Chapter 17

I pulled out some micro drones to map the city’s main shaft. Micro drones were used when a ship was stationary to inspect the hull and used in ship yards and dry dock mostly. I only had four of them and had built them with the fabricator and salvaged parts. With the minimal gravity on the planetoid I should have about 6 hours battery operation for each. I setup the recharging dock on top of the shuttle. That way they could return to charge themselves before continuing with the mapping. Unfortunately my drones were just visual and surface mapping. I couldn’t add advanced scanners to them. Well I could have gotten the sensors from the Sapphire powered armor but wanted to keep all of them intact. I had 44 more suits stored in one of the cargo containers.

I assumed my crew hadn’t used any bots or drones during their exploration because they were worried I might access their memory core when they returned. They had scrubbed their shuttle logs…which should have been a red flag now that I thought about it. I took my portable scanner and started circling the walkway on the reclamation level. The writing on the next access tunnel translated as ‘fuel depot’. I went inside and after exploring a few corridors found they separated water here into hydrogen and oxygen. I was happy to find six of their bots in docking stations here. The alcoves had probably been for charging them. There were a total of twenty three alcoves but I didn’t find any other bots in the large facility. The next access tunnel I entered had collapsed and I couldn’t find any script on the walls as to what lay beyond the rubble. Rather than backtrack I decided to finish my loop. I just had two more entrances.

The next corridor was clearly marked power distribution hub. I was excited to see what this alien society used for fuel. I ended up being thoroughly confused and after two hours in a brain lock figured it out from a schematic relief etched into the wall. The power generation facility was lower. This area just directed the power throughout the city above. I had tested snipped pieces of the wiring from bots brought to the Destiny’s Children. The alien power cable was laced with a complex crystalline weave that was a faster conductor than the Union used by almost 20%. It had huge implications if I could find out how it was manufactured and replicate the process.

Rather than descend to the power generators below I just checked the last corridor on this level. It was an atmospheric regulation facility. I was a little confused as to why there was any water left in the tanks. Wouldn’t the last aliens alive have used all the water creating atmosphere? My suit was down to two hours of air and Eve was due to arrive in 4 hours so I finished the loop and went back to the shuttle.

Shinade and Vanessa were exhausted inside the shuttle. The water tanks were already full and they were looking for some praise which I gave liberally. I was exhausted as well and we shared a meal together and talked. I told them I needed to set up a fuel refinement facility for the marine drop shuttle. Then I could get enough fuel to get to civilization. I told them the issues with my plan. The marine drop shuttle needed heavy maintenance after each jump as it wasn’t designed for multiple jumps.

Then I gave them the bad news. I was going alone. They were shocked and I tried to assure them I would be coming back for them. I could see they were upset and probably scared. I was glad I still had my power armor on in case they decided to jump me. I told them I would be leaving them with over 2 years of food and plenty of life support. This news did not make them any happier. I told them if I was successful in getting to civilization I would buy a ship and come right back. That still didn’t help until I revealed the amount of precious metals I had. I caught a flicker of that same greed in their eyes. Thankfully, Eve opened comms at that moment.

We all got back to work and I was glad the woman put aside their angst. Eve was going to soft crash the welded cargo containers near the top of this city shaft. Then we were going to bring all the containers down here one by one using the marine drop shuttle.

Twelve hours later I was on fumes as were Shinade and Vanessa. I decided to trust them and went to sleep in the marine shuttle and gave them this shuttle to live in. The 3rd shuttle would be their backup life support. I had a fourth shuttle as well but I had scavenged it for parts and then broke it down to recycle. Eve was the only one awake and was working on programming the bots. Technically this was a violation of Union law, bots were not allowed to program bots. They could only have bots execute preprogrammed actions. Another restriction I had lifted from Eve recently. I slept 11 hours.

On waking I panicked for a brief moment until I realized where I was. I should have used my SLUMBER unit but hadn’t unpacked it yet. Pre-programmed dreaming made it easier to wake up clear headed for me. Eve asked me if I was ok due to my brief panic. After saying I was fine she gave me an update. The women had been up for two hours and were setting up long term life support between the other two shuttles. I commed them and asked them to come to my shuttle to talk. They arrived 15 minutes later.

Taking a deep breath, I told them the plan again. But this time I told them they could keep 10% of the haul from this planetoid, 10% each. That seemed to motivate them and their excitement rose. I put the brakes on a little. I didn’t want them to go around ripping out interesting tech out of the walls and ruining it. They needed to be methodical. Eve interrupted.

She had a number of updates for me. First, she noted where the crew had found the precious metals. It was a storage facility for the city’s fabrication factory. Before she could continue we all asked where was it? The women wanted the precious metals, I wanted the fabricators! Eve brought up a projected holographic image of the city. The fabricators were two levels up. The levels below us were general manufacturing, power generators and recycling. There was a large amount of trash, scrap and bones at the bottom of the shaft she noted as well. Moving up the shaft there were levels for recreation, living, administration, education and hydroponics. We spent a few hours together examining the holographic image that was being updated in real time as bots sent back data.

The few interesting things I noted…there was a tunnel network with a rail that went to the other cities…there were nine cities according to at the terminal stations. The second thing I noted was one of the cities loosely translated to Space Exploration Branch. Maybe the aliens got FTL or passed by a habitable planet and abandoned the planetoid? The third thing I noted was there was a sign that translated to ‘archives’ on one of the access corridors far above.

I planned to send Eve to the archives with some bots to see if she could get the alien archives transcribed. Shinade and Vanessa would work on bringing the precious metals from the storage facility to here. Personally I wanted to explore the city responsible for space exploration…it was unlikely they had a spacecraft there but I should check anyway. The city was 240 km away and I planned to take the marine shuttle after I set up the fuel refinery.

Well I ran into some issues. I had fabricated everything I needed to refine the fuel before this but when I ran the fuel through the system the filters clogged up before too long. Apparently there were more impurities in the fuel than there should be. I only had six filters and couldn’t manufacture more. So I spent six hours finding a way to clean the filters and reuse them. That completed I told Eve and the women that I was taking the shuttle to explore the other city.