felt the breeze of his brisk pace and yelled, "Billy! What are you doing?"

"I am chasing Steve!"

"Oh fun! I want to come," Irene dropped the wire and joined the race. The whoosh of GlimmerLifts and laughter abounded in the expansive tree bottom. Tonto, the Water and Needle Tailor, looked up from the tree stand. Gathering his water-testing instruments, he observed Steve, Billy, and Irene barreling towards him. He prepared to zip out of the way, but all three of them shot off the tree and onto the speedy bullet train.

"Lily. Captain Brendan. Over." Tonto tried to reach the command center.

"Go ahead, Tonts. Lily here. Over."

"Ah, yeah half of our team just went for a ride on Jack's bullet train. Over."

"Thank you Tonto. We are aware of the situation. It's Christmas night. Captain Brendan says it's okay to have some fun. Over."

"Good because I am joining them. Out." Tonto waited for the train to pass in front of him and then hooked it, zipped over to it and joined the rest of the crew on Jack's newest thrill ride.