Chapter 147

The bridge of the Fateweaver was crewed by eight, not including my captain’s chair or first officer’s station.  The eight stations were engineering, pilot, communications, weapons, shields, security, navigation, and sensors.  There were a number of new faces but many familiar faces on the bridge.

Zoe was my pilot. She also chose the twenty best pilots and fifteen co-pilot from her flight school for the fighters and assault shuttles on board. Elias reluctantly came as our navigation officer. He had gotten a little pudgy in the last decade. He still had his brilliant mind when it came to navigation, though.

My communications officer was a Squirrel named Hyrena. She had served on the Void Phoenix and had since undergone formal training. She was a linguist who easily picked up new languages and specialized in racial-predisposed body language. She had worked on the planet with Suruchi, trying to unite the myriad of races on the planet that had been trapped in shadow subspace. They had been mostly successful, with only about a quarter of the planet still holding out after fourteen years.

My security officer was Luna Martis. Luna had been just twelve when she came on board the Void Phoenix with her parents and brother. She had become a combat suit technician in our voyages, and when we settled into the Bradbury system, she had gone through Abby’s marine combat school. She held the rank of captain in the Marines and was married to Mozzie, the Tirani Marine. Mozzie was a massive bear-like humanoid, and his race were some of the region’s best mercenaries. I had hired him onto the crew, and Luna had become fascinated with their species. She kind of forced herself on him even though they could not have children, and they had a good relationship.

Our weapons bridge station was manned by Alina Weaver. Alina had been a marine of the Union and passed her certs to be promoted to weapons officer. She was paired with our defensive shield specialist, a Squirrel named Dante, on the bridge since they needed a lot of communication in heavy battles. The Fateweaver had a lot of power systems and advanced capacitors, but at a certain point, you needed to decide whether you were applying power to the shields, propulsion or weapons.

Our bridge engineering officer was Fiona Agave. She was an entertainer when the Void Phoenix took her on. She was a charismatic singer when we had passengers. She had been an engineering student in college and dropped out to pursue her singing career. She was a methodical by-the-book engineer. Not too exceptional when it came to thinking outside the box. Her charisma did carry over to her management of the engineering staff. We had thirteen Squirrel, seven Nyriads, and five humans to go with sixty-eight of the best engineering bots we could produce.

All of the engineering bots had full synthetic covering and appeared human. We had a version of the engineering bots that were Squirrel designed by Gabby, but I went with the human version. We also had one hundred Black Widow bots in missiles on the ship. The missiles were designed to penetrate ships and hulls and deliver a single spider bot. The primary attack was still the fast-hardening foam.

My sensor operator was a young Tirani woman named Shara. She was only thirteen, but Tirani matured much faster than humans. She got her VR implants at 11 and completed all her certs in just over a year with distinction. My First Officer selected her for the role.

My First Officer was Francis Pineda. He had been a Marine officer and worked closely with Edmund on security and our Brotherhood defenses and investigations. He was one of the most moralistic men I have known. He was responsible for the crew and logistics on the ship.

There were a handful of familiar Marines in our complement of fifty-two. Abby, Mozzie, and Buckie were our commanders. Abby was happy to get off the bridge and turn her security duties over to Luna. The remaining forty-nine Marines were divided into seven squads of seven. Each squad had a lieutenant, two sergeants, and four privates. Or at least that had been the plan. We had a lot of requests to join the crew, and with only 52 of 190 Marines beds utilized, we ended up with a lot more sergeants than needed. The 52 Marines we did have were twenty-two humans, ten Squirrel, and twenty Tirani. Since Abby ran the training camp she selected the best raw recruits to go with the experienced Marines that made the cut for the Fateweaver.

Our Marine training facility was on the planet and operated in conjunction with the Naval base in orbit. The Naval base was the converted Brotherhood battleship we had captured in the system. Just like we were having trouble training the best pilots under Zoe’s direction, we had trouble graduating Marines from Abby’s school. Her graduation rate was about 33%. If they couldn’t cut it, they were sent to the Planetary Reserves, which my brother Silas commanded.

The Naval Academy had the same issue. Desdemona Rouse and Kara Briggs ran our Navy training. The five-year intensive course that had a graduation rate of just 25%. Part of the high rate of failure at the Naval Academy was from the various alien species enrolled not having a solid foundation of knowledge before they enrolled. As we were just getting the Navy up and running, we took everyone who applied. Failures of the program could go into the state-sponsored merchant marines or civilian service track. The failures of the Navy were extremely important as they kept our economy growing. They crewed traders and cargo haulers.

If they did not graduate, they had to pay back a fair value for the funds we invested in their training. That amounted to about eight years wages for a normal person or a ten-year government job service. They would get paid as a government employee and have 10% of their loan erased every one-year anniversary. It was a tidy system that worked.

Damian in engineering commed me that we were ready to leave the anchorage. Damian had joined the crew to escape his two hellions of children that he had with Vicky four years ago. Damian had been one of the instructors for the Naval Academy in the toughest department FTL travel. It seemed every week that our scientists made another advancement in the field.

Julian appeared next to me in his hologram form, indicating the status of the ship and that we could make way immediately. Julian was a splinter of my old ship’s AI, Julie. She had created the AI seed herself after Daniel had purged her system of all backdoors into the coding. Julie had been upset as the AI developed. It had chosen a male persona for itself. I guess she always wanted a daughter. Julie was responsible for safeguarding the research and technology of the entire system.

The alien sensors let her communicate instantaneously with fragments of her AI at the various stations in the system. Elvis had been tasked with monitoring the entire system in real-time and sending the data to Julie and Command. He whined about how boring his new job was and wanted to be back on board a spaceship. His snarky personality was going to be added to one of the future Fateweaver-class ships.

Some of the second-shift bridge staff were on the bridge at the backup stations. The Fateweaver had already traveled hundreds of light years on its maiden voyage. This was going to be the first time we were introducing the ship and ourselves to the humanity. Our target was Concordia Prime. The seat of the new human Federation and where Admiral LaRohce based his flagship.

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He finally left. Celeste couldn’t believe how much her father dragged his feet all the time. He was brilliant but an idiot when it came to dealing with people. She slapped her PerCom on and dialed Neo. He answered immediately, excited as well. Neo roomed with Amos in the aft of the asteroid base. It took her a while to bring together the crew.

Ezra and Emil were attending an event to commemorate their mother in the Wren enclave. Dartanian was all the way on the planet pretending he was 18 and trying to get into the hoverbike racing circuit. He would not make it back soon.

She commed the Squirrel engineers next. They had been waiting for this day for a long time. Her father would not let it happen, saying there were other priorities. The space tug was launched and headed for the stripped hull of the Void Phoenix while everyone was already on their way to the civilian space yards on another asteroid.

As everyone arrived, so did the Void Phoenix. She looked a mess. Julie was already downloading the prepared schematics for the ship. She knew there was probably going to be a prepared news release coming on the ship moving and being rebuilt. It had been in the works to surprise her father, but he hadn’t left the Bradbury, instead sending Uncle Edmund out on missions.

Well, the time had come, and her group was going to be full participants in rebuilding the most famous ship in the galaxy! Well, maybe that was a little extreme. But it is definitely the most famous ship in the nearest 500 light years. In the back of her mind, she hoped her father would be happy with the Fateweaver and let her take the rebuilt Void Phoneix.

She looked at the plans again. It was going to be returning to form as a luxury passenger liner—with a number of hidden surprises. Some of them she came up with herself. Well—Neo came up with the idea, but she approved them.

Emma and Eve entered the construction yard with them. Emma was her childhood bot that had grown up with her. She now had a frame of a muscular teen Squirrel girl. She had wanted to experiment with her body, and remaining human was boring. So, Gabby had designed her next upgrade as a teenage Squirrel. Eve was her father’s bot and like an older sister to Celeste. Eve had been her protector ever since she remembered.

Six Squirrel engineers joined the assembly in the viewing port for the yards. The hulk of the Void Phoenix was set down. The question was how fast could the rebuild get done? Her father was only supposed to be gone for four weeks.