

**Star Crew Down: The Final Episode**

by Jack Weyland

After weeks of effort, Josh had reached *Level Ten* on **Star Crew Down: The Final Episode**. He was on his way to final victory when the lights in the room went out and his laptop switched to battery power.

“Josh, did you do something up there to make the power go out?” his mother called to him from the bottom of the stairs

“No.”

“Can you come down and see if you can fix it? Your father isn’t home yet.”

He put the game on pause so he wouldn’t have to start all over at *Level One* again. He opened his bedroom door. It was pitch dark.

All he needed was another hour to finish the game. “Mom, I can’t see to go down the stairs. Maybe I should stay up here until the power goes back on.”

“I need you down here now to help me.”

He found a flashlight, turned it on and made his way down the stairs.

“I wonder if this is just our house or if it’s wide spread,” his mom said.

“I’ll go online and find out,” he said, starting back upstairs.

“Just look outside.”

He opened the front door and looked out. There were no lights in any of the houses nearby. “It’s not just our house,” he said. “So, can I go up and study?”

“I need you to go in the garage and set our propane camp stove on the work bench. Oh, open the side door so we have some ventilation.”

He hurried outside. His lap top had about an hour before the batteries gave out. He

needed to wipe out the clone warriors guarding the evil Dr. Gork.

Five minutes later, as he entered the house, he could hear his five year old sister Emma crying. She had been taking a nap and had woken up in darkness.

His mom came into the kitchen with Emma in her arms. “I need to comfort Emma. Can you take the pans off the stove and put them on the camp stove and finish cooking our dinner? I’ll take over as soon as I get Emma calmed down.”

“How long is that going to take?” he complained.

“I don’t know. I need your help, Josh.”

“Okay.”

His first impulse was to try to cook the food as fast as possible, but he knew that if he burned their dinner his mom would not be happy. So, even though he could almost hear the seconds ticking away on his laptop battery, he cooked the food on a medium flame.

Fifteen minutes later, as he transferred the food from pans on the camp stove into serving bowls, and carried them into the kitchen, he heard his dad’s car pull into the driveway. A minute later his dad came inside. “I’m home!”

“How were the roads?” Josh’s mom, still with Emma, asked.

“A mess! Because of the freezing rain, there’s downed tree limbs and power lines everywhere. They say this goes for fifty miles in every direction and that it might take a couple of weeks to get power back again. School will be cancelled too.”

“Oh, no,” Josh complained. He didn’t care if school was closed, but without electrical power, he’d lose his usual two or three hours a day playing video games. Josh ate fast and then asked to be excused.

“I need your help, Josh,” his mom said. “Our hot water heater won’t be working so I’ll need you to heat up some water on the cook stove, bring it in the kitchen and pour it into the sink.”

“Can’t we just use the hot water still in the hot water heater?” Josh asked.

“No, we’ll use that for baths tonight. We’d all better take a bath tonight. It might be a while before we have any hot water again. I’m afraid we’ll have to use the same water for all our baths.”

Josh scowled. “I don’t think so.”

“Well, that’s up to you. How about if you and your dad take care of doing the dishes, and figure out how we’re going to stay warm tonight, while I help Emma with her bath.”

As directed, Josh heated pans of water on the propane heater and then carried it into the kitchen and dumped it in the sink. His dad took care of washing, rinsing with cold water, drying, and putting everything away.

After two trips, his dad said, “I think that’s all the hot water we’ll need.”

“Okay.” He headed for the stairs.

“Where are you going?”

“I need to study.” For Josh the word study meant playing a video game.

“That can wait,” his dad said. “Start bringing in firewood into the family room. Also, get bedding from your bed and Emma’s bed, carry them downstairs and lay them on the couch. When you’re done with that, let me know.”

Josh and his dad hauled in a large couch and a love seat from the living room so everyone would have a place to sleep and then they all got ready for bed. His dad read scriptures and then

they had family prayer and retired to their temporary beds.

After an hour Josh was still not asleep so he went upstairs to play his video game.

An hour later he was battling the evil Dr. Gork when a warning on his laptop indicated his battery was about to go dead.

Because he didn't want to start again at *Level One*, he decided to let his laptop go into sleep mode. Maybe by tomorrow *I can go to a library where they'll have power*, he thought.

The next morning his dad woke him up at seven thirty. "Josh, wake up. We need to cut up all the downed limbs and branches on our front lawn and stack it all in the back yard so we can use it in our fire place. The way it looks now, we may need it all before this is over."

At first his dad didn't trust him with their chain saw, so Josh's role was mainly to haul cut logs to their back yard. But two hours later, as they started to clear the street of fallen limbs and branches, his dad gave him a safety lecture and then said, "Okay, you run the chain saw and I'll carry the wood for a while. Let's go ask Sister Crawford if she can use some help."

When Sister Crawford came to the door she was wearing a coat. "I'd invite you in but it's about as cold in here as it is outside," she said.

"Why don't you come over to our house?" Josh's dad said. "We've got a fireplace and so it's fairly comfortable in our family room."

"Really? That would be great. I'll go get Madison up. I've let her stay in bed this late because it's so cold in here."

"Can we clear up your front yard for you?" Josh's dad asked.

"Oh, you don't need to do that. You must be tired by now."

"It's no problem. Josh and I have nothing better to do."

“I wish David were here now.” Her husband was serving overseas in the Army.

“I do too, but let us help you. Josh and I are a good team.”

“Maybe I can get Madison to help out.”

Madison was a Laurel in their ward, and Josh was a priest. They could have been good friends but, actually, Josh was always too busy to talk to her much.

He and his dad started on the biggest tree limb that lay across the Crawford’s front lawn and driveway. Josh enjoyed running the chain saw.

After ten minutes, his dad came back from hauling a load to their back yard. He was now walking with a limp.

“I hurt my back on that last log. I think I’ll go in and rest for a few minutes.”

“Okay, I’ll just keep going.”

Half an hour later Madison came out. She was in a bad mood. “You don’t need any help, do you?”

“Not from you.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that if you don’t want to help, then don’t. I can do this by myself.”

“Yeah, right,” she scoffed. “Captain Video to the rescue, right?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Every day we’re waiting for the school bus, you never talk to anyone. You’re always playing video games. You have the social skills of a tree limb.”

That made him mad. “Go back inside then. I don’t need your help.”

“Don’t tell me what to do! If I decide to help you, then I’ll help you.”

“Fine then, help me. See that wood. Haul it to the pile in our back yard.”

“Why can’t I run the chain saw?”

“Because you can’t, that’s why. This is not a toy.”

“I know that, okay?”

After she carried her first load of wood to their back yard, she looked mad. “Can I make a suggestion?” she asked.

He sighed. “I guess. What’s your suggestion?”

“Cut the wood into smaller pieces. That last one I carried was too heavy.”

“I could have carried it,” he said.

“Great, then you carry the wood and I’ll run the chain saw.”

“Forget about running the chain saw. That’s never going to happen.”

“Why not?”

“Well, for one reason, it’s our chain saw. And, also, if you cut your leg off, then you’d be blaming me for the rest of your life.”

“I’ll be real careful with it,” she said softly.

“Forget it. It’s not going to happen.”

She pointed at one of the cut limbs. “See that. It’s way too big. I can’t carry it, and I really doubt if you could either.”

“I could totally carry that,” he said.

“Yeah, right,” she scoffed.

“Excuse me,” he said, picking up the log and hauling to their back yard.

When he came back, she was trying to figure out how to start the chain saw. “Don’t even

think about it,” he warned her.

After a few more minutes of arguing, they finally worked out a strategy that seemed to work for them. Josh cut the downed tree trunks into small lengths. He helped her carry some of the heavier sections. For small branches and limbs, he agreed to let her use the chain saw, at first making sure she was doing it the way his dad taught him.

At noon, his dad came out and inspected what they'd done. “I'm very impressed,” he said. “You two make a good team.”

Josh looked over at Madison and smiled. “I guess we do.”

“Madison, come have lunch with us,” his dad said. “We made some beef stew. We made a lot. I used up all the meat we had in our freezer. Ask your mom if she'd like to come too. We've got plenty.”

While they were eating, Madison caught him looking at her. “This is the first time you've ever made eye contact with me. Before, you were always playing some stupid video game while we waited for the bus, and then on the bus, and then walking from the bus to your locker.”

He felt uncomfortable. “I play once in a while.”

“Once in a while? Are you serious? You play all the time. I have a rule: if a guy plays video games in my presence, I don't want to have anything to do with him.”

“Why's that?”

“I can't compete with that. No girl can.”

“I'm not playing a video game now.”

“That's why I'm talking to you.”

“Lucky me,” he said sarcastically.

“Okay, look, I’m sorry if I came on too strong about this. My older sister Hannah’s husband is always playing games on his laptop. She can’t stand it. Most of the time when he’s home it’s like she’s not even there. Don’t end up like him, okay?”

“I won’t.”

“Promise?”

“What is with you anyway?” he complained.

“Just promise me you won’t end up like my brother in law.”

“What is your problem anyway? All right, fine. I promise,” he grumbled.

“Good. What have you got planned for the rest of the day?” she asked.

“Nothing.”

“Let me ask you a question. How can we justify doing our yards but not any of our neighbors?”

“I’m tired. I need a break.”

“Yeah, me too. That’s why I suggest we call some others our age in our ward. We get them to do the work and we supervise. I’m very good at supervising.”

“Yes, I’ve noticed.”

“We could keep working together,” she said. And she smiled at him.

“Okay, just one thing. Only you and me on the chain saw,” he said.

“Sounds good.”

They ended up with three other girls and four other guys. Every day they worked six hours a day, and then, after that, as a group, ate lunch together and then played board games next to the fireplace. Or if the weather permitted, they sled down a nearby street.

Ten days later, one morning just after nine in the morning, the electricity came on again. The first clue Josh had was that the living room lights were on and woke him up from a deep sleep. He could hear the furnace start up again.

Josh went back to sleep. When he finally got up and entered the kitchen, he read a note from his mom and dad saying that they had taken Emma to the store to get groceries but they'd be back soon.

Josh grabbed a handful of nuts from food storage and went upstairs to his room. For the past two weeks, he'd only spent a few minutes a day in there because it had been so cold. All he did there was change clothes.

He sat down at his desk and turned on his laptop, which had long ago, lost all power and shut off. He checked his emails. He had hundreds of emails from friends from all over the world who were into video games.

He tried to decide if he should take a shower first or start on *Level One* of **Star Crew Down**. He would need to spend several hours before he'd get to *Level Ten* again..

The phone in the kitchen rang. He hurried downstairs and answered. It was Madison. "What are you doing?"

The fact he was about to play a video game made him feel a little guilty. "Nothing."

"There's no school today. They have to wait for the building to warm up. So we've got another free day. What would you think about seeing if we could use the church for a killer volleyball tournament? Could you ask your dad?"

"Yeah, okay. That sounds fun. I'll ask him."

"Can I tell you something?" she said.

“Yeah, sure.”

“I was thinking last night about what we did over the past two weeks. I figure we helped like twenty families with all their downed trees. One of the men we helped, you remember the old man with the cane, when we were about to leave, he grabbed my hand and told me he’d never forget what we did for them. Isn’t that great? We actually did some good. I’m proud of what we did. And I’m proud of you. You’re way different than I thought. You care about other people. That’s number one in my book.”

“Thanks.”

“Well, I got to get cleaned up. I’ll call everyone and see if they can come.”

He hung up the phone and returned to his room and sat down in front of his laptop. He automatically hit the icon for **Star Crew Down: The Final Episode**. Usually he skipped the narrative but this time he didn’t: *In times of great upheaval in the empire, a small group of loyal friends, united in a cause bigger than themselves, dare to go against the evil that is engulfing the world. Join now with them as they continue their fight against darkness and chaos.*

Josh moved his mouse to the red **START GAME** button. But then he paused and re-read part of the narrative. *A small group of loyal friends, united in a cause bigger than themselves.*

*Wait a minute, he thought. I’ve already got that.*

He paused and focused his gaze on the red **START GAME** icon on his laptop.

He sighed contentedly. *I guess the last time I played this really was the final episode, he thought.*

He turned off his lap top and then hurried into the bathroom to get cleaned up so he’d be ready when Madison and his friends showed up for another great day serving others and playing

together.

United in a cause bigger than themselves.