**CHAPTER 7: PROMETHEUS**

I awoke well rested and commed Lina. A quick conversation and Lina was taking a hover cycle to my location. I had some time to negotiate with MD. My goal was to get MD to add Lina to the ‘crew’. It took two hours of arguing and the only way he would do so is if Lina had the psion ability of technogenesis. MD seemed to think he could imprint this ability on another human from his ‘success’ he had with me. When Lina finally arrived I met her at the rock face. As she pulled in on the hover cycle with the sniper rifle slung on her back and wearing her armored chest plate she looked very dangerous. She braked two feet away from me and reading her expression I could see relief on her face but that is not what exited her mouth, “Where the hell have you been sir?”

I composed myself and replied evenly, “The usual, solving crimes, making friends and getting my ass kicked.” I broke into a grin. Lina was not amused.

“We have had three search teams for your body for the last 3 weeks. Everyone thought you were dead since we could not locate your transmitter. Ellie is heading one team and the Kommish family is leading the other. Everyone has been working long hours to find you.” She seemed a little pissed and a fire in her eyes kind of scared me. I thought she might shoot me.

I activated my psion ability and commed MD and told him to drop the illusion. The rock face dissolved and the ship appeared. Lina jumped back reaching for her sniper rifle. “Our new ship, the Prometheus.” I stated with a flair of my arms. She stared for minutes, the sight not seeming to compute. Maybe her governing program was stuck in a loop? Lina finally came around. She looked to me and back to the ship a few times and then said the most priceless words.

“Does it fly?” her face growing into the face of a little girl on Christmas morning. I had just given her the best gift ever. “It’s huge! This ship is what, a cruiser? This is awesome, can I go inside? How did you take this ship by yourself? Was there crew already on board? Which corporation built this model? What kind of weapons does it have on board? How…” I raised my hands under the barrage of questions to have her stop.

“Long story as you can imagine Lina. We have a lot to do… but first in order to get you added to the crew you will need to undergo an…operation.” I spent the next four hours talking with Lina trying my best to explain things. My overall goal was to get Lina added to the crew, which would give us the majority over MD and should give us control over the ship. At least that was my plan. I didn't vocalize this as I was paranoid MD might be listening and fear losing control of the ship.

During this extended conversation I learned what had happened in my absence. The first few days Lina had scoured the area looking for my after finding the jeep. Then she asked for volunteers in Mycell from anywhere on the planet. Ellie flew back and became Lina’s deputy for the search. Could a deputy have a deputy? Well six other sheriffs flew in and thirty five civilians also volunteered to help. Three main search groups were formed and they had been searching fervently for three weeks. The loyalty choked me up. I had Lina communicate that I had been found alive and well and that we would head back to camp once our business was complete. Lina put Ellie in charge of the sheriff’s office and released the volunteers.

MD was waiting for us as we entered the ship through a lower cargo bay door. Lina was cautious but she trusted me. I introduced them to each other and gave Lina the tour of the ship myself. She was like a kid in a candy store. Her tough features had melted and every new room reminded me of a 10 year old during their first time at Disney Land. When we finished the tour and ended up in the lab room with the table I had spend my time trapped in I asked Lina the question, “Lina as I told you only a psion can become a member of this crew. MD has assured me he can do this for you but it will be quite painful.”

“I am ready and willing to do this. If this is successful then it will be worth every bit of pain I experience.” I commed MD and let him know she was willing. MD floated into the room and manipulated Lina to the table as he paralyzed her. He was not bashful in his enthusiasm and Lina was soon screaming. I moved to her opposite side and grabbed her hand and put my face into her view. As the procedure began I talked to Lina reassuringly.

Lina spent eight hours a day on the ‘operating’ table under MDs supervision and the rest of the day recovering. MD volunteered that the process was slower than expected. After ten days MD announced success in awakening her ‘general’ potential. This was an indication that MD had successful activated or implanted psion ability. MD said it would take about seven more days to finish the process for Lina. It ended up taking nine days. Other than Lina having sunken eyes and appearing to have lost 10% of her body weight she seemed well. Lina had taken over the quarters next to mine and had redecorated it to the best of her ability but had mostly spent the last 19 days sleeping and being operated on. My free time was spent sending messages, working the system and working on large crew recreation deck.

I kept in touch with Katrine and she kept letting me know her progress. She was working on a trading vessel 55 light years from Earth and heading in my direction. My estate had generated some funds which I reinvested in purchasing 2 more acres of green houses for the apple trees and another planter/harvester mech. The first crop of apples using fast grow had earned a greater than expected sum on Barstow. The additional green houses would add to the profitability and we now had three varieties of apples so each green house was going to be specialized. The Kommish family said when I returned I should come over for an apple pie. My head sheriff account had grown large enough for the holding facility to be built. I selected some extra options and put in the order and had Barstow assign the guards for the facility. The building had 55 prisoner capacity, a small landing field, a barracks for a dozen men, a small armory and a large office for the head sheriff. The facility was going to be manufactured and shipped in two weeks. I located the facility just outside of Mycell. When the facility was completed I gained 1500 experience in rewards and mission completions and made good progress to Sheriff IV.

I managed to sell the information about gaining the athletics endurance skill for free for 160,000 credits. Athena said I could of made more if I slowly gave out the information but ran the risk of the news hitting the forums and everyone getting the information for free. The purchasers of the information were the Middle Earth Corporation. They were the second largest PC group in the game and had about 600 members. The massive influx of cash was great but I was looking to invest. I felt my estate was in good hands and doing well. The distillery were we shipped most of our goods was my target. It was quite a distance from Mycell but it would eliminate a middle man and increase my profits. After a few messages with the owner he would part with the facility for 145,000 credits. Athena let me know it was worth about 150,000 credits so it was a good deal. It was almost fully automated and required five men to run. Unfortunately in its current state its profitability was listed as 4000/month. However it was operating at 50% capacity. Meaning if I could get more raw materials I could double the profitability. It seemed supply was limited due to the fact the population on Barstow was more interested in food than alcohol right now. After purchasing the distillery I made some quick changes. My concern was the product quality setting. It was set to 6. The thing is the higher the quality the less product produced. At a setting of 6 gave the highest profitability. Moving it to a 7 dropped it down to 3800/month, an 8 dropped it to 3600/month, a 9 down to 3400 and a 10 dropped it to 3000/month. So it was not so linear. I changed the packaging to Chevalier Sapphire with a blue bottle and slide the quality to a 9. I secured additional raw materials by having the Kommish family increase production and buying up product from other farms at a slighter higher cost. The main products would be three types of beer and vodka. I added security of six men with gear to protect this new asset, initial cost of 1000 credits each and 100 credits a month in pay. It reduced my profits slightly but I was a bit paranoid after dealing with the Bonner family. I also had future plans to expand this facility so making sure it was not pillaged was a priority. I spent a lot of time micromanaging two properties in my free time spending an additional 8,000 credits, which was everything I had left, but the effort slightly increased the profitability of each. I noticed a massive sugar cane plantation for sale 600 miles to the south for 50,000 credits. It had 30 square miles of fields and was automated. It was not very profitable, only yielding about 1200 credits a month. The maintenance on the mechs in the warm climate was biting into profits. I had Athena note the property and told her to work on negotiating the price down until I could swing the credits.

If I could secure my own transport shuttle I could yield a 15% increase in profit lines for the distillery even with shuttle maintenance factored in. A new transport shuttle equipped for transport between planets was a base cost of 200,000 credits and minimal systems outfitting was an additional 50,000 credits. Athena warned me that the system transport craft were controlled by the Bryant family and I could get in political trouble if I started taking away their business. Only one company built them in system and they only produced one every few months anyway. I thought of something. The schematics for all the shuttle parts were only 10,000 credits. If I could purchase these I thought the replicator on the Prometheus could make shuttles for me.

Another thought occurred to me. I talked with MD for a while about the projected illusion capability. It took 5% of available power to keep it active and could be changed with any designs. I downloaded images of dozens of cruisers and found one that was slightly larger than the Prometheus. It was an older model built on Earth by the Canadian Space Force. It was no longer in production but 102 had been built and only 13 were still in service, mostly by isolated planetary systems as a defensive force. The firepower was limited but it was noted for strong shields and good engines. I spent 500 credits getting close up images of the vessel and, after an hour of convincing, had MD change the holographic display to the new vessel. This should be good camouflage when we finally took off. Looking at the ship from outside was impressive. It was a dark blue paint job of the flagship of the old Canadian Fleet, the Red Mounty.

After the procedure Lina needed two more full days to recover. I note passed on my screen that my Drive Vehicle: Hover had completed and I immediately selected Pilot: Spacecraft and started training the skill to level 2. Whoa – 3 months! This skill progression was crazy stupid. From my training I remembered there were ways to reduce training time. Let’s see…Athena brought up the relevant information. You could study at a university which reduces training time by 75% costing 500 credits a month. You could get a ‘professor upgrade’ for your personal A.I. at a cost of 25,000 credits and each ‘program’ cost 10,000 credits times the level of the skill being trained. The effect was to reduce training time by 80%. This game knew how to milk credits from you. Lets see some tablet training programs would reduce training time by 25% for only a one time cost of 500 credits plus 100 credits per skill level. Since I was a PC I did not actually have to ‘study’ just needed to have the device in my possession. Since this was the only one I could currently afford I selected it and would pick up the device when I was in town next. My account read at just over 3500 credits.

I spent a few hours each day in the sanctuary. This is what I had taken to calling the large crew rec room. The walking paths I selected would be a rose laced white marble with flecks of silver in it. Apparently a quarry nearby the ship had this stuff available and MD was the one who had suggested using it. There were only three entrances to the room. Two large doors at either end and one in the center floor area. The design for the paths was a straight path between the doors and an oval running just inside the perimeter. A three meter wide stream was set to run in between bisecting the room. Where the stream intersected the path an ornate bridge would be built, MD volunteered to design the bridge. The stream was only going to be average one meter in depth but it also would feed a 10m x 25m pool via a small waterfall. The water was constantly recycled and cleaned and MD let me know if the artificial gravity was in danger of being lost the water would be sucked into holding tanks.

The day night cycle was set to 20 hours of daylight and 4 hours of night, this was determined to be the optimal. The temperature was set to 75 degrees day and 65 degrees night with a general humidity of 7%. I had decided to make three zones of plant life. The 10 meter ceiling would prevent me from having any grand trees. The ceiling itself was a vid display capable of emitting actual ‘sunlight’ and I selected having it follow the star and moon patterns of my childhood home on Earth. Fortunately this data was free to obtain. The largest zone covered half the area and was dedicated to a moderate climate of Earth. MD had 178 Earth plant species that he had collected from the colonists efforts on Bruin IV. All of them were utilitarian in nature, crop producing or terraforming in nature. I had ten of thousands of alien plant life to select from. I was able to sort by soil type, toxicity, climate, size, color, flowering, aggressiveness and digestibility to my life form. I found a grass-like plant that had an emerald sheen to it from how it collected water and held it until it was needed. It could be cut like normal grass and was not too invasive. This would be the basis on my landscaping. The maintenance bots would be keeping the grass cut to 7 centimeters. Half of the Earth like terrain would host trees; pear, apple, orange, cherry, lemon, lime, avocado, coconut and pecan. I found it strange because when I cross-referenced the Capsulite system no lemon, lime, pecan, coffee, avocado or coconut trees were listed. Apparently MD had been to another human colonized planet. It would take three months with fast grow to get seeds from these system unique trees, which I planned to promptly sell for a huge profit! MD was able to manage a layout where 5 trees for each could be planted and managed effectively. This amounted to 65 trees as there were two types of pears, coffee, apples and oranges. It would be cramped in the 70m x 18m space even with the layout having trees half growing over the marble path. I also set up to put the excess crops, not eaten by the crew, to be put preserved for sale later. I had a strong feeling I had just stumbled across a source of huge cash flow. I dotted the remaining landscape with alien flowers and bushes that would not interfere with the trees but could grow in the soil. Selecting these flowers took about 40 hours! In the end I had 128 different varieties and colors to spruce up the first zone below the tree canopy.

The second zone had the large pool in it. The 10m x 25m pool dominated the space. I created sand beach and had a dozen coconut trees planted as well. The beach led up to a 40m x 15m field. I made this into my ‘garden’. It contained 127 different small herb, spice and vegetable plants. I planned to eat ‘fresh’ food in my virtual reality!

The third zone I wanted to put in some exotic alien trees. I had a decent space to work with, 15m x 60m. I started by selecting 8 varieties of alien fruit bearing trees that required an acidic soil. This limited my remaining selection to alien flowers, herbs and vegetable plants. All these plants would be edible and I was interested in sampling them in the future. Maybe having a chef in the crew would not be a bad idea. I small fish pond measuring 6m x 15m was in the center of my alien forest. Since no earth species were in MDs stores I didn't have time to select the variety of alien fish I would put here just yet as I was hoping to find an Earth species.

The perimeter of the entire sanctuary outside the track was to be covered in grape and kiwi vines. There were 17 varieties of grape available to me. All would be given equal spacing on the wall and I figured I would have some excellent wine to sample in the future.

For insects and animals I went as minimal as possible. I know the ship bots could pollinate the flowers but selected bees anyway and just hoped none of the crew would be allergic! Some soil worms where selected to keep the soil aerated. The alien zone needed special worms that could tolerate it. My experience with the lupin made me shy away from introducing rabbits. I did select 7 varieties of alien birds with pleasant song voices for the space. The bots would control the population, as there were no predators here for them unless I added them. That was good enough for now. Setting up this space took a lot of time and now I just had to wait for MD’s bots to get it up and growing. MD also informed me once the sanctuary was fully running the fresh food could support an organic crew of 95 beings. On this information I had two of the crew rooms split into four good sized rooms and the remaining crew rooms divided into bunk rooms for 16 people each. The bunk spaces would have a privacy screen and the beds were the size of a queen. This would give me crew space for 42. I was not about to divide up Lina’s oversized room and face her wrath. I also found a room called the ‘meditation room’ that I was able to make into five rooms that were 4m x 4m, plenty large enough for any future guests. I was pleased with my work and patted myself on my back.