

# ***Destination Azahar***

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CONTENT: noseX ScFi

UNIVERSE: The Swarm Cycle

## ***Chapter 24 - The Governor***

[Note to reader: This chapter is a continuation of *The Librarian*. It picks up where the previous story ends. While it should not be necessary to have read *The Librarian* to understand the characters and relationships that follow, it is recommended.]

The small fleet of transport ships was getting close to Azahar. The colonists were getting a bit restless after spending two months in the confines of the three *Aurora*-class vessels. All of the standard briefings, enhancements, and cosmetic changes had been completed long enough for everyone to have recovered from the discomfort of any radical resizing they may have requested. However, not many of this group had elected to conform to the standard two-meter stature of Confederacy Space Marines.

These ships were loaded with some of the smartest and most innovative weapons masters from Earth who remained active in their profession. They were on their way to Azahar to populate the township of Demopolis and establish a research and development center that would merge Confederacy technology with human ingenuity to create superior weapons adapted to human physiology and thought processes.

The developers were a mix of college students, both undergraduate and graduate, professors, and professionals from both the military weapons industry and the Pentagon. Most of the latter two groups had been netted by luck or meddling by Confederacy officials on Earth, but the students and their professors had been the objectives of a pre-pack that had been organized by a librarian and a group of undergraduate students from Georgia Tech.

The ships were not just carrying technicians and scientists. There was also a group of mercenaries who had an association with the key organizer of the extraction, Lesa Crews. She had most recently been employed as a college librarian. Lesa had expected to be extracted as a concubine, but had received an unexpected offer during the pickup.

Commander Ian McGregor had made a case for recruiting militant individuals who did not qualify as sponsors. His proposal was to train and equip them to fight the Sa'arm on the ground and to return them to Earth before the Sa'arm arrived. Most of the present recruits were mercenaries in the employ of Lesa's father, Dean Martin Gotti.

There was a tenuous truce between the Confederacy Space Marines and the associates of the enigmatic Dean Gotti. While Cdr. McGregor was the official commander of the unit, Mr. Gotti was the *de facto* leader of his former private army, although he held no illusion of controlling his adult daughter, not that he had much control since she hit puberty, an event that seemed like it was both yesterday and a lifetime ago in his reminiscence.

Gotti was thrilled with his newborn grandson, Gerardo. He was civil to the baby's father primarily because he knew Lesa would make good on her threat of bodily harm if he wasn't. The father, Jake Caulfield, was no more than a child himself. Gotti didn't want to like the young man, but the boy's character and courage were slowly winning his respect.

Sergeants Budzinski and Miller of the Confederacy Space Marines were impressed by the skill and discipline exhibited by the mercenaries on the gymnasium's training mats. The two Marines typically came out on top: Budzinski because of his decades of experience and Miller because of her skill, speed, and feminine wiles. Both had also fully adjusted to their two-meter stature and each of them knew they would lose that particular advantage in a few weeks.

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The main attraction of the pre-pack was Admiral Benjamin Grayson. He was among the most prolific and innovative developers of technology in history even if he wasn't well known. Few of his inventions had been deployed due to being just a bit ahead of their time. The industrialists and military thinkers couldn't see the need to break from tradition.

His wife Martha was smarter than you'd expect for a quiet grandmotherly type. Her CAP scores, people skills, and talent for working behind the scenes had been recognized by the Darjee AI community who had designated her as the first governor-for-life of the planet Azahar shortly after she was extracted. The title had not come with a handbook. All she had to go by was her own concept of what a governor should do and the records of the activities that other planetary governors had pursued.

Martha shared a habitat pod on *Zephyrus* with her former husband in a combined household of twelve concubines and their eighteen children. There were a lot of concubine candidates with kids at the pickup and all volunteers had been allowed a supernumerary selection. Martha was pregnant, but had no children of her own under fourteen.

Ben had been taken to the ship for medical treatment shortly after the extraction began. Martha had used his proxy to select concubines ranging in age from 16 to 42. In addition to Raul, the fiery sixteen-year-old son of Jake's concubine, Consuela, she had selected a middle-aged man with four children.

The remaining ten were females selected to be stimulating at the dinner table as well as in the bedroom. The three athletic teenage girls and three young mothers were hot enough

to melt glass. The remaining four were far from dogs and proved to have some interesting ways of getting an aging gentleman out of his clothing and into compromising positions. Ben was far too conservative to have picked even his half of these women. He had wisely left the selections to his former wife and was a bit shocked by her choices.

*Zephyrus* was three weeks out from Azahar and Governor Grayson was alone in her on-board study as the ship made its way to Azahar considerably faster than the speed of light. She was reading the reports from Azaharat that were now six weeks old. They had been sent to Haru by supraluminal drone and had arrived at Earth just before the three transports engaged their FTL drives. The downside of FTL travel was being out of communication with the universe while in hyperspace.

The reports had been written by ship Captains Kozlowski and Collins, by Marine Commander Kehoe, and by Fleet Auxiliary Commanders McKinsey and Nguyen. Remarkable progress was being made to expand the manufacturing capability of the settlement. Each report had a different perspective, but none of the facts that were mentioned conflicted among the reports.

Collins and Kehoe had only been on-site for four days when the reports had been dispatched to Haru. Both were clearly impressed by what they found in the Azaharat System. The accomplishments of the two junior officers were phenomenal.

She was intrigued by the proposed greenhouse complex. The reports didn't show any measurable change in the atmosphere's chemistry. She made a note to herself to ask about the lack of atmospheric processors.

The majority of the industrial capacity was currently being earmarked to construct ships and essential facilities. Some of the manufacturing capacity was being diverted to develop parks and build recreational equipment. Grayson certainly had no issue with that. It was clearly a low priority item that used only a fraction of the available replication capacity.

There was no indication of when they would begin building ships, or what class of ship they intended to construct. The governor made a note to ask her former husband for recommendations in that area.

Her thoughts must have summoned him because Admiral Grayson quietly stepped behind Martha, gripped the points of her shoulders, and gently kissed her neck. "Haven't you read those reports enough times to have memorized them by now?"

Martha chuckled, "Yes, I'm just hoping to make more sense out of them. They're not contradictory, but there must be more going on at Azahar than these reports indicate."

Ben shook his head. "Like I said before, I'm surprised that the Marine colonel hasn't taken command of the entire solar system. This Commander McKinsey must be a force

to be reckoned with. Before we get into that, though, I came in to tell you that Yujiro Tanaka is here to see you.

"Wonderful!" Martha exclaimed as she shut down her terminal. "Will you join us for tea?"

Ben, knowing that more than tea was on the agenda, followed Martha into the parlor where Yujiro was waiting.

"Good afternoon, Yujiro." Martha greeted the small Japanese-American man who smiled warmly as he took her offered hand. "Ben and I were about to have tea. Do you have time to relax and join us?"

Yujiro laughed, "This two-month cruise is the most idle that I've been in many decades. Not even the knowledge that less than three weeks of the trip remain gives me much relief. Even at my age another three weeks of pampering feels like a very long time. I really need something to do."

Martha could tell that Yujiro was holding back and decided to test her observation. "Have you tired of your concubines so soon? I do hope you haven't discarded any of them."

"Busted," Yujiro remarked with only mild embarrassment and a hint of a Midwestern accent. "I must admit that I'm enjoying my five ladies entirely too much. I've regained the stamina of a teenager, but one can only spend so much time in the saddle before giving both the horse and rider a rest. I'm in a routine that makes me feel like I'm becoming a mindless automaton. Sex becomes as destructive to the mind as television after everyone's physical and emotional needs have been satisfied, don't you think?"

Martha laughed, "I'm not ready to compare sex to watching television just yet, but then I'm sporting a major handicap at the moment." Martha was stroking her distended abdomen. It was clear to anyone with any experience around pregnant people that she was in her second trimester, and rapidly approaching her third.

Ben removed three glass cups set in silver bases from a small cupboard and poured a small amount of zavarka into each cup. He added hot water from the samovar to his cup and stepped aside for Martha and Yujiro to dilute the strong tea to suit their tastes. Once everyone had doctored their tea with the available condiments, they sat at a low table surrounded by comfortable chairs.

When everyone was settled, Yujiro asked, "How may I be of service to the Governor?"

Martha smiled and teasingly asked, "Are you sure it's business? I could be in need of personal advice."

"I'm sure I'm not qualified for anything of a personal nature." The sparkle in Yujiro's dark eyes telegraphed he was going for a little payback. Shifting his attention to her abdomen he remarked, "You've clearly mastered the basics. The rest is just practice with an imaginative partner, and I believe Ben has been exposed to some of the most imaginative partners in the history of sex."

Ben started choking on the sip of tea he had just tried to swallow as Martha agreed, "Yes, Ben has shown a surprising capacity for learning from his much younger instructors."

"I apologize, Ben." Yujiro was a little distressed. "You were not my intended target. Martha is very skilled at redirecting torpedoes even after they have been laid in the water."

"There's no need to apologize, Yujiro," Ben assured the man who was his contemporary even though they both looked as though they had barely reached thirty. "You're not the one beset by nimble teenagers who're intent upon giving you a heart attack through ultimate pleasure."

Martha was laughing, "I'm the double beneficiary of Ben's feminine tribulations. I get a respite, and I profit from each lesson he masters when my name finally appears on his dance card. It's becoming a sizable rotation!" Martha was almost laughing too hard to speak. And, as is often the case, the laughter became contagious.

"I claim duress," Ben said as he tried to stop laughing. "Martha orchestrates liaisons where I'm in a disadvantageous position, and I'm taken advantage of. I would never behave in such an unseemly manner if not coerced. It's entrapment, plain and simple."

"I would love to have such a worthy excuse," Yujiro countered while shaking his head. "My concubines smile at me, my blood supply is diverted to my groin, and sexual excesses ensue."

Martha sobered up a bit, "This is all very entertaining, but sharing sexual scenarios is not what I wanted to discuss with you, Yujiro. I understand that you have some experience with mass production techniques."

Yujiro nodded, "Small vehicles mostly. I started as an engineer and worked my way into larger projects including the management of a multi-line facility that manufactured automobiles and light trucks."

"Excellent," Martha exclaimed as she put the remains of her tea on the small table. "I'd like your opinion on the current setup of Darjee replicators that are building ships and weapons at Azaharat. They replicate items at the molecular level which takes a bit of time. What I want to know is whether or not it's the most effective use of available resources."

Yujiro smiled, "I've been asking the AI about Confederacy manufacturing capabilities. No... Badgering the AI is probably a more accurate description. Their machines are amazing, but I still believe that the principles established by Henry Ford apply to replicators as much as they do to mechanized and manually assisted manufacturing on Earth."

"There are two fairly fresh volunteers from Mississippi who have been exceeding expectations when it comes to getting replicators up and running." Martha handed Yujiro her folder containing the manufacturing reports from Azahar. "Commanders Constance McKinsey and Tuan Nguyen have been getting the attention of their superiors. Those superiors seem to have been impressed enough to divert a large cadre of shipyard workers to Azaharat. Even though the leader of the workers outranks this pair, he's been directed to assist with the ongoing efforts and learn as much as he can from the two junior officers. "

"I know these names," Yujiro was introspective for a moment. "I don't recall ever meeting them, but I'm sure that they've done work at the facility in Mississippi where I was the plant manager a few years ago. I can't recall the details or... wait... Constance. Yes, I remember a project engineer insisting that a contract be awarded to Consistent Constance McKinsey even though she wasn't the lowest bidder." Yujiro looked at Martha and smiled, "They're already at Azahar?"

Martha nodded, "For several months now, where they've really been kicking ass and taking names. You spent some time with the US Navy between college and getting a real job, didn't you?" Martha cut her eyes to catch Ben's reaction to her jibe. He just shook his head, recognizing that he was being baited and refusing to react.

Yujiro laughed, "Yes, but there are those who say managing a plant isn't a real job, either. With my Navy Reserve time and management experience I have somehow managed to retain my old rank of captain in the Confederacy Fleet Auxiliary. I didn't opt for the Confederacy Space Navy because my skill set leans toward supply and logistics. Go figure."

"What I would like for you to do, Yujiro, is to look over what they've done." Martha had taken a very serious tone. "If they're on the right track, then I'd like for you to use your rank to run interference for them in order for us to build the greatest number of ships and weapons in the least amount of time."

She smiled as she glanced at Ben. "I'd like to avoid sending in the 500-pound gorilla unless I have to."

After chuckling at the comparison it was Yujiro's turn to be serious, "What kind of ships and weapons?"

Martha shrugged, "Any kind, every kind. Does it matter?"

Yujiro was emphatic, "Oh yes! It most certainly matters significantly. If you're building one or two of this followed by one or two of that, then the general purpose factory replicator is your best bet. You can only get an advantage from a production line if you are building hundreds of the exact same product."

"In that case," Admiral Grayson insinuated himself into the discussion. "The first step is to carefully choose a product and stick with it. The Sherman tank was adequate, but inferior to the tanks fielded by the Germans in World War Two in almost every combat category except for quantity. Its mass-produced numbers overwhelmed the most fearsome of the German tanks. It was also more reliable and easier to maintain than the complex German monsters."

Yujiro looked up from his examination of the production capacity and projections in the reports. "Choose your weapons, Governor," he said in all honesty, "And I'll help fill the galaxy with them. The Confederacy will be kept busy extracting enough crews and support personnel to fly them off the production lines."

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The Graysons weren't the only ones doing homework. Jake, Janet, and Toby had gotten together every afternoon since completing their orientation and training. They had been working as a team for almost a year looking for an advanced topic that would get them into graduate school on one of Professor Benjamin Grayson's projects. Each of them had been commissioned as an Ensign in the Confederacy Space Navy and assigned to the weapons research and development center on Azahar, just as soon as it was established.

On a personal note Jake had worked out a system for dealing with thirteen sexually active women: his eight female concubines, Lesa, and Lesa's four female concubines. His system allowed him some sleep most nights. Lesa's and his male concubines, Sven and Ito, could give him some assistance, but he felt the need to show affection to each of the women in the double pod he shared with Lesa. The precocious and perpetually horny Sarita would be fourteen soon and Jake saw no way to avoid adding her to his rotation. She had been attempting to trap Jake for months.

Toby had six women to distract him and wasn't getting much more sleep than his seventeen-year-old colleague. His male concubine, Amos, was capable of keeping the women sexually satisfied, but like Jake, Toby believed it was only proper that he take a personal interest in his concubines and give each one some quality one-on-one time every week.

Janet had two studs and five women who kept her bisexual needs well satisfied. It was rare for her to spend one-on-one time with any of them, other than her long-time lover, Misty, but each of them knew that Janet cared deeply for them even if the sexual play was just that: very playful. The eight adults had tightly bonded in the last two months.

Today their study group was joined by a couple of specialists from the Pentagon who had been attending the award event that had turned into a Confederacy extraction. "The problem with all of these weapons, except the lasers, is that the projectiles are too slow for the typical engagement distances in space," Lieutenant Commander Sorensen pointed out. He had become fond of the college kids during the trip and was one of the few professionals who took them seriously (to his credit in the long run).

"Even Jake's ball lightning has mass," Major Samuels pointed out. "We might be able to get it up to fifty kilometers per second with rail guns in space, but that's still more than a minute and a half of transit time at five thousand kilometers. While wet navy torpedoes can take longer than that to reach their targets, they have a stealthy approach and are attacking ships with limited maneuverability. It's hard to hide a 6,000-degree Kelvin basketball in open space, and it's easy to evade it with a multi-G acceleration capability."

"I doubt we could do better with something like plasma cannons or rail guns." Jake jumped into the discussion, "But something like a rocket can be programmed to fly an evasive pattern and track a maneuvering target. A high-G missile should be able to overtake and engage a maneuvering target. It might even be able to use jump engine technology to close with the target faster, and do it invisibly like the torpedoes of old. It could return to normal space seconds before contact with the target."

"Jump engines don't behave predictably in a gravity well," Janet pointed out. "The missile could come out of hyperspace anywhere between the point of origin and the target, and perhaps even beyond the target."

"That could actually be an advantage," Toby observed. "It could pop out anywhere making it impossible to target until after it reappears at a point that can't be predicted. If we have it run an evasive pattern while reacquiring the target and making its final approach, then it could get very close. If the warhead produces a large enough x-ray or neutron emission in the thermonuclear burst, then it may not even have to get all that close to be effective."

"Looking outside the box for the next generation of weapons is good," Sorensen remarked. "But I've been asked by Admiral Grayson to recommend something that can be mass produced as soon as we get settled at the colony. That means something that's been combat tested. We might risk making minor changes if they can be adequately tested, but nothing new and innovative for this round."

"Aren't we expecting to enter Azaharat sometime in the next two or three weeks?" Toby asked, "That isn't going to give us much time."

Sorensen held out his PDA. "Here's the short list of candidate ships and weapons. If you can give me your opinions of the best and worst by the time we reach landfall I'll be a lot more comfortable adding my recommendation to the others being given to Admiral Grayson who will, in turn, give Governor Grayson the prioritized list of military equipment."



Jake and Toby looked at each other and shrugged before accepting a copy of the list on their own PDAs. Jake remarked, "We'll take a look, but this isn't the kind of thing we normally do."

Toby added, "Except in fantasy role-playing games."

"True," Jake nodded. "We'll give you our best evaluation of your game pieces in a few days."

Janet laughingly added, "I promise to keep them from straying too far beyond reality."

Neither he nor Toby could hold a straight face and broke into laughter. Sorensen left unsure about what to expect from them.