Chapter 143 The Colony

I was not looking forward to meeting Rae’Ver.  It had been eight months since he had surrendered and been placed with the Brotherhood crews on the penal asteroid, and I had stalled on the confrontation.  Edmund had been in charge of the security of the prison asteroid with Francis and Abby in support.  Six men had died over the eight months in escape attempts and in-fighting.

I did not know what to do with the Brotherhood’s three hundred-odd men and women.  The soldiers and command staff would have to live out their days in captivity.  The engineers and technicians could be useful, but there was too much of a trust issue.  I was in transit to visit the penal asteroid in the Caladrius and reflected on how things had proceeded so far.

Now that the planet was harmonized from subspace and in phase, an effort was being made to establish an island to move the three hundred prisoners to.  The problem was that Suruchi had been embattled in politics.  There were over two dozen races on the planet.  Over the millennia, they had established many feudal states and had an uneasy truce.

Now that they were unfazed from subspace, they had access to technology again.  The device that had caused people to be brought into the shadow sub-space had been located deep in the core of the planet.  It had created a permanent EMP field in a halo around the planet that pulsed every few years, destroying all technology when it did.  Once the Squirrel had permanently deactivated the device, it was safe to land on the planet and establish our own colony and the penal island for the Brotherhood prisoners.

Suruchi quickly found the populations of the planet were closer to the VR Sword and Sorcery game we played on the Void Phoenix recreationally.  They relied on swords, crossbows, and crude firearms for combat.  Suruchi had all the power, landing in armored shuttles with power-armored Marines at her back.  Still, the races were resistant and wanted to maintain borders established through hundreds of years of conflict. The small human population on the planet also wanted nothing to do with our arrival or accept any assistance.

Suruchi tried to appease everyone.   Thankfully, after months of negotiation, Sururchi secured fifteen thousand square kilometers of the jungle along the equator and a fifty square mile island in the south pole for the penal colony.  She had done this mostly by bringing all the city leaders to one location and negotiating. It had been arduous, and I did not understand why she had gone to such lengths. Danielle said Suruchi needed a challenge, something near impossible. Bringing together so many races on one planet to live in harmony was that goal. She was a long way from achieving success but was taking steps in the correct direction.

Our jungle location was not ideal, but we were desperate to establish a colony on the planet as the space station was finished, and we needed to unload all the prefab modules and stop the drain of my personal resources.  The jungle site was rocky and had rough, but relatively flat plateaus.  Since it was too difficult to grow food in this region without technology, none of the races had settled it, and Suruchi secured the rights from neighboring aliens.  Our colony was going to border three alien civilizations.

The colony started four months ago and was already thriving. The colonists had named the city as they landed. It was to be called Arcadian. It meant harmony with nature. Suruchi had insisted it meant harmony with all life and species from across the cosmos.

Establishing and building the city was a monumental effort with our low population, and our industrial bots were in major demand on the building on the asteroids and harvesting materials. When a trade mission returned from Alliance space, there was always a fight over resources, namely the new bots.

The first focus was large, layered agricultural domes to be erected on the plateau so as not to interfere with the natural ecology. Once built, they were able to supply our entire colony of humans and Squirrel in the system after a few more months with the fast-growing crops we had. The overall civil engineering plan was to surround our colony city with five hundred of these food domes. Each dome could supply enough food for ten thousand people.

After the initial prefabs were landed and erected, the material was sourced from the asteroids rather than planetary mining, so the construction was sporadic, waiting on shipments. In the end, we hoped to be able to support a city of up to five million people on our small piece of jungle.

The planning for our city was designed by Julie, the AI from the Void Phoenix who was now serving as the Squirrel research computer on one of their asteroids. The AI had been built to serve as a university hub for a colony world, and I had repurposed her for my ship. Now, her life had come full circle. She told me she preferred to return to space as the intellect of a ship, but for now, she was being extremely useful as a platform for research and establishing the colony.

The city was going to sit atop the largest plateau near the center of our jungle lands. It was going to be twenty-five square kilometers. The plan was to build a ringed surface city to start, then build the city down into the plateau second before finishing the city with majestic buildings. It was going to take decades to achieve the final vision.

One of Suruchi’s first buildings was a United Nations for diplomacy on the planet and to bring all the races in with the slow reintroduction of technology.  I did not know what to think of her efforts.

The question was, what would our human and Squirrel colony export? The answer was technology. We planned to focus on building a university at the city’s center. The city was going to focus on expanding our knowledge and protecting the planet with the phasing satellites orbiting the planet. Now that the Squirrel had aligned the planet, they could shift the entire planet out of phase and hide it like they did the asteroids.

The problem was the amount of fuel required to maintain the shift of an entire planet. The Squirrel were frustrated as an entire medium tanker could only hold the planet in phase for 200 hours or so. The asteroids could use the same amount of fuel to remain phased for years. The solution to make the satellites more efficient was one of the major projects for the Squirrel.

The penal colony on the pole of the planet was completed as well. It was a simpler project, and we built a much smaller agricultural dome for the Brotherhood agents. Unlike the other domes, this doe was not going to be automated. They would have to do all the work themselves if they wanted to survive. The problem with the penal colony was that the Brotherhood prisoners only had thirty-seven women. Edmund was not concerned because he was certain over time, we would add more. The agricultural dome was designed to support about two thousand people.

The Caladrius was docking. Zoe was my pilot today. I think she just wanted to get away from her son, who was always crying for more food. My own son Dartanion was back on the ship with Danielle. With the docking complete, I left to tell the prisoners their new home was ready. They would be surrounded by miles of frozen tundra and have to work if they wanted to survive, but it would be a mark of some freedom.

Rae’Ver was in his own cell with Sha’Lua adjacent. I would meet with them last. Four Marines in Gecko armor met me in the airlock and guided me to the main prisoner detention area. It was a simple series of rooms filled with high oxygen-producing plants. I was also wearing the light Gecko armor as well. All the prisoners had simple skinsuits. They paused in their daily activities to see what the airlock produced today.

I stepped out and went into a speech about their new accommodations planet-side. Some faces looked hoeful, but most returned menacing stares. When I explained that they were going to have to farm their own food, the crowd got a little lively, and my Marine escorts needed to step forward to remind them who was in charge.

When they calmed down, I let them know their colony would still receive shipments of food—we still had crates of the Squirrel nutrient bars. I even added that we would introduce technology to them over time if they established a stable government. I noticed seven women in the group noticeably pregnant. I think I remembered a report from Doc about it. They requested their birth control removed. Edmund was pretty sure it was all a ploy for sympathy, though. The idea that children were innocent of the sins of the parent. I agreed but did not plan to release the mothers. We would monitor the children and remove them for their safety if needed.

The transport was coming in five days to take them to the planet. I left the large room and moved to the smaller cells. I stood before Rae’Ver and looked through the glass. He noticed me right away. He walked to the glass, and I moved to the right to talk with Sha’Lua first. The conversation was not pleasant. She had helped me purchase the Void Phoenix years ago. She was not happy with her situation or my presence.

I moved to Rae’Ver, who had waited patiently for me. He was overly polite. Too polite and too smug. I asked him if he wanted to live with the Brotherhood crew or remain here. He said he would like to join my crew. I told him I no longer had a ship. He had destroyed much of the Void Pheonix.

Then he went into a long story about how his race, the Sylvan, had been enslaved. I did not want to listen to this, but I was listening raptly for some reason. He told me how his people lived on a planet-sized ship that moved through the cosmos, eradicating entire populations, and that the Sylvan had revolted and saved the galaxy from certain doom.

He said that there were more of these massive ships and that one day they would arrive, lay waste to humanity, and enslave them. I was caught by his words and started nodding in agreement. Was he smiling in friendship? The story went on and on, and my mind clouded, and I felt like I was drowning in a fog-like haze. Then I felt it. Another presence in my mind. Rae’Ver’s grin on the other side of the glass was not needed to let me know who was there.

I had no control over my body. I heard myself start to ask Rae’Ver more and more questions about the Malevolents, as the Sylvan called them. I knew what he was doing. Damn it. This was being recorded, and it would show that Rae’Ver was convincing me of this threat to humanity. He was planning to get me to let him go. Five hours later, I heard my own voice call for the Marines. I asked them to chain and shackle Rae’Ver. He was coming back to my ship. And my Marines followed the orders without question.