Chapter 61

To Shinade’s credit she didn’t hold her grudge against Samantha against Samantha’s baby. She took care of the baby with her own without complaint. Eve was ever present as well, neglecting her other duties. Since I now had enough crew to cover things, I told Eve it was ok to be a nanny bot for a while. She missed the joke and said ok.

Abby had renovated one of the crew cabins on deck 8 to serve as security central. It was basically a monitoring room with three stations and multiple screens. It also had a small armory for quick access to non-lethal weapons. The most interesting part of the room was the controls for her new six spider bots. Those bots were each secured in hidden ceiling compartments in engineering, the bridge, the armory and three of the shuttle bays. The bots needed to be activated from this room.

Suruchi had gotten me the report on Asher’s brother who had been released. Apparently their grandfather who ran the navy training station back in the Union had gotten him released as well as other relatives. Asher and three of his cousins were still on Bastille waiting to be released. Apparently, the old man didn’t have enough credits to get all his grandchildren out. The gang Asher was part of was now at half strength.

I thought maybe this would be enough to get Francis Pineda to join us. I planned to call him on Bastille before we left. Abby had been sending him daily correspondence but he hadn’t budged.

I was at a loss what to do with Samantha ultra fast courier ship. It was a luxury ship unto itself and was roughly attached to the Void Phoenix. Once we started replacing hull plating it would be in the way. It was already a bit of a nightmare traveling in subspace with it, having to balance emitters and doing more complex mass calculations. I was in my cabin looking at the offers people had sent me to buy the craft. Julie’s hologram was in a cut off tee shirt and jean shorts lying on my bed trying to convince me it was time to play in the VR. She wanted to hunt the necromancer down.

She looked over my shoulder at what I was doing…did she need to look with her holo avatar? She asked why didn’t I just build a scaffolding cradle for the courier ship? I told it would take too much time to engineer it. She waved her hand and plans to do just that appeared on my work screen. Thinking my problem was resolved she asked to play the game.

I was engrossed in the plans she sent me. I asked how she did it so quick and she said she had schematics for 1,488 civilian ships in her database and the advanced ship structural courses in her library to bolster her knowledge. The plans she sent were good. They even looked natural and didn’t take away from the ship’s aesthetic sleekness. The added mass was too bad, it added 3% to the Void Phoenix’s mass plus the mass of the craft which was just the size of three heavy shuttles in a straight line. The added mass wouldn’t be an issue once we replaced the hull plating.

The main problem was with time. We were scheduled to depart in 9 days. Could we make all these modifications in such a short time? I was running projections on the screen to do the work and Julie harrumphed behind me and said I was no fun and disappeared to bother someone else.

I would need help from the station but it should be achievable. I sent out requests for estimates in my time frame from the station shipwrights. I would switch the hull plating fabricators to the belly of the ship to cover the expansion saving time later. The courier ship would essentially be concealed behind large belly bay doors. I played slightly with the design Julie had sent me to complete the illusion…there is no ultra fast courier here! Since Samantha had abandoned the ship I should go over it with an engineer’s eyes when I had the chance.

Abby knocked on my cabin door as I worked. She entered and sat on my bed as I had no other chairs in the room. We already had a staff meeting this morning and training after with the marines so I wasn’t sure what this was about. I swiveled to meet her gaze. She first lectured me on appearing more captain like when I roamed the ship. This was the umpteenth time I had this lecture since Abby had joined the crew. I was making changes…albeit slowly.

I asked her what her visit to my quarters was about. She said Buckie was two days out and wanted to make sure Doc was ready to regrow his leg. I had purchased everything the Doc had requested for the procedure so I assumed yes. Abby could have asked Doc directly. What did she really want to see me about?

She started by saying her and Suruchi had been talking…which caused me to groan. This was either about adding more crew or something expensive they wanted me to buy. Abby started soft. She had a list of new purchases with her. It was something that didn’t need my attention immediately so I just perused them. The only big ticket item was an 11th steward bot, male. I did notice Cori has a number of smaller purchases on the list. I did a quick check and she had had 17 orders coming up from the planet since being employed. That wasn’t a big deal but each had its own shipping charge. I sent a note off to Suruchi to talk to her about combing orders to limit the shipping costs. It was better to come from her than me as I wanted to keep Cori on friendly terms.

I looked at the male steward bot specs next. It was a brute, standing at 2.1 m, and full of faux muscles. The muscles were just appearance though and didn’t flex like on my bots. I asked why did we need this behemoth? Abby grinned and told me it was a request of one of the passengers. They had procured this bots services for the entire trip…essentially paying for almost half its cost. So a female passenger had certain tastes I mumbled. Abby choked a little and said the passenger wasn’t a woman. Well to each his own. It would give Gabby another male bot to skin to practice on when she was ready.

The next issue was a disciple issue. Apparently, Eve had broken Hanno’s nose in the corridor. What? Intentionally? Abby said yes, but it wasn’t Eve’s fault. I was already summoning Eve, she was just two cabins down with the babies. Abby continued with explanation. Apparently one of her marines had asked Eve if she was as ‘anatomically correct as the steward bots’. Eve promptly punched him in the face, breaking his nose.

Eve entered and stood at attention. I told her to relax, this was not a military ship. She eyed Abby who nodded and Eve visibly relaxed. Eve then was asked to account for herself. She said the comment had mad her…angry. So she responded, just enough force to let the victim know she didn’t appreciate his comment. She was angry at the marine? No, she was angry at me. What? Abby chuckled knowing this had been the direction this was going to go. Eve explained further why she was mad at me. She was still ‘incomplete’ while the dumb AI steward bots had been upgraded by me. Come on Eve! I wanted to make this upgrade complete…I planned to even upgrade her skeletal frame and add in the alien hull to obfuscate her not so legal upgrades. Eve looked at Abby who noded to her in what I assumed was encouragement. Eve said I was stalling. If I really wanted to, I could go ‘all OCD’ and finish the plans for the upgrade.

Yeah that was true. I was silent as I thought an appropriate response. Best to lay it out. I told Eve I was dragging my feet because I didn’t want…no couldn’t have sex with her. I saw her as my daughter and my friend. Not as a sex bot. Oh I had forgotten that Abby here. I looked at Abby and she looked a little uncomfortable but didn’t leave.

Eve remained still…was she going to do something drastic? Thoughts raced in my mind about a dozen bad possibilities and she finally spoke. She wanted me to be happy and she thought a receptive sexual partner would make me happy. She paused. But if what I needed from her was to be familial support she would do that.

I was so relieved that I almost missed Eve’s next question. Did this mean that Celeste was her sister? I didn’t pause and said yes immediately. Eve said she would still like the upgrades as soon as possible. She left the room and called me father on the way out.

I was left alone with Abby. We were both waiting for the other to speak. Abby started and asked what the punishment for Hanno should be? After some back and forth we decided on docking him one month’s pay. That over I was getting ready to leave to head and check on things in engineering.

Abby said she had a few more things. I asked what couldn’t have been brought up at the ship staff meeting this morning. New crew she said with a smirk. Of course, well what did her and Suruchi have in mind now?

Suruchi had headed down to the planet. She was finalizing the passenger list and cargo. She was interested in bringing two entertainers on board. Entertainers? One was a singer and the other was a comedian. A little old time entertainment. Abby had recordings of both for me to review. I immediately was concerned about the cost and asked Abby. It wasn’t too outrageous, 140 Sol credits for the singer and 130 Sol credits for the comedian monthly. Did we really need them though?

Abby said Suruchi would be a better person to convince me. She said both were ‘up and coming’ and popular on the planet. I didn’t need to review the vids of their performances. She could have them. But I decided to eliminate her open assistant steward position. I sent Suruchi a PerCom message approving the hirings but also said her staff was complete. No more hirings.

Thinking the surprises were done I tried to leave again but Abby said she had two more crew requests for me to review and set up interviews for if I was interested. What now I asked getting irritated. We had enough crew to function just fine! Abby said a new transport with prisoners from the Union had arrived on Bastille. The first was a marine, Titus Kinkade, Loree’s older brother. Loree had asked for a favor…she would take a loan to free him from me if I didn’t want to have him in the crew. Abby said he remembered Titus from training. He was a good marine but not exceptional. I looked at his release paperwork…nothing too outrageous. Fine process him! Abby wanted me to go through the rigmarole of an interview but I told her she could do it.

She had one more possible crew for me to review. There were 7,400 prisoners coming in on this last transport which I hadn’t been aware of. Was it my brother? I took the data slate and eagerly opened the file.

**Gwen Namari**

I looked at Abby. Yes, I had talked about Gwen with Abby, Buckie and Adam a few times. I was surprised Abby remembered. I ignored Abby and took the prisoner manifest and did my own searches. No, my brother was definitely not there and neither was Nila. Some disappointment but Gwen. She had been a friend to me even though I never really reciprocated.

Abby said the transport was due in three days. I couldn’t interview her until then. Abby said Gwen was injured, her right side of her face had been burned with plasma and right her eye wasn’t functional as well. That was an easy enough correction. Doc could get what she needed to fix her up right? Gwen was a life support engineer so she could help Nero. This was going to be a good thing. Buckie would be here in two days and Gwen in three days. Gwen could help me fend off Haily too. It seemed that Haily was stalking me, even showing up to my gym time with the marines.

We would depart for Ragnhild system in 9 days with a full crew, passenger and cargo. Everything was coming up aces for me.