



The Gravity Ray Gambit

By Ai Austin



The hum of the new SX-MR2 modular space runabout was a low, steady thrum that filled the cockpit. Kemlo, his hands resting lightly on the controls, felt a surge of excitement. "Ready for the test flight, Krillie?" he asked, a grin on his face. "Komputer says all systems are green." Krillie, her eyes fixed on the holographic display from her K-Pad, nodded. "Ready, Kemlo. The new hyper-jump module is installed and stable. Let's see what it can do."



With a final check of the navigation charts, Kemlo engaged the thrusters. The runabout lifted smoothly from its docking bay on Belt K, a sleek silver dart against the backdrop of the Earth. They accelerated away from the massive, intricate structure of the space station, leaving its familiar domes and spires behind. This was a routine test, but the new module promised to change everything, offering a leap into a new era of space travel.



Kemlo gave the command, and Krillie activated the hyper-jump module. For a moment, everything was silent. Then, a violent shudder ran through the ship, followed by a series of jarring jolts. The screens flickered and died. A high-pitched alarm blared. "What's happening?" Kemlo shouted over the noise, wrestling with the unresponsive controls. Krillie's face was pale. "The module... it's destabilizing! We're being thrown off course!"



When the shaking finally stopped, an eerie silence fell. The runabout drifted in an unknown sector of space. Kemlo's eyes widened as he saw it on the main viewscreen: a derelict ship, ancient and covered in strange, crystalline growths, floating silently. "That's not on any star chart I've ever seen," he murmured. "And it's not a heritage site." Krillie leaned forward, her curiosity overriding her fear. "Look at the hull. The design is completely alien."



"We need to know what it is," Krillie said, her engineering mind already at work. "But we're not going in there." Kemlo agreed. "Teleoperated drones it is." He deployed a single, spherical drone from the runabout's cargo bay. On the main screen, they watched as the drone cautiously approached the derelict ship, its cameras broadcasting a live feed of the strange vessel.



As the drone neared the hull, a faint, garbled signal registered on Krillie's K-Pad. "It's a distress call," she announced, her fingers flying across the screen. "But it's so old and corrupted." Krillie engaged KaRA, her robotic assistant, to begin the complex process of decoding the ancient message. The screen filled with a chaotic jumble of waveforms and code, slowly, painstakingly, resolving into something coherent.



The message finally resolved into a single, terrifying line: "Gravity Ray Destabilizer... will activate... threatens Belt K." Kemlo's eyes widened in alarm. "A destabilizer? That could bring down our entire protective envelope!" He looked at Krillie, his face grim. "The ship's own Gravity Ray is failing. The device must be on a timer, set to go off as a last resort."



"We can't just leave it," Krillie said, her voice firm. "It's our home." Kemlo nodded, his pilot instincts kicking in. "We have to get it. Now." He took the controls and expertly maneuvered the runabout, bringing it in close to the derelict ship's hull. The ship's Gravity Ray field was visibly flickering, a sign that the device was nearing activation.



Krillie took control of the runabout's robotic arm. Her hands moved with practiced precision as she guided the claw towards the pulsating device. Sparks flew as the claw made contact. The device began to hum ominously, its light intensifying. "It's activating!" she yelled. With a final, desperate tug, she detached the device just as a wave of energy pulsed from the derelict ship.



With the destabilizer safely contained in the runabout's cargo bay, Kemlo managed to stabilize the hyper-jump module and plot a course home. They returned to Belt K to a hero's welcome, their accidental detour having saved their home. As they stood on the observation deck, watching the stars, Kemlo smiled at Krillie. "Looks like our test flight was a success after all," he said. Krillie laughed. "A new module, a new mystery. I wonder what we'll discover next."