

Destination Azahar

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CONTENT: MFF ScFi

UNIVERSE: The Swarm Cycle

Chapter 11 - Plans Change

[Note to reader: This chapter is a continuation of *The Starbucks Aftermath*. It also picks up the story of some of the survivors from *Behind Enemy Lines*.]

Asimov arrived from Earth ahead of schedule after one of the strangest pickup missions on record. Along with the typical mix of military volunteers there were four decidedly non-military types. Botany Professor Naveen Avalareddy and his two associates were having a preliminary meeting with the curator of the Atlanta Botanical Gardens, Dr. Jason Brown, at a Starbucks when they found themselves to be the primary objective of a Confederacy extraction.

Professor Avalareddy's wife was not with him when the interdiction field sealed off the small coffee shop, and he would have refused extraction had it not been for the presence of a college football player, Marvin Clark. He convinced the professor to rescue a very young mother and be patient.

Clark was privy to the outlandish plan of a college librarian, the demure and proper-looking Lesa Crews, and passed key information to his friend, Misty Nokamura, who arranged to have Clark's preferred concubines and the professor's wife present when his dependent children were picked up. Jason Lawrence, the sponsor-qualified fifteen-year-old son of Rebecca, a concubine Clark had chosen at Starbucks, had bullied his way into the dependent extraction with his own choices of concubines.

The official ringmaster of the pickup circus was Master Gunnery Sergeant Raymond Budzinski, a veteran of wars both on Earth and among the stars. He was one of a handful of Confederacy Space Marines who had faced the Sa'arm in hand-to-hand combat and survived. He was an outstanding combat marine, but he had been outmaneuvered by the librarian and her co-conspirators. Budzinski had thought pickup duty would be like R&R, but had come to despise the assignment and longed to get back into something he was comfortable with: killing the enemy.

Budzinski had taken a liking to the young Marvin Clark, which was a good thing. Captain Ian McGregor had made Budzinski responsible for accelerating Clark's training as a platoon leader.

Budzinski had lost his platoon leader in underground combat with the Sa'arm on a planet deep in Sa'arm controlled space. More than half of Budzinski's platoon had been killed in action against the Sa'arm on two different planets, Tulak and Sa'Triste. He was scheming to get Clark and the two veterans he had extracted from a nursing home assigned to his platoon.

The AI in Clark's pod announced Budzinski's approach and Clark asked that he be admitted.

"Good afternoon, Lieutenant," Budzinski said brightly in the strong voice typical of platoon sergeants for millennia.

Clark returned Budzinski's salute, ignoring the Navy tradition of not saluting unless covered. "Good afternoon, Sergeant. What has you wandering the companionways of us lowly colonists?"

Budzinski ignored the hooks with a barely perceptible smile. "We've arrived in the Haruat system and should be in orbit above Haru sometime between chow and lights-out, but I don't expect anything to happen until after breakfast, though. Are you still keeping Rebecca in line by threatening to allow her son to have his way with her?"

Clark laughed as he thought about how jumpy Rebecca had been during the trip from Earth with her fifteen-year-old son and his concubines crowded into the same habitat pod with them. Both he and her son had teased her unmercifully. "I don't know that it's really that much of a threat. I think she's resigned to it happening. I truly believe she's starting to look forward to it.

"Jason looks a confident 20 now that he's recovered from the whole enhancement package, including a Big Bud. Nothing we said convinced him to not do it! He was on a power trip for a while, and of course Sasha didn't help. She loves being abused by Jason, and I've been slow to put a stop to it. But, he finally realized that neither of his women really enjoys Big Bud or being humiliated, and he's toned it down some. It looks like he's going to grow up faster than I did."

"The nanites can give you a cock any size you want. Having one the size of a tall beer can shouldn't be as much of an ego boost as having the skill to make women scream and cream, unless all of your brains are in the head of your trouser snake. A real man doesn't need a big dick to do that." Budzinski paused before commenting, "I still have trouble picturing you being an ass to women, sir." He shook his head; then looked Clark in the eye indicating that he was through with his rhetorical comments, "We should be able to get Jason fixed up in his own pod tomorrow or the next day. That'll give you a bit more space."

Clark cocked his head toward the interior of his pod. "Actually, it's not all that crowded. This thing has three times the floor space of the house I grew up in. Of course, we didn't have six mothers, two fathers and ten kids in the house. The kids take up four or five

times the space required by Jason, Angela, and Donna. What's the plan for Jason, by the way?"

Budzinski shrugged his shoulders. "No one has said anything to me. He's not officially a volunteer even though he has a six-point-nine CAP score. Fifteen is awfully young, but legal and doable with the nanites. A lot will depend upon his aptitude and attitude. Is he still as set on a military career as you are, sir?"

Clark nodded while considering his response. "He displays a lot of the traits of a drill sergeant already. He's certainly smart enough, and he's showing a lot of promise in reading what motivates others. He has a bit of a mean streak that I think he'll outgrow before too long. He also has enough situational awareness and leadership qualities to make a fine officer if he's allowed to complete his education."

"Captain McGregor appears to agree with your assessment, sir. He's going to arrange some interviews and tests for young Mr. Lawrence while the pods are being shuffled to and from *Asimov*. It just might be in the young man's best interest to remain in your household. I believe there's a plan being formulated that will team you with Corporal Miller for combat training. You remember her, right?"

Clark nodded, "Who could forget her? She's the striking woman who kept an eye on my friend Misty during the pickup." As he said 'striking' he held his cupped hands several inches from his chest.

Budzinski laughed, and then quickly sobered. "Be careful, sir, on two counts. Miller isn't easily shocked or insulted, but she's very dangerous when she feels she's being disrespected. She has also requested pregnancy leave and is prowling for a worthy father. Don't let her get her hooks into you, Lieutenant. Fraternizing is allowed by the dumbasses running this cluster fuck, but it's a bad idea and you shouldn't indulge."

Having heard some rumors regarding Budzinski and Miller, Clark just smiled, "Sounds like sage advice, Sergeant."

"Well, enough scuttlebutt, I'll catch up with you after breakfast. Good afternoon, sir." Budzinski came to attention and saluted before exiting. He hadn't even stayed long enough to sit down.

Clark returned the salute and bid the sergeant a good afternoon as well. The end of the journey from Earth meant that it was time to make some serious decisions about Jason.

Rebecca leaned around the doorway to get a peek at who was in the foyer. When she discovered that Marvin was alone she straightened up and quietly approached the man who literally owned her. He was lost in thought, but looked up and smiled when he detected motion. Rebecca asked him, "Was that Sergeant Budzinski?"

Marvin nodded, "He was checking to see if he'd picked the lucky week in the pool for when I swap you for Donna and/or Angela. Donna is really hot now that she has some meat on her bones, and Angela... Whew, something about Angela really cranks my tractor."

Rebecca put her arms around Marvin's neck, the little bit of neck that he had separating his jaw from his shoulders, and kissed him passionately before responding, "You're not going to make me jealous. I already share you with three other women. What's two more?" She reddened more than a little when she added, "I think Jason may have lost interest in me, but I no longer consider it a fate worse than death if you want me to seduce my eldest son."

Marvin took Rebecca's face in his hands, kissed her nose, and forced her to look him in the eyes, "Liar." He knew that she was trying reverse psychology and made his own attempt, "Or do you want a chance to try out Big Bud?"

Even after a month of wild group sex, Rebecca was mortified by the lewd thoughts scampering around in her head, and she quickly broke eye contact. "It's not that as much as... I don't think I can say it. I know that Sasha has had sex with Jason and... you... both of you at the same time." She rushed through the last phrase in a soft voice that Marvin would not have understood if it weren't for his nanite-enhanced hearing.

Marvin could barely mask his amusement when he asked Rebecca, "Have you taken on two guys at the same time before?" She hesitated before nodding. "Do you miss it?" Her face was beet red as she nodded again. "Would you prefer me and Jason or me and Sergeant Budzinski? Or, maybe you prefer Jason and Sergeant Budzinski? After all, you and I have been around the world many times in the last month."

Rebecca's eyes bored into Marvin, but she couldn't speak. Her throat had constricted so tightly that she could hardly breathe. She normally had no trouble deep-throating Marvin's modestly enhanced member, but she wouldn't be able to swallow a limp noodle at the moment. She worked her mouth a couple of times and when there was no sound Marvin pressed his open mouth over hers and tried to explore her tonsils with his tongue. He didn't back off until he felt her relax and respond to his kiss.

"Maybe I'll just tie you to the bed, turn the lights off, and let you guess who's working you over. You can imagine it's anyone you want." Marvin was getting a bit turned on by the adventurous streak that Rebecca was starting to exhibit.

He quickly changed the subject by asking, "What's the plan for this evening? We'll be docking at Haru tonight and they'll start offloading our pods sometime after breakfast tomorrow. It's time we made some plans for Jason."

Rebecca took a breath to speak, but Marvin put a finger to her lips. "No, I'm not referring to his sex life. Well, not directly anyway. Budzinski reminded me that Jason is not officially a volunteer even though he's aboard a colony ship and has a qualifying CAP

score. You and I have to accept that Jason is an adult, but you're still his mother. My advice is for him to remain with us until he can qualify for officers' candidate school, or whatever the Confederacy equivalent might be."

"This is why you haven't let him fuck me, isn't it?" Rebecca appeared to be having an epiphany. "You didn't want me to lose credibility with him in order to have some influence over his choices."

Marvin kissed her nose, "That's why you're my favorite. You're great in the sack and sharp as a tack."

Rebecca backhanded Marvin in the solar plexus, a typical soccer-mom reflex. "Anyone with a functioning eye and half a brain knows that Sasha and Millie are at the top of your list, but I'm perfectly happy being number three." The laughing couple retreated toward the family room where the kids were last seen when they realized that it was suddenly too quiet in the pod. Rebecca knew that quiet children typically required more supervision than rowdy ones.

Captain Cooper received updated orders as soon as she reported the arrival of *Asimov* in the Haruat system. She asked that Captain McGregor, Professor Avalareddy, and Dr. Brown to join her for dinner. McGregor made sure that Avalareddy and Brown understood that this was quite an honor. Colonists are simply not asked to the Captain's table aboard a colony transport.

As the ship moved toward Haru from the inbound jump zone Captain Cooper rose from her chair. "You have the bridge, Number One. I have guests for dinner and I'll be in my quarters until then. Call me if it looks like anything will approach within ten thousand meters of us or when we begin decelerating for orbit."

Her second on command gave her a brisk, "Aye, Captain. I have the con."

Cooper placed a call to her quarters on Haru. "Hello, Patricia dear. How have you been?"

"Lonely, Mistress," Patricia responded a few second later. *Asimov* was still far enough out for civilian voice and video to lag terribly. "I've really missed you and Reggie. Are you both well?"

"Reggie has complained that he's either has a cold back or cold chest when he wakes up," Cooper responded lightly. "But I'm sure he misses more than your warm body on the other side from me. Hasn't that nice Marine's couple been keeping you tuned?"

"Lieutenant Quarrels was killed three weeks ago and Civil Service took them and their kids away." Patricia reported with a great deal of emotion in her voice. "Can't something

be done to keep concubines from being treated so coldly when they've lost their loved ones? Losing your sponsor is bad enough, but to be dragged off to an uncertain future at the bordello or auction house is just..."

"I know, Patti, I know." Amanda did her best to reassure her concubine. "I've made arrangement for you and Reggie. If something happens to me you'll both be together and taken care of. Trust me on that."

"Please don't talk like that, Mistress," Patricia seemed even more upset. "I couldn't bear the thought of being without you forever."

Amanda was sympathetic, "I don't plan to checkout any time soon, sweetheart. I'll be tied up for another three days, but I'll send Reggie home shortly after we get within transporter range. I need his help for a dinner party in a couple of hours. In fact, I need to start cleaning up and getting ready for my guests. I'll see you soon, love."

"Thank you, Mistress. You're very thoughtful. I'm looking forward to you being home for a few days. Love you." Patricia responded. Amanda could hear the smile in Patricia's voice.

"Love you, too," Amanda said as she broke the connection.

"Reggie, dear," Amanda called out. "Please draw me a nice bubble bath and lay out my dress uniform. Go ahead, lay out your steward's uniform and then join me in the tub. You'll have to start setting things up for dinner while I dress."

Meghrani was hovering around Naveen advising him to relax, but making him extremely nervous. He didn't have the heart to ask her to be quiet. She had been crying from joy for days, ever since she had been told that she was pregnant. The nanites had corrected the issue with her reproductive system during her modest enhancements and she had been pregnant for almost a week.

There were no territorial battles between Naveen's concubines. Meghrani had taken Madeline under her wing after they had some long talks about the girl's history with men, and despite the girl's young age, Meghrani had insisted that Naveen show Madeline a good time in the bed.

Whenever it was time to feed John, Meghrani was there. She was fascinated by the miracle of Madeline feeding John by holding him to her breast. John was just starting on cereal and strained fruit. Meghrani was delighted to help by feeding him with a spoon since she had no milk and couldn't nurse him.

During one occasion Meghrani had supported her small breasts in her hands, "In nine months these protrusions will no longer be useless. I will be feeding my baby just like you feed yours."

Naveen escaped with a last-minute check of his hair, tie, shoes, and even his teeth before Meghrani pushed him out the door so he wouldn't be late.

Dr. Brown's escape was much easier. Alicia, his head concubine, gave him a critical inspection, front and back, before nodding her approval. With a kiss on the cheek and a "Good luck, Jason," Alicia sent him on his way.

Captain Cooper insisted that everyone remain seated when she arrived. After everyone had been introduced she commented, "I trust that everyone has had a comfortable voyage. Are there any improvements we can address that would make the transition more pleasant?"

When no one else appeared ready to respond, Avalareddy took a deep breath and dove in, "Some of the early briefings were rather graphic and shocking. Must they be so harsh?"

"I believe that Commander McGregor can answer that question better than I. Mr. McGregor?" The Captain passed the baton to the senior Marine.

McGregor cleared his throat, "We find that there are fewer casualties if the concubines and sponsors are splashed with the cold reality of their new situations. It's very rare for no one to be killed or recycled in the first twenty-four hours due to not fully appreciating the reality of their responsibilities and limitations. People who don't follow the rules are given a harsh lesson that is only beneficial to the witnesses. The dead learn nothing."

"Oh, my," Avalareddy responded. "And I thought we were all educated and civilized people, but I have observed disappointing behavior even among my colleagues. It is disheartening to see how seemingly civilized individuals respond when given absolute power over others. I never realized how much repressed hostility was so close to me."

McGregor nodded, "Yes, Mr. Rawlins may find the shoe on the other foot if he goes too far and a review board has his CAP score re-evaluated. More than one tyrannical sponsor has found themselves briefly in the ranks of the concubines before being recycled."

"On a more pleasant note," Cooper insinuated herself back into the conversation as the stewards were replacing the salads with the main course. "I'm fascinated to find two such distinguished botanists on my passenger manifest. Please, tell me what plans you have to continue your work at a colony."

Brown and Avalareddy looked at each other and, again, Avalareddy answered for the pair. "Not knowing the possibilities, I cannot say with certainty. I have been studying the tolerance for some genus of plants to low pressures and differing ratios of

atmospheric gasses. Maybe someone has seen the parameters of my grant and desires to expand the scope?"

Cooper was clearly intrigued, "The AI's do *not* allow plants or animals aboard colony ships. Does your research require laboratory experiments, or is it just examining previous observations and making theoretical projections?"

"For certain my team and I will be developing hypotheses," Avalareddy responded. "But plants will indeed be required. That was the purpose of our meeting with Dr. Brown. He has an extensive collection of flora specimens and strains."

Dr. Brown made his first verbal contribution, "I have a modest private collection of documented specimens in the greenhouse at my home, and even more in various locations throughout Georgia and Florida that support the Botanical Gardens."

McGregor commented, "I have just been forwarded a message from Earth. It appears that the Decurion settling your affairs in Atlanta learned about your collection and has taken the liberty of consolidating it for shipment."

This revelation by McGregor shocked Brown and intrigued Cooper. McGregor added, "Your collection is expected here in seven to ten days. Decurion Chalmers enlisted your staff to help with the packing. Hopefully they will arrive in good condition. Your groundskeeper was offered extraction to accompany your collection and supervise their care in transit."

"I didn't know George had a qualifying CAP score," Brown remarked.

"He doesn't," McGregor supplied. "But, his special skills permitted Chalmers to justify an exception. Mr. Alexiou won't enjoy the full privileges of a sponsor even though he's been allowed two concubines. He'll not be allowed off of Azahar unless his CAP improves or there is a general evacuation. By the way, Azahar is the name of the planet where you'll be conducting your research and experiments. Your habitat pods will be picked up by another ship in about three weeks."

"In the meantime," Cooper added, "your pods will be transferred to the orbiting station pending the arrival of *Copernicus*. She's inbound from Azahar as we speak."

"Actually, Commander," the purser of *Asimov*, Ensign Murphy, broke in. "I noticed on the updated cargo transfer schedule that several pods will be transferred from us to *Sir Galahad* for transport to Azahar."

"But, *Sir Galahad* is an assault ship," McGregor challenged. "It doesn't have pod mounts."

Captain Cooper nodded, "It's being modified, but I didn't think it would be ready for at least three months. Are our esteemed guests going to be hanging out at Haru that long

waiting for transport?" Cooper was considered introducing them to her family on Haru and decided to wait until she knew more about them.

Murphy didn't have an answer, "That information wasn't on the manifest, Captain."

Cooper graciously accepted the partial information. "Very well. Would you be so kind as to inquire after dinner and be sure that our guests are advised?"

"Of course, Ma'am," Murphy assured his captain.

Cooper changed the subject by asking McGregor, "How are the other charges of your colorful Sergeant Budzinski getting along?"

McGregor couldn't contain his mirth and snorted before responding. "Budzinski is at the very least 'colorful'. Everyone seems to believe that the best course of action is for Jason Lawrence to remain with Lieutenant Clark until Mr. Lawrence has an opportunity to mature a bit more."

The conversation continued on typical trivia for another hour. The group dispersed shortly after the Captain retired from the table.

Sir Galahad had been taking up a lot of valuable dock time and space with the extensive repairs and remodeling of the aft section of the ship. The missile bay and auxiliary fuel tanks that had been added before the long mission into Sa'arm space had taken a solid hit from a Sa'arm frigate. The resulting fire and a ruptured fuel cell came close to destroying the ship.

When Colonel Coggins saw that *Asimov* was ahead of schedule and had entered the Haruat system two days after *Copernicus* had left Azaharat for the three week journey to Haruat, he drafted recommendations to install temporary fittings for twelve pods on *Sir Galahad* and to cut orders sending her to Azahar with the botanists who were arriving on *Asimov*. He further recommended sending a naval architect and dock equipment to Azahar on *Sir Galahad* in order to complete the modifications there.

The Darjee freighter that the *Sir Lancelot*-class assault ships were based on was an older model that was not equipped with detachable pods. The *Sir Lancelot* class was almost as long as the *Aurora*-class colony ships, but had a lighter central frame. The planned modifications were going to take at least three more months, but she could be made space worthy with the recommended accommodations in less than a week. The approval was almost automatic.

As promised, Ensign Murphy made inquiries and within an hour of everyone's return to their quarters reported that *Sir Galahad* was having a dozen pod mounts jury-rigged to

the aft section and would be ready to leave for Azahar as soon as the greenhouse pods arriving from Earth were transferred.

Captain McGregor greeted Lieutenant Clark when he reported to him as ordered. "Lieutenant Clark, please have a seat." When Clark was seated McGregor came to the point of the meeting. "I'm sending you ahead to Azahar on *Sir Galahad* along with the headquarters platoon and some remnants of Corporal Miller's squad. You're to report to Captain Collins and arrange to have your pod transferred to his ship. Budzinski is headed back to Earth on *Asimov* for a pickup run to Demeter where *Asimov* will begin ferrying our battalion to Azahar. They should start arriving in about three months, roughly a month and a half after you get there.

"Miller will be your combat and physical training instructor. I see that you did very well on your college finals and have received nothing but praise regarding your studies to qualify as an officer of the Confederacy. Lieutenant Peterson will take over as your OCS instructor. I suggest that you get young Jason Lawrence to sit in and learn. See to it that he gets his high school diploma by the time you get to Azahar. Keep up the good work!"

"Thank you for the opportunity, sir."

Commander Cooper followed through with her promise to Patricia, although she did have Reggie return to the ship after spending two nights and a day with Patricia. The stress of having so many logistics screw-ups and last minute changes were getting to her and she really needed Reggie's help, as well as his schlong.

She left the transfer of the pods in the capable hand of Ensign Murphy and personally led Reggie back to her habitat pod on Haru. She was determined to not let the changing schedules and demands of others ruin her time with Reggie and Patti. She really wanted to learn how to avoid letting the poor planning of others become an emergency for her.

"Being so accommodating is part of your charm, Mistress," Patricia said just before her mouth was totally occupied with Amanda's wet vulva while Reggie slowly sank into her own dripping quim from behind. She was going to miss them when they shipped out and really appreciated her mistress making her the center of attention.

Reggie tried to pace himself, but the erotic spectacle he was part of overloaded his logic processes. He delivered what Patti demanded and then some. He took her place between Amanda's smooth thighs when the exhausted Patti rolled aside. He managed to get Amanda off before Patti recovered and again wanted attention, which she got from the other two participants in the mini-orgy.