Chapter 91

While the entire crew was busy around me I was spending my time working out and in VR. My workouts were all individual in the gym as I found out that having my body active allowed me to focus better. When I went into VR I was working on simulations with Julie for adding weapons to the Void Phoenix. We had a myriad of weapons to choose from, most substandard so we needed to be flexible in their placement to get them upgraded at a later point.

There were three major problems with adding weapons. The first was space was limited and adding them half hazardly would ruin the ship's aesthetics. We also had to hide the weapon additions behind our alien hull to hide them from scanners. Since we planned to change the outer hull enough to hide the *Void Phoenix* I was open to adding weapons.

The second point was the power systems to operate weapons. We had some military upgrades on the station we could swap out which would increase our power but the work to do so was going to be very tedious.

The third point was wiring the terminals on the bridge to control and utilize the weapons. This was a huge project as it required tie-ins with sensors and comms. Our sensors might even be upgraded with the alien modules and make any work at this point mute.

Over the first week at the station, we had tried a dozen things in VR and every one ended in a roadblock to my engineer's mind. Then Julie suggested something that I liked a lot. Instead of altering the *Void Phoneix*, just add a detachable hull. So in essence we would finish the new hull on the ship and then add large hollow modules to change our appearance. The sensors couldn’t be covered but we could add all new emitters to the fake hull. There were definitely enough spare parts in the station for this course of action.

We started doing mock-ups and I finally decided on the Norwegian Hauler hull. It hadn’t been manufactured in about 200 years but it was a large egg-shaped interstellar transport. Since the ship model was so old and rare out here in the rim the few inconsistencies in shape and size shouldn’t be noticed. We could also plead that our Norwegian Hauler had been through a bunch of upgrades. Julie was already drawing up new registration papers. The name ship moniker would be the *Portly Viking*. She said it was a good name for a transport ship. The only issue I could foresee is our available cargo was only about 15% of an actual Norwegian Hauler.

I was going to have to power up the fabricators on the station and get my alien hull fabricators to coat the faux hull in a thin layer as well.

The easiest defensive measure was to incorporate decoy drones. The drones could be stored in a tube located aft and launched through a fast retracting trap door. They emitted a strong electronic and thermal signal to match the ship and could be controlled for about 60 minutes at full burn before running out of fuel. The station had 78 in its stores. Each tube could hold 4 drones. I planned to take 16, putting eight in the tubes on ready and eight more in storage. The tubes were 14 meters in length and 2 meters in diameter and would need to be fabricated. It wasn’t difficult to find space for two tubes, both aft, one port side, and one starboard.

Nero was going to have a bit of work moving a few lines and running control cables to the bridge but nothing challenging as the tubes were essentially going to be installed in rarely used engineering access corridors.

The remaining 62 drones we were not taking were going to be used for target practice by Zoe and Elias. It was a bit of a waste but I figured since their actions had saved the ship from serious damage they deserved a little fun.

For defensive weapons, I wanted to add six anti-missile grazer turrets. They were for cruisers and could even damage fighters. Since the ship’s passenger complement was reduced I planned to remove 6 escape pods and install pop-up turrets. There would be three starboards and three port. These grazers would be mounted in areas of the hull not covered by the faux hull disguise. Powering the grazers was a huge issue. I found space to install one medium generator port and one starboard. To increase the rate of fire the turrets would be tied to draw from the main reactor as well if needed.

The final defensive measure I wanted to add was upgrading the shielding to the alien shields but that would take time.

I also had access to dozens of subspace disruptors on the station in storage. Although I didn’t foresee a use for them they were very expensive pieces of hardware so we stored all 49 in the *Void Phoenix’s* cargo hold.

For weapons, the easiest thing to add would be missiles. The quality of the Union missiles was quite low among the human civilizations but they were all I had access to. They came in two varieties dumb and smart. Dumb missiles once they were fired locked onto a target and made minor adjustments to pursue the assigned target. Smart missiles could be sent new commands from the ship and had enhanced evasive ability. Dumb missiles usually had poor evasive abilities. Union manufactured three sizes of missiles.

The smallest missile was good against fighters and gunships. The medium-sized dumb missiles were for corvettes and frigates. The large missiles were for destroyers and larger class ships. The smallest dumb missiles were 2 meters long and half a meter in diameter. The medium was five meters long and over a meter in diameter. The large, capital missiles were 16 meters long and two meters in diameter. Due to the size of *Void Phoenix,* the only missiles I could reasonably carry were the smallest version. I didn’t want to incorporate all the infrastructure required for the smart missiles so I was going dumb.

So how many small dumb missiles would I carry and where was the launcher going to be located? I decided on a single dual launcher. I was going to mount it aft at the rear of the cargo bay. I planned to make a small room with racks for missiles. Racks for 16 missiles plus two in the dual launcher…that was my capacity. I tasked Gabby with converting two stevedore bots from the station to be stationed in this room permanently. I would seal off the room behind the alien paneling so it would not be hidden completely from sensors. Offensive weapons were illegal in most human space civilizations.

So far all of these weapons would be usable with the Norweigon Hauler disguise installed and would be concealed from scans. The controls for the small dumb missiles were going to take a lot of programming and control setup on a bridge terminal. It may take longer than our stay at the dark station but it would happen.

Now offensive weapons. In the converted fighter bays, I had small rails guns, heavy lasers, heavy grazers, and even two heavy plasma throwers. The plasma throwers were useless to me as they were anti-boarding weapons. They created a short-range splatter arc to damage incoming boarding shuttles. They were too large and inefficient for my needs.

Rail guns were illegal in most sensible systems. Large rail guns could do significant damage to planets and create hazards in space lanes. The rail guns I had access to were small, firing eight-centimeter projectiles. They were short-range weapons and I didn’t want to carry a large stockpile of munitions. So that left me with either heavy lasters or grazers. The grazers were more energy intensive but had a better range. Union grazers were also the best variant of weapons produced is our region of space. Another reason to choose the grazer is the lasers the Union produced were inferior.

So I decided on two medium grazers used on large Union destroyers. A destroyer would have eight to twelve of these weapons and I planned to build an exterior emplacement on the *Void Phoenix*. The best iteration Julie and I came up with was installing the two grazer emplacements forward which made them look like eyes on the sleek body of the ship. I planned to store the grazers in the cargo hold for now and just work on getting the control lines to the bridge. I had no feasible power source for the grazers and they would be under the faux hull anyway. They would draw on the ship's main power core, basically taking all the power for sustained firing. I had enough small defensive weapons planned, so these two grazers were going to be my hammer.

The timeline for the actual installation was a long way off. For now, I just took the best two grazers and disassembled two others for the parts I could not fabricate.

So focusing on defense was my job. The entire ship was going to be abuzz with lots of changes.