

Battle Lines

by Jerry Oltion

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"If you love me, you'll do it." Zofia's soft, sultry voice filled the patrol plane's bubble cockpit, warming Gordon like sunlight pouring through a gap in the clouds. He looked over at her in the seat beside him and she smiled, her lips open slightly, a hint of teeth behind them. Her iridescent silver wings, held tight to her body, rustled softly as she tilted her head sideways and turned to look at him out of just her left eye. A wisp of dark hair fell forward to partially hide her face.

God, how he loved that coy look. She knew just which buttons to push. Still, what she was asking him to do...

"Love don't have nothin' to do with it, darlin'," he said, falling into the pilot's cant that he knew turned her on. "We're talkin' survival here. I don't have those pretty wings of yours."

"But I do," she said, extending them as far as she could in the narrow confines of the cockpit. They touched either side of the double-wide cabin, and wrapped around to nearly block his view ahead. "I will catch you. And then--" her voice grew softer "--then we will make glorious love in mid-air."

"Fallin' like bricks the whole time." He banked the plane around in a slow circle, looking for more of Relig's warriors, but the battle was over. It had been a rout; even bio-enhanced warclones were no match for a squadron of battleplanes. Zofia's people were free--and now she wanted to celebrate.

So did Gordon, but on the ground.

"I won't let you fall," she insisted. "I love you."

"I don't doubt that," he said, doubting it immensely. The two of them had spent twelve hours a day for four days on patrol in a crowded airplane without killing one another, but that didn't mean it was love. He didn't say that, though. What did it matter if she loved him? That wasn't the issue. He said, "What I doubt is whether you can keep an extra ninety kilos in the air. Like as not we'd both go splat if you tried it."

"Thanks for the compliment," she said sarcastically, and he realized he'd just belittled her secondary sex characteristics. Accipitan women might not have breasts, but their chest size was still a matter of importance to their lovers. Vital importance, if Zofia's description of their mating habits was true, for those shapely mounds that mimicked a normal woman's breasts were the powerful muscles that drove their wings.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean it that way. You have wonderfully big, rippling--one could even say heaving--pectorals. But I won't be any help at all in keeping us aloft. Not like an Accipitan man."

She laughed. "Hah. Our men are no help either. How could they be? They're upside down!"

Gordon supposed she had a point. He'd never seen an Accip fly inverted. The way their wings attached, he doubted if they could. Did the women actually carry their mates during sex? He supposed it was possible.

"All the same," he said, "I'm heavier than they are."

"Maybe, but not by that much. You certainly don't weigh ninety kilos." Her voice held a note of reproach.

"I do with my flight gear on."

"Silly, you won't be wearing flight gear."

He laughed at the image. "You want me to bail out of my plane with nothin' on, hopin' you'll snatch me

before I get to fallin' too fast for you to keep up, and then you expect me to--to perform--while I'm hangin' on for dear life? I hate to disappoint you, but human physiology doesn't work like that."

"How do you know? Have you ever tried it?"

He looked out at the ground two kilometers below. The cavern leading to Relig's underground warren was smaller than the thumbnail of his outstretched hand. The city on the arch spanning the cavern was smaller still. And tiny specks of flyers above it were just visible if he squinted. It was a long way down. In his warship Gordon felt invincible, and the thrill of victory for a just cause was a powerful aphrodisiac, but the thought of stepping out of his metal cocoon into all that empty air cooled his fire. The plane could fly fine without him, but without it he was a ballistic projectile. "I don't have to try it," he said. "I can imagine it just fine."

"I won't be wearing anything either." She rubbed her hands over his shoulders and chest, leaned close and nuzzled his ear.

Her voice and her caress brought the response she wanted, but Gordon took her hands in his before they could stray far enough to find that out.

"You want to make love in flight?" he asked. "Okay, let's do it. Right here, in the plane. If we unbuckle and twist around a little, we--"

"That's too restrictive," she said petulantly. "I want to feel free!"

"Okay, then, let's land and do it on the ground."

"It doesn't feel natural on the ground."

That line seemed so familiar Gordon had to laugh.

"What?"

How could he tell her that he recognized her come-on? It suddenly struck him how strange it was for him to be fighting her advances. Him, Gordon DeLinn, the interstellar rake of a fighter pilot. Usually he was the one who tried to talk hesitant women into having sex with him, not the other way around.

"You're being a tease!" she pouted, leaning away from him and looking out the side window.

"I'm not," he said. "I'm just not ready to risk my life for sex."

"You're not risking your life! I said I'd catch you."

He shrugged. "You'll try. But accidents happen. Turbulence, or a bug in your eye, or you might sprain your wrist bailing out."

"You think I'm ugly, don't you? I'm too alien. You think it'd be bestiality."

"What?" That had come out of nowhere. "Where'd you get that crazy idea?"

She turned her head again to face him, her lips full and red in a pout. "The missionaries have been preaching that it's a sin. That we Accipitans have been genetically altered until we're no longer human."

"Missionaries," Gordon snorted. Half the battles he had fought were against missionaries and their repressive agendas. He leaned toward her and kissed those soft, inviting lips. "Don't listen to those idiots," he told her. "You're plenty human enough for me." He didn't tell her that it was her differences that turned him on, that he liked his women exotic.

She kissed him hungrily, and her hands returned to his shoulders and back. He reached out and ran his fingers around her powerful muscles, along the soft, rippling skin at the edges of her wings, down the long ridges at her sides where they attached. She reached under his flight suit, tugging open the zips and running her hands over his chest, his sides, down into his pants. She began peeling his suit off of him, and he didn't stop her. He couldn't. He didn't have enough hands to do that and continue touching her, and now her wings themselves were caressing him, their silky softness enfolding him.

"Oh yes," she murmured. "Oh yes, let's do it."

"We *are* doing it," he said, unfastening the complicated straps that held her brief clothing in place.

"I want more." She kissed his right nipple, her tongue circling around and around until it was hard as a berry. "You drive me crazy," she whispered. "I want you."

He recognized those lines, too. Whispered in the heat of passion, they always worked. And now that he was on the receiving end, he knew why. It doesn't matter how many times a person hears them, or even uses them himself; they're incredibly flattering, and if someone wants to believe them, they will.

He was running out of protests. The plane was flying itself, would even return to the hanger if he told it to. And Zofia was playing his body like a bard plays a harp.

She pulled off his jacket, and the liner beneath it. Every inch of skin she exposed received a kiss. Gordon protested feebly, but he knew if she stopped he would finish undressing himself. He had to have her. His sense of self-preservation had given way to more primal urges; he wanted to make love with this woman right now, no matter what. Even if he had to do it her way.

"Do you promise to catch me?" he asked.

She smiled, knowing she had won. "Trust me," she said, as she reached for the lever that would blow the canopy and pitch them out into the air. "Trust me."

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