Chapter 75 Rethinking Plans

I got the alert that Jane Doe had been murdered by Edmund. I was in shock at first but then felt some relief. I had been stressing about her and couldn’t come up with a safe action to take. Edmund had made the brotherhood sound ridiculously powerful within human-settled space.

I was considering a new plot and path for the Void Phoenix. I had been planning to head toward the core worlds and had been toying with the idea of visiting Earth, the origin of humanity. The visitor passes for the planet were extremely expensive but the cost was easily within my means.

Rather than deal with Edmund, I was stalling. Claire was feeding Celeste and Amos so I called Julie. She appeared in a sports bra and running shorts. Ah, it was time to go to the workout with the marines and this was her way of reminding me. I asked Julie to dress more formally when in my presence from now on. She frowned and her garb changed to an elaborate ballroom dress. I made the mistake of letting out a smirk and smile. I shouldn’t have done that as it would just encourage the AI to fool around in the future.

Abby commed me a while later and Francis and herself were ready to discuss Edmund’s fate. I left my cabin and met them. Abby wanted Edmund to be placed in charge of ship counter-intelligence. Francis wanted Edmund kicked off the ship at the next port. All three of us agreed that we were going to have to purge the ship of any traces of the three Brotherhood agents. In the end, Edmund’s fate was mine to decide. We talked for an hour longer before I came to my decision and told them. Abby was happy and Francis seemed neutral to my decision.

Edmund was brought before us in under guard and I told him of his fate. He would resume his duties as a bartender on deck 7. But he was now going to be working for Francis, helping him with investigating crew and passengers. He was actually much better trained for this task than Francis. I had placated Francis by saying if Edmund misstepped in the future we would either turn him over to the authorities or abandon him at the next port. Edmund just nodded like this was all normal and expected.

For my workout, I ran 15 miles in low gravity since I missed the marine training. Buckie had led the training and it showed as a few of them were limping around the ship. I knew Buckie and Abby were trying to tighten up discipline after the takeover attempt. Abby even had one marine constantly in power armor to respond quickly to any threat.

I liked to think the attempt was an isolated incident but I couldn’t bet on it. After cleaning up I went and sat on the bridge in my captain’s chair. We always had two bridge officers on duty now. Haily and Elias were on duty now. They talked quietly to themselves and I worked at my captain's station. Since the incident, Haily had stopped her flirtatious efforts on me. Maybe she was hooking up with another crew member? I didn’t care. I had Celeste to watch over and a trio of women on my side; Eve, Gwen, and Julie. Even though I was starting to crave an intimate relationship I could go without for a little while longer…maybe I would take up Julie’s offer for some VR sex? That wouldn’t be too weird, right?

My eyes focused back on my course-plotting. We had registered to fly to the Ederne system after the Ragnhild system, remaining in Sapphire Empire space. I knew Suruchi was already setting up plans to contract cargo and passengers in Ederne. After Ederne I planned to take us into the People’s Solidity space, toward the human core worlds. Now I was reconsidering…no, I had already changed my mind.

I zoomed out. So far the Sapphire region of space had shown itself as relatively safe. Well besides the agents from and ultra-powerful core world syndicate trying to kill his crew and take his ship and alien artifacts. Maybe he should circle back and check in on his family? He had cleared their debt so he thought they would be fine without his interference.

I decided to only remain in the Ragnhild system for five days. Just enough time to refuel, reprovision and restock. Then he would do a quick jump on the Ederne system. From the Ederne system, he hoped to leave the Sapphire region of space. Not toward the Solidity but toward Anderson Research Station. This was an independent station that orbited a massive planet. The planet had a gravity six times that of Earth so it was uninhabitable. But life on the planet was vast and varied. So humans studied the life on the planet. The research station actually hosted dozens of scientists from various star nations.

I commed down to the lab where Edmund and Francis were working. I asked if the Brotherhood had an investment in the Anderson Research Station. It took them thirty minutes to check what data they could decode from the shuttle. Edmund said no agents were listed but the Brotherhood was funding some of the research. Edmund also said his access to the files was limited so he couldn’t be 100% certain either.

The station had 30,000 or so residents and steady interstellar traffic. More importantly from the station we could skirt human space and circle back toward the Union with one long subspace trip. I would check on my family and then goto to an independent station and get some weapons installed on the Void Phoenix.

Then we would bounce around the Rim Worlds delivering cargo and passengers while I researched the alien tech. It was a plan, maybe not a great plan but one I could accept. When we stopped in the Union I could task Abby and Buckie with collecting a few more marines they trusted as well.

I saved and locked my work on my captain’s terminal. Julie had appeared on the bridge. It was time to help Gabby skin her first male bot. In the robotics lab Abby, Luna, and Zed were playing while they waited for me. Luna wanted to watch the process and I said that maybe her parents would want her here for that. She said they already gave her permission. Not believing her I commed them. They said it was fine. Confused I explained in more detail what we were doing and they still said it was fine.

Luna had turned 13 recently and I thought that was a bit young to help assemble a male bot with functional anatomy. Not wanting to make Luna upset I told her she could watch from the corner of the room.

Gabby was slow and deliberate as she worked. I was watching her and giving her advice as she directed the three bots assisting her but I didn’t interfere. I was working on my terminal to create skins for my humanoid engineering bots. I didn’t actually plan to follow through I was just keeping my mind busy while I was in robotics supporting Gabby in her endeavors.

Gabby finished and was testing out the penis functionality on the bot while Luna’s eyes bulged. The steward bot was prone and face up. Gabby was at her terminal confirming her data.

I got a comm request from Francis and took the call. They had great news. Jane Doe hadn’t told her superiors she was on board the Phoenix. I mean they could figure it out eventually when she didn’t report in but we would have a grace period according to Edmund. I told them to start disassembling the shuttle anyway. I didn’t want any trace of Brotherhood tech out in the open. Everything useful could be stored in one of my engineering lab compartments.

At least I had gotten some good news today. Now I just had to distance myself from the Brotherhood. I looked at my PerCom. We were less than seven hours from dropping out in the Ragnhild system. I also had promised Gwen I would play the Sword and Sorcery game with her today. She was currently in the tank getting reskinned herself.

I told Gabby to send the steward bot back to Suruchi and a look of disappointment came on her face. What did she think I would let her test it out personally? I went and ordered the bot to dress and head back to deck 7 myself. I told Luna I was going to VR and if she wanted she could join me and Gwen…and probably Julie and Eve. She zipped out of the lab with Zed following on her heels.

Gabby asked if she could join too. I commed Francis and pitifully begged him to join us but he was too engrossed in what he was doing. I told Gabby it was ok but I really needed to get some more guys to balance the scales.

Let’s see if we can find the elusive necromancer in six hours.

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*Lazarus and Braddock sat in their cabin. The appointed time was coming up…sometime in the next 30 minutes the crew of his ship should knock the Void Phoenix out of subspace. They would then rush to engineering and make sure the ship couldn’t reenter subspace. That way his crew could board the Void Phoenix and take it over.*

*He hadn’t been able to find out what happened when they dropped out of subspace. But a few people did notice that three very attractive women did disappear from the luxury cabins. Since they had been dining in the restaurant on deck 7 their absence was noticed. Lazarus assumed they were the ones responsible for the combat and dropping out of sub-space.*

*His timer hit zero and started to count up. Maybe his crew had to get further out and the disruptor would go off soon. An hour later Lazarus swore and Braddock tried to quip that maybe they got lost. Lazarus gave the engineer a stare and he shrunk back. Space was big and interceptions like this were very difficult but he had been sending out locational pings with the device the Sylvan had given him. It was just freaking simple math to get on the correct vector and explode the disruptor at the correct time. Even though the Void Phoenix was fast his ship had a 30-hour head start. It should have been feasible.*

*Braddock asked if he could go and relax. Lazarus waived him off. What the fuck did that crafty engineer do to prevent him from ambushing the ship? To tell the truth, he had been a little relieved. There had been too many things that just were not adding up. He had thought about transmitting a warning to his ship when they broke out of subspace to just retreat and not take the Void Phoenix. But after days of thought and confirming the ship had no defensive or offensive weapons he committed to the action. But it never happened.*

*Braddock spent credits to get the companionship of a female steward bot the remainder of the trip. Lazarus didn’t care about the expense as it was Sylvan credits the boy was spending. He tried to get his mind straight and plan his next step. His own attempt failed so he would just transmit the ship’s location to the Sylvan and stand back and watch.*

*When the ship finally came out of subspace in the Ragnhild system it took two hours before his crew contacted him on board. The encrypted transmission said his signal was cut off just a day into transit. That made no sense…wait…he knew the Void Phoenix’s hull was being replated while in transit. Did the engineer somehow add something to the new hull to disrupt the Sylvan communication device? Was it on purpose because he knew who Lazarus actually was?*

*He needed to figure things out. Hopefully, he could claim both the Void Phoenix and his son with the help of the Sylvan.*