Chapter 14

Samantha had started a physical relationship with her sensor operator. At first she was hesitant but they had worked closely for too long and her need for companionship tore at her. She had thought about rekindling her relationship with her head engineer. He had a fantastic body and definitely took care of her needs but he lacked emotional investment in the coupling. It was as if he had been following a manual and checking the boxes. She wanted more. Her trysts with the life support engineer were spontaneous, energetic and varied from passionate to violent and that stirred her passions. The only issue was she was having a bigger influence on Samantha's decisions.

Samantha was now torn and indecisive. She had stumbled upon an embarrassment of riches on a rogue planet. They had been forced to lay over here so the engineer could clean a poorly maintained component. She had spent many days exploring the ruins with her navigator, sensor operator and the life support engineer. They had formed a strong relationship and even though Samantha felt she had lost a lot of her command authority she didn't mind, she had true friends now.

When they stumbled on the vault they were speechless by the readings. Seventy two tons of precious metals! Prior to this they had been collecting smaller items, mostly alien jewelry and small tech devices. The fact that they had mapped out six other possible cities on the planetoid...it was a lot of wealth. They had discussed among each other what they should do. Her lover didn't want to include the lead engineer in. She thought he was a pompous know it all that constantly brought her minor errors to light. The fact that the life support engineer had the same view of the young man and that had put the group leaning toward not telling him.

Then there was the prisoners. It was a minor blessing that they had tried to escape and most had been killed. But the foolhardy engineer had one of them in to the shuttle bay and she probably had the coordinates the planetoid memorized. It was something they couldn't risk. They had to eliminate them but the idea of killing them wasn't palatable. Samantha suggested they abandon them on the planetoid and after some discussion they decided to include the engineer as well. The engineer had formed a relationship with the prisoners and wouldn't let them abandon the prisoners to their deaths anyway. His personal bot, Eve, was a good enough engineer to get them to a port. Samantha had Eve's override codes per regulation so she was confident she could control the remarkable bot.

Then they could sell their haul and return here in a year or two to get some more loot. The engineer and the prisoners would be dead by then. So they started to put a plan into action completely focused getting enough loot on the ship and being prepared to abandon non-essential persons... It should be easy to keep the engineer occupied with alien tech and ship board duties while they formulated and executed their plans.

As I traveled to engineering I worked on my data pad to deal with the 20 other alerts I had received during the short transit. Everything could be handled by my small army of bots. Eve was walking behind me and I tasked her with fabricating some anti-tampering devices on all the bots. I didn't want the crew altering their programming again. I had been quite lax in security measures. It had not been my job and I didn't think I had needed to guard against my own crew.

In engineering I collected a maintenance tool kit and my best scanner and headed to the mystery crew cabin. I spent twenty minutes scanning the doorway. It was locked with the captain's passcodes...not an issue for me. I did find a magnetic lock release that activated an alert program to the captain's PerCom. Interesting.

I had two choices to enter the room. I could trick the program to show the magnetic lock didn't activate or I could just go through the wall of the adjacent living quarters. That door scanned as clean so I opened it. Most rooms were being used as storage but this one was not. I checked and it had been assigned to the old first officer. He had taken most of his personal items but a few things here and there reminded me of the incompetent man. I pulled two bots inside and quickly got the wall panels off and entered the adjacent crew quarters.

There were six crates stacked inside. Generic Union supply crates all just over a meter cube. I scanned looking for traps and finding none opened the crate. It was all exotic alien jewelry I assumed. The crate was full and I looked at a few pieces. Scanning the crystals and gems in the jewelry I found some were actually ingenious memory storage devices. The value of the knowledge here was far more valuable than the jewelry to me. There was a lift sled in the quarters and I thought that maybe I should move this treasure to a safer location. Checking the other three chests I found two crates contained finger sized ingots of platinum, palladium and rhodium. The fourth chest was more jewelry. So my crew mates were grave robbers and bank robbers apparently.

I think my biggest confusion was why didn't they read me in on this? It wouldn't have taken much to get me on board. Maybe greed on their end? But if they didn't read me in did that mean they planned to eliminate me? That would be stupid as I was the only one who could maintain the Destiny's Children. I broke into the computer systems and started researching what the other crew were doing. My heart sank. They were working on the basic engineering programs. With the army of bots I had already programmed they should be able to get to a station somewhere without me as long as the FTL drive didn't fail. I thought myself quite good and it could probably make 6-7 jumps without maintenance at this point. I couldn't deal with the betrayal I was feeling.

I calmed down and looked at my clock, 6 more hours and they would be returning. I needed to plan. I had Eve start to fabricate micro cameras and a special wireless network so I could monitor the crew. I got the cosmetic repair bots out of storage and the epoxy painting materials. I only had enough epoxy to repaint about a half of the corridors after a quick inventory. I would be able to embed the wireless cameras into the epoxy behind a one way lens making them invisible to anything other than a scanner. I could send my cleaning bots around to recharge the cameras and no one would be the wiser. Not trying to be too obvious I selected corridors that didn't have any exposed conduits or needed extensive work. I did make sure to plan to get enough of the ship so I could track their movements. The repainting hadn't started when their shuttle returned. I just hadn't had enough time.

I did have cameras in the shuttle bay and watched them depart. They had six of the standard canisters this time and moved them to an adjacent storage area that I never checked. Then the comms officer went and scrubbed the video. If I hadn't been watching live I would have missed this. They had a whole bunch of new junk in the cargo hold as well and Samantha commed me. She was excited on the comm about all the new tech they had found for me to research! They even found a deposit of water in the city, 400 thousand gallons! My mind raced and I said that was awesome. I said I would start to outfit a shuttle immediately with a filtration system and tanks to hold the harvested water. That would put me off leaving the ship until I could get my plan cemented.

I put Eve to work in covering our tracks. She obfuscated the fabricators production runs and cleaned the video archive and did many minor things to cover my own paranoia. The returning crew, after securing their loot, went to their quarters to sleep after all it was tiring work raiding an alien civilization. Before Samantha's PerCom went to sleep mode though she put the next mission profile to start in 30 hours. So they planned to go out again. I had permission to do my own mission in this 30 hour window according to the system. But I had too many things to do. I planned to go to the ruins after their next mission finished, not right now. I just needed time to set up some cameras so I could confirm they were planning to betray me.