Chapter 55

How could they let him die? One of the main characters in the vid died. He was my favorite, well one of them. I didn’t want to watch any more episodes and Eve seemed to share my outrage at losing one of the characters pivotal in the comedic aspect of the show. No wonder the series ended in just 17 more episodes…maybe it was a fake death…no that was unlikely from the post credits. A dream? No the show never resorted to such stupid mechanisms. He was definitely dead. I left Eve thoroughly disgusted. Maybe I wouldn’t watch the remaining episodes at all. No that wouldn’t be fair to Eve and Julie. The ship’s AI had watched the show with us according to Eve. Apparently they were ‘girlfriends’ like the two female co-pilots in the show. Well I was glad Eve had a friend.

I went to my cabin and found the emitter installed. I turned the setting on the emitter to off and crashed on my bed. No VR or SLUMBER unit just old fashioned sleep. My PerCom beeped and I wanted to ignore it but peeked at it. Someone had bought the statues! I sat bolt upright. It was an anonymous buyer. But 300,000 Sol credits? That was a ridiculous sum. I comm request came through with the auction house and I accepted.

The representative said the transaction was completed. After the auction house’s 5% fee, the 8% import tax and the 12% antiquities tax I was being transferred 225,000 Sol credits. I had to look up the last one because I had thought the tax on artwork was just 2%. After a second I found any artwork over 1,000 years old had an antiquities tax on it. There had been a note for me after they had assessed the statues but I had missed it. Well damn. I wasn’t going to sell any more alien artifacts in the Sapphire Empire.

I went and sat at the terminal in my cabin and brought up the ship’s finances report. I lot of things had been added and approved by Suruchi. I paged through them. Abby had purchased 20,400 Sol credits worth of materials under her security department. Emon had added another 1,300 Sol credits to his expenses. I groaned but checked the line items and didn’t see anything alarming. There was an outstanding request from Suruchi for approval of the new steward bots and inventory for the luxury shops. The bill was 28,320 Sol credits! I might have denied it but with sale of the statues I calmly hit the approve button after adding in Nero’s personal steward bot.

Next I went and worked on the order for the SNAIL suite. In addition to Doc’s list I added a few security measures from Abby’s notes and ordered a while new first order cryogenics unit for storing the base materials. We were going to build our own but this would save time. I submitted it. I checked on all our other orders and everything was proceeding well except the restocking of the ships food stores. Suruchi had put a hold on it and our new chef, Cori, needed to approve everything. Not my problem. I made some adjustments to my own material order. If I was going to upgrade the steward bots I might as well replace the entire skin. So I got material to do all 10 bots. I probably wouldn’t end up doing Nero’s though. I had given him a pay bonus and personal bot, that was enough.

Suruchi was comming me. It was time to finish the interviews. I sighed and exited me cabin to run into our new cook. She seemed to be spaced out thinking about something and walked into me. She awkwardly apologized and I made the effort to introduce myself. She was tall, just shy of 1.9m but fairly thin. She had a long neck and pouty lips. I stopped myself. She wasn’t overly attractive but somehow I was drawn to her looks and mannerisms. We exchanged a few words and I walked on and said I was looking forward to trying her cooking. She cocked her head like a dog and smiled at that and said she would prepare something for me tonight. Why did that excite me?

I got my faculties back by the time I got to Suruchi’s office. Abby and Suruchi were there as was Shinade. I paused like a thief caught in a spot light. Shinade had returned from the planet? Damn it Eve! You should have let me know! Fortunately there didn’t seem to be any fireworks between Shinade and Abby. They were talking amicably on the side about security measures. Suruchi had that stupid knowing look on her face that women had as I sat down.

They brought me into the security conversation. Abby wanted to isolate decks 6 and 7 from the rest of the ship. The only access would be through shuttle bays cargo elevators. It meant closing off seventeen other access points. I brought up the changes. The captain’s private elevator to the dining room would be eliminated. Lots of access shafts to aft engineering would be reduced in size or sealed. That would make maintenance a bit of a pain but not impossible. Everything looked ok except for blocking one of the access lifts from deck 4 to 6. Deck 4 had most of the food storage and the large food prep areas. The restaurants had mostly faux kitchens. The food was mostly prepared below and shipped up. Abby and Shinade studied that for a long time before deciding to install some additional security measures around the access lift.

Suruchi for her part had let this all play out. I shortly learned that Shinade was more than happy to hand over her security duties to Abby. She would take over the position of flight leader. What? This was still my ship and I assigned jobs…Shinade couldn’t just pick one out of the blue and give it to herself. Seeing my hesitation in saying something Suruchi eyebrows went up and Abby tossed her an old fashioned credit chip. Apparently Abby had just lost a bet.

Shinade quietly sipped a drink and rubbed her large belly while Abby and Suruchi lectured me on ‘growing a pair’. This ship was mine and I needed to take ownership. I needed to be a better communicator to the crew and not just go off half cocked all the time and do things but more importantly I needed to set the boundaries. Apparently Suruchi had been trying over and over again to give me the reigns of control but I kept dropping them. Abby suggested I needed a more direct approach.

I turned to Shinade and said we didn’t need a flight leader but she could have the position of lead fighter pilot. I know it was basically the same thing since we only had two fighters. She just grinned and toasted me with her drink, Suruchi face palmed but smiled at my concession. Shinade was going to be our combat pilot and work with Abby on security. But we had interviews to do. Shinade excused herself from the doldrums on the interview process and went to see Doc.

Our first interview was with Hanno Sabet, Mitchel Breece and Loree Kinkade. They all lived in the same housing block on Bastille and Abby thought they would be a package deal. The interview…well you couldn’t call it an interview really. It was just banter back and forth between Abby and the three. It was clear that Abby could work with group. Like Abby they didn’t look like marines with their slim forms. I liked them all and it reminded me on my time with Buckie, Abby and Adam. After the call ended I asked Abby if she knew what happened to Adam and Buckie.

Abby paused and I could see she was choked up a little. She had spent a few credits to connect with the net and found out Adam was confirmed KIA. Buckie had lost his right leg and was back on his home world in the Union. She hadn’t sent him a message but was planning to. Maybe a few credits once she got paid to help him get a new organic leg grown. My mind processed this. Could we send him funds to join us on the *Void Phoenix*? Would he want to? Did Abby want him to join us? Abby got a little excited and said she would send him a message.

With Suruchi we worked on the contracts for our three new marine grunts joining the crew. Being a civilian I thought Suruchi wouldn’t like this track but she seemed to think it a great idea. I know she had to deal with a number of minor issues on our first voyage with passengers and having some muscle to back her up would probably be welcome.

Our next interview was Lieutenant Francis Pineda. He was very formal and friendly during the interview. Once again it was Abby who took the lead with me and Suruchi popping a question every once a while. He was reluctant to leave Bastille. He had a sense of duty to keep the order in the residential units. I was surprised to hear Asher Dyson was one of the problems he was dealing with. Asher was in the navy camp residences but had formed his own little gang with a few of his siblings. Well once an asshole, always an asshole.

I asked Francis if we could convince him to leave and he just shook his head no. Abby was right he was a good man. We moved onto our next candidate. It was the Wren Saabir.

Saabir was a tiger Wren. A very big tiger Wren, 2.2 m in height was white and black stripped fur and a large head was predatory teeth. Abby just smirked when I gawked at him and looked over to her. After talking with him though he was very reserved and well mannered. I asked him some questions about his competencies and he listed off his mechanical certs. He seemed open to learning more. The reason why he would leave was for better opportunities. He was paid very little on Bastille and the Wren were mostly ostracized in the Sapphire society. I agreed with Abby and Suruchi to hire him.

Maria Sahagun was next. She was listed as a terrorist by the Sapphire Empire for her role in resisting annexation. If I freed her she wouldn’t be able to leave the ship while we were in Sapphire space. The interview went well though and she was already friends Hanno, Lucius, Mitchel and Abby. So that would give the ship five full time security personnel. I was a little sad we couldn’t get Francis. Maybe I could think of something to convince in the few weeks we were stationed here.

I dreaded the next interview. Abby was very high on her FTL engineer friend and I didn’t want an outside party tinkering with my engines. Damian Loredo was old. He had the thin white hair and beard but bright and lively blue eyes. He greeted Abby like long lost friends at the start of the interview. He was a very amiably person and had that same social charm that Abby exuded. I decided to end this before it got out of hand and started asking him some obscure engineering problems and asking for solutions. He got the first three correct and on the fourth we got into a disagreement over the correct solution to deal with parallel negative charge build up in a reactor’s feedback stabilization unit. In the end his solution was superior to mine and I was convinced. Well the old man had 70 years of active duty experience on me.

I could see Abby smirking out of the corner of me eye as we had both tried to convince the other that our solution was the better one. Fine! The interview ended and after a short discussion I would hire Damian. The old man just wanted to spend his time on a ship working on the engines and FTL drive. Abby said he was pretty spry for an old guy too. He had a daughter but was mostly estranged from her since he left her mother to continue serving in the fleet and had no desire to return to the defunct Union.

We were down to our final interview. After the spirited conversation with Damian my energy had been restored and I was ready. Edmund Asir. When he appeared on the screen I was a little shocked. He looked more like an actor from a vid than a soldier. He was well groomed and possessed a presence to him…no an attractiveness. Not like Razan who was just handsome being. Edmund had a magnetism to his aura even through the vid call. I could see that Suruchi had been engulfed as well and was just now recovering.

After we talked to him for a bit he asked to be the bartender on the ship. Why? He said he always wanted to be one and had watched many vids with charismatic bartenders. I looked to Suruchi for guidance and she was slow to break into the conversation. She asked him a few questions and then we ended the call to discuss. Suruchi immediately said hiring him would free up a steward bot from the barkeep duties. I looked at Abby and we both had that knowing look in our eyes. I told Suruchi to draw up a contract for him.

I lay back and said I was glad that was done and I could finally get some sleep. Abby laughed. She said my day wasn’t over. I had a two hour workout to get to with her. I groaned and was about to say no, asserting myself, but Abby beat me to it, saying I didn’t have a choice. Well I needed it so followed Abby to a session of pain and torture.