**New Story**

**Part 9**

**04/01/2020**

Jarwan Sunderson was sound asleep when Deidre called. Being up late and having filled the previous day with physical labor that even as a farmer he wasn’t used too he had elected to sleep until someone woke him up. Cheryl Laramie was the someone. She woke him by shaking his shoulders, he had tuned out his name being called.

His first words weren’t that coherent, but he quickly put his thoughts in order. “Is it daylight?”

“Just getting that way. I wouldn’t have woke you but the Deidre’s calling.”

“Okay, let me get a cup of coffee. Oh, thank you. You came prepared.”

The grey-haired woman smiled. “I figured it was safer to come bearing gifts. You needed you sleep. I hated to wake you, but they said it was important, not critical – important.”

The pseudo coffee started to work, the drink was artificial, the caffeine was real. “Okay, they can wait a few minutes. Give me a run down.”

She took a seat across from him sipping her own cup. “We’ve got one person standing watch in the Power shop and one roamer. Although to tell you the truth I don’t think the person roaming has stepped out of the building often. The ground is still muddy, and slippery. I busted my ass going to the bathroom.

“Okay, thanks,” he said. Struggling to his feet he looked around. A few people were up talking or eating, but most of the colony’s citizens were still sleeping. He made his way quietly over to the radio console and grabbed a headset from the colonist on duty.

“Jarwan here, not awake, but here,” he said.

Mike Halerin’s voice came back, “Sorry Jarwan. I know you need your sleep. But it looks like the planet may not be done trying to drown you.”

“It’s going to start storming again. We sort of figured it might.”

Halerin’s voice sounded regretful. “That’s what we think. I emphasize the word think. We’re not sure. I’ll let Wally fill you in the data he’s looking at. I’d butcher it anyway. I just thought you’d want to know.

“Got it.” Jarwan looked around for a messenger. “Polly, find Dunzin for me and get him over here. Thank you.”

“Mike, I just sent for Dunzin. I’m in the same boat as you as far understanding what the weather’s doing so let’s let Wally fill in Dunzin. He’s the one that’s going to have to decide what things we need to do anyway. At least as far as preparing structurally. On to my part. Are you planning any more shuttle flights?”

“We can do that. The question is what do we bring down?”

Jarwan thought about it for a second. Luckily Dunzin arrived and grabbed a headset. “Dunzin just got here. He probably has ideas on what else we could use.”

There was silence for such a long time that Jarwan checked the status indicator on the comm unit to make sure they hadn’t been cut off. Finally Halerin responded.

“Sorry about the silence. I had to confer with Wally. We’ve been trying to get a handle on why the planet is doing this to you. Obviously, we don’t have an answer yet but we think there’s a possibility it just wants you to move.”

It was the Colonist turn for a prolonged silence. Jarwan finally repeated the last word. He managed to make it a question. “Move, where?”

“Maybe just out of the desert. We don’t know. The only reason I brought up a wild idea like that is it might impact what we bring down to you. Anything we bring down has to be something you can carry with you.”

\*\*\* !!! Possibly move this.

“We can’t move. I’ve only got three cargo hauler, a dozen carry-bots and our feet. How are we supposed to move a colony? We’re setup for here and here alone. Even with all the pre-order gear we never thought about having to move.”

“That’s why I didn’t want even mention the idea. It’s all conjecture at this point. I just thought we might want to consider it when deciding on cargo drops.”

The colony leader sighed. “Understood. I’ll let our tech heads talk. I need to try and wrap my head around the idea.”

The two men turned over the call to Wally and Dunzin. Jarwan made his first command decision of he day. He decided to check on the other colonist and eat. After that he would start thinking about drastic options.

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The robot wasn’t as interesting as the alien skeleton. It was a about two meters in height with a width of around one meter. It had a tubular body with double tracks at the bottom for mobility and a rounded head covered in a ring of sensors of different types. There were no obvious eyes. Evidently the ring of sensors took care of vision. It would, Josh decided, be a bitch to sneak up on. The two cannon barrels they had faced were complimented by another pair extruding from opposite side. He couldn’t decide which was the robot front side. It had no face true face.

“This would have been a nasty character to tangle with.”

Wendy said, “I don’t know. The skeleton took him out.”

“Yea and look what it did for him.”

“I didn’t say it would be easy,” said Wendy.

Josh looked stepped around the machine and took a look in the room it had been coming out of. It was a the same width as the other one but extended further. Instead of rows of consoles it was filled with row after row of shelves. Shelves loaded down with boxes and what looked like weapons or tools. It was obviously a storeroom. Okay, thought Josh, now maybe we can get some answers about the people who build this place.

He heard Wendy’s voice from behind him. “I think we found the central supply.”

“I doubt that. There are probably many rooms just like this scattered around.” He thought about it, “or maybe not. Go get Mikiu. I think he’ll want to take a look at this. There’s all kind of stuff here for him to scan.”

“Sure.” He heard her steps moving around the robot, back to the other room.

He was starting to examine the items on the nearest shelf when he heard another sound, a squeak of machinery unused for centuries. He found himself in a crouch, facing the door with his firearm in his hand. He heard a voice shouting “Wendy”. It was his voice.

Hearing her name she spun around, just in time to catch a flash of energy across her stomach. Instinctively she fell backwards, mouth opening in a scream as she did so.

Josh felt the weapon in his hand recoiled. Saw a second hole open in the robots back. He heard the sound of Susan’s energy weapon and the retort of Mikiu’s gun. The robot made a squealing sound and then it’s weapons, front and back, slowly lowered. That was the only movement it made. It never moved on it’s tracks or rotated its body. A single light that had come on in the sensor ring around the head faded from a lukewarm red to nothing. The smell of burning metal joined the wisps of smoke escaping the metal body through the newly formed holes.

He raced to the robot. It did nothing but smell bad. Looking up he saw Susan racing to Wendy withering on the floor. Mikiu was there with his handheld sensor in hand, re-examining the machine. Josh saw something the others couldn’t; Jameson lying on the floor, not moving.

“Mikiu, behind you – Jameson,” he shouted. Without waiting for a response he hit his knees beside Wendy. His heart racing as he grabbed her shoulders and shoved his other hand under her head to keep it from banging on the floor. She was withering uncontrollably in pain.

“Whoa, try not to move.” He glanced at the bright red line across her belly. The red was from both a burn and blood, but it didn’t look deep. Susan was already pressing a pain-killer jab just above the wound. Within seconds the girls frantic withering subsided. The sounds of her harsh breathing quieted and Josh felt her body relax a little. He could see awareness creep back into her eyes.

He let his mind go partially blank and revert to his field training. The shot from the robot had been some kind of energy beam that had caught her across the stomach, just beneath her breasts. The beam had burnt away her field suit and a couple layers of skin underneath. He could see the flesh starting to blister. That was a good sign. The burn was only second degree.

“Oh, God that hurts like a mother,” she said, pounding the floor with her right hand, the other clenched in fist.

“Just give it a second, the pain should stop. Then I’ll need to take a closer look. Susan, stay with her,” he said.

He hadn’t forgotten about Jameson. Devante III had taught him never to forget any of his team members. He rushed to where Mikiu sat with Jameson.

“How is he?”

Mikiu’s face was pale underneath his beard. “Caught him in the leg. It’s bad but I don’t think it got the bone. He’s passed out. We need to wash this out and get bandage paste on it.”

Josh did the wound a quick look. It did look bad. “Just slap some paste on it for now. Wendy’s got a nasty wound across her stomach, not as bad as this. For now all we go do is spread paste over the wounds to stop the bleeding. I want to get back to the lounge room. We can worry about treating them once we’re back there.”

Mikiu was already busy squeezing the universal wound salve from a tube. It would work as a healing agent and seal away outside dirt and germs.

Josh leaned back on his heel, working at catching his breath. He asked, “Didn’t you say this thing was dead?”

“It was, is. It didn’t register any power. Something external had to wake it up, maybe our presence. Who was it shooting at?”

Josh shook his head, “Not for sure, I just heard it power up and then I was firing.”

“Good thing you’re jumpy. They might both be dead,” said Mikiu.

“I saw the barrels start to come up. It was like they caught on something.” Wendy’s voice was low and quiet, the pain med was taking full effect.

“Age,” said Mikiu. “If that thing hadn’t been severely old… It might have got all of us.”

Josh returned to Wendy’s side. “How’s the pain?”

She smiled and grimaced, “Still there. I can stand it now. Thank You for saving me.”

He returned the smile, with a grimace of his own. “I should have blasted it first thing, not took any chances.”

“If you hadn’t shouted, I might not be in pain, just dead. We have to get Jameson help.”

“Yea, well, first we’re getting out of here. In case this thing has buddies.” He turned to Susan. I hate to separate anyone from the group but we need some of that alien clothing from the lounge room. You okay to handle that.”

“Sure,” she said, “you figure on dragging them back on it?”

“Mikiu and I could fireman carry them, but it wouldn’t do their wounds much good.”

“And it would cause them a lot of pain. I can go. It shouldn’t take me very long.”

Josh licked his lips and said, “ok, go. Keep your weapon ready.” He paused, “by the way nice shooting. That goes for you too Mikiu.”

Susan raised her gun to her head in salute and took off down the corridor.

Mikiu was examining the damage to the robot. “I don’t know how much Susan and I helped. I think the big hole you blow through it did the trick.”

“Maybe, and maybe the only thing I did was piss it off and you guys finished it off. It’s not like Fargonius where we know who screwed up,” said Josh.

Mikiu gave him a hard look. “Bullshit, get over blaming yourself. The Captain and the reviewe board cleared you. You’re the only one still assigning blame.”

“I know that,” whispered Josh. “I just hate feeling helpless.”

Mikiu frowned, “I hate to tell you this buddy. It’s part of the job. You know that.”

Wendy’s voice, now almost a whisper, said. “When I feel better you can explain it to me.”

Her eyes were closed, and her breathing was slow and regular. Josh looked up at Mikiu, “she’s asleep.”

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 Sub-mind D117 didn’t the closest thing it could to being surprised and alarmed. It fired off diagnostic routines on itself, inter link channels and its downstream sub-minds. It had no warning when the security sub-system reactivated the anti-intrusion drone. That should not have happened. D117 sent an emergency protocol violation message upstream and waited for a response.”

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Jarwan was on his sixth cup of coffee and his stomach was beginning to complain. He tried to stifle the upcoming belch, but the doctor noticed. He was sitting with her and Dunzin discussing the immediate future.

She gave him a reproving look. “Have you ate anything to blunt that coffee?

He shook his head. “Haven’t had time.”

She gave him a disgusted look. “Take the time. You getting sick won’t help.” Turning back to the ongoing discussion she went on. “I don’t like the idea. Splitting us up into two warehouses just means I could have patients in two buildings and no way to get between them.”

“Granted,” said Jarwan, “but it doubles the chances of the colony surviving if something catastrophic happens.”

“The buildings are only a hundred meters apart. You think something could happen to just one.”

Dunzin grinned and said, “It’s not the distance, it’s the altitude.”

Jarwan and Dr. Bitterly both said, “what”.

“It’s easy. This building is eight meters above ground. The other one is underground. From what Wally and I can tell this next storm is going to be mainly a wind event, a sandstorm. Hopefully, fingers crossed, without the deluge of rain. At least that’s what we think. The underground warehouse if better suited for that. And I wasn’t suggesting a split of the colony. Just that we can probably only move half the people and equipment in one day.”

“I see,” said Jarwan. “Simple math, if we split in half and we’re forced to evacuate one of the buildings we only have to move half as many. It’s quicker.”

Dunzin shook his head. “That’s not exactly what I meant. But it is true. If we get half moved today, we only have the other half tomorrow, when the weather might be bad.

Jarwan saw Denise look quickly towards Dunzin, unable to determine if he was being sarcastic. She didn’t look happy. Instead of arguing she asked, “What about flooding. The other warehouse is underground with a ramp leading into it. Won’t the water just run downhill and build up against the door, or worse yet, leak under the door?”

“Drains,” said Dunzin. “When we built that warehouse, we didn’t know the weather patterns like we thought we did now. So, we installed drainpipes everywhere, lots of them. They empty about twenty meters lower than the warehouse floor. That means about fifty meters below ground. The warehouse has ten meters of sand on top of it.

Jarwan cut in, “It shouldn’t be a problem unless it rains forever. It shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Why didn’t we use it to begin with?”

The two men looked at each other and shrugged. “Judgement call,” said Jarwan. We just didn’t realize how bad the storm was going to be.” He motioned to the building around them. “This seemed easier. Should have known better than to go with easy.”

She let them off the hook. “Neither of you could have known what was going to happen. But I still don’t like this half at a time business. Why can’t we just move everyone together.”

Jarwan twisted his lips inward and looked over at Dunzin. “Valid question. If we decided to go all out.”

“Okay. That tells me what I’ll need the Deidre to deliver. Mike may not like it.”

“What do you need?”

“Jerimy and his engineering crew. I’m not worried about moving all the stuff from here to there. Hell, the people can move a lot of it themselves. Getting power and communications rigged up is another story. I need experienced manpower for that to happen in a day.”

“You’re probably right about the captain not liking it. At least under normal circumstances he wouldn’t. But since they might end up staying with us for a few years he’ll probably like the idea of his people being involved. I’ll call him. The worst thing that can happen is he says no.”

Jarwan left to call the Deidre. He was gone only ten minutes.

“Well, what’s the answer chief?” asked Dunzin.

“We can’t have Jerimy or Wally. Other than those two he’s willing to load us three junior engineers and some cargo muscle. He’s also going to send down the Deidres three tracked haulers. They’re bigger and more powerful than ours. Come in handy if we have to make a run for the forest.”

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Fortunately, the trip back to the lounge room dragging the injured on what Josh decided were the alien equivalent of overalls proved no great task. Mikiu and Susan pulled Jamerson on one while Josh pulled Wendy by himself. The girl had insisted that she could walk with a little help, but he said no. The material slid easily on the smooth grey floor even with the weight of their passengers. It took some effort to lift the two of them onto the alien couch without causing unnecessary pain, but they had managed.

Mikiu carefully cleaned each of their wounds and applied a new layer of bandage cream. It would act as an anti-bacterial and aid the healing process. For a bandage over the paste they cut up an emergency blanket. Josh hoped they wouldn’t need it.

Mikiu finished with his medical chores and asked, “Okay, wise but reluctant leader, what do we do now?”

“Well, the first thing I’m going to do is contact the ship. See if they’re still planning on sending a ship down. It would be nice if they sent the doc. After that, I’m open to suggestions,” finished Josh.

“We’ve got to do some more exploring, especially the star base level,” said Mikiu. “We still haven’t figured out how to shut down the weather. Although hopefully we won’t get shot at anymore.

“One thing at a time. Right now I’m more worried about getting Jameson medical help. His wound is beyond both our training. Susan, you got any experience with deep burns like this.”

The woman shook her head no. “Sorry, you guys have more training than I do.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Josh. “Jameson is the one that worries me. He doesn’t appear to be in pain. That means third degree burns. I have no idea how to handle that.” He was more worried about Wendy for personal reasons, but her wound wasn’t that serious, and he was sure she would be okay baring further trauma. He intended to prevent further trauma.

He tossed his backpack on the couch near Wendy. He only needed the radio and his sidearm for this trip. “The two of you watch over them. I’m going topside.”

He felt Mikiu’s eyes burning into him, “Did I suddenly grow horns or something?” Josh asked.

“Might as well have if you think you’re going by yourself, one of us goes with you,” said Mikiu.

“I need both of you here too take care of these two.”

“No you don’t,” muttered Wendy. “I’m awake now and I can still handle a gun. You and Mikiu go. Susan and I will talk about the two of you while you’re gone.”

Susan gave them a quirky grin. “Fortunately I know enough to keep the conversation going until you get back.”

Mikiu laughed. “I don’t think we have any choice.” The science officer tossed his own gear on the couch with Josh’s. If they got in trouble, they would still have their emergency belt packs.

They left the girls sitting with weapons drawn.

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For once he was awake when Jake called.

“Yes Yelaa,” he said in response to her voicing his rank.

“I’ve got your son sir,” she said.

“Put him through.”

“Dad, we’ve got a problem.” asked Josh’s voice.

Halerin caught the apprehension in his son’s voice. “What’s the problem?”

“I need Lovis.”

The captain felt that old tightness in his stomach that signified trouble. “Are you hurt?

“Not me dad. Wendy and Jameson. Wendy isn’t too bad, just a bad burn across here stomach. Jameson took one in the leg, bad, third degree. We could use the doc. We don’t have the proper stuff to treat it.”

“What the hell happened?”

“We got shot at by an old security robot. Thought it was dead, a dead alien put a hole through it God knows how long ago. It wasn’t dead enough, the robot I mean. The alien is a skeleton.”

“Well that makes up my mind on whether to try and send the Gig down. I was still thing on it. Is Jameson in immediate danger?”

Josh voice sounded a little guilty. “No, nothing like that. I didn’t mean to scare you. Right now he’s stable and sleeping. A couple of pain-jabs handled that. Wendy is awake and pulling guard duty with Mikiu. Just in case another bot with a gun shows up.”

Halerin frowned. He hated when one of his children was in danger and out of his reach. “Do you think that’s likely.”

“Didn’t think the first one was likely. It caught us by surprise. Like I said, an alien had already put a hole through it.”

Halerin nodded towards Yelaa who nodded back. “I already notified Dr. Lovis. She’s standing by.”

“Dr. Lovis is ready with questions son. You said a dead alien skeleton?”, queried Halerin. His brain had caught up with the information. A dead alien, even skeletal remains of one had never been found before. This was important.

“Yes, and I’m feeding a still pic to you on the data channel.”

“Good. In the meantime I’m sending the Gig down with Lovis so give her an idea of what to bring. Jerimy’s coming to. He wants to see the place and I figure you could use help with finding the weather controls. I’ll have Patty fly the thing.”

“That sounds good dad, but with the weather clear for now I just want to get Wendy and Jameson fixed up.”

“That of course is the priority. Trouble is we’ve got indications the planets not done screwing around yet. Jerimy can fill you in.”

“Okay dad. Dr. Lovis, you there.”

Halerin toggled the comm switch on his chair off when he heard the doctors voice respond. Leaning back he took a second to think before staring things moving. He hated being rushed.

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When Josh got back to the lounge room, he found Mikiu sitting patiently, his gun on the couch beside him. Susan was leaning back on the couch, awake and with her weapon in hand, but pointed downward. Wendy had fallen asleep.

“This is the way you two stand guard. I could have been another security bot.”

Mikiu glanced at Susan, “He obviously didn’t see the camp sensors you put out.”

“No, I saw them. That was a good idea. I should have thought of it.”

“Maybe it was all the worrying about your girlfriend,” said Susan.

He ignored her. “Jameson is the one I’m more worried. I think we’re okay. Patty’s going to fly Jerimy and Lovis down in a few hours. Soon as they get the Captains Gig loaded with supplies and a drone to test the camo shielding.”

“Hopefully, it won’t stop them, “said Mikiu.

“You got that right. I don’t see how they could support a dampening field like the wall.”

“With no structure, like the wall, to provide a projector I don’t see how they could. Thing about a dampening field like that is you have to have something to absorb the energy. Tough to do up on the air. At least for us,” said Mikiu.

“I guess we’ll find out. Wendy couldn’t stay awake huh?”

Susan answered. “She did while I put the sensors out. Then she just faded.”

Mikiu raised a finger. “Question, why not a shuttle to just fly us out of here. If a ship can come through once we can always go back with better equipment and more people.”

Josh raised his hands. “Answer, the weather may be getting ready for act two. We still need to find the controls. Jerimy’s going to fill us in when he gets here.”

Mikiu looked thoughtful, “Those monitors we found might be useful for tracking the weather. Might even be something in that room that involves the weather controlling. You learn anything that’ll help Wendy and Jameson?”

Josh smirked. “Dr. Lovis basically told me to keep my hands off of them until she gets here.”

“She obviously doesn’t know that you want to put your hands on Wendy again.”

“I’m sure she’ll figure it out smart ass.

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The wind was definitely picking up intensity. It wasn’t blowing things around like it had before, but Jarwan could sense the increasing fervor as the day got progressed. Something was definitely getting ready. The shuttles from the Deidre had touched down half an hour ago and were being off-loaded directly into the underground warehouse. Mike Halerin, true to his word, had sent along plenty of technicians to help with moving the necessary power and communication needs. As a bonus several general crew and family members of the ship had come along to provide hands and muscle for moving half the population over. To Denise Bitterlly’s delight the additional manpower made it likely that they would move the entire population today, instead of just half.

Dunzin had the same thought. “Bless Halerin. I’ll feel a lot better with everyone in the same place.”

Jarwan asked, “I thought you were for keeping half the people here. You think this buildings in danger don’t you?”

Dunzin, giving the warehouse a quick once over as if re-evaluating it, said, “I don’t know boss. Maybe I was just lying to myself. If the planet’s taking a second run at us, were safer underground. The problem is if the rain comes back heavy and continuous. I know what I told the doc but being at the bottom of that ramp could be a problem at some point.”

“It worked the last week,” pointed out Jarwan.

“Yea, it did. This one held up too and it got pretty windy the other night. We’re just playing the odds here. I do think we’re making the right move either way. Even with the repairs we did to the foundation you and I both know it’ll probably end up the same way.”

“You know,” Jarwan said, “when I was a boy on Duncan, we used to get really bad summer storms. Twisty windy ones that used to pick stuff up, like buildings. Every house and work building had a shelter. You know where those shelters always were?”

“Underground,” said Dunzin, “my home world had the same. They came in handy. Did you ever have to use one?”

“Personally, no, my family was lucky. But I saw what happened when they did the wind did a building, not pretty. You think we’ll have any trouble getting everyone moved?”

The engineer grinned. “Like I said, bless the captain. With the help from the ship it shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Power shop?”

“Redoing the patch job on the roof with something, excuse the expression, a little more concrete. Fortunately we already had a power line running to our new home and it’s buried a lot better than the other one. It should be. When we put it in we didn’t know the planet’s weather very well so we did it better.”

“You going to move that emergency power unit over?”

“Already installed a new one, courtesy of the Deidre. Time permitting tomorrow I’d like to hook up a second older one from storage. We already moved it over. I’m rigging the power shop for auto shutdown if the line fails. No use having someone stand watch now that we’ve had time to prepare a little.”

Jarwan tilted his head. “You know what worries me?”

“Everything.”

“Yea – that everything seems to be going fine. That cannot last.”

Dunzin shook his head and walked away. His boss and friend was a habitual worrier. Probably what made him the right man for this job.”

\*\*\* Need to insert something here from one of the other parties to mark passing time..

The transition to night started early. The sky was clouding quickly. Dunzin had anchored a heavy guideline between the entrance to the underground warehouse and the one they had occupied. If necessary, it would provide a safe guide from one to the other, weather permitting.

Dunzin put his hand on the door handle, ready to close and secure it against the impending storm.

Jarwan put a hand on his arm, “wait. Something else I want to get.” He glanced over his shoulder at the tracked cargo hauler. “We’ll need the hauler to carry it.”

Dunzin looked at his boss. “I thought we got everything heavy.”

“Not quite, come on.”:

Dunzin followed the colony leader to the rear corner of the former command section. Jarwan moved some gear thrown around in the preparation for the move to get to a small green footlocker.”

Dunzin frowned, scratched the back of his head, “if I didn’t know better, I’d think that was the gun box.”

“It is.”

“You, planning a shootout with the storm.”

Jarwan took a seat and looked around the warehouse to make sure they were alone. “Not with the storm.”

“Not with the storm, but with somebody?” asked Dunzin, his curiosity rising.

“Russ Dorkin took me aside while you guys unloaded his shuttle. The exploration party got themselves into a gunfight.”

Dunzin’s face registered shock as he slid into a seat of his own. “Is Wendy ok? A gunfight with who? Did they find live aliens?”

“No,” shaking his head for emphasis, “not aliens, one of the robots they left behind.” He pursed his lips to wet them, unused to the news he was delivering. “And yes, Wendy got hurt. But it’s not to bad. Jameson got it worse. Halerin sent the Captain’s Gig down with Dr. Lovis. That’s all I know.”

“Have you called him?”

“Russ said he didn’t use the radio because he didn’t know who might hear. He doesn’t want a panic.”

Dunzin was quiet for a moment. “Okay, we’re sticking this on the back of the hauler. Someone might notice it.”

Jarwan frowned, “I was hoping you could keep that from happening.”

“I can do that. We might want to fill in a couple people thought.”

“I’d rather wait and explain it after we finish getting setup. We can’t start carrying weapons out in the open of course. I just want them available.”

“What exactly happened?” asked Dunzin.

They stumbled across an old security robot with a hole through it courtesy of an alien skeleton. It woke it up. The guys from Deidre took it down but not before it got off a shot. Wendy took a blast burn across the belly, it got Jameson in the leg. Josh wanted a doctor for him but he thinks he’ll survive. This is all third and fourth-hand info.”

“Wendy and Jameson both shot. That’ll give them a story to tell their kids.”

Jarwan raised a hand. “I wouldn’t count on the kids part, at least for now. Wendy was awful eager to see Josh again. I think maybe she was having second thoughts about Jameson, and with the Deidre sticking around for a while. She had a thing for Josh before.

“I remember. One the nice thing about long lives is you have the chance for do overs. Jameson won’t like but he’ll get over it.”

“That’s one thing that worries me a bit. Wendy might end up with him because he got hurt.”

Dunzin clapped a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “You can worry all you want, not your life. Let the girl make her own choices.”

Jarwan held up a hand, “right as usual. Let’s make sure there’s nothing else we want to take.” He grabbed a coffee mug off the desk.

“Denise’s mug?”

“Just want to put some stuff on top of the guns, in case someone does look.”

“Right,” said Dunzin. The two men quickly tossed in enough miscellaneous junk the meager weapons cache was covered. The trip to the new base of operations was without incident.

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Josh woke Wendy before he and Mikiu started for the surface. He had decided to take Mikiu along, not knowing what the landing of the Albatross would entail. He might need help and although he didn’t like the idea of putting a burden on Wendy to stay awake, he liked the idea of not getting the doctor even less.

She gave him a weak smile. “I can handle staying awake. The only reason I fell asleep before was that I knew Susan and Mikiu were here. You two go catch a ship.”

He touched a hand to her face. “Right, won’t be long.”