Three Square Meals Ch. 154

Dana bounced the power coupling in the palm of her hand, then reached up into the Wormhole Generator and locked it in place.

“Hey, I thought you’d double-checked all the connections already?” Alyssa asked, as she squatted down beside her friend.

“I just wanted to make sure everything was hooked up correctly one last time,” she replied, reaching for the next power coupling in the bundle.

Alyssa watched her in silence as Dana locked each reinforced cable in place. “Sparks, nobody thinks you screwed up, okay?”

The redhead frowned and sealed the access plate back into position, then slid the brackets around the cabling and locked them with a satisfying click. She stared at the blue and green swirls that adorned the outer shell of the Wormhole Generator, then let out a weary sigh.

“I just hate not knowing what went wrong,” she admitted. “I can’t help feeling like I’ve missed something obvious, and it’s driving me fucking crazy!”

After patting her thigh, Alyssa slid her friend out from under the huge device. “Come on, we better head up to the Bridge. John will be back in a couple of minutes and we’ll be leaving straight away.”

Dana hauled herself up from the floating maintenance trolley, then shut down its anti-gravity device. She trudged after Alyssa and followed her down the corridor like a condemned man walking to the gallows. By the time they reached the grav-tubes, John and Jehanna’s voices echoed around them as the pair floated up in the blue field.

“I know they’ll love it!” Jehanna exclaimed, beaming at John in triumph.

“I trust you, honey,” he said, trying to look enthusiastic.

She laughed and gave him a hug. “That was very convincing! Now try it again with just a smidge more enthusiasm.”

“Hey, I’ve agreed to use it haven’t I?” he countered, slipping an arm around her shoulders.

Alyssa stood coquettishly by the entrance to the grav-tubes. “Oh my goodness!” she gasped, fanning her face. “Who is this immaculately dressed stranger?”

John grinned and pulled her into the grav-tube as they floated past. “The new suit was a big hit with the matriarchs. Thank you.”

“We do have a certain image to maintain,” she said, brushing her hand over his chest. “I have a feeling that every day would be casual Friday if you were in charge of the dress code.”

“There’s nothing wrong with good honest workout gear,” he said in mock indignation, before glancing down at his Chief Engineer as she lurched into the tube below them. \*Dana doesn’t look very happy. I take it she didn’t have much luck finding the issue with the wormhole generator?\*

Alyssa shook her head. \*Sparks is so gifted with machines, I can’t remember her ever struggling like this before,\* the blonde admitted. \*She’s taken a nasty hit to her professional pride.\*

They reached the Command Deck and this time there was a much lighter crew complement present. Calara, Rachel, and Sakura were all seated at their stations, patiently awaiting his arrival, then Jade spun around in the pilot’s chair and gave him a guilty wave.

John returned it and greeted the Nymph with a warm smile, to let her know all was forgiven. “Okay, take us out, Jade. When we’re completely clear of the local gravity wells, we can activate the Wormhole Generator.”

The Nymph whizzed the chair around again until she was facing forward, and hummed happily to herself as she began powering up the Invictus’ six Progenitor engines. Retro-thrusters blazed to life along the hull, and when she ramped up their power, the battlecruiser began to lift off the floor of the docking bay. Jade pulled back the throttle and the Invictus reversed out of the huge hangar until they had completely cleared the interior of Genthalas shipyard.

Jade pulled back on her flight stick to lift the ship’s bow, then when they were no longer looking at the golden spires of the Maliri space station, she shoved the throttle forward. They leapt forward like a scalded cat, their massive engines giving them the same kind of acceleration that you would expect from a strike craft.

As she banked them around towards their destination, Alyssa faced John from her XO chair. “John, I think we should visit Kythshara when we’re done with Geniya station.”

He glanced at her curiously. “You want to delay dropping the first set of mines? You must have a pretty good reason to go there.”

“There are three important reasons actually,” she clarified, before glancing at her girlfriend. “Do you want to tell him?”

“First and most important, we need to take control of Mael’nerak’s defence grid,” Calara explained. “It’s pointless luring the Galkiran invasion force to Kythshara if we can’t actually fire any of the gun platforms. It was all AI controlled before, and I’m sure the control systems were blown to pieces when the pyramid was destroyed; that means we’ll need to build a replacement.”

“Okay, I won’t argue with any of that, it all makes sense to me,” John readily agreed. “What else?”

“We need to make sure the Lianelis Saevath network is back up and running. Those cloak breaking sensors will be invaluable for helping us track down the Progenitor’s dreadnought. We also need to find a way to broadcast that data out to the Maliri forces, including the Invictus, so we can monitor the sensor network when we’re out harassing the thrall fleets.”

“Damn... that’s a good point too,” John said, nodding his approval. “So what’s the third reason?”

Calara went quiet, and glanced meaningfully at Alyssa.

“It’s a very important reason, but I’d rather not say what it is until we return to Kythshara,” she said cautiously.

“I’m not even going to get a hint?” he protested.

“I want to show you something in Mael’nerak’s palace,” she replied, meeting his questioning gaze. “I’ll tell you what it is now if you insist, but I’d prefer for you to see it for yourself.”

John considered their options, then nodded his consent. “The first two reasons alone are important enough to go back there. We need to properly set the trap on Kythshara and if that’s not possible, we need to know early enough to alter our plans.”

“Thanks for trusting me on the third reason,” Alyssa said quietly.

“Well you’ve got me intrigued, I’ll give you that,” he said with a wry smile.

Jade eased back on the throttle and the Invictus glided to a halt. “We’ve reached the jump point, Master.”

He turned to look at Dana, who was anxiously drumming her fingers on the Engineering Station. “The Wormhole Generator is fully charged. You can start the jump whenever you’re ready, Dana.”

She took a deep breath, then eased the field stabiliser slider into position and hit the button to activate the Wormhole Generator. Just like before, the rotating disc of tightly controlled energy sprang into existence, then began sweeping down the Invictus’ hull. John braced himself this time as the disc approached and he was very glad that he did, when that dizzying wave of disorientation hit. It was a bit easier to resist the urge to be violently sick and a quick glance around the Bridge confirmed that the girls had managed to hold back as well.

Dana slumped dejectedly in her chair. “I’m really sorry, John,” she muttered dejectedly. “It’s fucked up and I’ve got no idea how to fix it.”