



YOU ARE THE
GUN
I AM THE
WAR

LISLE TAM

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by Lisle Tam

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A prequel to the ‘Temasek Holorecords’ series.

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CHAPTER ONE

The height of the landing pad unnerved her. Bleary-eyed she squinted overhead as the solar glare filtering through the anti-UV glass dome pricked her eyes. Even with the accelerated cooling systems, the crowd glistened like roasted pigeons at the reunion dinner table on *Chú xī*; the eve of Chinese New Year. God only knew what the temperature was. The meteorologists were surely lying when they said it was 60 Cel. It had to be at least 80 Cel by now. Maybe it was better this way - no good came from second guessing state media. Trudging through the masses, she found her seat in the middle of Section C8 Row 2 next to her beaming parents.

None of the landing pads in Singapore could rival the one stationed at Marina Bay with its special marching ground leading to the stadium, and a height mirroring that of the sky base training centers afforded to countless batches of National Servicemen in the country's conscript army.

Of course its height was not without purpose - serving as a reminder to parents, siblings, lovers and friends alike of the grueling training sessions each NSman endured at high altitudes of 30,000 feet. Altitude sickness, heat stroke and various ozone diseases were the new common cold.

While each family was only provided with three tickets, the number of people that showed up for a recruit sometimes filled up the entire row of 12 seats. Somehow, there was always room for everyone without complaint.

Reminiscent of a weekend market, the dome echoed decibels and tones of the restless chatter amongst friends and family that attended as guests. There was always a sense of relief that lingered between the familiar spaces of these strangers, held together by the common experience as parents of 'lost' sons, and now waiting with bated breath the joy of their return home.

Of amusement to Lily was that the area still went by the name Marina Bay when they were up in the sky. The bay was more of a sea really, ever since the start of the First Civil War when a devastating attack destroyed most of the landmass in south Singapore.

It took 20 years to recover and rebuild from the attack but with the influx of foreign scholars and advancing technology, the event was but a spot in the annals of history. Having lived through World War II and the separation from Malaysia, fear was not something to be bounded by. Great countries lived through war all the time with great leaders surpassing each crisis point. Eventually, everyone reflected upon the First Civil War as just another period in time of struggles and survivals. One of those struggles being the adaptation to living in Temasek Air City.

Setting her thoughts and heat aside, Lily caught sight of the opening dome ceiling. It was the only signal she needed. Today was the day she would get her brother back after five years.

Silhouettes of grey blobs broke through the cloud cover, accompanied by pinpricks of sunlight as if the sky was revealing its hidden secrets for an anticipatory audience.

Dozens of airships sailed downwards to the landing pad as its latest batch of heroes leapt out and flew to the marching ground directed by their para-wings.

"Ma, Pa, look! Is that him? Is that first flier Darren?!" Craning her neck to see around the bulbous head of the man in front of her, she resisted the urge to jump up for a better look. Final landing took only seconds before the military anthem signaled the marching procession, the most inane part of the ceremony.

Guilt bubbled up as she knew that she was not going to sit around for it. She had seen this countless times while accompanying friends to their brother's or boyfriend's graduation parade. When you have watched whole platoons march around the landing pad stadium to stand in little rectangular formations, every other march turns out to be exactly the same. She conjured up an excuse to disappear for exactly 16 minutes and eight seconds, the time it would take for her to walk to the restrooms, nap and walk back in time for the artillery display. An elaborate showing of offensive and defensive tactics in airship war, the NSmen would stage a pseudo-war in the skies as airships and fliers battled it out. Executed after the First Civil War, the artillery display was the main reason she crashed every graduation parade she could.

"Ah girl, you going where?"

Clenching her tummy, she feigned a pained expression and pointed in the direction of the washrooms. "Ugh, I'm having a stomachache Pa."

"You faster come back okay? Wait you miss all the exciting parts then how? See one time, cannot see again!" Her mother interjected, clearly annoyed that no one had remembered to bring the holocam. Now Lily would have to purchase the 'NS Graduation Year 2022 Holorecord' for them or she would never hear the end of it. Subtlety was not a characteristic of the Chan family.

Nodding in agreement she fled the vicinity, those lost seconds were not coming out of her nap time. No way.

It was a chore communicating with her parents. Despite the usage of colloquial Singaporean English which was so adoringly labelled Singlish, and other dialects dying out, her parents like many elders still clung tightly to their roots. Even refusing the language conversion implants that would change the way they spoke.

“Aiyah. These things not natural,” her father objected when she once brought it up. “You think we robot is it? Don’t need don’t need! You got right? Can understand me right? Then what for I get? Siao ah!” He gaped at her as if it was a crime to go for such a harmless procedure. Even Darren, not that he needed it, had agreed not to get one just to reassure their parents.

Ignoring the grunts and sounds of annoyance as she clumsily clambered towards the exit, she prayed that one of the private rooms was unoccupied. Turning left at the washroom entrance towards the private rooms, an open door at the end of the row signaled that her favorite room with the lavender scented cooling system and waterbed capsule was still unoccupied.

Excellent! Setting the capsule timer for 15 minutes, she flopped onto the waterbed's soft awaiting embrace.

After staring into the void of walls surrounding her, she had just managed to close her eyes when a screeching resonated through the walls of her capsule. Sure that her 15 minutes were far from over, a quick glance at the red blinking lights displaying the countdown at 08:00 confirmed her suspicion. Yet the noise was increasingly louder and shrill.

Excitement and fear of missing out fueled her race towards the stadium. Maybe the artillery display had started early for once because they realized people were bored of the endless marching. But what was with all the smoke at the entrance? Maybe the display incorporated a

scarier new element that shocked ... OH A MILLION HELLS!

Shrieks and screams hung in the atmosphere along with a heavy stench, the kind that filled the air when she accidentally set the LaserRoast's setting too high while cooking pigeons for dinner. The airships and fliers were right in position where they should be except that they were firing everywhere at the stadium.

"OH NO, NO, NO! NO! MA?! PA?!" Lily stumbled forth heading straight for her seat in a daze as everything around her burned and obliterated from the constant firing.

A clawing and pulling at her ankle stopped her movements and she immediately regretted looking down. The scream rose and bubbled in her throat unable to escape as she shook her leg free of the burnt hand that belonged to a wailing child clearly in pain and bleeding from every orifice.

Before she could even comprehend the situation, a blast from behind propelled her forward into the middle of the row.

She saw them. Or what was left of them. Ma's favorite red paisley dress now black from soot and ashes, her arms wrapped around Pa's. Thoughts and words failed to form, only to be replaced by guttural cries that sounded monstrous to her ears. It felt like eternity as she crouched there screaming amidst the bombs and lasers waiting to die.

Flames started to lick at her shoes, kissing her exposed skin while a dark shadow emerged from the flames in front of her. Fear overtook Lily as she wondered if the devil himself had come for her.

"Oi! Get up get up!" The shadow now looming above yanked her up hard. "You want to die is it? Faster! Run lah!" She let the shadow drag her along, her own jelly legs unresponsive and her brain unable to erase the image of her parents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisle Tam loves going to theme parks, exploring tropical islands with an assortment of digital and film cameras, and wishes there was more time in the world for it. Lisle also enjoys alternative rock, blues, jazz, soul, electronic dance music, country, Asian hip-hop but is unsure about rap music in general.

Lisle believes that one has to read between the lines of biographies.

BOOKS

Temasek Holorecords Series

You Are The Gun, I Am The War (#0)
Bell and Tiger's Rock (#1)

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