Chapter 65 Repairing the Soul

Docking was a little tricky with the Void Phoenix. One of the clamps had bent when we released during our launch. I would have to install some sensors on the clamp arm to alert us of this in the future. I was going to have an exterior bot cut off the clamp but Zoe said it wasn’t an issue. She swung the ship around and to my amazement used the port wing to straighten out the bench support. She then proceeded to dock the ship normally.

Elias was grinning at me as my jaw was open. Zoe hadn’t used the computer…she did that all manually. I might have to give her a small pay increase as I didn’t want to lose such a competent pilot. As we were boarding the Void Phoenix I found Abby waiting for me. She was in the uniform Suruchi had designed for the crew and had a cross look on her face, like a mother who was meeting a child who was returning after sneaking out in the middle of the night.

I had planned to bring Gwen to her quarters and then to Doc after she cleaned up but Abby wanted a word. We walked over to the side of the cargo bay. I noticed a number of new crates were in here. So the consigned cargo was being loaded. The shuttle we were transporting for some of the luxury passengers was also secured in here. Abby started in on me bringing my focus to her.

She said I was free to do whatever I wanted. They were my ships after all but it would really help out the crew and herself in particular if she knew when I was leaving the ship. She wanted to always send at least two security personnel with me. Kidnapping and ransoming stupid captains was not usual. I felt guilty I had worried her. If I had Eve with me then I could have made an excuse but I had no defense. I hadn’t even serviced the courier ship before I left which would compound my maintenance work.

I apologized to her and told her my security chief would be informed next time I left the ship. I set up my PerCom to do it automatically. Abby then said there was only one other issue. My linked account for ship expenses had been depleted.

My eyes popped. I was broke? I checked my PerCom and indeed. I owed 1,928 sol credits and there was another 3,802 sol credits outstanding for items. I had thought we were done buying shit? I went to a terminal in the bay to look at it in spreadsheet form. Nero had bought 712 sol credits in parts…nothing there. Dora had bought 4,920 sol credits…furniture, alcohol, clothing, and other luxury items. I ground my teeth a little but I knew Suruchi would just say we would earn twice the amount back. Emon had a small 310 sol credit…mostly VR wiring materials. Haily had 7,204 sol credits! There was my issue. I checked and she had ordered numerous sensor upgrades. The rest of the crew only totaled 1,108 sol credits. I had been giving the crew a blank check. That needed to change.

I looked at Abby and said you knew this was going to happen didn’t you? She just smirked and said she didn’t think it would get this bad but it was a good lesson for me. Wait didn’t I hire someone to handle logistics?

Gwen was waiting for me. Titus and Francis had already been led away as I commed Vicky Charity. We talked for a bit and she hadn’t realized she was supposed to being budget control. She was just facilitating and logging all purchases for my review. Well she did a phenomenal job in organizing and logging everything…it was very easy to see me bleeding credits. I rubbed my temple.

We had spent all the prepayment for cargo and passenger tickets. Another 2,200 sol credits was expected before departure. Suruchi’s estimates for the sales during the trip would amount to 4,400 sol credits due to the lengthy voyage. Ok so we needed to set budgets I said. Abby giggled. They had brought up this point at our staff meetings a few times and I just brushed them off as I thought I was rich.

Maybe I could work this to my advantage? I told Abby and Charity I wanted spending locked down. ‘Struggle’ to pay our remaining balance…try to return some things as well. Make it seem from the outside we were tapped out for now. Even though piracy wasn’t big in the Sapphire region of space we had been spending pretty freely. If they crew thought we were low on credits they might be more prudent as well. Abby nodded and went up to sit with Charity to work on this. Suruchi was on her way up from the planet and would join them. Abby said I had made progress.

I returned to Gwen and we walked to her cabin. She wouldn’t be able to appreciate it as much being mostly blind. I directed her to the showers and she was shocked we had running water. I waited in the bedroom while she took a very long shower. When she finished she came out in the ships uniform. We talked as we walked to medical.

Gwen joked that she couldn’t wait to see my ship. Doc and her assistant bots were busy doing a lot of prep work. Apparently seven passengers had already purchased SNAIL treatments and the marines were getting a little aggressive in their training. A broken arm and two concussions in the last two days. I wasn’t here to listen to Doc so I introduced Gwen. Doc said I could step out for the examination as Gwen needed to get into the med scanner pod naked.

To my shock Gwen asked me to stay. She didn’t care if I saw her naked and she wanted me here for support. It had been a traumatic few weeks and I was the only one here she trusted. She stripped and I was shocked. The plasma burn was from her hip up to her head. There was black flecks of…skin suit still embedded in her flesh. Gwen said her injuries once stabilized fell low on the priority list. Gwen entered the scanner device and Doc began. Doc didn’t have great bedside manner.

She just listed off ailments. The eyes were first. The eye with the distorted cornea was first. Andei said it could repaired to restore normal vision. The other eye she deep scanned. The muscles were damaged when the eye ball was removed. She thought a cybernetic eye would be easier than growing a new eye. Gwen just nodded but seemed disappointed.

Doc went through the procedures for regrowing flesh. She would harvest stem cells and program them to grow the skin on a scaffolding. Then she would cut away the damaged flesh and replace it with the grow skin. Gwen was looking at about a month to grow the skin and then two weeks in a sterile tank for the new skin to take hold. After that some cosmetic surgeries to finish the procedure. Andei admitted she wasn’t a specialist in this type of replacement but she had the best equipment possible and her bot assistants were excellent.

Doc then said the eyes could be done in a single surgery. She just needed to order the cybernetic eye from the station. It would be indistinguishable from a normal eye and if Gwen wanted she could add some updates. I asked how much a cybernetic eye cost and Doc said between 90 and 300 sol credits. I told Doc I would make sure the credits were available. Gwen said thank you.

The exam continued with Doc listing minor ailment after minor ailment that could easily be treated. Finally the exam was done and I escorted Gwen back to her quarters. It was late so I stopped briefly in to see Celeste. Eve was there and told me something disturbing. The statues that I had sold were back on board. I was confused for a moment and Gwen said the deep cargo scanners identified the statues in one of the passenger crates. So the person who bought the statues was a passenger? That seemed to be a very weird coincidence. I checked the passenger manifest, Andrei Curran.

I commed Abby and she was aware of the person in question and that my statues were back on board. She was keeping a close eye on the man. She also said Andrei had paid 50 sol credits to be at the first captain’s dinner. Where did the 50 credits go? Abby said they went to the general crew salary fund. They were not being pocketed as tips as I had worried. Well it looks like I would be meeting the man soon and I trusted Abby to keep an eye on things.

I kissed Celeste good night and went to my cabin. I had a message from Francis. He was anxious to give the VR detective sim a try. I was glad he was settled in and was actually in a good mood to try my hand at defeating Moriarty this evening.

Andrei had boarded the ship two days early. The Void Phoenix was as good as any luxury transport he had taken in the past. He was a little peeved that he had ordered his own personal steward bot at considerable cost. He had thought the ship would be limited in its offerings so he had requested a personal steward bot. He thought the ridiculous expense might endear him to the owner of the ship but he hadn’t seen the mysterious Deven Wellspring yet. He pad 50 credits to have dinner with him during the voyage. Hopefully he could find out if he had any more ancient alien artifacts.

The food had been great so far and he was eating a second meal today in the open restaurant with the massive view screen currently showing the planet below. He was sipping some excellent white wine and choked. Jane Doe walked into the restaurant in a tight black dress. What the hell was that bitch doing here? He had a pit in his stomach and suddenly wasn’t very hungry. She had to be after the statues. He asked the waitress to bring the food to his cabin. He left and went to his cabin.

He needed to feel in control right now. He ordered his already naked steward bot to get on all fours on the bed. He stripped himself and planned to dominate the bot to vent his anger on the bot.