

[twenty one] we're doing space missions now

1992:

THE SPACE SHUTTLE ENDEAVOUR began its maiden flight as Nova watched on TV, and when the newsfeed began describing the problems that the rocket was facing, Nova sighed. Hank walked past her room, stopping himself when he saw her by catching the doorframe with his hand and swinging into her room.

"Is it time to go?" she asked.

He nodded. "Time to go."

Nova raced down to the underground base, finding her friends already in the process of getting ready to go. She pulled on the familiar suit, which had been given some upgrades, and when the entire team was ready to go, they headed into the hangar.

"It's a simple extraction," Raven explained. "We go into space, we get the astronauts, we bring them home. Any questions?"

"Yeah, like a thousand," Scott replied.

"We don't have time for a thousand," Raven said.

"So we're going to space?" Kurt asked.

"Yes, Kurt, we are going into space," Raven replied.

"We're doing space missions now," Peter said with a shrug. "Cool." ↻

"Will the X-Jet even get that high?" Scott asked.

"Well, technically, the—" Hank began.

"It'll get us there," Raven interjected. "Let's go."

The team boarded the jet, and Nova sat down in the seat behind Peter. With Raven and Hank at the controls, the ship shot into the sky, heading for the atmosphere. Nova knew that the gravity in space was very slim, so it would be harder to manipulate her powers.

Raven looked behind her and saw Nova's expression. "Hey, you'll be fine."

"Yeah, you say that now," Nova mumbled, as the jet began to shudder. "I don't think I'll be much good up there."

"I think this is not as much fun as I thought it would be," Kurt called.

The ship continued its upwards ascent, and when they finally broke through the atmosphere and entered space, the ship stopped moving and floated in the sky. Ahead of them, Nova could see a large red cloud that definitely did not look like a solar flare.

"That's a solar flare?" Raven asked.

"I've never seen a reading like this," Hank replied.

"There's the ship," Nova said, pointing at the space shuttle, which was spinning violently.

"The orientation thruster's misfiring," Hank said. "That cabin won't hold for long."

"Kurt, can you get in there?" Raven asked.

"It's spinning too fast," Kurt said. "I can't see inside the window."

"Scott, I need you to blast that thruster," Raven said. "Slow down the spin."

Scott's seat moved, lowering him down below the floor, where he sat before a targeting system. Looking through the scope, Scott let loose his optic beams and fired at the thruster. He was successful and the ship slowed in its spinning.

"Kurt, take Peter and Nova," Raven instructed. "Go."

"Wait, what?" Nova asked, not getting an answer as everyone was already in motion.

She felt Kurt's hand on her shoulder and she was suddenly inside the space shuttle. She was weightless, floating in the wreckage of the shuttle, and she closed her eyes to concentrate. She had never tried creating gravity on her own before; instead channelling what was already there and bending it to her will. This was something entirely different. She was creating it out of nothing and when she felt her feet touch down on the floor of the shuttle, she opened her eyes and saw Peter grinning at her, evidently impressed. ↻

He winked at Nova and Kurt. "Be right back."

He shot off and time slowed down for him. He unstrapped all of the astronauts, tossing them through the air towards Kurt and Nova, before he stopped at the window and eyed the anomaly beyond.

"Oh, shit," he whispered, before rushing back to Nova and Kurt.

Grabbing Kurt's slowly disappearing body, time sped back up to normal and Peter returned to the jet with Nova and Kurt, the astronauts floating around them. Nova closed her eyes and felt a tug in her gut, sending them all to the floor as she provided the ship with enough gravity to stabilise everybody.

"Strap in, we're headed home," Raven said.

"Wait," one of the astronauts spoke up. "Our commander, he's not here. He was in the airlock working on the thruster."

"The heat signature's rising fast," Hank said.

"I can't hold it any longer," Storm replied.

"We gotta get out of here," Raven said. "I said strap in."

"No, Raven, no," Charles's voice said. "We're not leaving anyone behind."

"I am not putting this team in more danger," Raven replied.

"What about their team?" Charles asked. "Jean can hold that shuttle together, can't you Jean? You know you can do anything you set your mind to."

"I can hold the ship together but not from here," Jean said. "I need to get inside."

"The heat's spiking," Hank said. "We've got less than a minute 'til those flares hit."

"She said she can do it," Scott said.

"Thirty seconds," Raven said.

Peter ran around Kurt, duct-taping a space helmet to his suit. Nova turned to them. "Count it down. Go."

Kurt and Jean disappeared, leaving the rest of the team to watch from the jet. Hank was watching the clock, the little numbers counting down. "We got twenty seconds... Ten, nine, eight, seven, six..."

"Hank, I know I said count them down but please stop counting!" Nova said.

"Three, two, one."

Nova heard Kurt return as the anomaly reached the abandoned space shuttle, tearing through it. She turned to look back on the astronauts they rescued, finding Kurt and the commander but not spotting Jean with them.

"Where's Jean?" Scott asked. "Kurt, where is she? Where is she?" ↻

"I-I'm sorry," Kurt gasped. ↻

The alarm started blaring through the jet and Hank called, "Brace for impact."

Nova watched as the solar flare began to move away from the jet, disappearing into itself and moving towards the shuttle, before the entire thing exploded. She let out a gasp. "Jean!" ↻

When the light died down, Nova saw Jean still floating there. Her eyes widened. "Holy shit. Kurt?"

"I'm on it," he replied, disappearing before he returned with Jean in his arms.

They laid her down and Scott crouched down beside her. Nova joined him, and when she touched Jean's hand gently, the girl stirred, her eyes opening slowly.

"Is every... Is everybody okay?" she asked quietly.

"Yeah, we're okay," Scott replied, leaning down to hug Jean.

"So let's go home," she whispered.

"Alright, everyone strap in," Raven ordered.

Once everyone was seated, Hank turned to Nova. "I might need a little help on the landing."

She rolled her eyes. "Honestly, all these years and you still need me?"

"Yes."

"Alright, you said it, not me."

As they headed back down to Earth, Nova closed her eyes and held the armrests of her seat. This happened a lot, with Hank requiring Nova's assistance in landing the jet safely, and as they flew back to the airspace that the rocket was fired from, Nova felt the power surge through her body and into the jet.

She slowed them down and brought them safely down to the ground, feeling the jet touch down lightly on the runway below. When she opened her eyes, she grinned. "Nailed it."

They let the astronauts off first, and when they walked off of the jet, they were met with cheers from the crowd that was assembled to greet them. They made sure that the astronauts would be okay before they headed back to the mansion, and as they flew, Nova looked over at Jean.

"Hey," she said. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Yeah, I'm fine."

But even as she said it, Jean Grey knew that something wasn't right, and it had everything to do with the amount of energy she seemingly absorbed up there in space... ↻

[Continue reading next part](#) □