

Saturday, May 26, 2068, 6:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"So, Gordon? How is Brandon doing on Four?" Jeff asked.

Gordon looked up from his plate, his mouth full of steak. He hastily chewed and swallowed, putting up a finger for his father to wait, then washed his beef down with some red wine. "He's doing great, Dad. I'd say he's just about through training on her."

"Good," Jeff replied, mashing down some of his baked potato with his fork. "Scott, how's he doing with flying?"

"Very well, Dad," Scott replied. "He's ready for his final test. So is Nikki, for that matter."

"Excellent," the patriarch responded with a smile. "Get those two licensed as soon as possible, son. Then, Virgil, you take Brandon and cross train him on Two." He turned to his wife. "Has Nikki checked out on Seven yet?"

Dianne stopped to look at the ceiling as she considered the question. "She's all checked out on the diagnostic and monitoring systems. Done very well with them, too. But I've been holding off training her intensively in flying Seven until she got that pilot's license."

"Okay. I understand. But I'd like you to start using the simulator with her this week," Jeff told her. "That way she'll be ready when push comes to shove. There's no reason why we can't overlap the training somewhat." He turned to Virgil again. "What about Dom and Elise, Virgil?"

"Dom's going to be fine once he learns to relax," Virgil replied. He shot a look at Scott. "Scott and I are working on a new training schedule for Elise. The one we had wasn't working. But she's coming along."

"Good," Jeff said with a nod. "Scott? When you come back from taking John to Five next week, I want you to let Callie handle Three for at least part of the journey. And Alan? You're to give her some intensive training on how to land Three in the silo. You know how tricky it is to do that."

"Yes, sir," Alan said. He frowned, puzzled. "Shouldn't I be going up to Five with John? Scott's got an awful lot on his plate."

"Yes, I do, and I want to get away from it for a little bit," Scott said staunchly. "Taking John up to Five is a rest for me, and it may be the last time I get to go with the new schedule."

"Well, I guess so," Alan said hesitantly. "But after this, I want to do the run, whether or not I'm going up to stay. Three is my baby."

"Agreed," Jeff said quickly. He knew that John had specifically asked for Scott to go; it seemed that he had something to discuss with his older brother. He looked around the table. "Anything

else?"

"I'm no closer to getting Kat that pilot's license than I was when we began," Scott said, disgusted with himself. "I'd appreciate it if someone else could help her."

"I'll do it if necessary," Jeff said, nodding. He glanced over at Kyrano, who was bringing in dessert with Lisa's assistance. "Have you heard from Tin-Tin, Kyrano?"

"Only that she and Miss Kat arrived safely," the retainer answered as he served a dish to Jeff. The bowl had a thick, homemade brownie in it. The confection was topped by a scoop of vanilla ice cream, which was in turn drizzled with a velvety fudge sauce.

"Very good." Jeff picked up his spoon and dipped it into the ice cream. The table then became quiet, except for the occasional remark about how delicious the dessert was.

From: Tikatu Sent: 10/28/2005

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