

Destination Azahar

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UNIVERSE: The Swarm Cycle

Chapter 13 - Selecting Critical Provisions

"Ladies and gentlemen," Atanas began, "my shipmates and I are looking for concubines with children between the ages of nine and twelve to accompany us on a five-year mission to map the Orion Spur, primarily the area occupied by the Sa'arm."

There was a murmuring among the shift-wearing occupants of the room.

He held up his hand to stave off the questions that were forming. "We're not going out there to fight. We're going out there to map their stars. We're not planning to get within a light-year of a star. If we pop into normal space where there's a threat, we can jump right back to FTL drive."

Atanas looked at his companions and in a quiet voice said, "We have the wrong group in here to interview. Our key to success is the kids, not the parents."

The typically quiet Ensign Marina Stayton spoke up: "He's right. *Copernicus* is a small ship that'll be filled with kids. If the adults don't get along something can be worked out, but if the kids can't iron out their differences we're screwed."

One of the Civil Service concubines spoke up: "Excuse me, but with the right guidance and supervision almost any group of kids can do well together."

Everyone turned to look at the Marilyn Monroe clone who had volunteered an opinion. Atanas asked her, "What makes you think that?"

The woman gave him an excellent Mona Lisa smile, "Twenty-five years experience in the New York public school system. The trick is getting them to leave their parents' prejudices at home when they leave for school."

Atanas got approving nods from Stayton and Johnson, after a quick visual poll of their eight concubines he was inspired. "Survey says... we have a winner. There are already 21 kids on a ship with only twelve pods. It will be just us for five years and ten of the 21 will turn fourteen while we're gone: six girls and four boys. We don't know how we'll control things if some qualify as sponsors when they're tested. We're not sure we can put them off until we return. Please, tell us more."

A male voice with a distinct French accent spoke up in the back. "It seems crazy to expect kids to jump into bed together and breed like rabbits when they turn fourteen. Only a few short years ago they were expected to wait until they were eighteen and married. Teach them respect by demonstrating respect, and you won't need breeding partners for them."

A striking redhead clinging to the Frenchman spoke up: "Both Philippe and Meredith are right. We've been together for a long time and our kids have adjusted to close quarters and mixed company with very few problems. Is there any chance Philippe and I can remain together?"

Alec Atanas shook his head, "Each of us is only authorized one additional concubine. I'm certain we could work things out where you'd be on the same ship, but not in the same household."

Knowing the male concubines are harder to place than females, Tribune Washburn spoke up, "I can make a special offer to the two ladies. You may select a male and a female concubine today, and today only."

Julie Johnson gave her two concubines a questioning look before asking the redhead, "Is Philippe as good as he sounds?"

"I was wondering that myself," Marina Stayton stammered out softly.

"Oh yes! Philippe is very good with children, and is both considerate and talented with women." The redhead gave Philippe a mischievous smile, "He's not at all like most Frenchmen." Her remark got her an indignant look from Philippe. But it appeared to be more playful than hostile.

Julie turned to her crewmate. It was not like her to be so forward. "I'll give you first choice."

"Thanks," Marina said to Julie; then looked Philippe in the eye. "Would you and your friend come with me, please?"

Had Marina not been such a shy wallflower she would have scored much higher than 6.8 on her CAP test. Shy or not, she knew that Philippe and Jeffery would have to get along and that Philippe should never try to dominate her or challenge her authority. She planned to have both Jeffery and Marta try out the redhead while she verified Philippe's skills. She could test his submissiveness by giving him a blowjob. If he made no move to dominate her during and after that, then she could be assured of his submissiveness.

"What's your name?" Marina asked the redhead as the five of them headed for a private interview room.

"Claire, mistress," the redhead responded as she released Philippe's hand and merged in between Jeffery and Marta instinctively knowing how this would progress.

Philippe followed a few paces behind Marina. He was comparing the figures of the three women ahead of him. They were all trim and athletic. Marina had the largest butt, and it wasn't all that big. She had the classic frame of a slender black woman, but the cleavage she displayed as she stood by the door to allow him to enter ahead of her looked inviting, if a bit out of place on her slender frame.

Marina closed the door as she entered the room and quietly said, "Strip, everybody."

The other four were naked before Marina had her shirt open. Philippe turned to help her, but she dropped to her knees in front of him setting the C-cup globes on her chest to jiggling. They didn't look out of place when fully exposed. If they were not factory original equipment, they were a high-quality aftermarket addition.

Looking down at the dark brown globes with black areolae and nipples, Philippe was shocked on many levels. First there was a gorgeous black sponsor giving him a blowjob. The rest hardly registered. The feel of the soft, thick lips on his shaft and the firm wet tongue abusing his glans was exquisite. He gasped once; then couldn't breathe.

Marina had elected to not Anglicize her features during up enhancement upgrade. She had retained the thick lips and wide nose typical of her genetic ancestry. She had eliminated her need for glasses, softened and smoothed her skin, and blended her previous variations in pigmentation. She appeared to be a fresh sixteen-year-old honor student.

That angelic face was soon buried in Philippe's pubic hair as Marina swallowed his entire shaft triggering a geyser from his tight balls. Philippe tried to apologize, but there was still no air in his lungs. He collapsed to the floor and almost passed out.

As soon as Marina had disappeared behind the closed door Julie turned to the silent room. "Is there another couple in the room?"

Four people stepped forward. Julie was beginning to regret giving Marina first choice.

"You don't have to limit yourself to concubines that have been together," the Tribune commented quietly.

Marina smiled, "Thank you, but I'd like to keep families together if possible." She turned to the four candidates, "What say we find a quite place to talk and get to know one another. First, I'd like to know about your kids."

The seven disappeared into another room leaving Alec, his ladies, and the Tribune in a room full of hopeful faces. Alec huddled with his four concubines and after getting a unanimous consensus straightened up and asked the Tribune, "Was that a sexist offer you made to my crewmates, or can I get a combination deal as well?"

Tribune Washburn laughed and shook his head, "I guess I'd better not risk being sued for sexual discrimination. You can pick a male as well as a female if your gate swings that way."

"His gate swings just fine, thank you very much," Debra spoke up in his defense, which filled the large room with laughter.

"That's more like it. It was beginning to feel like a funeral parlor in here," Alec said before turning to the busty blonde. "Do you have a recommendation for me, my dear? What's your name, by the way?"

"Natalie. I was the supernumerary in my previous mistress's house." The lovely blonde actually blushed when she added, "Your friend made an excellent choice with Philippe and Claire."

"I see. I don't imagine that someone as lovely as you has been here long enough to recommend anyone else in the room?" Alec added hopefully.

"I haven't looked like this for very long. I haven't tested any of these men if that's what you're asking, but my girls spend a good bit of time hanging out with Joshua and Reginald's kids. Spending social time with them is very pleasant," Natalie commented.

Alec spoke to the gathered concubines: "Very well then, will Joshua and Reginald please join us? I ask that the rest of you not be discouraged. My captain and our science officer are waiting for us return before coming here for their supernumerary selections."

Natalie asked, "Are you really certain that I'm going to be compatible with your crew?"

Alec laughed, "You're with me even if all of your holes have been sewn shut. There are never too many comedians on a small ship."

Natalie was blushing from hairline to nipple when she replied with, "Nothing has been sewn shut or put off-limits, Master."

Their exchange was interrupted as a smiling but noticeably disheveled Marina emerged from the interview room leading four equally rumped looking concubines. "Tribune, I offer sponsorship to Claire and Philippe."

The Tribune got acceptance from Claire and Philippe; then remarked, "May I say you've made an excellent choice. Are you taking them with you, or shall I arrange for delivery?"

Marina laughingly replied, "They're not very bulky or fragile. I'll take them with me as soon as we round up their kids." She gave the Tribune a puzzled look when she saw Alec enter the room she had just vacated leading the outspoken blonde and two men!

"He insisted on getting the same deal I offered you and Ensign Johnson," Tribune Washburn remarked without having to be asked. Speaking to the gathered concubines he advised, "If the rest of you will be patient I believe another member of *Copernicus's* crew will be here shortly."

Kozlowski was surprised to see Ensign Stayton back so soon. "I would have picked you for being the last one to make a concubine selection." He was a bit surprised to see her being followed by a slender-built, but very good-looking man. He was even more surprised by the leggy redhead behind four kids. She was holding a baby and being escorted by Jeff and Marta. Marta was carrying what looked like a sleepy two-year-old. He was looking past the group to see who else was entering through the boarding hatch when he asked, "What's this? Has someone else made a selection so quickly as well as you?"

It took a moment for the puzzled look to clear from Stayton's face. She was clearly distracted, "What? No, Captain, it's just me. This is Philippe and Claire. Tribune Washburn made me a deal I couldn't refuse. The four walking wounded with us are Pierre, Ariel, Charles, and Margaux. Marta is carrying Jacque and Claire is holding young Jessica."

Kozlowski started welcoming everyone aboard, but Stayton cut him short with, "Forgive me, sir, but I need to get the two little ones put down for much needed naps before lunch."

"Yes, of course," the captain agreed and stepped aside to allow the group to pass. "As soon as you get everyone settled I'd like to see you and Ensign Wallaby in the CIC. You might want to impose upon Mr. Wallaby to make some space in his pod available to you while you have your pod reconfigured. I doubt that your current floor plan will accommodate *two* new concubines *and* their children."

"Good idea. Thank you, Captain. We'll see you in about fifteen minutes." Stayton agreed and asked Nic to connect her with Ensign Wallaby.

Wallaby greeted everyone in his usual flamboyant style. He had been supervising the installation of the new instrumentation. Watching may have been a more accurate term, but he wanted to know as much as possible because it would be up to him to see that the equipment continued to function properly for the next five years.

He arrived at his pod shortly after authorizing his crewmate's family to enter ahead of him. "Hello," Wallaby said in his typical cheery voice. Rebecca was fawning over the little ones. "We can admire the babies later, Rebecca. As soon as you get the munchkins settled, we can be introduced to everyone else."

Philippe went with the ladies to help calm the little ones. He was a bit concerned about leaving them alone in case they woke up in yet another strange location. Life had been very unsettling for them since Captain Allison had gotten herself killed three weeks ago.

The two officers and a Spanish-looking seductress were sitting at a large table with mugs of what appeared to be tea. Cedric looked up when he saw motion across the room. "We're having a spot of tea. You're welcome to coffee if you prefer. I never developed a taste for the bitter brew that most colonials consume in such large quantities."

"Tea is fine, thank you." Philippe replied. When Penelope started to push away from the table he added, "I'll be happy to get it myself if you'll just point."

Penelope smiled and pointed out the replicator. It was a standard unit and in the usual location. She appreciated that Philippe didn't want to impose, nor did he want to intrude by making assumptions. When Rebecca finally emerged from the back bedroom where they had left the little ones, Marina once again introduced everyone except the kids. They had disappeared into the playroom with the five Wallaby instigators. The sporadic laughter allowed the older occupants of the pod to relax a bit.

Marina took a big drink from her cooling mug of tea before reminding Cedric, "The Captain wanted us to join him in the CIC when the kids were settled in. I'm enjoying the company even more than the tea, but we really should head forward."

In the CIC Captain Kozlowski gave Wallaby the option of heading down to the Civil Service Station. "I'd rather let Marina's new family members get to know mine. I don't think Philippe and Claire will be comfortable there without Penelope and Rebecca. Why don't you go ahead, sir? There should still be plenty to choose from after lunch."

Kozlowski was considering waiting until either Johnson or Atanas returned when both requested permission to board amid a background of laughter and mayhem. He wasn't surprised to see Johnson boarding with a new male and female face among her concubines, but was dumbstruck when Atanas boarded with a new male and female concubine.

Atanas almost laughed when he caught sight of his Captain's shocked face. "I couldn't let Johnson and Stayton have all the fun. You wouldn't want me to break up a set would you, sir?"

"And all this time I thought Debra was the wild card in your pod, Lieutenant," Kozlowski remarked while shaking his head.

With everyone back on board, Kozlowski turned the watch over to Atanas and the supervision of the multi-purpose room to Winifred, Atanas' most responsible concubine, perhaps the only responsible one, and headed for Dothan with his four concubines in tow.

Atanas asked Mary, Natalie, and Joshua to join him in the CIC for a few minutes. He assured Natalie and Joshua that their kids would be in good hands with Debra, Judy, and especially Winifred.

"First of all, Joshua, I should tell you that I have no desire to have sexual contact with you other than possibly teaming up with you to over-stimulate any cheeky females who get uppity." Mary rolled her eyes as Alec made that claim. "I should have probably mentioned that before accepting your offer to join my growing menagerie."

"I'm not terribly disappointed," Joshua remarked with a smirk.

"Oh, you're going to fit right in!" Mary exclaimed with a small laugh.

"On the other hand, you my dear," Alec directed his attention to Natalie, "will be required to participate in all manner of activities from loving caresses to outlandish and lascivious behavior with a range of partner combinations."

Natalie smiled and appeared totally at ease when she requested, "Bring it on, Master. I wasn't making empty promises at the Center when I said that I have no reservations about sex. I'll be ready anytime, anywhere, and with anyone... even when I'm bleeding."

Alec winced. "Now there's a mental image that I could have done without. Such an attitude seems out of character with such a beautiful schoolteacher."

"As I said earlier, I haven't looked like this for very long at all, and I'm still enjoying the attention I get from men." Natalie struck a pinup pose that showcased her round butt and boobs.

Alec asked, "Wouldn't you prefer to look more like your old self instead of calendar girl from the 1950s?"

"Oh, hell no!" Natalie exclaimed making her position abundantly clear. "The wicked witch of the west was cute compared to my original self. I don't know how I managed to marry, much less get pregnant... twice."

"There's nothing about this face and body that you want to change to make it yours instead of someone else's? I mean, your face and body are instantly recognized by everyone as belonging to someone who's been dead for more than half a century." Alec was clearly amazed that anyone could be so happy looking like someone else, even if that someone was one of the all-time sexiest women on Earth.

Natalie shrugged, "Maybe I could lose the mole and go for a bit more athletic build, although I find these soft curves nice even when I'm alone." Natalie was running her hands over her breasts, butt, and thighs. She even cupped her crotch.

Alec was instantly aroused, much to Mary's amusement. "Yes, I can see how they could serve as a fun playground." Alec groaned involuntarily when Natalie's hands lifted the hem of her shift to reveal delicate wisps of blonde pubic hair as she seductively stroked her smooth thighs and soft hips.

Mary laughed even harder when Alec glared in her direction, "It looks like Debra has some serious competition for the girl most likely."

"Most likely to what?" Joshua asked a bit throatily himself. He was clearly affected by Natalie's floorshow as much as Alec.

"Most likely to do something totally outrageous," Mary replied through tears of laughter. "Between Debra and Natalie trying to outdo each other, you guys are going to have perpetual erections! Hell, she's even making me drool from both my mouth and my crotch."

Alec looked very pleased with himself, "Nothing wrong with that, but we had best save it for later. You guys need to get out of here before we do something that the captain can't bring himself to ignore. Give them the grand tour, Mary. I'll join you later, and I do mean *join!*"

Kozlowski was very selective and not nearly as adventurous as Lieutenant Atanas. He went through an involved verbal interview process before test driving and selecting the conservative Scottish lass, Roselyn and her three children. Addison and Kelly would be over fourteen when they returned, and young Dmitri would be eight.

Ensign Cedric Wallaby arrived at the Center just as Kozlowski was heading his group toward the door. After returning Wallaby's crisp salute Kozlowski pled, "I shudder to think what you might return with considering the shocking selections that Lieutenant Atanas made. Please don't do anything that will embarrass our ship, Ensign. "

"Who, me, sir?" Wallaby appeared the picture of innocence. "No worries, Captain."

Kozlowski just groaned as he headed for the transporter terminus that would take him back up to the space dock and his ship.

Tribune Washburn stepped up to Cedric. "Your Captain appears to be a bit more conservative than your crewmates, Ensign. How about you? Are you ready to follow Lieutenant Atanas's lead and go for a pair?"

Cedric made a bit of a sour expression kind of like he had bitten into the bitter pith of a pecan. "I don't think I'm ready to share my ladies any more than the captain. I believe that it's safe to allow the gentlemen to return to the barracks, thank you kindly."

There were fifteen ladies loosely grouped in the lobby. Even with Rebecca and Penelope standing at his shoulders, Cedric felt alone and outnumbered. "Where shall we start? I trust everyone understands that we are leaving on a very long-range mission and not expecting to return to anything near civilized for five years, right?"

When that failed to thin the crowd any Cedric quipped, "Even with the superpowers that I have it would be taxing for me to interview each of you in a little room. As you probably know we're attempting to make the transition into adulthood as comfortable for our kids as possible on such a small ship. How many of you have twelve-year-old girls? God, I sound like such a wanking perv when I hear that echoing back to me!"

Penelope spoke up from the cover of Cedric's left shoulder, "We have a ten-year-old boy and three girls in the household that will reach fourteen in five years. We not looking to breed them like prize puppies; we want them to have a choice and not feel pushed because of boy-girl limitations."

"My daughter is twelve," a chestnut brunette spoke from the group. Cedric was immediately attracted to the thick Irish accent.

"Is she as striking as her mother?" Cedric asked as the woman stepped forward.

"I'm a fishmonger's wife next to Vicki, but I didn't think you would be looking at her for yourself," the woman said with a teasing smile.

Penelope shook her head and Rebecca rolled her eyes, they knew they were done. Verbal sparring was one of Cedric's favorite pastimes. Penelope remarked softly, "Well, this didn't take long."

"Not so fast," Cedric responded. "Do you have children other than Vicki?"

"Yes, my son Craig is nine and Hiram is about to be a year old."

Cedric was looking at the display that Washburn had given him, "You must be Fiona. I see that your previous sponsor was a fighter pilot at Tulak. They haven't been doing well against Sa'arm capital ships. Is Vanessa here?" Cedric scanned the concubines as he asked the question. A buxom strawberry blonde stepped up next to Vicki. "I see that the two of you had the same sponsor for the last two years. How do you feel about being separated?"

"Not to worry," Vanessa said, "Kenneth, Gianna and I will miss them terribly, but we'll be fine."

Cedric spoke to the two ladies that had come in with him, "Pene, would you and Becca step into the interview room with Fiona and Vanessa while I negotiate with Tribune Washburn? Go ahead and start without me. I'll join you shortly."

"It's okay with you for your concubines to mess around with each other," Vanessa asked in obvious surprise.

"Is that a problem?" Cedric asked with confusion and concern in his body language.

"*No!* Not at all," Vanessa grabbed Fiona's hand and almost ran to join Penelope and Rebecca as they made their way to an interview room.

"I can work a deal for a male-female two for one, but not two females," Washburn was on the defensive before Cedric spoke.

Cedric hoped that Washburn could be convinced in spite of his opening remarks. "My CAP score is four years old. I scored a six-point-nine, almost enough to qualify for four concubines. I haven't pressed the issue because I'm happy with the two I have, but I'm sure I would score seven or better if I were retested. Check with the AI that I've been working with for the last six months. Maybe I can get retested before I ship out."

Washburn was shaking his head, but let out a breath and was still for a moment. "The AI agrees with you. They are issuing you a new ID card, which you can collect from my office before you leave. Do you want to go for three? I still have a supernumerary authorization for you."

Cedric was clearly tempted, but declined. "I'd better not push it." He then looked at the disappointment on the collected faces and scanned the list one more time. "Then again, Mildred, you lost your sponsor from the same ship as Fiona and Vanessa. Did you know them well?"

A woman with fair skin and dark brown hair stepped forward, "Yes, very well. We bunked together to help each other out with childcare issues."

Cedric looked her in the eyes and asked, "Any qualms about sex with other women?"

Mildred smiled, and shook her head without breaking eye contact, "No qualms at all. Both my mouth and my mound are ambidextrous, and I have absolutely no backdoor shyness. How about you?"

Cedric managed to hold her gaze and smiled, "No, I'm strictly A-C, but I do enjoy the occasional trip around the world. Leave your clothes out here and let's see how well things are progressing in that itty bitty room, shall we?"

Kozlowski was beginning to worry that in solving a minor problem, he may have created a major one. There were now 51 kids aboard the little ship where they had conducted the search for Azahar with only 32, counting those of Nguyen and McKinsey. They had almost doubled the number of concubines as well, from 14 to 24. The core crew had

proven itself in the brief excursion in the vicinity of the Earth colonies, but that had all changed.

The mass of minors appeared to have merged and morphed into groups by gender and age without regard to past history. There would be issues among them. It was inevitable with so many of them so close both spatially and chronologically.

On the bright side they now had more than adequate supervision for the youngsters. None of the new concubines needed to have their attention divided between shipboard and household duties. Neither a crew member nor concubine was fresh from Earth. All were experienced with the realities of life in the colonies. The multi-purpose pod and the basement of the six radio telescope pods gave them a lot of room for group activities as well as quiet places to get away from it all.

The multi-purpose pod was excellent temporary quarters while the pods that required remodeling to accommodate the additional occupants were being modified by the AI. The families were rotated through one at a time. None of the changes required more than twenty-four hours, and most were completed in eight hours without displacing the families overnight.

One of the new concubines came aboard pregnant, and several others would be pregnant soon. Lieutenant Atanas had worked out a rotation that would not jeopardize the mission, but allow as many concubines and crew to get pregnant as possible. Even in the short time they were aboard before the refit was completed Jeffery and Philippe were becoming very knowledgeable engineering assistants making it easier for him to approve Ensign Stayton's request for pregnancy duty.

They had plenty of raw materials, fuel, and manufacturing capability for any scenario that they had imagined and simulated. The shuttle and additional medical capsules gave them a safety net for disasters over and above the five Mk II fusion powered habitat pods.

Kozlowski recovered a great deal of confidence as they boosted out of the Haru gravity well to the outbound jump point and headed toward Earth for a final calibration of their instruments. He was certainly more excited than anxious when all stations reported ready for FTL and he told the helmsman, "Execute."