
Subject: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:13:53 GMT

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The extended Tracy family and the new recruits have dealt with the tsunami's physical aftermath, and resumed their normal (or what passes for normal) routine. Training is becoming more in-depth, and the old guard is handing more responsibility over to the newcomers as they continue to integrate as a team. It is autumn in this part of the world, but spring in the homelands of all the residents, and with that change of season comes a yearning for renewal and refreshment. The island's inhabitants have also entered a time of celebration, and the new recruits will face their first test as a team apart from the veterans of International Rescue.

From: Tikatu Sent: 7/22/2005 9:15 AM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:19:07 GMT

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Saturday, April 21, 2068, 2 p.m., Tracy Island.

"Ready to go, Brandon?" Jeff asked as he climbed into the cockpit of JT-1.

"Yes, sir!" Brandon replied with a grin. "I've been looking forward to this all month!"

Jeff grinned back. He was flying out to Los Angeles, heading for his conversation with his wife's uncle, Andrew Carmichael, about becoming an agent for International Rescue. Brandon, whose birthday they had celebrated at lunch, was headed home for a week's break with his family. Since they were both going to the west coast of the US, it was decided that they would fly together, essentially killing two birds with one stone. The plan was for Jeff to fly to LAX, and for Brandon to catch a quick commercial flight to San Diego from there.

"We'll be arriving around ten p.m. Pacific time," Jeff said as he checked out the controls of his jet. "I think the last flight to San Diego leaves at eleven, so you should have plenty of time."

"Sounds good to me, Mr. Tracy," Brandon said as he fastened his safety straps. "I can hardly wait to get home!"

"I'm sorry you have to take a commercial flight to Christchurch on the way back, Brandon. But we don't have anyone scheduled to fly back from the States at that point."

"It's okay, Mr. Tracy. I can't expect to be ferried around like this all the time."

Jeff smiled, and took his plane out of the hangar. "JT-1 to Control. Requesting clearance for take off."

"Clearance granted, JT-1. Have a good flight," Scott's voice rang out over the radio.

"Roger that," Jeff replied. And with that he taxied down the runway and took his blue jet up into equally blue sky of the April afternoon.

From Tikatu, July 22, 2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:24:38 GMT
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Tracy Island, April 22nd -- 3.30 p.m.

Kat was resting on her balcony; things had slowly gotten back to normal. She was just debating whether to join her friends in the games room, or write to her father when her door chimed. Kat wandered to the door and opened it. Standing there was John. Kat looked surprised. "Why John, how nice to see you! Please, do come in."

As he entered, John explained, "The day before we got the call for the tsunami, Gordon told me that you had had some rather bad news regarding your mother. We've been busy, but I thought I should come to see if you are okay, and also to ask how your Mom is."

"Mum is feeling better, thank you, she is home now and being spoilt rotten by Dad. In fact, I was just thinking of emailing him. Thank you so much for asking. Would you care to join me in a drink?"

John nodded, and while she was gone, he began looking at some of the books on the small table. Picking them up, he browsed through them.

"They're my favourites," Kat said as she handed him a glass of juice.

"I have to say I don't know these authors," John murmured.

"They are whodunits, sort of medieval Miss Marple," Kat explained. "You can borrow them, if you like."

John thanked her. "I will if I ever find the time," he said. He took a sip of the juice, then asked, "So, you really had no idea just how ill your Mom was?"

Kat shook her head. "No, I think that Mum kept quiet, because it was around that time that I was having an interview for this job. I suspect that she knew that I really wanted this, so didn't want to make me turn it down. But now she is on the way to a complete recovery. I would like to visit her, but at the moment, Dad has said that there is really nothing I can do. I may ask permission to visit her on my birthday later this month."

"I'm sure that'll be fine," John replied.

"That would be wonderful! If so, I may plan my visit as a surprise for her."

Looking at her, John asked, "So tell me; what made you decide on a career as a mechanic? Is your father a mechanic?"

Kat laughed, "No, actually my dad is a college lecturer in the building department. Carpentry and Joinery is his subject. When I told my mum and dad I was going to be a mechanic, my mother nearly had a fit. Of course, she blamed it on my dad. I can still hear her now, shouting at him that it was his fault. But I suppose in a way she was right. I used to spend hours watching him tinkering with old cars. I just loved to help, loved the hands on approach. Mum used to tell her friends that she was sure it was just a phase I was going through, but when I enrolled for college, she had to give in to the idea of a daughter permanently in oily overalls, smelling of petrol and oil."

John laughed. "Hard on your Mom. What career did she think you should have had?"

"Oh, you know. Secretary, Florist, Hairdresser, girly things really. Anything but a messy, dirty mechanic."

John chuckled and Kat smiled.

"Now it's your turn. If your dad hadn't started International Rescue, what would you have liked to have done with your life?"

John looked thoughtful. "Mm, that's a good question. I probably would have concentrated on astronomical research, or maybe have stayed with the NASA or gone to the WSA."

They chatted in general about her work with Lady Penelope. Kat explained how thrilled she was to have been offered a job with International Rescue, but how guilty she had felt leaving Lady Penelope. "After all," she explained. "I had been working for her for four years, and we had a mutual respect for each other. Sometimes it was more than an employer/employee relationship; it was a friendship that formed over those four years."

John looked at his watch. "I really must go and leave you so that you can email your dad."

Kat smiled. "You're welcome any time, John. I enjoyed the chat; it was better than just sitting on my own. And thank you again for enquiring about my Mum."

John picked up the books and headed for the door, followed by Kat. "See you later," he said as he left the apartment.

"Bye, John. Thanks for visiting," Kat replied, as she closed the door.

From Tawnyangel22 July 23, 2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:24:48 GMT

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Sunday, April 22, 2068; 12:30 AM; Silver Spring, Maryland (4:30 PM on Tracy Island)

Lena shut down her computer with a tired sigh. She'd checked her itinerary for her first visit as I&M coordinator to another branch -- Houston, Texas this time -- and made her choices for the next visits over the next few months. She looked at the clock.

It's Easter already. Well, I'd better get some sleep if I'm going to church wit my family. I'm looking forward to hearing Kevin and Naomi sing in de choir. Den it will be on to Matthew's house for dinner and a nice family celebration.

She did her usual electrical check and walked out of the room. She double-checked the security system and made her way to her room. Twenty minutes later she was in bed, and twenty one minutes later she was sound asleep.

From Hobbeth July 23, 2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:25:05 GMT

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Tracy Island. Sunday, April 22nd, 6:00p.m.

SLAM!

"Do that any harder and the door will fall off completely."

Elise turned to look over her left shoulder as she made sure the door was indeed, shut. "Hi, Callie. You got laundry there too?" she asked, indicating towards the basket Callie was holding.

"Yep, just a small load, but I figured I might as well get it done as you never know when things'll change around here!"

Elise smiled as she went back to folding her towels.

"I must say, it's nice to have our apartments on the ground floor, not so far to walk to the laundry!" said Callie as she started to shove her clothes into the washer.

"Yes, it is." replied Elise.

The girls continued to idly chat while separating loads and folding clean ones. Once the last loads were in the washer and dryer respectively, Callie asked Elise to join her just outside on the patio. Elise grabbed some bottled drinks from her apartment and the two of them sat out on the chairs on the patio while their laundry tumbled and hummed inside.

"Can I ask you something personal?" inquired Callie.

"Sure, what?"

"How are you doing after that little run in with the wave in the boat pen?"

Elise looked at her friend. "Honestly?"

"Yes, honestly."

"I was scared to death when it happened. I thought I was drowning and it was all over. I felt like fate had finally caught up with me."

"I can imagine. Thank goodness Mr. Tracy was there to rescue you."

Elise chuckled a little. "Yeah, who would've thought he'd be rescuing me, just months after the helijet crash. I wonder what his boys thought of their 'old man' still being capable of rescuing people!"

This time Callie joined in the chuckling. "Seriously, Elise, I'm glad he was there to pull you out. And, I might add, I'm glad that you seem to be on the right track."

"Yes Callie, I am. Thanks to Dr. Tracy and some serious therapy with her, I'm getting back to my old self. It felt good to get back up in the air the other day; flying is what I do. I wonder what Virgil will think when I start taking his 'baby' for a spin? I've heard he's very, very protective of her!"

Callie rolled her eyes and laughed. "Let me know when the tickets go on sale for that show! I want a front row seat!"

Elise smiled. "I don't know if it'll be that much of a showdown, but hey, I can handle Scott so his brother shouldn't be too much trouble. I've spent some time training with Virgil and he seems harmless enough. Anyway, how about you? When do you get to flit around space again? That's got to be a trip in itself!"

Callie sighed contentedly. "Yes being up in that space station is certainly something to experience. All that technology was overwhelming when I first went up there, but John was patience itself, thank goodness. For every hot-tempered fibre that I've heard Scott has in his body, I swear John must have double that in patience!"

The two continued talking, and laughing and enjoying a pleasant evening until the resounding buzz of a dryer brought them back to the task at hand. They both sighed and stood, stretching their arms.

"Oh well, back to grind, I suppose," Callie remarked as she and Elise went in to finish the laundry.

From FrankieCTB2 July 23, 2005

Sunday, March 22, 2068, 1:45 p.m., local time, Los Angeles, CA

Jeff sighed as he got out of his sports car and surveyed the sprawling hacienda that Dr. Andrew Carmichael called home. He knew he was expected; Maggie Carmichael had insisted he come for Easter dinner, and to get onto the premises through the ornate grille they called a gate, he had to announce himself. ~I just hope I haven't damaged this friendship by holding onto the secret of IR for so long, he thought. ~I trust Andy to keep quiet about what Dianne told him, but will he want to become an agent? I should have brought her along, but Tyler wasn't feeling well after coming back from Bongo-Bongo and she wanted to stay home with him. Poor kid; I guess lamb didn't agree with him.

The door opened before he could knock and a smiling Maggie Carmichael greeted him with, "Jeff! How good to see you! I'm so glad you could come!" She embraced him, then looked beyond him for anyone else he might have brought. "Where's Dianne?"

"At home, Maggie. Tyler's not feeling well."

"Ah, of course. Doctor Mom strikes again!" she exclaimed. "Come in, come in! Drew's in his study. Drew! Jeff is here!"

Andrew Carmichael came out of his study. Jeff could tell by the stiffness of his greeting that he wasn't best pleased to see his old friend and nephew-in-law. "Where's Dianne?" he asked, as he shook Jeff's hand, trying to seem normal. Jeff explained again where Dianne was and why, and Andrew nodded. "I'm sure she can take care of it."

Jeff was greeted by Regina, Andrew's youngest daughter, and her husband, Philip. The obviously pregnant woman was trying hard to keep their other three children in check as they raced around. The youngest looked up at the newcomer with wide blue eyes, then put up his hands with grasping fingers, signaling that he wanted the stranger to pick him up. Jeff glanced over at Regina for permission; she chuckled and nodded, and Jeff crouched down to lift the child into his arms.

"So this is what it feels like to be a grandfather," he said jokingly, as the tot squeezed his nose with wet fingers. "I'll have to get my sons working on making me one soon."

"How's the foot?" Andrew asked off-handedly, as they walked towards the dining room.

"Good, very good. I'm just doing a little bit of therapy each day to keep things limber," Jeff replied. He blew raspberries at the toddler, who squealed with delight.

Andrew ushered Jeff and his passenger into the dining room, where Regina took the tot from Jeff and sat him in a high chair. The Carmichael's older daughter, Grace, was putting the finishing touches on the table, and greeted him with a smile. "Uncle Jeff! It's been a long time!" She came around to kiss him on the cheek. "I think you remember my husband, Austin." The two men shook hands and muttered some pleasantries, then everyone sat down at the table to enjoy their Easter feast.

An hour and a half later, Jeff was more than sated, and anxious to deal with the real reason for his visit. Regina was busy putting her children down for naps, and Grace's children, who were older, repaired to the game room to play. The two sons-in-law did the same, but to watch sports on the television. The maid was cleaning up the dinner table, and Andrew steered Jeff to his study so that they could talk.

"I think Maggie should also hear what I have to say," Jeff said quietly.

"Oh? You trust her? I'm surprised," Andrew replied, a touch of bitterness in his voice.

"I'll deal with that as we talk. But I have a... proposal to make, and I think she should hear it, too."

"All right." Andrew left, and came back a few minutes later with Maggie. She smiled at both men, and when she got a tiny smile from Jeff and no smile at all from her husband, she frowned.

"All right, what's going on with you two? I've never seen you quite so... cold to Jeff before, Drew. And Jeff, you've been acting like you've got some important business and that dinner was something to endure, not enjoy."

Jeff sighed. "Was I that obvious?"

"To me, yes. To anyone else, probably not." She sat down in one of the smooth leather chairs and crossed her legs. "Now, what is it?"

Jeff sat down next to her, and Andrew sat down behind his desk, folding his hands and putting them on the surface. "Should I start?" he asked, "Or do you want to tell the whole tale?"

"Go ahead and tell your part, Andy," Jeff said. "I've heard it from Dianne, but I'd like your point-of-view, too."

"All right." Andrew proceeded to tell Maggie all about his encounter with the CMO of International Rescue while he was working with Doctors Without Borders in Samoa. When he got to the part where Dianne had turned around, Maggie gasped, and for the rest of the story, her wide eyes were on Jeff.

As Andrew finished, she asked, "Is this true, Jeff? Is your family really... International Rescue?"

Jeff nodded. "Yes, Maggie. We are." He gazed at Andrew. "You have every right to be angry with me for not trusting you enough with the secret. You've been a good friend, and a person I have trusted over the years. But... it has been difficult to open up about this, even to my closest friends. There have been... there are people out there who would stop at nothing to get even the slightest hint of who we are and where we're based, who would kill to get their hands on our technology, or even to... to destroy us as a family and as an organization for revenge's sake. That's why I've been very, very selective about who I tell, and when."

He blew out a breath. "Dianne forced my hand in your case, Andy, Maggie. It's her opinion that we need you on our side, on our team, in case... in case she herself is injured or we have need of

medical facilities beyond what is in our infirmary at the island. I was angry at first that she had revealed us to you, Andy, but now that I know her reasons, I have to agree with her. Above and beyond that, you are family, and have proven yourself to be trustworthy for a long time. That's why I'm asking both of you now to join our organization as what we call agents." He held up his hands. "I don't know what else to say. You both look like you have questions, so go ahead and ask."

There was a moment of silence, then Andrew asked, "Did you marry Dianne to keep this secret of yours 'in the family'?"

Maggie exclaimed in shock, "Andrew!" while Jeff shook his head emphatically.

"No, Andy. I married her because I love her. Plain and simple."

"When you asked me for doctors, were you looking to recruit new members of... your group?"

Jeff shook his head again. "No, I wasn't. I was looking for exactly what I asked for, someone to take the medical end of things from Brains. Someone who could be discreet and who we wouldn't have to lie to if one or the other of the boys needed surgery. Someone we could take into our confidence on medical issues, both for the family, and for the boys as they worked on the field. I'll admit, I had toyed with the idea of adding a medical component, of having someone with more than just EMT or first aid training out there, but Dianne was the one who insisted I follow up on the idea. At first, she worked in our cargo carrier, which has a small sickbay. But then... then I built Thunderbird Seven for her so she would have better facilities to work in and with."

He swallowed and sighed. "If you must know, it was Dianne going out as International Rescue that saved my own life and that of my pilot when my helijet crashed in New Hampshire. If she had not been available, or she didn't have those facilities, I most likely would have died." He met Andrew's stormy gaze and said, "Let me ask you a question. If you had known then what you know now, would you have recommended Dianne to me?"

Andrew glared at him for a moment, then his expression changed and he sat back, his shoulders slumping. "Probably not." He sighed. "I guess I can understand something of why you kept this from us. But why are you here now? And why tell Maggie, too?"

"And what did you mean by the term 'agents'?" Maggie asked.

Jeff sat up straighter. "We have, throughout the world, a network of people who assist us in many different ways. Most of them gather intelligence for us. Some of them help with delivering communications and arranging for security when we're in their area. A very few actually undertake covert missions for us, doing things that we can't do for fear of exposure. We call them agents. I would like to extend to both of you the opportunity to help us out in this way. Your duties would be flexible, but mainly would be medical in nature. And I'm including you, Maggie, in this invitation because I believe that spouses have a right to know what's going on and the opportunity to participate if they want to."

There was a silence between the three again, then Maggie asked, "What would we need to be of help to you? Because I, for one, want in!"

Jeff chuckled, but Andrew didn't. His wife glanced over at him and said, "You're not going to let a little thing like hurt pride get in the way here, are you, Drew? Jeff has apologized for not telling us before, and truthfully, I'm glad he didn't. Now he and Dianne need us, and I want to help. But you're the one they really need, not an old gossip like me." She turned back to Jeff. "Does Lisa know about this?"

Jeff sighed again, but he smiled and nodded. "Yes, she does. Dianne was the one who didn't want to tell her; she knows her mother very well. Turns out that Lisa had figured it out for herself and kept it a secret, trying to prove to Dianne that she could keep a secret. We were quite surprised when we discovered that she knew." He paused, then said, "But Dianne's brothers don't know. There might come a time when they would have to know, but as Dianne said to me the other day, that time isn't now." He sat back and plunked one ankle on the knee of the opposite leg. "Lisa's been a big help, especially when she's come out to the Island to bolster our support team. Of course, the fact that she and Kyrano are an item doesn't hurt either."

"Of course not," Maggie said with a twinkle in her eye. "And it does explain why she's out at the island so often." Her face took on a more serious expression. "Perhaps that's a way I could help, too. And, if you ever needed a place for the kids to stay..."

"That's a great idea, Maggie, and a wonderful offer. Flying out to Greenville is quite a distance. Having a second place for the kids would be wonderful." He paused again, then added, "Well, a third place if you count the kids' other grandparents. We do try to let the kids visit every so often. But they don't know either, and won't." He turned to his friend. "What about it, Andy? Can we count on you? Can Dianne count on you?"

Andrew let out a long, quiet breath, then nodded. "Yes. You and Dianne can count on me. I can understand why you kept this from me."

"It really wasn't anything personal, Andy," Jeff assured him. "I have a lot of other friends that I've known for years that have no idea about the... ahem... 'family business'." He sat forward, and Maggie sat forward, too, her eyes eager and shining. "Now, let me tell you what happens next...." he began.

From Tikatu July 26, 2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:25:46 GMT
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April 22, 8:45pm, McCain Residence, San Diego

Brandon stood in the backyard smiling happily, looking at the clear night sky. He had just finished celebrating his thirty-first birthday with his family and the feeling he had was a good one. He was deep in thought when his sister, Shannon, came up and stood beside him.

"Hey, big Brother, that was a nice party."

"Yes, it was," he replied, his thoughts miles away.

"So, do you have any plans for tomorrow?"

The question caught him off guard and he looked at his sister with curiosity. "I hadn't planned anything special. What did you have in mind, Sis?"

"Well, I was thinking of..."

The Next Day

"Whoa, the view up here is GREAT!" Brandon shouted into his radio to be heard above the wind. He was currently 60 feet above the water, strapped into a parasail harness, looking down at the crystal blue water of the Pacific reflecting the sunlight like a diamond.

"I thought you'd like it," Shannon remarked from her position behind the boat's steering wheel.

"You bet I do!" he shouted in exhilaration. He grinned broadly as his sister slowed the boat, causing the parachute to drop towards the water, only to be pulled back up as she increased the boat's speed. This went on all day, the siblings taking turns going up, both enjoying each other's company.

Next on his 'to do list' was get in contact with his good friend Aaron Bradshaw. When Brandon arrived home from parasailing, he called his friend, wanting to make plans to get together before he left. Unfortunately, Aaron was not at home and his roommate informed Brandon that he wouldn't be back until Sunday.

Too bad. I was really looking forward to seeing him. Oh well, there's always next time.

It was a totally exhausted Brandon that slipped between the sheets. He reached up, putting his hand behind his head, thinking about how his vacation had been so far and sighed happily. He then pulled the covers over his head, going to sleep, and dreaming pleasant dreams.

From MagicMaster8 7/26/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:25:59 GMT
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Tuesday, April 24, 2068, 9 a.m., Tracy Island

"How was he, Nikki?" Dianne asked as she came into the sick room.

Nikki adjusted the I.V. as Dianne ran a scanner over the sleeping form. "He seemed to have a good night at first, but I think he had some nightmares. He didn't quite wake up, though. He's gone through a unit of glucose solution and his output has been consistent with that." She shook her head. "I tried him with a bit of lemon-lime soda, but he just couldn't keep it down."

Dianne sighed. "I think I know what's going on; it's just getting him to open up about it that's the hard part. I don't think he knows why this is happening." She turned to the nurse. "Thanks, Nikki. You've done a great job. Better get some sleep."

"All right, Dr. Tracy. I'll be back tonight." Nikki softly closed the door behind her and sighed. ~This is a tough job right now. I hope Dr. Tracy can get him to feeling better. It's always hard to see the little ones suffer.

Dianne logged herself in as physician/medic on duty and looked over the readings she had gotten. "He's lost some more weight, weight he couldn't afford to lose," she murmured to herself. "I wish it hadn't come to this. It seemed so minor when he first got back from Bongo-Bongo. But it's progressively gotten worse." She left the confines of the office and walked over to the bed, reaching out to stroke back the stiff brick red hair. Tyler stirred beneath her hand and opened his brown eyes.

"Hey, Spud," she said softly. "How are you doing this morning?"

He shrugged, his skinny shoulders lifting and falling. "It's morning?"

"Yes, Ty. It's morning," Dianne replied. "Ms. Nikki told me you had some nightmares."

He shrugged again. "I dunno. I don't remember any." He glanced with distaste at the needle in his hand. "When can I get out of here?"

"When you can eat solid food and keep it down, hon. You know that," Dianne reminded him gently.

"Mom, how come I'm so sick? I want to eat, but I keep throwing up," he asked, voice a tremulous whine.

At that moment, the door opened, and Jeff strode in. He smiled at his son, and the boy reached for him with a happy, "Dad!" He took the skinny body in his arms for a firm hug. Tyler seemed to not want to let go, so Jeff kept one arm around him while he reached out for Dianne and cupped her face briefly with his hand.

"When did you get back?" Tyler asked, still clinging to his adoptive father.

"In the wee hours of the morning, Ty. Your mom wanted me to sleep, and she wanted you to sleep before I came to see you," Jeff explained. "Now what's this I hear about you still not eating?"

"I try to eat, Dad, really I do. But I always throw it all up again," Tyler explained tearfully. "Now I have to have an IV..."

"I see that, Ty. They're not fun, are they?" Jeff asked. He raised the head of the bed and got the boy to scoot over towards Dianne, then put down the bed rails on his side and sat up on the mattress, his arm around Tyler's shoulders. "Now, your mom said she was going to tell me what she thought was wrong with you. What's the diagnosis, Dr. Mom?"

Dianne smiled at the little joke, then put down the lower rails on her side of the bed so she could perch at Tyler's feet. "Well, I've done a lot of testing on our Tyler here. All kinds of tests, everything I could think of, and none of it showed me what was wrong. No intestinal bugs, no nasty viruses, no terrible diseases, nothing like that. So, the only thing I could think of this possibly being is... stress."

"What makes you say that, Dr. Mom?" Jeff asked, squeezing his son to him.

"Well, for one thing, I've actually seen this before. Alex had it back in the days after Rick's death, back when people were blaming Rick for the bombing and I was... going to pieces. It took a while, but eventually he was able to realize that our family was still intact and that I was getting better. He learned some ways of dealing with stress, and I learned some ways to help him."

She reached out to stroke Tyler's skinny leg. "Now, our Mr. Tyler here has had a lot of stress over the past few months. His daddy nearly died in a helijet crash, there have been new people come to our island to live, and then a big wave threatened to wash us all away and he was shipped off to keep him safe without his mom or his dad to comfort him. That's a lot of stress for a nine-year-old to handle, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do," Jeff said quietly. He turned to Tyler. "What do you think of Dr. Mom's diagnosis?"

Tyler looked down at his hands, his tanned fingers twisting around each other. "I guess it might be right." He got quiet for a long moment as his parents waited to see what else he might say. Suddenly, he looked up at Jeff with big tears in his eyes, and nearly flung himself into his father's arms. "I was scared! I saw the pictures of the tsunami and what it did to other places and I was so scared that you might die and Cherie might die and Gordon might die! Alex told me I was being silly, and Grandma said I needed to be brave, but... I couldn't be! They told me you would be okay, but I didn't know until we got home... then there was all the junk in the boat pen and the smashed catamaran and... and... I heard you had to save Miss Collins and.... I was scared! So scared!"

Jeff held him and rocked him while Dianne smoothed the top of his foot. Tyler rested in his father's arms for a bit, then turned and flung himself at his mother, who enfolded him in her arms and rocked him some more, rubbing his back as she did. Jeff sat up and moved forward so he could encircle them both. She murmured, "It's okay, Ty. It's okay. It's okay to be scared."

She drew back for a moment and planted a kiss on his forehead. "I'm sorry that you felt you had to be brave, sweetie. And Alex should not have said you were being silly. Though if I know him, it was to cover up the fact that he was scared, too."

She stroked his hair again. "You know, whenever I wasn't really busy keeping track of patients and all, I was pretty scared, too. Scared for your Daddy and Cherie and Gordon. Scared and worried, worried for you and Alex and Grandma, too. And it was all right for me to be this way

because it's natural. It shows how much we love each other."

Tyler looked from one parent to another and asked suddenly. "What would happen to me if you died? If you both died?"

Jeff glanced over at Dianne, then put a hand on his son's head, and sighed. "If we both died, Scott would become guardian to you and Alex and Cherie, depending on how old you were. If Scott was unable to be guardian, then Virgil would be, and then John, and then Gordon, and then Alan. If all of us died, then you'd go to either Lady Penelope or your Uncle Jared, depending on who was better able to take care of you."

"I hope that never comes," Tyler said, nestling in his mother's arms.

"Me, too, Ty. Me, too," Jeff replied fervently.

"Now, young man," Dianne said, giving Tyler a squeeze. "There are some things we're going to have to do over the next few days to help you deal with the stress and fear you've been feeling. For one thing, I'm going to make sure you get enough good sleep. That means some medicine to help you sleep and get the rest your body needs. Then we need to talk about the things that scare you, and not only what scares you about your Daddy and I, but what scares you about the rest of the family. We live a very scary life, Tyler, and we all need to know how to deal with it every day. I'm going to teach you some things that will help you relax your body so it's not so tense. And hopefully soon, you'll feel like you can keep your food down so you can get out of here!"

"Okay, Mom," Tyler said with a sigh.

Jeff reached out and ruffled his son's hair. "How about we try a little ginger ale right now? Would that be okay?" He glanced at Dianne, who nodded her head slowly.

"I think we could try it, if Tyler feels up to it," she said. "What do you think, Tyler?"

"Maybe later," the boy said. "I'm kinda sleepy right now. Can I go back to bed?"

"Sure, Spud. You can. We'll have something a little later." Jeff climbed off the bed and let Tyler lie back on the mattress. Dianne lowered the head of the bed back down and both parents put up the side rails. Jeff kissed Tyler on the forehead and Dianne bussed him on the cheek. Then she lowered the lights in the sick room and, after giving Jeff a kiss of his own, went into her office. Jeff left, glancing back at the boy, who had turned onto his side, away from the door. He shook his head sadly. ~There are times when I forget that my dream comes with a cost. I just wish that my little ones didn't have to pay for it.

From Tikatu 7/27/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:28:44 GMT

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Tracy Island -- Wednesday April 25th - 9.15 am.

Scott waited in Thunderbird One's hangar, impatiently tapping his foot, and looking at his watch: 9.15 a.m.. ~Where on earth is she? I specifically told her 8.30 a.m. There is a lot to show her.

Brains arrived, obviously looking around for her. "Isn't she here yet?"

"No, she isn't," Scott snapped back.

"It's not like Kat to be late; she is usually very punctual." Brains tried to calm Scott.

Just then the sound of running footsteps was heard, and Kat appeared, very much out of breath.

"Kat, you're late," Scott said.

"Scott, I am so sorry! I overslept! You see, we were all up late last night chatting and...."

Actually, only part of her excuse was true. They had stayed up late chatting, but for the first time since she had been on the island, she felt nervous. She was suddenly worried. What if she couldn't learn everything? What if Scott got frustrated with her? He had been kind with her learning to fly, but she could sense that underneath, he was getting frustrated.

"Okay, okay," Scott interrupted irritably. He took a deep breath to calm himself. "So, let's make a start. There is a lot you have to know about Thunderbird One."

"Oh, yes!" Kat remarked brightly. "I have been reading the manual. I don't think it will be too hard to learn about Thunderbird One. I think I did quite well with Thunderbirds Two and Four."

"Really?" Scott remarked, an eyebrow rising.

"Kat," Brains looked at her and tried to diffuse the situation. "Thunderbird One is more complex than the other two crafts, you know."

For a split second Kat was going to say something, but changed her mind. Scott was looking rather annoyed. ~Maybe I have overstepped the mark, she thought to herself. Meekly she followed the two young men as they began maintenance work on the large rocket.

"We will begin at the front," Scott remarked, "We obviously can't do all that I had planned this morning since we are a little short on time."

Again Kat thought about saying how sorry she was for being late, but Scott and Brains walked ahead of her. "In the nose cone there is a computerised instrumentation system which uses 'nano' technology. This allows simplified control of the aircraft at high speed. There is also a forward radar and body-heat detection system."

Kat nodded, trying hard to appear as if she completely understood everything that Scott was telling her. But she had to admit, "I am not totally au fait with all the computerisation systems you use." Kat tried hard to keep a tremor from her voice.

Brains looked at her kindly. She was finding this hard; true, she had read the manual, but her remarks earlier had put her at odds with Scott.

Scott continued, "The rocket has a heat-resistant cahelium-bonded nose cone."

They headed for the interior. Kat was still feeling somewhat nervous. She had never experienced being as nervous as this before. Scott was not as easy going as his other brothers had been. Once inside the cabin, Scott pointed out the control console. Kat groaned inwardly, ~Another computerised system!

He pointed out that the pilot's seat rotates to remain upright when TB1 changes from vertical to horizontal flight. A folding ladder moves forward and unfolds telescopically downwards to allow access via underside exit hatch to pilot's cabin. Behind the cabin were the oxygen tanks, air-recycling duct, life support systems and atmosphere-recycling unit. He showed her the starboard window hatch.

"Okay, then," Scott said. "Now let's go outside and onto the gantry surrounding the rocket. I want to explain a few more things to you." He looked at Kat, who was by now looking distinctly unhappy. "Do you have any questions before we leave the interior?"

"Nnno... Scott," Kat mumbled.

Standing on the gantry overlooking Thunderbird One, Scott pointed out the remote-controlled hover camera, which uses anti-gravity technology to allow him to view the disaster area from the safety of Thunderbird One's cabin, also needed if there are poisonous gases or unstable ground. Heading back down the ladder through the body of the ship he showed her the service duct ladder, which was used when Thunderbird One was in the launch bay. Next they headed to the access hatch to the cargo bay, where a hover bike and Mobile Control are kept.

Scott went on relentlessly.

Kat found her voice, and asked Scott one or two questions. He answered her questions and then said, "I think that we'll leave the rest for another day. I suggest that we work again the day after tomorrow. I will give you a small test on what you have learned today, Kat."

Kat inwardly groaned. ~He is a hard taskmaster. Still, she thanked him.

Just as she was leaving, Scott called after her, "Kat, 8.30 am sharp."

"Okay, Scott," Kat answered as she hurried out of the hangar.

Scott watched her go and then said to Brains, "She has the makings of a good mechanic for the Thunderbird crafts, once she has settled down to the task. She seems to want to rush things though. She needs far more training."

Brains nodded in agreement. "I will arrange that for her. I intend to ask Tin-Tin to train her on most of the auxiliary vehicles. John and Alan can also help if they have the time."

From Tawnyangel22 7/29/2005

Thursday, April 26, 2068 10 a.m., Tracy Island.

Christopher walked the short distance to the dining room, one hand in his pocket. He had an empty bucket, and a chamois leather so he could clean the windows there. As soon as he entered the area, he heard voices in the kitchen. He stopped in mid-step.

"Well, Dad, did Uncle Drew say he'd join up?" John asked, fixing himself a cup of coffee.

Jeff sighed. "Yes, John, he did. He and Maggie are both going to be agents."

"You could have knocked me over with a feather when he came up to me at Samoa and made that comment about me 'not looking like a Maverick'," John remarked. "Why did Mom tell him about us?"

Jeff sipped his coffee. "She has her reasons, John. Mostly having to do with her own physical well-being."

"Did you straighten everything out in your 'discussion'?" John queried. "And is that why Christopher's disciplinary term got cut short?"

"Yes, it is. Seemed only fair." Jeff stabbed at his son with a finger. "But you are not to tell anyone, son. Not about any of it. I'll tell the family in my own good time."

Christopher's jaw clenched as he heard the words. ~So she breaks the rules as well and doesn't get so much as a slap on the wrist? he thought ~And my disciplinary term got cut short because it "seemed only fair"? His temper rose, but he fought to keep it down. He turned on his heel and left the area.

As he left, he hit the edge of the bucket against the old table standing there. The bucket made a clanging noise. He went directly to the monorail terminal and back to the Cliff House.

"Did you hear something? Is someone in the dining room?" Jeff asked.

John peered out, but couldn't see the bucket, which had rolled under the table. "I don't see anyone, Dad."

Christopher got back to his room, and got all his suitcases out from the cupboards. He started shoveling all the clothes into them. He threw one of the cases against the wall, stopping to try and calm down. Asterix just lay on his cushion and gave him an uninterested look.

Sitting down next to his cat, he said, "Asterix mate, looks like your life of luxury may soon be coming to an end." Getting up, he went over to his phone, and dialed Mr Tracy's number.

Jeff had just settled back down at his desk with his coffee when the vidphone rang. He frowned when he saw the number and recognized it as one that had been assigned to the Cliff House. He

pressed a button and the face of a scowling Christopher appeared. "Mr. Jordan," he said amiably. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to talk to you, Mr Tracy." Christopher inwardly screamed at the calm, collected face looking at him. "Regarding the shortening of my disciplinary term."

Jeff frowned a bit. "What about it?"

"I'd think it would be best if I discuss it in person."

Christopher disconnected the line. He went to his bathroom and smartened himself up. Putting on a fresh shirt and his RAF jacket, he put his tie on also. He checked his appearance and then went to the monorail. Getting on, he was breathing deeply to keep himself calm. He walked from the monorail to Mr Tracy's office.

"Mr Tracy," he said as he stood in front of the older man's desk.

Jeff stood and came out from behind his desk. "Mr. Jordan... Christopher... what do you want to discuss? Do you think your treatment has been unfair?" He leaned up against his desk, his hands on the top at the front.

"No." Christopher looked at Jeff. "I only think it is unfair that when your wife does exactly the same thing as I did, she doesn't get the same punishment as me."

Jeff's slight frown turned into a scowl. "Where did you hear this, Mr. Jordan?" he asked.

"I just happened to hear you and John talking earlier." Christopher smiled thinly. "didn't you hear the bucket?"

"That was you?" Jeff huffed out an exasperated breath. "Look here, Mr. Jordan. Dianne is Chief Medical Officer of International Rescue, not some trainee with an eye for a pretty face. She made a judgment call on letting a member of her own family in on the secret of International Rescue. A family member, I might add, who I have known and trusted for years. There is no comparison between her situation and yours!"

"Of course it's the same!" Christopher snapped. "It's security! You were giving me all that talk when you chewed me out before, and it doesn't apply to your family? That's hypocritical!"

Jeff stood up abruptly and stepped forward. His face grew red and he spoke in a low, dangerous voice. "If my wife had been stupid enough to talk to a television reporter, she would have merited the same treatment. So would any of my sons. But telling a trusted member of the family is not the same as blabbing it all over the BBC! And you're damned lucky that, as a result of my wife's so-called 'security breach', I took stock of my treatment of you and lessened your disciplinary period!"

"Don't give me that!" Christopher snarled back. "It's one rule for your family, and another for us! I cocked up big time, and I'm not ashamed to admit it, and I'm doing my punishment! What would happen if Gordon blabbed? Or Kat? Who would you punish? And who would you let off with a

'dear dear don't do that again?" He crossed his arms, daring Jeff to continue.

Jeff stood still, glaring at the pilot. Then he raised his arm and activated his telecomm. "Jeff to John."

John's face appeared on the tiny screen. He did a double take at his father's red, angry face, but said, "Yes, Dad?"

"Please come to the lounge immediately."

"Right away." John's picture winked out.

Jeff turned his hard eyes back to Christopher again, who stood there defiantly. "Obviously, you aren't listening to me. If either of them spoke to a reporter, they would be punished, and fairly. But I think that this has gone too far."

"Really?" Christopher looked at Jeff. "You need to take a long hard look at things. When I was in RAF, we were treated the same, even the officers. If they made a mistake, they were punished as well. You can't have favourites, Mr Tracy, and I don't think that your wife's case is any different to mine at all. Who knows who it could have been?"

"My wife's case is different because she made no mistake," Jeff countered. He raised his eyes as John came into the room. The younger man looked from Christopher to his father and back again, noting the angry postures. "John?"

"Yes, Father?"

"Prep Tracy One for a flight to Christchurch. Mr. Jordan is leaving our employ, effective immediately. He can catch a commercial flight from New Zealand." Jeff ignored John's gasp of surprise and held out his hand. "Your telecomm."

"Don't worry." Christopher tossed the telecomm on the desk. "I was packing anyway." He turned and walked out of the office.

Jeff watched him go, still glaring. John watched, too, and then turned to his father. "What was that all about?"

"I'll tell you later, John," Jeff growled as he settled back behind his desk.

the beginning to an end, by The Wrong Trousers and Tikatu 7/30/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:30:23 GMT
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Christopher stomped back into his flat and resumed his packing. He threw his clothes angrily into

the cases, then got the collapsible storage boxes from the cupboard. "What first?" he asked, looking at Asterix.

Asterix got up to sniff the open box, then jumped inside. He immediately sat down in the box to groom his nether parts.

"All right," Christopher said and smiled. "You can stay in there for a while, but then I've got to put you in your box." He stroked the little cat, then started to pack his books and films. His kitchen gear came next, and after a while his flat was looking very bare. "I'll miss it here," he said to himself. "But I don't feel part of things here. Maybe it was time to move on anyway."

The door buzzed. "Now who's that?" Christopher muttered. He answered the door to find Scott standing in the elevator.

"My father sent me over to give you a hand," Scott explained coolly.

"Really?" Christopher raised an eyebrow, not wanting to say what he really thought. "You never really liked me, did you Scott? Come in," he said as he gestured. "I'm nearly done and I'll be out of your hair forever."

"My personal feelings toward you are irrelevant. You're a talented pilot, and you and my father must really have gone at it for him to fire you like this," Scott said, almost conversationally. Christopher noticed that Scott had a PDA in his hand.

"Are you checking to see if I don't take anything I shouldn't?" Christopher exclaimed. "I don't believe it!"

"Don't worry!" He snarled as he put Asterix into his box. "I won't steal the silver!"

"It's not the silver I'm to inventory. It's your uniforms and other IR-issued materials and tech," Scott explained. "Please show me where they are?" He added, "You can understand this, can't you? When you left the RAF, there were things you had to return to them, right?"

"Yes, I understand." Christopher pointed to the items on the table. "All there, and the uniforms are ironed and hanging up." Asterix mewed from his box, "sorry mate, time for us to go"

Scott carefully examined the materials Christopher had left on the table. "You have some Tracy Industries identification to turn over as well."

"Forgot that." He got his wallet out and extracted the I.D card from it. "There you go."

Scott added that to the list, and put the ID with the other items. "I'll go get a float to help you with your things."

"Thank you, Scott."

It took about ten minutes, but Scott came back with an anti-gravity float, and Kyrano. As the older man looked into Christopher's face he said, "I will miss your presence, Mr. Jordan. I wish you well

in your next endeavor. Please, take the time to make your farewells to my daughter."

"Thank you, Kyrano." Christopher bowed. "Do you know where she is?"

"I believe she is in the lab. Perhaps you should go there while we load Tracy One."

They took the elevator down to the first floor, and dragged the float out onto the wide patio and over to the freight elevator in the cliffside. Callie and Elise were on the patio, and looked over at the parade. "What's going on?" Elise asked.

"I'm leaving I'm afraid." Christopher looked at them, he walked over. "Nice to have known you both." He hugged both girls. "Good luck with whatever you do."

They watched, perplexed, as the three men disappeared. Then Elise nudged Callie. "We'd better tell the others."

"Right," Callie agreed. "You get Dom and Nikki, I'll track down Kat."

Meanwhile, the freight elevator door opened, and the three men maneuvered the float over to Tracy One, where John was finishing up his preflight checks.

"Here's the cargo," Scott said. He nodded in the direction of the passage from the hangar to the pod repair bay. "You'll be faster if you take the ramp up to the pod repair bay and access the lab from there."

Christopher walked to the ramp, and entered the pod repair bay. He walked a little further, climbing the stairs to the lab. He saw Tin-Tin there, and his breath hitched in his throat. Breathing deeply, he walked into the lab. "Hello, Tin-Tin. I've come to say goodbye."

Tin-Tin gave him a puzzled look, then glanced over at Brains, who shrugged. "Goodbye? I don't understand, Christopher. Where are you going?"

"I'm leaving the Island for good." He smiled sadly. "My fault really; I said some things I shouldn't have. I just wanted to say...." He paused, not sure of what to say. "I just wanted to say that I love you. There! I said it!" He laughed. "I was too scared to do so before."

Tin-Tin gasped at his words, putting both hands to her mouth as she stared at him. "Oh, Christopher," she cried. "I... I don't know what to say!"

Brains stopped what he was doing and turned to watch the conversation, his eyes fixed on Christopher. "Perhaps I'd better leave," he suggested.

Christopher walked up to the shocked girl and kissed her squarely on the lips. "If you are ever in the UK, look me up. I'm sure you could find me if you looked hard enough."

She put a hand to her lips again and stared at him with her big, brown eyes. Then she swallowed and said in a soft squeak, "Goodbye." Her eyes filled with tears and she hurriedly left the room.

The two men watched her go, then Brains stepped over and held out his hand. "I don't know why you are leaving, but it has been nice working with you."

"I'm sure someone will tell you." Christopher smiled as he shook the bespectacled scientist's hand. "Goodbye, Brains, it's been nice knowing you." And with that, he walked out of the lab and back to the hangar.

He was surprised to see that there was a group waiting for him at Tracy One. Kat had Asterix out of his box and Joshua, settled in Dom's arms, was petting the cat, saying in his childish lisp, "Kitty. Kitty." They all turned to him as Nikki noticed him approach. Kat quickly put Asterix back in his crate, and the small group waited for him.

His eyes filling up with tears, he walked over. "No publicity," he tried to joke. "No photos." He leant down and got Asterix from his box, the cat noticing his mood. "It's not fair on you to keep moving you about. Dom?" He looked at him. "Would you like this terror?"

"If you feel you must leave him behind, I will take him," came a voice from the tail of the plane. Kyrano stepped up.

"He always liked you more than me." Chris smiled as he handed Asterix to Kyrano. "Besides where would he get his endless supplies of chicken?"

"Mrrroow?" Asterix didn't want to go, and tried to get back into his master's arms.

"You go with Kyrano now." Christopher sniffled. "He will love you so much." He directed Scott to which of the boxes contained the cat's things then, taking a deep breath, Christopher turned and walked over to the assembled group. "Well," he said, trying to smile, "this is it."

"I don't understand why you're leaving," Kat said. "What happened?"

John watched Christopher carefully to see what he would say.

"I'm not really cut out for life here," Christopher said. "I'm going to try some new challenges. It's been fun knowing you all though." He walked to the girls and hugged them, then shook the hands of the other men.

"It's time to go," John said quietly.

Scott held out his hand. "It was good to work with you."

"And you." Chris shook Scott's hand. "I hope whoever you get to follow me isn't as handsome and as good looking as me."

Scott snorted a laugh, as John climbed into the cockpit.

"Bye, all," Chris said as he climbed into the co-pilot's seat. "Bye, Asterix. Look after Kyrano for me."

John started the engines, and Christopher waved from the window. Slowly the jet taxied out of the

hangar, the small craft door opening slowly before them. The small group turned to watch the plane leave, some waving. Scott watched them go, too, his face creased into a thoughtful frown. ~I'm going to have to ask Dad what this is all about, because I know the others will be asking me.

a final farewell by The Wrong Trousers 8/1/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:30:34 GMT
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Thursday, April 26, 2068, 1:45 p.m., enroute to Christchurch in Tracy One.

The air in the cockpit was strained as the two men flew westward. John was itching to ask Christopher what had happened. He had an idea; his father would usually deputize Scott to fly someone to or from the island and for him to be sent, especially during lunchtime, was highly unusual. That meant this had some significance that only he would know.

Christopher, for his part, was feeling miserable. He had put on a brave front, and tried not to blame Jeff Tracy for his dismissal, but the words they exchanged still smarted, and he still felt it was all inherently unfair. Not only that, he missed Asterix. He was beginning to think that leaving the cat behind wasn't a good idea, not because he thought Kyrano wouldn't take good care of the furball, but because he was fond of the little bugger.

Finally, John could stand it no longer. They didn't have much farther to fly and he wanted to know. He turned to Christopher and asked, "So, what happened?"

Christopher glanced over at John, then turned his attention out the cockpit's windshield. "I'd rather not talk about it," he said, the words coming out clipped and much more harsh than he intended.

John made a deduction. "Were you in the dining room when my father and I were chatting?"

Chris started, and John grimly thought, ~Gotcha!

"Well, if you must know, yes, I was. I overheard you talking about your... your stepmother's indiscretion."

"And?" John asked, challenging the man.

Christopher scowled and his voice turned angry. "And it was not fair! Your stepmother should have been subjected to the same treatment I was! And for your father's shortening my discipline? That was only to assuage his guilty conscience!"

John could see that this man, disgruntled as he was, might pose a security threat of an entirely different kind. So, he decided to tackle the subject head on.

"Do you know the situation my mother was in, Jordan? Do you?"

This brought Christopher up short. "Not entirely, no," he admitted.

"She was about to come face to face with her own uncle. My Grandma Parkhurst's brother. Someone who she has known and who has known her all her life. Someone who was going to recognize her no matter what she did to try and camouflage who she is," John explained, his voice tight. "He's also a very old and dear friend of my father, and was the one to recommend Dianne for the post with us."

He paused to gather his thoughts for a moment. "This is a man that my father trusts, and has trusted for years. Now, before you go saying, 'Well, why didn't he tell this man sooner', it's because very, very few of my father's most trusted friends know about International Rescue. It's to protect them from people who might try and get to us through them. My father has enemies, people willing to kill for our secrets. Doctors, lawyers, accountants; those kinds of people can't defend themselves well against these enemies. So he keeps them in the dark unless he absolutely has to tell them."

"Dianne... Mom knows this, and she had to make a decision. Tell him upfront, or don't tell him and run the risk of him recognizing her anyway. She didn't have much time to decide or enough time to ask for instructions. Telling him was actually safer, since then he knew what was going on and wasn't going to be speculating about it out loud. He knew he had to keep quiet, and Mom knew he would. Why? Because she knew him and trusted him to. So, she seized the moment."

"But...", Christopher tried to interrupt, "it was still a breach of security! And your father can't afford to play favorites."

"Technically, yes, it was a breach. But it was a minimal one, a calculated one, and a decision made consciously, based on the people involved. Believe me, if that man had been anyone but Uncle Drew, Mom wouldn't have said a word." John looked forward. "Contrast that with your own 'indiscretion'. Caught off guard, forgot the protocol, talking to a stranger whose very purpose was to get a 'story', to plaster our secrets all over the news. Which one would you say was the bigger breach?"

"I wasn't aware of the entire situation," Christopher muttered. "Still, he wasn't being fair..."

"Who said he has to be?" John shot back. "It's his organization. He calls the shots, he makes the rules. But, seeing as he knew he really couldn't justify keeping you under discipline when he knew he couldn't really discipline his own wife, he cut back your sentence." John snorted. "Think about it. If you were the CEO of a company and your wife were, say, head of your I & M department, and she came in late to work three times because she had a meeting with some hardware supplier, could you give her the same dressing down and docking of pay that you'd give someone on your assembly line floor who did the same thing because he had a hangover? I don't think so. It's like comparing apples and oranges."

Christopher had nothing to say to this. John sighed and said, "Look, the only reason I'm hashing this out with you is because I can see you're disgruntled about the whole thing. I felt you really needed to know the big picture. I think, that when you think over what I've said, you'll realize that my dad was being generous to you." John stopped, then called into his microphone, "This is Tracy One to Christchurch Tower, requesting permission to land."

From Tikatu 8/1/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:30:47 GMT
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Washington D.C.; Friday, April 27, 2068; 5:45 PM (9:45 AM April 28 on Tracy Island)

Lena left her office and headed outside to go to the Foggy Bottom Metro station. She had decided to take the train to work that day and was glad not to have to drive home. She figured that at this time, most of the riders would already have left, and she would be able to get a seat -- at least she hoped so. She was halfway to her destination, when she heard an unfamiliar voice call her name.

"Mrs. Matumbo."

She stopped and saw a pale, thin man in a limousine, beckoning her over. She didn't move, but said, "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I am a friend of your brother-in-law, James. I'd like to talk to you. I have an offer to make, one I believe you might find to your advantage. Look, I can take you wherever you wish to go."

"I don't tink so. Being a friend of James doesn't recommend you to me. He isn't de type to have friends I can trust. So I wouldn't be interested in your offer." She turned to walk away.

Giles grew frustrated. He remembered his conversation with his sister a few days before.

"You imbecile! First we get nothing from the virus you sent to that silly little friend of yours and now this! It's been nearly two weeks since James Matumbo visited that woman and there have been no results! That man either planted the virus wrong or he doesn't know his sister-in-law as well as he thinks he does!"

"He had to have planted it correctly, Des. There's no way he could have made a mistake. And it wouldn't have mattered then if she had trusted him or not. It was in her computer."

"Then she has a virus protection program that can stop even my latest upgrades. We want her, so you'd better get her!"

Wincing inwardly at the memory he got out and hurried over to her. He took her by the arm. "I'm sorry, but I don't take no for an answer. You aren't in the vicinity of Tracy Industries, now. Who around you at this point would come to your protection, especially if I told them you were an employee of my family who had been stealing from us?"

Her chin came up at that, and she looked at him coldly. "Dere may be a few people who might buy your story at face value, but not many. And from dat little speech, I gatter you are a

Hightower."

He looked at her in surprise. "Your brother-in-law underestimates you. But my chauffeur here," and he indicated the black man who had gotten out and now stood by the open rear door, "would agree with me. Look, Mrs. Matumbo, I don't want to cause a scene. Just get into the car. I promise solemnly that neither of us will hurt you."

She looked at him with thinly disguised contempt, but felt she had no choice. She yielded to his gentle but insistent tugging and walked to the limo and got in. He followed her in and the chauffeur closed the door, then walking quickly around the car, got behind the wheel and soon smoothly merged in with the traffic.

Giles turned to Lena. "Now, Mrs. Matumbo, I understand you are very good at what you do, and what you do is work with and on computers. I also hear that you like a challenge."

"Dat would depend on what de challenge is."

"True. Well, you would be making upgrades to many programs, possibly creating your own, some to -- ah -- merge with others, modifying still others (which I understand you are already good at) and so on. The pay is very good, the benefits are excellent, and there's no telling how far you would go."

"You put dat in a good light, making it sound like a wonderful opportunity. . ."

"It is."

"But what you really mean is dat I would be upgrading viruses created by someone else, hacking into de computers of otter businesses and modifying stolen information to sell to someone else witout dose businesses being able to make a valid accusation."

"Why, Mrs. Matumbo! You make it sound so -- sleazy! And all I'm saying is that you'd have a greater chance to use your creativity."

Lena looked away from him, muttering something in her native Swahili. She happened to glance at the rear view mirror and saw the chauffeur's eyes widen. So he understands me, she thought. Interesting. I might be able to use dat to my advantage.

"I've heard your offer, and it isn't anyting I'd be interested in accepting. Now would you please pull over and let me out?"

He leaned toward her instead, and turned her head so that she had to look straight at him. "I told you before, I don't take 'no' for an answer. I suggest you give it serious consideration. My -- associates -- might not take your refusal well. I'd hate to see anything happen to you or someone you know because of it."

She pulled away angrily. "How dare you threaten me? Do you tink I would whimper and cry and immediately agree to your -- offer? I tell you now, if anyting bad happens to anyone I know, I will hold you and your 'associates' personally responsible, and I will retaliate. Make no mistake, I

have de resources to do so."

"Are you threatening me now?" he said in surprise and anger.

"No. It's a promise. So I suggest you make it your business to see dat notting goes wrong for anyone in my circle of family, friends or co-workers."

She then said something else in Swahili, and the chauffeur immediately pulled over. They were just outside the Dupont Circle station, and she got out before Giles could stop her. She turned and said, "Don't forget what I told you. Dis has been an interesting meeting, but I don't ever want to see or hear from you again. Good bye." She shut the door firmly and walked away into the station.

Giles looked at the back of the chauffeur's head. "What the hell did you pull over for? You let her get away!"

The African man looked impassively into the rear view mirror at Giles. "That woman is the daughter of warriors," he said. "You don't mess with them."

From Hobbeth 8/4/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:31:58 GMT
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Friday April 28th 2068, 12.47pm, Tracy Island

"Knock knock," Dominic said, poking his head around the sickroom door as it slid open. "Anyone home?"

Dianne looked up from her work and gave him a small smile. Tyler, propped up on some pillows, looking tired and wan, glanced over at this unexpected visitor.

"Good afternoon, Dom," Dianne said, putting down her data pad. "To what do we owe this pleasure? You're not on duty until tonight."

"I just thought," he said, stepping over towards Tyler's bed, "that Tyler here might be interested in reading an old book of mine. I first read it when I was sick when I was around his age, maybe a bit older."

Dianne looked over at Tyler, who nodded gently.

Dominic sat down on the chair beside the biobed and handed an old, yet still in surprisingly good condition book to Tyler, who took it and read out the title.

"Under the Hawthorn Tree, by Marita Conlon-McKenna." He surveyed the cover art and read the blurb on the back.

"Me ma gave that book t' me when I was sick in hospital, and told me that she expected me to make a full recovery so I could tell her all about it." Dominic said. "It's about the Irish famine waaaaay back in the 1840s. We had t' learn about it in school. I guess you probably don't. I think you'll like it though, and if you do, I have the two sequels in my apartment. I've got a boatload of books you might like. I've heard that you're something of a bookworm."

"How'd you know?" Tyler asked, shooting a glance over at his mother, who looked unconvincingly innocent.

Dominic tipped him a wink.

"Anyway, just thought you might be interested. Don't have to read it, like. If you do, I won't ask you to give me a full account of the story, considering I know it off by heart, but I will ask you your opinion, if you don't mind."

"I'll try it," Tyler said around a yawn, "when I can stay awake to read it." He managed a smile, and Dominic grinned back.

"Righty-o. See you later, Tyler."

"See you later, and thanks," said the boy.

Dominic sauntered over to Dianne and leant down on the desk.

"How's he doing today?" He asked.

"Much the same," Dianne said. "At least we know what it is now, more or less."

"That is something."

She shot him a questioning look, and before she could say anything, he said, "I'm a book hoarder as well as a book worm. I've kept a lot of my old books. Sometimes they were the only friends I had, what with all the moving about."

"Well, I'm sure Tyler will give it a read, at some stage, anyway."

"Marvellous." Dom clapped his hands and stood up. "Right, I've a little terror to track down. Last I heard he was running riot in Kat's apartment -- she's very keen to have him around, which is useful, I can tell you. See you later, Doctor."

"See you, Dom."

Dominic saluted Tyler on his way out, and went in search of his own wayward child.

From ArtisticRainey 8/6/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:32:24 GMT
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Saturday 28th April 2068, Tracy Island

Callie and Nikki walked along the beach, contemplating Christopher's sudden departure from the Island and International Rescue.

"Why would he leave so quickly? I know he said that he wasn't cut out for life here but there has to be more to it than that, right?"

Callie shrugged at Nikki's question. "I don't know. I wish I did though." She shook her head. "He must have been thinking about his decision for some time. He could have told us in advance. Maybe we could've talked him out of it or at least given him a goodbye dinner."

"I know I haven't known him for long, but he just didn't seem like the type to give up on something like this. Maybe Mr Tracy knows more to Christopher's quick departure."

"Are you going to ask him?"

Nikki shook her head. "No. If there was something more to this, and he wanted us to know about it, then he would tell us. I'm not going to go and start questioning him. You never know; it may be nothing and Christopher really wasn't cut out for life here." Both were silent for a while, trying to think of something other than Christopher leaving. Feeling the heat from the sun bearing down, Nikki spoke up. "I need a drink. Want to come up and join me?"

"Sure."

From Nikki-browneyes1 8/8/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:32:35 GMT
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Saturday, April 28, 2068, 5:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"He shoots, he scores!" Virgil crowed as he leaped into the air and stuffed the basketball into the goal.

"Woo hoo! Nice one, Virge," Gordon praised as he gave his partner a high five. "Oops!" He leaned over, waving his arms to cover John as he dribbled the ball before him. The covering strategy didn't work, as John faked turning one way, then quickly pivoted in the other direction, and handed the ball off to Scott.

Scott's blue eyes met Virgil's brown ones as they moved back and forth, up the court a little, then

down, the Thunderbird Two pilot matching his brother's moves step for step. Suddenly, Scott faked a pass over Virgil's head. The younger man reacted, and Scott broke away, dribbling the ball down the court and stuffing it into his own basket.

"Had enough?" he asked Gordon and Virgil. They were all perspiring heavily as the current court where they played was the outdoor one.

"Nope. Bring it on," Gordon challenged with a cocky grin.

"Scott, you're going to have to go one on one," John said regretfully. "I promised I'd eat dinner with Tyler. Hopefully get him to keep something down."

"Oh, okay," Scott said, absently bouncing the basket ball as he walked toward his brother. "How's the Spud doing?"

John sighed. "It's hard to say. I haven't seen him or spoken to Mom since breakfast. He didn't have a good night, though."

"I hope Mom can get him to eat, and soon. He's already pretty skinny," Gordon commiserated.

"Yeah, well, I'm going to try and help her this evening," John said, grabbing a bottle of Gatorade from the cooler they'd brought down. "But first I want a shower. See you guys later."

"Later, John," Virgil echoed as John walked off. He looked at his remaining brothers. "I'm with him. Plus I need some practice of another kind and if I can get a few moments in before dinner..."

"G'wan with ya! Who needs ya!" Gordon teased, waving him away. "Ol' Scooter an' me, we're gonna play for the championship of the universe!"

Virgil snorted a laugh, grabbed his own bottle of Gatorade and a towel, and headed off in the same direction John had taken, calling to him to wait up.

"Okay... Minnow," Scott said, grinning. "One on one."

"Suits me fine... Scooter," Gordon returned.

They played for several minutes. Scott had the reach and height on Gordon, but the aquanaut was sneakier and often managed to steal the ball from his brother. Thus, they were pretty evenly matched.

"Hey, Gords!" Scott said as he dribbled the ball down the court slowly. "What did you think about Dad's briefing about Christopher's departure?"

"I dunno, Scott. I mean, yeah, Mom technically caused a security breach. But really, it was her call to make as CMO."

"Yeah. It was her call. And I agree with Dad that it was the right one. But can he convince the new recruits of that?"

"Hasn't he told them yet?" Gordon asked, incredulous.

"No, he hasn't." Scott stopped dribbling the ball. "And I don't think that's wise. Scuttlebutt travels faster than light, you know."

"Yeah, I do. Have you talked to him about telling the newbies?"

Scott shook his sweaty head. "No, he's been a wrapped up with Ty, and with that expansion opportunity in Lima. Not to mention the upcoming celebrations. He's been online ordering furniture for the place in New Hampshire."

"Hope that doesn't bring back some nasty memories." Gordon said with a sigh. "And I hope that when he does tell the newbies, they'll understand. Sure sounded like Christopher didn't."

From Tikatu 8/8/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:33:04 GMT
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Saturday, April 28, 2068, 6:30 p.m., Tracy Island, the sickroom

"Hey, Spud!" John called cheerfully as he walked into the sickroom bearing a tray. "How's it going?"

Tyler looked up from the book he was reading. "Okay, I guess." He held the book up to John. "Mr. Dom lent me this. It's pretty cool."

John put the tray down on the rolling bed table, then took the book and looked at it carefully. "Sounds interesting. Maybe I'll ask him if I can borrow it after you're through." He shot a glance over at Nikki. "How are you, Nikki, and how's the patient?"

"I'm fine, John. As far as Tyler's concerned, you'll have to ask the doctor... or the patient himself," Nikki replied.

John nodded in understanding, and ruffled Tyler's hair. "So? How are you? What have you been up to?"

Tyler sighed, but managed a small smile. "Mom let me go to her relaxation techniques class this afternoon. Ms. Collins was there and so were Alex, Cherie, and Gordon. We were all learning how to relax our bodies. Ms. Collins has done it before; she just came to... to encourage us, that's the word she used. Gordon was serious about it; said he didn't want to spend anymore time in New York because of his back. Then Mom gave me some ginger ale afterward and... I kept it down!"

"Good news then!" John said. He leaned over and gave Tyler a playful punch on the arm. "You ready for the next step, Spud?"

"What's the next step?" Tyler asked.

John reached out for the tray and whipped off the cover that sat on the plate. "Strawberry-kiwi jello!"

"Ooh, my favorite!" Tyler exclaimed.

"Take your time with it, now," Nikki cautioned.

"I will," the boy promised. John made his little brother scoot over so he could join him on the bed, then picked up his own bowl of jello, and the two chatted while they slowly ate.

From Tikatu 8/8/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:34:59 GMT
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Tracy Island, Sunday, April 29th - morning

Kat looked at the wok, a leaving present from Lil. She had never unpacked it, being unsure about cooking with it. However, wanting to make a meal for her friends, she took it out of its box. ~Mm, I think I could do with some help to cook. She left her apartment and headed for the villa and the kitchen. Opening the kitchen door she looked inside and saw Kyrano alone. Coughing to get his attention, she smiled. "Good morning Kyrano."

"Good morning, Miss Kat. How are you today?"

"I'm fine Kyrano, but I have come to ask you a favour. I need some help."

"How can I be of assistance?" Kyrano queried.

"When I left Lady Penelope's employment to come here, her cook, Lil, gave me a wok as a leaving present. To be perfectly honest, I have never used one before." She hesitated, and then continued. "I thought I would like to cook a meal for my friends, and wondered if perhaps you could give me a lesson on how to use it."

"I can do that," Kyrano said, smiling. "I am not very busy. There is no time like the present, so let us see what we can do." He fetched the family wok from the store cupboard. "Now, you are vegetarian, so I assume that you will cook vegetarian meals."

Kat shook her head. "I could add some meat or fish for my friends."

At that moment, Cherie appeared. "Hi, Kyrano. Hello, Ms. Kat. What brings you here?"

"Miss Kat is having some lessons on cooking with a wok."

"Hey cool! Can I watch?" Cherie asked. "You never know; maybe I could cook for Mom and Dad."

Kyrano nodded and Cherie sat on a chair, ready to watch and help if needed. The chef explained about seasoning a new wok and then began going through the ingredients. He listed items, some that Kat had never heard of and certainly did not possess in her larder.

"Oh, Kyrano!" Kat looked crestfallen. "I don't possess any of the ingredients needed. When you next do a grocery run, could you possibly get some of these ingredients for me?"

"Miss Kat, do not worry. I have more than enough. I am sure that I could let you have sufficient to cook for your friends."

"Really? That would be brilliant! Thank you so much." Kat sounded relieved.

Kyrano explained about horizontal slicing, diagonal slicing, roll cutting, dicing and chopping the various vegetables.

"Can I try to slice some veggies as well?" Cherie asked.

Kat and Cherie began slicing and dicing onions, potatoes and carrots. When everything was ready Kyrano explained about the actual cooking.

"Now," Kyrano stated. "The most important technique in stir-frying is pre-heating the wok. This prevents the food sticking and absorbing excess oil. Place the wok over a moderate heat, and wait for a few minutes until the wok is very hot, then add the oil and swirl it to quickly coat the bottom and sides."

Kat listened carefully, taking in what Kyrano was saying.

"For recipes that begin by adding the flavouring ingredients, such as garlic or ginger, the wok should be only moderately hot, or these delicate ingredients may burn. If, however, the first ingredient is a meat or hearty vegetable, then the oil should be very hot, just below smoking point. As other ingredients are added, stir-fry over a high heat by stirring and tossing them with a metal spatula or spoon."

Satisfied that Kat was confident in giving it a try, Kyrano let Kat and Cherie add ingredients to the wok, stirring and tossing the vegetables. He then found a bag and placed in it ingredients that he thought she would need, along with some slices of meat. Kat thanked him and left the kitchen. Just as she headed out, so Gordon was coming in. They collided.

"Oh sorry, Gordon."

"Hi, Kat. That's okay. What are you doing here?" he asked, looking at the bulging bag.

"Kat has been having a lesson on cooking with a wok," Cherie explained, as she followed Kat out.

"When's the invite for a meal?" Gordon joked.

"Mm, I am going to have a dummy run first," Kat replied.

Heading back to her apartment Kat tried to remember everything that Kyrano had told her. Back in her kitchen, she seasoned the wok as Kyrano had told her, and then set about slicing a few vegetables. Placing the wok on the heat, she waited until it seemed very hot, then added the oil and swirled it around, coating the bottom and sides. ~Now it has to get hot before I add the vegetables~ she thought to herself.

In her rush to get the vegetables ready, she knocked over a glass dish. Fetching a dustpan and brush to brush up the pieces of glass, she totally forgot the wok. Suddenly, there was smoke in the kitchen. Her smoke alarm went off. Panicking, Kat rushed for the French windows and threw them open. To Kat's dismay the sprinkler system went off, soaking her and the kitchen.

Back at Kat's apartment, Nikki had seen the smoke, and was banging on Kat's door. Dom and Brandon had heard the commotion and had gone to fetch fire extinguishers.

"Kat, Kat, are you okay?"

Kat opened the door, with streaming eyes and coughing. "Yes, I am okay. I was trying to cook with my wok , but I knocked a dish over and while I was clearing up, guess the oil got too hot. Everything seems to be okay now."

Just as she was explaining, Dom and Brandon appeared, fire extinguishers in their hands. A very wet, red faced and embarrassed Kat had to explain to them that she had been trying to cook, and had let the oil get too hot.

"Remind me not to take up any invitations to come to dinner," Dom quipped. At Kat's devastated look, he frowned. "I wasn't being serious," he said.

"Seems like everything's okay in here..." Brandon said. "Is there any damage?"

"No, just sooty walls and ceiling and flooding," Kat answered.

"If you need help cleaning I am available," Nikki offered.

"Me too," Dom and Brandon said in unison.

Kat thanked them, and sighed as she regarded the mess.

From Tawnyangel22 8/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:46:35 GMT
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April 29th, Late Afternoon

"So, how was your vacation?" Scott asked as they left for Tracy Island.

Brandon turned his head, looking at the pilot. "It was great, Scott! I got to see most of my friends, and the highlight was the paragliding. It was fantastic! My sister, Shauna, knew where to go for the best view. The water shimmered like diamonds and the feeling of freedom I had made me feel like a bird in flight."

"Sounds like you had fun."

"You bet I did. I hope I don't have to wait so long to go back."

"I hope you don't have to either," Scott replied. They spent part of the journey back talking about the vacation and what was happening, then Brandon closed his eyes for a little nap. Next thing he knew, they were landing.

After freshening up and taking to the Tracys for a few minutes, Brandon excused himself and joined the others by the pool for drinks, telling them about his vacation, especially the parasailing. "I tell you, the feeling I had while I was up there was nothing short of fantastic. It's the nearest thing to being a bird that you can experience."

"Sounds like you had a ball," Callie interjected.

"Yes, I did. And I hope to be able to share the fun with you guys sometime. I'll have to remember to tell Dom and Nikki about it before I go to bed. Hey, where's Chris?" Brandon suddenly asked, looking around. "I thought he'd be here."

"You don't know, do you?" Callie asked.

"Know what? Heck, I just got home a few hours ago."

"Well, it's like this," Callie said and proceeded to tell Brandon what had happened while he was gone.

Brandon sat in one of the deck chairs by the pool, his knees pulled to his chest, deep in thought. Chris needed to give himself more time. You can't learn everything in two months. He heard a small meow and looked down to find Asterix standing there. The cat looked up at him and meowed sadly. Brandon reached down, picking up the marmalade tabby. Amazingly, the feline curled up in his lap and began purring. Brandon began stroking the cat softly, listening to the sound. "Hey big guy, it looks like you got left behind." The cat continued purring contentedly.

"You aren't so bad after all, Asterix," Brandon said as he stroked the cat's soft fur. After a few minutes he stood up, taking the cat in his arms. "Come on. Let's see if Kyrano has anything for you to eat."

From MagicMaster8 8/10/2005

Tuesday, May 1, 8 PM; Silver Spring, Maryland

Lena was relaxing for a change, when the phone rang. She answered it, and found a tearful Naomi on the other end. "What's de matter, honey?"

"Oh, Nyanya, something terrible has happened. One of the assistants at our church got an anonymous email, supposedly from some woman, accusing me of making improper advances to her daughter. They are saying that I should leave the church until this has been cleared up."

"Who is 'dey'?"

"The minister and some of the lay elders came here about an hour ago. Mom got really angry and told them that if they wanted to believe a message from some anonymous person over a family that had been going to that church since before I was born, then maybe we shouldn't go to that church at all, ever again."

Lena smiled at her. "Dat sounds like your motter, child." She became serious again. "I have an idea as to why dis happened. I'm sorry it happened to you. I'll see what I can do to correct de situation."

"You really think you can help? That would be wonderful!"

"Where is your motter?"

"She was so angry that she went out for a run after they left."

"Okay. You tell her dat you talked to me and I'll call her later."

"Will do, Nyanya. Thanks for hearing me out. You didn't even ask me if it was true!"

"I know you better dan dat, Naomi. You aren't dat type of person. Now, go wash your face and dry your tears. Tings will work out for de best."

"I will. Talk to you later. Bye."

Lena sat thinking for a few minutes. Then she went into her office; there were two things she wanted to do. First she looked up the minister's phone number. Then she turned on her computer and started a search. While the computer was doing its thing, she dialed the number.

There was an answer on the third ring. It was the minister, himself. "Mrs. Matumbo, if you're going to verbally assault me for what happened earlier today, I assure you that your daughter has already done so, and I'm not really prepared for another."

"Reverend, that isn't de reason for my call. I tink I can shed some light on dis situation. I tink dat my granddaughter has become de victim of someone who is trying to get to me."

There was a pause. Then, "Go on."

Dere is a business out dere dat is not entirely etical. Dey have tried to hack into de computers of de company I work for, as well as de personal computers of de family dat owns de company. Recently dey tried to recruit me to leave my job and join dem. When I refused, dey made veiled treats, saying dat my family -- and otters - might suffer unless I reconsidered. I told dem I'd hold dem personally responsible for anyting bad happening to dem. It sounds to me like dey didn't take my statement seriously."

"Are you sure they sent this message?"

"An anonymous email? How many people in your congregation know how to do dat?"

There was another, longer pause. "You are probably right. I-we should have realized that this wasn't on the up-and-up. I've known your family for many years, and to even consider it to be valid shows a serious lapse of judgment on my part. My only defense is that the shock of seeing an email like that caused me to falter; this church has never had that happen before. I'm sorry we didn't think this through more. We could have saved your daughter's family and ourselves a lot of grief. I'm very sorry this happened. I will need to apologize to your daughter, and in person."

"Reverend, a bit of advice. Wait until tomorrow at least. Give her time to calm down; she might not even give you de chance to speak until den."

There was a slight chuckle. "Yes, I've seen her temper before. I'll take your advice; I should talk to the others first, anyway. Thank you for calling, Mrs. Matumbo."

"Tank you for answering, Reverend. Goodbye."

She then turned to her computer and noticed it hadn't found anything. After trying a few different search keywords, she got what she was looking for. "De website of de Hightower's 'business'. Good. Now for my retaliation, as I promised."

She took out a CD and put it into her computer. On it was a program she had used only once, a long, long time ago. She'd kept it in case she ever needed to use it again, and she felt that now was a good time. She looked over the program, made a modification here and there, then satisfied, accessed the website. She transmitted the program to the website, and once it was downloaded, closed out the window and removed the CD.

"Dere, dat should keep dem busy for a substantial amount of time."

From Hobbeth 8/13/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:47:00 GMT
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Thunderbird Two Hangar, April 30th.

For the second time that morning Elise landed in the pilot's seat in a fit of giggles. The first time had been more from experiencing the unexpected, and now it was because she found the whole episode hysterical. Virgil shook his head, laughing along with her.

"Ohmigod, this is soooo much better than a ride at Disney World, Virgil!

"Yeah, and I don't charge as much for the ride!" he answered humorously.

The training session that morning had begun with Elise learning how to 'ride the chute' from the lounge down to Thunderbird Two's cockpit. Being tipped upside down threw her initially, but once she'd landed feet first into the pilot's seat with Virgil already there waiting for her, she'd collapsed into giggles.

"Believe me, Elise, the novelty wears off eventually."

She looked at him and suddenly asked, "Have you ever gotten stuck? You know, like halfway down the chute?"

He thought for a moment and replied that he couldn't remember any time he'd gotten stuck, but did tell her that once or twice Brains had while testing it. They both laughed, picturing the engineer stuck on the chute.

After that, she settled into the command seat and went through the pre-flight check procedures and pod selection format. Elise had graduated from the simulator training and was now learning how to handle the actual craft. Virgil had been impressed at how quickly she'd familiarized herself with the controls and at how comfortable she was with them.

"Pod selection complete." Her fingers quickly programmed information into the telemetry computer which, through sophisticated technology, transferred piloting commands from the simplified control cabin interface to the aircraft's complicated flight systems. She pushed a button on the console and the huge green transporter slowly descended over the pod. The clicking sounds heard in the cockpit indicated the pods electromagnetic docking clamps had activated and the pod was in place.

"Pod secure," Elise announced as she powered up the engines. "Proceeding with taxi to take off ramp position."

"FAB," Virgil answered.

Thunderbird Two steadily made her way to the launch ramp. Elise put on the brakes and waited for the ramp to rise. She quickly glanced over at Virgil who smiled and winked. "You're doing great!"

She let the breath out she'd been holding. The ramp rose and remained in take off position for a few minutes.

"Good work, Elise. Now let's see how you are at backing up!" Virgil grinned.

Once the ramp was lowered, she reversed the engines and slowly backed up the runway and into the hangar. Powering down the engines and raising the telescopic legs, Elise raised the main fuselage clear of the pod and shut down Thunderbird Two. She looked at Virgil. "Well? Do I pass?"

"A little slow reversing, but that takes practice. Yes, you passed."

She beamed a smile back at him and added, "You're definitely easier to please than Scott!"

Virgil laughed and replied, "Now don't go telling everyone I'm easy! I'd hate for my reputation to be ruined."

"It'll be our secret," she playfully answered. "Talking of Scott, how much of this whole Christopher thing did he know about before CJ left?"

"I don't know, Elise. I know Christopher was angry about the punishment for the security breach, but as to why he left and the details of it... well, I guess Dad's the one that's going to have to tell the rest of the team. I don't think Scott knew any more than the rest of us on the day that CJ left."

"It was quite a shock, that's for sure," Elise said as her thoughts drifted back to that day...

She and Callie had been out on the patio when Christopher, Scott, and a large amount of luggage emerged from common room hallway.

"What's going on?" Elise had asked.

Christopher told them he was leaving for good and hugged them as he said his farewells. Scott said nothing but continued on walking Christopher and his luggage to the freight elevator.

Elise had tracked down Dom and Nikki and, together with Callie and Kat, they'd assembled at the hangar with various other Tracy family members and Kyrano. Elise remembered more fond farewells and watched as John and Christopher boarded Tracy One and took off.

The second they were airborne, she marched over to Scott. "What the hell's going on here?" she demanded. "Are you going to just stand there and let him go?"

Scott took a deep breath and looked her in the eye. "I don't have a choice, Elise. It's out of my control."

He'd started to walk away, but she put out her hand to stop him. "Wait just a sec. You're telling me that the back-up pilot for TB1 just quit? Just like that?" she snapped her fingers for emphasis.

"No, I'm saying that I don't have all the details and it was a command decision." Scott tried not to sound snippy, but he was not at all happy at being put on the spot when his father should be the one explaining what had happened.

"Fine. I guess we'd all better watch our backs then, in case one of us is the next one put on a plane off this island."

Scott knew by the look on her face that she hadn't believed him about what he knew. He needed to talk to his father, the sooner the better, and so left the hangar before anyone else could corner him.

Elise wasn't satisfied with Scott's answers and, although she'd tried, she hadn't been able to get 2 seconds alone with him since then to ask him again.

"Hellooo? You in there?"

Elise snapped back to the present at the sound of Virgil's voice. "What? Oh! Yeah, I'm ready to go." She stood and the two of them made their way back to the lounge.

From FrankieCTB2 8/13/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:47:11 GMT
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*****Thunderbird Five, Wednesday, May 2, 2068; 8 a.m.*****

Callie awakened from a sound sleep after spending her first night alone on Thunderbird Five. "That felt surprisingly good," she said to herself. She pulled herself out of bed and got dressed before grabbing herself some breakfast. She sat near the window, looking down on planet Earth. My first time alone up here, she thought seriously. I'll be used to this every couple of months, but it feels odd. She smiled. It was sure nice of the others to give me the party the other night.

*****Flashback to Monday, April 30, 7 p.m. on Tracy Island*****

Callie had finished packing her clothes and necessities, as the next day would be her flight to the space station to be the solo space monitor.

Her workmates decided to throw her a goodbye party that evening, and Callie was pleasantly surprised. "I don't know what to say," she said with tears in her eyes.

Virgil said, "You'll be space monitor by yourself this time. Just know this, if you need any help or don't understand something, don't be afraid to call for help. John and Alan are the two best to assist you for space station issues, but any of us are available for whatever you need help with."

"I just hope I do everything all right. I don't want to let any of you down."

Jeff gave her some words of reassurance. "Callie, just have faith in yourself and your abilities. I trust you to use your best judgment to decide what calls are important."

"I guess I'm just a little nervous."

"I know you'll do just fine."

*****The next morning aboard Thunderbird Three*****

As John piloted Thunderbird Three with Callie sitting next to him, he noticed her becoming slightly unnerved. "Callie, just relax. You'll do fine on your own. You've proven to be a fast learner, and we trust you."

She breathed a nervous sigh. "I don't want to mess anything up," she said softly.

"Callie, just have confidence. If you're not sure about something, we're always available at Base. Now get ready for docking sequence."

"F-A-B."

After they had docked, they were joined by Alan in bringing fresh supplies into the station.

As Alan was about to leave, he said, "You know what to do. Flag any calls--"

"Flag any calls of high priority and possible emergency. Contact Base if any of those calls require International Rescue. I think I've got it." Callie laughed lightly.

"Okay, Callie. It's in your hands now. Take care of this baby until John comes back up next month."

"Right. I'll call Base to let them know you're on the way home."

When Thunderbird Three undocked from the station, Callie made the call. "Base from Thunderbird Five, changeover complete, and Thunderbird Three is on its way back to you."

Jeff smiled. "F-A-B, Ursa. Good luck."

*****End of Flashback*****

Callie continued looking out the window as she completed her breakfast. "It sure feels a little lonely up here, being so far away from friends and family. I know why I'm here, though, and I know what I have to do." She took her plate and placed it into the sink. "Well, time to start flagging calls." She went to the radio and started listening to various calls from all over the world, checking if any would need International Rescue's assistance.

*****By TracyFan4Ever (after a long stint of being offline) with helpful editing assistance from Tikatu.*****

From TracyFan4Ever 8/13/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Tracy Island - Wednesday, May 2nd - mid morning

Kat sat on the balcony of her apartment. A gentle breeze made the air seem cooler and ruffled her hair. The manual on her lap seemed very heavy, and before long she closed her eyes and began to think about everything that had happened in the last three months. Of the new friends that she had made: Callie, Dom and little Josh, Brandon, Christopher, Nikki and Elise.

Her thoughts went on to the Tracy family. Scott, who was teaching her the mechanics of Thunderbird One. Virgil and Gordon who were teaching her about Thunderbirds Two and Four. Yes, they had all been kind to her, even when she suffered bouts of homesickness, and self-doubts after her first rescue, and also her low blood sugar problem. She opened her eyes, stood up and leaned over the balcony rail, looking out to sea. ~What would my parents think if they really knew what their only daughter was doing. She sighed; she wished that she could tell them. They would be so proud, but she knew that she must never mention anything to them.

She wandered back into her apartment, and looked at her computer. Maybe she could send a short message. She sat down in front of the screen. She sighed to herself again. She felt restless, but she didn't know why. It seemed so quiet. Maybe she could invite the others to have a meal with her... Though after Sunday's disaster, she doubted anyone would trust her cooking skill. She liked to cook, but had to admit that living on her own had made her lazy. She used to rely on her microwave quite a bit when she was working for Lady Penelope and living at the West Lodge.

Intent on seeking out her colleagues, Kat headed for the main house. Mr Tracy was seated at his desk. He acknowledged Kat's "Hello!" with a smile and, "Hi, Kat. Nice to see you."

Kat headed for the pool, intending to think about asking her friends for a meal and saw John was seated on a lounge by the pool. Kat looked at him and wondered, ~Dare I? Of course! Why not?

"Hi, John." She sat down on the edge of the pool, kicking the water with her feet.

"Hello, Kat. How're you doing?"

She glanced at him. "Fine, thanks. Actually, I was wondering, er, that is to say, do you think you could possibly have dinner with me one evening? Just a simple meal; my way of thanking you for talking me into staying and also for showing me the stars."

John looked surprised, but he said, "Thank you, Kat. I'm sure I can squeeze it in. When were you thinking of having it?"

"Would Thursday at about 7.30 pm be okay for you?"

John shook his head.

"Sorry Kat, I can't make that day. It's Cherie's birthday and my Mom's is on the 5th. We are having a family celebration.

Kat hesitated. ~Could I invite him earlier, tonight in fact? She took a deep breath. "Could you make it this evening about 7.30pm?"

John grinned. "Sounds good to me. You have a date."

Kat smiled. "Then I'd better go. I have to plan what to have. See you this evening."

After she had left him, Kat suddenly realised that she had made rather a rash offer. What on earth could she give him? All her products were vegetarian and she knew that he liked steak. Could she borrow some ingredients from her friends? Maybe she could ask Kyrano. ~No, she decided, ~This is going to be a meal made by me. She looked in her fridge and store cupboards and smiled to herself. She knew exactly what to offer him.

From Tawnyangel22 8/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:49:33 GMT
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Wednesday, May 2, 2068, 3:15 p.m., Tracy Island.

"Mom?" Alex called as he poked his head into the infirmary. "Hey, Ty."

"Hi, Alex. She's in the office," Tyler said. He was sitting up in bed, playing a vid game on the single televid in the sick room.

"Okay, thanks." The older boy made his way into the office. "Mom? When is Tyler getting out of here?"

"Hello, Alex," his mother said distractedly, as she updated the sickroom inventory. Then his question registered. "I'm sorry, honey. Ty should be released tomorrow. Just waiting to see how he does with solid food tonight, that's all."

"Oh, good," the boy said. "I've kinda missed him." He looked down and scuffed his sandal on the floor. "I've kinda missed you, too, with you being down here so much and all."

Dianne stopped what she was doing and turned to face her son. "C'mere," she said opening her arms wide. "I'm sorry I haven't been around much for you. Believe me, when you've taken sick, I've been down here just as much for you."

Alex stepped over to her and accepted her embrace. "Yeah, I know. And Dad's been trying to fill in. But he's got a merger or something coming along...."

"Yes, I know," Dianne said emphatically.

"Well, anyway, I came down here to tell you that my banjo catfish doesn't look too good," he explained. "I don't know what to do."

"Honey, you're going to have to ask Gordon about it, or maybe Brains. You know I don't know how to fix a banjo catfish."

"I know. But you usually tell me what to do to make the water better," Alex said.

"Have you done the usual chemical checks and balances?" she asked.

"Yeah, but he's still not looking good."

She gave her son a sympathetic gaze. "I'm afraid you may lose him, hon. And I'm not talking about losing sight of him in the tank either."

"I know," the boy admitted. "If I do, can we go to Wellington and get a replacement? Maybe one of those panda corys?"

"We'll see," Dianne answered. "But any trip to Wellington would have to be either with one of your brothers or after your father and I return from my birthday celebration."

"I don't see why you and Dad have to go off together without us," Alex pouted. "We'd like to see the new place, too."

"You have school," his mother reminded him. "Besides, your Dad and I need to get away for a bit, just the two of us. We'll bring you to New Hampshire sometime during the school break, okay?"

"I guess so," Alex said with a sigh. "I guess I'd better go find Gordon."

"After you have the fish doctor look at the banjo, why don't you come back down and play a game with Tyler. You've barely been down to see him since he's been sick," Dianne suggested.

"Okay. I will. See you later, Mom," the boy said as he turned and left the office.

It took a few minutes to sink in, but Dianne looked up from her inventory, realizing that she hadn't heard the sick room door open and close. She poked her head into the infirmary section and saw Alex and Tyler sitting side by side on the bed, playing the video game.

"I thought you were going to find Gordon," she said as she came over to watch.

"Yeah, but I figured; hey, my brother's more important than a fish," Alex explained, not looking over at her.

Dianne smiled and ruffled his hair, then went back to work.

From Tikatu 8/14/2005 2:58 PM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Wednesday May 2, 2068. 3:45 pm. Tracy Island.

"I do it!"

"Now, Josh, you know you can't."

"I do it!"

"Josh, listen to me -- "

"I do it!"

"Fine, fine, go ahead and try."

Joshua's little fingers fumbled around the inflated water wings as he struggled to put them on his arms. The task of fitting his hand through the tight space was, as Dominic knew, something he couldn't do quite yet, and the toddler's temper began to rise. Averting the oncoming crisis, Dominic quickly pushed his son's arms through, and proceeded to tickle the life out of the little blond. Joshua immediately buckled with laughter, his consternation vanishing with the strokes of his father's fingers. Thank God for short memories, anyway... Dominic thought. Joshua bounced back up and ran over to the internal lift, reaching up for the 'call' button. Dom picked up the bag containing their towels and other essentials and headed to the lift himself.

He went to press the button himself, but Joshua shook his head.

"I do it!"

"Now, can you reach it, Josh?" Dominic asked, but Joshua simply continued to stretch.

Dom lifted the child up, and Josh hit the button with relish. He jumped back down, and ran into the lift as soon as it opened. Dominic shook his head.

"I'm getting too old for this..."

It was another sweltering day on the island. There was barely a breeze. Scott and Virgil were casually moving their chess pieces around the board, too hot to pay much attention to their game. Gordon and Elise were lounging under the big umbrellas by the pool. Elise was deep in a magazine, taking mental notes on new styles and accessories, while Gordon was contemplating whether he should stay where he was, or go for a dip in the pool. He closed his eyes, the heat sapping his energy and effectively making his decision for him, when a familiar voice drifted by through the still air. He looked up, and grinned at what he saw. Scott glanced up as he heard footsteps coming down from the villa, and went back to his game. He did a double take, however, his face incredulous.

"What is that?" He asked, a teasing smirk on his face.

Virgil glanced up and grinned.

"That is a shirt worthy of Gordon, am I right?"

Indeed, Dominic and Joshua had arrived, the former wearing what was probably the loudest, most garish Hawaiian shirt either brother had ever seen. Dominic set his bag down and shrugged off the shirt, tipping them a wink.

"Every man needs a shirt louder than the sound of his voice," Dom said.

Scott barked out a laugh at the soft-spoken Irishman. Simply a striped shirt would have done in that case, he thought.

"What is that?"

It was Gordon this time, the smile wiped off his face, replaced by a look of sheer astonishment.

"Hmm?" Dominic asked, before realizing Gordon was staring at his back. "Oh, that. It's a tattoo, laddie," he said.

"It's huge!" Gordon said, his eyes seemingly on the verge of popping. "My God, that must have hurt."

"Aye, it did."

Dominic quickly followed Joshua into the pool before the wayward child decided to go for a walk in the deep end. He cornered the child on the shallower steps, and leant over to grab a nearby beach ball.

"Why did you get it?" Elise asked.

She had looked up at Gordon's exclamation. Most of the newbies had seen it before, due to a certain night-time emergency call, but the sight was still something to behold. Across Dom's shoulders and all the way down his back was one huge, intricate tattoo of a pair of silvery wings.

"Why does anyone do anything when they're a teenager?" Dom asked, throwing the ball back to a delighted Josh. "I admit it wasn't the smartest thing I ever did, but I thought it was cool at the time. Now... not so much."

Gordon shook his head.

"You're insane." He said.

"Would you like to know how many piercings I have as well?"

"No, thank you." Gordon said, shaking his head again. "In-sane. Totally."

Dominic laughed and caught the ball enthusiastically thrown by Joshua, which nearly flew over his head.

"Nice arm," he heard Scott comment.

From ArtisticRainey 8/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:55:13 GMT
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Tracy Island, Wednesday May 2nd, Kat's apartment

At 7:30 the doorbell chimed. Kat wiped her hands on her apron, and taking it off, answered the door.

"Come in, John." She smiled. "Go through to the balcony. I have laid the table out there."

The table was laid with a bright red and white check tablecloth. "A goodbye gift from my aunt," Kat explained as she saw John looking at it. "I have made a fruit punch, or would you prefer juice?"

"Punch would be great, thanks," he said, and Kat poured two glasses, handing one to John. She went into the kitchen and returned with a bowl of mixed lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and radishes, together with a smaller bowl of Waldorf salad and some pots of cottage cheese. "I'm sorry that it's vegetarian," she said apologetically.

"Kat, I am quite happy eating veggie, as they say," John smiled at her.

They ate for a while in silence, only broken when Kat asked John if he wanted any more. To finish off with, Kat brought out a fresh pineapple. After they had finished, Kat began to clear away. John took some things into the kitchen and helped her fill the dishwasher and put other things away. Then Kat filled their glasses up again and they both wandered back out to the balcony.

"John," Kat began, "Thanks for coming over this evening. I just wanted to say thank you for making me welcome on the island."

"Thank you and you're welcome, Kat. It was a very nice meal and a very nice thought."

John told her about his stay on Thunderbird Five, and how lonely it could be, and that it would be great being on Earth for two months at a time now that Callie could take her turn. They talked about their families. Kat mentioned her two brothers, both younger than her but how she would have loved to have had a sister. John told her how his three youngest siblings had certainly brightened up life on the island. Slowly the sun began to sink and one or two stars began twinkling in the darkening sky.

"Do you remember when you came to Lady Penelope's to bring me back to Tracy Island? Little did I know at that time just what was in store for me," she said

"Yes, I remember. And I remember how you chatted almost the whole journey."

"Oh, yes, and when I arrived, I was so sleepy! I yawned and Doctor Tracy sent me to have a rest," Kat replied. "I was so embarrassed." They both smiled at that. "Everyone here has been so kind and helpful, except...."

John couldn't see her face. "Except?"

She returned to her chair. "Sometimes I annoy Scott. I really don't mean to, it's just that I made such a mess when I first flew in the simulator, and I am beginning to have qualms about learning Thunderbird One. I am really worried about training with him. You see, when I get nervous I tend jump in with what little I know. Mum used to say I should get my brain in gear before I say anything."

John laughed at this.

"It's true," Kat continued. "It can be so embarrassing."

John said seriously, "Kat, I don't think you have anything to worry about with Scott. True, he is a perfectionist, but he will take things very slowly with you. Just try to listen carefully. Maybe taking a notebook will help. You can jot down things you learn, and things you need to ask for the next lesson."

Kat smiled. "Thanks for that, John. I will do as you suggest."

John looked at his watch. "Do you know what time it is? It's way past midnight. I'd better be going. Thank you again for a lovely meal, Kat."

"It was a pleasure, and I am glad you enjoyed it," Kat responded.

"I must do the same for you, although I shall have to ask Kyrano for some vegetarian food," John added

Once he had left, Kat suddenly realised that she was thinking more and more about him. How nice he was, how friendly and caring. She hugged her arms around herself, going back onto the balcony and staring out into the inky blackness. She went over in her mind their conversation. Yes, she was sure that he would make her a meal. Maybe, just maybe, who knew what the future would hold.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 8/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:55:30 GMT

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London; Wednesday, May 2; 10 AM (10 PM on Tracy Island)

Desdemona Hightower was in Jacques' office, updating him. He had agreed to let her send the email attacking Lena's granddaughter, although his brother had strenuously objected. "If that doesn't get Mrs. Matumbo to realize that we mean business, nothing will," she said with a great deal of satisfaction.

"Perhaps," he replied. "But Giles seems to think otherwise."

"Giles!" she retorted contemptuously. "He is--"

Just then Jacques' phone rang. He answered it, listened to the panicky voice at the other end, and replied, "What? When did this happen?" There was a pause, then he snapped, "Well get as many people as you need on it fix it, and make it fast!" He slammed down the phone. "Damn!"

"What's wrong?"

"Someone has flooded our website with useless information! It seems that every byte of space is full! Every time someone clears space, it fills up again! This is intolerable!"

"I don't believe it! Who could have done such a thing?"

"I can think of one person right off. It seems that our little brother was right and we should have taken her statement more seriously."

"Lena Matumbo? Do you really think that old lady is capable of such a thing?"

"It is because of her abilities that we've been trying to recruit her, sister dear.

"When I get my hands on her, I'll --"

"You'll do nothing, Dez! She is exactly what we need to get into the Tracy Industries computer system. And if you try to harm her or her family in any way -- as she told Giles -- we'll lose our best chance of succeeding! Now I suggest you get on your computer and see if you can help them find and stop whatever she downloaded into our website. We've been effectively shut down because of this!"

"It could take hours! I have other plans!"

"I suggest you call her and tell her you'll be late. This is more important. The sooner you get started, the sooner you can leave to be with your latest fling. Go!"

From: Hobbeth Sent: 8/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:55:58 GMT
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Tracy Island; Thursday, May 3, 9:30 AM

Brains had already breakfasted and was in the lab. He'd been there for a while, and his computer was analyzing his latest experiment, so he decided to pass the time by checking his email.

There were several messages from colleagues all over the world, and he went through them, replying to this one, saving that one, until he had one left. It was from Lena, and had been sent very recently. He opened it and read:

There have been a couple of incidents in the last few days, and although at first I thought it wasn't necessary to bother you with them, I've changed my mind. Please forward this to whomever you feel should know about what occurred.

Last Friday, I was accosted by a tall, slender, pale man, whom I later realized was a Hightower. He coerced me to get into his limousine, where he attempted to convince me to leave Tracy Industries and join his family's company. When I refused, he threatened me by saying that something bad could happen to a member of my family. I got angry and told him I would retaliate. Then I was able to persuade his chauffeur to pull over -- I won't tell you how. As luck would have it, he stopped just outside one of the Metro subway stations, and I got out, telling this Hightower I never wanted to see or hear from him again.

Apparently the man didn't believe me, because yesterday I found out that one of my granddaughters had been slandered by an anonymous email to the church she attends. I called the minister and advised him generally of the situation, which effectively closed that matter. Then I kept my promise.

You have probably heard of a program that sends useless information, trivia and gibberish to websites, flooding all of their empty space. I have a copy of that program, having used it many years ago to put an end to the harassment from a certain business. I looked it over and made a few modifications, then uploaded it into the Hightower's website. It will continue to send garbage to the site for 72 hours, unless they find the code buried deep within the program that will stop it. That is highly unlikely, even for the Hightower's best computer programmer.

I get the feeling, however, that this will not stop them. That is why I'm notifying you.

Please give my best to the Tracys and to Tin-Tin. I'll be in touch soon.

Lena

Brains reread the message, and thought, I'm sure glad she's on our side. If she teamed up with the Hightowers, no business would be safe. And if the Hood got hold of her, no one would be safe.

Hmm. I think I'd better let Mr. Tracy know about this. And Tin-Tin, too; she has a rapport with Lena. I'll forward the message to their mailboxes. He immediately did so, adding a foreword at

the beginning. By then his computer was chiming to signal that the analysis was complete. He shut down his mailbox and got back to work.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 8/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:56:15 GMT
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Thursday, May 3, 2068, 7:30 p.m., Tracy Island

Scott glanced over at the happy face of Cherie, who had just turned 14. She had his gift in her hand and was just opening the card that went with it.

She rolled her eyes, "To my favorite little sister, love, Scott'. You guys don't get tired of this, do you?" she exclaimed. "I am everyone's favorite sister, little or big, because..."

Gordon held up his arms as if conducting an orchestra and gave the downbeat as she started to say the expected, "I'm your only sister!" Then everyone at the table burst into laughter.

Cherie made a face, slightly peeved to be caught being as predictable as her brothers, then she tore open the package. "Oooh! A unicorn charm! And a tiny ladybug!" She glanced over at Scott and said a bright and heartfelt, "Thank you!"

"You're welcome!" Scott had given her a sterling silver charm bracelet for her first birthday as a Tracy, and each of his original brothers had purchased a charm for it that year with the agreement that after the first year, Scott alone would buy the charms for her birthday and Christmas. He usually purchased two at a time, and afterwards, would solder them on the bracelet for her himself. He had a plan that for Cherie's sweet sixteenth; he would upgrade the bracelet to a gold one, and all the brothers could contribute that year if they wanted, but then after that, he alone would buy the charms again.

He found it a comforting thing to know he had a plan for her gifts, because, though he loved Cherie dearly, he didn't always understand her, especially now that she had entered puberty and was maturing physically and emotionally. It was strange to him that this young girl, who sometimes chafed under his brotherly care, so often turned to him for advice and even comfort. But then, all of the brothers turned to him for advice, with the possible exception of Tyler, who usually called on John, his proclaimed favorite brother. Even Alex had come to respect Scott's wisdom and if he didn't get the kind of answer he needed from their father, who he idolized, he would come to Scott first, then go to Brains, with whom the budding scientist had a special rapport.

"Ooh! I've been wanting this manga book!" Cherie said as she opened the gift from Virgil.

The chestnut-haired brother grinned. "So you've mentioned... more than once."

Everyone laughed again. Virgil's gifts were always music or art related or both. Artistic talent was

something that Cherie shared with him, a legacy of the girl's natural father. And somehow he was more attuned to her tastes in music than the others were. The art classes that he taught his youngest siblings were fun, he told Scott, and all three kids had some talent, but Cherie was serious about her art, while the other two dabbled in it, their interest waxing and waning as other things diverted attention.

Scott glanced over at Dianne, sitting close to his father. Now that is a gift of a different kind, he thought, not thinking so much about what he had given his stepmother, (several different bath items in one of her favorite fruity scents) but what his stepmother had given him, and particularly his father. As far as he was concerned, Dianne was the best thing to happen to his dad in a long, long time. Scott had always had the impression that his father's whole view on life had been colored by his grief over his own mother, Lucille. There was always that edge of sadness in his eyes, even at the happiest times, and there had been periods of depression as well, especially at the beginning. But those periods were gone, and so was the sadness. Now there was an underlying joy in his father's eyes and in his step. It was as if Dianne had turned on the light. And Scott had the definite impression that she had given him back his father, the one he remembered from childhood. It was a gift he would always remember.

"So, who's going with me to the ranch?" Cherie asked.

"Alan and I are!" John exclaimed. "We missed out on Alex's birthday party and since we're both here, we're going!"

"You do realize that Cherie's friends will be drooling all over you?" Gordon commented. "Adolescent girls just love handsome older brothers."

"And combine that with horses, and we won't be able to blast them out of there with dynamite," Scott commented. He remembered the party last year and how the girls giggled about him and the semi-whispered conversations between them about how "hot" he was. Not that he didn't want to be admired for his looks, but these girls were more than a bit young for him.

"Horses?" Kat perked up. "You have horses? I love to ride." The new recruits had been invited to the birthday celebration and told very emphatically that they didn't have to come or to bring gifts unless moved to do so. Most of them were enjoying the meal and chatting around the table.

"We have a ranch in Wyoming, a good sized spread," Jeff explained. "We have people raising horses and cattle for us there. That's where we get our beef. It's a refuge of sorts for us."

Scott remembered the occasional summer visits to that ranch. All five of the elder Tracys had worked hard during the visits and proven themselves. They had all learned to ride horses, and now the caretaker's eldest daughter was gently teaching the younger ones how. Cherie loved the place and often wished they lived there year-round.

"So, Dad?" Alan asked. "Where's your gift to Mom?"

"In New Hampshire," Jeff said, putting his arm around his wife and drawing her close.

The resulting silence was profound. All of a sudden, Scott found his mind's eye filled with the cold

bleakness of a New Hampshire hillside, the tangled wreckage of his father's helijet spotlighted in Thunderbird One's belly lights and the figure of his stepmother running across the snow, disappearing inside.

"Are you sure that's such a good idea?" Virgil asked quietly.

"Yes," Dianne said with certainty. "It is. The final step in healing."

There was another silence and Elise spoke up softly, "Will you be requiring my services, Mr. Tracy?" Scott could tell from her voice that she dreaded his answer.

"Not this time, Elise," Jeff replied. "Dianne and I will be taking Cherie's guests home from the ranch, then flying on from Greenville by ourselves."

Elise nodded slowly. Scott's keen eye saw the white knuckles of the hand that had grasped the table relax. I'm sure she needs to go up there, he thought. But she's not ready yet.

Slowly the conversations began again, not as loud as before, and that's why Scott was able to catch the next bit of conversation.

"Can I go to the ranch?" Tyler asked, his voice hopeful. Scott looked on the boy fondly. His youngest brother had given them quite a bit of concern in the days after the tsunami; who would have thought that the stress of the situation would have such a profound impact on the child? To Scott's eye, he was much too thin now, but he ate his dinner with relish and seemed to be pleased to be back in the company of the whole family.

"Yes, Ty, you're coming," Dianne said, reaching out to ruffled the short, stiff hair. "If only so I can keep an eye on your food intake. But you'll be coming back to the island with everyone else. You have a lot of school to catch up on."

School. Scott groaned internally. Now that Christopher was gone, it seemed that he might have to train Elise on the intricacies of Thunderbird One, at least until they got a new pilot candidate. He had trained her before and knew exactly what to expect: trouble.

Well, no reason to cross that bridge before we get there, he reminded himself as he sat up. He realized that he hadn't finished his cake, and he reached out to take another forkful, savoring the flavor and relaxing in the company of his family and friends.

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/17/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:57:29 GMT
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"Cherie, sweetie, wait up!"

Cherie turned around at the call and stopped.

"Hey Dominic," she said brightly. Her birthday euphoria was still running strong.

The thin man caught up with her and held out something long and thin, wrapped in crepe paper, with a little tag -- simply made of cardboard with a rather crudely drawn shooting star on the front.

"Happy Birthday," Dom said with a grin.

Cherie was taken aback. She hadn't expected anything from any of their new friends.

"Thanks, Dom, but you really didn't--"

"I know, I know. But how could I not give a present to my best babysitter, eh?"

Cherie laughed, and Dom waved the package a little to get her to take it. She could barely make out the Irishman's scrawled, tiny handwriting on the tag. His grin turned sheepish as she glanced at the picture on the front.

"Best I could do," he said with a nervous laugh. "I was never much of an artist."

Cherie unfurled the dark blue crepe -- where had Dom gotten it from? -- and into her hand rolled two long, thin, smooth sticks with simple flowers at the top.

"They're hair chopsticks," Dom said quickly, and Cherie assumed it was in case she didn't get, for she already knew.

"They're wonderful!" She said. "Where did you get them?"

"I, uh, made them, but credit has to go to Kyrano for getting me the sticks, Brains for the sandpaper and Alex for getting me the modelling clay. I know the flowers look a little silly but as I said, I'm not much of an artist."

Cherie let him ramble on before giving him a hug. Dom seemed taken aback.

"They're really, really cool," she assured him, admiring the hardened, varnished flowers on the top. In truth the flowers were actually much better than the drawing. "Thank you so much!" Dominic grinned widely.

"I'm really glad you like them," he said. "Now," he clapped his hands briefly and gave her a wink, "I'm off to tell Josh that he's going to get to see some horsies. And," he added, "that he'll have to give his babysitter a break for the day."

Cherie laughed, and Dominic strode around a corner and out of sight, his own chuckling resounding in the hallway.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 8/18/2005

Thursday, May 3, 2068, 9:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"Come," Kyrano said simply. He had finished the cleanup of the kitchen and dining area and was now relaxing in his favorite chair with a tiny glass of cognac (a habit left from his days in Paris). Asterix lay across his lap, purring as the retainer stroked the soft fur.

The door to his suite opened and Tin-Tin walked in. She leaned over to give her father a kiss on the cheek, then flopped down in the chair next to him. "The birthday party went well," she said in a careless tone.

"It did indeed," he replied. He continued to stroke the cat, and Tin-Tin leaned over to scritch the feline between the ears. "I am thinking of giving this little one a new name," he went on. "I have yet to choose one, however. I think something in Malay or perhaps in Chinese... what do you think, Tin-Tin?"

"It doesn't matter to me," she said, sitting back in the chair with a sigh. He kept stroking the cat, waiting for his daughter to unburden her heart.

When no words were forthcoming, he asked, "Will you be going with the family to the ranch?"

She sighed heavily. "I don't know. Alan will be there." She drew her knees up and put her arms around them. "Father, why can't I find a nice man? I mean, first there's Alan, who leads me on for years then drops me, saying his life is 'too dangerous' to share with anyone." She let go of her knees long enough to make her first and second fingers into little crooks, emphasizing the "too dangerous". "Then there's Giles Hightower, who I thought was witty and charming and who turns out to be a complete cad and only wanted me so he could get into the Tracy computer system."

She paused and shook her head. "Then... there was Christopher. He liked me, and I liked him and other than that disastrous first dinner, things seemed to be okay. Going slowly, but okay. Then all of a sudden, he mouths off at Mr. Tracy and leaves... gets thrown out... whichever way you want to look at it... and before he leaves, he kisses me and tells me that he loves me! Why couldn't he have said something before that? Why did he have to be so stupid as to get himself in trouble in the first place?" She lay her cheek down on her knees. "I'm such a failure."

"Come here, my child." Tin-Tin looked up to see that her father had put the cat down and had moved to a settee, and was patting the cushion next to him. She sighed again, got up and joined him. He put an arm around her shoulders and drew her to him.

"You are not a failure. It is the men who fail to see what they are missing. There will be a man for you, my daughter. One who will love and cherish you for all the right reasons, and who will not be afraid to share his life with you. It may not be soon, and you may wait a long time, but love will come to you. I know it will."

"Yes, it will probably come when I'm too old to enjoy it," Tin-Tin groused.

Kyrano shook his head. "One is never too old to enjoy love, my sweet one. I know that for a fact."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Father. I sometimes forget about you and Lisa," she said contritely. "Will she be coming to visit again soon?"

"Yes, she will. She is to return with the children from the visit to the ranch. Mr. Tracy and Dr. Tracy will be picking her up with Cherie's guests in Greenville."

Tin-Tin laughed a bit. "If only I could have the kind of relationship that you two have."

"Our relationship is fun," Kyrano said solemnly. "But we have both seen much pain in our lives, and that is why we do not hesitate to love. I would spare you such pain if I could."

"Mmmm," Tin-Tin said drowsily. "Do you think I should go to the ranch?"

"I do, daughter. You have been working hard lately and could use the change of scene. Besides, Dr. Tracy will need extra female hands to keep those girls in check."

Tin-Tin chuckled. "All right, Father. I will go." She kissed him again on the cheek, and got up from the settee. "I'll tell Dr. Tracy right away."

"Good," Kyrano said, smiling at her. "Good night, my sweet one."

"Goodnight, Father," Tin-Tin returned the smile as she left the sitting room.

Asterix leaped back up into the old man's lap and snuggled down. The retainer began to stroke him again. "Now as for you, little one, what shall I call you?"

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:58:40 GMT
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Tracy Island, Thursday May 3, 9:30pm.

"Do you think our daughter enjoyed her birthday celebration this evening?" Jeff asked his wife as he slipped an arm around her waist, gently pulling her to his side.

Turning her face upwards to meet his gaze, Dianne answered, "Absolutely! She adores her older brothers and her new friends on the team. But most of all she adores you." Jeff smiled softly and kissed Dianne tenderly.

"And how did you enjoy yours?" he asked, reluctantly pulling his lips from hers.

"Ah'll enjoy it more when you and I are alone in New Hampshire." She replied, her eyes twinkling. Jeff smiled knowingly. "I suppose we had better start packing for the trip in the morning or we'll

never make it to the ranch!" Dianne reluctantly eased herself away from Jeff and started to walk away. She'd only gone a few steps, then turned back with a questioning look at her husband. "Are you not coming?"

Jeff walked to her and sighed. Taking her upper arms in his hands and gently rubbing them he spoke. "Honey, I need to debrief the team about Christopher leaving. I've put it off too long as it is and, now that the team is all here, I think I need to do this before we leave tomorrow."

Dianne sighed, fully understanding his job as Commander of the team, yet begrudging what he had to do because she wanted her husband to herself for a couple of hours tonight. "Ah understand, Just try not t'be too long," she replied with a twinkle in her eye as she caressed his face with her palm. He turned his face to kiss it and promised her he wouldn't be long.

As Scott got up to get himself another helping of cake, he noticed Tin-Tin walking out of the lounge and then caught the exchange between his father and Dianne. He smiled, walking towards them.

"Goodnight, Scott." Dianne smiled as she also left the room.
"Guess the party's over then?"

"Yep," replied his father noticing how large the slice of cake was Scott was helping himself to.
"Son, where do you put it all?" Scott looked up innocently as he shoveled a bite into his mouth.

Jeff rolled his eyes and then became serious. "Scott, I want to have a short briefing with everyone in here in about 5 minutes."

"Christopher, right?" the son asked, reading his father's thoughts. Jeff nodded. Scott didn't need any more words.
Instead, he finished the cake and started rounding everyone up.

The team members sat around the lounge in various places waiting for their commander to begin. Jeff stood behind his desk, drew in a breath as he looked around, and began. "First, please forgive my short notice for this briefing, but in light of my travel plans over the next few days I wanted you all to be clear about the reasons for Mr. Jordan's departure from International Rescue." The room was silent; all eyes and ears were on the Commander.

"I'm fully aware of how things may look at the moment, but let me make this one point clear before I continue. International Rescue has zero tolerance for security breaches! One slip could mean the end of this organization and the end of saving people's lives." Jeff looked around as he spoke. Not even his own sons dared say a word. They knew better. "Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, Sir!" came unified reply.

Jeff paused before continuing, choosing his words carefully. "Recently, two team members, under two completely different sets of circumstances, risked the security of IR. Both were addressed and handled as I saw fit. Unfortunately, Mr. Jordan did not agree with some of our policies and my handling of each situation. As a result, he and I both thought it best if his continuation with IR be terminated."

"So it was mutual?" Scott was the first to speak up.

"Yes, Scott, it was. Mr. Jordan had apparently been re-thinking his position with us for a while and didn't think he could continue to be an asset to the team." Jeff noted how some of the new members glanced at each other.

"So where does that leave us for a second pilot on TB One?" This question came from Brandon.

"At this point we will need to cross-train some of you while we look for another pilot candidate."

At those words, Elise, who happened to be sitting next to Virgil and within earshot of Scott, groaned softly. Scott had been right with his earlier prediction to himself that trouble with blonde hair was coming his way.

Virgil spoke up next. "So who do we start training on One first?"

"Virgil, we have 3 active pilots right now, you and Scott and Elise..."

~Oh no, here it comes~ Elise groaned inwardly this time.

"What about Alan?" Nikki asked.

"Alan is capable of handling One, but only as a last resort. His main duties and responsibilities are with Three and manning the space station in rotation with John and Callie. Tin-Tin and Brains are certainly qualified, but I need them here or in Thunderbird Two."

Dom was the next to speak up "Sir, I'm a qualified pilot, not on large aircraft mind you but I'm willing to be of assistance."

"Thank you Dom, I appreciate that and will keep it in consideration, but your first priority is on Thunderbird 7 as part of our essential medical team; but in the event that push comes to shove, I may need you." Dom nodded his understanding.

"At this time I want Elise to start training on One as well as continuing with Virgil on Thunderbird Two. " Jeff looked in the direction of his 3 pilots.

The chestnut haired one was looking at the other two. Elise muttered, "Oh joy," rather dejectedly. Virgil fought to hide a smile. Scott wasn't exactly jumping with excitement either.

"Think you can handle that, Elise?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, sir," was her short, confident reply.

"Scott? Any problems that you can see with that?" Jeff dared his eldest to speak now or forever hold his peace.

"No, Sir!" came the practiced reply of a military man.

The commander smiled knowingly. "Are there any other questions?"

Various headshakes and mumbles of 'no' assured Jeff that the briefing was at an end. "Obviously, we will eventually be training some of you to be back up on One, as Elise can't be in two places at once, but for now I appreciate your attention and questions and concerns. Scott will be in charge while I'm gone. Thank you for your attention, and I'm glad everyone enjoyed the evening. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I have some packing to do. " With that Jeff headed off in the direction his wife had gone earlier, intending to keep his promise to her.

As the team dispersed, Elise turned and glared at Virgil. "What are you smirking at?" she all but demanded.

He looked almost too happy as he replied, "I was just thinking that now Scott gets to teach you how he flies his Thunderbird 'straight to hell'!"

Elise winced as Virgil's statement reminded her of where she'd told Scott he could fly to when she'd found out she wasn't going back to New York. "Funny, very funny!"

Scott watched the exchange with amusement. "If you two children are done squabbling, I guess we'd better figure out a schedule for training. Don't want to tire out the little puppy on her first day!" Scott grinned, turning on the famous Tracy smile.

Elise turned her icy glare from Virgil to Scott. Then shaking her head to herself, she announced she was going to bed and left.

Both brothers watched her go and, the second she was out of earshot, Virgil threw down the gauntlet. "Fifty bucks says you can't get through the first day without wanting to kill her!"

Scott, never one to back down from anything his brothers threw at him, replied, "Make it a hundred Bro, and you're on!"

Jeff had retired to the suite he and Dianne shared to find she'd already packed all but a few things. Slipping his arms around her from behind, he hugged her closely.

"Ah take it that ahll went well?"

"Yes, actually it did."

Later, as Dianne lay sleeping in his arms, he was satisfied that he'd done the right thing by having the briefing now instead of waiting. Kissing her cheek gently, he drifted off to sleep.

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 8/20/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:58:56 GMT
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Wednesday, May 3, sometime in the late afternoon, over the US, en route to Greenville, SC (having crossed the IDL)

"I hate the International Date Line," Cherie groused as she sat in her seat in Tracy One.

"I can't imagine why," Dianne replied with a roll of her eyes.

Thinking this was a legitimate question, Cherie hastened to explain. "We leave early on the fourth, fly all the way to Greenville, get to Grandma's in the early evening on the third and I have to wait a whole day for my friends to be out of school so we can go to Wyoming. However, my brothers get to go straight there together and get there earlier and have a whole extra day at the ranch!"

"Don't you want to actually be there when we pick up your friends?" her mother asked.

Cherie made a grumpy face. "Well, yeah... but I'd like to spend some extra time at the ranch, too, instead of going back with Grandma and the boys while you and Dad bring my friends home." She sighed heavily, the weight of a teenaged girl on her shoulders. "Couldn't we stay an extra day? Please?"

"We've talked this over already," Dianne reminded her daughter. "You have school and exams are coming up fast. You can't afford to miss much more than you're going to. And Tyler has a lot to catch up on since he was sick."

"I think he got better just in time to go the party," Cherie groused, folding her arms across her chest emphatically.

"You're pushing it, girl. You know very well that's not true," Dianne warned, her voice getting tight with annoyance. "The way you're talking, it's as if you didn't worry about him at all."

"Hmph." Cherie said, turning her swivel chair around.

Dianne shook her head with an exasperated sigh and got up, heading for the cockpit. "Mind if we change places for a bit, Tin-Tin?" she asked the Malaysian girl. "I'm tired of being the mother of a teenager. I'd much rather be a co-pilot at this point."

Tin-Tin chuckled. "Of course, Dianne. Be my guest. I'll go back and see if Cherie would like some 'girl talk'."

The two women switched places, but not before Dianne bestowed a kiss on the pilot's head. "How're you doing, dear?"

Jeff rolled his shoulders one at a time. "I'm okay. A bit stiff, I guess. I'll be glad to get to Greenville."

"How much longer?" his wife queried as she put on her headset.

"An hour, I figure. We're halfway across the US by now."

"What's the weather like?"

"Clear all the way to the eastern seaboard, but there's a low pressure system over the upper tier. The boys'll be in for some rain."

Dianne chuckled. "Well, how about that? Maybe Cherie will feel better if she knows her brothers won't be out horseback riding without her."

Jeff snorted a laugh and got back to his piloting.

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/20/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:59:17 GMT
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Friday, May 4, 2068, 6:30 p.m. local time, north of Cody, Wyoming

"Come and get it!" shouted Naomi Killdeer, one of the caretakers of the Tracy's Wyoming ranch. She rang the large triangle with enthusiasm and people started to arrive back at the main house.

"Dinner!" Alex shouted as he rubbed the mud off his cowboy boots. He did it as quickly, yet as carefully as he could. He knew that Naomi didn't like dirt in the house, and neither did his mother or his grandmother for that matter.

Jeff, Dianne, Lisa, Cherie and Cherie's five friends had arrived around 4:30, just about the time they had left Greenville. The flight from south to northwest took roughly an hour at Mach 2, and then there was an hour's drive from the Yellowstone Regional Jetport to the ranch itself. Cherie had been anxious to go riding, but first settled in with her friends and spent an hour or more talking and catching up so that by the time they were through, it was too late to ride that day. It didn't stop the girls from going down to the barn to moon over 16-year-old David Killdeer, who was brushing the horses and helping Alex and Tyler take the tack off their mounts from their trail ride with Alan and John. But once the girls set their eyes on the blond Tracy brothers, that was it. David couldn't hold a candle to the older men, and both brothers' faces turned pink at hearing these adolescent girls giggling over them.

Dom was there with Joshua, who was fascinated by the horses. His father encouraged the toddler to say, "Horsey," a word he was sure his son would learn by the end of the trip. Jeff had gone off to talk with Quentin Killdeer, the foreman of the ranch, while Dianne and Lisa had offered to help Naomi and her 12-year-old daughter, Miranda, prepare dinner. Not one to turn down help, the Shoshone woman put her employer's wife and mother-in-law to work and soon the kitchen was filled with happy chatter.

The girls had been there the year before, and knew something of the layout of the ranch. They also knew the rules: no riding after dark and no riding without an adult. So they knew they'd have to wait for the next morning to fulfill their hearts' desire.

"So, Fruitcake," skinny, bespectacled Erika asked Cherry. "Who's the guy with the baby?"

"That's Dominic Kelly and his little boy, Joshua," Cherry explained. "My mom hired him on as a nurse for when we get sick."

"Are you going to introduce me to that cute brother of yours?" tall, gangly Ellen asked.

"Which one?" Cherry replied. "Alex? Tyler?" She got a playful shove from Ellen for her pains, and a bunch of groans from the other girls.

"No, the tall, blond one," Ellen clarified.

"Oh, John!" Cherry said as if it had just occurred to her. "Yeah, I suppose so. I'll introduce you all... at dinner."

"Where's Scott this year? I thought he'd be here," petite and garrulous Maggie remarked. It had been very embarrassing to Scott to be the center of Maggie's attention the year before, especially considering that the girl had worn braces. Now the braces were off, but Cherry supposed that Maggie's attentions would probably be as well-received this year as the previous.

"Scott, Virgil, and Gordon went on Alex's party in February, so they stayed home this time," Cherry said.

"Is Gordon the redhaired one?" Lorena asked. "He was cute." Lorena's Eastern European accent wasn't as strong as it had been, but it was still noticable.

"Yeah, he is," Cherry responded as she and her friends entered the dining room. "Come on. Enough about my brothers. Let's eat!"

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/25/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:59:31 GMT
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]*****Saturday, May 5, 2068, Thunderbird Five, 11:20 a.m.*****[/I]

Callie had checked calls for three straight hours without even knowing it. "I never expected to listen to this many calls in a short amount of time." When she heard her stomach growling, she looked at the clock. "What!? I've worked that long already? No wonder my tummy was telling me something."

She put down the clipboard and went to the refrigerator to build herself a cold-cut ham sandwich. "I've got to remember to take a break so I don't get that bear growl again." She sat back and ate her lunch next to the window. She made a mental note to check her e-mail as soon as she finished lunch. After she took the last bite of her sandwich, she went to the computer. "Ah, a message from the Boss."

Ursa,

I called a spur-of-the-moment briefing with the team last night regarding Mr. Jordan. Since it was so last minute, I wasn't able to include you. Here's the gist of it.

She read the details of what caused Christopher's sudden parting of ways with International Rescue. She was surprised. "That's strange. I was sure he was doing well, especially after the tsunami. I guess I don't know people as well as I thought."

I just wanted to let you know the whole story, and I apologize for not allowing you to be part of the briefing last night. It was too sudden for me to contact you. You do understand the security policy, so I won't "yell" through the e-mail.

Good luck on your first solo run as space monitor.

The Boss

"Thanks, Mr. Tracy. I'll do the best I can." She went back to the console to start checking on calls again. There were a few that caught her attention, so she flagged them carefully. "Hmm, there's a forest fire in Spain and a tornado outbreak in the Plains again." She flagged those particular calls. "I have to be careful because any call could be the one sending us out."

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 8/27/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 01:59:44 GMT
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Saturday, May 5, 2068, 10:30 a.m., the Tracy ranch, Wyoming

Tin-Tin was having fun. Lots of fun. Far more fun than she thought she'd have. Almost too much fun, she thought with a giggle.

She was on a trail ride with Cherie and her friends. Tin-Tin had come along as a chaperone, and the leader of the ride was none other than... Alan. As the horses had been prepared for the excursion, Tin-Tin had listened in on the giggling girls as they had fun ogling the fifth Tracy brother and making comments on his "natural endowments", as Erika had put it. After breakfast, she had been in the kitchen helping Naomi, Dianne, and Lisa with the clean up, and she had overheard mother and daughter giggling, too, laying bets on which of the adolescent females would end up with a crush on Alan, and which would swoon over John.

So far, Bonnie was in the lead for Alan. She had that sickeningly sweet tone that teenaged girls get when approaching someone they think is "minty" and she contrived to ride beside him as often as the trail would permit. The other girls giggled at her, "Oh, that's so fascinating, Alan," and more than once Erika had done a sotto voce rendition of it.

But the best part of all, Tin-Tin thought was the way that Alan was reacting to it all. He was used to the adulation of women from his racing career but the puppy dog-like adulation of teenaged girls was something that was beginning to make him very... uncomfortable. It's strange, Tin-Tin thought, Last year I would have been annoyed and possibly angry at these girls and the way they're making Alan squirm. But this year? It's just too funny!

Cherie dropped back to pace Tin-Tin, her face a study in annoyance. "Why are they going so ga-ga over Alan?" she groused. "I mean, I can see it over John, but Alan? Don't they know how they look?"

"You must admit, Cherry, you've become part of a family of very good-looking men. And I'm sure you'll look a boy that way sometime yourself. But right now, I'm more interested in how Alan looks," Tin-Tin admitted. "I'm enjoying how Bonnie is making him squirm."

"Hey!" Cherie said, comprehension dawning. "You're right! He is... squirming, isn't he? Maybe I should encourage Bonnie."

"Not too much, Cherry. Don't want to leave your friend with a broken heart," Tin-Tin said.

Cherry gave Tin-Tin a perceptive look and nodded. "Right. I'd better move up and join them."

Cherry gave her mount a little kick and trotted up farther in line. Tin-Tin watched her fondly. I do believe, she thought happily, that I am finally over Mr. Alan Tracy. And it feels so good to be that way.

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/28/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:00:21 GMT
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Saturday May 5 2068, Tracy Ranch, Wyoming

"Horsey!" Joshua bellowed.

Dom smiled; the kid was a quick learner. Unfortunately, he had also become enamoured with the beautiful, powerful animals, and was constantly trying to sneak away towards them.

At that moment, he was held securely in his father's arms, but straining towards the horses, reaching his hands out.

"Horsey! I want...I want..."

Joshua's face contorted as he tried to say what he wanted to say, but the words would not come to him.

"I want..."

He burst into angry tears, his fists pulled into tight little balls.

"Aw, it's okay son, it's alright," Dom said in his most placating voice.

Joshua buried his face into his father's shoulder, a clear sign of his rage at himself, not the world around him. Dom gently patted the back of his head and began to rock him a little. It pained him to see the child so frustrated, but at least it was a good sign. He was learning.

David Killdeer, the son of the ranch's keepers, emerged out of the stable at the racket. Dom nodded at him, and the young man came over, somewhat wary of the sobbing child.

"What's the matter?" He asked.

"He's just a wee bit frustrated. I think he wanted to ride the horses like all the big boys and girls, but he couldn't say it, isn't that right, Jak?"

Joshua snivelled a bit and kept his face firmly turned away.

"I guess he'll be a rider when he's older," David commented with a grin.

Dominic shrugged.

"We'll see. In any case, I think I'm going to have to add another animal to the stuffed menagerie. We'll get a Horsey to go with all the rest, won't we?"

Joshua sat up a little, his tear-streaked face blotchy.

"Will we get a horsey just for you? A nice baby one you can play with?"

Joshua nodded. Dominic grinned at David.

"I think I'd better get on with that, or there'll be murder," he said.

"See you around," David said, and retreated into the stable once more.

"Now," Dom said, beginning to walk, "who do you think would be the better rider, Ducky or Squeaky Bear, eh?"

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 8/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:00:40 GMT
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Tracy Island

Brandon sat on a rock looking out at the ocean, sketch pad in hand. Occasionally he would look down at what he was drawing, changing minor details until he was satisfied with the results.

I'll never match Virgil in the art department, he thought to himself as he gathered up his materials, but I think I do pretty good.

He'd gone back to the Cliff House and was heading to his apartment when Virgil called out to him.

"Hey, Brandon, where've you been? I've looked everywhere for you."

"Sorry, Virgil. I needed some alone time so I went down to the beach." He shifted his sketchpad to his other hand. "So, what do you need?"

"I need to talk to you about the cross-training. I know your specialty is Thunderbird Four but Dad and I feel that everyone should know how to operate one of the other ships in case something incapacitated the pilot."

Brandon nodded in agreement. Christopher's departure had left a gap in the team that needed to be filled. "I'm ready whenever you are," Brandon said enthusiastically.

"Good, I'll let you know when and what the training schedule is."

They arrived at the apartment and were about to part company when Virgil noticed the sketch pad in his friend's hand. "I didn't know you were an artist," he remarked.

Brandon blushed with embarrassment. "I dabble in drawing a little. I'm not even real good at it."

"Come on, friend, I bet it's good. Mind if I take a look at your work?"

Brandon shook his head and handed the sketch pad to the younger man.

Virgil looked at the sketches and was surprised at the detail that was apparent. "What do you mean they aren't very good? Brandon, they're great. I couldn't have done a better job myself." He looked at the ocean picture, noting the ripples in the water.

"Thanks. That means a lot to me," Brandon said, his face not quite so red.

"I'm not kidding around with you. The talent's there." Virgil thought a moment. "How about I give you some pointers to help you improve?"

"That would be great," Brandon replied, "Just let me go put this up."

As the aquanaut went inside, Virgil smiled, knowing he had found a friend with artistic talent.

Post by Magicmaster8 Sent: 8/30/2005

Saturday, May 5, 2068, 3:30 p.m., Tracy ranch, Wyoming

"Hey, John!" Ellen said, spurring her horse up to trot next to John's mount. "How much longer?"

John sighed internally. Tall, gangly Ellen had attached herself to John over the past few hours and he was beginning to believe he should have taken the other option he had been offered. His father had approached him earlier and asked him if he wanted to take the girls on horseback up the tougher, more scenic horseback trail or drive them to the mall in Cody for dinner. He'd chosen the ride, mostly because he hadn't had much chance to ride himself, just a quick excursion with his younger brothers earlier the day before. And he did like to ride. He wished they got out to the ranch more often. ~Maybe I'll ask to have my birthday here with some of my friends, he thought. ~It would be beautiful in October. And no bugs.

"Another twenty minutes, Ellen," John replied, giving her a smile. "But you know you're supposed to ride single file up this trail, so you'd better drop back into place now."

"Okay, John. Thanks!" she said, letting her mount drop behind his... right behind his. He could almost feel her eyes watching his every move. ~I can see now what Scott was talking about. Next year, Virgil gets to do this!

Lisa gazed fondly at the white-blond who was leading them up the scenic path. She understood perfectly what was going on with the girls and how John felt, too. ~My boys went through this, and so did Dianne once upon a time. It brings back so many memories, good ones, of my kids as they were growing up. She shifted her gaze to her granddaughter, whose dark blonde hair shone in the sunlight. ~And now I get to see my grandchildren, especially Cherry, mature into such wonderful people. She shifted in the saddle. ~Oooch. I am going to be stiff come morning. This horseback riding is all right, but only on special occasions! I hope this scenic view is worth it!

Twenty minutes later, they had come to a ridge that looked out over the valley where the Tracy ranch sat. The girls oohed and aahed over the view, and Lisa walked over to John. "Thanks for being our escort up here, John. The view is almost worth the aches I'm going to feel tomorrow."

"Almost, Grandma P?"

"Almost. I'll have to have your mother work her massage magic on me tonight when she and your father get back from the shopping trip." She stood closer to him and murmured. "Don't let those girls get to you. It's only once a year. And their crushes are fleeting things."

"Thank heavens," John sighed. "Still, next year, Virgil is doing this!"

Lisa laughed and put an arm around him to hug him. He reciprocated, kissing her lightly on the cheek. "It's nice to have another grandma again," he said with a smile.

"And I'm happy to have so many handsome, well-trained grandsons," she replied. "Now if you could only train your youngest brothers to behave... especially while Jeff and Dianne are gone this

week."

"We're working on it, Grandma P. We're working on it."

From: Tikatu Sent: 8/31/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:01:17 GMT
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Saturday, May 5; London, 10 PM

"Aarghhh!"

Desdemona sat up in the bed she occupied with her latest paramour. On her face was a mixture of anger and frustration. Her bed partner was awakened by her cry and sat up as well, immediately put her hands on the woman's shoulders, massaging them and her neck.

"Let it go, cherie. You are so tense. This is not good for you."

"I can't! I've tried. How dare that woman do this to me!" She quickly got out of bed and paced the room. "And I can't even be sure we have it cleared out! I swear, if when I get back to the office, that garbage has filled up our space again, I'll ignore my brother and go see that woman myself. I'll make her wish she'd never heard of the name Hightower!"

"This is not like you! Why are you so angry?"

"No one gets the best of me, do you hear? No one!"

There was a pause as the younger woman considered how to phrase what she felt she had to say. Finally, she asked, "Are you more angry because of what this woman did to your company's computer system, or because she may be your equal in programming, if not possible better?"

Desdemona turned toward the bed, eyes flashing. "How dare you suggest that this woman is even my equal? No one is equal to me! Don't you ever forget it!"

The other woman cowered back in the bed. "I didn't say she was; I said she might be, only to understand your anger and frustration better. Please, please try to calm down. There is nothing you can do about it now. You need to rest and refresh yourself. Come back to bed."

Desdemona looked at her with contempt. "Do you think I can calm down just like that? That woman sent that garbage to our computers, and every time we thought we had a space cleared out, it filled up again. Only late last night did we seem to have it stopped. But I won't know until I go back on Monday. "

"Then come back to bed and let's spend some of the time thinking of things you could do to this person to make her regret what she did."

Desdemona's look changed to one of surprise. "An excellent idea, my dear. " She moved quickly and flung herself back onto the bed. "But first, I am going to make you regret what you said about her."

Before the other woman could realize what was about to happen, Desdemona moved on top of her and proceeded to make good her promise.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 8/31/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:02:06 GMT
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Saturday, May 5, 2068, 7:30 p.m., Cody, Wyoming

"I think I need this walk," Jeff said as he and Dianne walked slowly down the open area of the mall they were visiting. "That barbeque place was too filling."

"Oh, you've got that right," Dianne replied with a small groan. "I couldn't eat another bite."

"It was nice of your mother to take the boys off to find the arcade. It will make keeping track of Cherie and the girls a whole lot easier."

"Yes, and they'll think they're getting special treatment, too." She glanced around at the stores and the people who were walking by, pretty much ignoring them. "Nice not to be under the fisheye lens for a change. New York is always so... attuned to our comings and goings."

"Ned Cook isn't helping the situation there, either. I hear he's been pestering the public relations department for more 'updates'," Jeff said with disgust. "I hope he leaves us alone during our trip to New Hampshire."

"So do I," Dianne agreed fervently. She linked arms with him. "I wonder how long it will take for Cherie to spend that gift card you gave her?"

"Not long, I suppose," Jeff said with a shrug. "I just hope she buys some things for her friends as well as for herself."

"I don't think that's going to be a problem," Dianne replied, giving him a nudge. "Take a look."

The six girls were coming towards them, giggling and laughing together. They were all wearing new, matching jeans and shirts that, although differently colored, were similar in style. Each of the shirts had something different emblazoned across the chest. Erika's shirt was lavender, and read, "Cute, But Dangerous". Bonnie's was red, and said, "Spicy Hot!" Ellen had on a pink one that said, "Pretty Sassy". Maggie's was green and had the words, "Lucky Lady". Lorena's was yellow and said, "Sunshine Girl". And Cherie's was a royal blue with the word, "Princess", picked out in silvery lettering.

Jeff and Dianne looked at each other and chuckled together, then Dianne sighed. "Sometimes I wish we lived like normal, average people," she murmured. "It's hard on the kids to be so far from their friends."

"I know, love," her husband said quietly as he moved his arm to around her waist and drew her close. "But even if we didn't have the 'family business', we'd still have... the other family business, and it would affect how we lived." He kissed her on the head, his nose buried in her short waves. "We could still send her back to Greenville for school, you know."

Dianne sighed, leaning her head on his shoulder. "Yes, I know. But then... I'd miss her."

"And so would I. I've just barely begun to really get to know my daughter. I don't want to let her go so soon."

By this time the girls had gotten near. "Well?" Cherie asked, turning around with her arms held out. "What do you think?"

"I think you girls look great," Jeff said with a grin. "Especially you... Princess."

Cherie leaned in and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Thanks, Dad! C'mon, girls. We've got more shopping to do!"

The couple watched as the girls sauntered off down the mall, still giggling and whispering, shopping bags hanging off their arms. The adults changed direction, strolling along in the wake of the gaggle of girls. They watched as the girls stopped to talk to Dom and Joshua. The nurse was grinning at them, and little Josh held up a stuffed horse for the girls to see.

"Y'know, love, I haven't bought you anything special and today is your birthday," Jeff said quietly.

Dianne gave him a long-suffering look. "You mean the time alone with you won't be special enough?"

"Well, yes, it will, but today is the actual day, and I think I should get you something to remember it by," Jeff said. "Let's take a look around in... here." He pulled her into a shop next to the music store the girls had disappeared into. "I bet the girls will end up in here later, but right now, it's just you and me."

"Oh, Jeff," Dianne said with a chuckle, shaking her head.

About twenty minutes later, the girls walked into the store, and spied Jeff and Dianne finishing up their purchase. "Dad! Mom!" Cherie called. "What are you doing in here?"

"Oh, I'm just buying your mother a special birthday gift," Jeff said with a grin.

"What is it?" "Can we see?" "Show it to us, please?" The girls crowded around Dianne. With a smile and a sigh, she opened the box and pulled out... a stuffed cat. But not just any stuffed cat. This was a custom-made white cat, wearing a formal dress of dark burgundy satin, and a stuffed

golden crown on its head.

"Oooh!" "Oh, she's so cute!" "I want one like that!"

"Is she a princess?" Lorena asked, stroking the cat's soft, plush fur.

"No," Jeff said. "She's a queen... just like my wife."

From: TikatuSent: 8/31/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:02:24 GMT
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]*****Tracy Island; Sunday May 6, 2068; around 9 a.m.*****[/I]

Emily Tracy sat in a chair on the balcony of the lounge and enjoyed her cup of tea while taking in the view of the ocean. With her son, daughter-in-law, and most of her grandchildren away in Wyoming, things were very quiet.

Kyrano, stroking a purring Asterix, took a seat next to Emily. "Hello, Mrs. Tracy."

"Hello, Kyrano."

"How are you feeling?"

She sighed. "With most of the family away, I miss all the usual noise, especially of the grandkids."

"I understand. I miss my Tin-Tin, but I also hope she is enjoying herself."

Finishing her cup of tea, Emily leaned back in her chair. "She deserves some happiness for herself after all the trouble she's had lately." She frowned and spoke with an upset voice. "That Giles Tallman... oh, I mean Giles Hightower... he leads our Tin-Tin down a garden path, and all he wanted to do was use her! Then, just when things were looking promising with that Christopher Jordan, he ups and quits IR!"

Kyrano nodded in agreement. "I have spoken with my daughter about her situation. She understands the right man will come in her life one day."

"Well, I'm grateful she's surrounded by family and friends to help her get through the tough times."

"As am I."

She looked at Asterix. "The poor little one. He's been left here all alone."

"No, he is not alone," said Kyrano as he shook his head. "Like Tin-Tin, he is also surrounded by love. In fact, I have decided upon a new name for him. I wish to name him Durian, after an Asian

fruit. His fur matches in color."

She started stroking the marmalade tabby cat. "What do you think about that, Durian?"

The cat just continued enjoying the feel of the two humans stroking him.

"Sounds like you've got yourself a winner, Kyrano," Emily said with a chuckle.

"Indeed I do, Mrs. Tracy."

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 9/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:02:40 GMT
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Dianne breathed deeply, enjoying the smell of pine and water and leather and... horse. She chuckled under her breath and glanced ahead to the lead rider, his salt and pepper hair almost fully hidden under a cowboy hat. It was the last ride for the girls as a group, and the only ride Dianne and Jeff would enjoy while they were here. After this, the guests would be flown home and get to Greenville in mid-afternoon, while the boys would take Cherie out for one last ride before returning to the island.

"Mom?" Cherie said, dropping back a bit where the path by the river was wide enough for two, "Can't we stay a little longer? Please?"

Dianne shook her head. "I'm sorry, hon, but no. Your friends have school tomorrow, and because of the IDL, you and your brothers will miss a day anyway. Tyler can't afford that, and neither can you with exams coming up and all. Plus, I'd really like to get the rest of my birthday present underway. But don't worry; we'll find time to get out here this summer, maybe even bring some of yours and your brothers' friends out again."

"Hrmph," Cherie said with a pout. "You'd think that because we're rich, we'd have time to do whatever we wanted whenever we wanted."

"Cherie," her mother said in a warning tone. "That's a bad attitude to have and I won't stand for it. Yes, we're rich. But with that wealth comes responsibilities. I was just talking to your Dad last night about how much I sometimes wish we lived just like ordinary people, and he pointed out that even if we didn't have the 'family business', we'd still have responsibilities to the other family business, the one that generates the wealth. So get it into your head that we can't come and go at our leisure." Dianne sat up straighter in the saddle, stretching her shoulders back a bit. "Besides, you'd still have school, and for you and your brothers, that comes first."

Cherie looked down at the pommel of her saddle. "I'm sorry, Mom. I guess you're right." She

sighed. "I just sometimes wish... this kind of thing could last forever."

"If it lasted forever, you'd get bored of it," Dianne said with a small smile. "Better to let it end so you can come back and really appreciate it when it does happen." She looked ahead at the trail. "Uh oh. The trail's narrowing again. You'd better pull ahead of me."

"Okay, Mom," Cherie said with another sigh. She gave her horse a light kick and Dianne pulled back on her reins so that Cherie could get ahead of her.

~Sometimes I have to agree with her, Dianne mused. ~Sometimes I wish our lives were one big party. But then, would I feel as fulfilled as I do working with IR? And would our kids be the selfless, giving people they are or are becoming? I'm sure Jeff's boys would have to work hard not to fulfill the "playboy" image they often cultivate, despite Jeff and Lucille's smart training. But my kids? Without IR and the example of giving they see every day, they might not become the selfless individuals that I want them to be. So in that respect, I'm glad that we're not the usual "rich and famous" family. She sighed, then turned her attention back to the scenic area they were passing through.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/4/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:02:56 GMT
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Sunday, May 6, 2068, 10:30 p.m., Greenville, SC

"Oh, this feels... wonderful," Jeff said with a satisfied sigh. Dianne smiled as her skilled hands worked the kinks out of his back and shoulder muscles. She knelt on the king-sized bed, straddling first his buttocks then his thighs as she worked her way downward.

"I wish I could do the same for you, love," he murmured, his head pillowed on his hands, his eyes closed. "But I'm not as skilled at this as you and your mother are."

"I know," Dianne replied soothingly. "But you give great foot rubs, and I'll expect one after I'm done with you."

"If we don't get involved in something else, first," Jeff said, a smile touching his lips.

"Even if we do get involved in that 'something else'," she replied. "I still expect a foot rub."

"Yes, ma'am," he replied, as another heavy, satisfied sigh trailed off into an audible moan. "I'm glad we decided to take a hotel room," he continued, his voice becoming deeper and huskier. "I still don't feel right about being in your mother's house while she's away."

"She wouldn't have minded," Dianne told him as she massaged his sides. "But this way, we don't have to do any clean up before we leave."

"No, we don't. And it means I get to pamper you as you ought to be for your birthday." He reached down awkwardly with his left hand, searching for hers, and when he found it, he grabbed her by the wrist, letting his thumb caress the inside and drawing her arm up toward his face so he could kiss where he was caressing. This brought Dianne's body down onto his back and he smiled as he felt her weight on him and signs of her excitement through her skimpy silk chemise. He kissed the palm of her hand as she lavished her own caresses, butterfly light, on the back of his neck.

Without a word between them, she slipped off his back, rolling onto hers as he kept hold of her wrist. Moving onto his side, he kissed her arm all the way up from wrist to shoulder, then finally let go as he reached her neck, coming up on hands and knees above her.

"How about this kind of massage?" he asked in her ear between kisses.

"I like it," she replied with a low moan. "But it doesn't get you out of the foot rub."

He stopped and pulled back to grin at her. "Yes, ma'am." Then he planted his lips on her eager ones as they got busy with that "something else".

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/7/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:03:14 GMT
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Tracy Island; Monday, May 7, 11:30 AM

Brains looked up as Tin-Tin walked into the lab for the first time since returning from Wyoming. He noticed that she seemed different. She looks so refreshed and... well, happy!

She smiled at him and went to her desk to check her computer files and mailbox, not hearing his quick intake of breath. She turned it on and was soon engrossed in the mail that had piled up while she was gone.

For the first time in a very long time, Brains looked at his screen without seeing what was on it. He found himself less interested in his work and more in his co-worker. Her smile had knocked him for a loop, although she didn't seem to notice. He sat there, staring at nothing in particular, thinking about it, until his computer beeped at him, indicating that he'd gotten an email message. It startled him and he jumped, causing his legs to hit the underside of the desktop. "Ow!"

She turned around. "Brains? Are you all right?"

"Er, uh, yes, uh, Tin-Tin. I was just concentrating, and was startled," he replied, rubbing his legs. Then he screwed up his courage and said, "You seem to be -- I don't know -- more relaxed and happy than I've seen you in a long time. I guess you must have had a good time at the ranch?"

She smiled again. "Oh yes. It was so enjoyable. And you know what? I wasn't annoyed or jealous or anything like that when some of the girls drooled over Alan. It felt -- no, it feels so good

to finally be over him. Now, maybe I can find someone with whom I can share a more permanent relationship."

Wow! She's really over Alan! I wonder if -- no, I can't. How would I approach her? And what would it do to our relationship here in the lab? Can I risk that? Should I even think of taking the chance to --

"Brains!"

"Huh? Oh, I'm sorry, Tin-Tin. What did you say?"

"Never mind. It'll keep. You know, you have been working too hard. You haven't had a real break in ages. I think we should both stop and take a long one."

"What, now?"

"Sure. No time like the present. How about the two of us taking a walk along the beach? We could take a picnic basket, since it's almost lunchtime. I think it would do you a world of good."

His jaw had dropped as she spoke. Now he closed it quickly and swallowed hard. "Y-you want to have a picnic on the beach -- with me?"

"Right now I can't think of anyone I'd rather have a picnic with. Oh, come on, Brains. I'm sure anything you're working on can wait until this afternoon. I tell you what. I'll change into a swimsuit and see what's in the kitchen that we can take with us. You go change into some swim trunks, and I'll meet you by the pool in half an hour. We'll leave from there. Okay?"

"S-sure, Tin-Tin. Half an hour it is. See you by the pool!"

From: Hobbeth Sent: 9/7/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:03:37 GMT
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Monday, May 7, 2068, 2:30 p.m., Black Mountain, New Hampshire

"Here it is," Jeff said quietly as he pulled the SUV to a stop.

Dianne's eyes opened wide with wonder. "Oh, Jeff! What a beautiful place!" She turned to him, her eyes shining, but her countenance fell when she saw the look on his face. She reached out a hand to cup his cheek and draw his eyes toward her. "Oh, love. It's hard, isn't it?"

He swallowed heavily, his blue eyes meeting her brown ones frankly, and nodded slightly. "It is. Much harder than I anticipated."

"We don't have to stay," she offered. "We can go back to New York, spend the rest of the week at

the penthouse."

He sat quietly for a moment, looking down, avoiding her gaze, then raised his eyes back to hers again and shook his head. "No. I bought this place for you and I'm not going to let... what happened... interfere with your enjoyment of it. Or mine. Let's go up and see the inside." He pressed his hand over hers for a moment, then turned his face to kiss her palm.

She smiled at him. "Let's go."

They walked up to the A-frame cottage together, arms around each other's waists. He held the door open for her then stepped inside after her.

"Oh my!" she said as she looked around. Turning to him, she asked, "Did you pick out the furnishings?"

"Yes. It didn't make sense to come up here to an empty house. Anything you don't like, we get rid of and replace," he said. "But I thought I knew your tastes well enough to do some of the decorating."

"Oh, I love it!"

The furniture in the great room, where they now stood, was made of a redwood tone, in the plain Mission style of the Southwest. Braided Native American rugs covered some of the knotty pine floors, and a log cabin quilt hung above the flagstone fireplace. The cushions were of dark brown leather, and had pillows done in Native American patterns on them. The dining area was also of the Mission style, with a wide table and padded wooden chairs done in Native American prints. The kitchen was sunny and bright, the walls covered with a fine lined plaid in light blue. Curtains were white and light blue, and the dishes were white with a rim of dark jewel colors.

Together they climbed the stairs to the master bedroom, where the plain Mission style held sway, but there was the old fashioned feel of quilts done in dark plaids. The bathroom was done in the dark jeweltones on bright white.

Dianne sighed in contentment. She turned to give Jeff a sweet, passionate kiss. "It's all lovely, dearest," she said, her voice breathless. "Jes' me an' you heah, foah a whole week."

He smiled at the drawl that had surfaced, and moved his hand slowly down the side of her neck as he returned the kiss, making it deeper and slower before saying, "I've longed for this... just the two of us."

A sudden banging on the door interrupted the building passion. They exchanged glances full of surprise and annoyance at whoever dared to bother them.

"Ah'll go downstayahs an' find out what they want," Dianne said levelly. Jeff shook his head. He had heard this tone of Dianne's before and seen the glint in her eye and knew it meant trouble.

"I'll come with you. For backup."

She studied him for a moment, knowing very well what he was saying without words: "I'm going to make sure you don't make a fool of yourself." There was a pregnant pause, and then she nodded curtly. "Let's go."

The knocking continued. Outside, Ned Cook stood, microphone in hand, Joe at his right on the deck, camera at the ready. Two or three other reporters, smelling a story, were standing on the ground, hoping to catch a snippet from the famous and reclusive Jefferson Tracy and his still-new wife.

Cook heard the lock on the door being unfastened and pointed to Joe, who started his camera rolling. "Hello, America. Ned Cook here, waiting to get an exclusive interview with reclusive multibillionaire, Jefferson Tracy and his lovely new wife, Dr. Dianne Tracy. They've come to a property somewhere in New Hampshire for an undisclosed reason. The property is not far from the site where Mr. Tracy nearly lost his life in a helijet crash three months ago. Now, the door is opening and I hope that the couple will come out and answer a few questions. Here's Dr. Tracy."

He thrust his microphone in Dianne's face as she stepped out onto the deck, closing the door emphatically behind her. "Dr. Tracy? Could I ask a few questions? Why are you and your husband here, so close to the place where, if not for the actions of International Rescue, he would have lost his life?"

Dianne stood firmly and impassively, her arms folded over her chest, and no one could miss the thunderous look on her face. But it was with a clear and seemingly calm voice that she said, "Mistah Cook. Ah don' know how you found out wheyah we were. But th' only words Ah'm gonna give you ahr th' same ones Ah gave you in New York. The same ones mah children gave you theah when you harassed them. An' th' same ones mah husband gave you when you tried to break into his hospital room." She took out one finger and pointed it at him, punctuating every word with a stab toward him as she stated succinctly, "Mahnd. Yoah. Own. Bizness."

She glared out at the other reporters and waved a hand in their direction. "Thet goes foah th' rest o' you. Mahnd yoah own business." She stopped, turned as if to go back inside, then swiveled back. "An' whayle yoah at it: GET OFF MAH PROPERTY befoah Ah call th' sheriff an' have y'all removed." Then she spun on her heel, marched inside, and slammed the door in his face.

While she was confronting the media and keeping their attention, Jeff was quietly closing the vertical blinds that covered the lower windows of the A-frame. So when the startled Cook signaled Joe to try his luck, the windows were impenetrable.

"Yes, I'd like the sheriff's office please," he called on his satellite phone when he had finished with covering the windows. "Hello, this is Jefferson Tracy calling.... no, it really is Jefferson Tracy. Yes, THAT Jefferson Tracy. Listen, I don't have time for small talk here. My wife and I are at our cabin on Black Mountain... yes, it's the A-frame on Mountain Creek Road. We have a small group of reporters outside our house and we'd like your people to remove them... now." Jeff's face began to grow red with anger, and Dianne put a hand on his arm and gave him a warning look. "Yes, NOW." There was a pause. "Then let me talk to the sheriff himself. Oh, he is, is he? Where? Listen, I don't care if he's lunching with the governor! I want some action here! Never mind. You'll be hearing from Concord in just a few minutes." Jeff slammed down the phone and muttered imprecations under his breath.

"Looks like this is going to be a trying vacation for both of us, love," Dianne said, rubbing his shoulders.

"Not if I have anything to say about it," he replied with a growl. He picked up the phone. "I want the number of the governor's office in Concord, please."

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/12/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:03:49 GMT
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Monday, May 7, 2068, 10:30 p.m., Black Mountain, New Hampshire.

The music wound down and Jeff and Dianne stopped dancing. They kissed, long and deeply, and Jeff's hand slid up Dianne's back to find the zipper of the dress she was wearing for the occasion.

They had made dinner together, including a small chocolate cake to celebrate Dianne's birthday. Jeff had set the table, including candles and a fine wine to accompany the meal. Everything was quiet, almost too quiet for a pair that was used to the comings and goings of various offspring, parents, employees and friends. They had talked softly, and Jeff had pulled out two small boxes, one long, one short, wrapped in golden paper. He had watched Dianne's face as she opened them.

Her eyes had grown wide at the emerald necklace she found in the longer box. The large green stone, cut in the traditional near square, was flanked by tiny emeralds that ran along the platinum chain for at least two inches on each side. "Oh, Jeff, it's beautiful!" she had gushed as she took it out. Then she had turned her attention to the smaller box. Inside were matching emerald earrings. She had taken off the earrings that she was wearing, and slipped the new ones in, then had taken out the necklace. "Would you help me?" she had asked.

"Of course," he had murmured. He had gotten up and stood behind her, had fastened the necklace around her throat, then had leaned down to kiss her neck and as she had turned to him, her lips.

"Thank you, love! They're beautiful!" she had said breathily before kissing him again.

"Happy birthday," he had replied.

Jeff had moved over to the sound system and had turned on some of her favorite dance music, soft and slow, then returned to pull her chair back and offer her his hand. "May I have this dance?"

She had smiled and put her hand in his.

Now the zipper was slowly moving downward, exposing her back and her shoulders as the gap behind her widened. Jeff began to kiss the exposed skin while Dianne pulled his shirt tail from his

pants. She was far too close to undo the buttons on his shirt and she was loath to let him stop his kisses. But at last she pulled back a bit and whispered, "Why don' we take this someplace moah comfortable?"

He looked at her with amusement. "You mean you don't want to make love before a roaring fire in the fireplace?"

She shook her head. "Not on a hahdwood floah. Ah lahke a little bit o' padding beneath mah back. An' leathah is so hahd t' clean..."

He chuckled and said, "All right. You win... this time. Someday I will get you to make love on the kitchen table or the living room couch."

"You kin keep tryin', Mistah Tracy," Dianne said coquettishly. "Foah now, owah bedroom awaits." She took his hand and led him to their bedroom. The lights and the fire could wait for later.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:04:43 GMT
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May 8, 2068; Tracy Island, around 2 p.m.

Gordon came into the kitchen where Emily was making one of her trademark apple pies for the evening's dessert. He stood watching as she finished her preparations and put it in the oven.

"Mmm," Gordon remarked, taking in the scent of the cinnamon and fresh apples. "It already smells great!"

"Thank you for the compliment," Emily replied, turning to her grandson, a wooden spoon in her hand. "But it won't get you a piece until AFTER dinner so don't even try." She waved the utensil in his direction for emphasis.

"All right, I get the message," Gordon said, putting his hands up in mock surrender. "I just came to ask if you've talked to Virgil. I haven't seen him since breakfast."

"No, I haven't talked to your brother. Have you tried Thunderbird Two?"

xxxx

Virgil sat in Thunderbird Two's pilot's seat, going over a list of things that needed to be checked before they were called out again. Going to the storage area behind the cockpit he started taking inventory of the tools. He paid special attention to the oxyhydrite tanks and the laser cutters, making sure the tanks were full and the cutters were functioning properly. From there, he went to the lockers containing the fire suits. He pulled them out, checking them carefully for tears. After close inspection, he discovered a small tear in one of the suits. "I'll have to get Grandma to repair

this," he remarked, setting the damaged suit aside.

He was on his way to check the food stores when Gordon's voice came over his wristcom. "Hey Virg, where are you?"

"I'm down in Thunderbird Two, checking supplies."

A few minutes later, Gordon joined his brother. "Hey, I was wondering where you'd gone off to. I wanted to see if you'd like to go diving. Maybe check out the reef on the other side of the island."

"Sure thing. Just let me finish here then we'll go."

"Great. I'll meet you at the boat pen."

It took Virgil an hour and a half to finish with the equipment check and he hurried to join Gordon at the boat pen. He found his brother waiting patiently by one of the cabin cruisers.

"It took you long enough, Virg. Any longer and I would have left without you."

"Sorry, Gordon," Virgil said, tossing his diving equipment into the boat. "I was just making sure everything was okay."

As the two brothers made their way to the other side of the island, they talked about the lack of rescue activity.

"It's strange to go more than a few days without a rescue call coming in," Gordon said to his brother while steering the boat.

"I know. But it'll come soon enough. And when it does, we need to be ready. In the meantime, let's enjoy the peace."

As the boat sped through the water, Gordon described in detail what they'd find. Virgil smiled, leaning back in his seat, listening to his brother's enthusiasm.

From: Magicmaster8 Sent: 9/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:05:01 GMT
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Tracy Island; Wednesday, May 9, 8:45 AM

"Brains, I want to talk to you."

Startled, the engineer looked up to see Alan standing in the doorway with a look on his face that told Brains why he was here. But considering all the heartache he put Tin-Tin through, I'm not going to let him off easy. "Of course; come in and sit down. What's wrong? Is there a problem

with Thunderbird Three?"

Alan moved further into the room, but didn't accept the invitation. Instead, he leaned against a table and folded his arms across his chest. "No, the vessel is in perfect condition. Look, I'll get right to the point. Is it true that you and Tin-Tin went for a walk on the beach and had a picnic the other day? Just the two of you?"

"I don't see that it's any of your business, Alan, but yes, we did."

"Why?"

"What? What's your problem, Alan?"

"I don't have a problem, but you will if you don't answer the question. Why did you go walking alone with Tin-Tin?"

Brains shook his head, but when Alan straightened up, and moved closer, he replied, "Because she asked me, and I wanted to, okay? And both of us enjoyed ourselves. It was a nice break from work, and we both returned relaxed and refreshed."

Alan relaxed his stance a little. "Well, okay, but don't make a habit of doing that kind of thing."

Brains found himself becoming irritated. "If Tin-Tin wants to go on a picnic with me, or do anything else with me, why shouldn't I agree to? If I like her and she likes me, that's between us."

"Don't you realize what's going on here? She's just trying to make me come back to her. The poor girl is --"

"Is completely over you, Alan Tracy." The two men looked up, startled, to see Tin-Tin standing in the entrance, her hands on her hips. "I asked Brains to go picnicking with me because I wanted to be with him. He's a nice man, and I like him a lot. We had fun, and I hope that we can do it again, soon."

"Now, Tin-Tin --" Alan moved toward her, but was stopped in his tracks by her next words.

"Don't you 'now Tin-Tin' me! You told me it was over between us. Do you expect me to curl up and die, pining away for you?"

Brains leaned against his desk, admiration for Tin-Tin and amusement at Alan's predicament warring with each other for priority. He folded his arms and waited.

"Of course not; I --"

"You really should get over yourself, Alan. I'm so not into you that I was amused by all the attention you got from Cherie's girlfriends. And you know what? It felt good. It feels good. You have no right to tell anyone how to treat me, or whether or not to go out with me. You gave that right up the night you told me it was over between us."

"Tin-Tin, it was for your own good that I broke it off between us; I told you that at the time. You don't understand that I --"

"Alan, you never gave me a chance to respond that night. Well now I'm going to. How dare you treat me like I am just a child who has no involvement in any rescues? You seem to forget that I was with you when we went to rescue that Sun Probe rocket, and nearly got fried ourselves. I've been there from the first, and I know how dangerous it can get. But you don't have to be a member of International Rescue to be in dangerous situations; the victims that you have helped can attest to that. No, Alan. It's for a different reason entirely that you broke up with me. And you would agree, if you were being honest. So don't tell me it was for my good!"

Alan turned to look at Brains. "Don't you have anything to say?"

Brains grinned. "Not really. I think she's saying it all." He looked past him to Tin-Tin, who was glaring at Alan. "I will say that I find your 'I-don't-want-her-but-you-can't-have-her' attitude somewhat childish." He was rewarded by a smile of approval from Tin-Tin.

"I suppose you two will want to move in together, then?"

"Alan!"

"Alan, that was totally uncalled for," Brains admonished. "I think it's time you left before you embarrass yourself any further."

Shaking his head, the youngest of the five original Tracy brothers turned and walked out.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 9/15/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:12:58 GMT
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Tracy Island Wednesday May 9th midday

John whistled as he entered the kitchen. Emily Tracy smiled at her grandson. "You sound in a happy mood."

"I am, Grandma. Kat made me dinner last night and I offered to return the favour. But... I'm not the world's best chef."

"Lands sakes, well why did you offer then? And I thought you were the intelligent one," Emily said with a wink.

John shrugged and grinned.

"It seemed like a nice thing to do..."

"Well, why don't you take her on a picnic?" Emily suggested. "I can help you to pack a picnic basket."

"Sounds great!"

John helped his Grandma fill the basket with both vegetarian food for Kat and some of his favourite picnic foods.

"Thanks, Grandma," John said, giving Emily a peck on the cheek.

"Oh, you," she said, swatting him lightly on the back as he retreated.

John headed out through the lounge and down past the pool towards the beach. He had arranged to meet Kat on the beach. She was sitting on a large towel on the sand, head in a book. She looked up as his shadow fell across her. Shading her eyes, she said, "Oh hi, John."

"Hi, Kat. What are you reading?" John inquired, as he sat down beside her.

Kat showed John. "Brains has given me a manual on Thunderbird One. We are starting maintenance work on Thunderbird One now, and he has lent me this manual to look at to help me. I thought that it would be easier to read away from the others."

John smiled. "Well, I promised I was going to make you a meal, the truth is I would probably poison you. So, I've decided to take you on a picnic. Where would you like to go?"

Kat put the manual to one side. "Why not stay right here?"

"Sure," John nodded, "Let's have a swim first." They headed for the surf. John swam around strongly for a time, and then looked at Kat. "Come on in deeper."

Kat launched herself into the waves. The water was so warm. She swam lazily around for a while. John playfully tried to drag her under the waves. Kat began to splash John, and they splashed around in the water for quite a time, before Kat called for a truce.

Laughing they returned back to where they had left their towels. They sat down and John opened the basket. He brought out some slices of various cheeses, hard-boiled eggs, fresh fruit, a large bowl of mixed salad, and Waldorf and pasta salads. As they ate, John asked Kat what she had thought of the book he had lent her.

"It was so very interesting. I really enjoyed reading it. Have you written any more? I still blush at how naïve I must have seemed that night we looked at the stars. But there are one or two questions I would like to ask."

"Ask away," John replied, pouring two glasses of orange juice and handing one to her.

She hesitated. "Well... please don't laugh at me, but I can never quite understand black holes."

"Kat, I would never laugh at you. It's really great to be able to discuss my hobby with someone

who is really interested. Now a black hole is where a star shrinks under an incredible gravitational pull, which crushes it into a sphere of increasing density and decreasing size. As the density builds up, the escape velocity at the surface of the star gets higher and higher until it eventually exceeds the speed of light. At this point, light rays, which up until then have been able to escape from the star, are bent back on themselves and are unable to leave. Eventually there will be a point at which the light can break free. This is the 'event horizon', enclosing a zone forever hidden from our view. This zone is known as a black hole."

Kat nodded thoughtfully. "Can you see a black hole?"

He shook his head, "No, but there are indications that a black hole is there."

She took a sip of her drink. John lay back on the sand, hands behind his head, watching her.

"I remember years ago when I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Scotland, the aurora borealis was very visible. It was quite breathtaking. Have you ever seen it?" Kat turned to look at him.

"Yes I have," John acknowledged. "They were very visible on an arctic rescue we had to undertake."

"All of this is absolutely fascinating. I could go on listening to you and discussing astronomy forever." Kat smiled enthusiastically.

"Well, then, we must spend another evening watching through the telescope," John replied. "Now, how about some of Grandma's apple pie?"

They continued eating, watching the waves and the sea birds wheeling above them and landing on the sand. Kat felt her eyes closing. John watched her with amusement. She opened her eyes as a shout hailed them.

"Hello you two! Is there any food left?"

Kat giggled.

"Sorry, Gords, no. We have just finished it all." John frowned at his brother and then rolled his eyes at Kat, who just laughed.

"We are going swimming. Want to join us, John?" Brandon asked.

"No, we've already had a dip," John said. "But enjoy!"

Kat lay back on her towel as the two aquanauts walked further down the beach. John watched her for a moment and then said, "There's a comet due to pass over the Southern Hemisphere in July. I know that Alex and probably Tyler will want to see it through the telescope, and I was wondering whether you would care to join me on the roof one night to watch it."

"That would be lovely, John. Yes, I would like to see that very much."

John started to repack the picnic basket. "Guess we had better be heading back. I did agree to play a game of foosball with Alex, and if I don't get there on time, he'll be mad and he'd be right to be."

The two headed back, the setting sun throwing long shadows and a cooling breeze gently wafted the trees. Kat thought what a wonderful place it was, and how lucky she was to be living and working here. She stole a sidelong look at John. He was so good looking. She silently prayed that the two of them would become very good friends. At the villa they parted company.

"Thanks for the picnic, John," Kat said

"Thank you for your company. I'm glad you enjoyed it."

John headed for the lounge and the games room, whilst Kat returned to her apartment.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 9/15/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:13:16 GMT
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Wednesday, May 9, 2068, 9:00 p.m., Tracy Island

"To bed with you," Lisa told Tyler when she found him in the game room, playing pinball.

"Can't I stay up just a little longer?" the boy wheedled. "Just to finish this game?"

"No," his grandmother replied curtly. "You have school tomorrow."

Tyler pouted, and let the ball drain. With a scowl at her, he stomped off, heading for the stairs that would take him to the upper level, and his bedroom.

Lisa sighed and shook her head as she followed. She was joined on the upper level by Emily, who was also shaking her head and clucking her tongue. Alex glared at them both as he joined his brother. The two boys glanced at each other, and broke into a run, almost running smack dab into Scott, who whirled and quickly caught each by an arm. "No running in the house," the eldest Tracy son said firmly, "except in cases of emergency."

Neither boy said anything; they didn't dare mouth off to their eldest adoptive brother, but the looks on their faces said so much more than words. They shook off his grip, and walked as quickly as they dared down the hall to their suite, breaking into a run near the door.

Scott shook and scratched his head, a look of puzzled annoyance on his face. He turned when the two grandmothers caught up with him. Throwing a thumb over his shoulder he asked, "What's with them?"

Lisa sighed again. "I wish I knew. I think it's a combination of jet lag, time zone change, and just

plain orneriness. Plus the fact that Jeff and Dianne aren't here."

"Yes," Emily said in agreement. "Tyler's trying to catch up with his schoolwork and he's probably not one hundred percent over his troubles. Alex might be feeling a bit on the left out side; after all, Dianne danced attendance on Ty while he was sick, then there was the focus on Cherie for her birthday... speaking of whom, I'd better go warn her that her own bedtime is around the corner. Any idea where she might be?"

"Well," Lisa said, looking at her watch, then thinking for a moment. "She won't be online with her US crew; it's too early in the morning there. But there might be a couple of internet friends in this time zone... try the schoolroom first."

"Good idea," Emily replied. "Can you two handle the twin terrors while I see to Miss Cherie?"

"Sure, Grandma," Scott said. "Grandma P. and I can handle them. And if we can't, I'll call in reinforcements."

Grandma Tracy chuckled at her eldest grandson's comment. "F-A-B. I'll go find our girl; you two make sure those two monkeys don't destroy their room... any more than they already have." She turned and walked off down the hall, disappearing into the schoolroom.

Scott shook his head. "Used to be when the twin terrors we were talking about were Gordon and Alan," he commented as he pressed the button to open the door to the boys' suite.

The door refused to slide across, and Lisa pulled out a key. "I would have loved to see you five as kids, tearing up the house and giving your Dad those silver hairs he has today."

"I'll find you some vids," Scott said wryly as the door swished open. He gestured to the portal. "After you, milady."

Lisa snorted a laugh and entered the little boys' sitting room. Scott took a deep breath, looked ceilingward as if praying for strength, and followed.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/15/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:13:31 GMT
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Wednesday, May 9th, 2068, 10:50p.m, Tracy Island

Alan walked briskly from the Tracy Villa and down to the beach with his hands in his pockets. He was still in a mood from when he spoke with Brains and Tin-Tin. ~Tin-Tin and Brains? She's just using him. That's it. She's using him to try and get to me. Alan kicked the sand under his feet a few times. ~How dare she chew me out like that? And in front of Brains, too. And Brains had the audacity to agree with her? He had no right saying what he said to me.

Alan's stomping slowed to a gentle walk as he approached the Cliff House. ~I can get any woman I want. I'll show Tin-Tin. Alan looked up at the Cliff House apartments as he heard laughter flowing from the balcony. He looked up, calling to the two who were there and waving to them.

Brandon looked down at Alan and invited him to join them.
It didn't take long for Alan to make his way up. When he arrived, Brandon and Nikki were still laughing.

"You two look like you're having fun," Alan said.

"And you look like you could do with a laugh," Brandon observed.
Nikki frowned. "What's up?"

"It doesn't matter. But you're right, Brandon. I could do with a laugh," Alan answered.

"I heard Cherie's friends were pretty interested in you and your brothers. Must have been interesting." Brandon tried to keep a straight face.

"Interesting? More like embarrassing. You'd think they would drool over guys their own age." Alan folded his arms and noticed Nikki biting her bottom lip. "Don't laugh."

Nikki giggled slightly, trying to contain an outburst. "I can't help it. Alan, it's natural for teenage girls to drool over older guys. Trust me, I've been there."

"Who was the guy?" Brandon asked.

"I can't remember," Nikki replied.

"Yeah, right! Both men answered in unison.

"It doesn't matter who he was. You guys wouldn't know him." Nikki stood up. "I'm going to get a drink. Do you two want anything?"

"Nah. I'm going to head to my apartment and leave you two to chat." Brandon stretched as he also stood up. "I'll see you in the morning." He bid them goodnight and left.

"Do you want anything to drink, Alan?" Nikki asked after Brandon left.

"No, it's ok."

"I'll be back in a minute."

"Actually, I'll come with you. I need to ask you a question."

"Sure, go ahead."

Alan walked beside Nikki. He wasn't sure if he should ask her his question in case she bit his head off. He thought about how to phrase it right first. "Just say you've been dating this guy for a

long time... wait let me start again... would you... no."

"Alan, what's the question?"

Alan took a deep breath. "I was talking to a friend earlier who has a problem. He's been dating this girl for a long time and he broke up with her some months back because his job is too dangerous for him to carry on his relationship. Anyway, he thinks his ex is now dating a colleague of his."

"Is there more?" Nikki opened the door to her apartment and made her way to her kitchen to get a glass of water. The part about the job being too dangerous to continue the relationship sounded familiar.

"Well, my friend thinks his ex is using this colleague to get to him and pretending that she's over her previous relationship."

"What makes your, er, friend think that she's pretending?"

"She's moved on too fast. People don't move on that quickly." Alan sounded like he was starting to get angry.

"Whoa, Alan, calm down." Nikki put her glass down. "Your friend needs to realise that his ex can move on whenever she likes and with whoever she likes. He can't expect her to pine away for him and hope he takes her back. He broke up with her and she's moved on with her life. She's a free agent, so he needs to get over it." She was about to pick up her glass again when something else came to mind. "It also sounds like your friend needs to get over himself too. There are lots of people out there who have dangerous jobs but still manage to have healthy relationships, even families. Your friend needs to think about that because it sounds like if he continues with the way he is going, he'll probably end up being miserable or even alone."

"Isn't that a bit harsh?"

Nikki shrugged. "It's the truth."

From: Nikki-browneyes1 Sent: 9/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:13:47 GMT
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Wednesday, May 9, 10:30 a.m., Black Mountain, New Hampshire

Delayed Fallout, pt. 1

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Dianne asked, a concerned expression on her face.

"Yes, I'm sure," Jeff answered firmly. "I need to understand everything, even if I don't remember it all."

Dianne sighed heavily. Tuesday had been a long, lazy day for them both. They had gone exploring in the SUV, checking out the scenery which was still just becoming fully green in many of the mountainous areas. The press was kept at bay by a cadre of discreet security guards as they traveled. They had spent some time looking for a nice restaurant, and soon discovered that many were still closed because the tourist season had yet to begin. The plan for Thursday was to drive up Mt. Washington and visit some of the natural wonders in Franconia Notch. But today, Jeff wanted to go out to the crash site. He wanted to see where it was and hear Dianne tell him what happened. He had read all the rescue logs, yes, but he wanted the immediacy of being there.

He had given Callie a call, and asked her to go through the logs and find out the exact spot where the helijet went down. She was puzzled by the request but obliged him. Then he put in a call to New York and asked Steve, the head of the Tracy Industries hangar, to give him a more precise description. Steve didn't like it, but Jeff pressed him, and finally the hangar chief caved. Now Jeff was dressed in jeans and a light shirt of the traditional checked flannel and was ready to go.

They drove off the property in silence, Dianne with her arms wrapped tightly around her. It had finally dawned on her that the reason she didn't want Jeff to go to the crash site was not because of the effect it would have on him, but what it would do to her. ~Jeff doesn't realize what he's asking me to do and I don't know how I can tell him, especially when this might be something I need just as much as he does.

Jeff followed the GPS indicator and they bumped along the old logging road that led to the clearing they were looking for. When the device showed that they were close to their goal, they got out, Dianne hesitating as Jeff held out his hand. He had taken a smaller GPS unit with him, one that he could hang from a belt loop, and he consulted it as they penetrated a small stand of woods, Jeff in the lead, Dianne following numbly.

The white birch woods gave way to a wide, green clearing, the soft new grass already grown calf deep and with spring wildflowers waving in the sunshine, an occasional insect buzzing about them as it tended to its business. Jeff looked around in confused wonder at the site. "It's a lovely place."

"It didn't look lahke this back 'n February," Dianne said in a shaky voice that broke on the last word.

He glanced over at her, concerned, and sudden comprehension dawned. "Oh, God! Dianne! I'm... I'm sorry. I had no idea." He pulled her to him and held her close, feeling her tremble in his arms. "C'mon. Let's go back. I don't need to see this."

"But... Ah think Ah do," she murmured into his chest. "Ah've been goin' along all this tahme, thinkin' Ah had dealt with it, an'... now Ah'm not so shoah Ah have." She pulled away and gazed up into his blue eyes, her own filled with tremulous, yet-to-be-shed tears. She swallowed hard, and said, "Let's do what we came heah t' do."

"Are you sure?" Jeff asked, his voice persistent, his gaze into her eyes intense in his concern. "We don't have to do this."

Dianne nodded wordlessly, and Jeff drew in a deep breath, letting it out slowly. "All right," he

finally agreed. "We'll continue. But will you trust me to know if it's too much for you? Will you trust me to pull you away if I see you're overwhelmed? Because, frankly, I don't know that you'll be aware of it."

Dianne nodded again, and he let her go. "Okay, dear heart. Tell me what happened."

She clutched his hand in an almost painful grip, and silently pulled him into the clearing.

tbc....

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:14:05 GMT
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Delayed Fallout, pt. 2

"There wasn't enough room for Thunderbird One to set down," she began, her voice distant, as if reciting something that had happened to someone else. "Scott got down t' within about three meters befoah Ah bailed."

They were walking slowly uphill, stirring up the grass as they went, Dianne looking back every so often to try and gauge where everything was. Finally she stopped, one meter to the left of a flattened, rotting tree stump. "Heah. Heah's where Ah landed. God, it was cold! An' it was dark. All Ah could see was th' whahte o' th' snow, an' th' whahte on black o' th' trees, th' dark angry gray o' th' skah, an' th' black mess that was th' helijet." Her mind's eye brought her back to that time, and she shivered as if she was cold. "Th' snow was still falling, coverin' everythin' on th' ground, making mah depth perception useless. Ah still jumped. Once Ah reached th' ground, Scott threw down mah medikit."

Jeff looked around at the clearing from this point of view and agreed silently that Scott could not have put down, not with his wings out. Nor could Virgil have dropped the pod. He glanced at Dianne, who was crouched down, as if she had just jumped from Thunderbird One's belly. He was about to put a stop to the whole proceedings when she stood, one arm extended but not pointing. Then she walked quickly back down the hill a bit, bearing to her left.

"Heah's whayah th' fuselage was."

Jeff could see the patch of bare ground, still dark with oil and other fluids that had leached into the soil. The bare spot wasn't big enough to indicate the helijet's entire form, but that didn't matter to Dianne. "Th' doah was off, an' th' entryway was crumpled, but Ah still could climb inside. Ah shone mah flashlaht around an' called foah Elise."

She walked down the hill a few paces, passing him, her mind still in the moment three months ago. "She was heah, next t' you. She had broken ribs, an' she was cold, but my first priority was... you."

Uttering the pronoun seemed to bring her back into the here and now, and she took a deep shaky breath. "Th' doah an' some o' th' seats had fallen on you. You don't know how happy Ah was t' feel yoah pulse! Ah ran mah medical scannah ovah you an' read off th' injuries. Theyah were so many. You were gray. You were hypothermic. You had a concussion, an' broken bones, an' internal injuries. Ah tried t' bury mahself in mah work, tried t' be th' professional. It worked some..." She stopped and took a deep breath. "Ah was able t' tear mahself away long enough t' prepayah Elise foah transport. Ah got her ready an' Gordon, Brandon an' Dom came down. They helped me put her on an A-grav an' Brandon an' Dom took her up t' Seven's sickbay. Gordon stayed behahnd t' set up th' winches."

She paused, a long silence that concerned Jeff. When she spoke again, her voice was hesitant and very low. "Ah almost lost it heah. Twice. Two tahmes Ah saw you as mah husband an' not mah patient. Th' first tahme was befoah we sent Elise up. Ah begged you not t' die on me. The second tahme was when Ah was gettin' ready foah th' boys t' lift th' debris off o' you. Ah was goin' ovah mah equipment an' suddenly, you were mah husband again. Scott got me through that one. Tole me not t' give in oah give up. Tole me Ah had t' be strong, foah you, foah everyone. He helped put me back on track. Then Brandon came back down... an' he an' Gordon started liftin' th' debris off o' you. An' Ah got too busy t' think 'bout anythin' but bein' a doctor."

She wrapped her arms tightly around herself again. "Ah stayed with you in th' surgical bay all th' way t' New York, an' had t' disguise mahself a bit t' help bring you down t' th' ER. Brains tole me Ah had t' get mah drawl undah control. It was hard, but Ah did. Then... Ah had t' leave. It was th' hahdest thin' in th' world t' leave you theah at Mount Sinai, t' leave you theah in th' hands o' strangeahs. About broke mah heart. But Ah did it, an' Ah chivvied Virgil t' let me off at th' penthouse so Ah could put in mah appearance as Missus Tracy. Th' bad weathah had turned cooperative bah then, workin' foah us an' not against us lahke it did heah. Scott, who was followin' in One, dropped Gordon off so's Ah wouldn't be bah mahself. Good thin', too. Ah needed his support. Ah needed everyone's support. 'Cause Ah was so damn scayahed Ah was gonna lose you, lose mah beloved husband... lahke Ah lost Rick. An' Ah knew... Ah knew Ah wasn't strong enough t' go through that again."

tbc....

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:14:24 GMT
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Delayed Fallout, pt. 3

Dianne stopped talking. She just looked at the ground, holding herself tightly. Jeff was at a loss; he didn't know what to say. Finally, he asked simply, "When did you sing to me?"

She swallowed and replied, "On th' way t' Mount Sinai. Theyah wasn't anythin' Ah could say without breakin' down. So, Ah just stroked yoah hayah an' sang softly." She looked up at the white

clouds that floated serenely across the blue spring sky. "Ah was surprahzed that you remembered it."

"I did. I don't know why, but I did. I kept looking for you throughout that house in the dream."

He stepped over to her and took her in his arms, holding her close. She was stiff, and would not relax into his embrace. He held her head to his shoulder, and rubbed her back comfortingly.

"You would have gotten through it, Dianne. You would have. Don't ever sell yourself short. You were so strong for everyone, especially me. There were days when I just felt like giving up and you were the one who kept me going. You would have carried on without me, Dianne... but I'm so damned glad it wasn't necessary. And that's due to your skill and dedication as a doctor." He kissed her head, then laid his cheek on her hair. "You went above and beyond, my love; did things that would have broken most people, man or woman. I am amazed that you could even stand to be here and recount this to me, and I am so glad you shared your heart... and your pain and your fear."

He pulled back a little, and put a knuckle under her chin, raising her face to his. "You've carried all this around far too long. Let it go. Please, let it go. And let me be strong for you this time."

Dianne breathed in deeply, almost convulsively, then began to shake and sob. She clung to Jeff's neck, burying her face in his flannel shirt, making it damp with her tears as he continued to rub her back.

It seemed like time stopped in that clearing and there was nothing there save the two of them. But eventually Dianne calmed, and Jeff became aware of birdsong, and of the insects buzzing, and of the clouds moving along again. Dianne was spent and leaned heavily against him, her arms still around his neck.

"Ah did this once with yoah mothah, y'know. In New Yoahk. She was... a rock for me." She glanced up at him. "Yoah rahte, y'know. Ah would have survahved. But only because o' th' suppoah't o' owah family." She closed her eyes and nestled her head closer. "But Ah am damned glad it wasn't necessary."

"Hmm." Jeff hummed, looking up at the sky, a hint of humor in his voice. "Where have I heard that before?"

Dianne snorted a small laugh, just big enough for Jeff to know that she had reacted. He looked back down and kissed her on the forehead. "I think we're done here, don't you?"

She nodded wearily, and together they left the grassy clearing, and everything it represented, without a backwards glance.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/19/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:14:46 GMT

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Thursday May 10 2068, 8.20am, Tracy Island

John roughly towelled off his hair as he wandered into his room from the en suite, grinning. He threw down the towel and picked up his hairbrush, contemplating the matted blond thing masquerading as his hair. He hummed as he tamed the mess and carefully styled the lock over his forehead, before drying off and throwing on a t-shirt and shorts.

He began to whistle as he collected up his towels and threw them in the washing basket, and opened the en suite window to let in fresh air to waft away the shower steam. He had risen not long before in an inordinately good mood. Never one to be particularly depressed, the jaunty feeling John felt was still unusual. Yet it was not unwelcome. He wondered if his mood had anything to do with his dreams. John sat down on the bed and laced his fingers together, brows drawn. He couldn't remember what exactly they were, but he could feel a lingering sense of elation. Shadows and outlines danced at the edges of his memory, out of reach. If only he could only remember... Perhaps it would help explain.

John stood and let out a quick breath, and began to hum again as he searched for his socks and shoes. One reason for the happiness that he did know, however, was the memories of the picnic the day before. He grinned and began to tie his laces. It had gone off without a hitch. Both he and Kat had enjoyed themselves, both in the water and on the sand. She was so easy to talk to, so interested, and he had to admit, it was great to have someone who was genuinely interested in learning about the stars. It'll be fun to show her the comet, he thought. I know she'll appreciate it -- Alex and Tyler will too.

He strode over to the door, ready to get some breakfast, and suddenly he stopped, one hand poised over the door handle, and felt the grin slip off his face. Realization had dawned. This was unusual, unexpected, and a feeling he had not felt in some time. He was happy, overly happy, and wanted to become, perhaps, even happier... He let his arm drop. My God, I think...I think I have a crush on her!

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 9/20/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:15:08 GMT

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Of all the days in his life, John couldn't remember one of such turbulent emotions. The happiness of the morning had given way to a feeling of complete confusion, which in turn had given him a temper roughly equivalent to a bear with a branch stuck in its behind.

He had gone on to breakfast as planned, but his jaunty step had been replaced by slow wandering with his hands deep in his pockets. Emotions battled inside of him. The happiness at the thought of being with Kat, just talking to her, stargazing with her, simply holding her hand, still

simmered in his mind. The confusion had tainted its edge, however, and John did not know what to do. This was not as simple as having feelings for someone next door or a work colleague. Kat was both, which meant that she was always around, which increased the potential awkwardness and embarrassment from an unrequited affection quite significantly. He was thinking exactly of that when he collided with something large and solid, and sprang back with a yell.

"Whoa, John!" Virgil said, grabbing the top of his brother's flailing arms to stop him falling backwards. "Easy, boy. What's up? Left your eyes in your room?"

John steadied himself and stepped backwards out of reach. He gave Virgil a grin that didn't reach his eyes; a quick exit was necessary to avoid unwanted questions.

"Nothing, Virg," he said. "I just slept badly, that's all. I think I need a good breakfast to wake me up." The lie felt bitter on his tongue. Suddenly he wasn't hungry at all.

He kept the smile up, ignoring the concerned gaze of his brother, until he rounded a corner. It dropped off his face like a slate blown off a roof as he entered the kitchen. He accepted Kyrano's offer of a cup of coffee and leant against one of the counters. The retainer said nothing of his deflated mood. The same could not be said about his siblings gathered around the table. Cherie and Scott were scrutinising him carefully; John knew that look, and decided to beat a fast retreat before they started on him. Gordon, however, never the most diplomatic of people, threw John an amused look.

"You look happy," he said. "Got out of the wrong side of the bed?"

"Something like that."

John drank his coffee with closed eyes. This was not what he wanted right now. He drained the cup and set it down, thanking Kyrano. He made to leave, when Gordon piped up once more.

"Not having breakfast?"

"I'm not hungry," John said.

"That's not like --"

"Leave it, Gordon," John snapped, and strode out of the kitchen without a backward glance.

His face burned and his fists clenched in fury at himself. He wanted to go and apologise, but his legs carried him all the way down to the poolside, blissfully empty so early in the morning. He fell into a recliner and ran a hand over his face, pulling at his features. Why was he overreacting so much? He folded his arms and stared off across the pool. The sea in the distance was flat; he wished his mind echoed the calm. Why are you acting like a hormonal teenager? he asked himself. But he knew the answer. A battle was ongoing in his head. The white armoured champions of his feelings charged headlong into the darker warriors of worry. There was no doubt about it. He definitely wanted to be with Kat. It was as clear as the cloudless sky above him. If the situation was different, if they didn't live in such close quarters on the island, John wouldn't have had a second thought about asking her out. But the fact was that they did, and so he could do

nothing. I'm not going to ruin Dad's dream, he thought. I'm not going to jeopardise the team by throwing a wrench in the middle of my friendship with Kat. What if she doesn't want to be with me? What if I make her really awkward? And then everyone will start asking questions... I'll be mortified.

It was settled in his mind that he would do nothing. His white champions were firmly stamped down. That didn't mean he stopped feeling for her, however. In fact, it seemed to make him feel even more strongly. You've seen Romeo and Juliet, he thought. Unrequited love didn't get him anywhere. In fact, neither did true love... It had always been a minor thought that with the arrival of the new recruits some couplings could occur. John, however, had never thought that he would be involved in any.

He lay back and closed his eyes against the rising sun.

"What am I going to do?"

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 9/20/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:15:46 GMT
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Scott sped up as he saw his towheaded brother flop down into the lounge by the pool. Even from his view at the top of the steps from the balcony, he could see John's frustration. Scott's brows tightened. What on earth is the matter with him? he thought. As he neared his brother's side he heard a muttered, "What am I going to do?"

"What am I going to do with you?" He asked with a slight smile.

John jumped up as if burned and nearly fell sideways off the lounge.

"Don't do that," he said, clutching at his chest.

Scott shrugged and sat down on the side of the lounge next to John's and laced his fingers together, arms resting on his knees.

"Care to let me know what that was all about in the kitchen?" He asked.

Scott had played this game before more times than he could count. Sometimes he felt like 'Auntie Scott', forever the shoulder for all his brothers. John settled himself back on the lounge, composing his face into a look of unconcerned calm.

"Nothing," he said, looking into the distance. "I just wasn't hungry, that's all."

The look didn't fool Scott for one moment; as if that wasn't enough, John's stomach gave a loud protest at the lie. Scott shook his head as his brother coloured. John glanced over, and Scott pinned him with his best 'don't-give-me-that-bull-just-tell-me-the-truth' look, and as planned, John

deflated like a punctured beach ball. Scott softened his gaze. Jackpot, he thought.

"I never thought it would happen," John said, looking back out to the horizon. He seemed to be talking more to himself. "I mean, I knew it could happen, but I didn't think it would happen to me..."

"Care to let me know what 'it' is?" Scott asked.

"It's bad, Scott, really bad. I can't believe it..."

Countless situations began to whiz through Scott's mind, getting progressively more serious with every idea. What John in trouble? What was he keeping from them all? Was he sick?

"For goodness' sake John, what?" he asked irritably.

John turned to him, his eyes almost mournful. Scott's heart skipped a beat. What was wrong?

"I think...no, I know...I...I have feelings for Kat!"

It took Scott a few moments to take in the information. It was far from what he was expecting, and the relief, annoyance, and hilarity he felt burst out in one bark of laughter. John scowled at him.

"It's not funny, Scott!" He said.

"Oh, it is," Scott said around his laughter. "I thought... You had me expecting the worst! That's all that this is about?" He asked, schooling his face into a more sombre expression.

"Yes, it is!"

Scott lent forward and lightly smacked the side of John's head, grinning widely.

"That's my John all right," he said. John looked even more confused than before, so Scott continued. "Why are you making such a big deal out of this? It isn't even new news to me!"

"What? Well, it was to me this morning!" John was becoming more irritated.

Scott chuckled.

"I can read you like an open book, John Tracy," he said. "Me and Virgil were discussing it just yesterday."

"Virgil knows too?" John asked.

"And Gordon. He's probably told Alan, as well. And I'm pretty sure Grandma knows."

John's eyes were practically bulging out of his head. It made Scott chuckle even harder.

"Man, John, lighten up? Why are you so stressed about this?"

"Why? Why not? There's every chance that this'll mess everything up! What if I make a move on

her, and she doesn't reciprocate? What if it makes her feel so awkward that she decides to leave the island? It has the potential to ruin Father's plans."

Scott shook his head and sighed. Typical John.

"Johnny, listen to me. You're blowing this all out of proportion. You won't ruin things for Dad, no way. With the new recruits, it was inevitable that there would be some relationships. And if something goes wrong? It doesn't have to end in another departure. Look at Alan and Tin-Tin. They broke up, and the world didn't cave in, did it? And believe me, John, you're blind if you don't think she wants to get to know you better, at least."

John blinked.

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

John sounded much more like himself now. Scott grinned, and reached across to pat John's shoulder. Crisis averted, he thought. Chalk another victory up to Auntie Scott.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 9/20/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:16:00 GMT
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Thursday May 10 2068, 1.45pm, Tracy Island

Idle tinkling filled the quiet of the lounge as Virgil's fingers wandered over the ivories. He sat in half a doze, not really wanting to play a particular tune. They had been enjoying a few weeks of blessed downtime; other than training the newbies, there wasn't much to do. That was something Virgil was not complaining about.

His mind wandered with his fingers, and he thought back to that morning. Something was bugging Johnny, that was for sure. Gordon had recounted the incident in the kitchen, sounding a little stung. He had said that Scott went after him; thus Virgil knew he would fine out what was wrong soon enough.

As if beckoned by some strange psychic bond, Scott appeared in the doorway and made a beeline straight for the piano. Virgil stilled his fingers and sat up, lifted from his doze. Scott was grinning and shaking his head slightly. Virgil looked at his inquiringly, and Scott leant on the piano's edge with his eyebrows raised.

"Well?" Virgil asked.

"We were right."

Suddenly everything clicked, as if a key had been turned in a lock.

"Ah ha," Virgil said. "I knew we were onto something."

"Yep. And, in typical Johnny fashion, he blew it waaay out of proportion. The way he was talking at first, I thought there was something seriously wrong! He was babbling on about screwing up Dad's plans. I pointed out that it hadn't happened when Alan and Tin-Tin split up, and it wouldn't happen now."

Virgil hummed a little and rubbed his chin.

"Sooo, we've got one potential pairing. Who's up next?"

"Search me," Scott said. "But I'm sure another will present itself soon enough."

"Oh really," Virgil said with a pointed look.

"That's not what I meant!" Scott said.

"Uh huh."

"Really!"

"Uh huh."

"Stop that Virg."

"Uh huh!"

"Virgil!"

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 9/20/2005 5:42 AM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:16:44 GMT
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Friday, May 11, 2068, 11:00, p.m. local time, Los Angeles, California

"Hmmm."

Dianne sighed with contentment as she slipped into the hot, perfumed waters of the Jacuzzi. They had started their flight back to the island, racing the sun to the West Coast, where Jeff wined and dined her as a final touch to her weeklong birthday celebration. They had taken a luxury hotel suite for an overnight stay, and would resume their journey in the morning.

The door slid open, and Jeff came in, wrapped up in one of the thirsty white terrycloth bathrobes that the hotel provided. Dianne glanced over at him, looking him up and down once before closing her eyes again in relaxation.

"So, dear heart, how was your birthday?" he asked, sitting down on the tiled edge of the hot tub.

"Refreshing. Revealing. One of the best birthdays I can remember," she said with a satisfied sigh.

"Just one of the best birthdays?" he asked.

"Yes, well, it won't compare to having a baby in my arms for a birthday gift," she elaborated.

Jeff nodded sagely, though she couldn't see it. "Ah, I see. So, if I can give you a baby for next year's birthday..."

Dianne opened her eyes and gave him an exasperated look. "Don't even think about it."

He chuckled, and she relaxed back into the water at the sound. "All right, I won't. I haven't forgotten that we both agreed we're too old to start another family... which would be the result of our having a child at our respective ages. Not to mention the fact that one or the other of the kid's older brothers might make us grandparents before the kid got into kindergarten." He paused, watching her close her eyes again and smile. "What about the cottage?"

"Ohhh, it was lovely, Jeff," she murmured. "I'd love to stay there during ski season. Or maybe visit during the fall. The foliage in that area is supposed to be spectacular."

"I'll keep that in mind," he replied. He moved closer to her and put his fingers in the hot water, smoothing a dripping digit along the edges of her face, tracing the lines of cheek and jawbone then following her exposed neck down to lightly brush each collarbone.

"Hmmm," she sighed again, this time sounding less like a sigh and more like a low moan.

He lowered his lips to hers and grazed her soft, open mouth with them, teasing her with the contact until finally they came together with a gentle yet passionate kiss. She kept her eyes closed and heard a rustling, then the sound of the water rippling quietly as he entered the tub. His hands cupped her face and he planted another, firmer kiss on her lips, tongue rubbing on the surface, begging for entry. She allowed it, and brought her head up from where it was resting, opening her eyes to gaze at him. Her wet hands smoothed his hair back from the temples and followed the curve of his head to clasp behind his neck.

"Hmmm," he sighed, sounding much as she had a moment earlier. She smiled, and came to him, the two of them holding each other close in the steamy, scented waters, loving each other in an exquisite moment of peace and passion.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/22/2005 8:39 PM

]*****Saturday, May 12, 2068; Thunderbird Five; 4:30 p.m. (Tracy Island time)*****[/I]

Callie had been flagging calls most of the day, none of them requiring assistance from International Rescue. Despite the tornado outbreak in the Midwest several days earlier, many people had heeded the warnings and only a few needed rescue, all of which were handled by local units.

As dinner time approached, she took a break and started preparing her meal. She passed a photograph of herself and her family and suddenly realized that the next day was Mother's Day. "Oh, goodness, I didn't even think about getting Mom a present. I don't know if I can get her one this late in the game."

She sat down to where her photo was and looked at it closely. It was when she had received her Master's Degree from M.I.T. "Mom has always been one of my strongest supporters when it came to reaching my goals..."

*****Flashback to May 22, 2066; Massachusetts Institute of Technology*****

"Callie Louise Spencer," said the school president as she walked up to accept her Master's Degree in Communications Engineering just six months after earning her Master's in Bioengineering. "Congratulations, Miss Spencer."

"Thank you, sir," she said as she took the leather-bound folder from one of his hands and shook the other. After the ceremony ended, Callie went to join her parents and two brothers. "The day's finally arrived!" she exclaimed.

Lorraine smiled at her daughter. "Oh, honey, we're all so proud of you and all you've accomplished." She held up an envelope. "The World Space Agency sent this to our house by mistake instead of to you here at M.I.T. Did you put your home address on your resumé?"

"Yes, I did," Callie said. "I figured I'd be temporarily working with you in the steel business until I got a response from the WSA. I didn't know it would come so quickly. I sure hope it's not a rejection letter."

Her father, Richard, said, "Don't keep us in suspense, sweetie. Go on, open it."

Callie opened the envelope and looked at the letter. Thoroughly reading the message, her eyes lit up with more excitement. "I can't believe it! The World Space Agency has accepted my application and wants me to start training in two weeks at their home base in Space City!"

"You're kidding!" yelled Brian. "That's awesome!"

Her mother hugged her. "Sweetheart, this is one of the greatest moments you can have in your life. I'm so glad you didn't give up on your dreams."

"Mom, I owe you so much." Callie cried tears of joy. "When all those kids picked on me because of my goals, you were the first person to tell me not to stop believing in myself. You pushed me harder to succeed, and even though I won't be going into the steel business with you, I'm grateful to you for being there for me."

"Honey, you don't owe anything to me or anyone else. You did all the hard work on your own, and I can't wait for us to hear from you when you do reach Space City. We couldn't be any prouder than we already are."

*****Flashback Ends*****

Callie smiled and decided to write a special e-mail to her mother after she finished supper.

About 30 minutes after her meal, she sat down at the computer to first check for websites that delivered flowers and gifts for Mother's Day. After seeing a package with a dozen white roses and a sparkling silver necklace, she ordered it and made sure it would be delivered to her mother at the right address. Satisfied with her results, she typed up her e-mail.

Hi, Mom!

I just wanted to say Happy Mother's Day to you. I've never forgotten what you have done for me in my life. You have always been there for me through all my ups and downs. If it weren't for you, I really don't know where I would be right now. Even when there were days when I didn't act like I was appreciative, deep down I've always appreciated you and everything you do. You'll be receiving something from me on Sunday. I know this e-mail and the present would never be enough to tell you how much I love you. I hope your Mother's Day will be special.

With love,
Your daughter Callie

A satisfied smile on her face, she clicked "Send" to deliver the message to her mother back in her hometown of Opp.

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 9/22/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:17:15 GMT
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Sunday, May 13, 2068, 9:00 a.m., Tracy Island

"Happy Mother's Day!" Jeff said, beaming at his mother as he came into the dining room, a bouquet of roses in one hand.

"Oh, my!" Emily cried. "I wasn't sure you'd get home in time!"

He leaned over to kiss her, and presented her with the flowers. "We managed. And now we're ready for a second breakfast."

Dianne glanced up from where she was presenting Lisa with a similar bouquet. "You'd better get on into the kitchen then, Jeff. After all, the tradition is that the children make the breakfast for the moms."

Jeff laughed, and disappeared into the kitchen.

She kissed her own mother on the cheek. "Happy Mother's Day, Ma!"

"And to you, too, honey," Lisa replied, smiling as her daughter took the chair beside her. "I think the children have something more planned, perhaps for dinner. They weren't sure when you'd get back."

Dianne exchanged Mother's Day wishes with Emily as Gordon came out of the kitchen, a huge pile of pancakes stacked precariously on the plate he was carrying. "Hey, Mom!" he cried. "Happy Mother's Day!"

"Thank you, Gordon," Dianne said with a smile. She peered over the top of the plate as he served three pancakes to Lisa. "What do we have here?"

"Blueberry pancakes," he explained. "And believe it or not, Scott made them!"

She inspected the pancakes that he slid onto her plate. "Are you sure? They're not burnt."

Gordon chuckled. "Yes, I'm sure. He's got Kyrano out there watching his every move like a hawk! Virgil's frying up bacon, the kids are squeezing orange juice, John's in charge of the coffee, and Alan's doing the fetch-and-carry."

"Well, at least the coffee will be drinkable," Emily commented. "John's got a deft hand with the coffee maker."

"What's Jeff up to?" Lisa asked, cutting into her stack of pancakes with the side of a fork. Gordon left the plate on the table before them and went back into the kitchen.

"Double checking that we have the table set properly," Jeff said as he came out, a small stack of plates in his hands. He counted the places at the table, and did a quick computation, then set two more places just as Tin-Tin and Brains came into the dining room.

"Happy Mother's Day, Mrs. Tracy!" Tin-Tin called, giving the old lady a kiss on the cheek.

"Now, Tin-Tin, I told you a long time ago to call me Grandma!" Emily protested even as she accepted Tin-Tin's kiss. She returned the salute, saying, "Thank you for your lovely wishes, my dear."

"And happy Mother's Day to you, Dianne," the Malaysian girl said with a smile. She came around the table to kiss Lisa on the cheek. "And to you, too, Lisa."

"Thank you, Tin-Tin," Dianne replied, echoed by Lisa a second later. Brains gave the three women a slightly nervous wave, and wished them a happy Mother's Day as well. He spied the plate of pancakes and asked permission to take them down to his end of the table. Dianne watched out of the corner of her eye as the engineer politely served his assistant, who sat next to him with a big smile on her face.

Alan came out with a pitcher full of fresh squeezed orange juice. "Now, if there are any seeds in this, you can blame the kids," he said as he poured glasses for each of the celebrants. He glanced down the table to where Tin-Tin and Brains were talking quietly, then he sighed and marched down to pour juice for them as well.

Dianne leaned across the table to Emily, glancing down the table. "What's going on there?"

"I'm not quite sure," Emily replied, frowning on the sight of the three young people. "But I intend to find out."

"Mom!" came a cry from Tyler as he pelted out to give his mother a near strangle of a hug. "You're home! Happy Mother's Day!"

"Of course she's home, silly!" Alex said, following at a more sedate pace. "You saw Dad in the kitchen." He leaned over to kiss his mother on the cheek. "Happy Mother's Day, Mom."

"Thank you, Alex, Tyler," Dianne returned. She took a bite of her pancake, and a sip of her juice. "You did well with the juice, boys. Where's Cherie?"

"Right here, Mom," said the teen as she brought out a thermal carafe and poured coffee into her mother's cup, then moved onto fill each of her grandmothers' cups. "Happy Mother's Day."

Dianne chuckled. "Thank you, Cherry." She glanced at her mother and mother-in-law. "I have a feeling we're going to hear a lot of that today."

The three women laughed together, then applied themselves to the meal as more food and more family came to join them at the table for the special celebration.

From: Tikatu Sent: 9/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:17:45 GMT
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Tracy Island, May 14th -- 10.30 a.m.

Kat's phone began to play her familiar pop tune ring tone. Reaching for it, she answered it with, "Kat Williamson."

"Kat, my dear, how are you?" Lady Penelope looked particularly glamorous; her hair was piled up

on top in curls, with some falling down over her shoulder, and her diamante drop earrings sparkled as she moved her head.

"Lady Penelope, how lovely to hear from you!" Kat headed for the balcony and sat down on a chair to carry on the conversation.

"Well, I am just ringing to catch up with the latest gossip. I understand you were helping with the tsunami rescue."

"Oh, yes, that rescue. I have never mended so many old generators, nor worked on such archaic vehicles in such a short time. Nor have I been so dirty! I think I have become known on the island as little Miss Grubby!" She laughed.

"Well that must have been a worrying time for the Tracy's, as the wave washed over the island," Lady Penelope remarked.

"Yes, it was. But, I'm sure they found it a relief to know Mrs. Tracy, Kyrano, and the little boys were safe at Bongo-Bongo."

Kat thought about the island when they had returned from the rescue. She remembered the broken catamaran, and could imagine Gordon's face when he saw the state of the boat. She shuddered as she remembered the massive clearing up that they all had to help with.

"So," Lady Penelope asked in her cool manner, "is there any more news?"

"Well, Christopher has gone, been sacked really, but I'm sure you may already be aware of that," Kat answered. She was still unsure as to what had really happened between Christopher and Mr Tracy.

"Oh, my dear! I'm so sorry." From what Jeff had told her, he had entertained high hopes for Mr Jordan.

"I think maybe things started going wrong when Christopher talked to a reporter when we were rescuing the British Prime Minister from Tower Bridge," Kat added, although she didn't sound too convinced. She changed the subject. "Lady Penelope, you remember when I left, Lil gave me a wok as a leaving present?" Kat gave a short laugh "Please tell her that I have had a lesson with Kyrano on learning to cook with a wok."

"How did that go?" Lady Penelope asked.

"Well, the lesson was a success and Kyrano kindly leant me some ingredients. I had intended to cook for my friends. But things didn't go according to plan."

"Oh?" Lady Penelope queried. "What happened?"

"Well, you see I was doing a dummy run for practice, but, um, you see, while the oil was getting hot, I knocked over a glass dish. It broke, and when I went to fetch something to clear the debris away, I sort of forgot about the oil. Suddenly the room was full of smoke and the sprinkler was set off."

Lady Penelope raised her eyebrows, looking surprised. "Oh my dear, really? That doesn't seem such a catastrophe."

"Oh, but it was! You see, my smoke alarm set off the alarms in the villa, and I had John, Virgil and Gordon come running with fire extinguishers to see where the fire was."

Lady Penelope laughed out loud. "Oh, Kat, that could only happen to you!"

"They were very good about it, but I suffered from Gordon's wisecracks and jokes all the next day."

Lady Penelope smiled at Kat. "That is so typical of Gordon, he always has had a sense of mischief about him. The pranks he has played in the past! I would have thought you got off very lightly with him just teasing you. Anyway, my dear, the main purpose of my call is to advise you that a friend of Lofty called and saw your car in the garage. He seemed very interested in purchasing it. Apparently his present Lotus is rather beyond repair and he would dearly like to get another one. I told him that it was not for sale, but he seemed so keen that I promised that I would get in touch with the owner and ask whether it could be sold."

Kat was silent. ~Sell my car? My pride and joy? Oh I couldn't part with it! It was a twenty first birthday present from my parents.

Noting the silence, Lady Penelope continued. "Of course, if you do not wish to sell it, it can remain here. So when you come back for a holiday, it will be there for your use."

"Lady Penelope, could I think about this and let you know?" Kat said quietly. "It would be a wrench to sell it and, to be honest, I don't really need the money at the moment. However, if the gentleman is a keen collector of Lotus Elise's then, well... maybe."

They chatted for a while longer, with Kat enquiring about her parents, then Lady Penelope advised she had to go. She had an appointment to launch a ship, and so the conversation ended. Kat wandered down to the beach, deep in thought. She loved her little car; it was so speedy and her pride and joy. She was so immersed in her thoughts she didn't see Alan until she almost walked into him.

"Hey, Kat! You look as if you have the weight of the world on your shoulders."

Kat smiled a little. "I have quite a dilemma," she told him.

"Need some help, or friendly advice?" Alan asked as he fell in step with her.

"Alan, have you ever had something that you were really fond of, but knew it was no use to you, and you had the chance of getting rid of it, what would you do?"

Alan looked at Kat. "Hm, I don't quite follow, Kat. Sure, there are lots of things that I have been, and still am fond of. I was extremely fond of motorcar racing. I am fond of my family, and where I live, but apart from the racing, there is no question of getting rid of anything."

Kat looked thoughtful. "Alan," she began, "on my twenty first birthday, my parents gave me a Lotus Elise. It was, still is in fact, my pride and joy. When I left for Tracy Island and International Rescue, Lady Penelope agreed to my car remaining at Creighton-Ward Manor."

"You have a Lotus Elise? Wow!" Alan said. "What a beautiful car! No wonder you are so proud of it. That's one car I would sure love to drive."

"The thing is, though," Kat said, "Lady Penelope has been approached and has been asked to contact the owner, with a view to the car being sold."

"And now you are not sure what to do?" Alan asked gently.

"What would you do, Alan? You like cars; would you get rid of a favourite, in fact, only car?"

Alan hesitated and looked at the young woman walking by his side. "I would say, Kat, go with your gut feeling. Do you really want to sell your prized possession? True, you won't need it now, nor maybe in the future, but I assume that you will occasionally go back for vacations. If you sell your car, I think you will really miss it. If I were you, I would hang on to it for the moment."

Kat smiled at Alan. "Thank you for your advice; it has really made my mind up for me. Yes, I am going to ring Lady Penelope and tell that the car is definitely not for sale."

The two headed back to the villa chatting about cars, mechanics and Grand Prix races. Alan told Kat that he was going to the Monaco Grand Prix later that month. There followed a lively discussion on the present drivers, who were and who weren't doing well, and why.

"I think Pete Johnson, British driver for the McLaren team is so cool. He was just beginning to race in his first season, when Dad and I went to Silverstone last year. He is doing very well," Kat stated.

Alan had to agree, although he told Kat that he really rooted for the American driver for the British-American Racing Team.

With a grin, he said. "Say Kat, how about a little bet on which Driver--your British Pete Johnson or my American Dexter Thompson--gets highest in the points at the end of the season."

"You're on, Alan," Kat grinned back at him and they solemnly shook hands, before continuing back.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 9/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:18:09 GMT
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Monday, May 14 2068, 1.30pm, the gym, Tracy Island.

Melancholy. That word about summed it up. And this type had nothing to do with black bile. Bloody Medieval people... Dominic arched his back and slipped into another pose, concentrating on his breathing. In...and out...in...and out... He held it for quite some time, willing the built-up tension to evaporate. In...and out...

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Dom fell out of the pose with a strangled yelp and looked across the room to the source of the cry.

"AHH AHH AHH AHH!"

Apparently, Joshua was no longer asleep. He was wrenching the bars of the spacious play pen Dom had erected in an attempt to get some peace to practice his yoga without handing the child off to someone else. At first it had worked well -- Josh had even gone to sleep! The novelty had worn off now, and Dom clambered to his feet and across the room. Maybe it would work again in future.

"OUT! WANT OUT!"

"Yes, yes Joshua, you'll get out. Now please stop shoutin'."

"NOOO! OUT!"

"Joshua, stop that right now."

"NOOO!"

Red-faced, Joshua threw himself onto the floor of the playpen and beat his heels on the floor. Dominic took a deep breath and stepped over the low gate. Give me strength...

In the past month or so, Joshua had become increasingly bad-tempered. The frustration the child faced every day pained Dominic, but there was nothing he could do. It was a part of growing and learning. Unfortunately, it brought with it tantrums. The phrase 'terrible twos' didn't quite cover it. Dominic grabbed Joshua's soft nap blanket and sat cross-legged on the floor, holding his hands out to the child.

"Come on Josh, that's enough." More wailing. "Josh." Still more crying. "I can sit here longer than you can, you know."

As expected, eventually Joshua gave up -- Dom knew that he would rejoice on the day that he stopped the tantrums for good -- and clambered into his father's lap. Dominic wrapped the blanket around him and stroked his son's blond hair.

"See? There was no reason for that now, was there?"

Joshua snivelled and buried himself further into the blanket. Dom let out a long breath and inhaled deeply. Someone up there is makin' fun of me. He turned Josh around and stood up, surveying

the gym. He would come back and clean up later. He pushed his mat and Joshua's things into an out of the way corner with his foot before heading towards the monorail. He didn't really feel like going back to the apartment, however, so he changed course and headed for the pool. Joshua was complacent now. He wondered how long it would last.

Brandon, Alan, and Gordon were sitting at the poolside, the latter two engaged in an unenthusiastic game of chess. Brandon waved as Dom approached, and shot him a questioning glance when he sat down on the recliner with the air of a man who had just run a marathon.

"What's up?" He asked.

Dom attempted to settle Joshua on his lap, but one glimpse of red hair had set his mind afire again, and he jumped off and went straight to Gordon, who hoisted him up into his lap and cast a grin at Dom.

"I dunno. I'm just feelin' a bit out-of-sorts, I 'spose."

"Is the little guy giving you trouble?"

"Aye, but it's to be expected. He's two years and five months old exactly tomorrow." Dom let out a sigh that could only have been described as melancholy, and folded his arms.

"I get the feeling there's something else here, though," Brandon said.

"Hmm. I guess the mother's day stuff kinda threw me, yesterday. I should have been making breakfast and writing cards from Josh. I doubt if he can even remember his mother at all."

"Short-term girlfriend?"

"More like short-term wife."

"Wife?" Brandon asked. "Man, that must have hurt."

"More than you can know."

The conversation tapered off from there, before eventually Dom stood up and stretched.

"Could you keep a wee eye on him for me, Gordon?" He asked. "I've to go do some tidying up."

"Sure thing, Dom," Gordon said.

Brandon watched Dominic's retreating back with a small frown. There always seemed to be things that you didn't know about your friends.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 9/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:18:25 GMT
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Tuesday, May 15, 2068; Washington D.C.; 8:30 AM (12:30 AM May 16 on Tracy Island)

Tom knocked on Lena's open door and she looked up and smiled at him. He said, "Lena, do you have a minute? There's something going on out here that you should see."

Curious, she got up and followed him out into the cubicle area. Everyone on her staff was standing around a table where they had a cake and balloons. "SURPRISE! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!" they all shouted.

Laughing, she shook her head. "You didn't have to do dis. You people are too much."

"Oh, come on now. We have birthday parties for everyone in our department. Why would we not have one for our boss?" Louise brought out a box from behind her and handed it to Lena. "Happy Birthday, and many more."

"What on eart?" Lena untied the bow and lifted the lid. She found a plaque inside that read, "To Our Boss on the Anniversary of the Day the World was Graced With Her Presence". It also had the date and the signatures of every one in her department. "Tank you," she said, tears coming to her eyes, "Dis is wonderful. I'll put it where I can see it every day I'm in de office."

Everyone applauded and Tom said, "Okay, Lena; enough with the emotional outburst." He grinned at her. "Time to cut the cake." He held out the knife.

She chuckled and took it from him, moving to the table. A few minutes later everyone had a piece of cake and some coffee, or tea. They ate and chatted, and every once in a while, one or another of them moved off to take a call.

Louise asked her, "Do you have any plans for after work?"

"My family and I are getting togeter at my son's house for a quiet celebration. Since it's on a weekday, de kids have school and de adults have to be at work de next day, it will be small and end early."

"That's good. Often the best celebrations are the small, quiet ones."

The group chatted and celebrated until 9 AM, then Lena went back to her office, followed by more good wishes from her staff. Then everyone got back to work, but the good feeling lasted through the rest of the day.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 9/27/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:18:40 GMT

J*****Wednesday, May 16, 2068; Thunderbird Five; 1:30 p.m. (Tracy Island time; 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 15, somewhere in Nebraska)*****[/I]

Callie was having another hard day of flagging calls, checking which seemed to be of higher priority. Then, she heard what sounded like a child's voice. "Calling International Rescue, can you hear me?"

She opened communications and said, "This is International Rescue. What is your emergency?"

"Wow! You can really hear me?"

"Yes, I can. Can you tell me what the problem is?"

"Gee, I didn't know they had women. Is this really International Rescue?"

"Yes, I promise you, you have reached the right organization. But you have to tell me what's wrong, or I can't help you."

"Oh. I'm sorry. It's my teacher. I'm in the sixth grade. She's assigned us to write an interview, or mock interview, with a hero. All the others are writing about rock stars, or athletes. Susie Jenkins is even writing one about a person who's dead! I think her name is Marie Curie. But I want to write about you guys. You don't mind if I use the word 'guys', do you? I know some girls don't like to be called that."

"I don't mind at all." Callie had to let go of the button. "How do I respond to this? It's not an emergency."

"Are you there, International Rescue? Can you help me? Pleeaaaaaassssee?"

Pressing the button again, she said, "Stand by, please." She pressed another button and said, "Base from Thunderbird Five, come in, Base."

Jeff was sitting at the desk when the eyes of John's picture began to flash. He hit the switch that connected him to Callie. "Thunderbird Five, this is Base. What's the emergency, Ursa?"

"Base, I have a sixth-grader sending a call, but it's not an emergency. I know the rule is to turn it down. The problem is this is for a report on heroes, and he's chosen International Rescue. I'm not sure how to respond properly to him."

Jeff's eyebrows rose in surprise, then he began to chuckle. "I'm not sure this has ever happened before. Stay on the line; I'm going to call Quasar. He may have had experience in this." He muted communications and placed the call to John.

Two minutes later, the young man hurried into the room and over to Jeff's desk. He turned to his portrait - which now showed Callie - and said, "Hey, Ursa. What's up?"

"Have you ever had to respond to a call like this? A sixth-grader wants to do a report on us, but

I'm not sure what to say to him without giving away secrets." She shrugged. "Can you help me out on this one, Quasar?"

"Are you sure this kid is the real thing? I've had a couple of calls, but it turned out to be an attempt by reporters to get some information that would have compromised our security."

"He sounds like a genuine sixth-grader. Even the 'pleeeeeease' sounds authentic. What should I do to confirm he is in fact a sixth-grader and not another reporter?"

"Actually, I don't think you can. They pay kids to ask questions they write out. Only when he or she asks one that you feel is out of line, will you know."

"International Rescue? Are you still there? I've got to get this done tonight. The assignment is due tomorrow. Please help me."

"I tell you what," John said, when he heard the voice. "Go ahead and agree to the 'interview', and I'll listen in. Keep an eye on the screen. I'll signal you if the question is not one you can answer."

"F-A-B, Quasar." She pressed a button to respond to the boy. "Young man, you have your interview. Just keep in mind that there will be questions I may not be able to answer for security reasons."

"I understand, Miss. How can you tell if there's a real emergency and not a false alarm?"

"We have a way of monitoring all communications and know about potential emergencies before we get a call. So we can pretty much tell. And if we can't and decide to go, the person who arrives at the location first can."

"Okay. Next question: How many people are part of International Rescue?"

Callie looked at John, who shook his head. "Before I answer that, what's your name?"

"Peter Fink. But I ain't one - a fink, I mean."

Callie smiled, and so did John. "Well, Peter-not-a-fink, I can't tell you the answer to that question. All I can say is that we feel we have enough to handle just about any situation we might encounter."

Peter chuckled before asking the next question. "Why did International Rescue get started in the first place?"

Startled, she looked up at her screen, to see John make a slashing movement. She told Peter to hold on; she had to take another call. She muted him and looked questioningly at John.

"The answer to that question could be considered another security breach. Just tell him the founders felt there was a need, and were able to come up with the means to meet that need."

Callie nodded and, opening the channel, repeated what John told her.

"I'm glad the founders did start it, or a lot of other people wouldn't be alive right now. I have one last question. If the world runs out of people needing to be saved, would you continue with International Rescue?"

The question startled a laugh out of Callie. "Peter, I doubt that would ever happen. All I can say is that International Rescue will be around as long as it's needed. And that's something you and anyone else can quote me on." She saw John nodding in approval at her statement.

Peter smiled. "Thank you, International Rescue. This'll make a great report."

"Glad to assist, Peter. Good luck with your report."

"Thanks. Oh, I just thought of something. Are you the only girl - er, lady - in International Rescue?"

John nodded at her and mouthed, "Don't tell him how many there are, though."

She nodded back and replied, "No, I'm not. But that's all I can tell you."

"Okay. Thanks again. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Mr. Not-a-Fink."

Peter laughed as he turned off his radio. "Now I've got a great report to turn in tomorrow."

Callie terminated the call at her end and turned back to the screen. "Thanks for your help, Quasar."

"You're welcome, but I think you would have managed on your own. Interesting that you had something happen to you on your tour that never occurred when either Indy or I was aboard Five."

Jeff, who had watched and listened to the whole thing, agreed, saying, "You did very well."

*****By TracyFan4Ever and Hobbeth.*****

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 9/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:19:37 GMT
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Tracy Island, Thursday, May 17th - 10.30 a.m.

Kat looked at her watch, only five minutes more. She had been working steadily on the treadmill. Her hair was caught back in a wide bandana, and she was wearing shorts and T-shirt; she was working at a steady run. ~Phew~ she thought, ~here's me thinking that I was fit... Slowing the

machine down so that she was doing a brisk walk, she kept the rhythm going, not noticing Dom entering the Gym.

Dom watched her for a few moments before heading for the weights. Eventually Kat brought the machine to a halt, and grabbing a towel, wiped her face and hands. As she headed for the water machine, she caught sight of Dom working with the weights. Strolling over to him, she marvelled at his lean, lithe frame.

Flopping down beside him, Kat could barely speak.

"Working hard?" Dom asked, smiling at her.

"Gosh! There must be an easier way of keeping fit," she said, still fighting for breath.

"Try some weights," Dom suggested, reaching for a pair of light weights and handing them to Kat.

Showing her how to work with them, the two worked in silence for a few minutes.

"Dom?" Kat asked. "Didn't Brandon, or maybe it was Gordon, say that you do Yoga?"

"Sure, I practice Yoga," Dom replied.

"I'd love to try it," Kat said.

Without further ado, Dom put down the weights and showed Kat the lotus position. Kat tried to copy, but could only get one knee in the correct position, and try as she might, she could not quite get her other knee across.

"Dom, would you give me some Yoga lessons?" She asked. "In fact I am sure that you could give us all Yoga lessons." She continued eagerly.

Dom smiled nervously, and rubbed the back of his neck. "I guess so," he said. "I've never given lessons before, but I'll do my best! Tell the others if you like, the more the merrier." Dom helped himself to a drink before taking up the weights again.

"Where's Josh?" Kat asked.

"Oh, Cherie and Mrs Tracy are babysitting at the moment. I think that they are taking him to see Durian."

"You know, if ever you want some time to yourself, I know I would gladly baby-sit. I love having him around.." Kat told him.

"How are you with stories?" Dom laughed as he answered her question.

"Oh, um, well, I can read a story, I'm not much good at making up my own stories."

"That would be fine, although some of his favourite stories he knows by heart, so if you want to

skip a few pages to read the book more quickly, he will soon let you know."

Kat laughed. "I can just imagine Josh telling someone off for rushing his story."

"Of course, you could always sing to him." Dom said, a twinkle in his eye.

Kat groaned. "I don't think so, although it would be nice to get my guitar out, I haven't unpacked it since arriving here."

Dom grinned, "maybe we could have a musical evening, Virgil on the piano and you on the guitar."

Kat rolled her eyes. "No way, I'm not playing my guitar alongside Virgil on the piano. He is a very good pianist, I couldn't hope to compete with him."

Just then Cherie and Mrs Tracy appeared with Josh.

"Dada, kitty," Josh was trying to say.

"He wanted to bring Durian back with him." Cherie explained.

Dom and Kat both laughed. "I guess you may have a pet in your apartment yet." Kat said.

Kat collected her shoes and towel and calling goodbye to the others, headed back to her apartment.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/1/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:20:06 GMT

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Friday, 18th May, 2068, Tracy Island, 3:20pm

Outside, Nikki and Elise were relaxing on the balcony conversing about anything and everything. It started off with Nikki talking about her flight training that day. It didn't take long for them to get onto the subject of life before Tracy Island. Nikki spoke very fondly about her friends and workmates back in England. A few times, they laughed about the antics they got up to.

"You did what?"

"I know, I know, a really dumb thing to do but I was seventeen and I wasn't thinking about the consequences. I was really..."

"Dumb?" Elise repeated Nikki's word from earlier while she laughed. "I can just picture you falling asleep on that street corner and your friend picking you up and carrying you on his shoulder."

"Yeah, well, it wasn't funny back then. I was going to get a cab home but a mate of mine cancelled

it and decided to call my mum to pick me up. She was so disappointed, but she didn't chew me out which was weird. I never wanted to touch another drink after that. But then my eighteenth birthday came up that month and, of course, eighteen is when you become legal in England. At least I was sensible during that night." Nikki smiled. "But you know what? Whenever there was a party, my best friend always reminded me about that incident."

"That's what best friends are for," Elise remarked. They both fell silent for a little while before Elise spoke up again. "I enjoyed this chat. We should get all the girls together and just have a girls' night. And not just with us newbie women either. It could be a way to get to know each other better than we already do."

"That sounds good. We could have it in my apartment. But when?"

"How about for Kat's birthday."

"You're on. Though I doubt I'll be repeating that story."

"Oh, come on."

"It's embarrassing."

"That's what makes it good." Elise dodged a flying cushion and walked inside to get herself a drink.

From: Nikki-browneyes1 Sent: 10/3/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:20:24 GMT
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Saturday, May 19, 2068, 8:20 a.m., Tracy Island

John didn't look up from his packing as the door buzzer rang. "Come in," he said in a distracted tone. He heard the door swish open, then the quick light thudding of footsteps on the carpet. A thin body tackled him from behind and a skinny pair of arms wrapped around his chest. The force really wasn't enough to knock him over, but John knew how to play this game and fell onto his bed, missing the garment bag he had spread on it.

"Gotcha!" Tyler cried gleefully.

John laughed. "You sure did, Spud! Now, are you going to let me up or do I have to.... tickle you!" He reached down to the boy's exposed side and began to run his fingers up and down Tyler's ribs like a fast moving spider.

"No!" Tyler shouted between peals of laughter. "No tickles!" He laughed some more as John tapered off on tickling him. Once the tickling had completely stopped, Tyler levered himself off of his bigger brother, still breathless from the exertion.

John rolled over and came to a sitting position on the bed. The boy joined him. Looking at the garment bag, Tyler asked, "Where're you going?"

"Monte Carlo," John answered. "To watch a Grand Prix race."

"Monte Carlo... that's one of the tiny postage stamp countries in Europe, isn't it?"

"Yes, and no, Spud. It's a city in one of those teeny-tiny countries. The country is named Monaco."

"Oh, okay," Tyler said. He got up to peek inside John's garment bag. "Is Alan going, too?"

"Yep," John replied, returning to his packing. "I didn't get to go to Alan's birthday party, so he's invited me to share part of his present from Dad and Mom. He and I haven't had much opportunity to spend time together, until now."

"How long will you be gone?" Tyler asked, flopping down on the bed next to the garment bag.

"Just the weekend. The race only takes a day." John went to his closet and brought out a dressy suit with a double breasted, ivory jacket, and a dark blue shirt to wear with it.

"Why the suit?" the boy asked quizzically.

"Oh, I think we're going to the casino while we're there and it's usually a dress-up occasion to go there in Monte Carlo," John replied absently, adding a black tie to the dark blue shirt. "There, that should do."

"Can you bring something back for me?" Tyler asked. "Maybe a t-shirt or something?"

John ruffled the boy's stiff hair. "I suppose I can. I promised Kat I'd bring something back for her. She's really into auto racing, it seems."

"Kat? Into car racing? But she's a girl," Tyler said in disgust. "Girls aren't supposed to be into racing cars."

John laughed. "Spud, when it comes to women, you have a lot to learn."

"I hope I never have to learn it," Tyler muttered. He looked at his brother with a speculative eye. "Hey, how come she asked you to get something and not Alan?"

The older brother's eyebrow went up. "Well, why did you ask me and not Alan?"

Tyler rolled his eyes. "Duh! Because you're my favorite big brother, that's why!"

"Well then, Kat probably asked me because... because we're friends. Yeah. That's it. We're friends." John gave Tyler a smile.

The boy sighed. "Don't tell me you're going to get all kissy-face with her."

"Well, maybe," John drawled. "It all depends."

"Depends on what?"

"I don't know yet. We'll see," was the cryptic reply. The blond glanced over at the boy and said, "I promise I'll bring back something for you, too. Now amscray so I can finish packing."

"All right," Tyler said, slouching his way out of the room. He made kissing noises at John's back as he left, then hurried away as his older brother turned to throw a balled up pair of clean socks at him. The socks hit the door frame and bounced off, and a cheeky Tyler stuck his head back into the doorway with his hands stuck like antlers to his head and wiggling. "Neener, neener, neener," he said in sing-song. "You ca-an't hit me!"

John threw another sock ball at him and missed again, and Tyler took off down the hall toward the lounge, laughing. The blond stuck his head out the door in time to see the boy slam through the double doors at the end of the hall. Tyler paused one more time to stick out his tongue, then he disappeared.

The man shook his head and sighed, then went back to packing. "Kids," he muttered as he retrieved his socks.

Tyler passed out into the open air, and slowed down. "Kat! Hmph!" he said in disgust, huffing a breath. "Blech. If John gets all kissy-face with her, he won't have time for me." He sighed heavily. "But what can I do about it? All the big boys are gonna get kissy-face with someone sometime. Still... I don't know. We'll see how things go. If he makes time for me, then fine. If not... well... we'll see."

From: Tikatu Sent: 10/3/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:21:14 GMT
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MONACO GRAND PRIX - PART ONE
Tracy Island, May 19th 2068

Alan and John settled themselves for the flight to Monaco." So, we are going to the casino tonight?" John queried.

"Yep, we sure are," Alan replied, "and according to Kenny, there are some real cool babes working as croupiers."

John smiled to himself; he was certainly looking forward to a few days away. He thought back to the day that Alan had asked if he would like to accompany him to the Monaco Grand Prix. They were on the return to base, having left Callie on Thunderbird to do her month's duty. John had been delighted to accept. Before they left the island, Kat had asked if he could possibly buy her a

shirt or some other souvenir from the Jordan team. She had explained that she thought their British driver was cool. John had agreed to buy something for her. He hoped to find something really unique, and possibly get an autograph, too.

"So, John," Alan broke into his thoughts, "What do you make of our new recruits?"

John hesitated, then, "Well, Brandon and Dom have settled in; they seem to be fitting in. It's a pity about Christopher; he had the makings of a fine Thunderbird pilot."

"No, John, not the males, the females. I'm not interested in how Brandon and Dom have settled in."

John laughed. "Well, you didn't make yourself clear."

"Honestly, John, I don't want to discuss the males. Now what about the females?"

"Callie is very nice, very competent; she was very good working with me on Thunderbird Five. I have no concerns about her working up there on her own. She was excellent company; we discussed all manner of things, and we even had a bet on whose basketball team would win."

"So, whose did?" Alan asked.

"Hers," John replied, "but instead of making me do the chores, which the loser would have done, we shared, which was nice of her."

"I find Nikki very nice," Alan said, rather quietly.

"Oh?" John queried. "Nothing more?"

"We've had one or two chats, and I suspect that she had got the better of me on more than one occasion."

"She's a very good and conscientious nurse," John added.

Alan laughed. "And she had very definite views on the male population."

"Elise is very nice, although I haven't had much to do with her," John said. "I'm glad to see her coming along in her training on Two. I wonder how she'll do with Scott, training on One."

"That leaves Kat," Alan said.

"Ah yes, our mechanic," John replied. "We've talked a few times." Alan smiled.

"Well, I brought her to the island and returned her back home. I was the one who broke it to her about International Rescue. The other new recruits all knew, but for some reason Kat was quite unaware."

Alan raised his eyebrows. "I didn't know that."

"Well, she wasn't told about International Rescue until she had accepted the job. She was very hurt and angry when I told her. But that's history."

Alan just gave him a look. John turned to look out of the window. "She was very cut up about her mother having a serious operation. I called on her to offer my support, and we chatted for quite a while."

"Hmm. I had a conversation with her, too, recently. She asked my advice on whether or not to sell her Lotus Elise."

"And what did you tell her?"

"Not to sell. She considers it a prized possession and she should keep it."

"Hey!" John said with a smirk. "A first from you: good advice!"

Alan rolled his eyes as John laughed. Then the two brothers fell silent. Alan concentrating on piloting the jet, and John thinking about Kat. He had been more than a little surprised when he had confessed to Scott that he had feelings for her, only to be informed that Scott already knew. In fact, Scott had implied that Virgil, Gordon and Alan, not to mention Mrs Tracy, were aware. ~I wonder who else has seen it?

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/5/2005 3:40 PM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:21:38 GMT
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Tracy Island, Saturday May 19th, 4:15 p.m

Brandon sat by the swimming pool checking his dive gear. Gordon had told him about a coral reef on the other side of the island and he wanted to check it out. He was so preoccupied with making sure everything was working properly that he didn't hear footsteps behind him.

"Hi, Brandon," Kat came and sat down beside him. "Are you going to try out your gear in the pool? I'd love to watch you. If you have time, would you teach me?"

Brandon looked over at Kat's eager face and shook his head. "Sorry, not this time." He then explained where he was going.

Kat looked rather sad. Then she brightened up. "Would you let me accompany you? I could just sunbathe and watch you at the same time. It's rather quiet at the moment with Callie in Thunderbird Five and Alan and John away at the Monaco Grand Prix. Everyone else seems occupied at the moment."

Brandon thought a moment. He liked diving solo but at the same time he didn't want to disappoint Kat. Finally he spoke up. "I have a better idea. How about we go snorkeling instead? That way

you can enjoy the underwater beauty."

For a moment Kat's face lit up and then she looked unsure. "Actually, I haven't done much snorkeling, and I don't have any equipment of my own. Do you think I could borrow some from the Tracys? I'm sure they must have some spare equipment."

Brandon smiled reassuringly. "I'm sure Mr. Tracy won't mind you borrowing some equipment. Then you can practice in the pool before we go."

Kat's face brightened. "Thank you, Brandon. I'll go ask Mr. Tracy straight away and be back in a few minutes."

It wasn't long before Kat reappeared, a smile on her face. "There is plenty of equipment in that huge box at the far end of the pool." Brandon went along with her and, after much laughing and joking, managed to find some equipment that she was comfortable with. Then Kat followed Brandon back towards the edge of the pool. Standing on the edge, Kat remarked, "Okay, now what?"

"Now we get into the water," he replied in a deadpan voice. Kat blushed and followed him into the water. "Okay, you need to make sure your mask is tight. You don't want it to flood." Brandon knew what he was talking about. It had happened to him several times and it was not a pleasant experience. After making sure her mask was secure, he taught her the basics of how to breathe through the narrow plastic tube.

Slowly, Kat followed Brandon, gently placing her face under the water, and moving along at a slow pace. When they reached the end of the pool, they both stood in the shallow water. "Now, can we go snorkeling in the sea?" Kat asked, her enthusiasm showing.

"We'll do a few more passes in the pool to make sure you're ready, then we'll go." Brandon pushed himself off the side of the pool, Kat following behind him.

Kat and Brandon swam two more lengths. She was fit, but the effort of keeping her face and body under the water whilst swimming hard to keep up with Brandon, made her breathless.

"Hey, wait a minute. I need to catch my breath."

Brandon stopped swimming. "Sorry, Kat. I just wasn't thinking."

After a short breather, the two continued swimming up and down the pool. Eventually Brandon stopped swimming and said, "Okay, Kat, let's head for the beach."

The cabin cruiser approached the other side of the island, Brandon at the controls, with Kat standing beside him. Occasionally they would look across the water, seeing a pod of dolphins swimming in the distance. Finally, they arrived at their location and prepared to swim. She watched him in disgust as he spit in his mask and rinsed it off in the water.

"That's gross," Kat remarked as Brandon looked up at her with an amused look on his face.

"Hey, I know it looks bad, but it keeps the mask from fogging up."

Even though she felt disgusted at what he did, she thought that she had better do the same.

"Okay, Kat," Brandon said, replacing his mask. "Now just follow me." Going to the side of the boat, Brandon stepped down the boarding ladder, Kat following behind him.

They cleared the water from the snorkels and began a slow leisurely swim to the reef. Kat stared in amazement at what she saw. The brightly colored tropical fish swam to and fro, some disturbed by the human intruders.

The sea was a clear turquoise blue, and the fronds of seaweed and anenomes waved gently in the slow underwater currents. It was breathtakingly beautiful. When they arrived at the reef, the colours of the different corals looked almost luminescent in the clear water around them. Ooh, Kat thought, this is awesome.

For about an hour they swam around the reef, marveling at nature's colors. There was a moment when a large fish swam by them, surprising the two swimmers. Finally the water began to darken, telling them that it was time to head back.

The two climbed back on board the cabin cruiser. Taking off their masks and flippers, they both sat down on the deck. "Man, that was awesome! We must do that again sometime," Kat said. "I can't wait to tell Nikki and Elise how beautiful it was: all those colours, and the different fish. Wow!!."

"Of course we can do it again," Brandon replied as he started the boat's engine. As they headed home, they talked about the day's experiences.

Post by MagicMaster8 and TawnyAngel22 Sent: 10/5/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:21:54 GMT
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MONACO GRAND PRIX - PART TWO

Kenny Malone was waiting in the Arrivals lounge. He waved to Alan, and a moment later the two embraced, then Alan turned and indicated his brother. "I invited John along for this trip." They shook hands. "Great to see you again, John. I have a car outside. Where're you staying?"

Alan told him.

"Okay, I'll take you to your apartment. When you've freshened up we can go for a meal."

Once the luggage was placed into the car's boot, they left the airport. Kenny drove through the streets at a startling speed.

"Hey, Kenny," Alan laughed. "Just because the race drivers uses these streets doesn't mean that you have to drive like one of them."

"Oh, come on Alan, you can't pretend that you don't feel the adrenaline flowing. Given the chance, I bet you would drive equally as fast, if not faster."

After fifteen minutes of his fast driving, with a squeal of brakes, he pulled up outside a very palatial block of apartments.

John and Alan followed him into a large lift, arriving at the third floor. When they got out, they could see ahead of them a large ornate door. It opened into a large and highly decorated room. There were several other doors leading off. Ahead were some large French windows. Opening the windows, John found that the view of the sea and harbour, full of yachts and cruisers, was breathtaking. The apartment overlooked both the start and finish. At one end there was a large screen. This would enable them to see the entire race.

"I can't wait for tomorrow!" Alan stated enthusiastically.
After arranging to collect Alan and John later, Kenny left.

A few hours later, Kenny knocked on the apartment door. John opened it.

"Hi, Kenny, we're just coming." Alan shouted from his room. Both Alan and John had dress suits on.

Kenny led the Tracy brothers back down to his car. It was only a short drive to the restaurant. The waiter led them towards a table in an alcove at the rear of the restaurant.

Seated at the table three young women and a young man, much younger than Kenny, but so like him that Alan and John were not surprised when Kenny introduced him as his brother, Robert. Kenny introduced the young women. "May I introduce, Monique, Fabia, and Gabriella? They're very old friends. Monique and Fabia's boyfriends are mechanics for Ferrari, and Gabriella is my girlfriend. The ladies will be joining us at the casino tonight, but their boyfriends will be far too busy getting ready for the race." John and Alan shook hands with each of them.

Monique and Fabia both had their long blonde hair piled on top of their heads in curls. Monique had a figure hugging, long emerald green dress, with a low neckline and a high split. Fabia was wearing some tight black trousers, and a strapless Basque fastened down the back. After the meal in the restaurant, they hailed a taxi, and were driven to the casino. Once there they headed for the gaming tables.

"Come and play roulette," Monique said, leading John over to the tables. They sat down. The croupier passed some chips to Monique. "What number shall we have?"

"Oh, um, seventeen black." John grinned. He was beginning to enjoy himself. He had no idea where Alan and Fabia were, nor Kenny and Gabrielle. All he was aware of was Monique's perfume as she leant close to him.

"Dix-sept noir." The croupier spun the roulette wheel and tossed in the small ball. After a moment he called, "Vingt-cinq rouge."

"Oh, hard luck," Monique pouted. "Let's try again."

After several luckless games, John finally won. Soon Monique seemed to lose interest. "I don't see your brother and Fabia, nor Kenny and Gabrielle. Why don't we go back to your apartment for a nightcap?"

"What would your boyfriend think?" John asked.

Again Monique pouted. "He is busy, and not thinking about me. Why should I worry what he thinks?"

To John's relief, Alan appeared alone. "Where's Fabia?" Monique sounded sulky.

"Dunno," Alan replied. "She said she saw someone she knew, and she disappeared into the crowd."

"Maybe you should try and find her," John suggested diplomatically. Monique hesitated, and then hurried off.

"Did I appear at an inopportune moment?" Alan asked his brother.

"Well, she wanted the two of us to go back to the apartment for a nightcap," John said. "But she has a boyfriend."

"That obviously doesn't worry her," Alan said.

"Well, it concerns me. I think I'm heading back; coming with me?" John asked.

"Yes, let's go a hail a taxi." This was easier said than done; Monaco at the time of the Grand Prix was a very busy place. Finally Alan managed to get one to stop, giving the driver instructions for the apartment. Both brothers collapsed in the back; it had been a long day.

Alan and John stayed up late, discussing the girls and the casino. John was quite pleased that he had actually been lucky.

Soon after breakfast Kenny knocked on the door.

"Only you and Robert?" John enquired.

"Yeah. The ladies," Kenny explained, "have gone down to the pits."

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/6/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:22:18 GMT
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Tracy Island

After changing into her nightwear, Grandma Tracy sat at her writing desk in her room with her journal open in front of her. She thought for a few minutes, then began writing.

"May 19, 2068

"I noticed some strange behavior on the part of Alan, Brains and Tin-Tin at breakfast last Sunday. After thinking about it for a day or so, I decided to approach Kyrano, since after all he is Tin-Tin's father. He told me he had noticed it, too, and was considering talking to her about the situation. I suggested that we confront them together.

"He agreed, and the opportunity came that very day, when the two scientists didn't appear for lunch. We prepared trays for them and took them to Brains' lab. When we arrived, I was pleased to see them hard at work, and I noticed that Kyrano was, also. But what we thought they could do in that cluttered place, I can't imagine. I suppose we both expected them to be gone, maybe on the beach or out by the pool.

"I was glad when Kyrano took the initiative and asked his child what was going on. His cultural background enables him to be so tactful. I'm sure I would have been more direct. And Tin-Tin's reply was so respectful, and honest.

"She said, 'Father, after Alan broke things off with me, and the fiasco with Giles, I was very unhappy. Then when I realized at the ranch that I was finally over Alan, I wanted to celebrate. When I returned here, I saw Brains, and thought how good a friend he'd been all this time. Plus he's sweet, honest and up front, not to mention intelligent. He's thoughtful, and whenever we've been alone together, a perfect gentleman.'

"She went on to explain what happened the day after she returned to the island, then when Alan confronted Brains a couple of days later. Kyrano listened and I watched Brains while she talked. When she finished, I asked Brains how he felt about the whole situation.

He told us how much he admired Tin-Tin and enjoyed both a professional and friendly relationship with her. 'I find myself more than willing to pursue a closer relationship with her, if she wishes, and there is no objection. And we promise not to let it interfere with our work.' Tin-Tin agreed.

"Her father and I both told them we had no objection, but couldn't speak for anyone else. Then Kyrano said something to Tin-Tin in what I presume to be Malaysian, and she colored slightly, then smiled at him and hugged him. We left shortly after that.

"Later that same day, I told Jeff and Dianne what I had learned. Jeff looked thoughtful and Dianne looked at him questioningly. He smiled at her abashedly and told us that he'd taken his engineer for granted, not thinking about how he should have a personal life, as well as his professional one. I guess we are all that way. Brains is such a genius, coming up with so many scientific and technical discoveries, that we tend to forget he's a human being.

"I suppose I should have a chat with Alan about this, but I haven't been able catch him alone. I probably haven't tried very hard; this isn't a conversation I'm looking forward to having. But I will.

Grandma put down her pen and closed the book. She was tired and ready for sleep. Putting the book away in a drawer, she took off her robe and draped it at the foot of the bed. She slipped between the sheets and was soon asleep.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 10/7/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:22:54 GMT
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Sunday, May 20th, Tracy Island, Lunch time.

Elise rubbed her tired hand across her forehead. The headache looming in the back of her brain was threatening to burst forward at any moment. She inhaled deeply, then let it all out in a huff. Looking at her surroundings, she decided that Thunderbird One's interior wasn't as welcoming and, well... as cozy as Thunderbird Two's. Of course, now she'd be lucky if she could tell them apart. Sometimes it seemed as if the two machines were melded into one.

"Cross training? Whose bright idea was that?" she said aloud to herself.

Since the announcement had been made that she was to begin cross training on TB1 as well as continue training on TB2, Elise had been more tired than she'd ever been, more confused than she'd ever been and, to top it all off, she was now more burnt out than she'd ever been. "Flying used to be fun! What the hell happened?" was another thought spoken aloud. She knew exactly what the answer was: Scott Tracy. Sure, he was a great pilot and a great teacher, but did he have to be such a great pain in the rear?

Elise thought back over the last few days. She had read and re-read chapters of both manuals of One and Two and found herself mixing the two aircraft up. Not good! When Scott had first shown her the controls of One, she'd told him he was nuts.

"Are you SERIOUS? The ASI says 15,000 mph? That's ridiculous!" She smiled, as she remembered her statement and Scott's reaction.

"I'm VERY serious. Yes this 'Bird can reach that speed. I need to get to the disaster zones ASAP and assess the situation. I need a craft that can do the job, and I need it running at 110 percent, 24/7." His stern look had told Elise that it was best if she kept any further comments to herself for the moment.

The training had gone on like this every day. She'd question something and Scott would all but bite her head off. He was stressed because she had to split her time between Thunderbird One and Thunderbird Two, and yet he needed her to be a fully checked out pilot on One in less time than it would normally take. Elise was giving both aircraft everything she had. Unfortunately, she was now thinking she'd run out of everything she once had.

A sudden noise brought her back to the present. "Ready to try this again?" It was Scott. He was not happy and hadn't been since the practice flight earlier that morning.

Elise had powered up too fast; her launch was sloppy and the whole "horizontal-to-vertical-flight" changing thing had thrown her for a loop. She'd gotten the nose too far down once she'd attained horizontal flight and Scott had "reminded" her of it at least 3 times even after she'd corrected the problem. Wing retraction had been okay, and her vertical landing on an open strip on the other side of the island had improved, but tilting One and reversing her back into her launch bay had proven tricky. Needless to say, the ensuing conversation between teacher and student had been a very heated one!

"Yeah, sure, whenever you're ready," Elise replied.

"Well, don't look too enthusiastic. You might have to do this for a real emergency someday."

That did it! She was done! She mentally counted to ten before she spoke. "You know what? I've had it up to here!" she said loudly, a hand flattened out by her brow indicating just exactly where she'd 'had it' to.

"I'm done, Scott! I can't do this any more today! I need some food, so I'm going to lunch!" With that, she unbuckled her seat belt, and clambered out of the aircraft. She paid no attention to the yells and comments coming from Scott.

Without turning to look at him, she simply said, "Fly the damn thing yourself!" and walked off.

Scott muttered his own "Damn" and watched her go. He didn't want to be the bad guy, but he needed to get her trained. He knew she was giving it all she had, and in spite of himself, he admitted that she was very good and handled his 'Bird almost as good as he did. But there were times he didn't know whether to hug her or hit her! Memories of his Air Force days with her danced across his mind. "Good luck this afternoon, Virgil," Scott muttered aloud.

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 10/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:23:15 GMT
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Tracy Island. Lunchtime.

Once she'd walked out on Scott, Elise headed for the kitchen in the main house. Kyrano always had something good fixed and besides, her little apartment refrigerator was looking rather bare.

"Good day, Miss Elise," Kyrano said in greeting, bowing his head and smiling.

"Hello, Kyrano," came the almost dejected reply.

"Something is wrong, I see," said the Malaysian.

"Yeah, you could say that. So, what have you got going on in the way of lunch? I'm starved." Elise

obviously wanted to avoid the subject and Kyrano was wise enough not to pursue it.

"I am making various cold cut sandwiches. Just tell me what you would like and I will make you one as soon as I have finished preparing Mr. Virgil's."

"Oh, he's here?" she asked, glancing around the room.

"He just stepped out but will be returning shortly," Kyrano filled in.

Elise told him what she would like and then went to sit at the table. Virgil walked in just as she sat down and he immediately noticed how tired she looked. He turned to Kyrano who had just approached with sandwich plate in hand.

"What's wrong with Elise? Is she all right?"

"It is not for me to say, Mr. Virgil, but I would guess that something is wrong."

"Thanks, Kyrano," Virgil replied, taking the plate and heading towards Elise. "Mind if I join you?"

The blonde looked up at him. "No, go ahead, just as long as you're not planning to tell me how to eat my sandwich."

Uh oh Virgil was starting to recognize that 'look'. Something was definitely wrong. He made himself comfortable and waited until Kyrano had delivered her plate before continuing. "Let me guess: Scott, right?"

She looked at him silently for a few moments. How could this guy in front of me be possibly related to Scott? He's so much the opposite of him. "In a word--yes," Elise answered. "Virgil, I have had it up to here with him! I mean, he's a great pilot and all, but he's being such an ass!"

Virgil actually laughed.

"I'm serious, Virgil! How come he has to be like that?"

"Well, someone in this family had to be 'the ass' and he's the oldest, so it just kinda...."

"Oh, stop!" *Elise cut him off before he could finish, and he noticed she was smiling. He liked her smile.

"He's being tough on you, isn't he?"

"Yes. I understand why, and believe me, Virgil, I can take it, but he's absolutely driving me INSANE!"

"I'm sorry," Virgil offered as an apology for his overzealous brother.

"Not your fault. It's just with cross-training, I'm getting a little tired, that's all."

Virgil looked thoughtful for a moment and then suggested something. "Look, we can delay flying in 'Two until a little later, if you want. Instead, take some time for yourself to relax for a while."

She was almost shocked at his suggestion. "But your dad wants me checked out on both aircraft ASAP."

"I know, but I also know that a tired, stressed pilot can make sometimes fatal errors."

He was right and she knew it. She sat back and sighed deeply, glancing out of the window and the ocean and island around her. She turned her gaze back to Virgil.

"Okay, you win, Mr. Tracy! I'll go for a walk or something."

"Good." He winked at her.

Once they'd finished their lunch, they both stood to leave. On impulse she turned to Virgil

"Would you like to come for a walk with me?" "Sure, if you don't mind the company."

He smiled softly and suddenly Elise was very aware of how handsome Virgil was. She shook her head to clear her thoughts. She had enough on her mind without any more complications!

By FrankieCTB2

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:23:29 GMT
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MONACO GRAND PRIX - PART THREE

Alan, John, Kenny and Robert settled down to watch the race. Kenny had brought some cans of beer, and the balcony was cool with a breeze from the sea. From where they were situated they could clearly see the start. Twenty-five cars lined up with the current leader, the Italian, in pole position. The only British driver was in sixth.

The red lights came on, then the green light, and they all sped away on the promenade lap to warm up their tyres. Once round the track they again lined up, ready for the race to begin.

On the green light all the cars raced away, negotiating the right hand Virage St Devote for the first time, jostling for position on the dangerous corner. The Belgian driver was unlucky and his car touched with the Italian, and was forced to run off into the tyre wall.

Accelerating up the hill into Casino Square, the drivers had a chance to change gear. The road was slippery and the German driver nudged the British in an attempt to overtake. The British driver held his line and the German remained behind him.

"Wow!" Alan said. "This is great! Better than the Malaysian and I thought that was really

something."

Trying to out-accelerate the Italian, the Brazilian miscalculated and hit the barrier very hard, causing severe damage to his bodywork. He had to head for the pits.

The cars had to slow down for the tight left and right through Casino Square, and then they accelerated down the hill passed Hotel Metropole.

The beer was very welcome, and John was really enjoying the race. Robert was standing at times, shouting his head off.

Kenny looked at Alan. "Wishing you were down there?"

"How did you guess?" Alan replied.

On the cars raced, down through the hairpin at the Monte Carlo Grand Hotel and the sharp right hand past the fountains then into the Virage du Portier and the tunnel. Here the British tried to overtake the French and managed it, coming out of the tunnel into the bright sunlight at 170 mph.

"Great!" Kenny shouted. "With the Belgian taken off, that means that Jack is now in 4th. Could end with a podium finish if he can get past the Canadian."

"You're cheering the British?" John queried.

Kenny looked slightly sheepish. "Well, to be honest, the American driver was injured in the last race and is not taking part. Jack is a friend, so yes, I guess I am cheering for him."

A tight left-right chicane led into a short straight and then the swimming pool complex. This was followed by a hairpin turn of Virage Rascasse. Here the Canadian came undone as the driver completely blew it and ploughed into the barriers, thus making the way clear for the British to go into 3rd place.

As the cars roared past on to the second lap, the four young men cheered and shouted encouragement. Lap followed lap. The Italian had a terribly slow pit stop, which put him back three places. The British had incredibly bad luck with a puncture. On the final lap there were a few hair-raising moments, but the French finished in good style, followed by the Finnish and the Brazilian

"Let's go down and see the winners on the podium," Kenny suggested

Walking down to the street below, they battled through the milling throng of fans, sightseers and mechanics that were now spilling on to the streets. Eventually, they managed to get in front of the podium. This had been erected, just behind one of the main stands. All four cheered as they watched as the trophies were given and then the usual champagne fight, as the bottles were shaken, opened and sprayed over the winners and the crowd watching.

"Hi there!" a female voice shouted, and Monique hurried over to where they were standing. Fabia, and two young men, dressed in bright red, Ferrari team overalls, followed her. Smiling at John,

Monique introduced her boyfriend, Antonio, and Fabia's boyfriend, Carlos. Both young men shook hands with John and Alan.

"It was a good race?" Carlos asked.

"Yes, it was," Kenny answered. "Shame about your driver."

"Oh, next time it will be different. You'll see," Antonio replied. He linked arms with Monique and Fabia, saying, "Come on, girls. Let's go and see how Giuseppe is feeling." Then all four wandered away.

"Well, I think we had better be heading back to the airport and home," Alan told his friend.

"Before we go, I promised I'd buy something for Kat and Tyler," John explained as he went over to where souvenirs were being sold. He bought Kat a T-shirt and baseball cap. ~Too bad I can't get an autograph. Then he looked around for something for Tyler. Finally he bought him a T-shirt and a model racing car.

They said goodbye to Robert, and Kenny drove them to the airport, stopping at the apartment to collect their luggage. In the departure lounge, they all shook hands. "Until the next race?" Kenny asked hopefully.

"We'll see," Alan said. "But don't get your hopes up."

"Okay. Anyway, nice seeing you, John," Kenny added.

"Same here," John replied.

On the return, Alan said, "That Monique is very beautiful."

"Mm, yeah" John murmured. He sighed and closed his eyes. Yes, Monique was beautiful, but she had a boyfriend. Besides, he had someone else he'd rather think about.

Thanks to Tikatu and Hobbeth for these posts.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:23:45 GMT
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Sunday, May 20, Tracy Island. Early evening.

Although the training session with Elise had ended a while ago, Virgil was still putzing around on Thunderbird Two. He always found something to fiddle with or re-check. It was more habit than it was routine. His mind wandered back over the events since lunchtime.

Elise had been tired all afternoon, and although she made small, very subtle errors, he had caught them. He'd not said anything to her, knowing how stressed she'd been, but he certainly was going to say something to Scott! No one needed to be pushed as far as Scott was pushing her and Virgil knew that his brother knew it, too! Virgil's mind then wandered back to the after lunch walk he had shared with Elise.

****flashback****

"So how are you adjusting to life here--besides all the training that is?" Virgil asked as they walked slowly along the shoreline.

"I'm getting there, slowly, but getting there all the same." Elise replied, looking out to sea.

"That bad, huh?"

She glanced sideways at him, noticing how the wind ruffled his chestnut hair. "Well, it's not THAT bad!" She laughed. "It's just SO different from New York. It's like a whole different world out here. It's almost like it's not real. It's paradise, but with a rescue squad attached!"

Virgil laughed out loud. "I guess I've never seen it like that! It's just 'home' to me."

They continued walking and chatting and laughing until Virgil steered the conversation towards a more serious topic. "Elise? Can I ask you something personal?"

"Sure. What?"

He stopped walking and she did the same. Elise looked at him, waiting for his question. "Are you still having nightmares about the helijet accident?"

She averted her eyes for a split second, caught off guard. She recovered quickly and answered, "No, not about the accident. I know I still have a few fears to face about it, but the nightmare stopped a while ago."

Virgil understood those fears. He'd faced a few himself over the years, but there was still one question he needed an answer to. It had been bugging him since the night he'd heard her scream in the guest room and she was in the throes of a nightmare. He'd been there to comfort her, but she'd said some things that didn't make sense to him.

"Why do you ask?" Elise said.

Virgil looked softly at her, seeing her honesty and trust in her eyes. "I was just remembering the nightmare you had when you were in the guest room; you seemed to be scared of something other than that crash."

She seemed quite surprised that he'd still be concerned about that night. "Virgil, that was ages ago!"

"I know, but I still think you're bothered by something. I'm just concerned, that's all."

Elise started to stiffen. "Concerned that I'm going to crack under all this training pressure?"

~Damn it! This isn't how I want this to go. "No! That's NOT it. I feel like something is holding you back, Elise, and I want to help, if I can."

The anger she had started to show deflated and she remained silent for a few moments. She knew eventually she'd have to share with someone other than Callie. The sound of the waves lapping on the shore suddenly became louder and so did the silence between them. "Okay, you really want to know?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Fine. I'm ...," she drew in a breath before continuing, "I'm terrified of drowning. I still have nightmares about that day... that day when my parents... when they died." A sudden rush of unexpected emotion threatened to spill out of her in the form of tears, and she turned away from Virgil, who clearly saw that she was struggling. He took a step closer to her, then she continued talking. "That whole tsunami brought it all back again. If it hadn't been for your dad, I would've drowned. The water got me, and he grabbed me just in time. It was like being 9 years old again, struggling to stay above the water, watching the waves suck my parents under."

"Elise, I'm so sorry, honey." Virgil sincerely meant it, and just hearing him say it so compassionately almost broke her. But she was tougher than that and held it together. She turned back around to look at him.

"Virgil, I feel like I escaped death when I lost them, and I wasn't meant to. It's like death or fate is chasing me down. I've spent years flying and staying as far away from water as possible. Even if I had to fly over it, I took the route with the most land, and now I'm surrounded by water and I'm scared."

Virgil saw before him a frightened young woman who was trying to stay brave and mask her fears. He instinctively drew her close and put his arms around her in a comforting gesture which she accepted willingly. They stayed this way for a while, neither one speaking. Virgil was the first to eventually say something. "Do you think you'd like to talk this over with Dianne?"

"Maybe. I dunno. Maybe I'm just overreacting because I'm tired and stressed, and don't want to fail anyone."

"You won't fail, Elise. I'll make sure of it. Besides, Thunderbird Two told me she's starting to like the way you handled her!" He smiled and winked at her and she laughed a little.

"Yeah, I'm sure she did. Speaking of 'her' we'd better get some flying time in today."

"Yes, we should." They started making their way back towards the villa.

"Thanks Virgil, for listening and for understanding, I didn't mean to dump it all on you like that."

"S'okay, I have knack for getting 'dumped on'!"

They both laughed out loud, the tension from earlier now gone. The afternoon continued with training, the nightmare conversation was not brought up again. But Virgil noticed how it had affected her and he noticed how tired and irritable she became when things didn't go as smoothly as she wanted when flying Two.

****end flashback****

Virgil came back to the present. Glancing at his watch, he decided now was the perfect time to have that little chat with Scott! Elise was becoming a great pilot and he'd be damned if he let his brother's bullying and pressuring bring her down.

revelations by FrankieCTB2 Sent: 10/15/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 02:24:03 GMT
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*****Sunday, May 20, 2068; Thunderbird Five; around 9:30 p.m.*****

Callie stretched her arms after another long day of checking and flagging calls. "Oh, man, I never thought pressing so many buttons could do a number on my hands. I haven't done that in quite a long time." Sending a call to the base, she said, "There are several calls I'm keeping close tabs on, including possible volcanic activity at Mount Etna in Italy and the first tropical depression in the Eastern Pacific. The warmer waters around that depression will cause rapid strengthening."

Jeff nodded. "I understand, Ursa. Stay on top of those transmissions in case something develops out of either or both. Anything else to report?"

"Well, yes, sir, there is. I'm out of creamy peanut butter, and I've just got to have that with crackers and PB&J sandwiches."

After she heard Jeff chuckle, she asked, "Don't any of your sons eat peanut butter?"

"They normally won't eat it unless there's nothing left to eat. I guess we'll have to stock up on a lot of peanut butter on changeover. Speaking of my sons, it's nice to have all five of them together, and I have to thank you for making it possible."

Callie smiled. "It's good they have that extra time. To change the subject, sir, am I going to have to do any cross-training when I return to Earth?"

"You may have to, but we'll go into more detail about that when you get back."

"Okay, sir. I'm almost done with the daily diagnostic check. The communication systems are functioning properly, and the one bank to be emptied is almost done. Five more minutes, and then I'll head to bed."

"F-A-B, Ursa. Good night."

After ending the transmission, Callie saw the monitor read System Clear. "Ah, that's it. The daily check's done."

Going to the refrigerator, she grabbed a bottle of fruit-flavored water. Upon passing John's room, she noticed his plant. "Hmm, it looks like it could use some water." Looking at her water bottle, she said, "No, I don't think the plant would like the lime taste." Callie had to go into John's room to get to his little bathroom. "All I need is some regular H₂O, so there's no need for me to be nosy." After pouring water into the cup, she went back to "feed" the plant. "There you go. I know you need your good health for when John returns. Does Alan take good care of--" With a giggle she said, "I haven't talked to a plant since I was a kid."

Callie then went into her quarters and found her journal on the table near a photo of her family. Sitting on the bed, she grabbed the journal and nearby pen, opened the book, and started writing.

Today was another busy day, but once again, no calls for International Rescue to come out. I've been very lucky so far during my first solo run as space monitor. I think the most exciting call I've gotten so far this month was from that little boy, Peter Fink. He was so eager to do a report on us, even though I couldn't tell him too much. Not even John or Alan has had this problem before, so I got to have a first for IR while being up here. If he got a good grade, more power to him. I'll be going home in less than two weeks, but I have a feeling we'll be needed soon enough. The question right now is when.

It sure can be quiet and lonely up here. But like I told John when I came up here with him, it's the vital info I send back to Earth that makes all the difference.

I'm so happy Mom got her flowers and card on time. Because I completely forgot about the time difference between here and Opp, I actually thought I was too late.

She sighed as she continued writing.

Sometimes I worry that a call could come from my own family, and they would immediately recognize me if I responded. I pray nothing happens to my family. If they do have to call, I hope it'll be a time when either John or Alan is up here.

Well, that's all I can think of for now. I need some sleep because tomorrow will be another day of pressing buttons and checking calls.

After closing her journal, she walked to the closet. She took off her uniform and changed into a comfortable nightgown. Upon finishing her water, she tucked the bottle away for later recycling. Entering the bathroom, she brushed her teeth and then her hair with the hairbrush in her right hand. When she was done stroking her hair, she tied it up in a bun for the night, her way of keeping her hair straight while sleeping. Finally walking out of the bathroom, she pulled down the blanket and slipped under it. With a smile she looked at her family photo before she turned out the light for the evening.

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 10/15/2005

Tracy Island, Monday May 21 st 2068, night time

Kat felt restless, sleep seemed to be denied her. She got up and opened the French windows, and looked at the clear starry night. ~I wonder! she thought to herself. Getting dressed, she left her apartment and made her way up onto the roof where John kept his telescope.

Everything was quiet and peaceful. She had just readjusted the telescope so that she was able to look through the lens, when an amused voice, made her jump.

"Someone else having difficulty sleeping?"

"Oh, John, you startled me, I hope you don't mind. Yes, I couldn't sleep and the stars looked so welcoming. I just had to come and have a look." Kat replied.

John came over to her side. "You'll always be welcome here, Kat," he said.

Suddenly a shooting star shot across the sky.

"Look at that!" Kat remarked. "Make a wish," and she closed her eyes.

On opening them, she saw John looking at her with amusement in his eyes.

Feeling foolish, she said, "I guess it is just superstitious nonsense."

"Well, you never know, wishes can come true," John replied.

He thought back to a few days earlier, when they had all been sitting round the pool. He had been unable to take his eyes off her, a fact that his brothers hadn't failed to notice. He had looked at Gordon, who was rolling his eyes in a lovesick manner, with his hand pressed against his chest. John had left them to their silly games, hoping that Kat hadn't noticed. Now, back on the roof, he wasn't sure how to approach her.

"It's sure great to have all you new personnel here on the Island," he said, "and it's a great help and relief to Dad, and in fact to all the family."

"It's great to be here," Kat replied. "Just think that my world has been turned upside down in the space of a few months. Last New Year's Eve Party at Creighton Manor, I met your family, and now here I am actually working for International Rescue."

Suddenly another shooting star flashed across the sky. John closed his eyes. Kat laughed and closed her eyes as well.

On opening his eyes, John looked at Kat and said, "I have a feeling that our wishes might come true."

Kat blushed.

"It depends on what we wished," she said.

John smiled at her.

"Well, I think I might have a remedy for your sleeplessness," he said.

"Whatever you think will be wonderful," Kat said.

John was taken aback slightly by the tint of adoration in her tone. He cleared his throat and continued.

"I thought we could go down to the kitchen and make some hot chocolate."

Kat nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh, gosh, that would be lovely!"

They headed for the kitchen, where John made their drinks. They chatted about both their hobbies and interests. Kat talked about the times she used to ride.

"Did you compete?" John asked.

"Sometimes, although I wasn't very good. Mainly I rode for pleasure, just riding through the countryside. You simply can't beat riding a horse really early in the morning in summer. Everything is so quiet and peaceful. It seems as you and the horse were the only two living beings." She flushed slightly. "Sorry I get carried away when I am talking about horses." Kat laughed, and then glanced at him "Did you ride whilst you were at the ranch during Cherie's birthday celebrations?"

John replied that, yes, he had, but nothing more than a steady hack around the ranch.

"I suppose you ride western?" Kat queried. "I'd love to try that style."

"Maybe you will someday" John answered her, hoping that she would get a chance to go to the ranch.

Suddenly Kat tried to stifle a yawn.

"Oh, my, I do apologize, John," she said, "but I really must head for my apartment, otherwise I shall fall asleep here."

John walked with her back to her apartment.

"Goodnight Kat, and thanks for the company,"

"Goodnight, John and thank you for the hot chocolate." Kat replied, letting herself into her

apartment.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/16/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 19:39:25 GMT
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Tracy Island, Tuesday, May 22nd 2068. Early morning.

Even though the sun had barely started to rise on the horizon, some of the inhabitants of Tracy Island were already up and about to start their day. Virgil Tracy was one of them. Although he was known for his usual habit of sleeping later than his brothers, today was not one of those days.

He poured himself some freshly made coffee and headed out through the lounge to the balcony. Sipping the hot liquid carefully, he gazed out over the ocean admiring the glorious colors of the early morning. His keen artist's eye noted every color and hue as the hazy sun began to rise. It was peaceful this time of day, unless there was a rescue being launched. Then there would be a buzz of rushed activity with his brother Scott in full Commander mode.

Virgil looked about him. Scott would be shocked to see him up before the sun! Scott was always first up, but not this time. Nope, Virgil was up and it was Scott's fault that he was.

Gulping down another mouthful of coffee, Virgil's mind recalled the reason for his lack of sleep this past night: Scott and his training methods with Elise.

****flashback****

Virgil had intended to find Scott when he'd left Thunderbird Two on Sunday night but Scott had been engaged in a serious game of pool with Gordon and Brandon and by the time they were done, Virgil had fallen asleep watching a movie. So it was Monday morning before the two brothers were able to be alone long enough to have 'a chat'.

"What's on your mind, Virge?" Scott asked, knowing automatically by the way Virgil walked onto Thunderbird One's gantry and into the cockpit that something was bothering his brother.

Virgil thought he had carefully planned what he was going to say, but the more he thought about how miserable Elise was, the more angry he got about it.

"Scott, just what in the hell are you trying to do to Elise?"

Scott's blue eyes met his brother's brown ones. He sighed. "I'm trying to do what Dad wanted me to do. Cross-train her to fly One ASAP." He turned his focus back to what he was working on.

"Well, it's not working! You need to ease up on her, Scott. She's exhausted and making mistakes!"

Again, Scott stopped what he was doing and looked his brother in the eye. Virgil rarely raised his voice to anyone and the fact that he was doing it now showed Scott that there was a problem.

"Damn it, Virge! We need backup pilots and if I didn't think she could handle it, I wouldn't push her! She knows the expectations and she's more than capable of meeting them!"

"That may be, Scott, but your pushing her harder than you need to. She's not one of us! You can't expect her to live up to the Tracy standard that we've all had to since we were born. It comes easy for all of us and I think you're forgetting that."

Scott didn't like his brother's outburst and didn't appreciate being told how to train Elise. "Don't you dare stand here and preach to me about forgetting who I am and why we're here." Scott was now pointing an angry finger at Virgil. "I trained her in the Air Force and I'll have her trained as backup on Thunderbird One before you know it!"

"Great, Scott, just great," came the reply, dripping with sarcasm. "And just when do I get to train her on the pod vehicles? Hmmm? Not to mention she needs practice in dropping Four with Gordon on board!"

Scott hadn't actually thought about that aspect of the training on Thunderbird Two. His concern was getting her checked out as a pilot for both aircraft. He sighed deeply.

"We need to refigure this schedule with her, Virge. I don't want anyone feeling like they're being pushed over the edge." He thought for a moment. "How about I get her for one full day, she takes a day off and you get her for...say, 2 days? Then she gets one off and I get her back?"

Virgil digested this proposal and looked at his brother. "Sounds even crazier than what we're doing now, but I guess we'll try it."

Scott was offended. "What do you mean 'even crazier'? Damn it, Virgil, you got a better idea?"

"What I meant was that neither one of us, especially you, can take her for more than half a day without want to kiss her or strangle her! And no, I don't have a better idea." He sounded defeated, but managed a smile when he saw Scott grinning at his comment.

"I told you, bro, she does that to you! Now, who owes who the hundred bucks you mentioned at the start of all this training with Elise?"

****End of flashback***

Virgil swallowed the last gulp of his coffee. Today they started the new schedule. He would have Elise for 2 days, but at least Gordon would be there for part of it. Why did he have to be the one to break the news to her about the revised schedule? He turned around to head back into the villa and all but bumped right into Scott.

"You're up early. Are you okay?" asked Scott, genuinely concerned. Virgil was never up first, not even on Christmas morning. That was always Gordon's shining moment.

Virgil looked at him. "Elise. Two days. Remember?"

"Ah. Yes. I do remember. It'll be okay; underneath it all, she's an ace in the air."

"I know, Scott. It's on the ground where I fear for my life!"

They both chuckled, glad to be once again at ease with each other.

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 10/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 19:40:23 GMT
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Tracy Island, Wednesday, 23rd May 2068.

The celebrations of the barbeque died down slowly and most of the Island occupants began to leave the beach and head to the villa in small groups.

Gordon frowned when he noticed that Tin-Tin and the new female recruits were walking off in a different direction. He also Dianne tenderly kiss his father before joining them. "Hold up, where are you going? The villa's this way."

"We know, but we had something planned for Kat over at Nikki's apartment," Elise explained.

"Really? What?" Alex asked sounding excited.

"Just a little girls' night."

Gordon put on a look of someone who just got their feelings hurt. "And you didn't invite me?"

"You're not a girl," Cherie replied snarkily, as she followed her father up to the Villa.

"Then why aren't you going?" Alex taunted.

"She's not old enough," Jeff replied. "Come on, boys, Cherie."

"Sorry, Gordon." Nikki shrugged. "Maybe next time."

The women left Gordon pondering on what would happen that night. His thoughts were interrupted by someone tugging at his sleeve. Gordon looked down at his younger brother.

"I bet it'll be boring anyway." Alex wrinkled his nose slightly.

"Maybe, maybe not. I want to know what they're going to be up to."

"Gordon, don't you dare," John warned as he walked past his brothers with Scott and Virgil.

"I wasn't going to." Gordon held up his hands as if surrendering to someone. When his father and elder brothers disappeared, he pulled Alan and Alex towards him. Brandon and Dom curiously joined them. Gordon looked at the group. "I've got a plan."

"If it has anything to do with crashing their little do, count me out." Dominic shifted Josh from one arm to the other.

"Same here," Brandon said.

"Ok, then. It's just my brothers and me." Gordon put his hand on Alan and Alex's shoulder. He then looked at them as he voiced his plan. "Right! This is what we'll do."

Kat looked back at the three Tracy brothers. "What do you suppose they're whispering about?"

"Probably up to no good, if I know Gordon," Dianne replied.

"Well, they had better not try any tricks," Elise added, laughing.

Tin-Tin and Dianne followed Kat and Elise to Nikki's apartment. Nikki had gone ahead to organise the drinks and nibbles. Kat and Elise brought in extra chairs. Soon everyone was chatting and enjoying the fruit punch that Elise had provided.

"So then, Kat, are you looking forward to seeing your parents?" Dianne asked.

"Will there be any old boyfriends waiting to see you again?" Nikki asked.

Kat shook her head. "I never had any boyfriends."

"Can't believe that," Nikki said. "Surely, there must have been one."

Kat laughed. "Well, yes, there was one."

"Do tell!" Elise and Nikki chorused together.

"He was more a friend than a boyfriend."

"There is a difference?" Tin-Tin asked.

"We went out with a crowd of friends, though sometimes on our own. Nothing serious. Bowling, skating, that kind of thing. His family moved away and we lost touch. It was never that serious."

Gordon crept along the balcony with his brothers. He was hoping that they could see and hear what was going on without being detected. Alex edged his way past Gordon only to feel a firm hand on his shoulder.

"I'll go first. I don't want you to get in trouble," Gordon said. "At least, if I'm seen, you can make a run for it."

Alex was about to protest, but then thought of what might happen if he got caught. "Go ahead."

Gordon continued his creeping until he reached Nikki's window.
Alan smiled before whispering, "Score."

Kat glanced at the others. "So who's next for the confessional?"

"I don't have any interesting confessionals," Nikki stated.

Elise laughed as she said, "Oh please. I know a certain story..."

"No."

"Where Nikki..."

"Elise. Don't go there."

"Was absolutely..." Elise saw Nikki's eyes narrow and laughed once more. "Never mind." A few faces had a look of disappointment.
Nikki shook her head at Elise.

Outside, a few other faces looked disappointed, too.

"I wonder what the story was?" Alan asked.

Gordon shrugged. "I don't know. Why don't you go in there and ask her?"

"Sure Gordon, sure," came Alan's reply. He lightly punched Gordon's arm. As Gordon wasn't expecting it, he stumbled forward ever so slightly and knocked one of the balcony seats. "Maybe they didn't hear it," Alan hoped.

His hopes were soon dashed when they heard voices calling, "Did you hear something?" and "It sounded like it was coming from the balcony".

Gordon turned to his brothers and whispered for them to run. When they reached the bottom of the steps, they hid in the shadows as they heard a door open and Nikki speak before closing the door again.

"Whoever it was is nowhere to be seen," Nikki said as she sat down.

"Why do I get the feeling it was the three whispering Tracys." Tin-Tin got herself a drink before relaxing in her seat again.

"Well, whoever it was, they're gone now. So we can continue," Kat replied.

"You know what I want to know is, if it's not too personal?" Nikki looked at Dianne. "How long did it take to realise that you needed to and could move on after your first marriage?" Nikki thought

about it. "I'm sure there was a better way the phrase that. You don't have to answer it if you don't want to. It's just that after my mum divorced my father, she felt for a long while that she would be betraying us, her children, if she got into another relationship."

Dianne took a deep breath before answering. "About three years, I guess. My relatives, my mother and uncle in particular, kept pushing me to move on--not necessarily to remarry, but to get away from the sad memories and the bad feelings that had surrounded us as a family as a result of the bombing."

She sighed. "A lot of people had blamed my husband for the bombing, and as a result, I wasn't the most popular woman in town, especially since I refused to keep silent about my husband's innocence. I thought that as the investigation progressed, and it began to become clear that Rick had nothing to do with what had happened, that he'd been as much a victim as everyone else, things would change. But they didn't. And I was getting weary in spirit trying to defend him. That weariness didn't do my kids any good, and I could see that I had to do something to give myself a new purpose so I could be the mother that they really needed. Uncle Andrew's recommendation, and Jeff's hiring me seemed to be the perfect solution. Coming here was as much for my children as it was for me. It was an attempt to start fresh."

Dianne blushed and smiled. "It wasn't long before Jeff and I butted heads! I don't know if you've heard the story, but Jeff didn't tell me about IR right away." She went on to tell the listening women about her first weeks as the Tracy family physician and the stunning way she found out about the family's secret.

"I remember!" Tin-Tin said, shaking her head. "The next few weeks were not pleasant. Dianne was either giving Jeff the cold shoulder, or they were having shouting matches in the lounge. My father finally took a hand and told Mr. Tracy he should apologize."

"Did he?" Elise asked. She looked around at the other women. "I mean, if Mr. Tracy is anything like his eldest son, apologizing isn't high on his list of things to do."

The women chuckled, and Dianne said, "Yes, he eventually did. That broke the tension and we started getting to know one another better. And... here we are, married for a year and a half and very much in love." She paused, then said thoughtfully, "I think the difference is that my husband was gone, totally out of the picture, and so was Lucille. That left us free in a way. And the fact that Jeff really wanted to be a father to my kids was a big help. Alex had a real hard time with the idea of getting a new dad, but Jeff made it a point to reach out to him especially. It wasn't just the two of us having a relationship, it was about all of us having one on some level or another." She cocked her head at Nikki. "Does that make any sense?"

Nikki nodded. "Yes, it does. I wish my mother had realized that she could've moved on with her life when she felt ready and not wait until my siblings and I were older. I would never have thought she was betraying us. The same went with my brothers and sister. It's her life and she has the right to lead it the way she wants."

"Is she leading a happy life now?" Tin-Tin asked.

"Yes," came the answer from Nikki.

Dianne nodded her approval. "That's good to hear."

Nikki smirked. "Who wants to move onto something else?"

"You know, I would've loved to see your wedding ceremony to Jeff," Kat smiled.

"Me, too," Elise said.

Nikki held her hand up like she was in a class and wanted permission to say something. "Would it be too predictable if I said 'me three'?"

"Well, I can't say anything. I was there myself," Tin-Tin concluded.

Dianne smiled. "I do have it on vid, and you're welcome to see it if you like. It was quite a production! We knew that the press would be all over us if we held it away from home, so we decided to have it here, on the island. Jeff wanted to make it as private an event as he could, and everyone involved was sworn to secrecy, including the guests." She shook her head and rolled her eyes. "Not that it helped much!"

"An old friend of Jeff's, a former Air Force chaplain, performed the ceremony. My mother and brothers and their families were here, and so were my uncle and his family. There were lots of Jeff's friends and some of his business acquaintances. It was a pretty big party, and Jeff said it was one of the few times that both the Round House and the Cliff House were full. One of the doors that exited into Thunderbird Two's hangar was taken out and a temporary wall put in so that people staying in the Cliff House wouldn't suspect anything."

"What about IR?" Nikki asked. "What did you do about that?"

"We were on stand down for roughly four days. For the first time, Thunderbird Five was empty and on automatic, and we were not responding to calls. It was a tough decision to make, but necessary. All of us hoped and prayed nothing happened while during the wedding preparations and while the ceremony was going on."

"The wedding planners' crews built a big wooden platform between the villa and the Round House, covered it with a tent, and that's where we held everything. It was a really warm day and I have no idea how Jeff and the boys coped with their tuxedos! I was hot enough in my dress and it was sleeveless!"

"Tin-Tin was one of my bridesmaids, and Cherie was a junior bridesmaid. One of my sisters-in-law was my matron of honor, and Penelope was in the wedding party, too, as a bridesmaid. My attendants wore tea length, turquoise dresses with empire waists, spaghetti straps, and ribbons tied just below the bodice. They each wore an orchid over one ear, and carried bouquets of tropical flowers."

"What was your dress like?" Kat asked, her eyes wide and shining.

Dianne smiled. "Well, I didn't wear white. I wore a very, very pale blue that was a pastel of the

turquoise. The dress had lace cap sleeves, and beaded A-line bodice, then a chiffon skirt. No train. But it was designed especially for me by François Lemaire, and was made of Penelon."

"Did you have flowers in your hair?" Nikki asked.

"No, Penelope lent me one of her tiaras. Jeff wanted to buy me one, but I didn't see the need for it."

"Jeff had Kyrano as his best man and Scott, Virgil, and Alex as groomsmen. The other boys were ushers. They wore pale gray tuxedos with white shirts and ties to match the turquoise dresses, except for Jeff, of course, whose tie was white. My uncle gave me away, and Tyler was the ring bearer."

"After the ceremony, we had pictures taken, and while that was going on, the crews cleared the platform for dancing and a buffet. We had a small band playing mostly early 20th century classics and both a male and female vocalist to sing. Kyrano kept trying to hover over the buffet; he was not pleased with the head caterer's attitude. But the food was wonderful, and Kyrano finally had to admit it."

Nikki grinned when a mental picture of Kyrano hovering over the buffet made itself present.

"Who caught the bouquet?" Elise wanted to know. "And did you do that... that garter thing?"

"Yes, we did," Dianne replied, giving Tin-Tin a playful look, which set the Malaysian girl to blushing. "Tin-Tin caught the bouquet."

"Oooh!" the other women said, with Kat adding, "Who caught that garter?"

Tin-Tin rolled her eyes. "Gordon."

That set the small group to laughing. "Oh, I can just see it!" Elise crowed. "I bet he put that thing as high up your thigh as he could!"

"Ahem... yes, he did," was all that Tin-Tin would say.

Kat laughed. "I'd like to see the recording of the wedding someday."

"Same here," Nikki replied.

"Just let me know when you would like to view it," Dianne said with a smile.

The night continued with the girls reminiscing about their past until they were too tired to remember.

Girls night brought to you by Tawnyangel22, Tikatu and Nikki-browneyes. Sent: 10/25/2005

Thursday 24 May 2068, Tracy Island, 10.15am

Virgil found himself once more out on the balcony, a cup of coffee clutched in one hand. At least today it's at a decent hour! No more of those early mornings for me. And, once more, he found himself thinking back on the training of the new recruits. I think we've been lucky with who we've gotten, he thought as his eyes swept out across the churning ocean. Elise is coming along fine. She'll be trained up before we know it. Dom, on the other hand... Virgil took a sip of his coffee, his brows drawn, and thought back on the last training session he had scheduled for the man.

"Holy bejayzuss!"

Virgil chuckled as Dominic practically fell into the pilot's seat of Thunderbird Two. He did it every time. And it was always very funny.

"God, my back..." Dom shot a sharp glance at Virgil. "Who designed that thing? What about a nice, normal lift?" he asked as the seat straightened up and the steering gear pushed out.

"Myself and Brains came up with the idea," Virgil said, chuckling. "It's quicker. It's also useful for having people make ungraceful entrances."

Dominic sniffed pointedly and sat up in the seat. Virgil shook his head and tried to wipe the grin off his face, though he didn't have a lot of success. Instead, he was sure to stay behind Dom as the man went through the pre-flight checks and procedures that they had practiced so many times before in the simulator.

"There's a helluva lot to memorize," Dom commented.

"You say that every time," Virgil said.

"I know. And it doesn't change."

Virgil had been watching Dom closely. He was getting better. Certainly, he wasn't perfect, but he was getting better. Today wasn't the first time that he had taken TB2 up for real. Even so, there was a slight shake in Dom's hands, and Virgil twisted his lips into a frown. He's still hesitant, still worried. Maybe it'll take an actual rescue to get his confidence up. No offence to him, but I hope it doesn't come down to that any time soon. He's probably not ready for a baptism of fire just yet.

Soon enough they were heading up the runway, emerging from the massive cave hangar into the sunlight. The great ship was raised up on the ramp, and Virgil saw Dom mouthing the sequences as he went through them.

"Okay, here we go..."

The muffled roar of the massive craft's powerful engines burst to life, and Thunderbird Two rose up into the air, Dom's hands firmly clamped on the steering gear.

"Steady, now," Virgil said as Dom began to level her off. "Keep it gentle. Like we talked about before."

The rest of the flight didn't go too badly. Virgil chalked it up as a success. If only he would relax a little more. I know flying this 'Bird is a serious business; I would kill him if he didn't take it seriously, but hell, being as coiled as a spring doesn't help either. By the time TB2 was tucked up in her hangar, and the two men were ready to leave, Dom had unwound somewhat.

"How'd I do, Chief?" He asked as they headed for the lift back to the villa.

"You're getting better," Virgil said. "Some of the manoeuvres still need work, but you're shaping up nicely," he gave Dom a grin. "But..."

"There's always a 'but'," Dom said, the grin slipping off his face.

"You're too tense," Virgil said plainly. "You need to relax a bit more. You'll find that if you don't worry too much, things will come much easier. That's not to say," he hastened to add, "that you stop taking all of this seriously. I just think that you need to unwind a little bit when you're flying."

"It's not easy. Relax? Bloody hell, I'm flyin' about sixteen bazillion tons of metal and you say to relax a bit!"

"It'll come to you," Virgil said.

On the balcony, Virgil finished off his coffee, and let the mug dangle from his fingers. I only hope it does come to him, he thought, sooner rather than later. With a shake of his head, he deftly swung the mug up into his palm, and headed back to the kitchen for another.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 10/25/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:02:33 GMT
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Tracy Island, May 24th

Tin-Tin asked for clearance to take off.

"You're cleared for takeoff." Scott's voice came over the radio. "Have a good birthday, Kat. See you when you get back."

"Thanks, Scott," Kat replied.

Tin-Tin skillfully piloted the little Ladybird skyward and Kat settled down to enjoy the journey. Kat's thoughts went back to the previous evening and the surprise birthday barbecue her friends had held for her on the beach. It has been lovely, sitting on the beach, watching as Virgil and Scott had cooked. They made sure that there was plenty of vegetarian food. She blushed as she remembered that John had been particularly attentive, and she had enjoyed and encouraged those attentions. She also had fond thoughts about the girls' night that Nikki and Elise had arranged. She almost laughed aloud at the antics of Gordon and his brothers trying to find out just what was going on.

Thoughts of John brought back this morning and her present from him. She remembered clearly everything. He had sought her out, finding her in her apartment, doing a final check on her packing. She had been sitting on her case, trying to fasten it, when her door chimed. Sighing, she got off, and the suitcase instantly sprang open. Opening the door, Kat found a smiling John.

"Hi, John, come in. I am losing a battle to shut my case."

John entered, closing the door behind him and putting a small parcel on the floor. At her invitation, he sat on the case, managing to close and lock it.

"Gee, Kat, how long are you going for? A year?"

Kat smiled. "Only five days, but the British weather at this time of year can be so unpredictable. I'm catering for all weather types."

John shook his head and chuckled. He bent down to retrieve the parcel and handed it to Kat.

"Happy Birthday."

It was a fairly large, slim package, wrapped in pale blue wrapping paper. Kat opened it to reveal a painting of a Palomino mare and foal, grazing in a meadow in the summer.

Colouring slightly, Kat glanced at John. "It's beautiful. Thank you so much. I love Palominos." And standing on tiptoe, she kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"I'm glad you like it. I thought that something with horses would be okay."

"Okay? Oh, John, it's lovely and I know just where I'm going to hang it."

John had offered to help her hang the picture. She had been unable to offer him any refreshment, explaining that she would be stocking up with provisions whilst she was home.

And now she was heading towards home and the family that she still missed very much. Watching Tin-Tin as she piloted the tiny plane, Kat's thoughts led to Mr Tracy's talk with them all following Christopher's departure, and his expressing the need for more pilots.

"Tin-Tin," Kat said, "After Mr Tracy told us all that Christopher had left International Rescue, everyone began discussing cross training. So I was just wondering, would you, could you?" Kat faltered, remembering that Christopher had had feelings for Tin-Tin. "I'm sorry. Maybe I shouldn't

have mentioned him

Tin-Tin smiled. "Don't worry, Kat. Christopher is history now, I'm afraid. What were you going to say?"

"Well, I was wondering whether you would be prepared to give me some flying lessons. I have had some time in the simulator, but now I think that perhaps I should try piloting a real plane again. I have to say that I have tried in the past to learn to fly with Lady Penelope and also in the simulator with Scott." Here Kat sighed. "I wasn't exactly a shining success either time."

Tin-Tin smiled at the young woman. "I would be happy to teach you, as long as we get the A-OK. We'll sort it out when you're back on the island."

The two young women chatted about the latest fashions and Tin-Tin expressed her keenness to shop in London. Soon Tin-Tin was requesting permission to land at Creighton-Ward Manor.

"Permission granted, Miss Tin-Tin," Parker's voice was clear. "Welcome, and welcome back, Miss Kat."

Parker showed Tin-Tin and Kat to their rooms. After they had showered and changed into fresh clothes they came back down to the dining room where Lady Penelope had laid on a special meal for them.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/25/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:04:17 GMT
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England, May 25th -- Kat's home

Kat drove her beloved Lotus Elise through the estate, exiting at the gate by the West Lodge. Seeing Lofty in the garden, she stopped the car and got out.

"Hello, Lofty."

"'Ello, Miss Kat. I 'eard as what you wuz coming home for a few days."

Kat smiled. "I'm off to see my parents, but I shall be spending a day with Lady Penelope. We can catch up on news then."

Getting back into the car, Kat continued her drive along the familiar roads keeping away from the busy motorways. She pulled up outside her parents' house, sitting in the car for a few moments to collect her thoughts and calm herself. However, her mother had been watching, and as soon as the car pulled up she was out of the door and down the garden path.

"Kat! Oh my darling! It's so wonderful to see you."

Kat got out of the car and gave her mother a hug. "Mum, oh Mum! It's so nice to be home."

Laughing, mother and daughter, their arms around each other, headed indoors.

"Dad!" Kat hugged her father, and then she noticed Andrew and Melanie, and hugged them, too. She gasped in amazement, for entering the room were her eldest brother and his family.

"Timothy!" Smiling, her brother embraced her, and she stepped forward to hug her sister-in-law, Suzi, her niece, Estelle, and her nephew, Jake.

"We heard that you were coming home for your birthday. I had some holiday due and we felt that we should be here as well," her brother explained.

"Oh, what a lovely surprise, my whole family here! This is so wonderful!" Kat had tears in her eyes.

Her father brought a bottle of champagne and some champagne flutes. After he had filled one for each of them, he raised his glass, "To Kat! Happy Birthday, darling."

"To Kat! Happy Birthday," everyone chorused.

While her father, helped by the others, was preparing the evening meal, Kat found time to be alone with her mother.

"You're looking well, darling, though you're still very thin. They're not working you too hard, are they?"

Kat laughed and shook her head. "No, Mum, they are very kind, and the work is very easy, really, not much harder than when I was working for Lady Penelope."

"From what I have heard, there are five sons. Do you see much of them?"

"Mum, you're fishing," Kat replied. But she couldn't help the colour rising in her cheeks, something that her mother noticed.

"Aha? Is there someone you are interested in?"

"Mum", Kat blushed even more. "Well, one of the sons is very attentive, and he is so terribly nice."

Mrs Williamson looked delighted. "Oh, Kat, I would love to see you settled with the right man."

"MUM! I have only been there three months."

Mrs Williamson looked fondly at her daughter. "Okay, I'll not mention it again. But maybe..."

Kat breathed a sigh of relief; she didn't want her mother to ask any more awkward questions.

Kat enjoyed a very nice meal that night, and opened her presents. Her parents had given her a tiny gold watch. Tim and family had given her a set of her favourite pop group CDs, and Andrew and Melanie gave her a small gold locket on a thin chain. That night Kat went to bed in the tiny box room, and slept soundly, except for a dream about John, which sadly, she couldn't remember at all the next morning.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/25/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:05:02 GMT
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Saturday, May 26; London; 12:30 PM (12:30 AM May 27 on Tracy Island)

Tin-Tin and Lady Penelope were seated at a quiet table in an upscale restaurant. They'd spent the morning at a fashion show, then shopping, and both were in need of rest and sustenance. Penny had sent Parker off to get himself some lunch and return two hours later.

"Oh my," Tin-Tin exclaimed after opening the large menu. "I'm going to have some trouble deciding what I want to order. It all sounds so good!"

"That's fine, dear. You take your time. But please excuse me; I have to go powder my nose," replied Penny.

Tin-Tin looked up at her friend. "Of course. I'll be waiting."

The aristocrat got up and walked off, leaving Tin-Tin perusing the menu. She was startled a moment later to hear a voice say, "Why, Miss Kyrano! We meet again. And London has just become lovelier because you are here. Why didn't you let me know you were coming? And why haven't you been in touch lately? Please don't tell me there is someone else; it would devastate me."

She looked up to see Giles sitting himself in the chair just vacated by Penelope. She looked coolly at him. "Mr. Tallman. Or should I say Mr. Hightower?"

His smile slipped slightly, then returned, but was not as congenial as before. "I am found out. Oh dear. How did you know?"

"Oh, come now. That virus you sent me in your all-too-brief email was a pretty good clue. Then when we found out that there were similarities to viruses sent to Tracy Industries branches in different locations and someone associated with the Hightowers - by his own admission -- planted another one in Lena Matumbo's personal computer, well we put things together and came up with the answer. Now, if you don't mind. . ."

"Tin-Tin, that virus was a surprise to me, I promise you. And I used a different surname for a very

good reason. I wanted you to like me for myself, and not judge me because I'm a Hightower. And you did like me, didn't you?"

"What I liked was a lie. And I don't believe you now. So I suggest you leave."

Instead he reached across the table and took the menu from her with one hand, grasping her hand with the other. "Tin-Tin, don't say such a thing. You and I could be so good together. We had something once."

"Let go of my hand." She struggled to pull it away, but he held it tighter.

"Not until I've convinced you to come with me. You don't want to cause a scene now, do you?"

"Maybe she doesn't, but I will if you don't let go of her and leave the table this instant."

Startled, he looked up to see Lady Penelope standing beside him, eyes flashing. "Now why would I want to do that? Miss Kyrano and I were having a pleasant chat and getting reacquainted."

"It didn't look or sound that way to me. And since I am a good judge of situations, I must tell you, Mr. Hightower, that you are a liar. Get up and leave now, or I will have you thrown out."

He looked coldly at Penny. "I don't think you want to do that, Lady Penelope. It might give people the wrong idea about you. "

"You don't know much about me if you believe that. I'll say this only once more. Get up. You're in my seat." When Giles didn't move, she turned and gestured to the manager, who was standing not far away, watching. He hurried over.

"Is there a problem, milady?"

"Yes, this man is harassing my friend, and refuses to stop. He is also in my seat, and will not vacate it. I would like you to have him removed immediately."

The manager looked at Giles. "Sir, I'll have to ask you to leave now, or you will be thrown out."

Giles stood up, releasing Tin-Tin's hand. She immediately put it with the other in her lap. "I don't think you want to do that. You could lose a great deal of patronage if I told my friends how you treated me."

"But he'll gain a lot more than he loses, Mr. Hightower," replied Lady Penelope at her most aristocratic. "And they will be a better class of people."

Giles looked around at the other people who were patronizing the establishment. They were gazing at him in disapproval. He started to leave, when a waiter stopped him with a small platter. "Your bill, sir." Giles picked it up and looked at it briefly. Then, with an exclamation of disgust, took his billfold out, removed some money and placed it on the platter with the bill. As he stalked out, he was humiliated to hear several of the customers applauding.

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:08:16 GMT
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May 26th Kat's home

Kat awoke to a knock at the bedroom door and Estelle and Jake toddled in, accompanied by their mother, who was carrying a tray on which was Kat's breakfast. They sat on the bed and talked while she ate. At three years old, the twins were becoming independent. They were both bouncing on the bed, each trying to get their aunt's attention. Estelle, the elder by an hour, seemed more grown up than her brother.

"So," Suzi asked, "how's life in Kansas?"

Through a mouthful of toast and marmalade, Kat mumbled, "Oh, you know, not too bad; plenty of work, and plenty of recreation. Just a mechanic's job, but much, much better even than with Lady Penelope."

Pushing the tray to one side, Kat scrambled out of bed, heading to the bathroom. Suzi carried the tray back downstairs, followed by the twins.

As Kat took a leisurely shower, she groaned at the continual questions. It is so difficult. How can I continue to keep up this charade? she wondered.

After breakfast Kat watched as her father worked on his car.

"Need any help?" she asked. Immediately her father nodded, handing the spanners to her. For the next two hours father and daughter did what they used to do: work on a car. There was much laughter as her father asked if she remembered such and such. She replied that yes, she did; or no, she wasn't sure.

"Dad?" Kat looked serious. "Just how well is Mum? When I rang she said she was feeling really well. But I'm not convinced. She certainly doesn't seem fit to me. There are dark shadows under her eyes. She is more tired now and much thinner."

Kat's dad looked at his daughter. "For a while your mother was very seriously ill. Because she had concealed it for so long, by the time she collapsed it was almost too late."

Kat's face turned white. "I never realised she was so ill."

"She didn't want you to."

"Dad! She should have told me. I had a right to know."

"Sweetheart, she was wrong not to tell you, but she thought she was doing the right thing. She

knew how much you wanted that job. And now that she has had surgery, she will lead a relatively normal life. The doctor has told her to take things easy. And believe me, I intend to see that she does just that."

After lunch Kat drove to the local farm where she used to ride. Mr Bannister had intimated to Kat's mother that, whenever Kat came home, she was more than welcome to ride his horses.

"Kat, my dear, nice to see you again. Would you like to ride Jet or Sunny?"

"Sunny, please," Kat answered.

Once tacked up, Kat rode out of the stable and across the farmland towards the bridleways.

Trotting across the familiar landscape, Kat was in her element. She felt totally at one with nature. There was no other being, human or animal, in sight. Urging the little mare into a canter, they sped across the fields and along the bridleways. The wind caught Kat's breath, and she laughed out loud, totally enjoying herself. Finally she brought Sunny back to a trot and then a walk.

"Good girl," she said, patting the mare's neck.

Whilst she was walking back towards the farm, Kat began to think about John and the picnic he had taken her on. She thought also of the talk they had had whilst he was making them both some hot chocolate after watching the stars on the roof. She has been expressing to him the joys of riding.

Suddenly, she stopped. Sunny began to try to crop some grass. Kat realised that she was beginning to have feelings for him. ~But does he feel the same way? She fervently hoped that he did. But if he didn't... no, she didn't want to even think about that. Kat continued her ride, heading back to the farm.

Sitting on an upturned bucket in a corner of the stable, cleaning the saddle and bridle, she wished that she could confide in someone about her feelings. ~Lady Penelope, perhaps. I have always been able to talk to her. I may be able to discuss this with her whilst I'm here in England. Then there's always Elise and Nikki. Maybe I can talk things over with them as well.

Just after she arrived back from her ride, Melanie approached her. "Kat, we are bringing the wedding forward from the end of this year to Saturday, 17th November. Please, will you be my bridesmaid?"

Kat nodded. "Of course I will, Melly, just as long as I don't have to wear pink or frills."

Melanie shook her head. "As it will be a winter wedding, I shall be dressed in white velvet, with my bridesmaids - that's you and Estelle - in aquamarine coloured velvet."

Andrew came over and put his arm around his sister. "When will it be your turn, Kat?"

Kat blushed. "Not yet for a while, Andy."

Later that afternoon Kat and her mother headed for the hairdressers'. Kat had wanted to have her hair cut and, at her request, her mother had made an appointment at Kat's favourite hair salon.

"It won't be Janine," her mother explained. "She is on holiday, so I have arranged for Madeline to cut your hair this time."

Kat was relieved. Janine was a very nice young woman, but, oh boy, she could talk for England, and Kat just didn't want to have to put up with the third degree.

"So, Kat, how do you want your hair cut?" Madeline asked. Kat explained the kind of style she wanted.

One hour later Kat emerged from the salon with a totally new look. Gone was the length. Instead she had an inverted bob, shorter at the back with the sides chin level. The ends had been cut in such a way giving the effect of a tousled look. A side parting fell into a long wispy fringe.

Suzi and Melanie then joined mother and daughter for a shopping spree. Kat bought herself some more underwear, night attire - mainly large t-shirts - some cropped tops, strappy t-shirts, shorts and one very long, pretty, gypsy-style cheesecloth skirt in bright orange and coffee colours.

That night, as it was Kat's last night, all of the family went out to a well-known restaurant for a really expensive meal.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/26/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:09:25 GMT
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Tracy Island, Saturday May 26th, 4:00 pm

"What a day," Brandon sighed as he walked on the beach. His training on Thunderbird Four was continuing and soon he would begin training on one of the other craft. I wonder which one I'll be assigned to. Looking up, he spied Tyler and Alex running along the beach, laughing at something only they knew about.

Brandon looked around for Cherie, wondering where she was. It wasn't like her to allow the boys to roam unsupervised. Shouting at them to wait up, he hurried to catch up with them.

Finally getting close to them, he looked at the two young boys, wondering how to ask what he wanted to know. Not wanting to appear worried, he decided to approach them slowly. "Hey guys, what's up?" he asked casually.

"Not much," Tyler piped up. "We're just exploring the beach. You should see some of the things we found." He proceeded to describe some of the small marine life they'd found in the tide pools. Alex backed his brother's description of things, adding a few scientific embellishments of his own.

"That sounds neat, you guys," Brandon said with a chuckle. Then his face turned serious. "Does Cherie know you're out here by yourselves?"

Both boys looked at Brandon with wide eyes and Tyler was the first to answer him. "Cherie's working on a report for school and doesn't know we're out here. But Mom does. She's the one that said it was okay as long as we're careful and don't get too close to the water."

Alex folded his arms and rolled his eyes. "Besides, it's not like Cherie is our babysitter or anything. We can go places without her, y'know."

Brandon met Alex's defiant gaze and stared at the boy questioningly. "How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"We are telling the truth," Tyler said, anger creeping into his voice. "If you don't believe us, you can ask Mom when we get back."

Brandon put his hands up in mock surrender. "Hey, Tyler, I didn't mean to upset you. I care about you and Alex and I didn't want anything to happen to you," Brandon said by way of apology, reaching out to ruff Tyler's stiff brown hair. The nine year old glanced up at Big Mac, a smile on his face. Satisfied that a crisis had been averted, Brandon asked the two boys, "How about you guys show me what you found?"

"ALL RIGHT!" both boys shouted in unison as they took off up the beach, Brandon following behind.

The trio spent most of the afternoon exploring the beach and observing the marine life. At one point, Brandon pointed out a school of dolphins swimming offshore. The boys, in return, showed him a small octopus that had gotten trapped in a pool of water. The six inch gastropod was lying still, trying to be inconspicuous.

"Hey, Brandon, have you ever touched an octopus before?" Alex asked as he and his brother watched the small creature swimming in the tide pool. The intrusion of the boys caused the octopus to squirt out ink in an attempt to hide. Brandon squatted down beside the boys and looked at the small marine animal. He smiled, recalling an incident that happened while he was diving in the Bahamas.

"No I haven't," he replied, "but I did have one swim up to me when I was diving in the Bahamas.

"Was he as big as this one?" Tyler asked.

Brandon laughed as he answered the young boy. "Oh no, he was a whole lot bigger than our friend here. He was closer to six feet long from his head to the end of his tentacles." Brandon described what it was like to see a creature that big reach out and try to touch his mask.

"Whoa!" Alex said in awe. "Weren't you scared it would do something to you?"

"I was a little scared, but I realized he was curious more than anything else. So I just stood still and let him look me over. After a few minutes he swam away."

In another spot, they observed small crabs scurrying about, jostling each other for space in the small pool of water. The hole was only eight inches across, too small for the fifteen tiny crabs occupying it. "No wonder crabs are so crabby," Tyler remarked. "I know I'd be if I had to share my room with that many brothers and sisters

The three continued their exploring, going from one spot to another, seeing how many species of marine life they knew. Besides the octopus and crabs, they found numerous types of shells that Alex and Tyler identified. They were checking out another tide pool when the sun's descent indicated that it was time for them to head home.

As they were walked up the path towards the villa, they started talking about the day's adventure.

"You wanna know what the neatest part was for me?" Tyler piped up.

"What was that?" Brandon answered, taking Tyler up on his shoulders.

"It was seeing the dolphins and finding the octopus. I never knew there was so much life in one place."

Brandon turned his attention to the other boy. "What about you, Alex? What did you like about our little outing?"

The older boy thought a moment. "For me, it was being able to see the octopus up close. The nearest I ever got to one of them before was seeing them on the vid shows."

The boys continued talking animatedly as they entered the upper level of the villa, Brandon bringing up the rear. Dianne heard the noise as they started down the hallway. "Did you guys have fun?" Dianne asked as she came out of her suite, taking notice of her sons' dirt stained faces and grubby hands.

"It was cool, Mom. We actually saw an octopus and crabs and all sorts of neat stuff in the tidal pools..." Both boys tripped over themselves trying to describe what they saw.

"You can tell everybody about your adventures at the dinner table. Hurry and get washed up. We'll be eating in a few minutes." The boys nodded and hurried to clean up.

After the boys left, Dianne faced Brandon, a puzzled look on her face. "Did they do anything wrong?"

"Well," he began, "I was on the beach and saw them by themselves. I was concerned about their safety when I didn't see an adult with them."

"Didn't they tell you that it was okay with me that they were out there?"

"Yes, they did. But, to be honest, I wasn't too sure. You know how kids tend to stretch the truth sometimes." Brandon ran his hand through his hair nervously.

Dianne sighed. "I've raised my kids never to stretch the truth. Considering, though, that we have so many new people here, I understand that it's not always so easy to judge that."

"I'm sorry I didn't believe them."

"Brandon, this is their home and they have a big backyard to explore. As long as they let me know where they are, I don't mind them going out on their own."

"Doc, I'm sorry if I tried to take over being a parent to them. I was just concerned."

Dianne smiled. "It's okay, Brandon. I understand how you feel. Any of the new recruits probably would've done the same thing if he or she saw Alex and Tyler by themselves."

"You do have a point there," Brandon acknowledged. He smiled, recalling the time he spent with the boys. "I hope we can do it again real soon. They were both a pleasure to be around."

"I'm glad to hear it. If you don't feel comfortable about something you see the boys doing, don't hesitate to come to me, okay?"

"I will, you can count on that," the young man replied. After making a little more small talk, Dianne excused herself and headed to dinner. Brandon walked away and thought to himself, I wonder how I would have handled the situation if I were a dad? Hopefully I won't find that out for a long time.

Post by Magicmaster8 Sent: 10/26/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:09:58 GMT
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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

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:10:57 GMT

May 27th - England

The next day, Kat made her farewells to her family.

"Mum, please don't cry. I shall visit again. If not before, I shall see you all at the wedding."

Finally, wiping away the tears, Kat got into her car and began the journey back to Creighton-Ward Manor.

Parker met her at the door.

" 'Er ladyship h'is h'in the drawing room with Miss Tin-Tin."
As Kat entered the room, Lady Penelope rose to greet her.

"Kat, your hair looks wonderful, so different! The Tracy's won't recognise you. Did you have a wonderful time with your parents?"

"Yes, I did, but it was hard parting from them."

"Now my dear, I have a present for you. Parker?"

Parker came into the room carrying a crate of wine bottles. Kat gasped

"Twelve bottles of wine, six red and six white. After all," Penelope added with a smile, "there may be occasions when you want to celebrate."

Parker handed her a small parcel. Kat opened it to reveal a beautiful carved wooden wine bottle opener. Kat hugged him. "Thank you, Parker. It's lovely."

Lil entered and gave Kat a hamper. "Some ingredients and herbs and spices to use in the wok."

Kat was quite overcome. "Thank you all so much. They're wonderful presents." Then excusing herself, she headed for the garage to have a quick word with Lofty. He was working on FAB-1 wiping his hands on a piece of cloth; he came over to chat to her. Sitting on the edge of the bench, swinging her legs, they talked for a short while, about FAB-1 and Lady Penelope.

"She's a luvly boss. The best I have ever worked for," Lofty said enthusiastically.

Kat nodded in agreement. She would always have a soft spot for Lady Penelope. She felt that even now, there was nothing that she wouldn't do to assist her Ladyship.

Kat headed back to the house. Lady Penelope and Tin-Tin were in the Drawing Room. As soon as Kat appeared, Lady Penelope rang the bell for Parker to bring in the tea. During tea Tin-Tin showed Kat her purchases.

"Wow, what lovely clothes Tin-Tin. You'll look so elegant." Kat said. Thinking of the clothes that she had bought herself, which were all very practical. Except for the long skirt.

And for the next hour or so, the three young women discussed Lady Penelope and Tin-Tin's day in London at the Fashion Show and Kat's stay with her parents.

However, the time was growing nearer for Kat and Tin-Tin to return to Tracy Island.

Soon the little plane was loaded with not only Kat's presents and shopping, but Tin-Tin's purchases as well.

Hugging Lady Penelope, Parker and Lil one last time, Kat boarded the plane and, once clearance was given, headed back with Tin-Tin to Tracy Island.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 10/28/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:11:51 GMT
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Monday, May 28, 2068, 11 a.m., England

"You're late," Desdemona growled as Giles entered the office.

"So I am," Giles muttered back. "I'm surprised you noticed."

Desdemona was about to retort, but Jacques cut her off. "Is there any particular reason why you are late, Giles?"

"No, not really. I was doing some more research on the lovely Miss Tin-Tin Kyrano. I found out something interesting the other day and wanted to pursue it." Giles flopped down into one of the leather chairs.

"Oh? And what was that?" Desdemona sneered. "That she made a monkey out of you the other day at that London restaurant?"

Giles glared at his sister for a moment, then turned his gaze to Jacques. "She wasn't the one who tried to make a fool out of me; her companion was."

"Whoever she was, she didn't have far to go to make you look foolish," Dez replied, a smug smile on her face.

"Children, children," Jacques said, intervening. "You can stop the petty bickering now." He read the printout on his latest acquisition, then glanced up at Giles. "Aren't you going to tell us what you discovered? You wouldn't have brought it up otherwise."

"Oh, yes," Giles said, rubbing his forehead with the long fingers of one hand. "Her companion and champion was Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward. A rather formidable member of the British upper crust. She and Miss Kyrano share a passion for the same English designer: Elaine Wickfen."

"So, this Lady Penelope and your little friend like the same clothes," Dez sneered. "There's nothing interesting about that."

"Possibly. But Lady Penelope is also a very good friend of the entire Tracy family," Giles went on to say. "In fact, there were rumors linking her name in a romantic way with Jefferson Tracy. That is, until his current wife, Dr. Tracy, came along."

"And what exactly is this supposed to mean for us?" Jacques asked, returning to his printout. "I do not see how we can use this information of yours."

"Well," Giles said with a sigh, "Lady Penelope's major factotum is one Aloysius 'Nosey' Parker, a former cracksmen and second-story man. He might be amenable to a little action on the side, for the right price. Get into her Ladyship's home, and one might have a back door for access to the Tracys. In any case, I think it's an interesting connection and one we should not overlook."

"Your opinion has been noted and filed," Jacques replied shortly. He looked up at both his brother and sister. "Do we have everything in order to receive our guest?"

"Yes," Dez said. "Our people have kept our target under surveillance and have a good idea of her movements now. They are only waiting for your word."

"Good," Jacques said. "Then it is time to put our American operation into action." He smiled. "We may have a plant within Tracy Industries yet."

From: Tikatu Sent: 10/30/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:12:03 GMT
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Washington D.C.; Tuesday, May 29; 5:30 PM (9:30 AM Wednesday on Tracy Island)

Lena shut down her computer with a sigh. It had been a long day, and she was tired. Only two of her staff remained to clear up a couple of minor problems; they, too would be leaving soon. She did her usual checks of her office, picked up her purse and walked out. Wishing the others a good night, she headed to the elevator and a few minutes later, was on her way out of the building.

Remembering her encounter with Giles Hightower, she looked around to see if there were any strange cars parked nearby, but saw none. She shook her head sadly, thinking that it was a shame she had to be on guard so much more than before. She turned and headed to the Foggy Bottom Station. Five minutes later, she was on the platform, waiting for the train to arrive.

When it did, she got on, along with several other people. It wasn't quite as crowded as usual, since many people left work by five and were already on their way to their destinations. But she still had to stand. She didn't mind; she'd been sitting all day, and it felt good to be upright for a while. There were only two stops between her station and Metro Center, where she would get off

and transfer to the Red Line, taking her to Silver Spring and home.

But when the train stopped at the transfer point, she didn't get off. She wasn't on board, and neither were two men who had gotten on when she did.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 10/30/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:27:55 GMT
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Tracy Island, May 30th 2068, 3.00 pm

It had been a quiet, peaceful day. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the pool. John lay back on his reclining chair and watched the antics of his younger brothers and sister as they played with the new recruits. A water fight was in play and Cherie was aiming her water cannon at Nikki and Elise. Both young women were trying to do some serious sunbathing. Virgil took the cannon out of Cherie's hands and aimed it at Elise who screamed and, on jumping out of her chair, knocked him into the pool.

John had enjoyed his two-month stay on the island, which was coming to an end. He watched all this and suddenly realised that someone was missing.

"Has anyone seen Kat?" He asked.

"Probably Brains has kept her working. You know how involved he gets. He's most likely forgotten the time." Virgil said as he emerged from the pool.

"Go and find out where she is," Gordon called. There was a chuckle from the others around the pool.

John looked around. He felt confused. He was not quite sure how to take his brother's teasing. "I might do just that," he said.

"I thought you would've done that sooner." Virgil laughed.

"Why? What do you mean?" John asked, frowning slightly.

"Oh, come on John! We've all seen the looks you give her," Gordon added, winking at the others around the pool. Nikki and Elise nodded in agreement.

John coloured slightly. "Well, I think she should be here enjoying a relaxing time like the rest of you." And he left to go to Brains' lab.

As John entered the lab, Brains looked up from his work and gave John a smile. "Hi John. What can I do for you?" he asked his friend

"I was just wondering if Kat was still around?"

"She left about ten minutes ago to go to her apartment and change," Brains said. "Otherwise, she said something about joining her friends at the pool."

"Brains," John said, thinking how he could say what he wanted to say. "What do you think of Kat?"

Now Brains was very curious.

"That's an odd question," he said. "Well, as I've said before, she is a very good mechanic. Conscientious, hardworking and she is becoming a very good and reliable member of International Rescue."

"No Brains," John said, running a hand through his hair, "what I really meant was: how is she as a person?"

Brains crossed his arms and shrugged.

"Well, from my point of view, she is very nice. She gets on with most of us here on the island. On the rescues that she has been on with me, she has shown qualities of kindness, thoughtfulness and determination. But why the questions, John?"

"Because I'm finding that I am beginning to like her as more than a friend." He looked hard at Brains. "I would like us to become, um, you know, closer. But I don't really know how to approach her. I don't want her to think that I am pushing my attentions onto her."

Brains looked at his friend. "She doesn't talk much about anyone in particular. But I do know that she very much enjoyed your evening with her on the roof looking at the stars. She talked about that for a long time." He looked at his watch, "I suggest that maybe you should go to her apartment now if you want to talk to her."

John hurried to the cliff house. Would he be in time? He hoped so!

Kat had just come out of the shower, and had changed into shorts and a strappy vest top. She had poured herself a fresh orange juice, added some ice, and was relaxing on one of the balcony chairs. She was just thinking about going to join the others at the pool when the door chimed. She opened the door and was surprised to see John standing outside.

"Oh, hi! Won't you come in? I was just enjoying a drink and debating whether to join the others or not."

John smiled at her, stepped inside, and shut the door.

"Can I offer you a drink?" Kat asked.

"Yes, please. I'll have an orange juice."

Kat poured another glass and went out on to the balcony to join John.

John was watching her. She noticed and blushed. "Are you enjoying your stay back on earth? It must be nice only being up in space only one month in every three."

John agreed. "Yes, it certainly makes a difference having three share the rotation."

After they had finished their drinks, they chatted for a while. Finally Kat got up. "I think I'll go and join the rest. Are you coming with me?"

"Well, I thought we might stay here for a while..." He gave Kat a shy, almost embarrassed grin.

Kat looked both surprised and pleased. She smiled at him.

"Why, yes, if you want to."

John looked out to sea. He didn't know quite how to approach her. He leant on the balcony rail gazing into the distance trying to calm his feelings. He took a deep breath and turning to face her said, "Kat?"

"Yes, John," Kat replied.

"I know we haven't known each other very long. I'm really glad we met." He looked at her. "I would like us to become closer."

Kat blushed. Suddenly she felt elated and happy. This wonderful man wanted to get to know her better.

"John," she replied. "I would love us to be special friends. To become closer," she added softly, almost to herself. "Oh, let's take in the view on the balcony," she said.

They headed back to the outside and sat talking and enjoying the view.

"How's your mother now?" John asked.

"Getting better, thank you. In fact, she is home now. Dad has hired a part time nurse to take care of her while he is at work," Kat continued. "That email was such a shock. I really had no idea that she was so poorly."

John looked concerned. "How was she when you visited her?"

"She was feeling much better. It was so nice to see Mum and Dad and my brother Andrew and his fiancée. My other brother and family were over from the States. That was a lovely surprise."

"I believe you visited Lady Penelope?"

"Yes, and it was so nice to see Parker, Lil and Lofty again." Then she added, "It was nice to get back here."

They talked softly for a little while longer before Kat stepped away from the rail and stretched.

"Well, I think that I really should join the others," she said, heading for the kitchen with the empty glasses. "They'll be wondering where I am."

John was a little taken aback at the abruptness, but he said nothing. Then they joined the rest at the pool.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 11/1/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:28:14 GMT
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*****Wednesday, May 30, 2068; Thunderbird Five; 5:12 p.m.*****

Callie was preparing her dinner of fried chicken and okra in the microwave oven. "Mmm-mmmm. That smells deee-licious." She looked around and sighed. "It's too bad there isn't a cooler on Thunderbird Three or a regular stove and oven up here, but cooking on a space station is a lot different than in the kitchen at home."

Looking at the calendar on the wall, she realized she was going home in two days. "I can't wait to cook in the kitchen again." An idea began to formulate in her mind. "Yeah, I'll try cooking for everyone on the island."

When she heard the microwave beep, Callie took her dinner out and walked to the table with it. "All right, mouth, teeth, and gums; look out, stomach, here it comes." She took her fork and knife and cut into the fried chicken. But seconds before she could take that first bite, she heard a beeping she hadn't heard before. "What is that?" she asked, curious. Putting the fork with that first bite of chicken on the plate, she stepped up from the table and went to the main control room.

Observing the console, she saw only a light flashing. "If I remember what John showed me, this means one of the agents is in trouble. I'd better contact Base." She pressed another button and said, "Base from Thunderbird Five, do you copy?"

Jeff was looking at his latest report when he saw the eyes on John's portrait flashing. Pressing the button on the desk, he said, "Go ahead, Ursa."

"Sir, I'm getting an emergency signal from one of our agents."

Looking at Penelope's portrait, he knew it wasn't from her. "Check to see who's--"

Callie had to interrupt him. "Wait, sir, I'm receiving audio."

"All right, keep the channel open so I can hear it."

"F-A-B."

Adjusting the volume, Callie and Jeff were able to hear pieces of a conversation.

"I want to know where we're going," said a woman with an African accent. "Who hired you?"

One man with a deep voice replied, "We can't tell you that."

After a pause, the woman spoke again. "I see dat we're crossing de ocean. You both have British accents, so we are probably heading dere, specifically London." Silence lasted for a few seconds again. "I also believe de Hightowers hired you. Am I right?"

"Very clever, lady. I'd lay odds on you figuring out why."

"Quiet, you fool!" said another man angrily. "You're getting too close to giving us away, and you know our orders!"

Jeff gasped; he knew who was in trouble. "Lena Matumbo's been kidnapped by associates of the Hightowers. She's sending us the conversation through her PDA."

The strange conversation continued. "Well, gentlemen," said Lena, "since I do have dat right, I tink the Hightowers want to make me join dem. If dat is true, dey don't have a prayer."

"Yes, well, neither do you," said the first man.

Closing her eyes, Callie silently prayed for Lena's safety. "Sir, is there anything I can do?"

"Just keep listening in and keep us informed."

"Yes, sir."

When Callie's image was replaced with John's portrait photo again, Jeff pressed another button. "This is Base calling International Rescue, England."

*****By TracyFan4Ever. Thanks to Hobbeth for the Lena part.*****

Sent: 11/1/2005 11:02 PM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:28:44 GMT
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Wednesday, May 30, 5:30 AM, Creighton-Ward Manor

Lady Penelope was awakened out of a sound sleep by the call from International Rescue. She activated it, voice only (after all, she felt she had to look her best when Jeff saw her). "Go ahead,

Base."

"Pink Lady, I'm sorry to have awakened you so early, but one of our agents has been kidnapped and is headed your way. We believe the Hightowers have arranged it."

"Oh dear," she replied. "Who is the agent?"

"Our newest agent; I believe you got her dossier a couple of months ago."

"Ah yes; I remember. But how on earth did they find out that she was an agent so quickly?"

"They didn't. They learned of her in connection with her regular job at our other family business. They want to recruit her to help them infiltrate our computers there."

"I understand. That is the reason Giles Hightower was so insistent on Tin-Tin going with him somewhere."

"Yes, I heard about that. We are all grateful for your help, although probably not as much as she was, but back to the present situation. I'll leave it up to you how to effect a rescue, but once the agent is safe, notify me and I'll have someone come to return her to her home."

"Of course I will."

Once the call from Jeff was terminated, Lady Penelope looked at her bedside clock. She realized that it was too early to speak to Parker, given the fact that it took time to rouse him out of a sound sleep. She, however, was now wide-awake. She dressed, and went downstairs to her study. Getting Lena's dossier out of her safe, she read it over once again, and looked at her picture for a long time. A handsome woman; I think I might enjoy having her as a guest here, if only for a day.

She leaned back in her chair, considering and rejecting ideas for rescuing the woman. One idea, however, intrigued her and she mulled it over. It grew, and became feasible to her. She knew it would take more people than just herself and Parker, and she'd need more information from Jeff, but she believed it would work.

Finally hearing her staff moving about, she called Parker into the room. When he arrived, she signaled for him to close the door and move close to her desk. "We don't have much time. An IR agent from America has been kidnapped and is being brought to London. We need to rescue her quickly. I have an idea how, but I'll need more than your help. Do you still stay in contact with your friends who own those large black cabs?"

"Yus, milady. Two h'or three h'of them."

"We'll need two of them for my plan to work. I want you to give them a call and see if they will be willing to cooperate. Tell them there will be a reward."

"H'Of course, milady. What is it you'll want them to do?"

"Here's my plan. Timing will be everything." She went on to explain the details to him.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:29:00 GMT
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London; Wednesday, May 30, 10 AM; Jacques Hightower's office

Lena was "ushered" into the office looking only slightly the worse for wear. Jacques was sitting at his desk, checking something on the computer, but he looked up at her entrance. Two men were with her, each holding one of her arms firmly.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen. This is no way to treat a lady. Let her go. Mrs. Matumbo," he said, rising and walking around his desk to greet her. "I am Jacques Hightower. Please accept my apologies for the way you were treated. I hope you were at least made comfortable waiting for our jet, and on the flight over."

"Under de circumstances," she replied coolly, "I was fairly comfortable. But kidnapping is kidnapping, and de comfort level was severely lessened by dat fact."

"I know, I know," he replied sorrowfully as one of the men handed him her purse. "But it seems I had no other choice. I could not get away to visit you in America, and I really wanted to meet you. But I forget my manners. Please sit down. Would you like something to drink? Coffee, tea?"

She sat in the chair he indicated and as he returned to his seat, she answered, "De only tings I would like are to know why you brought me here and den for you to return me home."

He paused to open the handbag and look inside, then looked questioningly at one of the men, who said, "That's all that was in it, sir. No makeup, not even a lipstick. Just her wallet, card case, keys, tissues and a PDA."

Jacques reached in the purse and brought out the last named item. "This is a new one -- state of the art, too, if I'm not mistaken. Where did you get it?"

"It was a gift from a friend. My otter one was old, so it was given me as a replacement."

"That person must be quite a friend. This isn't an inexpensive gift." He looked at her intently. She only shrugged.

"Maybe. I couldn't say."

There was a long pause as Jacques continued to gaze at her. She met his look calmly, not betraying her hope that he, like his minions, didn't try to fool with it. During the flight over, she'd managed to get them to let her check it by saying that she might have appointments that evening, or the next morning, and would be missed. They never realized that she activated the emergency signal and opened communications, setting it for transmit only. She hoped that whoever was

listening would contact Jeff Tracy, and someone would be sent to help her get away from these people.

Finally he put the PDA back in her purse and said, "Your first request I can easily answer. I wanted to meet the woman who not only came up with a program to block anything my sister can come up with to infiltrate the computers of Tracy Industries, or the Tracy family, but also put ours out of commission for several days. That was very naughty of you, Mrs. Matumbo."

"As opposed to what you or your sister tried to do to my granddaughter? I don't tink so. I told your -- I presume he is your brotter -- I told him not to try anyting, or I would retaliate. He -- or you -- didn't believe me, so you had to learn de hard way."

"Point taken. But I'm curious to know how you found the virus planted in your computer so easily."

"I had been working on modifying a program dat would detect anyting created by de person who develops dose virus programs. I'd finished it de night before it was planted."

"Oh come now. It couldn't have been that simple."

"Actually, once I knew what to look for, it was. And it didn't take me very long to find out what to look for. Anyone wit a modicum of computer expertise, de right tools and enough time would be able to spot it. I just happened to be de one who did."

A gasp of outrage caused her to turn and look to her right. A tall blonde woman was rising from a sofa, an indignant look on her face. As she approached the two, her eyes showing her anger, Lena stood up.

"How dare you say such things about my work! No one, no one can equal my expertise!"

"Calm down, Dez. Mind your manners. She is our guest. Mrs. Matumbo, this is my sister, Desdemona."

Lena nodded coolly at the other woman, who turned to her brother. "Manners are wasted on these uncouth Americans. Look at her. That outfit is so outmoded it's laughable. And it's so rumpled, too. And you expect me to believe that this -- person -- is so computer savvy that she could do what was done to my work and our computers?"

"I doubt you'd be perfectly dressed and coiffed if you'd been kidnapped, flown across the ocean and forced to come to your kidnappers all in de same close. As for my being fashionable or not, I don't follow what people who don't know me say I should dress in, like a sheep. I am my own fashion, and wear what I like, not what someone else tells me I'm supposed to like."

"A sheep?! Jacques, did you hear that? She called me a sheep!"

"Dez, will you calm down?" Jacques said, amused. "Mrs. Matumbo is evidently a formidable opponent." He turned back to the older woman. "Now that we've gotten to know each other a little, tell me what it would take to get you to leave Tracy Industries and join our company."

"You couldn't meet my price."

"Now, now. You must understand; we are very rich. I'm sure we could come to some kind of agreement. Go ahead, name your price."

Lena sat back down, crossing one leg over the other. "You would have to return all de secrets you've stolen and not yet sold, den turn etical."

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005]

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:29:46 GMT
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Jacques gave a bark of laughter. "Now why would we do a thing like that, Mrs. Matumbo? Our methods have proved to be very profitable. I think you're very naïve, to think that we would accede to your demands."

"I knew you wouldn't. But you asked, so I told you."

Desdemona sat down in the chair next to Lena's. "Jacques, I have an idea. Why don't I take Mrs. Matumbo to the compound, where the two of us can have a nice talk?" She began stroking Lena's arm. "I've never had the opportunity to use my particular persuasive abilities on an older woman before," she purred. "It could be very informative, in more ways than one."

"I don't think that's a very good idea, sister dear." Everyone looked around to see Giles walking into the office. "Mrs. Matumbo, it's nice to see you again. But please don't think I had anything to do with your being brought here. I warned them, but they don't listen to me."

"Giles, what are you doing here?" his sister asked him sharply.

"The last time I checked, I was still a part of this family. I do have a right to be here, you know."

"Well, go away. You had your chance, and now it's my turn." She continued stroking Lena, who had stiffened in shock, and continued. "I'm sure I can convince -- Ow!"

Lena had grabbed Desdemona's thumb and bent it backwards. The younger woman's wrist followed, then her forearm. She screamed in pain, but couldn't do a thing about it.

"You touch me like dat again," Lena said in a low angry voice, "and I'll 'persuade' you right into a hospital bed."

Jacques appeared to be even more amused than before. "It seems your persuasive techniques don't work on everyone, Dez. Mrs. Matumbo, please let my sister go. Otherwise, I'll have to let my associates here stop you, and you won't like it."

Lena glanced around, then looked contemptuously at Desdemona. "I meant what I said. And I

always keep my word. Remember dat." She let go of the other woman's hand.

Jacques continued. "Your idea of taking her to the compound is a good one, Dez, but not for the procedure you suggest. Giles, I want you to go with them. Make sure they don't kill each other. I'll be along later." He paused. "It will be a while before you can leave, however. The car you need to use was taken for servicing and won't be back for another two hours."

He sat in thought for several minutes, while Desdemona rubbed her arm and Giles went over to the sofa and sat down. The bodyguards watched impassively. Lena was outwardly calm, but inside was wondering if anyone could get there in time to help her.

"All right. Giles, why don't you and Mrs. Matumbo go to the lounge, while Dez and I have a chat? I imagine she hasn't had anything to eat for some time and must be starving. I know I can trust you to treat her well. And maybe she'll see us in a better light." At her look, he added, "I promise you, there won't be anything in the food or drink to drug you. And I keep my word."

Giles stood up and walked over to the chairs. "That sounds like an excellent idea. I could use a little something, myself. Mrs. Matumbo, would you please join me?" He held out his arm.

Lena looked up at him, then stood up and took it. "You won't persuade me, you know," she said, looking back at Jacques.

"Oh, I hope we will, madam. Otherwise, no one will ever see you again," he replied.

Her chin went up a fraction; she turned and left the room with Giles.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:30:01 GMT
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Wednesday, May 30, 1 PM; England

The Hightower limousine headed away from their office building, on the most direct route to their compound. Giles was in the back, seated between his sister and Lena, to keep anything from happening. The door on Lena's side was locked; it and the window mechanism were controlled by the driver, preventing her from attempting an escape.

In Desdemona's lap was Lena's purse. Jacques had given it to her, suggesting that she try to break into the PDA inside it. "It's just possible that it might provide us with a way to get some of those secrets that Tracy Industries has." She was looking forward to the challenge, to prove that she was much better with computers than the woman on the other side of the car seat.

A large black cab, of the type used in the previous century, turned onto the road behind them. They had come to a little-traveled area, and their driver had sped up, per Desdemona's request. They were coming to a four-way stop, and she told the driver to go right through. "You're eager to

get to the compound, Dez, but let's try to get there in one piece," her brother admonished.

"Oh, stop whining, Giles. Nothing is going to happen."

But something did. Seconds before the limo got to the intersection, another black cab was seen at the stop sign on their right. It pulled out and the limo driver slammed on the brakes. The cars both stopped, the limo mere inches from the cab's passenger door. The cab following the Hightower's car pulled up behind them, effectively blocking them from backing up and leaving the scene.

The driver of the cab they nearly hit got out and walked around to yell at the limo driver. "'Ere, now. Wha' d'ye think you're doin'? You got a stop sign, same as me. D'you think you're such niff-naff toffs that you c'n just run the rest of us workin' stiffs down any time you please?"

The limo driver pressed the button to roll his window down. He started to tell the man to move his car - that there had been no accident - but he didn't get more than a couple of words out. The cabbie sprayed a gas in his face that knocked him out almost immediately.

Lena was sitting on the opposite side of the car from the driver, and saw what happened. Her eyes widened, but she said nothing. She caught a movement out of the corner of her right eye and glanced over. The driver of the cab behind them had come up to the passenger door and was looking in questioningly. Desdemona lowered her window and started to tell him to get the other man to leave, but he threw a small round object into the car. It broke open on impact with the floor, releasing another gas that had all three passengers unconscious within moments.

The two men grinned at and nudged each other in celebration of a smooth operation, then one of them took a large handkerchief out of his pocket and waved it above his head. Soon a pink Rolls Royce, driven by Parker, with Penelope in the back, was seen pulling up to the group. When it stopped, the men walked over to it.

"Well done, gentlemen. I must admit, it was most considerate of Jacques Hightower to keep Mrs. Matumbo's PDA with him, so we could learn where they would take her and by what route, then give it to his sister to work on. Now, let's get our agent out of there and into this car. Then we can leave these people to their nap."

Parker got out of the car and went to the door by Lena. He tried to open it, then turned and said, "H'it seems to be locked, Milady."

"How unfortunate. But that would be expected. Can you get to the lock, or do we have to remove the others to get to her?"

"Wait a minute, yer Ladyship," one of Parker's cronies said, "I seen this type of car before, I did. There's a control on the dash that should unlock it." He pushed the driver aside and scanned the controls for a minute. "Ah, got it." He pressed a button and they heard a distinct 'click' from the rear door. Parker tried again, and it opened. He was just in time to keep Lena from falling out onto the pavement.

"'Ere, Nosey, let me give yer a hand there." The other man hurried around to help Parker, and

they quickly got the older woman into the back seat with Penny. The man who unlocked the door walked over and handed Lena's purse to the aristocrat.

"Thought you'd be wantin' this."

"Thank you, sir. Parker, please give them their reward."

Parker handed an envelope to each of the two men. They looked inside and their eyes lit up. They both touched the brim of their caps to Penny and one of them said, "Thankee, yer ladyship. Any time ye want summat done, just call on us."

"Thank you, gentlemen. I shall certainly keep that in mind. Now I suggest we all leave. We don't want to be anywhere in sight when these people regain consciousness."

The two cabbies touched their hats again, and went back to their vehicles. Penelope and Parker watched them go, then he got into FAB-1. Soon they were on their way back to Creighton-Ward Manor, leaving the two Hightowers and their driver asleep in their vehicle.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:30:25 GMT
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Wednesday, May 30, 3:30 PM; Creighton-Ward Manor

Lena woke up to find herself in a richly appointed room. Her shoes had been removed and an afghan was covering her. She closed her eyes again, trying to remember just what had happened. Images of the near accident, and of Desdemona letting the window down, then there was something tossed into the car, and a hissing sound. We must have been knocked out, she thought, but by whom?

Just then she heard the door quietly being opened. She sat up and turned in that direction, to see a young blonde woman look in. She remembered the picture in the lounge of the Villa on Tracy Island, and realized the identity of her rescuer. "Oh, good," said the woman. "You're awake. How do you feel?"

"Better, tank you. I believe you are Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward." Lena smiled. "De picture of you in de Tracy home is a very good likeness."

Penny smiled back and walked into the room. "Yes, it is, rather. Now, I've contacted Jeff, and he will be sending someone to pick you up and take you to the island. Then you will head for home. Since you don't have your passport with you, it will bypass all the red tape and questions that would be asked if you returned from here."

Lena blinked. "I hadn't tought of dat. But what about my family and my job?"

"Don't worry. Jeff contacted someone in your office and told him or her that you would be away for a few days. As far as your family is concerned, you can call them in a while and let them know that you are all right. But right now, why don't you refresh yourself and then come downstairs for tea? I took the liberty of purchasing some items you might need, since you've been in those clothes for over twenty-four hours. They are in that bag on the chair. I hope they fit."

"Tank you, Lady Penelope. Dat was very thoughtful of you. And I could use a cup of tea."

"More than one, I should think. Well, I'll leave you to freshen up. The stairs are to the right. Come down when you are ready." Penny smiled at Lena again, turned and left the room.

Lena picked up the bag and went into the bathroom. She decided to take a quick shower, and was glad of it, for she felt much better when she was through. Lady Penelope has excellent taste, she thought as she pulled the clothes out of the bag and put them on. They fit her excellently, and were the colors she loved to wear. She went back into the bedroom, put her shoes back on, and left the room.

She found Lady Penelope in a room near the bottom of the stairs. "Come in and sit down, Mrs. Matumbo. I'll pour you some tea."

"Please call me Lena. I'd prefer it."

"Then you must call me Penny. It would make me feel better, since you are my elder. I don't normally call them by their first names, unless I've known them for a very long time, like Jeff. And please, help yourself to some biscuits or anything else we have here. Lemon? Sugar? Cream?"

"Just a lump of sugar, please."

The two women sat and chatted. Penny told Lena that Jeff had called her again. Scott and Alan would leave in a few hours to pick her up and take her to the island, as she had been informed earlier. "But he expects you to remain there for a few days, to recover from your ordeal. Actually, he insists that you do so." She looked mischievous.

Lena laughed. "Well, since he's already taken care of my being absent at de office, I suppose I could stay wit dem for a bit. But I do have to call my family and let dem know I won't be home for a while."

"Of course. Now, since there is a twelve hour difference between here and Tracy Island, I don't expect the boys to arrive until the middle of the night. So I'll make sure they have some rest, and a good breakfast in the morning, and you'll leave tomorrow afternoon. That should put you on the island some time during the morning of the first."

"I suppose I'd better get used to de time differences all over de world. I tink dat will come in handy in de future."

The women sat and chatted companionably for some time, then Penny showed Lena where she

could call her family. She left her alone until Lena had finished, and sought her out. She gave her new friend a tour of her mansion and grounds, and introduced her to Parker, telling her how they were able to rescue her. Lena was highly amused by Parker's descriptions of Giles and Desdemona after they were rendered unconscious.

After dinner, and some more good talk, Lena went upstairs to bed. She was more tired than she would admit. She found a nightgown in the same bag the other clothes had been in, and after carefully hanging her new clothes up, put it on, brushed her teeth, and got into bed. Soon she was asleep.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:30:41 GMT
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Thursday, May 31, 2068, 8:30 a.m., Creighton-Ward Manor (7:30 p.m. Tracy Island)

"Good morning, Lena," Penelope said, as the older woman entered the dining room. "Did you sleep well?"

"Good morning to you, Penny," Lena replied with a smile. "I slept very well, tank you."

"Come sit here beside me," the younger woman said. "So often my guests sit across from me at the other end of the table and I feel like I must shout at them to carry on any conversation."

Lena laughed, and took a seat to Penelope's right. Parker came out with a teapot.

"Tea, madame?" he asked.

"Yes, tank you, Parker."

He poured for her, then offered her the sugar bowl with its silver tongs. Lena selected a lump of sugar to add to her tea.

"Breakfast will be h'out shortly," he announced, and he made his way back to the kitchen.

"Did de Tracys arrive safely last night?" Lena asked after a sip of her tea.

"Yes, they did," Penny replied. "Though I must admit I was a trifle surprised. It seems that Jeff sent Brains along with Alan, instead of Scott. I am at a loss as to why. He rarely makes such errors."

"Perhaps he changed his mind for some reason or otter," Lena suggested.

"Perhaps. I shall have to ask." She looked up to see the door to the dining room open. "Oh, here is Alan now."

"Good morning, Penny. Good morning, Lena," Alan said, smiling. "I see I'm in time for breakfast."

"Your timing is impeccable as always, Alan," Penny said, returning the smile. "However, I did think you would sleep longer than you have."

"So did I," Alan admitted as he took a seat across from Lena. "But the time zone change made it a little difficult. Plus, I'm a light sleeper anyway. Comes with the territory as space monitor."

"Ah, I understand," Penny said, nodding. She discreetly rang for Parker and let him know that Alan was ready to eat.

"Space monitor? What is dat?" Lena asked, curious. Then she shook her head. "You don't have to answer dat if you don't want to."

Alan and Penny exchanged glances, then Alan shrugged.

"I might as well," he said. "Our communications are handled through a space station, which we have christened Thunderbird Five. It's in geostationary orbit just to the west of the island. Whoever is up there is dubbed the 'space monitor'."

"Ah! I see."

At that moment, Parker came out with plates of Eggs Benedict for the ladies. "Ay will return wiv yer breakfast momentarily, Mr. H'Alan. Would you like tea or coffee?"

"Coffee, please, Parker," Alan answered.

As Parker went off for the coffee pot, Lena asked, "Where is Brains? I understand dat he came wit you instead of Scott."

"He's still sawing logs," Alan replied. "Father thought about the situation a bit and decided that, since Scott is making the run up to the space station tomorrow, he shouldn't be flying for long hours beforehand. This way, Scott will be fresh to fly up to Thunderbird Five with John."

"I understand," Lena replied. "Which one of dem will remain?"

"John will," Alan told her. "He and I and now Callie Spencer share duties as space monitor." He smiled widely. "It sure is nice to stay down on Earth for two months at a time."

"Speaking of time off, how was Monaco?" Penelope asked.

This started a discussion on the Grand Prix and how things developed there as the trio ate breakfast together.

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/4/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:31:50 GMT
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Tracy Island. May 31st. 7:40pm.

"I'll never get the hang of all this!" Dom huffed as he pushed the manual aside.

"Sure you will. It just takes a little time, and it's not like you've never had flying experience," Elise replied helpfully.

The two pilots-in-training were in Dom's apartment. Joshua was thankfully asleep taking a much needed nap, judging by the sprawling mess of toys on almost every available piece of floor space. Earlier, Elise had bumped into Dom and Virgil in Thunderbird Two's hangar and the three of them had discussed concerns they all had. Afterward, Elise had offered to help Dom with some training issues he had. They'd decided it would be easier to work at Dom's place. That way Dom wouldn't have to haul the baby and his collection of 'stuff' anywhere, and Dom would be more relaxed. They'd been going over flight controls of the huge cargo transporter.

"That's easy for you to say, but I've been at my wit's end worrying 'bout it all! I have helicopter experience, not great, big, cargo plane experience." Dom looked frustrated and tired; feelings Elise knew only too well.

"Dom, I flew choppers in the Air Force, and a couple of fighter jets, plus I have private jet and helijet experience. I know where you're coming from, but once you get the hours in Two, it will get easier. It did for me. Of course NOW I have to fly Scott's precious baby, and God help me if I get a scratch on it! Now that's stress!" They both chuckled.

"Ah, Elise, it's just this whole back up pilot thing that's makin' me nervous. I'm a medic not a full-time pilot."

"I know, Dom, but this cross-training is something we've all got to do. The Tracys need the help. C'mon, let's go over this one more time, and then we'll move onto pod procedures. You do know that we're going to be training together with Virgil and dropping a pod, right?" Elise wasn't so sure Dom knew what she was talking about, as he'd gotten a little paler. "Dom?"

"What? Oh yes, right. A pod. Will there be anything in it?"

Elise thought for a second or two and then answered "I dunno, I didn't think to ask Virgil."

"Guess we'll find out then." said Dom.

They both sighed and went back to the manuals. The pod dropping was scheduled very soon, sooner than either of them wanted, but they had no choice in the matter. Flying Thunderbird Two was one thing, but dropping large parts of it into the ocean was a whole different ball game!

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 11/8/2005

Tracy Island, May 31st -- early evening

John was in his room packing his case ready for his stay on Thunderbird Five. He realised that now that he and Kat had declared their desire to become closer, he really must have a farewell chat with her and arrange to communicate whilst he was up in Thunderbird Five. He knew that tomorrow Scott would want to make an early start so that Callie could be relieved and brought back to base as soon as possible.

He wanted somewhere quiet, someplace where they could be alone. Not surrounded by his family or her friends, somewhere that even Tyler wouldn't find them. Then he realised: they could go for a walk along the beach. At the far end, there were some rock pools. That would certainly be quiet enough. He called her on her communicator.

"Kat?"

"Yes, John?" Kat answered.

"Will you meet me at the pool, in say, twenty minutes time?"

Kat hurried down to the pool. She was a little apprehensive. ~What does he want? After yesterday when we both declared our desire to get closer, has he changed his mind? she wondered. She knew he was going to Thunderbird Five for the next month. She really was beginning to like him very much. And by what had transpired yesterday, it seemed he felt the same for her.

John was waiting. "I thought we could go for a walk on the beach."

As they walked, John spoke. "You are doubtless aware that I'm leaving for my spell of duty in Thunderbird Five. I really wanted to say goodbye to you without an audience."

Kat smiled at him. "I shall miss you, you know." She whispered.

"I'll miss you too. But I'm sure we can communicate. In fact, I make communication an absolute must." John replied.

"How will we communicate? Won't your father object?"

John looked serious and pinned her with a steady gaze. "We'll work something out." He added thoughtfully. "We can always send each other emails."

Kat nodded and returned his gaze, "Yes, you're right, of course," she said.

"Now, shall we head back for the Villa? There's something I want to give you," John said.

Turning, they headed back to the Villa. Kat was intrigued. Whatever did John want to give her?

They walked back through the lounge and headed for his room. John picked up a small portable telescope.

"This is for you Kat." he said, smiling at her amazement. "You can use it on the balcony."

"For me? John, how wonderful."

Picking up the small telescope and its tripod, John led Kat through the corridors of the Villa, going downstairs to the monorail.

Once in her apartment, John carried the tripod out on to the balcony and placed the telescope on it.

"There! Now you can watch the stars easily. When you send me an email, you can try and explain what you have been looking at."

"That's so kind of you, John. I shall certainly spend quite a few evenings looking at the stars. It will be fun trying to explain in an email just what I have been looking at. Now, can I offer you a drink?" She asked him. "I have orange juice or wine."

"Just juice, please," John said. "My father always told me never to drink and fly a spaceship."

Kat chuckled and fetched the drinks. She joined John back on the balcony. While they were drinking, John explained to Kat how to work the telescope.

A short while later he took his leave of her, promising to be in touch as soon as he could.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 11/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:38:14 GMT
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Tracy Island, June 1st, early morning.

"You know, I always knew you were crazy. Even though you tried to hide it for years, I just KNEW you were!"

Virgil rolled his eyes at his younger brother and the drama he was creating all by himself.

"Do you seriously think I am going to let your two wonder-pilots-in-training drop Pod 4 with moi inside it?" Gordon asked, emphatically pointing to himself.

Virgil sighed. "Yes Gordon, I seriously do think my 'wonder pilots' are going to drop you! Now get over it, and get into Four so we can get going!"

Gordon started to protest, but instead looked past Virgil. Virgil followed his brother's gaze and turned around to see Dom and Elise approaching. Both had their flight suits on, and Elise had her blonde hair in a ponytail pulled through her baseball style cap.

~Looks kinda cute~ Virgil thought to himself. "Morning. You both ready?"

They smiled and said their greetings.

"Yep, I guess it's 'do or die' day," said Elise.

Gordon knew an opening when he heard one and wasted no time jumping in. "Die? Did you say die?" " He clutched his heart in true Shakespearean style and moaned loudly before dropping to one knee, grabbing Elise's hand as he did so. "Please! I beg of you, I don't want to die today! Not in my Thunderbird! I'm too young! I deserve more than this! Please tell me you won't dump me into the depths unknown to suffer such a fate?"

Throughout this whole performance, Elise had looked at Gordon as if he had totally lost his mind. Dom had much the same look and Virgil just rolled his eyes... again. Elise then looked at Virgil, who stood with his hands casually on his hips, shaking his head pitifully at his brother who was now 'sobbing' for mercy at her feet.

"Gordon, I take it this means you're actually going to be inside the pod we're dropping today?" she asked carefully.

"Oh, bejzus." Dom muttered.

Gordon raised his pitiful face and meekly replied, "Yes. I will be at your mercy, so please, I beg you, don't just dump me. Virgil does that and it really hurts!"

Virgil glared at him. "I do no such thing and you damn well know it!"

Gordon winked at Elise and she immediately started to play along.

"Gordon, trust me, I will drop you down with velvet gloved hands. I promise you won't feel a thing except the softness of the waves caressing the pod." Her voice almost purred as she spoke.

Gordon grinned like the Cheshire Cat and looked at her. He was still holding the hand he'd grabbed earlier and he now kissed it as he asked, "Oh baby! Marry me right this minute!"

Elise cracked up laughing to the echoes of moaning in disgust from Virgil and snickering from Dom.

"Get up, and get outta here you jerk!" Virgil shoved a laughing Gordon to his feet and pushed him towards the pod.

"Hey, Virge, how come you never offer to drop me with velvet hands, hmmm?" the red head yelled back.

"Because I grew up in the same house as you, and I know things about you that are just plain wrong!" Virgil shot back, starting to laugh himself.

Gordon disappeared into the pod still laughing. Virgil turned to Elise and Dom smiling.

"See what I have to put up with? Either of you two want a brother?"

They laughed along with Virgil and both shook their heads no.

"Well, can't blame a guy for trying. Now, let's get this training underway before Gordon has too much time to think on his hands!"

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 11/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:38:40 GMT
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Thursday, May 31; London; 10 AM

Giles stood outside his brother's office, wishing he could be somewhere else -- anywhere else. He remembered his brother and sister's rage when they realized that Lena had slipped through their fingers once again.

xxxx

When they had regained consciousness, it took the three of them to realize what had happened. He was all for calling his brother there and then, but -- as usual -- Desdemona had overruled him. She told the driver to get them to the compound as fast as he could; they would call Jacques from there.

Once they arrived, he went to his quarters, leaving his sister to break the news. He freshened up, then went to the study, and found Dez there, her back to him, still on the phone, whining that it wasn't her fault. He could hear his brother's voice all the way across the room and knew that he was furious. He quietly left before she could discover his presence and try to make him talk to Jacques.

He went to the library where the staff brought him some coffee and crumpets. He helped himself, and sat in his favorite chair, to await his sister. Ten minutes later, she walked in and sat down nearby.

"Jacques is furious, and it's all your fault."

"My fault? How on earth could it be my fault?"

"Why didn't you do something? I can't think of everything, you know."

"Oh, come now, Dez. For once in your life. . ."

"Shut up, Giles. I'm not in the mood to hear it." She helped herself to some coffee. "Anyway, Jacques wants to see you in his office tomorrow. And he wants every detail about what happened."

"You were on with him long enough. Didn't he get everything from you?"

"He wants to hear about it from you. He was so angry, he probably didn't listen to half of what I said."

Giles sighed and finished his coffee. Then he stood up and headed for the door. His sister's sharp voice stopped him.

"Where do you think you are going?"

His hand on the knob, he turned and said, "To talk to Roland. I want to get his point of view of this whole thing. Perhaps he can furnish us with a description of the cabbie. It pays, sister dear, to get as much information as possible. Oh, and I suggest you spend the night here, instead of returning to whomever your latest paramour is. If Jacques were to find out you returned -- and you know he probably would -- I wouldn't put it past him to have someone pick you up and bring you to him."

She paled at his words, but said nothing. Satisfied, he left.

xxxx

Reluctantly, he opened the door and walked in. He winced as his brother looked up at him and said, "Well?" in a clipped tone that told Giles he was still in a foul mood. Assuming an insouciance he was far from feeling, he walked over to the desk and sat down. He gave his brother a detailed -- and accurate -- version of the previous afternoon's events. He also told Jacques what their driver had said when he was questioned.

Jacques sat forward. "So, two black cabs in an area where one is seldom seen, and no one is even a little bit suspicious. And two drivers, whose descriptions would fit half the males in London -- and several females. Why on earth didn't you call from the car instead of waiting until you reached the compound? You wasted precious time by doing that."

Giles shook his head. "I know, and I wanted to, but Dez overrode me -- as usual. I've told you and told you not to mess with Lena Matumbo. She has friends. But would you listen to me? Oh, no. You two know better." He shifted in his seat. "Well, you were wrong and I was right."

"What about her PDA?"

"What?"

"Her PDA. It was in her purse. I gave it to Dez."

Giles frowned. "Whoever rescued her, must have taken it. The purse was gone when we woke up."

"Damn!" Jacques stood up suddenly and began pacing. "That's something else we need to get. That PDA has technology no one else has. I want it!"

Giles said nothing. He sat there, thinking. It was a while before his brother noticed his silence and he stopped in front of him. "Well? Are you just going to sit there like a block of wood? Or don't you have anything to say?"

"Would it matter if I did?"

"Giles." There was a warning in his brother's voice.

"Okay, okay. There is someone else we might try to get. I've heard of someone else affiliated with Tracy Industries, and he would have far more secrets than Mrs. Matumbo."

"Who?"

"Hiram Hackenbacker."

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/10/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:39:44 GMT
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Tracy Island, 7:30 a.m. June 1st.

"Pod selection complete, lowering main frame: now."

The vibration of Thunderbird Two lowering down on the pod echoed around the hangar. The resounding 'thump' followed and Dom immediately announced, "Electromagnetic docking clamps secure."

Elise sat in the seat just behind and to the right of the pilot. She noted how calmer Dom seemed and more confident he was since they had gotten together to go over some issues. Virgil was standing to Dom's left and softly talked to him every now and again, coaching him along.

The huge hangar door opened and they taxied to the takeoff strip. The engines roared to life as Dom continued to verbally check off his take-off procedure. Elise knew it by heart; she'd done it enough times. Thunderbird Two pushed forward and upwards and in no time Dom was leveling her off and banking around to the left.

"We'll circle the island a couple of times to warm up and then we'll bring her down for the drop," Virgil said. Dom nodded trying to show a confidence he really didn't feel. "Once we've done a

drop, we'll move off, circle and return for the pod pick up. Then you guys can switch and Frankie can do her drop and pick up... with velvet gloves. After that, she can return Two to base." Virgil grinned.

"HEY! I'm still here ya know!" Gordon added. He'd been listening in on his radio to Virgil's instructions and Virgil knew it.

"Just making sure you're taken care of little brother!" Virgil replied. A not-so-polite grunt was Gordon's answer.

Dom did great banking slowly around then leveling the transporter for a slow descent to the spot where the drop would take place.

"Thunderbird Four from Thunderbird Two, approaching drop zone, ETA 2 minutes."

"F-A-B, Thunderbird Two. Ready for drop on your word." Gordon replied all business now.

~Amazing how he does that, thought Elise. ~From clown to serious rescue operative in .5 seconds~ Then she remembered when she and Gordon had been in New York after the accident. He'd been playful one minute and dead serious the next.

She glanced out the window and a sudden wave of fear washed over her, causing her to catch her breath. The ocean was moving up towards them and it threw her off her momentum for a second.

Virgil heard her and turned around. "You okay, Elise?" he asked, genuinely concerned.

She looked at him, not sure what to say, but she needn't have said anything because Virgil immediately knew what had startled her. He walked back to stand closer to her, out of Dom's earshot.

"It'll be okay, Elise, I promise. You'll do fine, just try not to think about it, okay?" His words were gentle and she smiled weakly at him.

"I'll try."

"Good girl." He winked, smiled softly, and returned to his position next to Dom.

Without much coaching, Dom powered down the turbine engines to operate as turbo fans at hovering speed. He advised Gordon to prepare for the drop and announced "Releasing pod: NOW!" He flipped the small switch and the sound of the magnetic bolts releasing the pod from the main frame could be heard in the cockpit.

"GERONIMO!" Gordon's voice crackled over the radio.

"Knock it off, Cousteau!" warned Virgil.

"Sorry, Dak," answered the voice on the radio.

"Not a problem. Are you down safely?"

"Yep! I'll just bob around down here 'til y'all come and get me!"

"F-A-B, Thunderbird Four."

Dom powered the engines up and moved off slowly, but as he increased the thrust Thunderbird Two shot forward faster than he'd anticipated.

"Bloody Hell! What just happened?" Dom suddenly became a little panicked.

"It's okay, Dak. You forgot to take into account that, with a pod no longer attached, there's a significant weight change in the main frame."

"Ah, is that what it was then? Scared the bejzus outta me!" Dom managed to collect himself and settle down to flying Two around the island.

Elise had been taking mental notes the entire time. ~Damn, I'd completely forgotten about the fuselage weight differential. Poor Dom. She made a note to herself to apologize to him later.

In no time at all they were back hovering over the pod.

"Thunderbird Four from Thunderbird Two, preparing to pick up pod now."

"F-A-B," Gordon replied.

Dom took a deep breath and lowered the aircraft. Reading his computer guidance system, he steered the main frame onto the pod. Once again securing the magnetic bolts, Dom made the green monster whole. Remembering what Virgil had just said about weight adjustments, he was careful not to thrust the engines too quickly.

As the craft moved away, a cheer could be heard from Gordon.

"Woo-Hoo, Dak!"

Virgil clapped him on the back and praised his performance. Dom, visibly relieved, smiled and said, "Ah, 'twas nothing!"

"Yeah, I'll bet!" added Elise as she switched places with Dom. Once in the pilot seat, she immediately became the professional pilot she'd always been. Virgil watched admiringly as she maneuvered the controls with ease, totally settled now with flying his baby, after such a rocky start with her training.

"Thunderbird Four from Thunderbird Two, approaching drop zone in 1.5 minutes. Be ready." Down in Thunderbird Four, Gordon was quite taken back by the female voice of authority which was now sitting in his brothers' seat!

"YES MA'AM!" he immediately replied.

"Smart ass." said Elise under her breath, but loud enough to make sure Gordon heard.

"Hey, I heard that!" complained the aquanaut.

Elise smirked, "You were meant to. Now get ready, we're over the drop zone." She glanced at Virgil, who looked very impressed with her quick wit with his brother. She grinned.

"Hey, Cousteau?"

"What?"

She lowered her voice and said, "I just want you to know I'm putting on my velvet gloves now... just for you... and like I promised, you won't feel a thing!" Virgil started laughing and Gordon didn't have time to think of a reply before she announced "Releasing pod NOW!"

Pod 4 hit the water gently and started bobbing up and down.

"Damn! That was smooth, girl! What d'ya say we do it again?" Gordon suggested provocatively.

"In your dreams!" Virgil interjected bluntly.

Elise shook her head, laughing softly. "You boys are a mess!"

"Boys? Did you hear that Van Gogh? She called us boys!"

"Don't go there, Cousteau," his brother warned.

The bantering stopped as Elise suddenly heard an alarm on the control panel. Scanning quickly she said, "Possible shut down in starboard vertical take-off ram jet." Virgil scanned the control panel for further indications of the problem.

"Shutting down starboard ram-jet," Elise continued "Vertical take-off power now controlled by port ram-jet. Hold on, I'm taking her up."

Elise gave the port ram-jet full throttle and the aircraft lurched upwards to the left, almost knocking Dom out of his seat. Once they'd recovered and were at low level cruising, Virgil was able to work on the computer interface and re-set the faulty ram-jet via the sophisticated flight controls. Once he confirmed that all was ok, Elise banked around again, and advised Gordon to prepare for pick up. When the pod was safely retrieved and Thunderbird Two was on approach to base, Gordon appeared in the cockpit.

"Everything okay, Virgil?"

"Yeah, starboard ram-jet cut out on us. I'll get Brains to check it out and run diagnostics on it when we get home."

Gordon nodded in agreement.

Elise landed smoothly and despite having to turn twice to line up for the reversal into the hangar, she shut down Two with ease and the four team members made their way down to the hangar. They waited for Brains and his verdict on what had happened. The engineer wasted no time in correcting the problem and assured the pilots that they had followed protocol to the letter.

As they walked toward the elevator to the main villa, Virgil and Gordon both let the two 'wonder-pilots' know what a great job they'd done. Now all they had to do was practice it for real!

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 11/10/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:41:08 GMT
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Friday 01 June 2068, en route to TB5, 10.30am

John had always thought that Thunderbird Three seemed to be alive. He knew it was a stupid notion; the rocket was nothing more than a man-made construction of cahelium alloy, held together by bolts and seals, running on fuel, not blood. Even so, sometimes he felt that every thrum was a heartbeat, and that the great rocket, the big sister of the other 'Birds, was alive. He imagined her knowing the well-travelled route to Thunderbird Five by heart. John shook his head. It was a dumb notion.

There was a dull swish amongst the harmony of humming, and John turned to see Scott enter the control room with two cups of steaming coffee. The smell was rich, and John accepted his drink gratefully. It smelled so good, and it was actually liquid. That meant it wasn't Scott's. Kyrano thought of everything.

"Thanks, Scott," he said, taking a deep sniff of the aroma.

"I don't think we could survive without Kyrano," Scott commented. "He sent a whole carafe with us."

"I'll be taking that on board," John said.

Scott took a sip of his drink, and then cradled the cup in his hands.

"Are you looking forward to going back up to the Tin Can?" he asked, casting a sidelong glance at his brother.

John shrugged, and cast his eyes across the flickering displays on the control panels.

"I guess so. It'll be kind of nice to get some peace and quiet for once," he said with a grin. "The island's sudden population increase has made that a rare commodity."

Scott chuckled.

"You can say that again." Immediately he held up one silencing finger just as John, with a sharp grin, opened his mouth. "I meant that metaphorically."

John clicked his fingers and muttered an unconvincing, "Damn," before laughing.

"You know me too well, Scott."

"That's true." Scott's face sobered. "Speaking of which, how goes that thing that we talked about a few weeks back?"

"I'd say pretty good," John said after a moment. "We've talked a bit, and we're going to get to know each other some more. We'll see where it goes."

Scott nodded sagely and leant back in his seat, taking another sip.

"And have you finally got it into that blond head of yours that you physically can't bring IR crashing down around you?"

John reddened lightly, but rolled his eyes. "Yes, Mom."

"That's Auntie."

"What?"

"Nothing."

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 11/10/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:41:24 GMT
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9 AM Friday, June 1; Tracy Island

"Here they come," Jeff said to his wife, immediately after giving the jet carrying Brains, Alan and Lena clearance to land. "Shall we go down and meet them?"

"By all means. I want to see for myself how Lena is. From what Alan said, she'll probably need some counseling. What happened to her is apparently just starting to sink in."

Frowning, Jeff looked into Dianne's troubled eyes. "You may be right. I hope we can help her get over the trauma."

Together they left the lounge, remembering what Alan had told them.

"Just before we left, Penny asked me to keep an eye on Lena. She said the woman had been too

calm during her stay. She thought that Lena might have a delayed reaction to what happened, once she was in the jet. She seemed to be okay, but a couple of times, when she didn't realize I was watching her, I saw her shaking, and she would mutter something and make a visible effort to stop. She hasn't really smiled the entire trip, nor has she slept."

They arrived at the jet just as the door opened. Both were shocked at Lena's appearance. She was fatigued and rumpled -- which they expected -- but the worst part was the lack of emotion. She also appeared to have aged years since her last visit. She returned their hugs of welcome halfheartedly.

"To the guest room with you, for as long a sleep as you need," Dianne said immediately. "No arguments -- doctor's orders."

Lena smiled wanly. "In dat case, I will obey. It's been a very tiring couple of days. Lead on, doctor."

The two women turned and headed to the Villa. Jeff turned to Alan and Brains. "Okay; talk to me."

"Dad, I can't tell you much more than I already did. She didn't sleep, and she barely ate anything; she said she wasn't hungry. You saw her; this whole episode did something to her. When I tried to talk to her about it, she closed up. She said it had nothing to do with International Rescue, and for that reason alone she was sorry she used her IR equipment to call for help. But she had no other way of contacting anyone for help. I told her not to be silly; that as an employee of Tracy Industries, she had a right to expect our protection."

"And you were right. Brains, do you have anything to add?"

"Not really, Mr. Tracy. Except that I heard her mutter something about being Masai. I'm afraid I don't really know what that means."

"Okay. I'll tell Dianne what you said. Now go get something to eat, then some rest. Brains, no going to the lab until you do both." He smiled at his engineer, who looked slightly chagrined. "I know you; you'd go straight there if no one prevented it. But you need food and sleep as much as anyone else does."

"Okay, Mr. Tracy."

"See you later, Dad."

The two headed up to the Villa, and Jeff contacted Kat on the commlink, asking her to check over the jet as soon as she could. Then he followed his son and engineer up to the Villa.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/10/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Tracy Island -- Friday, 1st June, 3.30pm

"Okay. I think we'll call it a day." Gordon said. He had been doing more extensive training with Brandon on Thunderbird Four. "I'll have to hurry. I promised Alex and Tyler I would take them fishing after school."

Then he looked at Brandon. "Say! Why don't you come along as well? It will be nice to relax after the work I've put you through. Besides, I may need help with my younger brothers."

Brandon grinned. "Yep, it would be kind of relaxing. I haven't been deep-sea fishing for quite a while."

Once changed and refreshed. Gordon and Brandon headed for the boat pen; to be greeted with two eager young boys. Soon the boat was speeding through the water. A small pod of dolphins decided to follow the boat. Alex and Tyler pointed excitedly at them.

"Are there whales in these waters, Gordon?" Tyler asked.

"Yes, Ty," Gordon answered. "Whales do sometimes frequent these waters."

As soon as the boat was far enough out, Gordon weighed anchor and set about sorting out his fishing rods. Brandon sat down on the deck and watched as Gordon cast his line. Tyler and Alex were leaning over the sides, watching for something to tug on Gordon's line.

"Don't you want to fish?" Gordon turned to Brandon.

"Not just yet. I just think I'll watch you for the moment. Is there any beer on board?"

Gordon smiled. "Yes, in the small fridge in the galley. While you're there, please bring me one as well."

"And us," Alex cheekily added.

"There are some bottles of juice or lemonade for you two," Gordon said, as he concentrated on the line, which was moving gently in the breeze. He opened his bottle of beer and took a long swig. This was the life. The sun shone from a cloudless sky.

Brandon closed his eyes and relaxed. He began to think about everything that had happened in the three months since he had been appointed as a member of International Rescue. The rescues had been dangerous but at the same time exciting. He was working with a crack team. Not only the Tracy family, but the other new recruits like him. He was suddenly awakened from his daydream by the rocking of the boat.

"Hey, steady, Gordon."

"Brandon! Quick! There's a fish on Gordon's line!" Tyler was waving his skinny arms wildly, urging Brandon to join them at the side of the boat.

All four stared at the line, which was being pulled taut. Gordon tried to reel in his catch.

"Play it a little," Brandon suggested. "Otherwise it may snap the line."

Puffing, Gordon said through gritted teeth, "I am trying to bring it in.

"Can I help, can I?" Tyler was jumping up and down in his excitement.

"I want to help bring it in," Alex said. "Besides, you're too small." He gave his brother a look that clearly showed his seniority.

After half an hour of arm wrenching, Gordon finally managed to bring the fish to the surface.

"Wow! Just look at that!" Brandon exclaimed. "What do you think it is?"

"It's a small Skate," Gordon answered. "Kyrano will be pleased."

Carefully, and with the two youngest Tracy brothers' help, the fish was landed on the deck. Although it wasn't as big as they had first thought; it still thrashed its fins and head. Quickly, Gordon killed it.

"Can we have a turn, Gordon?" Alex asked his older brother.

"I think we'll move a little further out to sea," Gordon said, as he went and restarted the engine. After cruising for a further ten minutes, Gordon once again weighed anchor. Eagerly Alex and Tyler watched as Gordon put more bait on the hook; before showing them how to cast the line. Both Alex and Tyler tried to hold the rod together.

"Hey," Gordon laughed. "One at a time, guys."

"Can I go first please?" Tyler begged. "Alex always gets to do things before me."

"I don't," Alex began to argue back.

Brandon stood up. "There's more than one rod. I'll help you, Tyler."

For the next hour, all four continued fishing. All that could be heard was either Alex or Tyler calling

"Look! I've got one!"

"Aww, it got away."

"Steady. You're rocking the boat."

"I'm trying to reel it in."

"I've caught more than you." That was Alex, who was having more success with Gordon helping him than Tyler was with Brandon. Eventually, Gordon looked at the ten fairly good-sized fish lying on the deck alongside the larger one he had caught.

"Looks like we'll all eat well tonight," Gordon said with a pleased look on his face.

"Well, I think we had better head for home," Brandon replied. "I promised Dom I'd meet him in the gym. We've planned to do a work out together." He looked meaningfully at Gordon.

"We landed some fish!" Tyler was capering around the deck, while Alex was trying to conceal his excitement. "Wait till we tell Mom and Dad!" he added.

Gordon just looked at Brandon. "I think that we helped them a little, don't you?"

Brandon laughed and nodded.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 11/13/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:42:41 GMT
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]*****Friday, June 1, 2068; Thunderbird Five; 6:00 p.m.*****[/I]

For the first time, Callie Spencer was putting what she had learned on the Thunderbird Three simulator to the test. She had flown the red rocket with ease away from Thunderbird Five and through Earth's atmosphere. The only part that had plagued her in the simulator was landing it upright in the Round House silo. She had finally succeeded two weeks before she left for her run as space monitor. Practicing the landing at least twice a day, she eventually got the landing down on the simulator. While she was prepping herself for the real landing, she thought back to when John and Scott arrived to change personnel.

*****Flashback to 1:00 p.m.*****

Callie had already packed her clothes, and after making sure the system checks were completed, she waited patiently for the arrival of Thunderbird Three.

John's voice was soon heard over the radio. "Thunderbird Five from Thunderbird Three. Request permission for docking."

Pressing a button on the control panel, she checked the cameras for anything that could jeopardize the docking sequence. She nodded and said, "Hatch is clear, Thunderbird Three. You are clear for docking."

"F-A-B."

Within fifteen minutes the two machines were connected. John and Scott entered the space station, John holding his suitcase.

"Welcome aboard, John," said Callie jokingly.

"Thanks, Callie. You had a fairly quiet month, didn't you?"

"Yeah, except for that call from the boy and Lena's signal from her PDA when she was kidnapped. Speaking of Lena, is she all right?"

"We don't know for sure. Dad knows more of the details than we do."

Scott said, "We do know she's on the island now. Come on, we've got a lot of loading and unloading to do."

For an hour-and-a-half, the three took the supplies off the spaceship and moved them onto the space station. Then, they loaded the trash and empty water containers into the rocket for return to Earth.

John looked at Callie. "Dad told us about the lack of peanut butter, so when it's your turn in August, we'll stock up on it for you."

"Aw, you don't have to do that. Anyway, I'm ready to go back to the island."

After another 15 minutes, Callie was at the controls of Thunderbird Three. "Ready to leave, Quasar."

"F-A-B, Ursa. Good luck flying her home."

"Thanks."

*****End flashback*****

This is it, she thought. I hope I get this right. Concentrating on the controls, she said, "Base from Thunderbird Three, requesting permission to land."

Jeff said, "F-A-B, Ursa. You're clear to land."

She pressed a few buttons to allow the rocket to do a complete flip to place into its position. Pushing the button to fire the retro rockets, she carefully watched her angle of entry. "Dead straight," she whispered. "Now just keep it at this angle..."

Scott noticed her talking to herself. You've almost got it, Callie. Just one thousand feet left.

For every hundred feet, the retros fired out more exhaust, slowing their descent into the silo. After about seven minutes, the rocket landed softly on the blast ducts.

"Congratulations, Callie," said Scott. "You successfully landed Thunderbird Three safely."

She exhaled a deep breath. "For a little while, I didn't think I could do it."

"Hey, you practiced the landings on your own in the simulator, and you did really well for your first time on the real thing. Before too long, it'll become second nature to you."

The pair went down the elevator to the sofa, which descended from the rocket and started its trip back into the lounge.

"I really need to talk to Mr. Tracy about the cross-training, because there are so many people training in Thunderbird One and Thunderbird Two already," Callie said. "I'm not sure I'm even needed for cross-training."

"We'll talk with Dad about that when we get to the lounge."

"Okay."

They continued on the railroad car, until a long hydraulic lift pushed the sofa upward into the lounge.

When the sofa emerged in the lounge, Jeff said, "Welcome home, Callie."

"Thank you, sir."

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 11/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:44:20 GMT
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Friday, June 1, 2068, 5:45 p.m., Tracy Island

"Ewww! That's gross!"

"No! No! That's cool!"

Tyler and Alex stood by, watching as Gordon and Brandon helped Kyrano prepare the fish they'd caught for dinner. Tyler had his eyes half open and was standing with his hands held palms out and his face turned away as the men beheaded, gutted and filleted the fish. Alex eagerly watched the sight, trying to pick out the various organs as they were removed from the dead bodies.

"I'm getting out of here!" Tyler said, making a face. He turned and hurried away.

"He's not going to make a very good fisherman, is he?" Gordon commented. "This is all part of the sport, especially if you want to eat the catch."

"Aww, he'll probably get used to it as he gets older," Brandon disagreed. He put the fish that he had just finished with onto a tray, and stood up. "Can you finish the rest?"

Gordon looked around. "Yeah, I think we can." He looked up at Brandon from his seat. "You going to eat with us? Enjoy some of our catch?"

"No, but thanks for the invitation. There's a shindig planned for Callie's homecoming tonight, and I'm doing the grilling. I'd better get over there and get things ready."

"Okay, man. Thanks for helping out."

"Indeed, Mr. Brandon," Kyrano said. "Thank you for your contribution."

"No problem, Kyrano. And I didn't catch the fish, I just helped Tyler do it," the aquanaut said with a chuckle and a grin. "Later guys." He raised a hand in farewell before going inside to wash his hands.

Alex and Gordon both bid him goodbye, and Gordon finished up with the last of the fish.

"This will be a tasty meal tonight," Gordon said. He glanced over at his younger brother. "Do you think Tyler will eat this now that he's seen how to clean a fish?"

"If Mom has anything to say about it, he will," Alex said. He glance over at Kyrano. "What else are we having, Kyrano?"

The Malaysian smiled. "Your Tracy grandmother is making some of her apple pies, while your Parkhurst grandmother is making green beans almonidine and a rice pilaf. She told me she would rather make hush puppies and cole slaw, but since I will be steaming the fish instead of frying it, she agreed to make the lighter fare."

"Next time, can we have a fish fry with hush puppies? I love hush puppies!" Alex pleaded.

"I will take your request under advisement, Mr. Alex," Kyrano said, nodding. He lifted the tray with the fish on it. "I must begin to cook these. Thank you for cleaning them, Mr. Gordon. And thank you, Mr. Alex, for catching them."

"You're welcome," Gordon and Alex both answered.

Alex followed Gordon as he stepped into a utility room to wash his fishy hands. First he washed them, then he squeezed a half a fresh lemon, left there by Kyrano for the purpose, over them to get out the fishy smell.

"I'm going to go clean up before dinner," Gordon said. "I think you should, too."

"Yeah, I guess so. I'll see you at dinner, Gords," Alex replied saucily as he skipped from the room.

"Little brothers," Gordon said, shaking his head. "You can't do a thing with 'em."

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:44:37 GMT

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Friday, June 1, 2068, 6:15 PM; Tracy Island

While Emily and Lisa took the side dishes out to the dining room, Kyrano removed the fish from the steamer and placed them onto a platter. He had found a way of adding certain spices to enhance the flavor, and this particular dish had become a family favorite. Now it was ready to eat and smelled wonderful. He turned to take the platter into the dining room and place it on the table.

He returned to the kitchen, and heard Durian meowing plaintively from the wire enclosure that Kyrano had put in the kitchen, so the kitten could keep him company. But Durian had found a way out earlier and gotten into the trash, where the fish heads were prior to being ground up for fertilizer. Kyrano had hurried over to him and picked him up, managing to get him to drop the head in his mouth. He'd put the kitten back into the enclosure, found how he'd gotten out, and fixed it so he couldn't do that again.

Once the food was served and the family was eating, he took Durian out of the enclosure and, sitting at a small table, held him on his lap, petting him. He grew concerned as he noticed the kitten seemed listless and unwell. He lifted him to look at his eyes, but saw nothing to tell him what was wrong, so put him back on his lap and continued to pet him.

About twenty-five minutes later, the door to the dining room opened, and Grandma Tracy walked through. "The dinner was delicious as usual, Kyrano, and the boys all say that the only thing that can top it off is my apple pie. Land sakes, I -- dear me! What's going on?"

They heard a yell from the dining room. "Please excuse me. I had Durian on my lap when you came in, and he ran through the door when you came in." He hurried out.

"Ewww!" "Gross!" "Oh, yuck!"

Kyrano stopped in his tracks, appalled. Durian had jumped onto the table, and was hunched in the middle of it, vomiting. He coughed a little, and looked up to see Kyrano and mewed pitifully. Kyrano picked him up and looked into the kitten's eyes once again. "He had been in the kitchen earlier and was eating the fish heads; how he got into the trash, I don't know. But they shouldn't have affected him like this; not that much time has passed since they were caught." He cradled Durian in his arms.

Just then the kitten tensed and coughed up a fish eye on the Malaysian's sleeve. Paling at the sight, Cherie suddenly put her napkin to her mouth and got up quickly, running out of the room. Dianne glanced at Jeff, and left, following her. Everyone looked at each other, wondering if the fish would make them sick, too. Gordon frowned; Alex and Tyler looked worried, since they had been the ones to catch the fish.

Kyrano shifted Durian to one arm and reached out to take the platter with the remaining pieces of fish back into the kitchen. "I will save this in case he becomes worse, so we may find out what is making him ill. I hope this does not affect any of you. Please extend my apologies to Miss Cherie for having to witness such a thing."

"Of course, Kyrano. And despite the unintentional floor -- or should I say table -- show, dinner was up to your usual standards."

"Thank you, sir. And now I must attend to things in the kitchen. And to this little one." He turned and left.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/15/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:44:50 GMT
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Friday, June 1, 2068, 6:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"Oh, this is wonderful, Brains," Tin-Tin declared as she stretched upward. She was sitting on a blanket that she had spread on the sand.

"Yes, I have to agree," Brains said as he rummaged around in the picnic cooler he had brought along. "It was nice of your father to prepare this supper for us."

"Actually, it was Lisa who did most of the work," she replied. "My father was busy preparing the fish that the boys brought in. I'm sorry to have missed it, but a light meal is more what I need."

"Me, too," Brains said, smiling. "Here's a salad with chicken, some iced tea..."

"Oooh! Lisa's sweet tea! She makes the best!"

Brains poured out some of the tea for each of them, then served the salad. Tin-Tin took a deep swallow of the drink and made a noise of satisfaction.

"I am so glad to be away from the lab. Upgrading all the visors with the heads up tech was so tedious," she said. Sitting crosslegged on the blanket, she took a bite of the chicken, and waved her fork a bit. "But it's all done. I just have to return them to the team members."

"You've been busy lately, Tin-Tin," Brains commented. He took a drink of his own tea. "You've basically thrown yourself into your work. Why?"

There was a moment of quiet, then Tin-Tin sighed. "My encounter with Giles Hightower in England, I suppose. Working hard helps me forget what a fool I was to trust him."

"How could you know what kind of creep he was?" Brains replied. He chewed thoughtfully on a

bite of salad, then continued. "You have nothing to be ashamed of, Tin-Tin. Anyone can be gulled by someone charming who pays particular attention to them."

She gazed at him with an eyebrow raised. He noticed her looking at him, and asked, "What?"

"Have you ever been gulled by someone charming who paid particular attention to you?"

Brains blushed. "Well, yes. But she couldn't hold a candle to you, Tin-Tin." He looked back down at his salad. "And that's all I'll say about the matter!"

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/19/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:45:03 GMT
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Friday, June 1, 2068, 7:30 p.m., Tracy Island

"How's Durian?" Lisa asked as she sat across the kitchen table from Kyrano.

The Malaysian sighed, "He is lethargic and will not eat. I fear I shall have to send him to a veterinarian."

The older woman picked up a forkful of rice and slipped it into her mouth. She usually ate with her family of an evening, but this time she had decided to wait for her beau before having dinner. Neither she nor Kyrano had counted on the cat's disgusting performance in the middle of the table.

"Do you think the fish is contaminated?" she asked. "I know that you cooked it well, so there should have been no chance of food poisoning."

He shook his head sadly. "I do not know. I have saved some of the fish and may ask Mr. Brains to analyze it for us, just in case." He glanced up at his companion. "I am sorry that Cherie..."

"Don't worry about it," Lisa said, waving her free hand. "Cherie's at that stage where she overreacts to that sort of thing. I would have thought her to have a stronger stomach considering all the creepy things Alex has brought home over the years."

She took a bite of the chicken breast that Kyrano had prepared in lieu of the fish. "Now, let's eat and not worry. Sometimes animals pick up things that human's don't and vice versa. No sense borrowing trouble."

Kyrano smiled slightly and nodded. He reached a hand across to cover hers. "Yes, you are right. We should enjoy this time together."

Lisa returned the smile, looking remarkably like her daughter as she winked at him.

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:45:26 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068, 6:15 a.m., Tracy Island

"Ugh," Dianne moaned as she rolled over. Her wristwatch communicator was buzzing for her attention and she picked it up to answer the call.

"Yes?" she asked thickly.

Alex's pale and worried face stared back at her. "Mom," he said. "Tyler's throwing up. And I don't feel so good either."

She sighed. "I'll be right there."

"Okay, Mom."

Dianne rolled out of bed, feeling weary and tired. She went to her closet and pulled out a modest robe. As she donned it, Jeff stirred.

"Wassamatta?" he slurred from his side of the bed.

"Tyler's sick, and probably Alex, too," she replied, tying the belt of her robe. "I'm going to check on them."

"Kay," Jeff muttered. He rolled over and his steady breathing told her that he had gone back to sleep.

She sighed a long-suffering sigh and, taking her communicator with her, left their suite. Standing outside the door was a pale Cherie.

"Mom, my stomach hurts and I feel hot," the teen complained.

Dianne raised the back of her hand to her daughter's forehead and said, "Yes, you've got a fever. Go back to your room and I'll be there in a few minutes. I need to check on the boys first."

"Okay, Mom," Cherie said wearily. The two walked together, past Scott's room, and to Cherie's suite, where the teenager stopped and stepped through the door. Dianne continued to the room on the corner.

Entering the cluttered sitting area, she passed through the double sliding doors to the boys' even more cluttered bedroom. The light was on in the bathroom and she could just hear the toilet flushing. Stepping inside, she found both boys. Tyler was sitting on the floor next to the commode looking totally wiped out and holding his stomach, while Alex was rinsing out his mouth.

"I threw up, too, Mom," the older boy said, sounding miserable.

"So I gathered," Dianne replied. She made her way over to her youngest son. "I think we'd better take you down to the sick room."

"I don't wanna go there," Tyler whined, shaking his head. "I hate it there! Can't I stay here and sleep in my own bed?"

"Please, Mom, let him stay," Alex pleaded. "I don't want to be up here alone."

Tyler's eyes grew wide with panic, and he climbed to his knees, leaning over the toilet to vomit again. Dianne held his head steady as he retched, then found a washcloth to wipe his face with when he was done. She noticed how hot he was and glanced up at Alex.

"I think you both should go down to the sick room, at least until we figure out what this is and have an idea of how long it's going to last," she said. "And until I can call in some back up to help take care of you. I have a feeling this has something to do with the fish we ate last night..."

Alex cut her off. "We didn't do anything bad to the fish, Mom! I swear we didn't!"

Dianne put an arm around him. "I know, Alex, I know. If what I think has happened is true, you had nothing to do with it." She sighed heavily. "I'm going down to the sick room for a couple of emesis bowls so that you'll have something to throw up into should you need to on the way down. But you're both going down there, at least for a little while. We'll need to take blood samples." She squatted down beside Tyler and pushed his stiff hair from his sweaty brow. "I promise that once we get things squared away down there, and the nurses are here to help me, you can come back and sleep in your own bed, okay?"

Tyler nodded. She stood, breathed out another sigh, then headed down to the sick room.

On the way, she contacted Kyrano and Brains, asking them to meet her at the infirmary. Her mother came along as well, and Dianne was glad to see her.

"All three of the youngest children are sick, but especially the boys. I'm going to bring them down here for a period of observation. Kyrano? Would you please contact Dom and Nikki and tell them I need them? Mom, please go up and check on Cherie, then stay with the boys until I can get back up there. Brains? I'm going to take blood samples from the boys and I'd like you to analyze that fish for us. See if that's the culprit."

"You know what it will mean if it is," Brains warned.

Dianne nodded. "Yes, I do. It means the whole family will be sick, from Tyler all the way up to Em. Myself included."

"Lisa and I did not eat the fish, nor did Mr. Brains or Tin-Tin. And I did not send any to Mrs. Matumbo, either," Kyrano informed her.

Dianne sat wearily down at her desk. "I'd hate to ask Lena to help out if this turns out to be as bad as it looks, but we might have to." She glanced over at the three people before her. "Well, I'd better things ready for those blood samples. Ma, I'll be up for the boys in a few minutes."

"Right. When you bring them down, I'll look in on Em," Lisa said, nodding.

"Okay. Let's get going. Hopefully there'll be some time before the adults come down with symptoms. And pray, really pray, that we don't get an emergency call," Dianne said seriously. "International Rescue may be non-functional for a few days here."

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/21/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:46:22 GMT
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Saturday 02 June, 6.15am, Tracy Island.

Buzz, buzz, buzz.

The noise roused Dominic to somewhere between sleep and waking, and he pressed his face into the pillow.

Buzz, buzz, buzz.

Heaving a deep sigh, he reluctantly raised his head and glanced over at the bedside table, where the noise was coming from, and frowned. What on earth is that?

Buzz, buzz, buzz.

It took a few moments for the fog of sleep to lift enough from his brain before Dom realized that it was his wrist comm., and at -- 6.20am?! -- it could only be sounding for something bad. He sat up and reached across for it, rubbing his face with one hand.

"Dom here," he said.

"Mr Kelly," came Kyrano's voice, "Doctor Tracy has requested your presence in the sick room immediately. The youngest Tracys have come down with an illness."

"I'll be right there. Will someone be able to take Joshua for me?"

"I shall tend to him."

"Okay. Thanks. Dom out."

Dominic sprang out of bed and started to get dressed, followed by setting a record for getting washed. He was ready in a snap and went to Joshua's room. The child was already awake, as per

usual, and Dom quickly washed and dressed him too.

"Ready for an adventure?" He asked. "Daddy has to work, so you'll be spending time with Kyrano, okay Jak? Come on."

Joshua obediently took his father's hand, and the two headed for the monorail.

Dom had met Nikki on the way to the sick room, and as soon as they got there, they were informed of the situation, and were following in Dianne's wake to get the Alex and Tyler.

"We can only hope that it wasn't the fish," Dianne said, "although it's the likely culprit."

In a flash, they had transferred the boys back down to the sick room, and the nurses set about taking the blood samples. When Dianne took them for testing, Dom glanced at Nikki, a worried twist to his lips.

"I hope this doesn't turn out to be a family-wide occurrence," he said.

"I know. It could be a disaster if there's a call..." Nikki commented.

They didn't stop to ponder upon it any further, and set about making the miserable young Tracys comfortable, and waited.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 11/23/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:47:21 GMT
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Tracy Island -- late morning June 2nd

Virgil was tossing and turning in his sleep. He woke suddenly. What had wakened him? There was a terrible pain in his stomach, and waves of nausea swept over him. Groggily he rose and, with a sudden urgency, rushed for his bathroom. He had never felt so ill. He was dizzy and hot, then he was shivering. He tottered back to his bed. Glancing at his bedside clock he couldn't believe his eyes. It was nearly noon. Groaning, he rested his head back onto the pillow. But no sooner had his head hit the pillow than the same urge as before made him rush to the bathroom again. Resting his head in his hands, he felt the dizziness nearly overcome him.

Virgil didn't know how long he stayed in the bathroom. He just felt that he didn't ever want to move again. Eventually he felt that he could make it back to bed

He lay down on his bed, feeling very weak. It was no good; he had to use the bathroom again. The gripping pains in his stomach were relentless in their intensity. He began to retch and this

time failed to make it to his bathroom.

Feeling decidedly wobbly, he was just returning to his bed when Dianne entered. Taking one look at Virgil, she said, "You too, huh?"

"Mom, I've never felt so sick in my life. What's wrong with me?"

Dianne placed the back of her hand on his forehead. He felt hot and sweaty, although he was shivering violently.

"Hm, seems you're suffering the same as Grandma Tracy, Alex and Tyler. Looks like the fish we ate was contaminated. Brains is analysing the remains," Dianne said, pulling his covers up over him. "At the moment, the only thing to do is to try and sleep it off."

Virgil smiled weakly. "I don't think I have anything left inside to part with."

"I'll have Dom or Nikki bring you a bowl and some hydration fluid. I'm going to check on the rest of the family. I have a nasty feeling that everyone who ate the fish will be affected."

"Mom? How long will this last? What if a call comes through?"

"I'm not sure. It could hang on for days. We'll just have to hope we don't get a call," Dianne replied wearily. She smoothed a hand over his forehead and hair. "Now try and get some rest."

"I'll try," Virgil said sleepily. He snuggled under the covers like a little boy, sighing.

Dianne smiled wanly back at him and echoed his sigh as she left the room to check on Alan and Gordon.

written by TawnyAngel22 Sent: 11/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:47:38 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068, noon, Tracy Island

"Dianne? Dianne?" Brains called through his communicator. There was no answer and he frowned. ~I'd better go up and find out what's going on in the sick room.

He walked into the infirmary to find it nearly empty. The boys and Emily had been moved back up to their rooms after it was deemed that they'd be better off in their own beds. Nikki was cleaning up a mess on the floor, her face covered by a mask and wearing medical gloves. The smell of antiseptic was heavy in the air.

"Where's Dianne?" he asked Nikki.

She sighed, and indicated the rest room with her head. "In there. It's finally caught up with her."

"Oh," he said, blinking behind his glasses.

The door opened and Dianne came out, one hand on her abdomen, looking pale and wiped out. She noticed the scientist standing there and asked, "What is it? Do you know?"

Snagging an emesis bowl, she headed for her office, Brains following along. "Yes, I know what it is... sort of."

"What do you mean, sort of?" Dianne asked, sitting heavily in her chair and looking up at him with bleary eyes.

"It seems to be a form of shigellosis, but a strain that has never been catalogued before," he replied, sitting on the edge of her desk, folding his arms. "In fact, this may end up being named for us if it's truly a new strain of the bacteria."

Dianne let out a long breath. "How long do you think it will last? And do you think it will respond to regular shigellosis meds?"

"How long? I don't know, but the onset is a whole lot faster than the usual strains of the diseases, so I'd say that it shouldn't last as long," Brains responded. "And I don't see why it wouldn't respond to meds."

"Okay." Dianne closed her eyes and breathed deeply for a few moments, then opened a new window on her computer. "I'm sending in a prescription for the meds to our usual pharmacist in Wellington. Can you see that it's picked up and distributed?"

"Sure," Brains told her. "Tin-Tin would probably be best to pick up the meds. I'll send her on her way right now."

"Good," Dianne muttered as she perused the pharmacist's lists. "Because by the time she comes back, I'm going to be in my own bed, hopefully sleeping this off." A few clicks of the mouse and she said, "There..." But her next words were cut off short as she put one hand over her mouth, picked up the emesis bowl, and headed at high speed for the sick room's toilet.

Brains watched her go, then settled down behind her desk. He checked on the pharmacy order, then raised his communicator. "Brains to Tin-Tin. I have a job for you..."

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:47:54 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 5:30 a.m., Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjal range, India (noon Tracy Island)

The worker wore warm clothes and had an oxygen mask, just in case. The heavy-duty halogen

light he carried on his helmet illuminated his workspace within the dark tunnel. Though the tunnel did carry lighting, it wasn't activated until a train passed through, thus saving energy.

His gloved fingers worked clumsily at the device he was setting up. He had used a collapsible ladder, one that could be anchored in the smooth cement ceiling of the long monorail tunnel, and had worked on his first device from that precarious perch. It had been the more difficult bit of hardware: a motion sensitive transmitter that would trigger the device he was working on now.

This one was an explosive charge that would sit on the ceiling itself and was powerful enough to bring down tons of the concrete that made up the tunnel. The transmitter would send a signal to the explosive once the engine of the train that he was interested in passed beneath it. Then, it would trigger another explosion, right where it was situated, once the entire train had cleared the spot.

He smiled as he worked. There was a particular piece of hardware aboard that train, an anti-aircraft scanner that could detect anything. "Including those blasted Thunderbirds," he muttered under his breath.

He checked his watch, noticing that he still had enough time to get down to the station and board the train in his current guise. Then he would be handy when the power went out and the train had to stop. "I will check the maintenance tunnel once again," he murmured. "I cannot allow myself to be trapped here with the rest of the passengers." The tunnel would deposit him on the side of the mountain, from which he could access a helijet he had hidden not far away. Earlier, he had unloaded a four-wheel drive truck from that helijet so he could get back down the mountain.

"There, done!" he exclaimed softly. He didn't like the echoes of the long tunnel; they reminded him how far beneath the ground he really was. "Now to check my escape route, and then into my truck for the journey down to the station. In a few short hours, the train will come by and the tunnel will collapse, trapping it and making the acquisition of that particular bit of technology very, very simple."

He laughed softly under his breath as he climbed down to the floor of the tunnel. Pressing a button, the pitons that held the ladder released and it fell, ready to be picked up and stored for another use. He loaded it into his truck, then headed for the maintenance access point to reassure himself of its usefulness.

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:48:09 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 8:30 a.m., Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjal range, India (3 p.m. Tracy Island)

The India Star monorail train made its way into the long Banihal Tunnel. The passage through the Pir Panjal mountains was over seven miles long and had taken years to build. It was used by monorail trains carrying both passengers and freight to and from the central portions of India to

the northern ones.

A swarthy man, not particularly noticeable in his unassuming clothes and his bland face, paid close attention to his PDA as the train entered the tunnel. The exterior lights switched on providing a glimpse of the smooth walls as the monorail flashed by. Two miles into the tunnel, words appeared on the man's PDA: "device 1 triggered". This was accompanied by a strong vibration in the monorail, strong enough to make the train slow down. Then, moments later, the words "device 2 triggered" appeared on the PDA, followed by an actual shaking and a jarring screech as the rails holding up the train from the back tore from the roof and fell, twisted, into the pile of debris that was now blocking the tunnel.

The man smiled inwardly even as he reacted to the situation as he would be expected to: with fear and confusion.

The train came to a halt less than a quarter mile from the farthest blockage, saving itself and the passengers from a devastating collision with a wall of rock. However, the rails were twisted, and groaned precariously as the weight of the train threatened to pull the still standing threads from the ceiling. To the rear, the back of the monorail was already dragging on the ground as the rails they passed over had been weakened more and had fallen from their overhead stanchions. Power to the tunnel was disrupted; lights went out both inside and outside the train, and the giant ventilation fans ceased to turn.

The passengers were reacting with panic despite the best efforts of the crew to calm them. The swarthy man disappeared into the milling crowd, heading for the rear of the train where the piece of technology he was looking for had been stored.

Unbeknownst to the would-be thief, the explosions he had set off had another, unforeseen effect. A slope of talus, pieces of loose rock that littered a part of the mountain almost like a glacier, were shaken loose from their positions and had flowed like a stony avalanche downward, covering both the ventilation shafts that brought fresh air into the tunnel... and the maintenance exit that the culprit hoped to use to make his escape.

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/24/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:48:21 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068, 3:15 p.m., Wellington, New Zealand

Tin-Tin loaded the last of her purchases into the car. She had been given a list of medical supplies and special foods by Brains, Dom, and her father when she left the island. The family's usual pharmacist had found himself without enough of the medicine that Dianne had ordered, so while he tried to get an emergency delivery from his wholesaler, Tin-Tin took a Tracy family car - one of the ones they kept at the airport - and went shopping.

She glanced at her watch and sighed. ~The pharmacist said he should have the medication by

three. I hate seeming to pester him, but I've got to get that medicine to the island as soon as possible.

Shaking her head, she got into the car and started it up. ~I hope traffic is light. I'm really pressed for time here. The little boys in particular need this drug now. With that thought, she pulled out of the parking lot and drove back to the pharmacy, hoping that the prescription Dianne had emailed would be filled by the time she arrived there.

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/25/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:48:34 GMT
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The electronic doors meant that there was no chance to slam the door, something that Nikki was very glad for. Alan had just finally dropped off to sleep after waking up to the unpleasant surprise that he was about to lose his lunch (So to speak, she thought), and that was a lot of hours to be awake and miserable. Nikki kept a firm hold on the tray she was carrying, which bore a now-empty water jug. She made her way back down to the sick room to replenish it, but bumped into Kat on the way, who was taking care of a certain someone.

"Hello Nikki," Kat said, gently tugging Joshua's arm to urge him onwards.

"Hey Kat," Nikki said.

"It's awful what's happened, isn't it?" She asked. "Whenever I heard, I just had to come and help. I think Lisa and Kyrano were glad to have Joshua off their hands for a little while."

Nikki grinned and tipped a wink to the little boy.

"Your daddy's working hard today," she glanced at her watch and said, "and so am I. I've got to get going. Be a good boy, won't you?" she said to Joshua. Her eyes rolled up to Kat, and she grinned slyly. "And you be a good girl and don't hide him away to keep him."

Kat chuckled and shook her head. Joshua glanced up and giggled at her mirth.

"We'll see," she said.

Nikki gave them a wave before heading off again, shaking her head.

From: ArtisticRaine Sent: 11/28/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:48:51 GMT

Saturday, June 2, 8:45 a.m., Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjal range, India (3:15 p.m. Tracy Island)

"Ah, there is my beauty," the nondescript man murmured as he opened the stainless steel case. The scanner was much more compact than he had hoped for and, as a bonus, there was a micro disk slipped into the foam rubber casing that held it secure. "Instructions on how to use it, and perhaps even the plans for the device," he said in quiet satisfaction. "Now, to make my escape."

The guards had proved to be no trouble; the thief's hypnotic powers had rendered them unconscious before either could draw a weapon. He put on his infrared goggles again and checked to see if anyone was loitering near this, the second to last car on the train. He drew back as the conductor and another railway employee hurried by, flashlights in hand, heading for the last car. The thief had no idea what was in that last carriage, nor did he care. He had what he had come for and now it was time to leave the train and its passengers to their fate.

He stepped out cautiously, just in time to see the conductor, who had forced open the door to the twisted final car, stumble out of it, coughing, dropping to his knees, then passing out entirely. The other employee, who the thief now recognized as one of the stewards, looked terrified. He pulled the conductor away, beginning to cough on his own. Finally, he too, succumbed to whatever was leaking from the last train.

The bandit, known worldwide as the Hood, turned away from the last car. A slightly acrid smell teased his nose behind the mask he wore and he fought the urge to sneeze. Through his goggles he could see a thin plume of gas rising to the ceiling of the damaged tunnel.

~It would be foolish to pass behind that final car since whatever is in it is knocking out those who go by. I will make my way between the cars instead.

He did so, hurrying to find the shadows of the tunnel wall, pressing the case between himself and the wall to hide it should a torch light fall on him. At last he found the door that would lead him to freedom. Smiling, he opened it, and passed through.

The stairway was long and narrow, and the air got colder as he approached the top. He panted in the thin atmosphere, wishing he had brought along an oxygen mask. He knew how much higher on the mountain the stair would take him, but thought himself in good enough physical condition that he could take those stairs twice within just a few hours. He hadn't counted on the burden of the stainless steel case.

At last he reached the exit, the secured hatchway that would give him access to the clear air and his waiting helijet. He pressed a small device to the lock. It beeped as cheerily as it had earlier and the light on the lock turned green. "Yes!" he cried sharply, then he pushed against the hatch.

Nothing happened.

He frowned, and put down his burden to push with both of his powerful arms.

Again, nothing happened.

He cursed and pushed again, harder. All that he could hear was a slight scraping, as of metal on rock.

He stopped to consider this sound. ~Rocks on the hatch? Who would put rocks on the hatch? The thing was clear when I checked it earlier...

At last it dawned on him what had happened. He cursed long, loudly, and inventively. He cursed the mountain, he cursed the tunnel, and he cursed himself for being blind to this possibility. He cursed until he had to stop, panting, the thin air robbing him of the oxygen he need to continue his ranting.

~Now what do I do? he asked himself, sitting down on one of the upper steps. ~I can go back down but, if I did my job with the explosives correctly, there will be no way out. And there is that gas, whatever it is. It could render me unconscious and I would be captured. Rescue will not come soon enough... unless...

He shook his head and shuddered at the thought, but he knew this was his only option. ~I cannot believe it. I cannot believe things have come to this... when I, Belah Gaat, sworn enemy to International Rescue, must humiliate myself and call upon them for assistance.

He sighed, reached into his pocket for a portable satellite phone, one that any prudent businessman might carry, and one he used to make his disguise complete. ~I can only hope whoever answers the call does not recognize my voice.

He dialed the emergency services number. He knew that his signal would not reach them, but he hoped that his enemies could monitor the airwaves and hear him. "Calling International Rescue... I have an emergency... calling International Rescue..."

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/28/2005[/color

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:49:09 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068

When Lena woke up from her long sleep, she found that her clothes had been washed, dried and returned to her room. She dressed and found her way first to the lounge. Finding no one there, she headed downstairs to the dining room, then into the kitchen. She went in and saw a distressed Kyrano being comforted by Lisa.

"What has happened? What's wrong?"

"Some of the family are ill," Lisa replied. "We believe that it is due to the fish they ate for dinner. Durian had managed to get into the trash and eat a few of the heads. Shortly afterward, he started throwing up. He isn't well, poor thing. But this morning all three of the children woke up sick. The boys, especially, are really affected."

"Oh, poor babies. How can I help?"

"Lena, you are a guest here. Don't worry; we can handle things. Not everyone had the fish; Kyrano, Tin-Tin, Brains and myself ate other food. And it could be possible that not everyone in the family will be affected."

"No, I want to help. Anything I can do, just ask. I want to be useful." She turned to the Malaysian. "What's wrong, Kyrano? You don't tink you caused dis, do you?"

"How else could it have happened? Somehow I cooked it wrong."

"Not possible, Kyrano," Lisa replied. "What Durian ate was raw. Therefore, it couldn't have been your cooking."

"Dat's right. Dere must have been something in de fish when dey were caught. And notting you could have done would have eliminated it. I've seen you cook. You are very finicky about cleanliness and thorough heating of everyting you make. It has to have been some new bacteria or something, dat is resistant to de usual metods of cooking." She paused. "Who is Durian?"

In spite of himself, Kyrano was comforted, and chuckled at Lena's question. "Durian is the kitten who used to be known as Asterix. Christopher is no longer a member of International Rescue, and decided to leave the cat behind when he departed for home. But please, sit down and I will get you some breakfast right away. You must be starving."

Lena admitted it, and added, "But I still want to help, especially if more -- or most -- of de family is sick. Dere are several tings I can do."

Thus she found herself later, checking on various affected family members, changing and cleaning emesis bowls. She did her work so quietly that most were unaware of her presence. If one of them did wake up while she was there, she soothed them with a cool hand stroking a hot forehead, or holding a head while the person tried to empty the contents of his or her stomach. She always made sure that each person was sleeping before she left the room.

Although she seemed tireless in her work, Brains, Kyrano and Lisa -- fully aware of her ordeal -- made sure she ate and rested. Nevertheless, as the day wore on, they were very grateful for her help.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 11/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:49:21 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068, 3:50 p.m., Thunderbird Five

"Base from Thunderbird Five. Base from Thunderbird Five. Come in, base." John frowned as he

called his home for what seemed like the umpteenth time. "Where are you, Dad?" he muttered to himself. "We have an emergency call!"

At last the screen switched on. "Finally!" he murmured.

But instead of the resolute face of his father, the weary visage of Brains looked back at him from behind the desk.

"Go ahead, Thunderbird Five," Brains said.

John was dying to ask what the problem was, and why his father wasn't sitting in his usual spot, but he knew that time was precious so he put his questions aside for the moment.

"We have an emergency call, Einstein," he told the scientist. "A monorail has been trapped in a tunnel by a rockslide. The tunnel is in the Pir Panjal area of India. I'm sending coordinates now. The caller said that there seem to be injuries and some kind of dangerous gas is leaking from one of the cars. The power is out, the ventilation fans aren't working, and the maintenance entrances are blocked."

"All right, Quasar. Send me the details. I'll call up the troops," Brains replied, activating Jeff's computer. He also hit the button on the desk that sent the emergency signal ringing through the house and its environs.

"F-A-B, Einstein." John transmitted the requested data, then asked hesitantly, "Uh, Einstein? Where's the Commander?"

Brains sighed. "He's sick, Quasar. Pretty much all of the veterans are sick."

"All of the veterans?" John asked, incredulous.

"Everyone but me and Sweet," Brains informed him. "They all had fresh caught fish last night and it turned out to be contaminated."

"You mean... everyone's sick? Even GM?"

"Not quite everyone. GM is sick, but not K and his lady. Or our visiting Agent 62. The four of us are helping Dak and Angel take care of the ill ones. Sweet should be back soon with medication that will help."

"How long will this illness last? And just who is going to go out on this rescue call?" John demanded to know.

"I don't know how long it will last, but not one of the veterans is going to be able to take on this mission." Brains adjusted his glasses and gazed at John's concerned expression. "It seems that International Rescue is now in the hands of its new recruits."

From: Tikatu Sent: 11/30/2005

]*****Saturday, June 2, 2068; Tracy Island Monorail; 3:55 p.m. *****[/I]

Brandon, Callie, and Elise were all riding in the monorail car to the Villa, having just received an emergency call.

Callie shook her head. "I can't believe the Tracys got sick from the fish."

"I can't either," Brandon replied. What I can't figure out is how the fish got tainted in the first place. As far as I know, there are no contaminants in the water."

When Elise had spoken to Scott earlier, she knew he didn't sound so good. "Poor Scott, his voice sounded like he had every cold and flu symptom imaginable."

"I know what you mean, Elise. Virgil sounded the same way when he called me this morning. I could hardly understand what he was saying." Brandon looked thoughtful as the monorail continued its journey.

When the three arrived at the Villa, they passed by the sick room, where Dom came out.

"How's the family doing?" asked Callie.

"Well, they're still sick, but at least they're not as bad as they were earlier. Tin-Tin should be back with the medication soon enough."

"Do you have any idea how long they'll be bedridden, Dom?" Elise asked with concern.

"We can't be certain of that, I'm afraid. I also know there's an emergency, so tell whoever is in charge that Nikki and I will be there as soon as we tend to the boys."

The three newbies continued quickly to the lounge where they found Kat keeping Joshua amused. Brandon gave her a quick nod hello before turning to face Brains. Callie and Elise came and stood beside him, followed a couple of minutes later by Nikki and Dom.

"What do we have?" Brandon asked, feeling the familiar adrenaline surge.

Brains looked up at the line of recruits and nodded in approval. "There's a monorail train trapped in a tunnel in the Pir Panjal region of India. An avalanche and some loose rocks have created a dangerous situation. There's no ventilation, and a lot of people are in danger of poisoning from a cloud of toxic gas."

"How much time do they have before the air runs completely out?"

"From what John told me, there's a window of eight hours. After that point, the toxic gas will become too much for everyone trapped."

"That doesn't give us much time to get to the danger zone," Callie remarked to Brains.

"You're right, so we've got to move fast." Brains made his decision. "Elise, you'll fly Thunderbird One to the danger zone and set up Mobile Control. Dom will be the pilot for Thunderbird Two. Brandon, Callie, Kat and Nikki, you'll travel with him. I'll need you to load Pod Five with the Monobrake, the Excavator, and a couple of extra hover bikes."

"Yes, sir," said Dom. "I'll make sure the pod's loaded. Anything else we need to do before we go?"

"Yes. HAZMAT suits, cold weather gear, and oxygen tanks with masks. This is high in the mountain ranges, so the air will be a lot thinner and you're not used to it. You'll find the new heads-up display visors with your uniforms."

Callie nodded. "All right. Brandon and I will check the equipment on our way."

"Very well. If there's nothing else, Thunderbirds Are Go!"

*****By MagicMaster8 and TracyFan4Ever Sent: 12/2/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:49:51 GMT
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Saturday, June 2; Tracy Island

Lena was in Scott's room when the emergency signal went off. She had just cleaned out his emesis bowl, and was returning it to the bedside table. The sound of the alarm had the effect of waking him up and he "leaped" out of bed, only to fall to his knees.

She quickly put the bowl down and hurried to him, lifting him up and pushing him back to his bed. He began to protest. "There's an emergency. I've got to go!"

"Not in your condition. You can't even stand by yourself, let alone leave the room. Now get back into bed."

"You don't understand, Lena. I'm the field commander. I have to..."

"I understand more than you think. But you aren't in any condition to fly any of those vessels you call Thunderbirds. Now lie down and get some sleep, or I'll sit on you until you do. Is that understood, young man?"

Scott tried once more to sit up, but found he couldn't do it. Plus he was beginning to get a raging headache. He lay back and Lena pulled the bedclothes over him. Then she sat on the edge of the bed and stroked his head.

"That feels good."

"Den I'll keep doing it until you go back to sleep. Don't worry. You've been training de otters to do de job. Dey'll take care of whatever it is, almost as well as you all would. Now close your eyes." She began to hum softly as she stroked his temples, and he shut his eyes. Soon his deep even breathing told her he was asleep, and she kissed him on the cheek, then quietly left the room.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 12/3/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:50:01 GMT
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Dianne opened one bleary eye as she heard Jeff groan and felt the bed shift as he sat up on its edge. It was something that had happened before as he tried to get to the bathroom to deal with the diarrhea he was experiencing.

But his wife knew that this time was different. She could hear the emergency signal going off and just knew that Jeff was trying to answer it.

"Jeff?" she mumbled. "Where're you goin'?"

"Gotta go. The signal..."

She felt the bed shift again, but before he could stand up fully, she reached across, almost lunging at him, and grabbed the back of his pajama shirt. With a yank, she pulled him back down onto the bed. He turned to her, glaring, as she let go of his shirt.

"You're going nowhere," she growled, glaring back at him. "Doctor's orders."

"But the signal..." he protested.

"Let the recruits handle it. We're all too sick to do anything, you included. Now lay back down before I have to pull rank on you."

"Okay, okay," he said with a sigh as he rolled back into bed. He had to admit, it felt a whole lot better to lie down and close his eyes. He opened them fractionally to look at Dianne, who was still watching him from behind half-opened eyelids.

"I'm going back to sleep," he told her. "So are you." And with that, he readjusted his pillow, snuggling his head into it, and closed his eyes.

Dianne watched him for a moment more, then rolled over. Soon both of them were again asleep.

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/3/2005 1:08 AM

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

The atmosphere was heavy in Thunderbird Two's cockpit as the great craft sped towards the Pir Panjal range. This was weird. This was bizarre. This was happening. And yet, somehow, none of them seemed able to believe it. Dominic had never felt so afraid in his life, but he pushed the feeling into the back of his mind. There was no time for that. He had a job to do and he would do it right. They all would, because they were more than able. I think this is what they call 'just lucky', he thought. It's just lucky that Elise and I were cross-training on TB2 recently. It's just lucky that this didn't happen a few months ago when we first joined IR. Let's hope that our luck keeps on running... Soon into the trip, Elise's voice rang out from the radio.

"Thunderbird Two from Thunderbird One."

"Thunderbird Two here," Dom replied.

"I've arrived at Danger Zone and am looking for somewhere to set up Mobile Control. What's your ETA?"

"ETA one hour, Thunderbird One," Dom replied.

"FAB. I'll keep you informed of developments here. Try and get as much speed out of her as you can; we need all the time we can get."

"FAB."

"And Dak?"

"Yeah?"

"You're doing great."

"Thanks, Frankie."

"Thunderbird One out."

Dom could hear the smile in her voice, and found himself heartened a little bit more. She knows it, I know it, we all know it. We can do this.

It seemed like no time before Thunderbird Two arrived at Danger Zone. Elise had landed TB1 in a safe spot, and was sitting at Mobile Control, thankful for the protective clothing and O2, when the ship came into sight.

"Base from Mobile Control," she said into the radio.

"Base here."

"Thunderbird Two has arrived."

"Good. Tell them to unload the equipment and head into that tunnel right away."

"FAB. I'll make sure everyone is suited up properly."

"Right. Keep me informed. Base out."

Elise watched as Dom circled for a moment before brining the craft down safely, and then raising the hydraulic legs to reveal the pod. Let's do this, she thought, and reached for the radio again to relay Brains' instructions.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 12/4/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:50:43 GMT
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Tracy Island -- June 2nd

Cherie was tossing and turning in her bed. She reached out once more for the emesis bowl. Groaning, she lay back on her pillows. They felt so hard against her aching head.

Lisa looked round the door at her. On seeing Cherie looking so distressed, she went in and sat the bed beside her granddaughter.

"Grandma, I feel so awful. Do you think it was the fish?"

Her grandmother nodded her head. "Yes I'm afraid it was. It was contaminated with a new type of Shigella virus."

Cherie groaned. "How long will I go on feeling so sick?"

"It may hang around for a few days." Lisa remarked, gently stroking Cherie's hot, feverish face. "Tin-Tin should soon be back with the medication your Mom ordered."

"Grandma? I'm never, ever going to eat fish again."

Lisa smiled at her granddaughter. "I'm sure you will, in time."

"Well, if I do," Cherie grumbled. "It won't be any fish caught by my brothers. It's all their fault I'm feeling like this."

"Cherie, that's not very fair," her grandmother said. "I'm sure they had no idea that the fish was contaminated. And they are feeling just as sick as you are."

Lisa changed the emesis bowl and, after bathing Cherie's head with a cool cloth, left the teenager

to her restless sleep.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 12/5/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:50:57 GMT
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*****Saturday, June 2, 2068; Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjal Range, India; 11:30 a.m. (6 p.m. on Tracy Island)*****

For the first time since she joined International Rescue, Callie had to go on a mission without any of the Tracys. This was a new experience for her, having been part of the organization less than four months. Her mind and her heart were battling mixed emotions of fear and excitement.

In Thunderbird Two's storage bay, everyone checked the various equipment needed for this operation. Nikki handed out the cold weather gear; the oxygen tanks and HAZMAT suits were left in Callie's hands. Dom did pre-launch checks on the Monobrake while Brandon ran through the diagnostics for the Excavator. Kat prepped the hoverbike and loaded up the relay device needed to enhance communications between themselves and the base.

Callie struggled to keep her own emotions in check. I can't believe I'm actually doing this, she thought. If ever there was that time for the "trial by fire," I think this is really it.

As her nerves were getting slightly on edge, she accidentally dropped one of the suits on the floor. "I've got to be more careful," she said as she picked up the suit. She checked every nook and cranny to make sure nothing in the suit was compromised, which would pose a threat to anyone wearing it. "Doesn't look like anything's damaged. I don't want the suits to have problems before we can even get to the rescue."

Shaking his head, Brandon noticed how nervous she was. "Take it easy, Callie. The suit's okay. I don't think anything bad is going to happen."

"I've got to check it, Brandon. It's that important to me." She sighed. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap at you like that."

"It's okay. If it makes you feel any better, I'm nervous, too. Just remember what you learned from your training and you'll do just fine, I promise."

"Thanks. Here's your HAZMAT suit."

Callie got into her own cold weather gear and new heads-up visor when she got a call from Elise. "Ursa from Frankie. You about ready?"

"Almost. I just need to get myself into my HAZMAT suit and my oxygen tank. What's up?"

At Mobile Control, Elise answered, "I want you to go with Big Mac in the Excavator. You're the one

who can determine what's creating the toxic gas inside the cavern."

"F-A-B, Frankie. When I get in there, I'll start analyzing the components with this device Einstein wanted me to test. I think he calls it the Chemicalyzer. Base will have to keep their ears open through the whole thing."

"Okay. MGM will take the hover bike to install the relay device so communications between Mobile Control and Base will be much clearer through the mountains."

"Anything to keep the lines open and clear." As soon as Callie finished getting dressed, she said, "All right, I'm ready to go."

"F-A-B. Good luck, Ursa."

"Thanks." Something tells me I'm gonna need all the luck I can get...

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 12/5/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:51:09 GMT
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After working in her last hospital for a while, Nikki felt she had more freedom in the workplace to carry out her job without always having to wait for instructions from the doctors. That's how she felt now. This was the first rescue without Dr Tracy and she hoped it went well.

After suiting up, Nikki joined the others as they made their way to proceed with the rescue.

"This is going to be a tough one without the others," she said.

"I'm sure we'll all do fine." Brandon laid a hand on Nikki's shoulder.

Kat agreed. "We've done the training and we've had loads of experience plus years of experience in our past fields. With this rescue we can prove to ourselves that we don't need to heavily rely on the original team.

Nikki nodded. "You're right. Let's get these people out of there."

Everyone quieted down when the radio activated and they listened for their instructions from Elise.

From: Nikki-browneyes1 Sent: 12/6/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Saturday, June 2nd -- Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjol Range, India, 12.00 noon (6.30 pm Tracy Island)

"I've got to get this relay device up and running," Kat muttered to herself. She managed to secure her data pad and the case containing the relay device equipment onto the hover bike. Then she started it up, rode it out of the pod, and disappeared inside the tunnel.

She remembered earlier when they had gathered in the lounge. Brains had told them about the rescue call. He had handed her a large case and data pad, saying, "Kat, you will need to set up this relay device, so that you can all communicate with Mobile Control from inside the tunnel. You can download the instructions on to the data pad on your way to the danger zone. If you think of any problems or questions, you can contact me before you enter the tunnel."

~Now where is the best place to set this thing up? she wondered as she drove slowly into the tunnel. Callie and Brandon drove past her on the Excavator, followed by Nikki and Dom on the Monobrake.

Finally stopping about a mile inside the tunnel, she found a good spot, and began to unpack the equipment. Setting up her data pad, she began working on the device by the light of the hover bike's headlamp.

~This is not going to be easy. How on earth am I to construct it? she thought.

Picking up the poles, which made up the base of the relay device, she managed to fit them together. Struggling to raise them into a tripod was definitely not easy. Reading her notes again, she realised that she should have put the device together before constructing the legs. Sighing to herself, she managed to lay the poles back down on the ground.

Kat reached in the case for the large dome and the antenna. The antenna was small and fitted neatly in to the top of the dome, which could be turned to any direction. Once more she studied her data pad.

~Oh Brains, I do wish you were here, she thought as she retrieved the last piece of equipment from the case. Rumbling noises from further down the tunnel, made her wonder how the others were getting on.

She screwed together the sections to form a cylindrical object. Plugging in the connecting wires and switches; she finally fitted the dome and antenna. Now all that was left was for Kat to place the cylinder and dome on the tripod, and then see if it worked. She managed to raise the tripod once again. Once everything felt steady, she gingerly stretched as high as she could and fitted the device to the tripod.

Turning the 'out' switch to the 'on' position, Kat listened. There was a great deal of crackling and buzzing. Twisting the multidirectional dome in one direction, the crackling was greatly increased; but the buzzing stopped. Turning it in the opposite direction, the crackling disappeared; but the buzzing was louder. ~Come on, come on, Kat was silently praying. Eventually, after she had turned the dome in what seemed every conceivable direction; the buzzing and crackling suddenly

ceased.

~Fingers crossed, here goes! Kat muttered to herself
"MGM to Mobile Control, can you hear me?"

Nothing.

"MGM to Mobile Control, come in Mobile Control."

Then to much to her relief "Mobile Control to MGM. Receiving you loud and clear."

"MGM to Frankie. Good to hear you." Kat's relief was great.

From: Tawnyangel22 Sent: 12/6/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:52:06 GMT
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The sound of the excavator working had long disappeared; the Monobrake made its way steadily up the tunnel. The track above was mostly unharmed, except for a few nicks made by falling debris. Nikki checked through her medical bag once more as Dom kept an eye on the controls. Everything was just as it had been at the last check, of course, but it paid to be meticulous.

"How's it looking?" She asked Dom as she finished putting everything back.

"I'm not sure how much usable track is left, to be honest. It's probably not a lot."

"Right."

The assessment proved to be true very quickly, as the Monobrake's warning signal began to sound, reverberating down into the blackness.

"That's us," Dom said, beginning the shut down process. "It's on our feet from here."

"At least it won't be an endless trek," Nikki said. "We've come a long way already."

"Yeah. By the time we get there we'll have got the signal from Ursa and Big Mac, I reckon."

As they collected their things, and Nikki relayed the situation back to Mobile Control, and then they headed on into the tunnel.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 12/7/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:52:20 GMT

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While Kat was setting up the relay, Callie and Brandon had gone ahead to check the damage caused by the cave-in. Brandon looked confident on the outside, but he was as nervous as Callie. Like her, this was his first assignment without the guidance of the Tracys.

This is a far cry from the first rescue I went out on. At least the Tracys were there to guide me. Now, though, it's different. Please, let me do this right, Brandon thought fervently as they continued into the tunnel. He watched as the excavator chewed through the rocks and it didn't take long for them to get through the pile of rubble.

"Okay," Brandon said, after they'd broken through, "we need to find out what we're dealing with. Callie nodded in agreement. They continued on, the only illumination coming from the Excavator's front light. As they pushed forward, the extent of the damage became clear.

"There it is," Brandon said as the first of the monorail cars came into view. The metal rail was twisted, the compartment battered. He noticed a white gas rising from the open doors, creating a light mist that hovered over the cars.

"You ready to get started, Ursa?" Brandon asked, bringing the Excavator to a halt.

Callie stood up, checking her HAZMAT suit one more time. "I'm ready to go, Big Mac," she answered, her voice slightly shaky.

This didn't get past Brandon. "You'll do fine, Callie. Remember, we were taught by the best."

"But, what if...?"

Brandon cut her off. "Nothing is going to happen. Stay focused and concentrate on the task at hand."

After a few more words of reassurance from her colleague, Callie took a deep breath and stepped out into the tunnel, activating the Chemicalyzer. Brandon watched her for a few moments before reaching out and activating the radio to report to Mobile Control.

Post by Magicmaster8 Sent: 12/9/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:52:35 GMT

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As Brandon made a preliminary report to Mobile Control, Callie scanned the air in the tunnel with the new Chemicalyzer device. For about ten minutes, nothing seemed to register. However, when she got closer to the train, the device started beeping. Looks like I've got something here, she thought. "Base and Mobile Control from Ursa. I'm getting readings on the Chemicalyzer. Base, I'll upload the data to you through Thunderbird Five."

Back at base, Brains monitored the situation. "Okay, Ursa. Use your heads-up visor to check around for any chemicals in and around the train. India is known for transporting chemicals and people in the same train."

She looked at the screen in front of her eyes. Wow, this thing really works! Able to see information in front of her face, she continued analyzing the chemicals.

Elise waited outside patiently for Callie's readings. I know she's the right one for this part of the job, she thought. The sooner we can get the information, the quicker we can contain it. Inside, Callie was able to see the names of the two chemicals. "I've got it. The two chemicals are alsterene and zinc oxide."

Elise said, "F-A-B. Ursa, you and Big Mac concentrate on containing the two chemicals. You may need to neutralize what's already leaking first. I'll talk with MGM about the ventilation problem."

"Wait, Mobile Control. Before we can neutralize the leak, we need to contain the drums first. This way there won't be another leak."

"Ursa's right," Brains said. "The containers need to stop leaking first."

"F-A-B. Sorry about that."

"Don't worry about it, Frankie. Call it a learning experience. Ursa, Big Mac, you both know what to do."

"Right, we'll get on it immediately." She contacted Brandon. "Big Mac, we've got several canisters leaking alsterene and zinc oxide. First thing to do is contain these drums to prevent more gas from coming out, then neutralize the mixture already affecting the area."

"I wonder if there's been anything else besides the leaking materials."

"There's one way to find out. Thunderbird Five from Ursa. Do you copy?"

John responded, "Loud and clear, Ursa." That relay's working perfectly. "What can I do for you?"

"Do you have the train's manifest?"

"I'm getting that information right now." After about twenty seconds of silence, he said, "I have the info. Stand by for uploading to your heads-up."

Callie saw some information scrolling across her screen, but the screen was blurry. She couldn't reach the ball on her visor to scroll down because of the HAZMAT suit. Great, I've got no way to see all the information. "Quasar, I can't reach the scroll ball. Can you get the list to scroll slowly for me?"

"F-A-B, Ursa."

As the manifest list went through, one item caught her eye. "Thunderbird Five from Ursa. Do you

know about this item: 'Prototype for project #2149-E'?"

"Negative, Ursa. I have no idea what that is. I tried to get information from government officials and got nothing out of it."

"Thanks, Quasar." The list kept scrolling slowly downward, and she noticed something she never expected to see. "Sodium bicarbonate?" Slapping her helmet-covered head, she muttered, "Of course, the most common chemical neutralizer in the world: baking soda! There should be more than enough to neutralize the gas in here."

Back at the base, Brains smiled. "Good work, Ursa. You and Big Mac can use the baking soda to stop the gas when you get done sealing the broken containers of alsterene and zinc oxide." Callie realized there was a problem with that idea. "How do we do that? We didn't bring any equipment for sealing the canisters."

We didn't anticipate having to use the foam sealant, and Kat's the only person who's actually used it, Brains thought. We never did train the others on this. Fortunately, there's plenty of that in Thunderbird Two.

From: TracyFan4Ever Sent: 12/10/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:53:25 GMT
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The Hood had secreted himself behind a large piece of concrete. Keeping his head low to avoid the gaseous mist that was filling the chamber from the top down, he listened and watched with interest as the Excavator chewed its way through the rubble, then rumbled into the cavern. Two figures, suited up in HAZMAT suits with the IR insignia on them clambered out, one of them holding out a device that he had not seen before.

~Could it be the engineer? he wondered as he squinted through his infrared goggles. ~No, this person is too tall. His interest was diverted by two more suited figures entering the chamber, one carrying a clearly-marked medikit and the other a cutting device. ~Hmm. Four? Then who is out at their Mobile Control? And who is in their space station?

Suddenly, he was reminded of the information he had gleaned from his brother, Kyrano, during their last encounter. A tidbit that his dreaded enemy had recently recruited new blood for his endeavors. ~Perhaps these people are some of their new members. Then should I stay and watch them? Or should I make good my escape?

The decision was hard to make. Tantalizing bits of vocalization wafted his way, and he strained to hear if these people were part of the hated Tracy clan or not. He finally decided that the one with the device was not, and was a woman, but he could not determine anything about the other one, besides the fact that he was male. The others were too far away to hear.

~I had better leave, he said to himself, as he looked upward. ~This gas is moving downward and I

do not have my breathing equipment.

So saying, he waited until the two nearest him entered the car from which the gas was escaping. Then he picked up his prize and moved, quickly and carefully, to the hole dug by the Excavator.

xxxx

"Mobile Control to MGM. Come in, MGM."

Kat adjusted the relay minutely and answered the call. "MGM here."

"Ursa is in need of some foam sealant. I'm told you're the only one who is familiar with it," Elise said. "Can you pull it from Thunderbird Two and take it down to her, then show her how to use it?"

Kat was surprised; she hadn't any idea that she would be doing so much in this rescue. "F-A-B, Mobile Control. I'm on my way."

She hopped on the hoverbike and, after giving the relay on last look, pressed on to the mouth of the tunnel.

As she hurried to procure the items her comrades needed, the Hood had come upon the Monobrake.

~Hmm. Could I use this to make my getaway? It seems to be able to ride both on the rail and on the ground.

He climbed up on the machine and looked over the controls in the open cockpit. ~No, there is a computer that most likely requires a password before the vehicle will start. And I do not have time to tinker with it. I will press on.

In the meantime, Kat had found the canisters of foam sealant. She made sure she had the right equipment to apply it. Then she ducked into the crews' quarter to eat a quick energy bar. Her sugar needs supplied, she closed up her jacket, made sure her HAZMAT suit was secure, grabbed what she had come for, and went back out the way she had come in, through the pod's catwalks.

Walking over to Mobile Control, she checked in with Elise.

"I have what Ursa needs."

"Good," Elise said with a smile behind her oxygen mask. "I'll radio in that you're coming. On your way back out, do me a favor? Check on the Monobrake? I had an indicator light on it a moment ago. Then stop at the relay, check it over, and come back here to relieve me at Mobile Control."

Kat's eyes grew wide. "Me? At Mobile Control? Whatever for?"

"We need to see if there are any ventilation shafts clear of the rock that slid down. If there's even one within the Danger Zone, we need to hook it up to a generator to clear that gas from the

tunnel. The fastest way to check is for me to reconnoiter with Thunderbird One."

"Oh, I see. Will you be long at it?"

Elise shrugged. "I shouldn't be."

"All right. First this, then the Monobrake, the relay, and back out here."

"You've got it. Now get going."

"F-A-B."

Kat secured the canisters and equipment on the back of the hoverbike, and sped off down the tunnel in the direction of the Danger Zone.

The Hood stopped walking. He heard a humming sound echoing through the tunnel, one that sounded vaguely familiar. He shrank back against the wall as his augmented sight watched a small figure whiz by on a hover vehicle.

~Now I know that some of the new members of IR are here. Even my thrice-cursed niece is not as small as that. He stopped for a moment. ~Although... Tracy does have a young daughter. That could have been her. He put down the heavy case he had been lugging along. ~Perhaps I should wait and see if she comes back out. Surely Tracy would not allow the child to remain within such a hazardous place but is using her as a courier. I will move along slowly and see what happens. Perhaps I can relieve her of the vehicle to help me escape.

So he picked up the case again and started walking, watching all the time for the return of the small person who was driving the hoverbike.

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/11/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:53:37 GMT
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As soon as the call from Brandon and Callie came through, the two nurses had sped up the last section of the tunnel. When the monorail train came into view, parts gnarled and twisted into an unrecognisable mess of metal, they set to work. It was a blessing to find that the doors of the cars were easy to slide open for the most part. On occasion they had to use the gutting gear to get through to the people inside. I guess this is why they invented electronically sliding ones... Dom thought. It's a pity that they're not working now.

They were quick in starting their triage, and soon Dom started to evacuate the worst cases out to the Excavator's tunnel. There weren't as many red tags as there could have been. Another blessing, he thought. The soft hiss of the oxygen supplies mingled with the sound of dulled moans from the injured, and it was punctuated by the steady beat of feet. I love anti-grav stretchers. They make life so much easier, Dom thought as he lined up another red tag for transport.

"When... When will we be out of here?" The man asked, his face creased with pain behind his O2 mask.

"Very soon, sir," Dominic replied. "Don't worry."

The man closed his eyes and muttered something in his native tongue, which Dominic took to be something like relief.

The sooner we're out of here the better, he thought, and headed back up the tunnel for the next patient.

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 12/11/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:54:30 GMT
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Tracy Island, the same day

Lena walked into the lounge and sat down quietly. Brains glanced over and briefly smiled at her, acknowledging her presence, then returned to monitoring the transmissions. Seeing that he was concentrating so hard, she didn't interrupt, but hoped there would be a lull, so she could talk to him.

Ten minutes later, her wish was granted. He looked up again and said, "Hello, Lena. How is the family doing?"

"As well as can be expected. Dey are all asleep at de moment. Did you find out what caused dis illness?"

"It was a form of Shigellosis, that was in some fish the family ate."

She frowned slightly. "Shigellosis? Dat sounds familiar."

"It should. There were an exceptionally large number of cases in Kenya about 55 years ago. Mostly children according to the accounts."

Her face cleared. "Now I remember. A lot of de schools had been sent vegetables dat had been grown in water dat sewage had gotten into. About 30 children died. De rest of us wanted to."

"The rest of you?"

"Yes. My brotters, sister, and I came down wit it, but had a doctor who had de medicine dat would help. So we survived. But I tought it could be killed by normal cooking procedures."

"The usual form can. But this seems to be a mutated strain, one that appears to be very heat resistant. And since very little of the bacteria needs to survive to infect anyone, nothing anyone could have done would have prevented it."

"I presume you have contacted de CDC? Dey have to locate de area dat has de sewage de fish swam trough."

"Yes, I did that as soon as I got the test results."

"Dat's good. Well, I'll leave you to handle de rescue and go tell Kyrano. He has been so upset, tinkin dat he was responsible. Even Lisa isn't having much luck comforting him."

"I thought Tin-Tin told him about the results."

"I'm sure she would have, but she was sent to get de medicine before she had de chance." She stood up. "Would you like me to bring you some coffee and someting to eat?"

"Thank you, Lena. I'd appreciate that a lot. That reminds me." He turned back to the computer and as Lena left the room, she heard him say, "MGM from Base. MGM, do you have your food packets?"

From: Hobbeth Sent: 12/12/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 20:54:44 GMT
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"...and so you see, Kyrano, dere was no way you could have caused dis," Lena concluded. "De contamination was not your fault."

Kyrano's shoulders sagged momentarily in relief. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Matumbo, for bringing this news to me. I was very worried that I had done something wrong, but I could not think of what it might have been. To know that I am not at fault is a great relief."

He straightened up, and turned to smile at Lisa, who had her hands on his shoulders. She smiled back encouragingly, then asked Lena, "Did Brains say when this sickness might end?"

Lena shook her head. "No, he didn't. But de medicine dat Tin-Tin is bringing should help a lot." She smiled ruefully. "I should know; I had one of de otter versions of dis as a child."

"Did someone call my name?"

The three in the kitchen looked up and cried out in pleasure and relief at seeing Tin-Tin standing, smiling, in the doorway. She brought in the packages she was carrying and put them down on the countertop, then extracted a bag bearing the name of a New Zealand pharmacist. "I've got what we need to treat the Tracys. The rest of the items are waiting in the elevator."

She frowned a bit, then asked, "I noticed that Thunderbird Two is gone. What happened? Was there a rescue call?"

"Yes, Tin-Tin," Lisa replied. "The new recruits are handling it. I'm sure Brains can give you more information when you go upstairs."

Tin-Tin nodded. "I'll go up right now and see what I can do."

Kyrano put a hand out to stop Tin-Tin. "How is Durian?"

The young woman sighed. "The vet seemed optimistic that he'd pull through, but he'd really like to know what kind of bug he's dealing with."

The retainer nodded. "I shall call him and tell him what Mrs. Matumbo has just told me. Perhaps that will help in the treatment of the creature." He looked down a bit and smiled slightly. "I fear I have become attached to little Durian. I hope he survives this illness."

"Me, too, Father," Tin-Tin said softly, reaching out to touch her father's arm. Then she turned to go. "I'd better deliver this to Brains and man the desk for a bit so he can administer it to the Tracys."

"Tin-Tin, please tell him I will be dere wit his coffee and snack in a few minutes," Lena said.

Tin-Tin nodded, then hurried off. The three adults glanced at each other, then Kyrano stood. "I will call the vet now."

"And I'll help Lena whip up something for all of us to eat," Lisa said. "Come on. It's back to work for us."

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/14/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:22:01 GMT
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Banihal Tunnel, Pir Panjol Range, India

Kat drove the hoverbike along the tunnel. Arriving at the danger zone, she quickly found Callie and Brandon.

"Here's the sealant. Now let's get those drums sealed." Handing Callie one of the spray cans, she showed her how to apply the sealant foam. Once she was assured that Callie could use the device, Kat headed back towards the tunnel entrance. The gas was beginning to infiltrate the air. All around her was noise, dust, and moaning passengers, some seriously injured, others just trapped in the wreckage. She noticed Dom and Nikki working amongst the injured.

Stopping at the monobrake, she climbed off the hoverbike and examined the larger vehicle. Nothing seemed amiss. Assuming that it was most likely a false alarm, she climbed back on the hoverbike and headed towards the relay device.

The Hood's patience had been rewarded. The small figure had returned on the hoverbike and after stopping it, had gotten off. With his infrared goggles he could make out a device on a tripod. Some form of communication, he wondered. He watched for a moment; trying to decide what to do. The figure was small. He had the element of surprise. He was sure he would be able to overcome whoever it was. Making absolutely sure that the box was safe, he began to move forward. He stopped again and waited deciding just what he would do.

Once back at the relay device, Kat contacted Mobile Control to advise Elise that the monobrake seemed okay and that she was on her way to relieve her. She had just contacted Elise. Suddenly she broke off mid-sentence. She had heard something, as though someone was creeping along in the dark. The hairs at the back of her neck seemed to stand on end. She was not alone. Someone or something was slowly edging towards her. Holding her breath, she pressed herself into the tunnel wall. Suddenly the shuffling stopped. Kat held her breath. Had she been detected? Had she been heard? After all she had been talking to Mobile Control.

Elise became concerned when Kat failed to continue talking and tried to re-establish contact.

"MGM from Mobile control. Come in, MGM. Everything okay?"

Inside the tunnel, everything was so quiet. She almost began to imagine she had heard something, until Elise's voice made her jump. "Frankie," Kat began to whisper. "I'm sure I heard something like someone was coming along the tunnel. I don't feel that I'm alone."

"Do you think it could be one of the passengers?" Elise queried.

"I'm not sure. Shall I make myself known?"

"No, not just yet. Let me check with Dak. I'll try to find out if one of the passengers has wandered away."

Once Elise had broken off with her, Kat resumed listening to her surroundings. The silence was almost deafening. Apart from the occasional rumble way down the line and sometimes a drop of water falling, everything was quiet. Too quiet, Kat thought. She sensed that she wasn't alone, but whoever it was, was also keeping very still.

Elise contacted her once more. "MGM, according to Angel and Dak, none of the passengers have moved. Unless they have been freed, they are either too injured, or still trapped in the train."

"Shall I try to make contact, Frankie?" Kat asked.

"I'm not sure, MGM. I don't like the idea of you tackling someone on your own."

Just at that moment the Hood rushed Kat, throwing her to the ground. She rolled over, trying to get away from him, and let out a yell. Then she heard the sound of the hoverbike been driven

away at high speed.

"What on earth's happening MGM?" Elise's voice was loud in her ear. "What's going on? Are you okay?"

Kat lay on the ground in total darkness. She felt totally disoriented. Gasping for breath, she tried to move. Her head and knees ached, and there was a tight feeling in her chest.

"MGM from Mobile Control. Come in please."

"Mobile Control from MGM," Kat gasped. "Someone has just pushed past me, knocking me over. He got away on the hoverbike."

"Are you sure you're okay?"

"I'm just winded," Kat replied, trying to catch her breath.

"I'll watch out for him when he leaves the tunnel. I'll get Einstein to contact the Indian authorities. After all we are not exactly sure who this person is. He seems desperate," Elise remarked before contacting John. "Quasar from Mobile Control. An unknown passenger has attacked MGM. I'm going to contact Dak to see if they could spare Angel or Big Mac to help her back to Thunderbird Two."

"Mobile Control from Quasar. Is MGM okay? Has she been badly injured?"

"Quasar from Mobile Control. She appears to be badly winded. I'm going to get help for her."

Kat heard this conversation. "No, Frankie! I'm okay. Just let me get my breath back, and I will make my way out to Mobile Control to relieve you."

"MGM from Thunderbird Five." John sounded concerned. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes, thank you, Quasar. I'm just a little winded. It would seem that one of the passengers, for some unknown reason tried to escape and in the attempt pushed me out of the way. I have no idea who he was or why he was here. But he has got away on the hoverbike."

"Do you think he was traumatised, and didn't know where he was?" John asked her.

"Dunno. I think that he was certainly shocked to find me here. It all happened so quickly. Anyway once I get my breath back I'm going to head back to Mobile Control. I have to relieve Frankie, so that she can check the ventilation units."

Retrieving her torch, she painfully began to make her way out of the tunnel.

Satisfied that she was okay, John reported all of their conversation to Base. Brains didn't seem too happy about the intruder, feeling that there was more to it than a traumatised passenger. But as the rescue was top priority, he had no choice other than to let the local authorities handle it.

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges

Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:23:18 GMT

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Brains was just concluding his update on the progress of the rescue for Tin-Tin when Lena walked in. She was carrying a tray with two mugs, a carafe of coffee, some snacks and other necessities for the drinks. He moved aside to allow her to set it on the desk, and immediately poured both himself and Tin-Tin some coffee.

"Ahh," he said after taking a sip. "Lena, you are an angel of mercy. I needed this." He grabbed a bite to eat.

"You are de one who will be dat, once you give de medicine to dose who need it. And de sooner it is administered, de sooner dey will feel better."

"Will you come help me?"

"Of course. Are you going to give doses to everyone?"

"I think that I'll inject those who were hardest hit first."

"Dat would be Mrs. Tracy, Alex, Tyler, and Cherie."

"Then we'll wait to see how they respond to it. After that, we can decide if anyone else needs some of the medicine. Since we're already upstairs, we'll start with the children." He turned to the young Malaysian. "If there's any more trouble, Tin-Tin, give me a holler."

"All right. Now go take care of the poor children and Grandma."

He smiled at her and motioned for Lena to follow him. They came to Cherie's room first, and went in. She was awake, throwing up in her emesis bowl. Lena hurried over and held her head until the retching ceased. Then she helped the young girl lay back, taking a cool damp cloth and wiping her face with it.

Cherie's eyes were closed, but she knew who was there. "Lena, I wish it would stop."

"I know you do, sweetheart. And Brains has some medicine dat should help it go away sooner."

The girl opened her eyes and saw him for the first time. He had a needle in his hand. "A shot?" she whined. "Can't you give me a pill instead?"

"Shh," admonished Lena. "What good would a pill do if you trew it up before it could do any good? Now be a good girl and let him give you de shot. It'll only take a few seconds." She leaned over and whispered in Cherie's ear as Brains took her arm and injected the drug.

"There! All done," he said. "And you didn't even flinch."

"I never felt it! I was listening to what Lena was saying, and didn't notice. Thank you, Lena," she replied.

"My pleasure. Now, take some sips of water, and get some sleep." She took a mug from the nightstand and held the straw to the young girl's lips. Cherie drank some, then sank back into her pillows with a sigh.

"One down. Now for the boys," Brains said quietly to Lena.

The young girl heard. Without opening her eyes, she said, "Bet they flinch."

Both adults looked at each other and smiled. "Sleep now. I'll be back later to see how you are doing," said Lena as she followed Brains out of the room.

The boys were both sound asleep, and Brains did his work so efficiently, they never woke up. Then they headed downstairs to see and help Emily.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 12/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:23:32 GMT
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"Come on now, Joshua," Lisa cajoled, putting some peeled slices of fruit on the plate in front of the toddler. "Eat your apple."

"No!" Joshua cried. "Wan' Da!"

"Your Daddy's at work now, Josh," Lisa said softly, trying to put a piece of fruit to the little boy's mouth. "He'll be home soon. He wants you to eat your fruit."

"No!" the little boy cried, his lower lip beginning to wobble. "Wan' Da!"

Lisa's shoulders slumped. She knew what that trembling lower lip meant. Joshua was tired, but too wound up to sleep. He was hungry, but he wanted his father more than food.

One more try, she thought, then I take him out and try to rock him. I haven't been this unsuccessful with a child since Jared's twins.

She held out the sipper cup, half full of milk, offering it to the little boy. "Here's some nummy milk, Josh. Drink it up, now."

Josh took the cup, put it to his lips and took a swallow or two, then tossed the cup aside. "Wan' Da!" he wailed.

"Okay. That's it," Lisa muttered to herself. She unfastened the boy from his booster seat and took him away from the table. There was a small crib set up in Kyrano's sitting room and Dom had brought over several of Joshua's toys, including his current favorite, his horsie. Lisa brought him down to Kyrano's quarters and sat him on the floor, groaning as she sat down with him.

"Okay, Josh," she said brightly. "Let's play with the blocks!"

Josh picked up his horsie and held it tight. "Wan' Da," he said with a sniff as he crawled into Lisa's lap.

Lisa rocked him back and forth, stroking his bright blond hair. "I know, Josh. I know. He'll be home soon." I hope.

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/18/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:23:44 GMT
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The wrecked monorail lay on the floor of the tunnel like a wounded snake, one long twist of ruined metal. Silence reigned; the darkness was thick. The rhythm of Nikki's breathing beat a steady tattoo in her ears as she checked the last compartment of the ruined vehicle. There was no one left. She breathed a sight of relief. That's them all.

"Dak from Angel," she said into her comm unit.

"Dak here. 'Sup?"

"The last of the passengers are out. It's time to start evac."

"Already on it."

"FAB. I'm on my way back now. Angel out."

Considering the potential carnage that could have been caused, the number of red tags that were ready for transport was small. As soon as Nikki got back to the triage area, she and Dom began to take the casualties out of the tunnel. It was slow work, with only the two of them; Callie and Brandon were still sealing up the containers.

"Did they find out who it was who pushed past MGM earlier?" Nikki asked.

"No," Dom replied. "And I did another head count. There's no one missing."

"This is creepy," Nikki said. "It's given me the jitters."

"Me too. But let's not think about it. The sooner we're out of here the better."

From: ArtisticRainey Sent: 12/19/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:24:04 GMT
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In the tunnel, Callie and Brandon continued their clean-up efforts on the spill.

"I think four canisters of baking soda should do it," said Callie.

"I'm not so sure, Ursa. This is a pretty big spill," Brandon replied, taking one of the canisters and opening it, spreading the contents on the ground.

As Callie spread some from another container, she said, "Yeah, you're right, Big Mac. We should make it eight. That should definitely be enough."

He looked around the site. ~I'm still not sure, but Callie's the expert. I'll go with what she says. "Just make sure we cover every area of the spill, right?"

"Yeah. Even one little area left can still be dangerous."

"Tell me about it," Brandon replied, opening another container. Lifting it with a grunt, he started carrying it down the tunnel, stopping ever so often to cover the spill, leaving Callie to work on the area closest to the damaged car.

~I just need to put enough baking soda over this area, and it should neutralize the problem completely, she said to herself.

About an hour later, the pair finished pouring the sodium bicarbonate, and the effects started to show immediately.

"Eww," said Callie. "Mobile Control from Ursa. Spill has been neutralized. The liquid is now harmless, but it looks like someone just lost their lunch."

At Mobile Control, Elise raised her eyebrow at Callie's description of the neutralized spill.

"F-A-B. And, Ursa? That was a little too much detail," Elise said dryly.

Standing behind Callie, Brandon heard her graphic description and let out a small 'erp', his face turning pale. She heard the little sound and looked over at her partner, noticing his paleness.

"Big Mac? Are you okay?" she asked with concern.

"Uh, yeah, I'm fine," he replied hastily. "Come on, we've gotta finish cleaning this up. Grab a

shovel and let's go, Ursa."

The two worked side by side, scooping up the neutralized chemicals and putting them in the empty sodium bicarbonate containers. Callie noticed how quickly Brandon was shoveling up the chemical piles.

"Whoa, take it easy, Big Mac. What's the rush?"

"I... just... want... to get it done, that's all."

"You're getting sick just seeing this vile shade of green, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not," Brandon said defensively. "I just want to get the job done, that's all."

"Whatever you say. I just hope, for your sake, you don't lose it in that HAZMAT suit."

"If I do, I'll blame you," he replied in an attempt to lighten the seriousness of the situation.

"If you do," Callie said sweetly, "I'll tell Gordon what REALLY happened."

"Oh, no!" Brandon said in mock horror. "If you tell him that, he won't let me live it down," he said with a laugh. Another 20 minutes went by and their task was complete.

"Whew," said Brandon with a sigh of relief. "I'm glad that's done. Now, can we please get out of here?"

"Come on, let's go," Callie said in reply. The two walked back to the Excavator, both having one nervous thought. They hoped Kat would get the ventilation fans working soon.

Post by Magicmaster8 & TracyFan4Ever Sent: 12/21/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:24:33 GMT
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A little while later, Lena went softly into the youngest Tracy boys' bedroom. Alex was sleeping, but Tyler was tossing about on his bed. She immediately went over to him and found that he was only half awake. Laying a cool hand on his forehead, she whispered, "Shhh, little one. You must get some rest, so you can get well."

His eyes opened and he looked directly at her. "Who are you?"

"I'm Lena Matumbo. I was here a couple of monts ago, remember?"

Tyler frowned for a moment. "Oh, yeah. I remember now. I don't feel good. I think I'm gonna. . ."
He rolled onto his stomach and leaned over to throw up into an emesis bowl placed beside his

bed. All of the invalids had similar receptacles near them. Lena held his forehead in her hand, supporting him.

When he was on his back once again, he whimpered. "I don't like feeling this way. Can you make it go away?"

"De medicine dat Brains gave you earlier when you were asleep will do dat, honey," she said as she stroked his hair. "It will take a while. I understand you were very sick recently. Dat's why you are so sick now. But you will get better. Just rest."

"I'm thirsty."

She found the insulated cup that was on the nightstand and put the straw in his mouth. He took a couple of sips, then turned away. She straightened out his bedclothes and sat next to him, once again stroking his forehead. "I'm going to sit here until you go back to sleep. Would you like to hear a Swahili lullaby dat I used to put my babies and grandbabies to sleep wit?"

"Okay."

She softly began to sing and Tyler's eyes slowly closed. Soon his deep even breathing told her that he was asleep. She emptied and rinsed out the bowl, putting it back in its place by his bed. Then she checked on Alex, who was lightly snoring. She smiled, and quietly left the room, to check on Cherie.

From: Hobbeth Sent: 12/21/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:24:45 GMT
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June 2, 2068, 1:45 p.m. local time

The Hood was having difficulty. The hoverbike he had stolen, though seemingly simple to operate, wasn't made for riding at high speeds with a heavy load. He had not had time to secure the stainless steel case to the back of the machine, and was still carrying it in one hand, while trying to hurry down the darkened tunnel. As a result, he found the machine listing to the right until finally, the case bumped and scraped against the wall.

That one bump was his undoing. The hoverbike slewed around, the rear of it smashing into the tunnel wall. The impact threw him from the machine, and he landed painfully on the concrete floor. Cursing in Malay, he shook his head groggily, and got to his feet. He hissed as he took stock of himself, but was relieved to see that he had nothing more than a series of nasty scrapes and bumps that would become bruises in short order.

The hoverbike, however, was wrecked. He could go no further with it.

~Even International Rescue's machinery is cursed against me! he thought angrily. ~Now I must walk the rest of the way to the tunnel entrance where the authorities will be waiting for me, unless... yes! A maintenance access! International Rescue may be set against me, but Dame Fortune is smiling on me! From here I can escape the tunnel and make my way to my waiting helijet!

With renewed energy, the Hood picked up his burdensome case and strode over to the maintenance access. He opened the door and began the long climb to the exit that would put him on the mountain's rocky slope, hopeful that, at least for today, all of International Rescue's machinations against him would be for naught.

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/26/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:25:01 GMT
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It seemed to be taking forever to reach Mobile Control, but as Kat huffed and puffed along she was determined to make it on her own and not have to call for help. Silently cursing the idiot who had pushed her off the hoverbike, said object came into view.

"Oh no." Kat stared down at the mangled bike, which now lay against the tunnel wall. She looked around. There was no sign of the stranger.

She looked down at the bike again. Whoever it was obviously had no idea how to control it or they wouldn't have dumped and mangled it. There was no way she'd be able to get the bike out by herself.

As she raised her wrist-comm to her mouth she noticed the maintenance entrance. "So that's he got out. MGM to Mobile Control."

"Mobile Control here. Go ahead. MGM, are you okay?"

"Yeah, getting there. I've found the hoverbike. It's wrecked I'm afraid, but I think our culprit got out through a maintenance tunnel." Kat heard Elise sigh.

"Okay, MGM I'll contact the others and maybe we can bring it out on the monobrake after Angel and Dak have evacuated everyone. How are you doing for time?"

"FAB. I should be with you in about 5 mins or so."

"FAB. Mobile Control out." Elise sat back. This was not good. Obviously, Kat's attacker was someone who had not wanted to be seen hanging around the train wreck and who apparently wasn't too injured, if injured at all. ~The question is, what did they want and why were they in such a hurry to escape?

Minutes later, Elise saw a hobbling Kat emerging from the tunnel. She walked over to help.

"Here, sit down and take it easy for a bit," Elise said. "You didn't get a look at him or her did you?"

Kat shook her head. "No. He pushed me from behind. I felt something was wrong but he caught me off guard."

"You're sure it was a 'he'?"

Kat nodded. "With that brute strength, it would have to be."

"Well, I called base and Quasar and they know what's going on. I guess there's nothing else we can do except get on with the job at hand." Elise gave Kat a quick run down of Mobile Control. The mechanic was familiar with it, having worked on the technical side of it with Brains.

"I'll take TB1 up and get a look at those ventilation shafts and hopefully one will be clear enough to work with."

"FAB, Frankie, and good luck."

"Thanks." Elise hurriedly jogged towards the silver rocket, muttering to herself. "Now I have to get this damn thing back up in the air again."

She hadn't been happy about piloting it in the first place on this rescue, but buckled down and did it. Right now, it just wasn't her favorite thing to fly. That, and the fact that Scott was its 'mommy', made her cringe.

Kat watched as TB1 lifted up gracefully, teetered back and forth a little, then banked over to the right to fly back along the tunnel. She bit her lip, thankful that Scott wasn't here.

Elise flew over the seven mile length of the tunnel carefully. ~How am I going to figure out which vents are over the Danger Zone? she asked herself. ~Time to ask Base.

"Base from Thunderbird One," she called.

"Base here, Thunderbird One. Go ahead, Frankie," came Brains's voice.

"Base, the tunnel has a lot of ventilation shafts. How can I find out which ones are over the Danger Zone?"

Brains replied. "You'll need to locate Big Mac and Ursa with the Thermal Imager and then calculate the distance MGM will need to get the generator in position. If you have problems with the imager, call Quasar to locate them by their chips."

Elise listened carefully to his words and simply replied "FAB."

Locating the thermal imager she continued to fly along the tunnel until she got the tell-tale reading indicating life. Two distinct images confirmed that she'd located Brandon and Callie.

The first two vents she saw were a lost cause. Both were covered with debris and rocks, but the 3rd and 4th ones looked okay.

"Base and Mobile Control from Thunderbird One. Vent shafts 1 and 2 are blocked, number 3 is about 1/4 blocked but vent 4 is clear. That's our best bet for setting the generator up."

"FAB, Thunderbird One," Brains replied.

"Big Mac and Ursa from Thunderbird One, come in."

"This is Big Mac. Thunderbird One, go ahead."

Elise relayed what Brains had told her.

"We're just finishing up now and then will be heading out."

"FAB Big Mac. I'm showing 4 vents located where you are. From up here, two are covered, the third is partially covered but the fourth one is clear. Unfortunately, from down where he was they all looked the same and looked okay.

"Which one is the one we're going to use Frankie?" Elise checked the imager once again and advised "Vent shaft 4, not the one that's immediately above you, but the next one."

"FAB." Brandon acknowledged.

Elise bid them farewell and turned Thunderbird One back towards Mobile Control, leaving Brandon to update Ursa on the situation.

"TB1 returning to danger zone, Mobile Control."

"FAB."

Thunderbird One came down with a few bumps but remained intact and Elise was soon running towards Kat. She immediately updated Kat on what she'd seen from the air.

"Big Mac and Ursa have been informed. Now we have to find out when the Monobrake is coming out, then we'll have to get you and the generator on it. Then it will head back down the tunnel."

"Okay, I'll check the status on the Monobrake and then Mobile Control is all yours," Kat replied.

From: FrankieCTB2 Sent: 12/28/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:25:34 GMT
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Kat watched as Elise piloted Thunderbird One up and headed for the mountain range. She sat looking at the controls. ~Me, in charge of Mobile Control! I'd better tell Brains that I'm here.

"Base from Mobile Control."

"Mobile Control from Base. Is that you, MGM?"

"Yes, Einstein. I'm just covering for Frankie whilst she searches for a clear ventilation shaft so I can get the generator to work the fans. Have you received any news on the person who pushed me over and stole the hoverbike?"

"No news from the authorities. However, Dom has reported that there were no missing passengers."

Just then John contacted Mobile Control. "Mobile Control from Thunderbird Five. Come in, Mobile Control."

"Thunderbird Five from Mobile Control, MGM speaking. How can I help you, Quasar?"

"MGM, are you all right?"

"Okay, although my elbows and knees are very sore. I guess I will have some beautiful bruises."

"Glad to hear you weren't seriously injured. Good luck, MGM, and take care."

"Thanks, Quasar. I will. Talk to you later."

John signed off and Kat continued watching the dials, and listening in to the conversations coming through from the danger zone. After what seemed an eternity, Thunderbird One's engines could be heard..

Dom helped Kat place the small, yet surprisingly heavy, generator on to the monobrake. She climbed up beside him, and they drove back inside the tunnel. Kat asked if he could stop at the relay device.

"Just for a precautionary check," she said.

Once she was satisfied that everything was still in order, she climbed back on board, and they continued to the site of the crash. Working with the co-ordinates that Elise had provided, Kat started to look for the ventilation unit. Dom left her, stating that he should continue his work with Nikki. Kat looked around, seeing if anyone else were free to assist her. Seeing Brandon talking to Callie, she called to ask if either were free.

"I can give you a hand, MGM." Brandon answered. "How can I help?"

"Can you carry this generator to the ventilation unit? It's not too far."

Brandon picked up the generator and followed Kat.

Kat and Brandon climbed up to the ventilation unit. Brandon heaved the cables attached to the generator to her. Between them, they managed to fix the cables from the generator to the ventilation unit. It was not an easy task; the cables were cumbersome and the connections were dirty and full of debris. But finally they were attached. Switching on the power, there was a hum; and then the large fans began to slowly rotate, going faster and faster, until the bad air and gasses began to be drawn away from the crash site, up the shaft and out into the atmosphere.

"Phew, Big Mac," Kat said. "This has been some rescue. I wonder how the Tracys are? I can just imagine Scott's face when he learns that I have been in control of Mobile Control, if only for a short while."

Brandon nodded. "This has sure been a baptism by fire for all of us."

written by TawnyAngel22 Sent: 12/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:25:49 GMT
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Saturday, June 2, 2068, 3 p.m., local time, Pir Panjal range, India

The Hood sat back in his pilot's seat, sipping a cup of green tea that he had brewed in the tiny galley of his hoverjet. The stainless steel case was stored securely in the helijet's hold, and though he was impatient to get back to his Malaysian stronghold and examine his prize, he waited.

~Patience will be my weapon this time, he mused. ~If I leave now, I may attract the attention of International Rescue, and Thunderbird One can easily outfly this craft. If I wait until they are gone, I should be able to leave undetected. He smiled smugly. ~The camouflage on my helijet was excellent. Thunderbird One flew over me twice and did not detect my presence.

Taking a sip of tea, he lifted his binoculars to his eyes again. "Yesssss," he murmured. "Thunderbird One is airborne... but something must be wrong with the pilot. I have never seen it lift off with such a lack of grace. And... yes, Thunderbird Two has lifted off. And again, the pilot's skill is lacking." He put down his cup. "Perhaps... could it be possible? Could all of the eternally cursed Tracy family have been missing from this operation? Could this have been staffed solely by their new recruits?"

He began to power up his helijet. "I could perhaps ask it of my half-brother when I return to my temple." Then he shook his bald head. "No, the last attempt nearly laid me low. I will not risk it again except in greatest need. However... perhaps I can find a way to learn more about these new recruits. I will give the matter some thought."

With that, he lifted off the face of the mountain and made his way in the opposite direction of the Thunderbirds, heading for Malaysia, and an enjoying evening with his new toy.

XXXXXXXXXX

"Thunderbirds Two and Five from Thunderbird One," Elise called into her microphone. "Calling stand down at 1500 hours local time. Base, we're on our way back."

"Thunderbird One from Thunderbird Two," came Dom's Irish accent. "F-A-B. Stand down acknowledged."

"Thunderbird One from Thunderbird Five," said John at nearly the exact same time, "F-A-B."

"Thunderbird One from Base." Brains's tenor added to the blend of male voices. "F-A-B. What is your ETA?"

Elise laughed, a short chuckle that removed some of the tension she felt flying the lead Thunderbird. "One at a time, you guys, one at a time! Base, our ETA is 2 hours. I'm pacing Thunderbird Two home."

"F-A-B, Thunderbird One," Brains replied. "You've all done well."

"Uh, Base from Thunderbird Two," Dom called out. "What is the status of the... uh, other team?"

Both of the Thunderbird pilots and the space monitor could hear the heavy sigh. "Still incapacitated. I'll give you more of a report when you return to base."

"F-A-B, Base. Thunderbird Two, out."

"Does that mean we'll still be on sick room duty when we get back?" Nikki asked, frowning.

"I don't know," Dom said distractedly as he prepared to lift Thunderbird Two back into the air.

"Tell you what, Dom," Nikki began. "I'll get a nap in crew's quarters on the way home and take over the sick room for a while. It'll give both you and Brains a break."

"You're a true angel, Nikki," Dom replied with a grin. "Thank you."

"I could watch Joshua for you," Kat suggested.

"Thank you for the offer, Kat, but I think I'd like to spend some time with my son myself," Dom replied kindly. "He doesn't always like it when his Da goes to work."

Callie stretched. "I'll be glad to get back and have something decent to eat." She turned to Brandon and nudged him. "How about you?"

Brandon shook his head. "I'll pass on the food, I think. I've still got those chemical leftovers on my mind."

The group laughed, and Nikki got up to find the crew's quarters, intending to nap while the others came down off the euphoria of their first, unaccompanied rescue.

XXXXXXXXXX

"Base from Thunderbird Five," John called as soon as Brains was done talking with the on-site rescue team.

"Base here, go ahead."

"Einstein, I intercepted a message from the Indian Defense authorities. It seems that Kat's mysterious attacker has made off with the prototype of a new anti-aircraft scanner, one that will even detect our ships."

Brains groaned. "Oh, wonderful. Any way for us to get the schematics so we can develop a countermeasure?"

John shook his head. "I don't know. I doubt they'd give the schematics up at this point. Maybe the Commander can come up with something once he's back on his feet."

"I hope so. Anything else I need to know?"

The space monitor shook his head. "Not that I can think of."

"Then I'd better get on with my medical duties."

"F-A-B, Thunderbird Five, out."

From: Tikatu Sent: 12/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:26:07 GMT
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Brains sat back with a sigh and looked over at Tin-Tin, then at Lena, who had just come into the lounge. "It's over. They are on their way back to the island."

"Wonderful," said Tin-Tin. "Now we know that they can handle themselves. Why don't you go get some rest until they arrive? I can handle things from here."

"Can't," he replied, smiling at her. "I have to check on Mrs. Tracy and the three youngest kids, to see if they have responded to the injections. And if they have, I think there are three others who could probably use some of the medicine. But I would like you to stay here and make sure the airspace is clear when they get close, so they can land."

"That I can do. Go take care of the invalids."

"Lena, would you come with me and assist?"

"Of course. I'll see you later, Tin-Tin."

"I'll look forward to it. Give my love to all of them," the young Malaysian replied.

Lena and Brains headed to the boys' room, where they found Tyler sleeping peacefully, and Alex sitting up, reading. He looked up at them as they walked in, and smiled.

"How do you feel, Alex?" Brains asked, walking over to the bed.

"I'm a lot better than I was this morning. I've been awake for about an hour, and haven't felt like I needed to throw up in all that time. But I'm still feeling a little queasy and weak."

Brains and Lena smiled at each other. "Has your brotter been awake in dat hour?"

"Uh-uh. He's sleeping like a baby. Man, whatever it was, sure is going away fast."

"It had some help. A few hours ago, we gave you two an injection while you were asleep."

"An injection? And I didn't wake up? Where did I get it?"

"In your arm."

Alex started rubbing his arm. "That's why it hurts, isn't it?"

Lena chuckled. "Wrong arm, Alex. Dat pain is all in your mind."

Brains laughed at the expression on the boy's face. "You get some rest. If things go as well as they have so far, you'll probably be fine in the morning. Just take it easy."

Alex nodded and returned to his book, as Brains and Lena left and headed to Cherie's room. She woke up as they walked in, and sat up. "Hi, Lena, Brains." She paused, realizing that she was sitting up and not throwing up. "I feel so much better. Do I need more of the medicine?"

"No, Cherry. One shot is supposed to be enough, and judging from you and their brothers, it is. So after we check on your Tracy grandmother, we'll be giving shots to a few others. You should all be completely back to normal in a day or two."

"Just stay in bed and rest, honey," Lena added, smiling.

"Okay. Can I read?"

"As long as you don't get overtired," Brains answered. "Any time you feel yourself getting sleepy, stop and take a nap. That way, you'll get better even faster."

She agreed, and they left. They checked on Emily, who was also responding, but less quickly than the children. She had been awake when they walked in, but fell back to sleep before they left.

Brains was feeling optimistic about the medicine's efficacy, and he and Lena discussed who else

should receive a shot -- and in what order. He decided, after checking the other rooms, that three other people needed injections -- Jeff, Scott and Virgil.

"Alan and Gordon seem to be less affected than the others, and Dr. Tracy is fighting it very well on her own. I'll keep an injection on hand in case she goes downhill, but I don't think she'll need it," Brains told Lena as they reached the top of the stairs.

"All right. Who do you want to do first?"

Brains stopped in the hall to consider her question. "Mr. Tracy. Then Scott and Virgil."

They went to the master suite and Lena knocked. They heard a voice, but couldn't make out the words. She took matters into her own hands, and opened the door. Dianne was awake, but didn't sit up. The bedclothes were twisted, so Lena went over to her and straightened them, telling her that the children were feeling better, as was Emily.

"That's good to hear, but I haven't seen any improvement in Jeff. I'm not quite as nauseous as I was, but I have a long way to go before I feel like myself again."

"We've come to give your husband an injection of de medicine. Dat will help."

As Brains went to Jeff's side of the bed and pulled one of his arms out from under the covers, the older man woke up and looked up at him. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to give you an injection. You aren't improving according to your wife, and it hasn't been that long since you were in the hospital."

"An injection?" Jeff replied, unconsciously repeating what Alex said earlier, and trying to move his arm back under the covers. "I had enough of needles in the hospital to last me the rest of my life."

As Lena tried to hide a smile, Dianne irritably said, "Jeff, just take your medicine like a man. Do you want to feel like this for a few more days, or for a shorter period?"

"Oh, all right," Jeff grouched. He held his arm out. "Just do it."

Brains gave him a wry look, and quickly injected the medicine into Jeff's arm. Lena moved over and straightened the covers on his side of the bed, made sure there was water in their containers nearby and the bowls were cleaned out. Then they left and headed to Scott's room.

Scott was awake and throwing up when they walked in. Lena hurried over and held his forehead, then helped him to lay back when he was through. She gave him some water and cleaned out the bowl, replacing it where it had been. Scott watched her, then looked over at Brains.

"What's that?"

"Some medicine to counteract the illness."

"That's a needle. I don't want a needle."

Lena gazed down at him. "My hero. You aren't afraid of such a small ting, are you?"

"You don't understand, Lena. I - I fainted the last time I got an injection."

"Come on, Scott," said Brains incredulously. "That was different. That needle was larger than this one. It won't be so bad."

"Welllll... I don't know."

"Lena, will you do what you did when I gave Cherie a shot?"

"What did you do, Lena?"

"I just talked to her, like dis," Lena replied as she leaned over and began whispering in his ear.

Brains took Scott's arm and gave him the injection. Much to his surprise, Scott flinched. "I don't believe you. You actually felt it?"

"Sorry. I barely felt something, and instinct took over. Thanks, Lena."

"You're welcome. Now, get some sleep. I'll check in on you in a few hours." She covered him as he settled down and she and Brains left the room.

Once outside, she said to her companion, "Like fotter, like son?"

He choked a laugh. "It would seem so, wouldn't it? Let's hope we don't have to go through the same thing with Virgil."

Fortunately, Virgil was asleep and, like Alex and Tyler, never woke up as they took care of him. They left and parted company, Brains heading down to the sick room to take care of the syringes. Lena headed to the lounge to keep Tin-Tin company.

"All set?" Tin-Tin asked.

"All set," Lena affirmed. "Now all we have to do is wait for de otters to get home."

written by Hobbeth Sent: 12/29/2005

Subject: Re: Celebrations and Challenges
Posted by [artisticrainey](#) on Fri, 27 Jul 2012 21:26:27 GMT
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And with that we end Chapter Six: Celebrations and Challenges!
