

Even a cold station needs supply.

Organs. Arteries: matter, energy, access for repair. Data innervation. Atmosphere optional.

Bio-spaces need more, their complexity driving design. Max ran the corridors in a straight route to the Fab room. Suit-cam on a swivel, nerves on the edge. Easier trip when the place wasn't falling apart. She marked the calorie cost. Balanced it against intel value and found the lines through the walls and got out before anything could find her back.

In the art room, she took her last pictures, tested every detail. Said her goodbyes to the tent and the screen and the hack clamps. Weren't worth the weight.

Then carbon beckoned and she took to the ceiling.

*Temple was down.* Given everything so far, risk was unacceptable. Glove and boot mags took her up the tracks on the walls. Passed bulbous extrusions wrapped in fibrous skin. She checked their inputs, searched for feeds by sonar or passive radiation beneath the mess. Watched the portals as they opened and closed. Noted which could be traversed; made a mental list and bumped routes that required bridging down to 'last resort'.

The options bloomed a decision tree in four dimensions. Depth-first and iterative appealed, supply-line proximity would give her min-max parameters. Time and energy limited things. Only two days of food left, for a start.

Max took the first route based on incline alone. Slogged a hundred metres up and right, used the spike probe as a piton, arm stressed all the way. Made a grave resolution to fashion crampons from the next wall panel she could break. Do something about the non-existent friction.

The supply zones *should* be a consistent network. Little chance of an incomplete maze, not with the energy costs involved. Scant reassurance took her to the first changeover—still bio-friendly, no active power, dead corridors in the dark. The similarities were marked. Deep drops. Habitation layered in clusters on the walls, functions unknown. Wouldn't take a blind exploration on the slim odds of a hidden cache. No sense to spin the wheel.

Max let the suit-cam go wild, pulled as much from local-env as she could. Kept eyes and augs peeled for the return of a flicker on the heatmap. Return of a high-speed clue. Return of some silhouette she would catch this time. Ask questions both of them wouldn't like.

It never showed.

She left quickly. Mapped the options, had to double back twice. Strayed too far from the fab supply routes. Returned with a barely-controlled slide and a slight grin down the tunnels. Needed to burn stress. Needed to save energy more.

Each new path grew in her mind, dismal branches on a tight timer. Five later and the doubts started in full.

The hab-zones might not be connected. Took a while to sink in but the revelation dragged her heart down to simmer in her stomach. The maze question returned, dulling movement, until she juggled it and locked it back down. Nagging started up instead. Ideas stacked to unpleasant conclusions.

*The opening and closing doors. The regrowth of the walls. Hab-units without clear paths up or down.*

She couldn't be sure. Didn't have the time to check. Wouldn't stay too long to find out if floating heat in fog and a sudden particle beam might interrupt her survey. Interrupt flesh and bone and steel and leave a blast door dripping slag. But the lack of engine rooms laid atop the mismatched stack and deepened stress. Felt wrong. Cancerous. Proper routing not guaranteed. If it weren't for the faint signs of intelligence in the background—systems still online and ready for purpose—she'd have wondered if the structure was randomised.

The nanotube channels carried plasma for mass rebuild. So what was its source? What blew the air? Pumped the water?

Another route. Another strain on her arms until the clank of a ceramic rim. Another in-between room, honeycomb plates on the wall and a dim glow from the recesses like emergency lighting for ghosts. She pulled herself over the lip and dropped to the floor. Made it halfway across to scan the far wall. Then Max lagged, mind catching up through the numb repetitions to note the subtitles' hang in mid-air.

[Save/preserve us/in-group.]

[Protect/rebuild us/in-group.]

[Until/toward the other shore/land]

[Save/preserve yourself without breaking the other rules/orders.]

Without overlap. Without mania. Burnt on the panels clear enough for the translation engine to do its shoddy work.

*“A ship is built with a promise.”*

Her hand crept toward the plasma-lance at her waist on instinct. Checked the walls, the ceiling, every corner for sensors. Let the cam gyre and scan the walls in frenzy. Even without a clear message she'd recognise the layout anywhere.

A rule-set.