Chapter 22

The station had passages marked in six languages. I was familiar with two of them from my youth, human galactic standard and German. I didn’t need the signs though as my PerCom maps navigated me through the station. I was happy to see pairs of station guards in plasteel armor at regular intervals. It was a cheap infantry armor used by marines in poorer stellar nations. My brother had sent me a picture of him wearing a set but it was just his ceremonial armor.

The bazaar was a large open park area. Large flowering trees lined a large central boardwalk. There were buildings lining either side of the walkway. Dozens of humans and elves moved on the causeway and a large furry humanoid. Curious I walked closer to a pair of the furries to inspect them. I sent Eve a picture to get me info. They were shorter than me by a head and looked like powerful cat men.

Eve sent me a data package. They were Wren. A bioengineered species by a human civilization near the core worlds. Skimming the text apparently they imitated various species in humanoid form of old earth cats. They were used as slave labor, grunt infantry and fetish prostitutes. They were outlawed in most human star nations. The ones on this station apparently all came from a single exodus ship fleeing their slavery. Eve’s data said there were 4,922 on the station. They worked menial jobs mostly. Curiosity abated, I followed my PerCom directions to the recommended specialty goods store. They were listed as dealing in alien artifacts and had a jewelry fabricator as well.

The shop was neat and orderly with display cases lining the floor. It smelled like…I couldn’t place the smell but it was sweet and fresh. Like flowers after a heavy rain. There were six customers and three elves looked to be the proprietors. I waited for one to become free to help me and scanned the cases. Most items were simple jewelry but there was some curious alien artwork. Sculptures, paintings, utensils…I laughed internally thinking I should have brought some of the alien sporks here to sell. I was interrupted by one of the elves who was free. I told him I was here to sell and he brought me to a back room where an aged elf sat. He left me with the elf and I noted four defense bots on the far side of the room.

After a brief introduction the elf took a piece of the jewelry I had and put it in an analyzer. I had made sure to not bring any jewelry with crystalline data storage. A lot of the jewelry did have the alien script on it though. After a minute a hologram image of the object appeared and the elf intensely manipulated it, examining the item. There was a bunch of script in what I assumed was their language. I took an image with my PerCom to translate later if needed. He then started asking me questions. My prepared response was I had traded for a crate of jewelry from a stranded human ship in exchange for repairing their FTL drive. I also said the humans said they found an ancient derelict spaceship and plundered it. That was where the jewelry came from according to them.

The elf was engrossed in the item now and after twenty minutes of examination apologized for ignoring me. He said the metal and artistry in the piece alone was worth close to 20,000. But he couldn’t identify the script but the age of the jewelry was around 370,000 years, plus or minus 2,000 years. He was extremely interested in the piece and any others I might have. I brought out the other 19 pieces I had with me and his eyes literally bulged a little. Bulging eyes were definitely not an attractive trait of the elves.

He sat down at a terminal and said if I was going to sell the lot he could serve as an intermediary. There were three elven city ships in communication range that had collectors of such objects. He could scan the items and put them up for sale on a quick auction. His commission would be 10% of the sale and that included responsibility for delivery. He then tried to convince me that his contacts would pay 30-50% more than a human collector and the sale could be completed in as little as 12 hours if he flagged the sale. All the collectors would get an alert immediately to check the goods. I decided it would be ok. It would save me time. I agreed to a 12 hour sale window. He gave me a pre-payment of 170,000 credits, the value of the metal and artistry, and receipts for all the jewelry objects with their scanned data. I left happy to have some credits on my PerCom. I went to a cafe and got a fantastic breakfast and coffee. Reheated meals were getting old even if the officer ones were not that terrible. With my station access I ordered repair parts for the marine drop shuttle, 39,000 station credits gone quickly but the shuttle would be back to optimal functionality. Sipping my third cup of great coffee I decided to look into the machines I would need to synthesize Eve’s upgrades.

They had some excellent fabricators for sale…and many could be built to order…some better than the ones I had originally used to build Eve. I reduced my list to three machines that could cover all the operations I needed. They were all small scale fabricators but extremely high end. Altogether I would be out 1.1 million station credits. But with these three machines I could make any repairs to Eve’s synthetic flesh. It was the least she deserved for her loyalty. I added three generic current generation small scale robotic parts fabricators as well, just 420,000 credits for those. My own fabricators could do this work but in a rougher manner. These machines were the gold standard for fine robotics for the solo robotics engineer currently.

I left the café and decided to do some other shopping. I entered a clothing store and got a dozen simple modern fashion outfits for myself. Thinking on it I added a dozen outfits for Eve as well. As I was leaving the store I turned around and got half a dozen for each Shinade and Vanessa. The sum of the purchases was just over 2,000 station credits, quite expensive in my opinion. I had everything sent back to the shuttle. My next stop was the skin suit store. I found marine quality skin suits here for 1,500 credits each with two nanobot patch kits. I compared the pricing to the Union prices. With the exchange rates I was paying a lot less than I would in the Union. I got three for me, one for Eve and one each for Shinade and Vanessa. I got a slight discount for a volume purchase.

My next stop was to purchase some ship bots. No matter what ship I planned to buy I would need some bots for the ship. I went into a shop that manufactured and sold ship maintenance bots. A middle aged human male with long black hair and a fancy suit sat me in a private room to work on my order.

Although I had a large number of bots most were archaic and required a lot of maintenance and some were not very good at their jobs. If I was getting a new ship I wanted modern bots that all had the same parts tree. I went went through my wish list. First I wanted eight exterior bots for exterior hull repairs and maintenance. He went through my options slowly showing many variations that they had license to fabricate. I decided on two large bots with advanced programming options. They were half the size of a shuttle but extremely versatile. Each carried a price tag of 150,000 station credits…the cost of a decent shuttle. I ordered 6 small utility exterior bots to support the large bots for just 17,000 credits each in addition. Next on my wish list was humanoid engineering assistant bots. I bought 12 mid tier bots with various specialties, costing 19,000 credits each. More expensive than I would have hoped but the configurations were what I needed to cover all ship systems. I got ten large humanoid stevedore bots at 14,000 credits each. The high cost was mostly for their AI as they could take complex direction but basically they just moved things from point A to point B. I added five small advanced cleaning bots at 3,500 credits each. I actually got a 500 credit discount on each. He then tried to sell me combat bots. They were illegal in most star nations. They were also expensive. The humanoid model he tried to sell me was 400,000 credits. After his long winded sales pitch I got twenty wolf like bots. They had a spinal mount for a weapon but I just bought the base model for 6,000 credits. They were the cheapest combat bot. I figured I could upgrade them myself. I added a team of three restoration bots as an after thought, 8,500 credits each. They were the only bots I had left on Destiny’s Children and they had done a great job in resurfacing and repainting the corridors and hiding the spy cameras. All these bots were from the same manufacturer from the core worlds, Venuvian Robotics. I wasn't completely sure the station had licenses to manufacture them but I didn't care.

My spending spree done I deposited 100,000 credits for all the bots. He would send the smaller and cheaper bots to my shuttle immediately. It would give me and Eve something to do. We had to scan the bots for illicit devices and comb the programming for back doors and replace the memory chips to secure them when they arrived.

I made my way back to the shuttle and crashed immediately onto the bunk. I should have gone to some luxury hotel room on the station and reveled in a shower and soft bed but I didn’t want to stay away from Eve. I set my SLUMBER unit for a four hour nap with an emergency training program and passed out.