

Part 1

The advent of faster than light travel was one of the most important discoveries of the 31st century. It changed business, politics, and human society altogether. No longer was mankind bound to a single rock in the cosmos. We were free to spread as far as our imaginations would allow... for the most part. The sad reality was that some things just couldn't travel at faster than light speeds. Certain chemicals, gasses and even metals reacted strangely to hyperspace and therefore had to be shipped the old fashioned way.

If you lived on a planet where Beryllium didn't occur naturally your options were to either wait for two standard-decades while it shipped from the nearest planet where it could be mined, or do without. Most colonists chose the latter option, but the ones who didn't were willing to pay top dollar for materials that might have been incredibly affordable off world.

Cthonia made her living shipping just those sorts of materials. She'd technically been alive for 278 years, though she'd only spent 24 of those out of cryo-sleep. It was possible to launch an unmanned ship at a planet and hope that it made it there okay, but a lot could go wrong on a spaceship over decades, so Cthonia opted to travel with her cargo, frozen in a plastic pod. She only woke up if she was needed. Occasionally there would be a minor mechanical error that she'd need to correct or a batch of spoiled cargo would have to be jettisoned, but on her last two flights she'd slept through her entire trip and woke up on a new planet with a stockpile of exotic merchandise to sell at a hefty mark up.

The fun part was watching the galaxy move on without her while she slept. When she'd gone to sleep sixty years ago the planet of Caseous Minor had been a backwoods colony world with a tiny population. Now, stepping off of her bulky freighter she found herself surrounded by people and skyscrapers. Most of the people seemed to be wearing long, silk ribbons that wrapped around themselves and left little to the imagination. Cthonia's clothes were simpler than that.

Why bother trying to keep up with trends when they'd be out of style by your next stop? Cthonia's wardrobe was almost exclusively made of composite materials. It was cheap, it was comfortable, and most importantly, it kept well. No one wanted to exit their sleeping pod with a ship full of cargo only to realize that all of their clothes had rotted away. Besides, Cthonia could worry about being fashionable when she was filthy rich.

In the new space age, most people worked hard for pennies until they were too old or too broken to work anymore. Cthonia had no intention of living like that. Her goals amounted to two things: A private beach and zero responsibility. This shipment was finally going to earn her enough money to make that dream a reality.

When traveling through space, your ticket price was determined by weight, and over time artificial selection meant people tended slimmer and shorter. Cthonia was an Amazon in comparison to the colonists surrounding her. She'd been lanky growing up, finding her above-average height and relative lack of curves to be a bit awkward. Now she stood a head above most men and her modest C-cups far surpassed those of the women she passed on the street. She smirked and supposed that there were some benefits to being so far behind.

She finally found a customs checkpoint and approached the counter. The man behind it was short, even by colonist standards and round-faced with the same copper toned skin and dark hair common to most humans these days. He glanced up at her, with his dark eyes, a look of mild annoyance on his face. Cthonia couldn't be sure if it was prejudice on his part or just that the man hated his job.

"Speak Basic?" He asked. His voice was deep and gruff despite his frame.

"Assuming it hasn't changed much in the last sixty years." Cthonia replied, hands on her hips. One red eyebrow cocked over a sky blue eye, and a wide smile on her face to expose the gap between her otherwise perfect teeth.

"Shouldn't be an issue." He slid a clip-board across his desk toward her. "What did you bring?"

"About seven hundred Kilotons of Beryllium." she said, initialing in a few places and providing her ship's designation number.

"Oh! People will be excited to hear about that." He perked up a bit as he took the clipboard back from her "We can offer you 40 credits per unit."

Cthonia blinked. "40 per unit? What, did someone find Beryllium on this hunk of rock while I was en route?"

The customs officer shrugged. "A Beryllium asteroid hit one of our moons about fifteen years back. It's still not the most plentiful resource, but It's not impossible to come by if you're a motivated buyer."

"You have to be able to do better than forty. I bought this load at 25 per unit. Between fuel costs and maintenance I'll be losing money."

"You're welcome to apply for the proper permits and try to sell it on the street." He held out a pad to her and she reluctantly pressed her thumb against it, transferring ownership of the beryllium and adding the credits to her account. The asteroid was bad luck, but there was nothing she could do about it now except cut her losses and find another shipment. She looked around at the buildings surrounding the spaceport.

“Is there anything fun around here to pass the time while they unload the metal?” She asked, glancing back down at the customs officer.

“Most people come here for the Huff dens.” He didn’t bother looking up from his paperwork.

“Huff Dens?” She cocked an eyebrow.

He did look up at that. “Xelirium extract: Street name Huff. Gets you high like nothing else without all those pesky side effects from most drugs. It’s 100% natural, 100% safe and 100% unique to this rock.”

She perked up at that. “So it’s not available off planet?”

“No, but don’t get any ideas. Xelirium is non toxic but that doesn’t mean it’s safe for transport. High concentrations of Xelirium in its solid state are incredibly unstable. Anyone who would try to ship the stuff, sub-light or otherwise, would have to have a death wish.”

Six standard hours later, Cthonia was doing her pre-launch check with a cargo of over six hundred Kilotons of solid-state Xelirium. The customs officer hadn’t been kidding. Huff was some seriously volatile stuff. Not only was it explosive, but also prone to sublimation and rapid expansion under the incorrect heat conditions. It was a dangerous mission, but Cthonia trusted her gut, and she trusted her ship.

Her vessel was appropriately called The Centipede, and one only had to look at it to understand why. Aside from the propulsion section in the back and the cabin in the front, the ship was simply a long narrow tube with four dozen boxy compartments lining either side jutting out into space. All but two of these compartments were packed to the brim with Huff. The remaining two, the ones nearest to the front, were for Cthonia. One was full of medicinal gel: a sort of wonder drug to help Cthonia’s frozen body stay healthy in cryo-sleep. The other was full of a basic nutrient paste.

Between the two capsules Cthonia had everything she could possibly need for her sixty year sleep. She climbed into the cockpit, a stark white room, a bit smaller than a standard habitation unit and began a diagnostic.

“Good morning Cthonia!” The computer’s voice said, brightly. “Any important info about this new cargo I should know before takeoff?”

“Only that it’s extremely volatile. I’m going to remain awake for the launch sequence just in case you need me.”

“10/4 good buddy!” The computer chirped. “I’ll begin rising with gravity dampeners on. It’s a bit more fuel intensive, but it’ll give us a smoother ascent.” A dull hum rippled throughout

the cabin, and Cthonia sat down in the pilot's chair, gripping the armrests in anticipation. There were no windows. The computer did all of the flying. The only amenities were her tools to assist her with maintenance and her cryo-pod to ensure that she wasn't geriatric by the time her cargo arrived. Right now, all she could do was wait and hope nothing went wrong. A display told her their elevation and showed tension levels for each of the cargo containers. A few times they came close to their tolerances and Cthonia instructed the computer to compensate.

After a tense few minutes, they finally cleared the atmosphere and Cthonia allowed herself to relax. She let go of the armrests and noticed the indents that her fingernails had left in the foam.

"Anything else I can do for you Cthonia?" The computer asked as Cthonia stripped out of her clothes and folded them neatly on the floor of her pod.

"Nothing until we get to the Bollea Space-port . The hard part's over." She stepped into her pod and lay back against the soft padded interior as a glass dome closed over her. "See you in sixty years. Next stop, private beach."

Part 2

Cthonia awoke to the sound of sirens blaring and warning lights flashing through the frosted glass of the cryo-pod. Its canopy slid open and Cthonia ducked out before it was fully clear in her rush to check the monitors.

"Computer, give me an update." She yelled as she tried to pull up mission data. According to the readout she'd only been in cryosleep for eight years. They'd barely traveled ten percent of the total distance.

"We have sublimation in Canisters A-2, B-3, and A-6."

"How much damage?" She asked, retrieving her tool belt and clasp it around her naked waist.

"All three canisters have been significantly warped due to pressure as the Solid state Xelirium turns into a gas. Superficial damage to neighboring canister, but no chain reaction. Estimating four minutes until canister A-6 ruptures."

"Shit." She slammed her fist against a button at the back of the cabin and a round porthole opened, a little less than three feet in diameter. The Centipede's spinal column was built with durability as a priority and comfort as an afterthought. It was cramped and lacked the

artificial gravity of the pilot's cabin. Each canister had four heavy bolts securing it as well as a large wheel valve, which could be loosened to manually jettison a defective container.

She pulled herself through the tube, using the protruding bolts as hand-holds. She was thankful that the damaged canisters were so near to the front and she reached A-6 quickly, pulling out her ratcheting wrench and Loosening the four bolts with practiced precision.

"A-6 will reach critical pressure in T-minus two minutes" The computer called out, it's voice uniformly cheerful. "Canisters B-3 and A-2 will reach critical pressure in T-minus three minutes." Cthonia finished with the bolts and grabbed the valve, giving it a full rotation until she felt the mechanism holding the canister come loose.

"Computer," She called out, already pulling herself back toward the front of the ship. "Jettison canister A-6" There was a hissing sound behind her as a small amount of fuel was used to propel the damaged canister away from the ship and safely out into space. She passed Canister B-3, electing to service A-2 first, since it was so close to the canister containing her food. Assuming B-3 exploding didn't cause a hull breach it was likely to only damage the neighboring canisters. As much as she bemoaned losing even more of her shipment it was a preferable alternative to starving inside her cryo pod.

She Reached A-2, loosened the bolts, and spun the valve in record time. Once she had finished, she kicked off the wall in front of her back toward B-3.

"Computer, Jettison canister A-2" There was another hiss, like air being sucked out of a sealed container followed by a loud metallic crunch. "Computer?" Cthonia called out. Already finishing the third bolt for B-3.

"Canister A-2 has significantly warped due to pressure and is trapped between canisters A-1 and A-3. T-minus one minute to breach."

She growled and turned around. Canister A-3 was directly behind her, and she loosened the bolts with one hand while turning the valve with the other. She finished in less than thirty seconds and turned back around to loosen the valve behind her even as she began to issue more orders.

"Computer, Jettison canisters A-2, A-3 and B-3 now!" She pulled her hands away from the valve and struck at the final bolt for B-3 with her wrench, Shearing it off just as three hisses sounded off in quick succession. It was as if the ship were lined with tea kettles. The canisters were shot into space, and after several moments of silence Cthonia allowed herself to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Computer, status report?" She called out.

“No immediate danger, but we do have a problem,” the computer said. It’s perpetually optimistic tone making the statement sound sarcastic. “Canister A-2 Damaged Canister A-1 during jettison. We are leaking nutrient paste at a rate of one liter per hour. I would recommend transferring the contents of canister A-1 to a different container immediately.”

Cthonia struck the wall with her wrench. All of the containers were full of Huff, and she’d already lost four canisters. She wasn’t eager to empty another and let her proffits float off into space.

“Can we distribute the contents of one of the Xelirium canisters across the others?” Cthonia asked.

The computer paused before answering. “That action is not advised. All canisters are already at recommended capacity for solid-state Xelirium. Exceeding maximum thresholds would significantly increase the likelihood of catastrophic failure.”

Cthonia huffed, pushing a floating lock of curly red hair out of her face. “Okay, what about the Medi-gel? We haven’t refilled that in a bit. Is there room in Canister B-1?”

Another pause. “The nutrient paste could be diverted to canister B-1 with the medicinal-gel, however both substances would likely combine, possibly reducing the Gel’s effectiveness.”

“Would it be dangerous?”

“Both substances are non-toxic and non-volatile. Combining the two would pose no health risk.”

“Then do that. I need to get back to bed.” She dropped her wrench back into her belt and reached for a bolt to pull herself toward the cabin. She noticed a twinge of pain in her wrist as she did and she pulled it away from the wall to examine it. Her hand was red and puffy up to her thumb and her wrist looked inflamed. She’d likely hurt it when she’d used the wrench to shear off the last bolt. “Computer.” She called out again. “Could you run a quick bioscan?”

A third pause. “Captain Cthonia Grace Hopper, Approximate relative age: 24 standard years. Height: 172 centimeters, Weight: 63 kilograms. Blood pressure: Slightly elevated. Injuries: Dislocated left wrist, Minor abrasion on right thigh. Recommended treatment: Return to cryopod for the administration of Medicinal-gel.”

She looked down at her leg, only just noticing the long red scrape on her thigh. In her haste to get to the canisters she’d likely scraped it against one of the protruding bolts. It was no trouble. Even if the medi-gel wasn’t as effective, none of it was life threatening and she could just have her injuries treated at the next planet. She pulled herself to the cockpit being sure to use her right arm.

“Do we know why the Xelirium began to sublime?” Cthonia asked as she pulled herself out from the tube and unlatched her toolbelt.

“We hit a distortion wave as we passed through a hyperspace lane along our route. The Delirium reacted unexpectedly to the distortion. Fortunately, I was able to adjust course before the majority of the cargo could be affected.”

“Good work. Let’s plot a new course to avoid any more hyperspace routes in the future.”

“That poses a problem, captain.” The computer responded without pause as if it had anticipated this suggestion. “There is no direct route which does not pass through any hyperspace lanes without multiple course corrections. The shortest route possible would add an additional 24 years to our journey.”

Cthonia whistled. “Well do what you have to. With the proffit we stand to make we can afford the extra years of travel.” She opened up her pod and lied back. “Besides. It’s not like an asteroid made of Xelirium is going to crash into their moon.”

Part 3

Cthonia woke again, this time no alarms sounded and there didn’t seem to be any urgency. Her wrist no longer ached and she felt rested, but other than that there wasn’t any indication that time had passed. She begrudgingly sat up as the canopy opened, rubbing at her eyes.

“I’m going to be really annoyed if we haven’t arrived yet.”

“No such luck, captain. We’ve encountered a minor mechanical issue that requires your attention.”

“Of course.” Cthonia groaned as she stepped gracelessly from the pod. One of her least favorite parts about spending so much time in cryo-sleep was how every waking moment was spent in crisis. The body rested, but it was tough to go so long without any down time. The only real relaxation she’d had while awake was during her brief stops at space-ports between shipments.

“Eyes on the prize girl. Eyes on the prize.” She plopped down into the pilot’s chair. The seat felt different on her naked behind. She felt like she sunk deeper into it but sat slightly higher than usual. Her eyes fluttered open lazily. She looked down at her body sprawled lazily in the chair and blinked a few times. It took her a moment to register what she was seeing.

She screamed and jumped up from the chair. "Computer! What the fuck?"

"Something I can help you with, good buddy?"

"Run a bioscan!"

"Are you sure you don't want to look into those mechanical--"

"Now, computer!"

The computer paused for longer than normal as Cthonia stood there, breathing heavily, looking down at herself in abject horror. After what felt like an eternity the computer finally chimed back in.

"Captain Cthonia Grace Hopper, Approximate relative age: 24 standard years. Height: 172 centimeters, Weight: 97 kilograms. Blood pressure: Slightly elevated."

The words hung in the air: 97 kilograms. Cthonia had gained over 30 kilos since she last entered the pod. She turned trying to take in as much of herself as possible and wishing that the centipede had a mirror onboard. She cupped her hands beneath her breasts and supported them, immediately feeling a relief on her back which she'd previously been unaware of needing.

"How long was I in the pod?" She asked, leaning sideways to get a better view of her wider hips."

"It's been 16 years since you entered Cryo-sleep."

"And Why am I so..." The words caught in her throat and she blushed. "...so voluptuous?" She cringed at the word. Voluptuous? There were certainly more accurate words. Cthonia just didn't want to say them.

"Retrieving Cryo-pod monitoring data." The computer chirped, and its monitor flickered to life. Cthonia sat down in the chair to watch, doing her best to ignore the way her body jiggled. Her tits being a bit bigger was something she could live with. It was her belly she was concerned about.

The video on the monitor showed Cthonia, removing her tool belt from around her slim hips and putting it away, then laying back in her Cryo-pod. As soon as the glass canopy closed, Cthonia's body went unnaturally still. A graphic at the bottom showed the date and slowly the numbers began to climb. It was imperceptible at first, but as the footage sped up it was clear that Cthonia was breathing, her chest rose and fell over weeks and months. Her swollen wrist discolored as the bruise set in before healing completely.

Then it happened, it was like watching a balloon fill with air or, in this case, pudding. Her hips were the most obvious reference point as they slowly moved outward. Fat filled in from her middle outward, making her belly pooch out and her thighs swell where they met her legs, tapering down to the knees until her entire leg grew thicker. Similarly, her stomach started flat, but began to push out from her, expanding rounder and fuller day by day. Her navel remained in the same position, and her belly never grew too heavy to begin sagging over her mons pubis, but it stood out proud and round. The type of tummy that couldn't be hidden, even with the fluffiest of sweaters.

The fat expanded upward. Filling out her modest, slightly pointed breasts. They became rounder like ripening fruits, and once they'd reached optimum fullness they began to sag, her nipples drifting lower as her chest became fuller and fuller. Some fat softened her arms, and her cheeks, though she wouldn't have been able to tell without the time lapse. The expansion stopped just as the fat seemed to reach every part of her and the screen froze. Cthonia realized with some horror that she was looking at a current picture of herself. A representation of her body as it was immediately before she exited the pod.

"How did this..." She trailed off, but the computer seemed to catch her meaning.

"When you combined the stores of food and medi-gel, I warned that it might make the medi-gel less effective, however, the opposite appears to be true."

"The medi-gel is... more effective?"

"No, but it did compromise the integrity of your nutrient paste. Before you enter Cryosleep the nutrient paste is specially formulated to deliver exactly the amount of calories and nutrients that your body needs during its sleep. Mixing with the med-gel threw off that balance. In essence, the ratio of calories to nutrients is heavily weighted toward calories."

"So..." Cthonia started. "In order to keep me healthy, the ship overfed me? Can't it just feed me less?"

"I'd advise against it. It could result in you getting scorbutus disorder, also known as scurvy."

Cthonia did some quick math in her head and leaped up from her chair "So I'm going to gain over 150 kilos by the time this trip is over?" Her stomach did a flip, which was even more disconcerting with so much more stomach.

"Not necessarily. For a time, it was necessary to increase your medi-gel intake in order to heal your wrist. Under normal circumstances You would be gaining Just over a Kilogram a year which, on our current course, would bring your final weight to 170 kilograms, having gained a total of 106 kilograms in fat."

Cthonia's eyes widened, and she dropped back into the chair, her body quaking like a beaker of medi-gel. She placed her palms on her belly to stop it jiggling and stared back at the image of herself on the screen trying to imagine herself growing even larger.

"Captain, if I may. The mechanical malfunctions..."

"Of course!" Cthonia sat up. "What's wrong?"

"We're having some issues with our environmental controls, and I think it might be tied to the fuel system." A schematic of the ship appeared on screen showing a flashing icon in the rear near the thrusters. Cthonia nodded, retrieving her tool belt and loosening it so that it fit around her waist. She'd over compensated, and it hung loosely below her belly, but her hips were far too wide for it to fall to the ground.

She climbed into the ship's spine, careful not to let her wider hips rub on the sides. She just had to slide back there, fix whatever was wrong with the fuel system, and then get back to her cabin. There would be time to consider the ramifications of her ballooning waistline later.

She focused on her breathing as she slowly made her way to the back of the ship. It was a bit like swimming. Hand over hand, pulling herself along with long sweeps of her arms. It was almost therapeutic. She let herself relax into the practiced motions like a form of moving meditation.

That was when her belt snagged on a stray bolt and swung her face first into the bulkhead. She let out a quiet grunt as she moved back, squinting her eyes shut and placing both hands over her face.

"Shit shit shit." She whispered, her voice sounding nasally and wrong in her own ears. "Computer." She gurgled. "Bioscan."

"Captain Cthonia Grace Hopper, Approximate relative age: 24 standard years. Height: 172 centimeters, Weight: 97 kilograms. Blood pressure: Slightly elevated. Scans indicate a fracture of the nasal bone and acute epistaxis. Immediate medi-gel treatment is recommended."

Cthonia blinked, letting her eyes refocus. There were globs of dark blood floating around her and her hands were stained red. She pulled her hands away, and more blood flowed from her face into the open air.

"That's a lot of blood." She whispered.

"Not to worry, buddy. I'll run a full bio-sweep once you're back in your cryo-pod."

"I'm not going to pass out or anything am I?"

“You are in no imminent danger from blood loss, however, I should note that repairing this injury will require a further treatment with medi-gel adding another 12 kilograms to your final weight.”

“Fantastic.” She swung her fist into the bulkhead in frustration and immediately regretted it. She winced in pain and shook her hand, spraying droplets of blood across the bulkhead.

“15 kilos, counting the abrasions on your knuckles.”

“Will I gain extra weight for harsh language?”

“I don’t believe so--” The computer was cut off by a string of profanity of significant volume and duration. After several solid minutes of screaming Cthonia calmed down, breathing heavily.

“16 kilos, counting minor larynx irritation.”

Cthonia scowled at the nearest speaker, She tightened her belt and continued toward the engine, more careful to avoid the exposed bolts. She left bloody handprints as she pulled herself along, and had to be careful that her grip didn’t slip, but finally made it to the engine and began running a diagnostic.

“It looks like it’s taking more fuel than expected to keep the temperature consistent in the canisters. Don’t tell me that the huff is giving off heat.”

“That is one possibility. My data banks don’t indicate that Xelirium has a recorded half-life, but it was discovered less than a decade before your arrival on Cassius. You’re likely the first person to attempt to store it in a solid state for this duration.”

“I’ll adjust the fuel system to compensate.” She punched in the commands to the control console, grimacing at the bloody fingerprints she left on the screen. “Will diverting fuel slow us down at all?”

“We are currently running on a fuel surplus due to no longer carrying the weight of the four canisters we jettisoned sixteen years ago.”

“Ugh, you don’t have to remind me.” Cthonia began the long crawl back to her cabin.

“The loss of product is unfortunate, but I thought that you would welcome it considering the effect that prolonging our journey could have on your figure.”

Cthonia didn’t respond. Every canister represented a small fortune, and credits could pay for a lot of cosmetic surgery. She wasn’t thrilled about her increased size, but there was nothing like a broken nose to put the fragility of the human body into perspective.

She reached the cabin, and as soon as her feet were on solid ground she lost her enlightened perspective. In zero-g it was easy to ignore the extra weight and effort that came with being significantly fatter. Thirty kilos was not an insignificant amount to carry around, and she hated it immediately. She sat down in her chair, retrieving a medical kit from under the console.

“Computer, let’s not get blindsided again. Contact Casus Minor. I want to learn as much about Xelirium as I can before I go back to sleep.”

Inside the medpack was a tube of pure medi-gel, as well as some more basic supplies. She squeezed the tube out on her broken nose and winced as the bone snapped back into place. There was a familiar tickling as her skin knitted itself back together. She rubbed the rest on her knuckles and even licked a bit of it off of her fist, remember her screaming fit earlier.

“Captain,” The computer piped in. “There is no response from Casus Minor.”

“As in they’re not picking up?” She tossed the empty tube back into the medpack and turned to the monitor.

“As in there is no Casus Minor, or at least no signals that I can detect.”

“Patch us through to our destination planet then.” She pulled on a T-shirt that hugged snugly around her new curves just as the monitor flashed to life. A man with dark, curly hair in an olive green jumpsuit appeared on the screen reading from a datapad as he greeted her.

“This is the Bollea space port, to whom am I-- Jesus fuck!”

Cthonia blinked. Her first thought was that he’d noticed her weight, but pudgy colonists weren’t that uncommon. Finally she remembered that her face was still covered in blood.

“Sorry, sorry!” She pulled up the collar of her shirt and did her best to wipe her face without a mirror. “This is Captain Cthonia Grace Hopper of the sub-light freighter Centipede. I’ve been trying to hail Casus Minor and I’m not getting a response. Did something happen while I was asleep?”

“Uh... yeah. A lot actually. Was Casus your point of origin? That’d put you about fifteen years out.”

“Try twenty four.” Cthonia corrected, planting her chin on her fist. “We’ve been having to take an unusual route due to the volatile nature of our cargo.”

He perked up at that. “What kind of cargo?”

“Ever heard of Huff?”

“You have Xelirium on board?” He nearly dropped his datapad. “You’ve been transporting Xelirium through deep-space for the last twenty four years?”

“Yeah, and it hasn’t been a cakewalk either.” She tried to hide her satisfaction. She was going to be loaded once this stuff hit the market.

“Do you have any idea what you’re transporting?”

“It’s a drug isn’t it?”

“It’s a fuel source. Casus was bombed into oblivion during the civil war before they could find a way to manufacture it. The Xelirium on your ship may be the last of it in the entire galaxy.” Cthonia, always proud of her poker-face, felt her eyes widen involuntarily. “Hang on, let me get a fix on your coordinates.”

“Computer, end transmission.” She yelled, voice cracking and the screen shut off.

“Is there a problem, captain?” The computer chimed in.

“Didn’t you hear? ‘The last in the galaxy.’” She jumped up from her seat, bouncing on her toes and punching the air in excitement, all bobbing auburn curls and jiggling rolls.

“Why did you hang up on the gentleman from the space port?”

“Well, that’s what you do when someone’s trying to steal your haul.” She pulled off the bloody top and tossed it into the corner. “Trust me. When you’re carrying something this valuable, you don’t need that kind of attention.”

She fell back into her cryo-pod, trying to ignore the way her bigger body bounced. She could worry about being fat once she was rich beyond her wildest dreams. Once she was safe inside, a membrane of blue energy began to pass through the ship. The bio-sweep covered every exposed surface, burning away any blood or biological-matter that Cthonia had left behind. She watched through the glass dome as the blue light passed over her crumpled, bloody top. Bits of orange light cracked over the surface, leaving the garment clean in its wake.

“They did say that there was a war a few years back, right?” Cthonia asked as she punched in a few final adjustments to her cryo-pod. “That’s the kind of thing that can disrupt hyperspace routes. Make sure to run a scan every few years so we don’t bump into any.”

“Understood captain. Have a pleasant sleep.”

There was a gentle hiss as the cryo-pod came online. With any luck she wouldn't be woken up again for another sixty years.

Part 4

Cthonia awoke, not to sirens or explosions, but to silence. Her pod was dark; the kind of true darkness that you can only experience in a spaceship. She placed her hands on the glass of her pod and listened. Finally she could make out the ever-present hum of the engines and the metallic creaks of her long, jointed ship shifting.

"Computer?" She asked. No response. She waited a moment, until the sound of her own breathing began to grate on her nerves, and she reached for the manual release to her pod. The door hissed open. The fact that her cabin wasn't immediately bathed in emergency lights was a bad sign. Still, she could breathe, the ship was moving, and she wasn't floating in the air. Those were all good signs, and Cthonia had spent the past two-hundred years aboard this ship. She should have no trouble navigating it in the dark.

She stepped out from her pod and immediately lost her balance

She'd been so concerned about the ship she'd forgotten about her own progressive growth. Cthonia righted herself, intensely aware of how much her backside and belly jiggled and placed her hands on her stomach. They met flesh far sooner than she'd hoped she would.

Okay, so she was getting pretty fat at this point. That meant that a decent amount of time had passed. She'd worry about that once she got the power back on. She managed to find her tool belt after tripping over her crumpled top and lit a hand-torch

The light was dim and directional, but enough for her to find the system panel under one of the monitors. Once she'd removed that, the problem became obvious. The electrical systems had been knocked offline by some kind of electro-magnetic interference. She frowned. Electro-magnetic radiation was more common in space than melanoma in a binary star system, but it should have been the type of thing that the Centipede was hardened against. Still, it was an easy enough fix.

A few flipped switches, and the computer was back online. The cabin filled with an even white light and Cthonia got her first good look at herself and let out an involuntary cry that sounded pathetic in her own ears. She'd known she'd be bigger, she'd even tried to imagine herself heavier, but the reality of it was difficult to reconcile.

"Captain, you're awake!" The computer chimed, apparently pleased to be back online

“Computer, bioscan.” She croaked as she lifted her round heavy breasts to get a better look at her belly.

“You’ve been asleep for thirty-seven years and have gained thirty-nine kilograms over that period, putting your total weight at 136 kilograms.” Cthonia sucked in a tiny gasp that seemed to make her belly expand even more. She lifted her leg to try to get a good look at her toes but was far too heavy to maintain that position. Her new center of mass required that she keep both feet on the ground.

She was starting to show the tell tale signs of a person who’d passed puppy-fat and moved into long-term obesity. Her belly was starting to hang, and her ripened breasts now hung to either side of it. Her biceps had become pillowy, and her hands were pudgy. Each of her knuckles had been placed with tiny divots in the back of her hand. These didn’t feel like the hands of an engineer. What kind of person would let themselves go like this?

The computer continued. “I hate to interrupt, but there’s some pertinent information that you might want to know.”

“Right, what’s the situation?” Cthonia looked up from her hands. The possibility of trouble pushing aside her concerns about her figure.

“We appear to have visitors. I’m reading life-signs indicating that we have three additional passengers currently in the spine.”

Cthonia spun to face the circular bulkhead door. “How did they get on board?”

“Unclear. There is another spacecraft matching course, directly in front of us, but no breach in our hull. How should we proceed?”

Cthonia didn’t answer. She was already pulling on her top, which was not laughably small. It barely covered her breasts and tit-fat bubbled from the arm holes as she tried to tug it down over her belly. Someone was on board her ship. She didn’t care how they got there or what they were doing. She’d already sacrificed too much for this shipment. She had no intention of letting some stow away further jeopardize things.

She gave up on the top and grabbed her shorts attempting to pull those on. They barely made it past her knees. She growled and balled them into her fist. Fine. If the trespassers hadn’t wanted to see her bottomless then they shouldn’t have trespassed.

She punched the button by the porthole to the spine with the side of her fist. The aperture slid open. All the way at the back of the ship, she could make out three men in dark coveralls examining one of the canisters. There was no sign of forced entry and, more surprisingly, the men didn’t appear to be floating.

“Hey!” She yelled, Pulling herself through the porthole and ignoring how her hips scraped against the sides. Her foot made contact with the deck indicating that there was indeed gravity in the long corridor. “What the hell are you doing aboard my ship?” The men turned. They were all shorter than her and slim with dark hair and narrow eyes. Two of them raised weapons but the third lifted a hand to stop them.

“My my! If it isn’t Captain Hopper herself. More of her than I expected.” He smiled showing perfectly uniform teeth.

“Get a look at her, boss” said one of the other men. “They sure don’t make ‘em like that anymore.”

“I’m not sure they ever did.” Said the other goon, whistling.

Cthonia’s jaw tightened and her fist clenched harder around the balled up shorts. “You have me at a disadvantage.”

“Yes, three to one.” The boss said. “That was intentional. We’re treasure hunters. Sometimes, hunting for treasure can be dangerous. Did you know that this ship is the last known source of Xelirium in the galaxy? Most people think that you exploded decades ago in the vacuum of space.”

“Well, obviously I’m still here. So, why don’t you piss off back to your ship and let me finish my delivery?”

“She doesn’t seem to be getting the point.” He snapped his fingers and one of the goons raised their gun and fired a concentrated beam of blue light directly at her chest. She barely had time to register what had happened before crumpling to the deck. Blood poured from the golf ball sized hole just above her right breast and pooled onto the floor.

“Christ, Kevin!” the boss yelled. “Do you know how unstable this stuff is?” He grabbed the gun from the man and punched him in the shoulder. “Whatever, let’s just get a teleporter on each of these canisters so that we can get out of here.”

Cthonia regained consciousness with a sharp intake of breath. She’d only been passed out a few moments but the amount of blood on the floor seemed like a bad sign. She pulled the crumpled shorts to her chest and began stemming the flow of blood. The men looked to be busy at the other end of the ship. Slowly and carefully she began crawling toward the hatch.

“Hey hey!” The lead pirate yelled. “Kevin, get her.” The goon raised his gun again and the boss stopped him. “I said get her, not shoot her, get her.” Cthonia reached the port-hole and slammed it shut as the goon came sprinting towards her.

“Computer.” She croaked as she pulled herself toward the cryopod. “Begin a biosweep.”

“Right away, good buddy!” The lid to her Cryo-pod closed as she rugged her fattened, injured body inside.

“Patch me up, but keep me awake. I’m not letting them take the Xelirium.”

“Captain, the damage done to your lungs and ribcage is catastrophic. The amount necessary to full repair the damage might render you immobile.”

“Just do your best to keep me alive while still small enough to get through the hatch.”

The familiar blue light filled the cockpit and moved backwards toward the spine of the ship. She heard a male scream, then some frantic shouting, then nothing.

“Did we get them?” She asked, fading fast.

“Unknown. Their vital signs disappeared before the bio-sweep could be completed.”

The pod began emergency medical procedures. Tubes burst through the walls around her and plugged into her arms, her back and her chest. She felt a cooling calming sensation fill her as the medi-gel went to work repairing her body even as it pumped thousands of calories into her.

Her belly, already far too fat, began to swell, wobbling lower and lower by the second. She watched as her breasts grew fuller and sagged down her chest, even as the wound above them began to close. Her already pudgy fingers grew thicker as even her hands swelled with fat and she could feel her backside swell wider as her thighs became thicker than the width of her torso at the start of her journey. She forced herself to bear it. She’d have her beach, even if she ended up looking like a whale.

“Captain,” The computer cut in. “incoming message.”

“You’re going to pay for doing that to Kevin.” The pirate boss’s voice cut in over the intercom. “I’ll admit, I’m impressed. You defended your ship with no hyperdrive and no weapons, but I’ve got a century’s worth of technology you’ve never even seen. You and all that Xelirium are mine.” The entire ship lurched as something seemed to stop them in their tracks.

“Captain. We seem to be caught in some sort of tractor beam. They’re pulling us in.”

Cthonia wasn’t fully healed, but she was already nearing a point where she wasn’t sure she’d be able to access the spine. She pulled the emergency release and stumbled out of her pod wobbling and jiggling as she fought to maintain her balance. The sheer weight of her body was nearly more than she could handle.

“Full reverse.” Cthonia barked as she dragged herself toward her tool belt. Each step feeling like a marathon as her wounded chest throbbed.

“Oh, don’t be like that.” The pirate's voice cut in again. There’s brave and then there’s pathetic. Struggle all you want. You’ll run out of fuel eventually, and then you’re at my mercy.”

“Computer,” Cthonia grunted as she forced herself to her feet. “Begin turning us around.”

The computer paused for a moment to run the numbers. “Even turned away from the pirates’ we don’t have enough thrust to break free.”

“Just do it!” She tried to fasten her tool belt around her hips but found that she was far too wide and instead slung it over her shoulder. “Counter clockwise turn. I want our ships to remain on the same plane and keep me apprised of your progress.”

She hit the button on the wall and opened up the bulkhead door to the spine. It was quite a squeeze. Her top half could fit through just fine, but her hips got stuck and it took quite a bit of wiggling and jiggling to force herself through.

Inside the spine of the Centipede the only evidence that the pirates had ever been there was a crumpled pile of clothes by the port hole and a singed starburst pattern on the wall where the beam weapon had passed through Cthonia. Whatever had created the artificial gravity was gone now, and that suited Cthonia just fine.

Her weight was basically a non-issue now, but her bulk was still a problem in the confined space. She forced herself through the passage. Ignoring where her hips caught on the exposed bolts. She bit her lip as she pulled herself along. She only needed to reach one of the canisters. She stopped next to canister B-2 and began loosening the bolt.

“We’re at seventy degrees.” The computer chirped. “The tractor beam is resisting our attempts at maneuvering and we’re down to Sixty percent of our fuel.” Cthonia removed the bolt. She was sweating and her chest felt tight where the pirate had shot her. She’d done this dozens of times before but now it was taking all of her energy just to move her heavy arms. The bolt came away and she moved on to the next canister.

“You can’t escape.” The pirate's voice echoed down the spine of the ship. “Stop fighting and come aboard. Maybe we can even negotiate a share of the profits.”

“We’re at ninety degrees” the computer called out. “Fuel is at forty percent.” Cthonia’s lips lifted in a tight smile as she reached canister B-4. She swung her wrench, shearing off the bolt. The pirate’s ship was on the centipedes broadside. Modern space-ships had all sorts of weapons and gadgets, but ship to ship combat was centuries old.

“Computer.” Cthonia called out. “Jettison canisters B-2 and B-4.” There was a hiss as the canisters were shot out into space directly toward the would-be treasure hunters. Immediately the Xelirium began to sublime. As the canisters were pulled into the tractor beam. They exploded just as they reached the ship.

As the pirate ship exploded, the Centipede was finally released, and its powerful thrusters were free to push it out of range of the debris. Cthonia held onto the bulkhead as the ship shook and shuddered as it surfed along the shockwave of Xelirium gas. Slowly, everything calmed and Cthonia was left jiggling and gasping in zero-gravity

“Computer. I need an update.”

“The enemy ship has been destroyed. Pressure within the remaining canisters returning to safe levels. Fuel reserves are at thirty-eight percent.”

Cthonia sighed as she pulled her huge body back toward the cabin. Getting through the porthole had been relatively easy when she was fighting for her life and full of adrenaline, but it took her nearly twenty minutes to squeeze all of her flab back into the front of the ship.

“With our current fuel levels it will take nearly 78 years to reach our destination.”

“Let’s take our time.” Cthonia said, as she settled back into her pod. “We can’t afford another emergency considering that I can’t fit through the door anymore.” She let the door slide closed. “When I wake up next I plan on having my beach.” She let the lights go dark, closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

Part 5

Cthonia’s eyes fluttered open and she found herself surrounded by a number of diminutive people in brightly colored clothing. They chirped and clicked as she regained consciousness and one waved some kind of device over her face.

“Where am I?” She asked, still feeling groggy and confused.

The multi-colored little people chirped and squeaked before one of them stepped forward to address her.

“You arrived at our... Space dock... forty three hours ago.” She spoke without confidence and with a heavy accent, but Cthonia had no trouble understanding her. “The name has changed since the... great war... but you knew our sun as ‘Bollea’”.

“The Bollea system!” Cthonia said. “I actually made it.” She tried to sit up, but something was pinning her down.

“Try to rest. You were asleep for... much too long.” The tiny woman placed a hand on her forehead.

“I’m fine. I don’t need to be restrained. I need to check on my cargo.”

“Restrained? What is restrained?”

Cthonia tilted her head upward only to be greeted by a pair of massive breasts which rolled onto either of her arms. They were huge, each easily as large as her pre-fattening body and nearly as heavy if the inability to move her arms was any indication.

She pulled her pillowy arms out from under the avalanche of tit flesh and balled her tubby hands into fists. The extra fat around her hands had the contradictory effect of making them look smaller. She wriggled her sausage fingers and used her pillow like arms to push herself up.

Her belly flopped forward, dragging the rest of her body into a sitting position. It spread out in front of her like an ocean of fat. It was nearly as big as her cryo-pod and just as round. She couldn’t see her legs or her feet, but she could feel them, and she wriggled them to make sure that they were still out in the open air and not buried under her flab.

“This is impossible.” She said, marveling at her new size.

“I am sorry... maybe your friend could explain better?”

“My friend?”

Another one of the colorful little people wheeled in a cart which was piled high with a familiar assortment of electronics.

“Computer!”

“10/4, good buddy.” The computer exclaimed. “I’ve been conversing with the locals since we arrived. Apparently we missed a lot while you were asleep. There was a big war, a lot of new technology, and now humanity lives in a post scarcity society! Isn’t that great?”

Cthonia’s smile faltered. “Post scarcity? As in--”

“As in the Xelirium that we’ve been transported is actually worthless now.” The computer was as upbeat and as chipper as ever. Cthonia wanted to scream. All of that work, the loss of her figure, all for nothing.

“I should let you know that our journey was delayed a bit.” The computer continued. “The technological renaissance that the rest of the galaxy experienced lead to a lot of new hyperspace routes, and we were forced to change course several times. I had to reroute most of your life support systems when you outgrew your cryopod.”

“How long was I out?” Cthonia asked, looking over her new blob-like body.

“In total our journey lasted one hundred and forty eight years, brining your total weight to 328 kilograms.” Cthonia nearly choked as she heard the number, but the computer kept talking. “In that time, much of human history was lost, in no small part, due to the war.”

“We are fascinated by you.” The woman cut in. “Your ship, your technology; even your anatomy is different than ours.”

““This young lady is named--” The computer made a series of clicks and whistles that Cthonia couldn’t decipher. “She’s something like an anthropologist. She’d like for us to stay here with her so that she can learn more about the past.”

“Look, I’m... flattered?” Cthonia offered, not sure how much the woman understood. “This is just a lot to take in. I don’t even know where someone like me fits into a ‘post scarcity society.’”

“Don’t answer until you’ve seen the... what is the word? The view.” The woman placed a hand against one wall and the building seemed to unfold. The wall and ceiling opened up until Cthonia could see that they were just on a rocky shoal next to a black sand beach one the edge of a glassy green ocean. The pink sun hung in the sky next to one of the planet’s moons. The air was cool and sweet, and it was everything Cthonia had imagined.

“Well, I suppose we can stay for a bit...” Cthonia conceded. “At least until I slim down.”