Chapter 18

 Samantha was ecstatic. The latest expedition had yielded a massive haul and the other three women were already talking how to spend their fortune. Samantha had directed them to leave 2,000 meals on the balcony next to where they found the water. That way the engineer could survive until they returned. They were still debating on whether to sell the information of the planetoid’s location or return to get more treasure with some hired mercenaries. The vote was leaning to returning unless they were able to sell the technology for a massive haul. The engineer seemed to think it was worth billions.

As soon as they docked the engineer tried to depart to collect the water. Samantha had to keep Eve on the ship so conceded to allowing two prisoners to go with him. Thankfully he was not taking the marine drop shuttle. That shuttle had enough speed to catch the ship when they lifted off. As soon as he disappeared into the shaft the crew was on the bridge to lift off.

All systems were showing green and soon the ship was in space. Someone volunteered to get the other prisoners into an escape pod and Samantha waved them to it. She was focused on the comms and the shaft opening. Would the engineer plead for them to come and get him? The escape pod launched and still nothing from the engineer. A red light drew her attention…the escape pod was on a collision course with the planetoid. Was it a malfunction? No. She tried to override the thrusters but nothing worked…no communication was available with the escape pod. She heard someone mention they were ready to enter FTL. Then everything went to shit.

The cargo containers all emergency ejected from their locks...she thought they were welded down…no the engineer fixed that issue. While everyone was trying to figure out what happened one of the shuttles started lifting off. It was the marine shuttle…and Eve was piloting, she should be in sleep mode? What the hell was going on? She gave the order to return to the planetoid. But all she got from the crew was panicked responses that they were locked out from controls.

The crew member that had launched the escape pod was back on board the bridge and a shouting match occurred. She had said she did what needed to be done. They couldn’t risk word getting out and the less people that knew the better. She had also dumped the meals Samantha had ordered left for the engineer into space. The engineer commed from engineering. The room was stripped of everything? The shuttle they had just landed in and was full of their loot was now departing the bay. Samantha thought the ship would now self destruct, a fitting end for the betrayal they had done to the engineer.

Instead the jump drive cycled up. A panicked yell from the engineer to kill the jump came and to not enter FTL no matter what. It was too late. The ship transitioned into FTL. The engineer was crying on the other end. The fuel and reserves were almost empty. A cold spread over Samantha ….being adrift in deep space was a nightmare for her. More bad news came. Deep space comm relays were not working. All the bots had moved themselves to the shuttles. Samantha was shedding tears in quiet. It was karma, she knew it. A scream of rage then broke her sadness. The treasure was gone from the quarters and crew storage. Someone ripped the panels off the bridge walls, that was gone too.. Samantha sat there regretting every decision she had been persuaded to make in the last few weeks.

The flight to the other city was relatively brief but I found the shaft sealed with a massive heavy door. After landing and exploring for a few hours around the area I couldn’t find any access to the city below. I gave up, more than a little frustrated, and figured I would try the underground access between cities. First I would need a ride to traverse the tram tunnels. If that failed I would try to get something to cut through the sealed large access doors from the outside.

Back at the city I talked with Eve over the comm. She had better luck than me. She found over six million crystalline disks in neat trays on organized shelves. The data storage was more compact than what we had found in the bots. Eve thought this was the civilizations entire history, art and technology. There were device readers in the library and she was in the process of extracting a terminal and bringing it back to the ship.

Shinade and Vanessa had been using bots to haul the rare metals back to the shuttles. They said there was hundreds of tons of metals in the warehouse for the fabricators. Everything was neatly organized and they thought they could fill 100 or so containers with precious metals. They were referring to the meter cubed small cargo ones and just taking the most valuable metals. After a quick back and forth I would need to get my fabricators online to make more of the containers. I entered my shuttle and relaxed for a while, eating and sipping a bottle of wine.

Eve was back before the women. She had a complete reader device to study. Eve asked if she could get additional personal memory to work on powering and developing a translation for the archive disks. Since Eve rarely asked for anything I gave her the green light and increased her memory by 30%. Had I made an archeologist Android? Shinade and Vanessa entered shortly after and took off their suits to have a meal.

We all smelled horrible in the enclosed space. So I announced that before I got the fabricators set up and before I explored the star port I would be building a shower. Shinade said I really knew the way to a girls heart. The woman returned to their own shuttle after eating and some talk about what they found. I started to plan to pressurize a cargo container to set up the fabricators in. Eve was working on her reader device, figuring out how to power it. She mentioned offhandedly that I had promised her a vagina. Damn my robot was getting a little needy.

After working for a few hours in the planning stage I took a break to set up my SLUMBER unit. It wasn’t long before I had programmed and powered the device and fell asleep. Eve interrupted a rather pleasant murder mystery, an old English detective role play, that I was trying for the first time. Becoming alert quickly Eve said Shinade was in the cargo container with the Sapphire powered armor and infantry weapons. We only had one camera in the container and I couldn’t see much. Eve sent in another bot that she could puppet. The bot walked into the camera view and Eve said Shinade was emptying containers of meals. Soon she was taking the empty containers out. I doubted she just needed the containers. My guess is she was seeing where things were located. I would be making the small containers in a day or two…she couldn’t be that impatient to loot the alien warehouse. Ok new plan. I would use setting up the fabricators as an excuse to move all the fighters, battle suits and weapons away from the woman.

I decided to put the shower in cargo container with the fabricators as well…well I decided to weld two cargo containers together for more workspace. That would give me a single room 50m x 40m x 20m. My wonderful plan turned into a nightmare. It took me two days to get a vacuum seal and atmosphere. I ended up losing a lot of oxygen from ruptures. I should have expected that as I had roughly fabricated the containers. Well when I finally finished I was the first to use the shower and it was divine!

The fabricator was cranking out small containers for holding the precious metals. Shinade and Vanessa wanted two hundred containers and fortunately they had cheaper metal stock to make them from the warehouse. But they would have to haul up the stock first. Eve was making steady progress but had no updates. Her additional memory was incorporated and applied to deciphering the crystalline archival disks.

I was excited to explore the starport city. The drone had shown clear passage out to 120 km, about halfway to the city before it had to return. I built a small 4-wheeled motorized ATV. It was the simplest vehicle to make and it could hold six batteries for 50 hours of total operation. The load capacity was 500 lbs so I could wear my armor, bring a rifle, scanner and small cutting kit. My load was maxed out so I couldn’t bring anything back. I estimated 5 hours transit time there using the connecting tunnel. I planned to bring 250 hours worth of air and six days of food in case something came up. Eve would come to me if I didn’t return in three days. My goal was just exploration and if I found anything useful I would try to open the sealed portal.

I hadn’t talked much with the women in the last few days but told them in person that I was heading out. They both seemed genuine in wishing me luck.