Chapter 66 Friends

Francis was a great companion in the game. He had a very analytical mind and a great grasp of the era. We had a lot of fun working together to find and utilize the clues. In the end, we failed to find Moriarty before he assassinated the prime minister. We got close and almost captured him twice. Francis couldn’t believe I only wanted to play in ‘nightmare’ mode. He did have a great time as Watson and wanted to do it again. He had forty or so other suggestions for other detective VR games based on other books as well. There were sixty Sherlock variations we could do and I wanted to win a few before moving on. I asked him if he was interested in the sword and sorcery genre. He wasn’t sure but agreed to try it if time permitted. Abby had a huge number of things for him to do in security. I think I had made a friend?

I woke up and was surprised my PerCom wasn’t flashing with urgent messages. I checked and other than a slew of purchase orders being held up for payment there were no emergencies. Oh, I was sure there were emergencies, I just didn’t have to handle them! Our departure was in 62 hours. We already had 21 guests on board and the shuttle was making constant trips picking up more.

That was why Abby had been wearing her dress uniform designed for the crew. When the crew was in the passenger area, they had to wear the ship’s uniform. It was an order from Suruchi to present a professional front. Well, it was best to get going. I showered and changed into fresh clothes and a skin suit. I didn’t put on my uniform as I didn’t plan to venture to any areas of the ship where the passengers were.

The morning meeting went well and I was unhappy to learn that the first captain’s dinner would be on the first night of departure with the passengers. Six people had already paid for the privilege. Did they all pay 50 Sol credits? They said just Jane Doe, Andrei Curran and Sophie Ferdinand had paid. The other three people were guests of those individuals. Suruchi calmed me by saying there would only be two other captain’s dinners on the voyage. She planned to have them every third night.

Next, we started to hash out the finances of the ship. Setting budgets for departments, ship maintenance, and guest services. I was extremely stingy with budgets as I wanted it to appear I was close to my financial limit. A lot of the crew knew I was hoarding crates of precious metals and Shinade was ridiculously wealthy in her own right. Her cabin had loads of new clothes technical gadgets, replica weapons and ‘artwork’. Well…artwork was in the eye of the beholder.

With a tightening of the purse strings, it would make the crew work harder to run a ship and utilize the hospitality to extend profits. They were already forecasting to exceed projected profits by 28% for this trip. Suruchi and Dora had raised cabin prices and luxury good prices and it hadn’t curbed demand. Evidently there were not many luxury space liners that traveled to the Ragnhild system. Suruchi seemed to think I was brilliant in selecting the destination and I just went along with it.

Suruchi had three crew addition requests at the meeting, but I turned her down. Surprisingly she said she would pay for one of them out of her salary. It was a woman named Camille Cortes. Essentially her role was going to be Suruchi’s personal assistant. I checked her profile 22 and recently graduated from a Prestigious University with an advanced degree in human psychology. She appeared extremely attractive from the headshot in the application folder. I told her it was fine but any bonuses I paid to the crew would not include her. Suruchi pursed her lips but nodded.

Abby reviewed security procedures for the umpteenth time at the meeting. She was positioning the wolf bots at various access points. They would be useful in alerting Julie to any trouble early. Next, she reminded crew that they were not to allow any passengers on deck 8 or deck 9. An attractive passenger had gotten Henry to give her a tour of the bridge. Henry thought more with his dick than his head. Abby suggested not letting him mingle with passengers in the future. I thought and said no, all crew were free to socialize with passengers. If Suruchi thought the crew was causing issues, then they would be banned for 30 days. Suruchi nodded at that.

Abby had some bad news. Emon was leaving. I learned Emon had been offered a teaching position at one of the premier universities on the planet at similar pay. He wasn’t cut out for space travel anyway. I planned to talk with him right after training this morning. I had some questions regarding Julie before he left. The rest of the meeting just reviewed things we had gone over in the past so I was extremely bored.

Training with the marines was a little different today. We were incorporating Titus and Francis into our routine. Haily was on the treadmill, watching us as was her norm. At least she had completed all her bridge certifications. She was now a full-fledged bridge officer. Abby decided on some team building wrestling today. Ugh, three matches went on simultaneously and then partners were rotated. This went on for fifteen matches. The team that won got to choose tomorrow’s workout.

I won seven of my twelve matches. Loree was two of my losses. She seemed to always get me to pin her and grab her breast. She would then say something inappropriate and cause me to blush and release her and then she turned the table completely. Abby said I needed to get over getting suckered…and to happen twice to the same opponent? She was disappointed.

Gwen walked in and looked around before joining Haily on the treadmills. My stomach lurched as they started talking. Relax I told myself. I had no designs on Gwen and Haily was a good enough person. Abby was handing out duty assignments the marines were leaving so I approached Gwen and Haily.

They were talking about the ship when I approached. Haily said hello with a big smile. She was still holding out hope. Gwen asked if I could accompany her to medical later today. Andie had gotten the cybernetic eye and synthetic corona and lens for her bad eye. The surgery was going to take just under an hour. I agreed and said I had to talk with Emon and then I would be in the robotics lab after. I left the two talking and running.

Emon was in his quarters packing and immediately thanked me for the opportunity and transit. His contract had already been settled by Suruchi and he just needed to pack and depart. I asked him about my ship AI and the VR system upgrades. He talked enthusiastically about them. The VR was the best possible system and he had almost stayed on board just to keep working on it. Julie was fully integrated into the ship. She could send bots to respond to emergencies and self-initiate most diagnostics. I asked him about her personality…how was it constituted?

He said he used a base loyalty algorithm targeting me as the owner and captain. It had some freedom to grow into its shell and would have been influenced by my interactions and any persons I noted as being loyal. The personality was now completely formed. If I wasn’t happy, I could purge and reset… I waved him off and told him I was happy with Julie. I was simply curious. Also, she might be listening in on this conversation…

I thanked Emon for his work and sent him a 100 Sol credit bonus. His contract had been strict and Suruchi had followed it to the letter, so he lost a portion of his salary. The bonus essentially made up for that. We shook hands and I left him to continue packing.

In the robotics lab I was a little shocked to see all the wolf bots were completed. Gabby must have done some all-nighters to finish. I was happy she had worked so hard but that meant she was ready to reskin the male steward bots. Well, I was going to spend my next two days getting ready to fabricate Eve’s new body. Today I planned to make her skeleton on the alien hull fabricator. Eve’s new frame was 1.86m in height (6’1”). I added a little height to create slightly larger bones for her hidden memory and processors.

I was admiring the frame when Gwen chimed the door to enter. I let her in and she walked around the room as I explained everything. Doc called Gwen to medical and I accompanied her. I held her hand during the procedures and she was given a mask to wear. Doc said she could remove it in 12 hours. The nanobots would need that much time to connect the cybernetic eye to her nervous system. The other eye would need a few weeks to heal. Gwen should stop in once a day to medical and either see her or one of her med bot assistants. They needed to check the eye’s progress s and inject the healing aides.

I walked Gwen back to the cabin. She asked if I could join her, not sexually. Just stay with her tonight. We lay in her bed talking and I told her about the sword and sorcery game and my trouble with the sexual ship AI. She thought it was all hilarious. She asked me what our relationship was. I paused and then said we were friends…she was the sister I always wanted. She said that was good. We fell asleep next to each.

The next day the headaches of getting ready to launch were on other people. Abby had canceled training and I was free to work on Eve 2.0. Eve had been glued to Celeste’s and Amos’ sides. She was taking the big sister and nanny role very seriously. I sent her new body profiles and she adjusted them to her tastes. When I got them back her hips were still a bit narrow and she added a little to her breast size but kept her facial features the same. I was ready. As soon as we entered subspace I could begin.

*Aston couldn’t believe his luck. Samantha had exited the ship and flown down to the planet in a shuttle to a port where he had multiple contacts. They agreed to hold her until he could reach them.*

*When he had arrived on the planet it hadn’t taken long to find other agents of the Sylvan. This should have scared him a little bit, but it didn’t. He was focused on bringing the engineer to justice…well getting his revenge. It had taken a large sum of credits to purchase another passenger’s tickets for him and Braddock. He had to buy them from someone who already had them as the ship was sold out! The thing that irked him the most was he couldn’t get a luxury cabin, just a regular cabin. No matter he would rectify that eventually.*

*He was recovering from the cosmetic surgery to alter his face, so the bandages covered his face when Samantha was brought before him. She didn’t recognize his face but when he asked where his ship and son were the color drained from her face and terror was plastered there. He didn’t need to torture her at all. She numbly answered all his questions. When he was done she asked about her fate?*

*Aston had thought about bringing her with him but that didn’t make sense. She had betrayed him once and would do so again. She was an off-worlder and if she disappeared no one would look for her. She was still attractive… One of his Sylvan contacts was part of the seedier society. He figured a quick death was too good for her. A life of misery would be better suited. He made the call on his PerCom and the man on the other end was more than happy to retrieve Samantha for him and employ her services.*

*He needed to plan. The Void Phoenix was leaving in 26 hours. He doubted he could smuggle any weapons on board and thought it best not to try. He was allowed one service bot to bring with him. The good thing was once you identified one contact of the planet you had a link to the entire network. It was a bit scary how embedded the Sylvan network was in Sapphire society. He called another contact and asked to quickly get a highly functional steward bot ready. It needed to have some dark combat coding that he could activate when needed. This wasn’t a problem and 14 hours later he was in transit to the station where the Void Phoenix was docked.*

*He had removed most of his bandages and hated the reflection in the mirror. He had been a gorgeous man and now he looked…common. Another thing he would repay the engineer for. The crate containing his steward bot was released to his care on the station. With Braddock in tow, he went and boarded the Void Phoenix.*