**Chapter 7**

Jonteel, usually a patient man, found himself chewing the inside of his upper lip, a habit he thought well lost in the past. But, without anything to do for the moment while waiting for the active sensor sweep, he spent the time studying his two companions.

Trent was a little odd for his tastes. The thought of going bald intentionally at a time when science had solved that particular malady offended his nature. The I’m an engineer – I can design and or fix anything, everything in its place – mentality that his ordered mind demanded couldn’t reconcile the idea of letting a repairable system fail. The man was also a bit of a free spirt, liable to be involved in pursuits of things that most would find outside the norm. The man liked his fun. He was Jonteel admitted, a fair engineer and one of the best pilots he had ever met. Besides that, he was Ardam’s best and oldest friend.

Cwen was a different kind of odd. She was something that the human race had long outgrown but no longer looked on as different. He wasn’t sure what body parts Cwen came with or if they were original. Cwen preferred the pronouns it and they for reference to itself. Still, as in Trent’s case, she was a reliable well-trained engineer and pilot. She also pulled double duty as a companion in virtually any type of endeavor except one. He had never known her to engage in any type of sexual liaison. That in itself was not odd. A lot of people were still somewhat private about affairs of the heart or skin even in the age of very long lifespans. Cwen, however, seemed to take no interest in such goings-on at all. He didn’t think that it even occurred to it.

It was Trent who broke his internal musings. “Oh crap.”

“I gather from you response that I’m not going to like what you’re about to tell me.”

“Me either,” chipped in Cwen.

Trent shook his head. “Well, I thought it was probably a company ship of course. A survey ship wouldn’t have bothered with this cat and mouse stuff. They’d have just sailed up and asked our business.”

Jonteel prodded him, “okay, you’ve told us who it isn’t. Who is it?”

“A company ship for sure, but it’s a damm big one. I’d say heavy cruiser of some type. Looks like a Fermon hull, one of the extended jobs, and in case your wondering I read several weapon ports and emitters.”

“You’re sure it’s not survey?” asked Jonteel.

“Not unless they’re using a false ‘who am I’ responder, and a ship that big doesn’t need to lie about who it is.”

Jonteel nodded, “any sign of those weapons being active?”

“No, I don’t even read any active sensors except for normal nav stuff. She’s just moving into orbit. If our active sensor sweep surprised them, they’re not showing it.”

Cwen sighed. “I’m sure that’s exactly what they want to get across. They know we’re here and they have nothing to say, at least for now.