Chapter 115

We dropped out of subspace far outside of the system, and I began to review the sensor data from subspace.  How did something exist in subspace?  This was the closest we had gotten to the objects in subspace, so the data was more detailed.  As I was reviewing the data, real space data was populated, and the comm traffic was heating up.

Haily was saying there was nothing that required our attention.  Ships were just making minor requests for assistance.  I noted there were only 568 ships remaining in the Squirrel exodus fleet.  They had lost 88 ships.  Some would probably get here eventually, but it was a huge loss of life.  Returning to my analysis, the Squirrel subspace scientists were requesting permission to enter the bridge from the two marines on guard duty at the access hatch.  I thought for a bit and decided to meet them down in the lab.

I left Kara in charge and went to the lab to dissect the data with the Squirrel.  They were beyond excited, and I was not.  I figured the haunted planet probably had something to do with its shadow being in subspace.  That is what the Squirrel were calling objects in subspace, shadows.  The Squirrel were excited about how part of the shadow planets and sun could exist in subspace without an emitter.

My mind connected the dots.  Our fuel after the planetoid had exploded had been different but more efficient.  That meant everything that had been caught in the explosion might have been partially phased into subspace without an emitter due to the wave. I commed the bridge and asked if they had ever scanned the Void Phoenix when we were in subspace.  A confused Elias replied no.  Shit, that is right, I couldn’t prove my absurd hypothesis by being on the ship.

I came up with a plan.  I would take a shuttle and travel a few million miles away.  The *Void Phoenix* would do a micro-jump and scan my shuttle.  If I was correct, then everything caught in the wave when the planetoid exploded now existed in subspace as well as real space.  Maybe the effect faded over time, and it wouldn’t show up on scanners.  It would explain the mystery of how our fuel, after the explosion, lost mass and had an increased efficiency.  The Squirrel were split on my theory, and Doc thought I was crazy.  Everyone on the bridge thought I was crazy.

As we prepared, I was demoted.  I would not be on the shuttle.  Finn Martin had been in the explosion, and he was one of our shuttle pilots.  He would have the honor of sitting in for me.  The micro subspace jump was just going to be 11 seconds, taking us along the periphery of the system.  It was two days of preparation, and I had to help Damian with maintenance on the subspace engines.

During this time, the Squirrel were setting up mining operations in the sparse asteroid field and rapidly building space stations that focused on growing nutrient-rich algae.  I wasn’t privy to their food situation, but I guessed it was less than a year.  Julie had run the numbers, and we could make a trip to the fungal people and perhaps get them a carbohydrate paste in bulk when we refueled.  It would be a time-sink for us, though, and I really didn’t want the investment or responsibility. Maybe we would serve as an escort for one of their bigger transports after they offloaded their passengers.

The anticipated subspace hop occurred, and it was as I had expected.  The parts of the shuttle that had been in the wave had been changed and showed up in subspace, as did Finn.  What even more problematic was the sensors picked up like on the planet.  There were people living on the planet in subspace.   So somehow, people had been phased into subspace completely.  For us, everything caught in the explosion just had a shadow of subspace.  The Squirrel scientists, now eighteen from various other ships, were intrigued and trying to unravel the data.

What allowed someone to get trapped in subspace? Unfortunately, I didn’t have any more fuel to test as that would have been the easiest.  I tasked the scientists with trying to figure out how to get our ‘shadows’ back into real space completely rather than figuring out how to put more matter split between the two realities.

I found it just wasn’t the Squirrel’s cute appearance that made you want to trust them.  Once you earned their trust as completely as I had, you got us sucked into their family mentality.  Unfortunately, Celeste loved anything furry, and playing roughly with the younger Squirrel children was a pastime for her.  It just gave Gwen and Danielle more time to start instilling discipline.  I think Celeste was playing a game with us,  she was extremely bright, and her rebellion and screaming were her way of trying to control the situation and keep attention on her.

I decided we were going to remain for a few weeks.  I had no plans to go anywhere near the two planets or the sun that had subspace shadows.  The Void Phoenix deployed both its emergency solar array and our miniature gas mining platform.  Both were single use as once they were deployed, they could not be stored again without damaging them.  It was going to allow us to replenish a little bit of fuel and conserve our current fuel.  We would leave both fuel producers for the Squirrel when we left.

It wasn’t long before we were paired with a large passenger liner that was serving as a research vessel.  I wasn’t sure how many scientists were working on the subspace data, but it freed me up to work on the Squirrel battle suits.

We had manufactured five of the Gecko suits so far, and they were currently being tested by the Squirrel marines that had signed on to my crew.    Since we were the only ship with a facility to produce the alien hull material that made the suits so impressive, the Squirrel were giving us feeder stock to manufacture as many of the suits as we could manage before we departed.  The Squirrel research ship had engineers and scientists trying to set up their own manufacturing of the alien hull material, but we were months, if not years, away from being able to mass produce the material.  Their ingenuity was impressive, and I may be underestimating them.

The Squirrel were slowly taking refugees off my ship.  They were reluctant to land any citizens on the planets after I had revealed the planets had subspace shadows, and there was life on those shadows.  At least they were being cautious.  They were focused on mining six massive asteroids with light gravity.  These asteroids were being converted into massive space stations.  Their objective was to build living modules as fast as possible, followed by algae farms.  Slowly the ships were being unloaded of refugees and onto the large asteroids.

We sent our shuttles out to help harvest ice asteroids by vectoring them toward their new space stations.  I saw the plans for each of the asteroids, and they planned to house 100,000 citizens on each of the six asteroids, which measured between 80 km and 165 km.  This would give them some growth potential if they couldn’t colonize the only planet with atmosphere in the system.

The largest of these asteroids was going to be turned into a capital shipyard.  That was where the Squirrel were in the most trouble.  They had two combat frigates and six combat corvettes, and that was it.  All their other military assets had remained to defend the Squirrel home system.  The shipyard would take years to reach functionality but would build only light cruisers heavy on automation.  If they could get manufacturing of the alien hull plating for the cruisers then they would be extremely formable.

We had entered into an open technology exchange with the Squirrel.  It was mostly our technology going out, but we did get numerous upgrades to our life support and short-range sensors that could be used.  The higher efficiency life support technology would sell extremely well if returned to human-controlled space.  The sensors upgrades were not going to be of much use to the *Void Phoenix,* but for our shuttles and fighters, they would give us about a 30% larger sensor envelope.  Subspace theory was evolving every day.  The minds of the Squirrel physicists seemed naturally inclined to understanding abstract thoughts.

After three weeks in the Bradbury system, the only Squirrel on our ship were the enlisted marines and 23 scientists with 32 spouses and children. At this three-week mark, they made their first major breakthrough.  It was a reproduction of one of the complex parts of the alien sensor.  That fact that it worked as it was supposed to was beyond remarkable.  Only 68 parts to go.

After a month in the system, I got some concerning news.  We had supplied a lot of our meals to the Squirrel since they had the same digestive physiology as our crew.  There were some things they could handle, but carbohydrate, protein, and fat metabolism were the same.  We only had 88 days left of food, according to Cori.  I shouldn’t have been surprised as we had so many refugees on board and were still hosting a number of scientists.  Cori started ordering the algae food bars from the Squirrel.  They had two flavors; terrible and revolting.  Doc did confirm they would keep us alive and took minimal space on board.

Our marines found their own fun running full combat suit drills on small asteroids with pellet guns.  I even joined them in my custom Badger suit.  Sometimes we practiced with the 380 marines the Squirrel had left.  We were producing suits for those marines at a rate of about one Geko combat suit every day.

It was six weeks into our time in Bradbury, and it was time for us to continue on our pursuit of the Union fleet.  There was nothing left for us here. We had completed 41 Geko suits for the Squirrel and would be leaving them with enough parts to assemble.  We had committed to escorting two Squirrel transports to the system with the fungal race.  The Squirrel needed food and fuel, and we needed the same.  Six hours before we were scheduled to leave the Squirrel physicists came to me with a breakthrough.  They had designed small emitters that could hold a person in subspace.

We needed to use the Gorilla suits to get the emitters enough power, but they theorized the weapons on the suits could do damage in subspace if they were in range.  So rather than leaving, I was sending six marine volunteers to the dead planet in the system in one of our Brotherhood shuttlecraft.  We moved the *Void Phoenix* closer to the planet, and there was a lot of tension on the bridge as they launched.  After they landed on a glacier, we watched as the six Gorilla suits activated the emitters….and disappeared.

When they returned twenty minutes later, they said there were a few abandoned structures, and the weather was much milder on the subspace variant of the planet.  The atmosphere was still not breathable, though.  So now that we knew we could move into subspace without requiring momentum, what was the next step?  Should we outfit the *Void Phoenix* with the emitters….ultimate stealth was completely disappearing.  The Squirrel were going to test and make sure subspace disrupters didn’t interfere with their new emitters first.

The other project they were working on was completely theoretical.  It was a ‘cleansing cube’ that they hoped would scrub all instances of subspace shadows from someone. They hoped it would merge all the shadows into our current spacial reality. This is what I had hoped they would find, and it was a good enough reason to remain in the Bradbury system for a little longer.