Chapter 20

Eve got to work on locating the access to the plantoid's gravometric drive and the controls. Unfortunately the controls and access were in another city that had been abandoned. We needed a shuttle to reach it.

I went with Eve on a quick shuttle exploratory mission to the city that contained the controls for the planetoid. When we got the the city looked stripped, they had obviously recycled everything they could. Eve had internal maps now of the city and we landed close to an unassuming skeletal building. I suited up and Eve took us to a large elevator shaft. We powered up the drones and sent them down the shaft. Eve directed them and with relief in her voice said the control center looked intact. Her use of emotion was getting better.

The control center was 350 meters down the shaft. We flew back to the others and started planning to move our base camp. I worked with my fabricator to build a make shift elevator lift. Fortunately we had plenty of material from the alien warehouse to work with and the elevator and winch system should be rated for up to 2,000 kg. It took 2 days of hard work and then we started moving everything. The women were happy with the rare and precious metal haul they had, 219 containers. I was starting to trust both of them more and we were talking more. I had to nix their request to move into my shuttle though.

I was getting slightly nervous of the fuel expenditure to move everything to the other city so we left 10 of the 16 cargo containers behind, taking just the essentials for life support and one container of precious metals. While I was setting up the lift with the help from some bots, Shinade and Vanessa set up the facilities. We only brought 10,000 gallons of water so they had to set up a water recycler as well. They were not trained for the equipment so after I finished the lift I had to walk them through the process and we had a fair amount of joking going around during the process.

Eve descended on the lift before me with a handful of bots to start working on the control room. After eating with the women I joined her but left a bot to serve as a sentry and to operate the lift controls. I might be being overly paranoid but felt the minimal effort was worth my piece of mind.

It took a week to figure out everything in the control terminal and we had many problems. The first of which was the inertia compensators for the planetoid had been stripped according to records in order to quickly build more spacecraft during the exodus. That meant we would be limited in how much acceleration that we could apply. The second was the fuel supply for the device was mostly stripped as well even though the records showed more should be present. Apparently the aliens had scraped out what fuel they safely could. The fuel was a solid state mixture of heavy elements that worked a nuclear reactor. The energy output was phenomenal and it was another piece of technology I salivated to reverse engineer. Under the direction of Eve the bots scanned the remaining fuel and Eve guessed the grav device could function for 60 to 70 hours before being exhausted at an acceleration of 11 meters per second per second. Well the sooner we could activate the drive and start on a new vector the more distance we could gain from the original course. I had decided to apply thrust on a vector perpendicular to the current one. It should give us the best distance without slowing the planetoid down or speeding it up too much.

Thankfully there was a disk in the archives with clear directions on how to operate the device. It was Eve's task to translate and digest the material and to operate the drive controls when time came. She immediately ran into another problem. The star charts for plotting the vectors were not updated in hundreds of thousands of years. The solution was for Eve to make her best guess on the acceleration vector and bypass the navigation module in the alien controls.

Overall we spent five days getting ready. Now was it a good idea to start an ancient alien device with such a large amount of power in such a short amount of time researching it? Absolutely not. That was why we staged the shuttle craft with our three most valuable containers attached and ready to depart in case of a cascading failure. It was exciting though, preparing for the ultimate moment.

Eve was alone in the control room and at her insistence I was observing from inside my shuttle with Shinade and Vanessa. The start up sequence took three hours of build up and Eve had to continuously bypass checklist items. She explained it each time and although she didn't show concern I was feeling it. When the moment came it was anticlimactic. She rotated the planetoid to orient it properly and activated and increased the artificial gravity. We felt that and soon the rock was on its new vector. I watched the plot on the screen and first pumped. I felt Vanessa's hands rubbing my shoulders and I let her. Eve was constantly running from terminal to terminal to control the planetoid as alerts kept popping up. After three hours things slowed down for her. She announced we had 71 hours remaining on the fuel and I whooped. Eve would be down there on her own during that time. I had to start planning my own departure.

Over the next three days Vanessa and Shinade were both extremely helpful in getting my shuttle ready. We were eating together two or three times a day and talking as well. I think they were doing their best to make sure I wouldn't abandon them here. After all we had just removed their only other hope of getting recued. I did run a few simulations to take them with me and it would be feasible but I never clued them in. I fully intended to come back for them anyway.

The drive shut down six minutes before Eve's calculations and she returned to the surface. I immediately hugged her and said she did a remarkable job. And to her credit she returned the hug. She joined us in preparing the shuttle for departure. Three days later I was ready to leave. We did come up with a backup plan. If I didn't return in 60 days they would send one of their shuttles to insert into the planetoids original path and broadcast a distress signal with their location.

I was surprised on the night I was to depart both Shinade and Vanessa joined me in the shower. I knew they were trying to make sure I didn't forget about them. They took turns in front and behind me as we passionately kissed me in rotation. Somehow they had found soap and we washed each other with a luffa. I wasn't sure how long the shower lasted but didn't mind. We dried and moved to my sleeping arrangements in my shuttle. It was just a small bed for one. Shinade was the more aggressive of the two and mounted me after I was prone on the bed while Vanessa kneeled next to me and kissed me and caressed both of us with her hands. After Shinade climaxed they switched positions. This repeated twice more before we were all exhausted. I did catch Eve watching us but didn't draw attention to her spying.

Sleeping on a bed for one with three people wasn't that comfortable. After getting some restless sleep I untangled myself and dressed. I started to confirm everything on the pilot consul and Eve joined me in the co-pilot chair. I didn't hear the woman leave but when I went back the bed was empty. Six hours later I was attaching the needed cargo container for the trip and commed the woman and emphatically told them I would be back for them.

As we lifted off Eve turned to me and asked me why we didn't take them with us. She had seen my projections for taking them with us. I thought for a moment before saying they added too many variables and uncertainties to where we were going. She slowly nodded and soon we had drifted far enough away from the planetoid to engage our first micro jump.