Chapter 29

After returning to normal space I had a massive amount of maintenance to do. Refueling, cleaning, calibrations, efficiency checks. I sent out all the exterior bots to scan the hull. Eve was right by my side helping direct the bots and report on progresses. I decided it was time to confront Eve as well.

I started with saying how quick the exterior checks were with the four massive bots, it was like we had twice as many as we actually needed. She missed my sarcasm and just agreed with me. Well score one for Eve. Next I broached the subject of the stewards being modeled after the actors from the Pirate comedy.

She paused and locked eyes with me. She asked if she did something wrong by getting them made in those images. I said no but I wanted to know why she did it. She replied that when we watched the vids of that show together it was the only time I laughed and laughter is an indicator of happiness. I paused in routing two bots to tie in an exterior hull sensor module. Wow. I told Eve thank you and that we should plan to watch some more vids together. She smiled happily and said the university computer had 294 episodes we had not yet watched on it. We worked in unison for another hour before I broached the last subject.

I asked Eve why the princess in SLUMBER quest looked like her. Without missing a beat she said she wanted to show me that she was viable sexual partner so it would motivate me to work on her upgrades. She added that she could wait until the ship was operating optimally. It took me a few moments to process that. I asked how would me having sex with a VR princess demonstrate she was a viable sexual partner. Eve replied immediately that was because she was controlling the VR princess in real time herself.

Wait, what? My mind raced. Eve hacked my SLUMBER unit to join me in the preprogrammed dreams. Too many issues with this…the unit shouldn’t be able to be hacked, Eve should have barriers that prevented her from hacking anything at all and just the fact she joined my dream without asking. I tried to act casual when I asked if she had been part of any of my other SLUMBER programs. She said she had observed me in the last 7 operations but only joined in as the princess twice. Ok I needed to run a complete diagnostic on Eve and examine her operations history. I wasn’t scared of her. Her base programming code was essentially as my bodyguard and that was hard coded and unalterable programming. After we got back to the planetoid…no too obvious…maybe a few days after we got back.

The rest of the time before the jump I was distracted but got a lot done. When we entered FTL again the drive was operating at 105%, excellent. Eve said it was time to rest and asked if I wanted her to set up my SLUMBER unit. I pretended to think a moment then said sure. I wanted an emergency drill…a solo challenge. An hour later after eating I was laying down with my SLUMBER unit.

The scenario was an alien attack and I was on a battleship. I had to make my way to the shuttle bay and escape in a heavy fighter…at least that is what I decided was my best course of action. A heavy fighter had a micro jump drive. Well I got to the fighter and out into space but the aliens had pulse grav well so my fighter wouldn’t jump. I was shot down as I tried to race out of the envelope of the pulse grav well.

Waking I was a bit upset. If I had known that species of alien had pulse grav wells then I could have planned for it. I made notes on PerCom to study up on alien species…my university computer had 103 alien races on file and each one had its own extensive education course…. Since Eve had already hacked my SLUMBER unit I asked if she could make university courses into SLUMBER education programs. She said yes but would need access to the university core AI to do so. I told her I would set it up…and allow her access after I made sure I hard-lined the AIs core programming.

I did a quick trip to the bridge and found Henry sleeping there. When I asked he why he never left the bridge he said a ship always needed to have at least one person on the bridge. Huh, the kid was right. He was a better captain than me as all I focused on was improving the ship and keeping the ship running. I patted him on the back and told him to go to sleep in his quarters. I would be on bridge watch for the remaining duration of FTL.

I could do a lot here. I started moving my bot army around on various assignments. One of the smaller cargo holds was full of components that we had replaced and was just junk. It wasn’t worth recycling so I planned to jettison it into a planet to burn it up. I checked on deck 9 and it was looking good except the color scheme. I spent some time with the design software planning out the deck renovations.

I was planning to own a cabin adjacent to the university AI. Next I moved the deck’s small armory next to my cabin. I left the 9 cabins that had already been refurbished alone. I decided to move the medical unit down to deck 7. I kept the captain’s briefing room just off the bridge but removed two other rooms in the captain suite. With this space and the medical unit space I could make 4 more crew cabins on the deck. So that would be a total of 15 crews cabins on deck 9, 11 crew cabins on deck 8, 11 remaining crew cabins on deck 4 and there were 12 crew cabins scattered in aft engineering in blocks of 4. The cabins on deck 4 were double occupancy but I would switch them to single occupancy. So my crew complement, if I used all these cabins, would be 49 with single occupancy. I was thinking deck 5 would become my archeology lab and hopefully mount the massive alien sensor module into it as well. I would remove all the cabins and build in some security vaults for the artifacts and labs to study them. Deck 6 and 7 would remain as is, 39 regular passenger cabins and 24 luxury cabins respectively.

Henry returned to the bridge which interrupted my drafting session. We talked about family for a bit. I told him about my family and he told me his parents worked the asteroid belt in the Silverstream system. He had two older brothers, both killed in the same mining accident as one tried to save the other. That was why his parents had gotten him an education. Well besides his terrible decorating skills Henry seemed like a good kid.

We returned to normal space again and I had Henry remain glued to long range sensors. I think we were ok. If someone had followed us we would have seen them during our first stop. I went back to engineering to do my duties there and Eve joined me. This stop almost seemed routine. After the FTL drive I went and visited Nero and Gabby and praised them for their work. I told them they could use the university computer to obtain more certs. I actually told Gabby she had to spend at least 12 hours a week working on them. The more she learned the more valuable she would be.

I found the Wren directing the cleaning bots in the lower decks. She was doing ok and I left her to it. I got a quick nap without the SLUMBER unit and then went to the bridge for the final FTL leg of our journey.

We entered FTL and the drive was at 101% efficiency. Looks like we were going to settle around 96% if my calculations were correct. During this leg I decided it was time to prep the university computer for Eve and also to get it ready to serve as the ships AI.

Well I now wished I had a computer engineer in my crew. I was trying to set up an impenetrable series of firewalls for the AI but my lack of knowledge was evident. I decided I couldn’t tie the AI into the ship until the firewalls were installed, checked and tested. I did manage to hardwire the AI programming so that it’s core programming could only be changed by physically changing out the central operating data disks. I gave it an old English accent based on an actress in an ancient movie. The movie had a fantastical nanny who used an umbrella to travel. I didn’t watch the movie but the voice struck me as perfect for a ships AI. Just as I was finishing up Henry commed me and said we were 20 minutes from our exit point. I told everyone to get to the bridge excitedly. They were going to see their home for the next few months.