Chapter 47 Crew Additions

Suruchi went straight to work. I found myself with some free time. I spent a few hours on the FTL drive and checking on the engineering bots. Eve had everything well under control but I spent some time working along side her. She complained that monitoring communications, shipments and programming the bots was too much for her. She wanted her programming expanded. I was more than a little worried about expanding her programming further so I promised to remove a few of her duties. We were both working in the labs unpacking the equipment for the botany lab and material science lab. They were civilian grade labs that were shipped from Gunther station. Mostly I just got some familiarity with the equipment and got the bots to install it. A call was flagged on my PerCom by Suruchi as important.

Emon’s shuttle was on approach and she wanted to me to meet him and help him get settled in. I thought that is why I hired her? Before I could reply the communication ended. Eve voiced my own thoughts asking if this was not Suruchi’s job now? I just heaved a heavy sigh and went to the lower cargo hold where we were receiving all shuttles.

I was relieved to find Suruchi there as well to meet Emon. Thankfully she told me that in order to maintain the hierarchy of authority I would need to interview and orient new crew members with her. She would see to the running and maintaining the non-engineering aspects of the ship as agreed. Emon arrived with six large crates of personal items and two humanoid bots. His bots were not overly impressive, just cleaning and basic service bots with hard metallic shells.

Suruchi took the lead and brought us all up to the central lift to deck 4. She had decided to put Emon in one of the crew quarters on this deck. I was more of a third wheel and as Suruchi expounded on the wonders of the ship, I was impressed with how much she knew and how she was able to talk up the ship. After his bots got his belongs into his quarters, we all went to the robotics lab. Emon was extremely impressed with the machines and workstations. He said the facility was even better than the university one on Gunther Prime. Smaller… but better equipment he added. I had repaired or upgraded all my fabricators from Gunther station.

Emon was paging through the projects and asking questions on one of the main displays. When my current evolution of Eve’s vagina came up I blushed, Suruchi looked at me with amusement and Emon studied the schematic with intensity. I killed the monitor’s power and told Emon that he would have to earn the privilege to work in the robotics and design laboratory. His job would be limited to integrating the university computer into the ship’s AI and keeping all the bots running at maximum efficiency. This would take away one of Eve’s duties. Technically bots could only maintain, repair and upgrade other bots under human supervision, it was on of the basic laws of AI. I told Emon there was a small secondary robotics lab on deck 3 where he could maintain the army of bots on the ship.

Our next stop was up to the navigation and university computer cores on deck 9. Emon was impressed with the university computer. It was an advanced model for being so far from the human core systems. A university on a planet with a billion inhabitants this far out might have something comparable to this computer he said. I was happy to know that I had gotten a great deal on the university system. We then went over the expanding the capacity to serve as the ships AI and to handle a large multiple of VR stations to be installed in all cabins and quarters. I wanted the AI to be able to monitor and assign bots as needed and to assist the bridge crew in as many capacities as possible. He seemed excited at the prospects of the project. Unfortunately, he said it would take him a few months to get everything done that I wanted as the extent of the programming was extensive for the Ais conversion. The VR expansion wouldn’t take much effort though.

Suruchi interrupted and said he had three days to network the VR stations into the luxury cabins. She was using the VR as a tool in advertising our luxury cabins. I checked the station directory and she had put up an advertisement and booking page for our ship! She worked fast! She had the cost listed at 120 Sol credits per cabin plus 10 Sol credits per person, up to a total of four per cabin. Meals not included. We left Emon to start his work and Suruchi walked me to the captain’s conference room…which had been converted to an office with a separate reception area. What the hell? She was definitely making herself at home. We sat in her office that had minimal furniture but I had a suspicion that would change shortly.

Suruchi handed me a data slate. The data slate was a projected expense report for ship operations on a monthly basis in Sol credits. I reduced to the simplest itemized view.

 Crew Salaries 6,000

 Ship Maintenance, Fuel 10,000

 Auxiliary Ship Funds, Taxes 2,000

 Ship Provisions 3,000

 Projected Revenue based on two transits per month

 Luxury Cabins 6,800

 Passenger Cabins 2,400

 Food, Entertainment Sales 1,500

 Cargo 2,000

I immediately and jokingly asked if 21,000 expenses vs 12,700 revenue was a good business model. Suruchi didn’t laugh. She just said she couldn’t see my passenger business becoming viable unless we gained reputation as a fast and safe liner to raise prices. I didn’t tell her I had enough liquidity to run the business at a loss for decades, probably centuries. Instead, I asked her what I should do. She had two dozen potential circular interstellar flight routes in the Sapphire Empire. We would be competing with other passenger liners but could log four or five trips per month instead of the two projected in the expense report. It would raise maintenance and fuel but greatly increase revenue if we could get close to 100% booking each leg and possibly make a small profit.

I told her I would think on it. For now I told her to just plan on the trip to the Arana system. I didn’t realize how hard it was to make a profit with starships. I went down to the robotics lab to work on Eve’s upgrades. Over the next few days I bounced back and forth from the robotics lab to the alien hull fabricators. Eve was doing her best to transcribe the two archival data chips she located that were related to the devices. They were very different from the fabricators I was used to. Taking one apart seemed like my best option so that is what I was currently doing. I related this to someone being familiar with a simplistic radio and trying to figure out holographic display screen. You understood the what the device was meant to do but it was painstaking slow to understand the higher complexity. Well, whenever I got frustrated, I just returned to the robotics lab.

It only took Suruchi a day and half after Emon arrived to set up interviews. The first interview was with an entire family. The husband and wife were in their forties and were both certified shuttle craft engineers. They had moved out here as civilian contractors for the navy’s cargo and transportation logistics department. Their eldest son was a twenty-year-old shuttle pilot. They also had a young daughter who was twelve. Suruchi said it was a package deal but her background checks had glowing reviews for the married couple and the son had over 400 hours shuttle time logged without incident.

The interview went fast and the daughter was playing with Zed the entire time. Did I mention Gabby’s puppy had decided to follow me around the ship? Eve said it was because I played with him and gave him a ton of treats. This hadn’t made Gabby happy but Zed still slept in her cabin at night at least.

I signed off on adding Stavros and Evira Matris to the crew as shuttle engineers. Their son, Finn, was added as the shuttle pilot. Their contract was very favorable according to Suruchi and included a full VR education for their daughter, Luna, up to age 22. They had a five-year contract but freedom to buy out the contract or renew it pending a positive performance review after five years. A few hours later the family was moving from Gunther Station to my ship and getting settled in. Apparently, Zed had found a new playmate as he started following Luna around almost immediately. I could see why Gabby had been jealous as I missed the pup. Eve suggested I make my own puppy bot and I dismissed the suggestion.

Suruchi had a candidate for our medical officer. He was a retired army surgeon and in his fifties. He looked younger…maybe thirty-five so he had some anti-aging treatments. The interview didn’t go well as he seemed too stiff to me. He had never been married or had any kids. Post interview Suruchi agreed that he may lack bed side manner and his outstanding resume wasn’t enough to make up for it. Before I could leave another candidate came into the Suruchi’s office.

It was a friend of Suruchi from college on Gunther Prime. She was a strikingly beautiful woman and I guessed her beauty might be more from surgery than natural. She was 1.8m in height, green eyes, dirty blonde hair and mid tone skin. She spoke eloquently and since she was interviewing for the chief steward position, I thought she could do well. Suruchi asked her numerous questions about her experience in the hotel industry for my benefit I think. She was a cross between a concierge and receptionist it seemed for luxury hotels on Gunther Prime. She had worked with high-end clientele and had over a decade experience. Post interview I gave the green light to Suruchi and that is how Dora Kiernan was added to the crew.

I had two days reprieve from interviews as Suruchi was working diligently in getting cargo and passengers lined up while training Dora. With our departure just 36 hours away we had 20 cabins booked and twelve tons of miscellaneous cargo for Arana. Dora was slowly taking over the duties of finding passengers. It was a little outside her background by Suruchi told me she could manage it. Suruchi had dozens of contacts from her prior job and she knew who could afford to travel to Arana and who needed to travel there for work.

Well, my free time was almost up, it had almost felt like a vacation. I had enjoyed working on Eve’s enhancements and trying to figure out the hull plating fabricators. I actually examined a sample of the hull plating in the new material science lab and it not only was stronger, lighter, had excellent radiation shielding but also was extremely difficult to for scanners to penetrate…at least the scanners I had access to couldn’t penetrate it at all! It was 27 different molecular layers, repeated 919 times. Each molecular layer was .001 mm thick giving the overall plating a thickness of 24.9 mm. I was sure more layers could be added but the effectiveness of that thickness was more than sufficient for our needs. I was running models in my spare time to hopefully be able to replace our entire hull with the material in modular fashion. I also planned to add thinner additional plating around sensitive computer systems, the bridge, shuttle bays, most of engineering and replace the hulls on the shuttles and fighters. Shinade had completed her certification as a heavy fighter pilot. Apparently, there was a party to celebrate her accomplishment but I hadn’t been invited…Abby told me about it.

Suruchi had finally hired a medical officer. Well, I wasn’t too sure she was 100% qualified. She was 27 and had graduated the top of her class from the top medical school on the Gunther Prime. She was a bit of nerd according to Suruchi and specialized in virology but had plenty of experience in an ER and as a physician. Suruchi had interviewed her planet side so I wasn’t present and had missed the video conference call because I was using my SLUMBER unit. Eve had set the ‘Do Not Disturb’ settings on the SLUMBER unit so only she could interrupt me…I changed them back after I figured it out.

So, I met Dr. Andie Niaz when she was moving into her quarters on the ship. She was thin and pretty plain looking. She was also ridiculously nervous on meeting me. I wasn’t sure why. We talked for a bit and I showed her the medical facility and she was impressed and gave her a small budget to get any supplies or equipment she thought she needed. She was reviewing her medical steward bot’s programming specs and asked about getting a nurse bot too and I just turned to Suruchi and told her to order two ‘nurse bots’ to the doctor’s specifications. I had hired Suruchi so I didn’t have to deal with this!

We never found a logistics officer. Suruchi had apparently interviewed 5 different candidates but every background check she did through her old firm had turned up red flags. I did get annoyed when my PerCom buzzed with a message that I was due for a physical. I decided to humor the new doctor and went to medical. I lay in a chamber and the scan took 28 minutes. My blood work was done while I was in the machine. Andie told me I needed some adjustments to my diet or she could program the supplement machines to produce vitamin pills I would need to take twice a day. Eve interrupted over the med bay comms to say the supplements were fine and she would make sure I took them. I tried not to look surprised at the interruption and just nodded pointing at the speaker in the ceiling. I knew Eve was monitoring the entire ship but that was a little creepy.

That was about all the excitement. The ship was humming with activity now and my Sol credit balance was down to 24,920 credits. We had 42 passengers in our luxury cabins and I had no intention of meeting any of them!

Vanessa came to say goodbye. Her shuttle was packed to the brim and she had booked her shuttle and herself on a transport returning to her home system in six days. Eve had scanned her shuttle six separate times to make sure she was only carrying what I had allocated for her. I had really thought she might stay but was glad she was going home to her family. We didn’t talk about Samantha at all just some small talk and a long hug. She had already said her farewells to Shinade, Gabby, Nero and Henry.

With Vanessa gone I went to engineering to prep the ship for launch. It took 2 hours…I was being more careful than normal…before we left the dock. Henry said we got a comm from the station commodore wishing us a safe and speedy voyage. The amount of money I had spent was probably extremely welcome to the struggling economy. We gained enough distance from the gas giant over the next few hours to enter sub space. It was time for the next adventure…Abby I’m coming.