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Subject: Re: Regaining Momentum

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Tue, 24 Jul 2012 00:35:43 GMT

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The crew, recruits and veterans alike, followed Gordon down another long flight. He paused on a landing and in front of a heavy metal door. The smell of fuel was stronger now, and it made Cassie nervous. There were flammability warnings on the door, and a human biohazard warning, but no environmental biohazard ones, a fact that made her blink in surprise. A fuel that's not considered an environmental biohazard? she pondered. I've never heard of such a thing.

"Is everyone here?" Gordon asked, peering over the small crowd.

Virgil was last down the stairs. "Yeah."

"Okay. You've all seen the tanker. Now here's where we keep the fuel." Gordon put a hand up to a scanner, and unlocked the door. Scott, who had wormed his way to the front of the crowd, led them all inside.

"Wow," Nikki breathed in awe.

Six huge tanks loomed before them as they stepped out onto a catwalk. Cassie noticed that the scent of fuel didn't increase as much as she thought it would; it was hardly noticeable at all. Scott led the way to the right, walking slowly backwards as he began to speak.

"These cahelium reinforced tanks hold enough fuel to provide Tracy Island and IR's auxiliary vehicles for nine months to a year. However, we don't like to let them get less than 75 percent depleted, so a tanker arrives roughly every six months to fill the tanks." He smiled, and scratched the back of his head. "With the increased needs of our jets, and the increased use of the pod vehicles lately, we found we needed to make a fuel run a little sooner than normal."

"So, you come out here every six months to see to the tank refilling?" Will asked.

"Actually, no. The whole fuel retrieval system is totally automated," Virgil piped up from where he was at the back of the pack. "A tanker ship pulls up, assisted by navigation lights and a laser-guidance system, and the computers take over. We usually run a diagnostic on the place when we come out. Gordon's gone off to do that now."

They kept moving along the catwalk, passing through a control room where Scott stopped. "Virge, if you'd take them the rest of the way around, I'll see that our tanker's full and ready to go."

"F-A-B," Virgil said as he slipped through the crowd and to the head of the line. "Come along here."

"How do you keep this place safe?" Callie asked, a puzzled frown on her face. "I mean, we can monitor it from Five, but we can't really do anything about it."

"And I don't see that you have the equipment at Tracy Island to do anything about a fire or explosion from there, either," Cassie added

"Well," Virgil said, sounding a bit sheepish. "This room is inside a blast shield made of reinforced cahelium, just like the power plant we saw, and the power plant on the island. So that's our second line of defense." He stopped and pointed down to a series of four relatively stubby pipes with open vents on their slanted tops. "Down there is our first. Those vents can suck the air out of this room, or flood it with seawater, within two minutes. Brains discovered that to be the optimum balance of time between action and explosion."

"I see," Cassie said with a nod. "I'd think that sucking the air out would be more effective."

"I'm sure you're right, Cassie, but Brains likes to cover every contingency."

"What's this cahelium that I keep hearin' about?" Will asked, scratching his head a bit.

"It's a metal that Brains designed," Virgil replied. "He's got several variations of it, and all of the Thunderbirds are made of it. It's virtually indestructible."

"That's right," Dom said quietly, catching everyone's attention. He realized that people were listening, and he gave a pained, crooked smile when he realized it. "Dr. Tracy said we were okay in Seven, that nothing could damage cahelium except more cahelium. Then... the medical cabin..." His voice trailed off.

"Yeah," Virgil said just as quietly. A moment passed, and he heaved a sigh, and continued in a louder, brighter tone. "Why don't we turn around and head back? There's nothing much more to see along the catwalk."

There was a murmur of agreement, and the tour group allowed him to slip back to the head of the line as they turned around.

"Virgil," Cassie began. "I noticed that this stuff is flammable." She waved an arm at the tanks. "But you don't have an environmental biohazard warning on it? How come?"

"Because it's water soluble," Virgil said, shrugging a bit. "If it's spilled in the sea, or a lake, it breaks down quickly into harmless components. If absorbed into the ground, a good watering or rain will do the same to it. We have a human warning on it because it'll make anyone who drinks it ill, but the remedy is to drink lots of water and dilute it." He grimaced. "It'll move through the digestive tract like lightning, though. Not a pleasant prospect."

"I see." Cassie looked thoughtful.

Luke, who'd been following their conversation asked, "How does it burn? I mean, does it add to the air pollution? Deplete the ozone layer?"

"No to both, Luke. It burns clean."

"Then why hasn't Tracy Industries patented it and sold it?" Dom asked, frowning as he remembered his half-brother's article. "It would do the world a very big favor."

"Oh, it's patented," Virgil said as they entered the control room where Scott waited. "But there are groups out there, such as the oil cartels and the automobile industry, that want nothing to do with it. They've been actively working in the World Government to have its discovery suppressed."

"Hm." Dom said, his frown clearing a bit. "I wonder if the 'share the tech' people know about that."

"Or if they even care," Elise grumbled. She dropped back to walk with Scott at his invitation.

"Hey, Virgil," Brandon said. "You mentioned that the tankers pull up to the island for delivery. Does that mean the equipment is at sea level?"

"Yeah, it does," Virgil replied as they moved back onto the landing.

Gordon waited for them there. "Everything's shipshape with the computerized systems," he said.

"Good." Virgil shut the door, and Gordon put his hand up to lock it.

"What I was wondering," Brandon said as they started up the steps again, "was what do you have to prevent corrosion. All that equipment, getting slammed by the waves and the salt air..."

"Everything's covered." Gordon turned on the steps to look back at Brandon. "Covered and camouflaged, just like the entrance to the hangar. That way, corrosion is kept to a minimum."

"And Mateo will always look like just a rock in the middle of the ocean," Scott added. When they reached the top of the steps, the group stopped. "Elise and I will take the tanker to Tracy Island now. We'll be back within the hour."

"In the meantime, we can grab something to eat..." Virgil began.

"And whoever wants to go see where Thunderbird Four docks can come with me!"

"I'd like to see Thunderbird Three's silo," Callie said.

The three Tracy brothers glanced at each other. "Okay," Virgil said. "Whoever wants to see Thunderbird Three's silo, come with me."

Gordon rubbed his hands together. "And whoever wants to see Thunderbird Four's slip, follow me!"

He sounded so eager that Cassie decided to follow him. Dom and Nikki joined the small party as, predictably, did Brandon. Luke and Will went off with Virgil and Callie. Gordon led them back to the main hangar, and across it to another long flight of stairs.

"You certainly get your exercise roaming around this place," Nikki quipped.

"Yeah, I don't know if I'll make it back up," Cassie added with a grin.

"Pffft!" Gordon waved a dismissive hand. "You ladies are fit as fiddles."

He brought them down to another cavern, this one far more rough than the others, though the empty slip was smooth concrete. Dark sea water lapped gently against its side. "There's a camouflaged door below sea level over there," he said pointing to what looked like a solid rock wall. "Thunderbird Four can come and go undetected. In fact, that's what usually happens when we need the tanker. We launch Thunderbird Four via the airstrip -- it has small hover jets so we can do it -- and I chauffeur the pilots here and back."

"And today, Virgil gets to do it?" Brandon asked.

"Yep. We thought it would be a good experience for all you new folks... or newer folks, since some of you have been here a good while now."

"Has Dianne been here?" Dom asked.

"No, she hasn't, but she had to work with the kids today on schoolwork." Gordon grimaced. "She'd be unhappy with the state of the first aid station."

"You think?" Nikki said, chuckling.

Cassie listened to the conversation with one ear and looked down at the dark water, and unconsciously hugged herself. She knew that she'd be learning to swim in that environment, and it didn't exactly make her feel comfortable seeing it here, so opaque and foreboding. She was relieved to hear Gordon say, "Okay, folks, let's head back up to the hangar. My grandmother packed us quite a lunch, and I'd like to get into it before Virgil's group does!"

"Sounds good to me!" Brandon said heartily as they retraced their steps and headed up that long flight.

--Mateo Island, finis

Posted by Tikatu on October 27, 2007

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