Chapter 59

This trip to the VR was different. Luna was here and her avatar was…disconcerting. Her avatar was dressed in skintight black leather and looked about thirty years old. She was playing a stealthy assassin seductress according to Julie. I needed to get some testosterone into this group…maybe Nero would play if I could tare him away from his sex bot.

We spent most of the session leveling up Luna’s character. Battling minor undead and searching for more clues to the necromancer’s whereabouts. I think it had been a mistake to bring Luna here. When we stopped in a tavern some burly male patrons flirted with her and she enjoyed the attention. I felt the need to step in and it started a bar fight. It was a game. Why did I feel the need to protect her? Well she reached level 4 by the end of the VR dream session while Eve, myself and Julie were sitting at level 8.

Eve came to the training session and of course she wasn’t at all. She reduced her reflexes enough to keep it somewhat fair. Abby was about evenly matched…the rest of us were not so fortunate. I think Eve was enjoying herself. Loree said we needed to even things by getting the powered combat armor on. The marines had all been fitted so it didn’t take everyone long to suit up. Eve quickly got frustrated.

Her bare strikes couldn’t harm us and are new speed was only slightly inferior to Eve’s maxed out speed. Eve’s body was taking a beating and I had to stop the training. Eve asked if she could be sized for a suit of combat armor herself. Wow that would violate so many laws in so many nations. Well what they didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them. I conferred with Abby and she agreed it would be ok as long as we didn’t reveal this. A sophisticated AI in control of powerful weapons had lead to so many human deaths over the centuries. We would be hunted and put on trial if found out. Abby would take precautions to lock down the training room when Eve trained in combat armor. When it was announced the marines just groaned.

The next week flew by. The shuttles and fighters had their hulls upgraded and the shielding around vulnerable systems was completed. They were moving on to the massive project of replacing the outer hull of the *Void Phoenix*. Stavros and Evira had repainted the lux shuttle a dark rich glossy blue. The two fighters and marine drop shuttle were repainted in a dull flat black. The last shuttle had been refurbished. It had been a boarding shuttle and it was more a transport shuttle now. It was painted a dull metallic gray.

During the week, with the help of Eve and Gabby, I completed refitting the skins on all the female steward bots. I guided Gabby as she worked on designing her male refits for the remaining steward bots.

During a workout with the marines Julie announced over the ship comms that Shinade had gone into labor. I rushed to medical to be there for the birth of my daughter. Shinade said with some pain and malice that there was no need for me to be here. I sighed and Doc came to my rescue and said I could wait on the far side of the room. I immediately began to pace as the med bots and Doc made Shinade comfortable. She refused any aide claiming women of her line didn’t need it.

I shocked call came in. Samantha had gone into labor as well and was on her way here. Doc gave me a curious look but I just shrugged. Soon both women were next to each other in labor and I swearit looked like they were competing on who could give birth first. Samantha one and the look of anger on Shinades face had Doc shuffling Samantha off to a private recovery bed with her new baby boy. I congratulated her but I don’t think she heard but Shinade’s death glare prevented me from going over to her as she left.

It took Shinade another twenty minutes before the baby girl was born. She cried briefly as Doc worked on the umbilical cord and cleaned her. Then she calmed down and a very sweaty Shinade held her. I stood over her and the baby girl smiling. I think I finally found some happiness is the tiny child.

I asked Shinade what she had decided to name the girl and she looked at me and said Celeste Callista Cordova. That translated to ‘heavenly beauty’ and used Shinade’s last name, Cordova, but I didn’t argue. And Celeste was the name I had suggested back when we had talked about names. Maybe this was a peace offering on her part?

*Samantha was in turmoil. She was experiencing depression and self-loathing. The longer she was away from the Pirate King Acton the more she regretted her time there*. *The crew of the Void Phoenix shunned her. She was isolated and alone. She had attempted a few times to see about escaping with Acton’s ultra fast courier but the damn guard dog bots followed her everywhere.*

*The engineer had added crew at Gunther station and she had almost made some headway with Suruchi, the first officer, before Shinade had gotten to her and convinced Suruchi that Samantha was not a person to be trusted. The new ship’s doctor, Andie, was the closest thing to a friend but she cared more about Samantha’s unborn child than her. She needed to find a way out.*

*On a brief trip to the promenade on deck 7 Samantha was shocked to find the cargo from the courier she had stolen was being sold in the shops there. It shouldn’t have surprised her but it did make her feel angry and hopeless. She had no control. The puppy on board, Zed, was the only being that was always happy to see her. Sometimes she would just sit and watch scenic views on the wall screens from old Earth and pet the dog.*

*When the Void Phoenix arrived in the Arana system she pulled herself together. She needed to act. She did a fair amount of research and gathered the necessary formula to induce labor. It had taken some minor subterfuge to get the med bots to make it for her. When Shinade went into labor Samantha would follow shortly after.*

*The moment finally came. A ship wide alert by Julie the annoying helpful and friendly AI announced it. Samantha returned to her cabin and took the drug. Ten minutes later she began to go into labor herself. She called for assistance and was soon next to Shinade in medical. Shinade was giving her a death stare that said…’how dare you take away my moment of being the center of attention!’ The engineer paced back and forth on the other side of the room while Andie calmly monitored both women.*

*It was Samantha who gave birth first. Probably due to her drug cocktail. The baby was three weeks early according to Andie but she didn’t detect any complications.*

*It had been a fairly easy birth from what she had expected. The child was of her womb and she was having trouble disassociating herself from it as she cradled it. No! She needed to be free of the past and this trap. She wanted to go to her cabin to rest but the med bots just moved her to an isolated bed while Shinade continued in her birthing process.*

*Shinade didn’t want any aides. She had yelled at Andie twice that her family was strong and didn’t need aide to give birth. She did swear a few times at the Engineer for her current predicament. Finally she heard the wailing of a new born. Her own son was asleep in a crib next to hers with Eve standing watch over it. She asked Eve for a favor, could Eve serve as her child’s god mother? Eve needed to communicate with Julie to find out what that was before smiling and saying yes. Damn Eve was acted more human sometimes than humans did.*

*It was two days before she was allowed back to her quarters. She took the child with her and refused to let anyone know the child’s name. A day later she managed to get off the ship and disappear into the station. She couldn’t get her ship but she did manage to get a few chips of hard Sapphireian currency. Just enough to get down to the planet. Thankfully her PerCom had all her identity chips active and she had no issues.*

Abby was apologizing. Samantha had skipped out. It was noted that Samantha had left for the station two days ago but her marines thought she was just going to the station to get supplies for her newborn. Abby said we shouldn’t make a huge effort to search for her as it would draw attention to us. There was a letter.

The letter was addressed to me and Eve. It detailed her shame of everything she had done since abandoning the engineer on the planetoid. She couldn’t live with herself. She was entrusting her child to him and Eve. Her son’s name was Amos Rue. Eve said that name meant ‘burden or regret’. Wow Samantha, way to lay it on your son. I hope one day she didn’t realize what a mistake she had just done. I would raise the boy like my own.