Chapter 101

I found Eve in the robotics lab.  She was completely naked, and the discarded power armor was on the floor.  Her stump of a shoulder had cables, dried fluid, and synthetic flesh hanging from it.  She was manipulating the machines in the lab to free her missing arm from the power suit.

I immediately hugged her, and she wrapped her one good arm around me, returning it.  She apologized for losing the arm.  She explained it had gotten caught in a brace on the fall in the lift.  The weight of the two bots and herself had torn it free.  I laughed at her nonchalance.  She said she was never in any danger from the two inferior bots, well, she admitted when they landed in the cargo bay she had been momentarily pinned and immobilized.  But she just continued disabling the first bot with her good arm.  The other bot tried to flee but she tackled it and went after its sensors since it was being uncooperative with allowing her access to its internals.  Then the Marines had arrived to finish it off.

I moved to the station to take over the task of freeing her arm.  I had Eve lay down to clean up her shoulder and run a scan on the damage.  Gabby entered the lab with her damaged Venom bots in tow and paused.  I realized Eve was still naked and covered her.

Gabby and Eve started a conversation about the Venom bots and their effectiveness and shortcomings.  I focused on stripping Eve’s freed arm and repairing the attachments.  I would reskin the arm once it was attached.  The conversation irked me a bit because Gabby was referring to the spider bots as her creation.  She had fabricated them but I had designed them.  I don’t know why I cared but I did.

As I was most of the way through the rebuild, I received a comm.  It was Abby asking what to do with the Armageddon bots.  They could be brought to the robotics lab.  They were tall at 2.3 meters and extremely dense.  When they arrived, I immediately pulled their computer cores and stored the cores in shielded containment boxes.  Then I got to the good part.

These bots were the most recent tech from the core worlds.  Illegal in most parts of human-controlled space unless licensed by Earth.  I just scratched the surface but was learning quite a bit about how to harden military hardware.  Eve interrupted me and asked about her arm.

I spent two hours fabricating myself rather than let the machines do the work. I felt I owed it to Eve for putting her in the line of fire. I also reactivated her ethical directives. I didn’t get around to recoating her arm in synth flesh. She left wanting to check on Celeste and Amos. That left Gabby and me in the lab.

I moved to the killer bots and Gabby started talking. I returned the conversation as best I could while I was studying the more intact bot. I was kicking myself for having overlooked so much in my designs. I had never had access to military bots or been educated in their construction so I excused my shortcomings. Gabby repeated her last question and I paused.

She was asking to be put in charge of robotic defenses for the *Void Phoenix*. She had worked on the wolf bots and Vemon Queen bots, so she considered herself well-suited for the role. She had enjoyed being on the bridge while her spiders had stalled the commando’s advance. There were extra terminals on the bridge she offered, hopefully. It would be good to have one person overseeing all the bot defenses. Remote piloted bots were not as frowned upon as dumb AI bots. I called Julie to set up some training to see if Gabby would be good at directing multiple bots from a terminal on the bridge. She ran and hugged me…maybe a little too long and tightly, before running off to her VR connection in her quarters.

An hour later and Suruchi commed me. The envoys were asking why we had not transitioned yet. She had been stalling them. I couldn’t believe they hadn’t been alerted, but I guess the engagement was six decks down, and the real action was on the other ship. I checked on the progress of the crew. Damian, Elias, Maria, and Danielle were all working on the problem of encompassing the enemy frigate in our subspace transition. Julie was assisting by controlling the emitters on the other ship, but they were still an hour or two away from a safe transition, according to Damian. I guess I should have hired a navigation engineer. I told Suruchi the planned transition was in two hours.

I checked on Saabir, Yannis, and Nero. They were responsible for securing the enemy ship to our hull so we could safely plunder it during our trip. Edmund and Vicky were already over there, logging cargo to be brought back to the *Void Phoenix*. I felt like one of the pirates in the vid. It was definitely a rush taking valuable cargo after an intense firefight.

Feeling fatigued, I headed back to my room to see Celeste and Amos and then got some sleep. Eve had her arm covered and was talking with Celeste, who was demanding ice cream, her dinner untouched. Amos’ plate was finished. I went and got my daughter cookie dough ice cream, and Eve gave me an irritated look. I just shrugged.

While I was playing with Celeste after her ice cream dinner, Eve asked me a favor. She wanted her own custom suit of powered stealth armor. She had used mine, but it was a little big and hindered her speed by 14%. I immediately put it in the manufacturing queue with a new suit for myself. My old suit would be repaired but turned over to the marines. An alert came from the bridge for an impending transition, and I took Celeste and Amos to the bridge to observe it.

They had been on the bridge before, but this was the first time entering subspace from here. It was usually dull visually, but Elias switched on the special filters to make it look pretty for the kids. A cheer went up from the bridge as we had just accomplished the feat of defending our ship and getting a very advanced frigate as well. I sent out an entire month’s bonus from my captain’s chair to the entire crew. I had already been informed we had found a stash of hard currency Sol credits on the enemy ship. I sent Abby a note to divide 1,000 Sol credits to the marines how she saw fit on top of the bonus I had just sent. Abby returned my message with an engagement debrief in the morning. Yeah, I had overridden her orders to retreat in favor of saving Eve. Well, that was tomorrow. Now it was time to sleep.

The combat debrief included Kara Briggs, Abby, Julie, Doc, and Buckie. Doc started the meeting. We had seven marines with injuries, two would be returning to duty in 24 hours and the remainder in the next two weeks. No casualties, but she did have to put a cybernetic heart in one of the marines. It had been the quickest way to save his life. Next, we talked about the phases of the combat and the mistakes we made. Abby detailed so many errors that I wasn’t sure we had won the battle.

She finally got into the chain of command I was dreading. My insistence to save Eve was never brought up, just that I should have told her to alter the orders instead of stepping in. I nodded, taking the reprimand. I then reviewed the body armor footage of the assault from different angles as we talked about future best practices in boarding actions. I guessed this was probably not out last so I paid attention. Next time I would be suited up and in action. Abby could command. We talked about the Vemon Queens and how they could be better utilized and I mentioned that Gabby wanted the full-time job of ship’s bot hive mind. Everyone thought that was a great idea.

The meeting lasted five hours. I couldn’t believe a battle debrief could last 20 times as long as the battle. When we were done, I retreated to my robotics lab. I was alone as Gabby was still in VR. I went back to work on the Armageddon bots, and something struck me as odd. I retrieved the power generator for the bots since they had been removed. I kept scanning them and got more and more confused. They were powerful, too powerful. The tech seemed alien and used a fuel I was not familiar with. They were only slightly superior to the alien generators that I had, but they were still better. The fuel could be synthesized, Julie said at a loss of efficiency in the conversation, but at least it was possible. It had a strong radioactive signature, but we could encase it in our alien plating. I think it was going to be possible to use these micro fission generators to power my heavy combat armor and the Venom Queens.

During the first four days in subspace, I got help from my crew and Julie to reverse engineer the fission generator. Our fabricators could handle the materials, and we made some minor upgrades with alien hull components. The fuel fabrication was going to be at a 280% energy loss, but that was fine. We were going to convert the frigate’s main reactor to create the fuel and just burn through all the ship’s reserves to make as many fuel pellets as possible for the fission reactors.

The conversion was going to take time, longer than our trip to drop off the envoys so the frigate was going to be attached for quite some time.

I was able to complete my new combat suit and Eve’s as well. Eve’s new suit was kept secret and stored in a locker in my quarters. I ended up giving Eve a complete body recoat in synthflesh. Well, I had Gabby do it for practice. Gabby was redesigned the Venom Queens and renamed them Black Widows, which irked me. She was putting her stamp on the bots. Then Gabby gave me her ship defense plan. She wanted to build twelve upgraded wolf bots and 32 spider bots. I had planned on just 28 spider bots. She also wanted to add seven undercover steward bots on deck seven that she could control.

I looked at her plans and all of them were male steward bots. It was not a bad idea to have agents on the luxury deck, though. I approved three female and three male bots that Gabby was going to build from scratch. If we ever took on full loads of passengers again Suruchi and Dora would be happy. I also stipulated that Julie would serve as an intermediary when Gabby puppeted the bots. It was easy to tell she wasn’t pleased with that caveat.

One other huge step for us was our shield engineer, Hans Anders. He came up with a simple deflector module for the combat suits. It should be able to deflect solid projectiles with minimal energy. This would hopefully solve the concussion micro grenades we had trouble with in the fight. Halfway through our trip I was forced to have dinner with our guests. The Tirani insisted on sitting down with me. Danielle joined me as my date and Eve also attended. Dora, Suruchi and Kara joined us as well.

The Tirani were extremely happy with the accommodations and the speed of the trip. Danielle and Doc had even did some troubleshooting to get the VR adapted for their neural biology. The purple grass had been a hit the entire trip, with my arborist complaining the Tirani rolling around in it was destroying the crop. The ship chef had also gone out her way to prepare the most incredible food for them. They said I was being underpaid for the trip. As the extraordinary meal finished, they made a request. They wanted the Drusi delegation to be hosted on my ship when we arrived.