Chapter 88

We made our way out of the system and Damian delayed entering subspace for over two hours.  I realized I might need to hire one or two people to help him. He had enough bots but he by far had the biggest task on the ship and Eve and I no longer helped him as much.

Finally, Damian gave the go-ahead and we transitioned into subspace on the arcing vector.  We were headed for the abandoned deep space Union resupply base.  All we had were coordinates between two stars.  Space was big and there was a good chance we wouldn’t be able to find it.  We would try as Francis seemed to think it was important and I was hoping to find extensive resources to outfit the *Void Phoenix*.

With us safely in subspace, I went to help Damian for a few hours.  I told him he could get with Abby and Francis and see if he could remember a few engineers that might want to join us from the old Union.  We had sent some preliminary inquiries out but hadn’t cemented any hidings yet.  Damian was old but still spry.  He said he had more than a few names from his long service life.  I told him he could hire up to four engineers for the FTL and power systems.  His eyes lit up at this and he left to talk with Abby.

Before settling into a routine I planned our next jump with Elias.  If we didn’t find the black site resupply base then I planned to jump to the outskirts of my home system.  From there I would use the Ultra Fast Courier to go home and visit with my parents and give them the news about my brother.  They may actually already know but I wanted to see them again and introduce them to Celeste.  It was a very long jump of 19 days.  There were two civilian refueling stations in the system that I was hesitant to use.  We should have 9-10 days of FTL drive fuel left over if I decided not to refuel but then I hated being so close to empty.  Elias said he would do everything he could to make the path as fuel efficient as possible.

My routine became a short staff meeting in the morning.  Since we had so few guests on board there was not much to talk about.  All security upgrades were done with the exception of adding more marines, Venom Queens, and heavy combat armor.  I then spent a few hours working with the new software engineer on the stealth suits.  Danielle was smart and very attractive with sky-blue eyes and a brilliant white smile.  She was also an optimist which made working with her pass the time quickly.  Danielle had a long way to go before I would say she was a master programmer but with the help of Julie she was correcting one issue at a time and quickly expanding her proficiency.

After a few hours of working on the suits, I worked out in the gym.  It was now packed with crew trying to hit credit incentives for fitness.  Abby had a very small budget, just 3 Sol credits per crew member per six months but apparently, that was enough to get almost everyone to the gym regularly.  When my workouts involved combat training I was extremely focused for two reasons now.  One was to keep my standing in the crew and the second was to be ready if another group tried to take over the ship.

From the gym, I was off to the robotics or main engineering.  If it was engineering then I was helping Damian.  If it was the robotics lab then I was working on tweaking my spider bots or the heavy combat armor.  I had a meal and play break with Celeste and then I was on the bridge for a shift.  I usually did my captain duties during this time, checking certs, approving future purchases, assigning repair priorities, and running emergency scenarios with the bridge crew.

Then I was off to dinner in my cabin with Gwen and the babies.  Gwen got me caught up on crew gossip.  After this meal, I played with the kids and then went into VR.  I didn’t have time to play games as I was reviewing crew members' completed emergency scenarios with Julie.  We compiled notes for them and then Julie prepped their next scenario for them, either solo or in a group. Then I usually ran some combat sims with the marines in VR.  I was liking the new stealth suit and planned to build myself a custom one once I was certain all the programming kinks had been worked out.

The days in subspace blended together and the only interesting thing was my software engineer had taken to wearing a skin-tight white top to our collaborative sessions.  She would pull down her skin suit to her waist and show off her upper body.  She said it was more comfortable but I was fairly certain she was trying to get my attention.  I asked Gwen to make sure before I actually made any type of move on the woman.

Before I received an answer from Gwen I got a shock. I walked into the robotics lab and found Danielle working with Gabby on an engineering bot. This room required security permissions and Danielle did not have them. Gabby had let her in here. Gabby, seeing my face tried to explain. Danielle was having trouble with some upgrades to the engineering bot and she offered to help in her in my design lab. Danielle started to profess how impressive my setup was but my expression did not change.

Danielle was monitored and had limited access to sensitive systems on the ship. And her work was always double-checked. Now she was in the heart of some of my most precious secrets. The other adjacent labs held my alien research projects, the hull fabrication units, and the alien artifacts. I knew it might hurt any chance I might have to have a relationship with Danielle in the future but I told her she had to leave and respect the areas of the ship that were off-limits to her. After she left I laid into Gabby, probably harming my relationship with her a little bit too. I just couldn't be careless.

The good news was my new planetary xeno scientist was happier than a pig in shit working in the botany lab. The only issue was he wanted to write research papers on the stasis device that kept the seeds viable for thousands upon thousands of years. Nope, wasn’t going to happen at this time. He seemed to accept the answer but you know scientists… Well the other big news they had was four of the bushes they were growing would be fruiting. The alien berries should keep the two occupied for months.

My new shield engineer, Hans Anders, had also been making processes on our existing shields. Improving efficiency by a few percent and doing more thorough maintenance on them. As we approached our destination I had finally unleashed him on the alien shield technology. He was flabbergasted by the emitter's specs and fell into trying to reverse-engineer them. It would of course take time.

I was on the bridge when we were due to drop out of subspace in the middle of nowhere. I was hoping we would find the mysterious depot but knew the odds might be pretty small. The transition was smooth and I started getting updates from the crew…nothing. Francis went to Haley’s comm station and inputted some numbers. A radio frequency…and yes it worked. The station was broadcasting on a low frequency with its location in code. It was a genius way to find the station, broadcasting constantly at the speed of light.

We were 21 million miles away from the station. Not too bad when you think about it. The two stars were just over eleven light years apart, neither star system had a human presence, just some small corporate mining operations. We were essentially in the middle of nowhere and Elias had gotten us damn close! We wouldn’t even have to enter subspace again…just a few hours and we would be there.

As we approached the station it was actually two extremely old-style fighter carriers welded together on long-range scanners. The hulking ships were probably on their last legs and this was their final destination. Francis was next to m as we got close then Haley pipped up, four missiles incoming, ETA 5 minutes 13 seconds.

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*Hanson Gammon sat in the ancient chair on the Anderson Research Station. He had arrived four days after the Void Phoenix had fled. It had made him quite upset. The local Brotherhood agents were all scientists and hackers. Why had no one thought to stall the Void Phoenix! His passive alert had just said to notify him if the ship arrived but still, they should have realized it was a high-priority target.*

*He didn’t like games of cat and mouse. He preferred more direct missions, kill this person, blow up this ship, sabotage this research station. He was still looking forward to seeing Jane’s face when he rescued her from the Void Pheonix. That was the only thing that this extended and frustrating mission would make all this effort worth it.*

*He reviewed the supplies they took on board again. They had received substantial supplies for such a small crew. The wood furniture didn’t make sense though. He guessed they were in a hurry and if the rumors that the space elves were also pursuing the Void Phoenix. That was not something he was equipped to deal with or wanted any part of. He was one of the few people that knew the Sylvan race had moles in human space. Humans working for fucking aliens! He wished he had a few missions to purge these infiltrators but that was not his jurisdiction!*

*Then there was the massive amount of material they sold at the station. Where in the galaxy did they come across so many precious metals? Were they interstellar planet vault raiders? Was that why Jane Doe had been so interested in this insignificant ship? He didn’t like mysteries and the Brotherhood gave him unfettered resources but still this amount wealth…maybe he would want to solve this little mystery.*

*His PerCom beeped. An agent in system operations had sent him a message. Fuck. The space elves' War Chariots were in the outer which meant their city-ship wouldn’t be far behind. Anderson Space Station would soon be a nest of rats fleeing a burning building. He sighed deeply and commed his own ship to get ready to depart. The best thing he could do was head to a planet in the relative vector the Void Pheonix had headed in. He didn’t like having the space elves on his ass but he couldn’t abandon his mission without dire consequences. His failure in apprehending the subspace researcher Milo Dejarsdon had left a black mark on his record. A second colossal failure and he may be demoted or taken out of active service.*

*Well, at least there was no directive on whether this captain Deven Wellspring had to be taken alive. The longer he made this chase the more likely Hanson would kill him out of spite.*