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EPISODE

Mission III - Part 3

BY SCARLETTT — 2026-05-13



In [part 2](/mission-iii-part-2/), Ruby and Saaz learned more about the mysterious Venusian surface anomaly known as 'The Cathedral' and planned the dangerous trip there. In this third part of the seven part series, they travel to the location of The Cathedral and begin their descent through the Venusian clouds.

Mission III: Venus - Part 3: Descent

The expeditionary airship had reached [Lakshmi Planum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshmi_Planum)¹ and was nearing the location of *The Cathedral*. Ruby and Saaz were being dressed in the environment suits which was a long and complicated process. The suits consisted of a large number of heat and pressure resistant plates, fitted together like a suit of armour. On top of the armour, there was also a supporting exoskeleton to compensate for the suits' weight and stiffness, and to make movement in them more like natural movement. The exoskeleton was a complex mix of jointed metal parts, wires and hydraulic pipes.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lakshmi_Planum

Ruby was holding her hands out, as the particularly complicated glove section of the suit was being assembled around them. She wriggled her shoulders a little. The suit was a little cumbersome.. but not as much as she had expected and certainly less than some of the cosplay outfits she had worn.

"Oh, Ruby", said Saaz. "Did you remember to ask your onboard AI not to make any brain chemistry alterations? I want us to feel the full raw emotional experience!"

Ruby nodded. She'd asked Shelley not to adjust her hormones unless it was a life or death situation

The airship's pilot AI continued running back over the main points of the safety briefing. *"... as mentioned, should you start to feel any heat build up, burning sensations or pinching feelings, move very quickly to an area free of obstacles and hold your arms out. The accompanying spider-bots will quickly make any suit repairs or deploy protective webs."*

The airship AI went on. *"I can confirm that an Entanglement Drive is now in a suitable orbital position above us and has a positional lock on your suits with its tractor beams. It's now ready, as a backup, to pull you back up to a safer altitude should there be an emergency."*

The faceplates were locked onto their suits and powered up. Now looking through the faceplate's internal screens, for a few seconds Ruby could see numeric values and wireframe shapes being drawn around parts of the airship's cabin. She knew her faceplate was preparing to compensate for the opaque atmosphere on the surface.

Ruby and Saaz stood up. The last parts of the suits were being attached to them; the heat-resistant ornamental robes Saaz had designed. The two women, despite the relative bulk of the environment suits, now looked like priestesses of some exotic religion.

"We are there," said the airship AI. Ruby and Saaz climbed through a hatch in the floor of the airship cabin, and took their seats in the small, rounded mainly-glass cabin of the rotorcraft clamped below the airship. The hatch sealed above them.

"Releasing rotorcraft in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... clamps released!" Ruby felt the vibration of the craft's motors and a light, falling sensation. The 50-odd kilometer descent to the surface had begun...

They dropped through thicker and thicker plumes of cloud. It grew darker, until the suit faceplates started to compensate and it became clear again. Ruby looked down. She could now see the surface. It looked blocky and pixelated, but its resolution slowly improved as they descended. Ruby guessed that was an effect of the faceplates' object detection system not being designed for objects at a distance. One block of pixels was blinking red. Ruby knew that was the faceplate indicating where they were going.

...and that was...

The Cathedral. Ruby started breathing in long slow breaths, controlling her feelings of nervousness and apprehension. It wasn't stage-fright, it was something else much stronger. Ruby wondered...what was it about The Cathedral that always evoked such strong feelings?

Ruby felt Saaz's hand grip hers...