Chapter 132 A Brother Named Silas

I delayed my meeting with my brother.  I wanted to reassemble my crew and rendezvous with the two captured ships in the same system.  The battleship command staff had agreed to meet us in the binary star system, and my Marines remained on board.  There had not been enough old loyal Union officers to keep the ship, and we had seeded the crew with our targets.  It did not take long until they folded at the thought of returning to human-controlled space.  The information we released in our espionage attempt also greatly helped pave the way for the crew to capitulate.

The binary star system felt crowded with our fleet two days later.  The Caladrius completed its maintenance and then was again docked in the belly of the Void Phoneix. All the shuttles had been serviced and prepped for an emergency. The scientists were already transitioning the old Union drop shuttle to continue their higher band tests in subspace.

Abby, Buckie, and Francis were debriefing the potential new additions to our crew.  Taking on so many crew at once had Doc and Edmund working overtime to complete their psychological evaluations and physicals.  We cycled them in pairs to the Void Phoneix.  Many of them needed numerous treatments by Doc.  We found out the Union fleet had been running low on supplies since their pharmaceutical manufacturing ship had been lost in transit early in the exodus.  The treatments requiring high-end drugs were now only permitted to the wealthy and administrative staff in their exodus fleet.

While waiting for everyone to arrive in the binary star system, I had one meal with Nila, Gwen, and Danielle. I should have realized Danielle would not have been too enthused with Nila’s presence. Gwen did her best to keep the meal peaceful and not ruffle feathers. It was obvious Nila was not the same person I remembered.  She had a more hardened look, and her eyes didn’t dance like I remembered.  She also had not thrown herself at me as I had dreamed.  I did not know what to do with the situation.  Gwen saved me from figuring it out slowly on my own.

Gwen informed me Nila was damaged.  The innocent teenager from the academy was long gone.  She had been in a relationship with the first officer when the exodus happened.  They decided to marry to stay on the same ship, but he quickly degraded into an authoritarian commander, which carried into their marriage.  The child she now carried was her lost hope of softening the man.  It had worked as he became overprotective and jealous beyond reason.  Nila wanted to get to the nearest human colony that could be considered safe and raise her child there.

Gwen also said my relationship with Danielle was possibly damaged beyond repair.  When I personally went to rescue Nila, that had been too telling for her.  Danielle was considering her options.  Danielle was attractive, intelligent, and good with Celeste.  Sometimes you miss what is right in front of you.  Just before meeting my brother, I approached Danielle and somewhat unromantically asked her to marry me.  She was not excited as I had hoped, but she said yes.  When I asked her to have a baby with me, that broke the damn, and she cried in my arms.  I had enough emotional intelligence to know they were tears of happiness.

The marital union was a simple registration in the ship computer.  I also found Eve appearing somewhat happier and asked her why she had been upset with Nila when we rescued her.  Her answer was simple.  I had built Eve to deal with the loss of Nila at the naval academy, and bringing Nila back was an off-hand way of saying Eve was being replaced.  Eve’s absurd leaps in logic reminded me of a human woman.   With all of Eve’s processing power and access to Julie’s database, she had awkward leaps of logic.  I told Eve she could never be replaced.  When I sent everyone to help her against the Armageddon bots, that is how she should view her value to me.  That comment seemed to soothe the ego of Eve. Did Eve have an ego?

Half a day later, I turned my attention to my brother.  He was currently in medical getting checked out by Doc with another member we hoped to recruit. I walked in like I was a normal visitor.  My brother did a double take, and then his jaw loosened and wouldn’t work.  He had not been told I had been his rescuer.  I walked up to him, and he stood and hugged me.  He told me he had been informed I had been killed in action.  He asked if I was a member of the crew, maybe the lead engineer.  When I told him I was the captain, his jaw refused to work again.  Doc interrupted the reunion and asked Silas to get back on the table for his exam.

After the medical exam, I took Silas to the restaurant on the luxury deck.  Cori, the master chef, had prepared something special for us.  As we ate, my brother told me what had happened to him after his Marine training.  He was assigned to logistics and, at first, was working on assault vehicles. He was helping maintain fourteen APC units and would have been a driver if the vehicles landed on a planter. The fleet gave up carrying assault vehicles in favor of additional missiles.  So he had been assigned to armories on various ships.  He was in four large fleet battles before the ship he was on joined the exodus fleet.

The exodus journey had been tense.  After the first two subspace trips, a few ships failed to emerge from subspace every time they exited subspace. Their fleet lacked many things, among them quality FTL engineers.  Resupplying was also a nightmare.  Either spending months trying to make their own fuel, partnering for fuel, or forcibly taking it.  Halfway through their trek, the other two fleets joined them.  All the remaining ground vehicles were consolidated on one of the battleships, and somehow Silas had been put in command of maintaining them.

He had been a little sick when the company of Marines assigned to utilize the vehicles was training more for keeping order in the future colony rather than protecting the colony from outside sources. Silas was glad to be recused and to see me. This reunion had gone much better than the meeting with our parents.

I reciprocated and told him the cliff notes on my journey.  I left out the part about being pursued by the Sylvan and Brotherhood for now.  The food was excellent, and the conversation was therapeutic.  He thanked me for coming to retrieve him.

We went to see Celeste next, and I introduced Danielle and Eve to Silas.  When I told him that Eve was a bot, he didn’t believe it until Eve demonstrated her immense strength but lifting him with one hand.  With all the pleasantries over, I asked Silas what did he want?  I was planning to return to the Bradbury system and probably stay there until Celeste grew up.  I would also have to wait for my child with Danielle to grow up—maybe it would be the end of my journey, and I could be happy there. It would be a good place to hide from both the Brotherhood and the Sylvan.

Silas considered his options and did not want to be on a ship any longer.  He did not want to spend his days on Persia IV, where we grew up and ran a harvester like our parents.  He asked about being in charge of the motorized vehicles.  I had three hover bikes on board and had left two hover tanks with the Squirrel in Bradbury.  Silas said that was a start with a big smile.

It was four days before things started to settle with my mini-fleet. We had one hundred and four men and women on the battleship with suspect loyalties. Edmund was uncertain if any of them were Brotherhood agents. He suspected all the agents had been on the larger, more impressive battleships.

The cargo of the captured battleship had enough pre-fab modules to establish a colony for ten thousand people. It was one-third of all the modules the exodus fleet had been carrying. The ghost world in the Bradbury system would be a great place to establish a colony if it didn’t have numerous other races already living in phased space. Maybe the Squirrel had come up with a way to completely bring everyone out of phased space.

At our staff meeting, we started to make plans. The refueling ship would be kept. It would be sent on missions to build a stockpile of fuel in the Bradbury system. The battleship cost way too much fuel and personnel to operate, and most of the weapons had been stripped. As it was coming out of being mothballed, the old weapons had been removed, and they had been waiting for newer weapons to arrive in order to be installed. Instead, the Union had fallen first.

The decision was made to convert the ship to a space station to service other smaller ships. This was a common fate for large capital ships. It was a task that Julie suggested we hand over to the passengers on the battleship. They had been essentially abducted from the best technology university in the Union. They had the skills, which would also give them something to focus on. The group had already elected one person to speak for them as a group, Gordan Farsmith. He had been a professor at the university and in charge of the material science department.

I met with the older man, and he was grateful for being rescued from their fate but had a lot of demands. The meeting did not last long, as I sent him to meet with Suruchi and Kara. I just did not have the patience to listen to him. Suruchi was a born diplomat and trader, and after their meeting, Gordan had been thoroughly outclassed. Not only did he not get any of his demands met, but Suruchi had gotten the entire passenger compliment to start working on the conversation of their ship to a space station.

Kara asked for permission to take command of the battleship while in transit, and I agreed. She took half of our Marine compliment, including Buckie. The ship was a massive asset and needed to be protected. The Squirrel had evolved their prototype transponder. Now the sensors on the Void Phoenix could track ships that had the device installed. We added the devices to all the shuttles, fighters, and ships. The Squirrel engineer was constantly working to improve the devices. They were just under a cubic meter, too large to add to a ship unawares.

Elias was working on the best route back to the Bradbury system. We could not return the way we came. Even if we took the time to manufacture the emitters for the higher bands of subspace, the fuel required for the battleship would take months. We were going to be stuck traveling in regular subspace until we reached the Bradbury system—6 months at Elias’ best estimate.

The good news was our tanker ship had enough fuel to get us two long jumps—almost one-third of the way. We would have to resupply twice. I was in my quarters a few hours before the transition to subspace. Damien commed me and made a request to transfer to the battleship. He was familiar with the engines and subspace drive and the current lead engineer over there didn’t know his asshole from his mouth, according to Damian.

Damian assured me that he would get the battleship to the Bradbury system. He also guaranteed he could cut the downtime between subspace jumps down from two weeks to eight days. The Void Phoenix could make the journey back to the Bradbury system in two long subspace jumps. The only issue was I would need to do my own maintenance on the Void Phoenix’s drives. I signed off on the transfer, the battleship had too many people to risk.

The Void Phoenix would remain with the other two ships until we were halfway returned. All three ships formed my small fleet and entered subspace together.