Chapter 34

I was prepping my Lux shuttle. The first thing with the alien tech was to see if I could get the sensor module moved to my ship. It was 19.2m long, 4.9m wide and 4.2m high. The knowledge I was missing was its mass, power requirements, whether it could operate independently or if it required multiple units, and also how it needed to be mounted on a ship.

I thought about putting it on the promenade on deck 7 but decided not to. The walkway was 120m long and 23m wide but it had been paths, trees and gardens in the plans. I had an interesting thought. I still had those alien seeds that were viable. I chastised myself after thinking of creating an alien garden. They might be sentient man eating trees or something worse. I did make a note to Eve to create a secure botany lab on deck to try growing the trees. I did decide that the walkway should be utilized to grow ship's food while still being aesthetically pleasing. I decided I could repurpose the two ancient bots that were over 500 years old to maintain the ships gardens. They had just avoided a fate of being left to drift in space for eternity.

I ran some schematic overlays and found I could get the module onto deck 5 of the ship. I would need to do some cutting into the hull and then repair the hull after...probably better to just plan a cargo bay door access there instead. Well I did have four massive exterior maintenance bots. I sent an alert to Nero to make sure all the bulkheads, power cables, life support lines and anything else to deck 5 had good seals. I would program the exterior bots to cut into the ship there and then they could gut deck 5 to make room for the alien research labs fairly quickly.

I sent Eve the preliminary work diagram. She replied shortly that she could oversee the refitting of deck 4 and 5 while I was gallivanting on the planetoid. I think she was being funny or perhaps she was upset because she wasn't coming with me? She was going to be making shuttle runs back and forth with another shuttle eventually so I would see her regularly so I was not sure what her problem was.

My shuttle was ready to head to down with one stevedore bot loaded so I commed Henry and he opened the shuttle bay doors. It was a quick descent and I quickly moved the bots to the landing site and they started on their programmed instructions. The cradle would be very rough and I expected the bottom of the hull to take very minor damage but the savings in fuel, time and effort would be worth it. I returned to to the planetoid supplies to make my first load. First I took out my hover bike and secured it in a cargo container. I got to work loading my load. I was loading up Eve's university computer, 6 crates of archive disks first. The disks were just under 3cm x 3cm x 1cm and embedded in square holders, like an old fashioned coin in clear plastic. Each crate held over 100,000 disks and were the ones that Eve had packed. There were over 30 million disks in the archives...that was 300 crates if we took them all! Just packing them would be a nightmare. I decided to get one of the steward bots down here and working on it.

Next I grabbed a pile of alien data slates. Then I added various shield emitters, some micro generators, the alien seeds in the stasis device, a few crates of meals, all of the alcohol, the emitter that created the opaque bubble, a few suits of power armor, and finally 6 generic Union generators. I then sent the full shuttle back to the ship on auto pilot. I commed Eve and Henry, telling them it was incoming. That completed I got on my hover bike and went to the downed shuttle.

It took me just under an hour to replace the part and run safety checks. A handful of warnings but nothing that made me worried. I was headed to the alien spaceport next to do scans on the large deep space scanner. Shinade and Vanessa had cut through the ceiling of city shaft so I was able to land the shuttle inside. I also planned to get samples of the hull plating and some of the larger shield emitters. I worked diligently for hours. Eve commed me and said I had been on the planet 21 hours and it was time to take a break. Originally, I had planned to just remain on the planet surface until the *Void Phoenix* landed but my exhaustion hit like wrench to the head. I flew the loaded shuttle back to the ship.

On board Eve met me in the shuttle bay, she got me to eat and shower. Eve had silenced my PerCom so the other crew couldn't interrupt. She got me into bed with the SLUMBER unit going. I checked the program and it was an alien course on a species called the Huntru. Soon I was pushed into a preprogrammed dream.

*Acton 'Axle' Burrow was looking at the woman who he had rescued a few weeks prior. He didn't know what to make of her. She was a Union captain of a small transport and had been relatively compliant. Her three colleagues were all dead. Shortly after they had captured the group Axle had decided to take her to his cabin. She just lay there and let him have his way with her. While this was going on the other three made an escape attempt. They killed two crewmen and got to an escape pod. They had thought the* Indomitable *was over a planet, it was not. It was their asteroid base.*

*Another of his ships had went in to scoop them up but they had tried to activate the pods thrusters and ended up slamming it into the ship which cracked the shell on the pod. The women didn't have skin suits on and by the time the ship had pressurized the escape pod in the bay they were all dead. So just the blonde captain lived. She hadn't believed him that her crew had tried to escape without her until he showed her the video. It hit her hard but didn't break her. He had taken her three more times before she started talking to him.*

*She didn't say much but he started to like her. He told her how he became a pirate. He had been a logistics officer for a navy space station in the Sapphire Empire. He had been skimming supplies to sell for credits and was found out. Instead of going to prison for life the navy sent him and other criminals to crew new corvettes to be pirates in the Union and harass shipping within the Union. He quickly rose to the captain position. His crew was very successful. Soon he was leading five corvettes and set up a base on a rogue asteroid.*

*His fleet started adding smaller ships from their attacks; transports, gunships, assault shuttles, and other corvettes. His numbers grew and now he had over 1,200 pirates, 8 corvettes with supporting ships. Unfortunately he received a communication recently from the Sapphire Admiral who had given him the corvette. All pirate actions on shipping were to be ended as the Union was in talks for a complete surrender. So he started raiding remote colonies to keep his pirate crews happy. That was how he found her ship. They were returning from a raid on an agricultural colony.*

*It took a few weeks but soon Samantha was recognized as Axle's woman and began to have free reign on the base and his ship. One night in his cabin she revealed something to him too fantastical to be true. There was a planetoid in deep space filled with treasure and technology. At first he didn't believe her. Why wasn't there any of this treasure on the ship? She concocted a story about a diabolical engineer who set her and her crew up. After a week he had her old ship searched top to bottom. They found three pieces of apparent alien jewelry in the walls beneath the bridge. He needed to talk with Samantha...maybe her stories of treasure and a traitorous engineer were true.*