Chapter 82

After spending my first day in Ederne hanging out with the crew I returned to work. I was keeping close tabs on the resupply and maintenance while we were in port. Abby, Francis, and Edmund were tracking the crew as they left and returned to the ship. On my second day, Gabby asked me to set up a run on the alien hull fabrication unit for her bot frame. I sent her a price for the frame to be printed on the device saying it would take time away from my engineering bots doing hull and suit runs. It was also a frigging very advanced piece of hardware.

She tried to bargain me down to a lower fee but I wouldn’t budge. I figured it would cost her most of her savings just for the frame. I was wrong. She had about twice the funds I estimated. It still wouldn’t be enough to complete the bot but she would be able to get the frame and the mechanicals installed at least.

I met her in the chamber with the alien fabricators and she gave me the cold shoulder, clearly pissed I was charging her so much for manufacturing the bot. I sighed and sat her down. I then spent an hour going over what I was charging her and what her finished steward bot would be worth in the galaxy markets…about four times her investment! I could see the credit signs in her eyes warring with her fantasies with her bot companion. I had no doubt what she had in store for the bot.

She cheered up as we programmed and created the frame for her. I then had her send me her files for review. In my cabin, I looked over her plans and suddenly felt uncomfortable. I ran some comparisons…yep. What should I do? Her bot's final dimensions would match my body almost exactly. The height, shape, muscles, waist… Her plans for the face and genitalia at least were not mine. She couldn’t be that obvious. The genitals were as she had experimented. It had mechanisms to alter the girth and length of the penis. I decided to just let her proceed. I sent her an approval message to her PerCom but said any changes needed to be run by me. At least it would be months before she could raise enough funds to actually finish the bot.

I tried to find our master chef numerous times while in the ship dock but she was being run from station to station by our shuttle pilot Finn. Many of the stations grew their own specialty produce or synthetic meats in vats. She was collecting provisions and sampling the systems offerings. Since I was on a ‘break’ from the Claire bot I was hoping to find someone amiable to companionship with me. Unless I wanted to explore the hospitality staff I was out of luck.

I spent the second and third days testing the stealth suits with Abby, Hanno, Buckie, and Loree. They had practiced in VR with the new models but real life was always slightly different. The suits were far superior to anything they had ever piloted before. They were amazed they had been able to subdue the Brotherhood agents. It had been mostly luck. The testing wasn’t all perfect and we found dozens of issues that needed addressing. Mostly programming but some structural and functionality issues as well. Julie for her part had synched the suits with her ad hoc design suite and VR. Once a problem was found it took less than twenty minutes for Julie to offer multiple solutions.

Abby had a request for more spider bots and equipping sensitive areas of the ship with jets of hardening foam as it had been our best weapon.

I pointed out our suits had the dissolving agent in both wrists. If the Brotherhood had opted for a different loadout they would have escaped the foam easily enough. We did agree to add twenty-eight spider bots to the ship, seven locations with four bots hidden in secret compartments lined with the alien hull plating. It would be in secret though as I planned to design and fabricate them myself when I had time. They wouldn’t be the fragile spider bots we purchased but hardened bots with the alien hull plating for their frame and skin. The fluffy wolf bots were fine and all but if we faced a truly serious threat again we would be ready.

I commed Eve and asked her to dig through the alien archives for data on the alien power generators. I had two engineering bots pull a handful of different ones out of storage and bring them to a side lab. It was mostly going to be figuring out the fuel fabrication for the generators and deciphering the crystalline control modules on the devices. I only had one device in storage that could make the advanced alien crystalline modules and reverse engineering that would take years if not longer…unless I got some help. Well, I wanted to power my future spider bots with alien power generators…small ones.

I paused in my planning. I had this grandiose plan that would take months to work through. The ship needed defense now. I would put my spider bots on the side burner now…maybe work on them in VR with Julie when I slept. I set my priorities.

First, finish 12 of the advanced stealth suits. They were mobile but the camouflage programming had a long way to come.

Second, finish the 24 heavy combat suits (READERS IF YOU HAVE A NAME FOR THIS MODEL LET ME KNOE) and get them functional.

Third, fill out the shipboard marine compliment. Abby, Buckie, and Francis were already working on this. We needed to fill out our roles with 32 more marines. This was going to allow us to keep two marines on duty at all times on the bridge, engineering, security room and shuttle bay. Was it overkill? For a non-military vessel probably. If we were a military vessel it wouldn’t be enough. I felt it was just the right amount to protect my most precious investment, my daughter Celeste.

The fourth and final on my list was to get the Void Phoneix hull completed! Fortunately, the metals we needed were relatively cheap in the Ederne system. I was stuffing as much feeder stock as possible in with the lumber being loaded onto my ship.

After these four items the ship would be defendable and then we could focus on the offense aspects. Julie had already run a few dozen mock-ups to add weapons to the ship…I didn’t like any of them. They were either too obvious, too ugly, caused too many engineering headaches to install and maintain, or were just completely unfeasible to purchase in our current location. We would just keep working on it. Our best and simplest bet was advanced missiles but buying them was the issue.

I spent my evenings with Gwen in the Sword and Sorcery game. It was just the two of us as Julie was locked out and Eve was mopping. Gabby was enthralled with her personal bot project. I tried to get Gwen into the detective sim but after one session she preferred to dominate me in the fantasy game.

On the fourth day in the Ederne system, Gwen was finally hobbling around and helping Nero with life support. I told her she could wait but she wanted to help and she was mostly just directing the engineering bots anyway. Gwen also had dinner with me in my cabin at the end of the workday. Gwen socialized with the rest of the crew during the day and downloaded the gossip to me verbally at dinner. I listened but didn’t really care who was fucking who or who was upset with whom unless it affected ship operations.

Well on the fourth day Saabir crashed the hovercycle. The fact that he lived with minimal damage to himself showed the safety measures added had worked. Rebuilding the cycle was now the new project on board in their spare time. All the thrill seekers were contributing to the project. It was a team-building exercise. I decided to ‘request’ three hoverbikes be built. We could fabricate everything on board except the power systems. I would buy those at the next large port of call when they were not so expensive.

I managed to spend a fair amount of time working from my cabin which allowed me to spend significant time with Celeste and Amos. They were happy and growing. Doc came by at least once a day to check on them herself. I think she was feeling the motherly itch herself.

On the morning of our fifth day in the Ederne port I ran through checks on everything myself to make sure everything was on board and all the engineering issues were handled. I then ordered the crew back to the ship for a quick departure as we had received an ‘urgent’ request. It was so ‘urgent’ that everyone was getting a 10% monthly bonus. I released the funds to their accounts.

Forty minutes later I was on the bridge and my crew was dressed in their uniforms and preparing the ship to make its way out to the outer system to enter subspace. I had down all the navigation calculations myself and just sent them now to Elias to double-check.

He flew through them with the help of the computer and optimized our flight slightly and sent them back to me in just seven minutes. It had taken me an hour…

With our five-day vacation completed, we left port and headed for the Vinita system to have a little chat with one General Stanton Higgs.