Chapter 30

The return to normal space was anticlimactic as nothing was on sensors when we emerged. It took us 20 minutes to find the planetoid and another 7 hours to catch up to it. I mean space is big, really big, the tiniest errors cause you to be off by hundreds of thousands of kilometers…and I had made some very very tiny errors.

Shinade and Vanessa were probably in one of the city shafts and shielded from comms so I decided to wait until we were closer before trying to contact them. As we got closer Henry was on sensors and noticed a shuttle on the surface. I downloaded my data of the planetoid to the computer and was worried. The shuttle was not near one of the city shafts. As the image resolved and I confirmed it was one of our shuttles. My heart thumped in my chest…we got closer. Henry said no heat signature…then he said no life signs.

What happened? Henry then said the shuttle was intact. Were they still here or had they been taken away? Had they perished? I found myself gripping the chair with white knuckles. We moved into an orbit over the shuttle. I had planned to land on the planetoid with the Void Phoenix as the gravity was low enough to do so. But we had to make some preparations and would only be able to land once due to the fuel costs and extensive prep work to build a cradle for the ship. So if I wanted to investigate the abandoned shuttle I would need to take another shuttle down. I decided on my luxury shuttle as it would use the least amount of fuel. I told Eve to stay on the ship and she was not happy. Her angry face was quite good and I complimented her on it. She said thank you but her angry face remained. I told her I needed someone on board because I didn’t trust my new crew 100% yet.

I suited up and went down to the planet. The shuttle controls were ridiculously easy to use. The autopilot was such that I just needed to select the destination and the entire flight route was programmed and initiated. I landed and explored the shuttle. It was full of crates of precious metals. The women had made more crates as these were not the style I had made while I was with them.

Many possibilities ran through my head. I checked the flight log on the shuttle. Ah, the shuttle had a ruptured actuator fuel line. This meant it would have been difficult to keep level and control the flight…especially with the heavy load. Exploring around the shuttle and there were footprints around the exterior of the craft and tracks from my ATV. So maybe the women were ok. Relief flooded me and I realized I didn’t just like the women, they were my friends and I cared about their well being.

I calculated the direction of the tracks and figured they had headed to the city with controls for the gravity drive. It was where I had left them. I flew my shuttle over to the city and had the ship change its position to orbit over the city. Almost immediately my comms lit up.

It was Shinade asking me to identify myself. I did respond and heard two screams of joy on the other line. The channel was open so everyone on the ship heard as well. I had only been gone 41 days so I was actually 9 days early in my return. I landed my shuttle and entered the one remaining shuttle and it smelled terrible and so did the women who hugged me immediately. Vanessa wouldn’t let go and started crying. Shinade had more control but I could see some relief on her relaxing her worry aged face.

I got the story of what happened after my departure. They decided to explore the other cities and that went well for two weeks. They found the other cities matched the one we had first entered during our exploration. The cities connected to the spaceport all showed various similarities to it in terms of size, loot and abandoned technology. All the other cities on the planetoid had been stripped, they had checked three so far. They then decided to try and loot all the fabricator warehouses for precious metals. On their second trip the shuttle bucked and they couldn’t control the flight so they landed. Shinade did a 90 km jog back to base camp to get the ATV. She almost ran out of oxygen but made it and retrieved Vanessa.

When they finally got back they found the water tank heaters had failed and the frozen water had ruptured the tanks, flooding the cargo containers and ruining the fabricators. With one shuttle damaged they were indecisive on whether or not to implement the back up plan and insert a shuttle with an emergency beacon into the original flight path of the planetoid. They would have to be on the shuttle in order to do so as it had much of their remaining life support. Something else went wrong just about every day after that, like the planetoid was cursed.

I was calm and just hugged Vanessa. In my mind I could see a thousand ways they could have done things better. Vanessa had been a shuttle technician. She had just refueled and ran generic scans on shuttles but she could have figured out the required repairs. That was all fine and good. I told them I had brought back a ship and we were heading up to it. And there were showers I said scrunching my nose.

They got in their suits and we went to my shuttle. They were suitably impressed with it but I asked them to keep their suits on during transit. No point in ruining that new shuttle smell.

On the ship approach they were again impressed. The shape of the Void Phoenix was extremely sleek and it looked more like a predator of the oceans than a spacecraft. The shuttle bay got them super excited as they had thought the ship was new. Eve was there to greet them and after two minutes Eve announced the Shinade was pregnant.

Rae’Ver was beyond furious. He didn’t let his emotion bleed out and affect others though. He had too much control for that. He could sooth himself and bash objects into the walls with his telekinetic blasts though. That made him feel a little better.

The seller had fled the station. He briefly considered retaking the station from the humans. But no, that would make too many parties upset. The station was a valuable highway of goods from the human empires to the Sylvan city ships. He went to question the low elf Sha’Lua for the third time. He had already scoured her mind with his powers and found nothing useful. She had been cooperative and had supplied images of the seller, one human named Devon Wellspring, to him. She even claimed to be on good relations with the human. Fine. He would take her with him when he left in case he needed her and her relation to the human. He had been at the station for three days and had missed the human by three days. The human had a 6 day head start.

Calming he looked at the vector the…Void Phoenix…has taken. There were three star systems along that path at 13, 58 and 103 light years distant. He had sent scouts to each. Sha’Lua seemed to think he was going to rendezvous with another ship since he had come into the station on a short range shuttle. If that was the case he would need to send dozens of scouts along this path to try and find where he had left sub space. Damn the amount of resources he would have to invest if he went this route. Damn the disrespectful humans. He finally decided to send out 38 scout ships between here and the first star system 13 light years away. Time was ticking on being able to find the trail before is dissipated. He also posted a 50,000 Sylvan credit bounty on the whereabouts of the Void Phoenix. That was a fortune to humans. They could even use those credits to purchase Sylvan goods. He suddenly grinned. This was going to be fun…the hunt…he sensed the reward at the end of this chase would be worth it.