Chapter 46 The Grand Tour

As we departed the shuttle and enter the ship from the lower cargo hold, I watched Suruchi with intensity trying to glean her reaction to ship as we walked. The cargo bay was clean an immaculate with crates stacked orderly and secured. That was the benefit of having bots do most of the work. They did not take short cuts in their labors and always followed doctrine to the letter. She asked what was in the crates and I pulled a charging data pad from the wall and logged in and handed it to her. She spent twenty minutes reviewing it before replacing it herself. These data pads just had general descriptions of cargo. Ship’s crew had the detailed contents on their PerCom. While she was reviewing the cargo manifests, I worked on my PerCom to announce Emon and Suruchi to the crew and grant them permissions.

We started working our way up the decks. A lot of things had been moved around since we escaped the planetoid. Deck 2 were the supplementary cargo bays and ship’s primary provision stores. She once again reviewed the cargo manifest. I was not overly worried. Alien tech was rare, but she wasn’t aware of just how valuable the cargo was or how old it was and the descriptions were still general in nature. For instance, the crates of alien jewelry were labeled as alien objects. Deck 3 contained quite a bit of engineering for life support and other ship systems like shields and propulsion. We did not spend too much time here but from my perspective it was looking good. A few bots were working and it looked like most engineering supply lockers had been filled. The deck still needed a new coat of epoxy paint though so I sent off a note on my PerCom to Eve to program the bots for it.

Now Deck 4 and 5 housed my labs and workshops. It was my pride and joy, my playground, and where I would spend all my time if I did not have to keep the ship running. Suruchi just walked through and nodded at the machines. As we approached the robotics lab a small puppy came at us barking. My thought was Gabby had made so much progress in such a short amount of time but when I picked up the puppy it peed on me. A gave Suruchi a blank look and she laughed.

Gabby was in the robotics lab working and came rushing out to get her puppy. When she saw what had happened she turned red and apologized taking the puppy back. She had gotten the puppy to help her in her ‘research’. She said the puppy was genetically a 92% match to a Bernese Mountain Dog and was named Zed. After petting the cute puppy for a bit it became more comfortable in my presence and we entered the lab.

Gabby was currently working on her synthetic fur. We all got into a conversation, and she was using the fur as a vibration sensor for the bot’s extrasensory perception. She was having some success but it didn’t like the fur’s feel. She wanted the fur to be soft like Zed’s. Gabby had samples and Suruchi was impressed with the project overall by her in depth questions. As we talked Nero commed and asked Gabby how the deck 3 water recycler rebuild was coming along. She blushed and said she needed to go check on her bots. She asked me not to tell Nero about the puppy yet…so she hadn’t asked me or her father for permission?

We continued the tour of the two decks. I did not show Suruchi my two massive alien sensors on deck 5 as she probably wouldn’t appreciate the devices in their complexity.

Deck 6 contained the regular passenger cabins but was stuffed with crates of alien artifacts. She asked if we would be taking any passengers in these cabins and I said probably not. She peeked into a few cabins, only three had been refurbished so far but crates from Gunther station crowded the hallways and rooms with the alien crates. The common areas here for passengers were not quite as crowded. We had been interrupted in our harvest on the planetoid and many things had been moved around. The common areas had been repainted and looked great, they just needed all the furnishings installed. Since we had converted deck 5 from passenger cabins to labs the common areas were probably a little too large.

Heading up to deck 7 she said she was really impressed with the ship so far but the lack of crew sightings were making her nervous. She had the list of crew already but she didn’t think we had nearly enough crew for the ship’s size. I tried to convince her we had plenty of bots to cover the shortcomings but she didn’t seem assured.

Of course, as we walked onto deck 7 Samantha was the first person we encountered. She was very pregnant and my first words were ‘it’s not mine,’ a terrible attempt at humor on my part. I mentally slapped myself for saying something so stupid. I said Samantha was not a crew member but a passenger we were dropping off soon. This statement gave Samantha a sour look on her face. Well, I didn’t need to placate her. She left us, saying few neutral words to Suruchi. As we walked, I told her about Samantha’s circumstances and Suruchi just nodded like it made sense. I think she was just very good at containing her emotions and keeping a straight face.

Finally we reached deck 7 which showed the better side of the *Void Phoenix*. There were a number of bots working and Shinade and Vanessa were working hard here as well. Shinade’s pregnancy in full view I mumbled that that one is mine and I think Suruchi smirked at my admission. Almost all the cabins were refitted and we toured two with the women and Suruchi’s compliments had them beaming and happy. Hadn’t complimented them on the cabins just yesterday and got the cold shoulder?

One thing that drew Suruchi’s attention was the promenade and I told her I planned to use it to grow fresh produce for the ship’s kitchens. I planned on getting mostly fruiting trees. Suruchi said gardening was a hobby of hers and wondered if she could oversee this facet of the deck.

I went to my PerCom and gave her permissions for the two ancient bots I planned to utilize for managing this project. I also locked down the botany lab from Suruchi and the rest of the crew. I didn’t want anyone mistakenly planting something from the Hy’Nar seed capsule. Once I trusted her a little more I might let her study the seeds and their germination. The botany lab was just a room with thirty crates in it right now. I sent a note to Eve to unpack and set everything up.

Shinade rejoined us on deck 8 so she could show off her redesign of the deck and how functional it was in defending the ship from potential threats. I wanted to stop her explanations but Suruchi kept lavishing praise on her efforts and saying ‘what a brilliant idea’ as Shinade explained everything. Suruchi was winning over the crew. As first officer crew morale fell to her I guess but I was a little jealous. Suruchi suggested getting a few security personal in the Gunther system to utilize Shinade’s efforts but I told here we would be picking someone up soon for that…or at least I hoped Abby would take the role…oh maybe there might be some fireworks as to who was in charge of security…Abby or Shinade? I had not considered that. One thing at a time, first recue Abby.

We spent over two hours on deck 8 as the familiarity between Shinade and Suruchi grew. Eventually I had to pry them apart and bring the tour up to deck 9. The command deck was completed. We toured the bridge and I was happy to see all the stations were installed. I excused myself for a moment to slide into one of the three engineers stations on the bridge. Damn, it was comfortable. I activated the terminals and was extremely impressed with the displays and ease of working through the menus. A few things still needed to be connected but it was a huge improvement. The bridge had 13 stations in its new configuration. Captain, first officer, pilot, co-pilot, navigation, sensors, communications, life support engineering, propulsion engineering, FTL engineering, shuttle control, steward and security. All were the best commercial options that the Sapphire Empire could sell. We had room to configure two more stations on the bridge and I decided to keep the space open for now. How many crew did I actually need…well that was Suruchi’s problem to figure out.

Henry came running onto the bridge half dressed as we were leaving. I didn’t want to know why he wasn’t here. Soon we would have enough crew to always keep at least one person on watch. We started the tour of the rest of the deck and the first room was the captains conference room and his cabin. When Suruchi asked if this was my room I said no, I had a suite aft. She then said if she could use this room as hers. I stumbled a little bit but couldn’t find fault, so I agreed. My suite area was still larger anyway.

The officers lounge looked great and could hold more than twenty people comfortably. I showed her the nav computer and the university computer secured compartments expecting her to be amazed at them. She just looked everything over and nodded. Her interest was piqued briefly at the 20 VR learning stations. She asked about extending VR access to all the cabins on the ship…crew and passenger. I sat at a terminal and ran out some costs. Upgrading the main computer was a bit steep to handle the load…adding what 150 terminals and the hard line feeds?...then installation and maintenance costs. About 30,000 Sol credits by my estimates. Suchuchi was over my shoulder the entire time I was doing this work and when I finished she asked me to add the Sapphire Empire’s entertainment database and courses not already on the system. Just another 1,240 Sol credits.

Suruchi spent time convincing the cost was worth it. I was just thinking about the delay these upgrades would make. We were already getting close to my original 72-hour resupply window. I would need to extend it by 72 hours if we were going to accept passengers Suruchi said. I sighed and after some discussion we decided on opening up all 24 luxury cabins to passengers for a trip to Arana system. I still needed time to clear the passenger deck and didn’t think three days would cover it.

Suruchi was excited, she had something to do with a hard deadline now. The rest of the tour went quickly but she was impressed with the shuttle bays and paused briefly at the covered fighters in bays 5 and 6 but wisely didn’t ask questions. I had to order the interior of my luxury shuttle to get refurbished at her insistence since it would soon be ferrying passengers. She didn’t want to see the aft third of the ship which was the heart of the engineering. I was a bit disappointed at this but I had a list of my own things to do.

Suruchi sent me her completed contract. I transferred the steward bots to her supervision and she was off to get things done. She was excited about the prospects of running a passenger liner. Well as long as the passengers stayed on decks 6 and 7 and out of my way I could deal with it.