Chapter 137

The discussion of what to do with the Godfather spy took numerous meetings. My core group of advisors of, Abby, Suruchi, Edmund, Nero, Doc, and Kara were all in the meetings. Danielle listened but did not contribute to the conversation. There were three camps. Edmund and Doc wanted to leverage the Godfathers as allies against the Brotherhood. Abby and Kara wanted to eliminate the threat by leaving him behind on the planet with supplies to survive or even killing him outright. They felt he had learned too many of our secrets to be a chance of survival. Suruchi and Nero thought just imprisoning him would be the best course of action. That way, if we did need him to negotiate with the Godfather organization in the future, we could use him.

In the end, it was another decision for me to make. The thought of sentencing someone to death still burned on my humanity, but as my daughter grew, I was willing to take on those shadows if it protected her. My engineer brain was telling them there was a lot of potential utility in JJ. According to JJ, the Godfather organization operated mostly in the Rim worlds. They secretly saved races that the Brotherhood had forced to near extinction through genocide to make humans the dominant race in the galaxy.

JJ would not answer how large his organization actually was or how deeply embedded in races across the stars, but Edmund raised serious doubts about their actual strength. The Brotherhood had secret fleets with advanced technology—real hidden power. The Godfathers were more like a shadow organization composed of just operatives in his mind.

As we prepared to continue our trip, I decided to imprison JJ on the Void Phoenix. We gave him access to VR and gave him cell equipment to maintain his conditioning, but he was now a prisoner.

The one most hurt by this was Zoe. She had an energetic relationship with JJ since he had come aboard. I allowed her permission to see JJ, and she did so every day. Julie monitored the interactions closely, and it was clear that Zoe was still smitten. Hopefully, she would not do something foolish.

We thoroughly scanned the Alliance fleet that was serving as our escorts. It was more of a precaution than anything else. They carried a standard Marine compliment and didn’t have any extra boarding supplies. Abby didn’t see any indication that they were going to perform a double cross. The battleship was at the center of the escort fleet as we entered sub-space.

The nine-day trip had my focus on fleet logistics and getting ready to purchase the two medium tankers. We had a number of extra crew on the Void Phoenix training in VR to prepare to crew the alien ships we would be purchasing. One of the ships would most likely be new, and the other one would be a few years old. The configuration of the tankers was made for Naval support. Due to this, the two tankers would have a basic set of defensive weapons. Eight of the Marines on the Void Phoenix were cross-training to operate these weapons.

The trip was mostly uneventful. Celeste and Amos were starting wander more all over the ship. I had Celeste and the playmate bot shadowing them to keep them out of trouble. For some reason Zed, Gabby’s dog, was running away from the pair when he saw them. I asked Julie to review the video footage to see what had caused the ever-friendly dog to be scared of the children.

Julie found footage of of Celeste and Amos taking over one of the Black Window bots in the cargo bay. It was one of four prepped for our new medium tankers. Celeste had used it to run around the cargo bay, and she chased Zed with it and even encased him in the spray foam agent.

I came down hard on Celeste, Amos, and Eve for bullying Zed. I do not think I had ever felt such raw emotion before. Zed, even though he was a dog, was a friend. I gave the speech ‘treat others like you wish to be treated.’ I even went to the archaic discipline of spanking, making both children cry. Eve was sent for a seven-day deactivation for not intervening. Celeste and Amos were cut off from VR helmets for thirty days. Their brains had not developed enough for full VR implants. I then talked with all the crew on board about disciplining Celeste and Amos for acting dangerously—they were free to intercede on my behalf and send me a report. Abby’s response was—about time.

When we exited in the Alliance system, it was a spaceship manufacturing center with rich asteroid belts and one terraformed planet. The planet was converted by a race that died out over 200,000 years ago, but the ruins left clear evidence that they had hauled thousands of ice asteroids and created an atmosphere. It would have been a bio-engineering project on a massive scale. Humanity had its own terraforming projects, but all were monumental undertakings. The first ever successful project was Mars, which took nearly 1500 years and innumerable resources in the early centuries of Earth’s discovery of subspace.

Each of the system’s two asteroid belts had massive shipyards. The smaller was focused on civilian ships, and the larger belt was reserved for naval ships. We were directed to dock with a civilian station in the lesser belt. The station was a sprawling matrix of scaffolding with dozens of ships under construction simultaneously. It was a widely diverse operation, with each of the Alliance races building their variants of civilian starships.

Our battleship was getting a lot of attention from the local patrol cutters around the station, even though it barely had any weaponry. Edmund, Abby, and Julie were going to be on security for the crews of both ships and tracking all cargo on and off the ships. It was going to be a nightmare as we planned for two weeks here and planned to let everyone explore the hospitality of the station.

I already had numerous requests for assistance from the Alliance for the technology I had already traded with them. They were running into manufacturing issues because of the limitations on AI. I decided Eve could serve as the liaison with the Alliance scientists as a continuation of her punishment.

I didn’t have time to do the maintenance on the FTL drives with the purchase of the new ships. Damian was still under Doc’s care, so I fully expected the two weeks to be extended. At least Suruchi was extremely busy with colony planning. We had a lot of prefab buildings on the battleship but were lacking quite a bit for a successful colony in the Bradbury system. We had no one on board prepared for this so Julie was advising Suruchi and Vicky for the emmense of the amount of supplies needed. So many supplies that they wanted me to purchase another transport in addition to the two tankers. For the first time, I felt my funds were not bottomless.

My brother asked for a meeting with me, and I fit him into my busy schedule. My brother had his planetary defense army worked out as well. We knew there were other cities made up of numerous races on the habitable planet in the system, and I had not given much thought to their disposition toward new settlers.

I looked over what my brother wanted, fifty SA heavy fighters, fifty APC tanks, ten heavy drop shuttles, and five hundred Marines in Badger Powered Armor. The SA fighters were Space to Atmosphere (SA) fighters. They would be stationed on the converted battleship serving as a space station. I put down the data slate as I continued to eat the meal Cori, the chef, had prepared.

Everything he put down was reasonable, but the resources and manpower were well outside my means. There was no way I could afford to hire Tirani mercenaries and maintain what was essentially an army. Silas had talked to the Squirrel scientists, and he believed most of his forces would be composed of volunteers from their species to start. For some reason, the Squirrel almost worshipped me for saving their species from extinction.

I told my brother we could work on it. The Squirrel preferred the Gecko suits over the Badger suits. I did not think the APC tanks warranted as I did not want to conquer the planet. The fighters were rational to defend the space station. I did not want to buy the many heavy fighters. I believed I could convince the Squirrel to manufacture them, though.

So my answer to my brother was yes to five hundred marines, ten heavy landing shuttles, and seventy fighters. Thirty-six space fighters and thirty-six SA fighters. But I put a note that it would be a twelve-year development program to reach that strength. I was already watching my credits evaporate. Somehow the colony would have to support the military financially—and this army did not even include spaceships! I was going from being an admiral to a system governor. That did not work for me as there were much better people for the job.

Of course, all of these plans were reliant on the Squirrel to get us access planet and then negotiate peace with the current residents. These steps were too far ahead in the process. For now, we would just be prepared as possible.

It was thirteen days after we arrived that I went to tour the ships I was going to purchase. One medium transport and two naval support tankers. Even though the queue for new ships was backlogged, I was allowed to jump the queue for my purchase at no charge. The Alliance was doing what it could to keep my friendship.

The schematics went through Julie’s program, and she found dozens of problems with the design. High degrees of inefficiency and numerous problems with compatibility. The only upgrade I planned was to tie in a simple AI to help the crew. It was a violation to us AI on civilian ships in the Alliance—but I was not a member of the Alliance.

The transport was the nicest ship of the bunch. It was completed six months ago, and the builder was still waiting on the final payment. Most likely, the person who had commissioned the ship had perished in a subspace accident. I was given the option to purchase the ship at their cost, and the money the original buyer paid would go into an escrow. The ship was the same size as the Void Phoenix but just had four large cargo decks and a fifth top deck for crew quarters. It would take about fifteen people to run the ship.

The two fleet support tankers were more robust builds but lacked crew amenities. Both ended up being mostly new, having just completed a pair of jumps in support of three Alliance battleships. Those battleships were now stationed in defense of this system and could wait two years for new tankers to be built. They were barely passable to do what we needed but would get us to the Bradbury system, and then the Squirrel would hopefully overhaul them for a fee.

We were going to have to hire engineers from the Alliance populace. I just did not have the skilled personnel for it. I turned over the issue to Kara Briggs. If we could draw all the crew from a single Alliance race, maybe we could get them to establish a small colony as well. My hope was sixty civilian engineers and families.

Kara found a race called the Nyriads in the Alliance. They were humanoid, had light blue skin, and were short—between 1.2 and 1.4 meters. The Nyriads were decent engineers among the races of the Alliance, except they required slightly higher oxygen content in life support. They preferred 25-26%, while humans standardized oxygen between 21-22% on spaceships. On the sixteenth day in port, Kara had lined up thirty-nine Nyriad engineers and one hundred and seven family members.

That was the best we were going to do, and all the engineers and families would be on our three new ships with four Marines from the Void Phoenix and three command crew from the battleship. It took another twelve days to get the crews and families situated on the ships. In all, we had spent thirty-two days in the system.

The new ships had the subspace transponders mounted on the bridge so we could track their progress in the subspace. We had enough fuel to only need to stop once more to reach the Bradbury system. We would have plenty of Alliance systems to choose from on the trip to resupply.

When the fleet lined up at the edge of the system, I felt like a real admiral commanding five ships. It felt like we were complete and in the final stretch of a very long journey.