Chapter 36

Getting the trams running with Eve was not as easy as she had forecasted. Eve had to return and study at her alien reader device and go to the archives to find the proper data disk. The one she had based her proposition on was a much older version of the tram’s engineering and even then her understanding was not perfect. The current iteration on the trams relied on pulses of electricity transmitted from the tracks and not the tram. It took five days to get a work around completed and then another day to configure the generator for the proper intensity.

In the end we got all the trams functional using Union generators. The tram was another piece of technology I wanted to explore further because the power requirements were so small but for now I would be happy making use of it.

I also made the mistake of bringing down one of the steward bots to pack up the archival data disks. It’s skin froze, cracked and then fell away. The bot still functioned but I would need to replace his outer synthetic skin layer. The skinless steward bot loaded crates with archival data disks. If the single bot was supplied with crates it was still going to take it about 280 days to box them all. I would have to get another steward bot into a skin suit and make sure the skin suit heaters didn’t fail. I gave that problem to Nero. Eve wore a skin suit and even out of it her skin suit her skin would hold together. Eve’s skin was just far superior.

So the only bots I pulled from the ship after that incident were stevedore bots and a pair of large exterior bots. After fixing the fabricator we started manufacturing titanium alloy crates and we systematically went to each city and took its warehoused precious metals and moved tons of other materials to the city where the Void Phoenix resided. We had 2,380 crates of precious metals and tons of loose not so precious metals in large bins. As planned we loaded 1,100 crates of the most valuable metals and another 100 crates of semi-precious metals for the fabricators.

In the middle of this looting Tora had come up with some insights into the sensor module. Eve had helped her study the device with archival knowledge from the data disks. Tora learned the devices worked in concert with each other. That meant you needed at least two linked. The good thing is they could be adjacent to each other. They functioned by sending out a subspace wave and then interpreting the gravimetric feedback and triangulating the return data to create images. What made the devices incredible was they could instantly plot images out to over 300 million kilometers!

Eve said the devices were mostly used by the aliens to locate harvestable material as the planetoid was passing through space. So what I needed was a second sensor, a bridge monitor to interpret the data and display it, cabling for the devices to the bridge terminal and a way to power everything. All I could do for now was to transport another sensor module to the ship and load a bunch of terminals in the starship warehouse and hope one of them would work. There were 18 different terminals and they were just labeled with a sequence of alien numbers in the warehouse. The directory was not in the university archives as best as Eve could figure. I guessed the directory was on one of the terminals! I was not delusional to think we could get the devices working in a few remaining months. The two modules large were going to be crammed onto deck 5 but that was fine. I filled one of the smaller cargo holds on the Void Phoenix with 36 terminals, two of each, and a few kilometers of different cable from the warehouse. The hold was packed to the ceiling and I hoped we had everything needed to get the sensors working and reverse engineered.

Nero had sent the two remaining male steward bots in skin suits to help load the archival disks. He had a small generator setup nearby to charge their suits as they worked. With three steward bots working they should finish in plenty of time. There were two other university archives in two other cities but I hoped they were just copies, 300 cubic meters was all I was willing to allocate for the data disks at this time. Eve also told me that Nero was making use of the three female form steward bots in his quarters. Not something I needed to know but it killed any curiosity of trying the bots other functions myself.

Shinade had been a handful in her sexual needs for a few weeks but suddenly cut me off. I was worried I had done something wrong but Eve informed me that she had pieced together a medical scanner and checked on the baby for Shinade. It was a healthy girl. Shinade was showing and told Eve it just felt wrong continuing her promiscuous nature as the baby was developing.

I was actually a little angry that I hadn’t been informed of the scanner or the fact that it was a girl. Eve hadn’t told me because she had thought that Shinade had told me. The subterfuge had me worried. I was reevaluating my feelings for Shinade because of it. Was I attracted to Shinade or the fact that Shinade was the mother of my child?

My fears were abated two days later when the entire crew had a surprise reveal party for me. Telling me the baby’s gender and showing the scans to me. They hadn’t told Eve because they didn’t think she could withhold the secret from me. I allowed the crew access to the alcohol stash for the party. It was a nice break from all the work.

After the materials and the additional large sensor module were moved I focused on the hull plating. I went in search of the specific fabricator with Eve. It ended taking three days of searching as apparently the hull fabricator was not in the spaceport city. Each of the surrounding cities specialized in manufacturing various components. The fabricators varied in size. The smallest was the size of a shuttle and the largest the size of a cruiser.

Eve was still just scratching the surface of understanding the fabricators in her translation efforts. Translating an operations manual for the planetoid drive was easy compared to understanding the myriad levels of complexity of the fabricators.

They were essentially 3D printers but operated on an atomic level, laying complex molecules at a time but at ridiculous speed. This made sense and was how their crystalline storage devices were able to hold so much data. The hull fabricators were not as complex in their printing thankfully. There were four different types that Eve identified that specialized in printing the material used in the hull plating. The smallest of these fabricators was the size of a large shuttle. The attached printing tank was just over a five meter cube. It took us two days to confirm this was the entire unit except a power feed. There were a half dozen of these smaller units and I had the goal of getting at least two on board the Void Phoenix undamaged. Eve reworked the deck 4 plans to hold the two fabricators.

We were on day 132 of our efforts on the planetoid. The ship was packed with the exception of deck 7, the luxury cabin deck, only being utilized about 30% so far. That final 70% was causing a migraine for me. I just wanted to take everything! I had plenty of shield emitters, inertia compensators, dozens of pieces of smaller technology, over 100 alien bots, and 50 crates of alien jewelry, sculptures and personal items. Only one of the cities had vehicles remaining and they were all trashed. They were stacked at the bottom of the city shaft. Eve guessed the aliens were running out of fuel so stopped using them. This is where I was sorting through the pile with Eve and six stevedore bots. I hoped to get a handful of the mostly intact vehicles to deck 7 as my final haul. Six other stevedore bots were already moving 3 alien vehicles to the tram platform.

I was interrupted in my work with a hasty and panicked comm from Henry. A fighter was on long range passive sensors…at least it looked like a fighter to him. The ship was 5 hours out on its current flight path. I ordered the stevedore bots to grab the three alien hover cycles we had untangled and bring them to the platform. I hopped on my own hover cycle with Eve behind me and moved to the tram station. The bots would take 30 minutes to get to the station…15 minutes to get to the city…30 minutes to get the vehicles and bots on board…they might make it. If not I would leave them behind. It would only take me 30 minutes on my hover cycle to get to the ship.

I told Henry to begin to power up the generators and start flight checks. I would evaluate the situation when I got to the bridge. I had Eve ready to remote operate the tram with commands through the stevedore bots.

I reached the bridge 38 minutes after Henry’s first communication. He had the fighter on passive radar. I agreed it was a fighter. Which meant there was a bigger ship somewhere close. I slowed down the ship’s awakening, making sure we checked everything. It would give the stevedore bots time to return with the vehicles but more importantly I wanted to make sure everything was green before lift off. If I rushed this and something went wrong we would be sitting ducks.

Soon the radar was lighting up with more ships. Holy shit. Dozens of ships were making way toward us and a few popped out from FTL…none closer at least. Our power signature would become visible when we activated our primary power reactor. I hit the activation and waited for the expectant communication.

It came and the image on my screen was a man dressed in mismatched simple clothes in an gaudy oversized captains chair…and to the right side and behind the man was Samantha.