Chapter 50 Alicanto Excursions

I spent my evening in engineering as I had an alert on my PerCom. The inertia compensators were fluctuating by 2%. It was barely noticeable but I wanted to solve the issue before it ballooned. I took each unit offline and had the exterior bots service them one at a time. The eighth one finally reduced the fluctuations from 1.8% to 0.2%. I replaced the unit and brought the malfunctioning unit to my workshop in engineering.

The unit was new, just replaced at Gunther station, so it should have had a much longer life. What I found spooked me a little. A transmitter cleverly hidden in the emitter had come loose and was rattling around. It must have been rattling at a specific frequency to obstruct the emitter’s function a little. The chances of that happening were so minuscule…maybe I was lucky? I assumed there might be others on the ship and they would all be difficult, if not impossible to find. I sat there thinking for a period…wait I had this device…all I needed to do was figure out how it broadcast and then I could scan for other transmitters. Eve brought me dinner as I worked and I explained what I was doing. Eve programmed a few exterior and interior bots to scan for the devices when I was done.

It took a few hours to construct the scanners and then I went to my cabin to clean up and wait. The bots found three other devices. Two nested in life support apparatus’ that had been replaced and one in another inertia compensator emitter. Someone definitely wanted to know where I was going. The devices could only transmit at light speed but it would give the interested parties an early warning to any system I entered that they had a receiver in. I packaged the devices together. I looked at our course…we would come within about a light week of a system being mined by the Sapphire Empire. I set up a crude drop probe to dump the devices and keep them powered.

I then spent a few hours with Eve going over our security procedures to try to stop this from happening again. I wasn’t naïve. This was probably an attempt to catch my ship…from the pirate vid it was common practice to sell intel on potential targets.

My ship was fast and could outrun most ships out here. If I was able to replace the hull plating I would reduce our mass by another 14%...a huge amount giving us even better acceleration. I probably couldn’t arm my ship with anything other than defensive measures. Most human star faring nations had tight restrictions on that. A quick search of the Sapphire Empire starship codes and all I could equip were point defense lasers unless I was a licensed privateer…which required way too many hurdles to get it. Well point defense lasers would be useful against weak fighters and missiles. Piracy was almost non-existent in the Sapphire Empire…at least reports of piracy. That was the justification for their restrictions on weapons.

I looked at my star map. I decided in the moment to head toward the core worlds, toward Earth. It would be the best place to sell the alien technology once I successfully reverse engineered it. Maintaining the guise as a passenger liner would help reach the core worlds. I sent Eve a message to prepare a dossier on the People’s Sodality. It was the next star kingdom in line with a course toward Earth. This also meant we could plan on trips to two star systems in the Sapphire Empire along the way. I choose Ragnhild and Ederne. Both had populations in the billions and would add to my cover of being a passenger liner.

I went to the robotics lab and worked on Eve’s upgrades for a while. I was at the phase of synthesizing my efforts. I was working on the breasts, areola and nipples. My efforts looked good enough. The bot would be able to control the stiffness, color and thermal regulation of the area. I sent the results to Eve and we could complete this minor upgrade anytime after Eve approved. I had made a lot of progress for the female genitalia as well. I could produce a functional unit but still was working on how I was going to incorporate it into Eve’s structure. It would take up a fair amount of space and I would need to move some systems…or reduce some systems in size…it was going to take some time. Eve, for her part, had seen my progress and was very happy I was getting close. I was figuring it would take me two weeks of work over the next few months.

Eve came to me and brought dinner. When I got focused on my work I usually forgot to eat. I was losing muscle mass and really needed to get into a training regimen. Eve checked the sample breasts I had produced and watching her poke them and adjust them with the computer was erotic but extremely weird. I knew just watching this I would never be able to be intimate with Eve. Eve suggested I use the female steward bots as test subjects for the vagina. They were getting heavily used by the passengers and I could get feedback on my efforts. I told Eve there were just some things I did not need to know! I would upgrade the steward bots but was definitely planning to just supervise the work and not be hands on the upgrades.

Eve had a report on the People’s Sodality as well. It was a religious state based on a Neofundamentalist Ideology. The religion was loosely based on a mix of old Christianity and Hinduism. They had a leader called the Spiritual Father/Mother. Some 90% of the population followed the base religion. They were not overly tolerant of other religions in their space. Their military were noted as zealots…willing to fight to the death. For this reason they were mostly excluded from incursions from other human nations. The Sodality had a really low tourist index according to Eve. She added that it was deemed extremely safe for trading though. She affirmed it would be safe to travel through their space.

Religion. I was familiar with the concepts. Belief in a higher power and that there was purpose in life and something to look forward to after death. I looked at what I projected as the ship’s route and decided to stop in People’s Sodality…in the Corvalan system. The Corvalan system had a habitable planet and habitable moon. It was one of their industrial systems and I should be able to sell some previous metal cargo easily there.

I got the dreaded alert on my PerCom from Suruchi for joining her and her guests in the captain’s dining room in two days. She was very pleasant in the invite and there was a menu attached. I looked briefly at it and nearly lost it. They were using the meals I had gotten from the restaurant on Gunther Prime! Those were for the crew and myself not for the frigging passengers! I tapped on my PerCom with force and looked for a secure place on the ship. The botany lab had the only proper storage space with the proper cryo fridge. I could pack maybe 1200 meals into the space. I decided to have Eve oversee this super important mission.

I worked the next two days expecting some sort of blowback from Suruchi or Dora for confiscating the 1200 meals but it never came. On the day for the dinner, I got no less than fourteen reminders to attend. Eve made sure I dressed in my best outfit and I walked to Deck 7. It had completely changed since I had been here last. The promenade had flowering trees, some with fruit I didn’t recognize. My two ancient bots were tending small gardens among the trees. There were only a few passengers milling around enjoying the flora. I found the captain’s dining room and entered.

Suruchi was seated at the head of the table with older males to her right and left. Dora was next to one of the men and an older woman was opposite Dora. The spacing was such that the only open seat was at the other end of the table opposite of Suruchi.

Suruchi introduced me as the ship’s owner and head engineer. I was immediately bombarded with compliments on the ship and squirmed as Suruchi smiled at my discomfort. Appetizers were brought out and we started eating and I got more comfortable and started answering questions. The two men were business men, one was an investment banker and the other sold textiles. Both were returning to the heart of the Sapphire Empire as opportunities in the Gunther system had dried up. The men were not completely boring at least and had a few humorous stories to share.

As the main course was brought out Suruchi brought up creating a formal transportation company. That way we could register in each star nation we traveled to and get insurance and legal protections. Both business men at the table had a lot of input on this and it was clear that was why they were here. They were here to convince me of the benefits of doing so. I really didn’t need much convincing but thought it would be fun to tease Suruchi with indecision. It took till the end of the meal before I agreed only to find dessert was going to be presentations on names for the company.

The first choice was *Alicanto Excursions*. It had a logo of a bird that reminded me of a phoenix. It was a silvery and gold shimmering bird with spread wings and radiant eyes. The feathers on the bird changed as you looked at the image. I said that looks great, we will go with it. I left before Suruchi could show her other options. It might have been a little cruel as she had probably spent quite a bit of time on her presentation. I smirked to myself as I left thinking Suruchi would be less insistent to invite me to dinner again.