Chapter 25

With the hull turned over to me I found a new issue. The ship had been powered by the docking platform. There were no active generators on the ship and no fuel to run them. I felt a little bit duped but I should have noticed this in engineering. The rates for energy feeds were quite high. I decided to just keep decks 8, 9, and 10 pressurized and also the aft third of the ship that held engineering. This caused me to have to fix 19 bulkheads. Eve was busy ferrying supplies and bots to our new ship.

A day later and I was seriously doubting my timeline. I researched renting one of the internal ship docks in the Silverstream station. A pressurized one with oxygen that would fit the Void Phoenix was 10,000 credits a day. That way I wouldn’t have to worry about my internal life support, just cycle outside air. It was worth it. It would take Eve off shuttle duty and get my parts and bots to me quickly. I put in the request and prepaid for 14 days. The response was my ship was queued to be towed in 13 hours. Of course I wouldn’t receive a refund for the half of a day I had to wait.

I was in engineering and looking over the FTL when Eve arrived. So far we had received one exterior bot, the 20 wolf guard bots and the assortment of cleaning bots. I sighed. I never realized how useless I was without bots to do all the heavy lifting and menial tasks. I didn’t want the exterior bot working until after we moved the ship so it was stored in a cargo bay. There was an engineering exterior bot bay by the large cargo bays but it could only hold one of the large exterior bots. I put notes that the bay would hold one large exterior bot and 3 of the smaller ones. The other 3 large bots and remaining smaller ones would be fitted for shuttle bay…4. Bay 4 was in the worst shape so adding the charging slips for the bots would make less work.

I assigned Eve to start the tear down of the FTL drive. It was a drive I was unfamiliar with and actually more advanced than drives I had worked on in the past. The core world tech took time to dribble out to the furthest colonized stars. I was getting overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task before me. I took a breath and stepped back.

First thing. I needed bots. Used bots would be fine until my new bots could arrive. I looked at the station auction site and started buying up certified refurbished bots. I got fourteen in all for 100,000. That should get me started and they would be here in 40 minutes as a delivery shuttle was prepped! Next I needed my priorities.

1. FTL drive, 2. Life Support refurbished for engineering, and decks 8-10. 3. All parts and supplies loaded.

I set my PerCom for 11 days and started queuing commands for bots.

Two days later I was ready to shoot myself. Every time I started a mini fix I found a dozen more issues and needed to order more parts. They only saving grace was the cleaning bots had eliminated the urine smell main engineering…well mostly eliminated it. The new bots were trickling in as well. Every advanced engineering bot I added to the team gave me new hope. Eve was a beast, doing the work of four bots and handling problems without asking for my input. Today’s delivery was the four reconstruction bots. I just planned to add them to my cleaning crew but Eve said the fabricators were due to arrive in 3 days and they should clear and prepare a space for them. I had planned to just store the fabricators in the cargo bay…ok Eve wanted the robotics fabrication lab set up.

I opened the master ship blueprint. I did plan to add my other fabricators on the planetoid to this ship. Ok Deck 4 was a crew deck…I could turn this block of 16 quarters into material storage as they were close to the cargo lifts…and if moved this…. Ok I would only have 11 crew quarters left on the deck…the remaining 58 quarters would be converted to the robotics and fabrication lab and would fit one of my less capable 3d printer and electronics fabricators later on. Reconstructing this area should give the constructor bots something to work on.

Two days later the robotics equipment had arrived early and Eve giddily supervised the installation. She then said I needed to eat and sleep. Too many things to do…she insisted and somewhat forcibly got me into my SLUMBER unit. She even programmed the scenario for 8 hours of rest. The scenario was a sexcapade quest. It was a sword and sorcery quest where I was the leader of a band of misfits that had to find the missing princess. The misfits were three beautiful women who took my every order very seriously. It was fun and on waking I felt much rested even though I never got around to saving the princess.

Day 7 rolled around and I was happy the entire FTL drive was in pieces and parts were being cleaned and replaced by my bot army. I decided I needed to buy some educational software for this newer tech. After an extensive search I found an education and entertainment VR system from the core worlds for sale. It was 39 years old but supposedly ‘lightly’ used. It had a 20 person capacity at one time for its VR system. Doing my background research, basically asking Sha’lua, I found it was sold to the Sylvan but their biology was not compatible and apparently it gave them headaches and after images. The price for the unit was 1.4 million and I nearly dropped the matter completely. But I looked at the programs…it was a colony university unit. It had 38,910 courses and 9.12 million entertainment programs. It was designed for a new colony to serve as its educational cornerstone. It even had download ports to export courses to PerCom units. That was probably why it only had twenty stations. But the size of this beast was 9m x 9m x 4m. Interestingly the device had its own AI. I was thinking of co opting the AI to serve as the ship’s AI…well after I got away from Silverstream.

I bought the machine and now needed to put it somewhere. I struggled for a while as it had to be centrally located and would need EMP shielding and radiation shielding. As I was looking I found another fucking issue which made me angry. The ships navigation computer was missing!

I had ignored it’s red indicator just figuring it had no power but the room that was suppose to house it was empty. Navigation computers were not cheap and needed to be tied into the sensors and FTL and sub space drives. All skills I did not have or time to learn. If you didn’t calibrate it correctly you could end up in a star or planet. Shit. I was going to have to contract this out and my timer was ticking.

I found I had 209 station emails requesting jobs on my ship. I hadn’t checked my station access logs so this was surprising. I filtered and found two people claiming they had the skills to install a navigation computer. I noted the two people and went to see how much the nav computer would cost. I started swearing looking at the lead times…30 days. I could pay nearly double and get the computer in four. Fuck! This is why you needed a crew. If I had 10 humans roaming the ship this would have been found much earlier. I ordered the nav computer with a full bridge suite station unit and backup station for installation in engineering. I winced pushing the payment through. I had just over 1 million station credits remaining. This ship was a money pit for sure.

Eve had sent me the estimated operating cost at 20,000 per month for the ship in station credits. But that didn't include paying crew. I scanned pay rates. Engineers made between 400 and 1,200 system credits monthly. Pilots between 800 and 2,000. Navigators between 600 and 1,500. Regular crew were between 300 and 600. I got with Eve and decided I needed to add some crew.

We spent two hours and came up with a list and top end monthly salaries:

Navigation Engineer 1,800

Life Support Engineer 1,200

Navigator 1,500

Pilot 2,000

Shuttle Pilot 1,000

Logistics Officer 1,000

Medical Officer 2,000

Propulsion Engineer 2,000

Security Officer 1,000

Chief Steward 800

Robotics Engineer 1,000

This was our final list in priority order. I was going to be the 'owner' and FTL engineer. I hoped Shinade would take the security officer spot but that was still to be determined. Vanessa might take the steward or logistics spot...I wasn't even sure they would join me with the amount of wealth they would be getting.

First I decided to set up appointments with the two navigation engineers that had contacted me. Both accepted interviews and I got back to work. The first interview was a Wren a few hours later. She appeared to be a panther sub-species with glossy black fur and golden eyes. Her name was Tora. She had been young when they started their voyage here to the station and had apprenticed to the navigator and engineer. When I asked her what happened to the nav computer she was hesitant to tell me but eventually said it was sold separately from the craft. They had a few discoveries in their voyage and to keep them secret the nav computer had to be removed. Could she do the job? I asked a series of questions and found her mildly competent and she was willing to join the ship as crew. I dismissed her. Truthfully the idea that I would bring someone on board that could bring that smell back that I was trying to eliminate from the ship was turning me off to her.

The next interview interrupted my work two hours later. It was a male human in his late seventies. He had plenty of youth treatments and looked no older than 50. After questioning him he was willing to do the work but didn't plan to leave the station. He wanted 1,200 credits to install the new nav computer and he was very experienced so it was a no brainer to hire him on the spot. He could start to set up the connections and make the new nav computer plug and play when it arrived. Calibration shouldn't take more than 12 hours after it was installed.

I returned to work and gave Eve the duty of bringing in two life support engineers for interviews. She was also to find two candidates for the navigator and the pilot positions. That was all I could handle. Hopefully I could find two or three crew before I left. Owning a ship was becoming a full time job.