Chapter 15

The next 30 hours were a whirlwind of activity for me. It was hard to stay in my old patterns and Eve reminded me when I started to deviate too much. In addition to getting the third shuttle ready to pull 25,000 gallons of water I was directing bots to repaint corridors and implant numerous cameras. When Samantha asked me why I was doing this I said the ship was pretty much ready to fly so I was finding busywork. She seemed to buy it or at least was distracted enough to not get suspicious.

I went through the motions of 'excitedly' examining the new alien tech they had salvaged. There were some very interesting items in there that I wanted to explore further but didn't have time currently. They even had three larger shield generators! Each of the generators looked to be slightly different which should be invaluable to reverse engineering the technology.

I got Shinade resettled into her prisoner cell. Eve said she looked good and should recover fully. I put her across from Vanessa so the two could talk with each other. I planned to remain stoic to their feminine charms at least until I could resolve my issues with my crew. The other prisoners were doing fine when I checked on them.

I was definitely not a covert operative and I think my saving grace was due to the fact the officers assigned to this tug were not overly competent, well Samantha was above average in my estimation but the other three were not. When I was using my SLUMBER unit the three officers moved their haul to the same quarters, I had discovered the crates. That was strike one against them. It should probably have been strike two but I wanted to give them the benefit of the doubt. They did their best to cover their tracks but with my cameras now in place it was easy to see their subterfuge.

I had to attend the briefing for their next 'mission'. It was fully orchestrated for me and when I was asked to elaborate on the tech I had researched so far I was caught off guard for a second. I was able to switch into an in-depth review of the shield generator and how far past humanity this alien civilization was in this area. When I said the discoveries could be worth billions they all looked at each other with wide eyes. Hadn't they read my reports? From Eve's research she had estimated their small alien artifacts and the precious metals might yield two hundred million...that is if they got another six crates on the next operation. I should also search the rest of the ship. Maybe they had created other stashes.

Instead of excitement in their eyes all I saw was greed. They were eager to cash in on my research. After my turn the comms officer said they would be working on salvage from what they expected was a university and research lab next. I supplied the proper level of excitement at the prospects. Samantha then said this would be their last mission. After they got back I would have time to get my water and then we would depart. So that was their plan. They were going to abandon me on this planetoid? Ok I could work with that if that was the case.

The crew left on their shuttle on what was to be a 28 hour mission. They wanted to make sure their last haul was significant apparently. I started making my own plans...

I found two other stashes on the ship. One stash was eight crates of just precious metals stored in the crew luggage area. That was smart as I had an entire deck and would never look here. There was suppose to be 5,000 crew meals stored here but 1,000 of the meals had been moved to the main galley to create room for their stash. The other stash was a bunch of loose bars and alien jewelry stuffed into walls on the bridge. The walls had no wiring or conduits so I would have never opened them for maintenance. In all their total haul would be twice what me and Eve had originally estimated. Storing these items in this way was against regulations…I should correct that.

The crew returned 26 hours later with a full hold. I met them in the shuttle bay when they landed and said I was anxious to get back to civilization and had my shuttle prepped and ready to go. I had all their maps of the city layout so it shouldn't take me too long, I estimated six hours. Samantha hesitated asking me to leave Eve on the ship, that was strike two for them. Eve was the only remotely competent engineer after me. I told her Eve was set up to operate the water filtration system but I could take Shinade or Vanessa instead as it wasn’t too difficult. She agreed too quickly. The two women were shackled in the cargo hold to help me. Maybe Samantha thought I would appreciate the companionship in my final hours?

As I was descending into the opening to the massive underground city I set up relays so I could utilize the cameras on the ship. It was just as bad as I had assumed. They immediately began prepping the ship for lift off and a jump toward the Gestalt Confederacy. It was a free trade nation so that made sense but it was two months travel which didn't make much sense to me. Did they not realize how important an engineer was?

Well the Destiny's Children lifted off and I watched the crew scramble. I was more than a little shocked to see the comms officer go to the prisoner cells and force the other prisoners to an escape pod. I hadn't planned on that and I noticed on the camera she was setting the pod for a full burn. It would cause the pod to crash into the planetoid. It was something I hadn’t planned on and couldn’t correct. I thought about changing my plan and using my comm to contact Eve but decided to let things play out. I needed to be 100% certain they were going to leave me.

Samantha sent Eve a command override to shut her down. I had removed the safeguards months ago but Eve faked going to sleep mode as planned. Two hours later they attempted to jump which failed. The attempt caused the cargo containers and escape pods to be ejected from my programmed response. They should be panicking now. I saw my communications board light up as they attempted to contact me and I turned it off showing ‘no signal’ to the bridge crew. If they had checked the load profile of the containers they would have realized I had moved most of the fuel and gear to them including my fabricators. The reading they were seeing on the bridge were fake, they had almost no fuel. All of the bots left on the ship were programmed to head to the marine drop shuttle. Eve came out of her fake sleep mode and joined the bots in the marine shuttle. Eve got the marine shuttle lifted off and the last shuttle was also ejected from the bay with their recent haul. No point leaving them anything. Once the shuttles cleared the ship the FTL drive kicked in shortly after. It would lock them out until fuel was expended. When it cut out that would put them about 120 days of drift toward a habitable star system that was a low-tech farming community of the Union. I left them enough food and life support for 180 days. If there were no spacecraft in system they might have to abandon ship. There was a salvageable escape pod in the bay where my fabricators used to be. If they got creative they should be able to fix it up by the time they got there.

Now on my end I had 120 days to get myself safely to civilization. I wished I could see their faces when they found out I had taken all their loot as well and removed their long-range communication arrays. I slapped myself, I should have left them a video message or something to rub it in. Well guess I didn’t think of everything.