

Journey Through Night

Part II

By Pete Planisek

“Stop prepping that damn thing every two minutes, Hazler,” Dublin admonished as he sat down across from her and began to blow the steam off his rations.

The only response from Hazler was a series of familiar clicks and a low hum from the power pack as it was reinserted.

“Never talk to her when she’s performing weapons check,” Rifran’s voice advised into the icy darkness they all sat in. “Its bad luck.”

Dublin paused a moment, uncertain if he believed Rifran, then began to shake his head and mutter as he took a bite.

The food never reached his mouth. Instead, he was smashed against the bulkhead.

“If you’d been on Jyiteen with us you’d know to always check your weapon before stuffing your face,” Rifran passionately declared. “That’s something they don’t teach you academy types, is it? Do you have any idea what they did to us on that moon?”

“Shut up, Rifran. Let the rook eat. Can’t blame him for thinking he knows better than us,” Hazler stated as she reset the safety on her weapon. “How many academy guys are still in V Company?”

A few low laughs echoed in the dark.

“Just the doc,” Rifran said, easing up on Dublin. “Most officers don’t make it cause they’re too busy plotting their next career move instead of learning to duck or shoot back.”

This comment was greeted with even more laughter.

“The academy’s no substitute for experience. That’s why they promoted the LT,” Hazler affirmed.

“Oh yeah, how long have you been on the lines?” Dublin demanded.

The low laughter and conversation ceased. For the first time since their arrival on the station, Dublin was grateful for the darkness.

“That all depends,” Rifran began. “You’re what, 27 by universal time, Dublin? Our home worlds all have different calendars, there’s universal time, the gift of those long hyper sleep naps as we jump between systems, how light speed travel impacts aging ... all taken into account, I’ve been on the frontlines for over 200 years.”

“179.”

“322,” another voice called out.

Hazlar came closer to Dublin.

“At least the nightmares from hyper sleep you wake up from, eventually; the front line for drafted noncoms like us just ... keeps ... going, while rich, little academy types like you go back home and design suicide missions like this for us over and over again. That is, if you don’t get us killed while you’re ‘field training.’ This is a dream you never wake up from so if it’s all the same with you, sir, I’ll check my weapon as many times as I possibly can.”

“New equipment is just about useless,” Rifran asserted.

“Damn right,” several voices agreed.

The darkness was suddenly aglow with helmet communication beacons. They only need acknowledge one to all hear Cayde’s message.

“Assemble in the side corridor. We have situation.”

*

Cayde finally paused, silently grateful for the unanticipated distraction her rookie was providing.

“It’s Dublin, right?”

“Yes, sir!” The academy man she’d been burdened with for this mission crisply replied.

“Mission briefings are not the time to be performing a weapons check, Dublin.”

“Yes, sir! Sorry sir!” He slung his primary weapon over this shoulder and stood at attention.

Cayde resisted the urge to shake her head and continued.

“Until we know what we’re dealing with I want a reconnaissance in force. We’ll start at the position supplied by the heads up tracking and spiral out from there after we have a clearer idea of the situation and what areas are depressurized. Hazler?”

“And if it’s a trap, sir?”

“Then it’s us or them,” Cadye curtly replied. “But we have to ascertain Sargent Isa’s mission status and if possible save our own people. Doctor.”

“Right. This mission may take us into some more heavily radiated areas so Rad Protocol Stage 7 injections will be required.

Cadye nodded in agreement as her unit retrieved their med kits.

“How much of this shit can a body actually absorb?” Hazler murmured to Rifran.

“Maybe that’s what Doc’s been pondering the past two days,” Rifran quietly remarked as he injected himself.

“Personally, I’ve been wondering why those bodies weren’t more decomposed.”

“Lack of microbes on the station, temperature, pressure,” Rifran shrugged. “You good rookie?” He asked turning to Dublin for a moment.

“Fine,” the younger man tersely stated.

Rifran was unfazed as he returned his attention to Hazler.

“But I’ve never seen Doc bothered by anything like the bodies in that room,” she continued.

“We’ve all got our breaking point,” Rifran countered. “Still should see if we can get anything out of him about it ... if the LT hasn’t already.”

They both laughed knowingly as they grabbed their gear to move out.

*

“Nobody touch anything. Keep your respirators on. I want two on point in every direction while we check this out,” Cayde ordered in a calm but deadly serious tone as she motioned Doctor Tomlinson to proceed. “Remember they can come from above or below too. Standard sentry positions; keep us covered people.”

They’d been searching for three days and finally managed to locate a measure of Sargent Isa’s fallen unit; however, Isa, St. Crux, the remainder of Isa’s unit, and even the ostensibly injured Henta remained unaccounted for. More ghosts in the darkness Cayde thought to herself.

Six of her unit had been lost since the start of their search. Two had succumbed to radiation poisoning, one had fallen down an open hatchway in the dark; the other three now resided in the icy grip of space, victims of this part of the station constantly losing pressure and sealing off rooms and passages until their air ran out. Privately, Cayde wished she could convince herself such losses were necessary or acceptable.

Worse still were the sense of dread she felt both from this place and her growing fears of the unknown. A finite amount of time existed for them to accomplish their larger mission here, and while vital, their search had delayed them. And then there were the ever increasing headaches and images gleaned in the wink of an eye in the corner of her vision. Not only had they persisted but they were increasing in number. While the cause remained elusive, each seemed to bring her closer to a moment of clarity. If only she could decipher what she was seeing.

“Well Doc? She inquired as she leaned down as Tomlinson completed his scans.

“According to this, these men, Isa’s men, not only killed each other but they died 142 years ago.”

Story continues in Part III



“Journey Through Night Part II” by Pete Planisek

Published by Enceladus Literary LLC

©2014

All Rights Reserved