

Destination Azahar

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UNIVERSE: The Swarm Cycle

Chapter 25 - The Arrival

Henry Cohen was reflecting on the changes in his life since being extracted from Earth. He abhorred violence. He didn't even watch American football, and hockey was totally out of the question. Had it not been for his intelligence and overdeveloped senses of loyalty and compassion he would not have qualified as a volunteer. His distaste for violence was noted during his placement interviews, and the AI tactfully suggested that he be offered a Civil Service posting.

Henry's sophistication and boyish charm allowed him to live the fantasy life of a rich bachelor long before women began looking for way of improving their carnal skills. Henry's sense of honor and compassion didn't stop him from persuading scores of women into using him as their practice dummy. He was rarely crude, but had found that unseemly language offended fewer women than it made wet.

It was made clear to Decurion Cohen that he would be pretty much on his own. His resources would be limited to what he could beg, borrow or steal. The counselor suggested that he develop a rapport with the local governor and the military commanders. Tribune Washburn would be available to him as a mentor, and he was told to contact Legate ap Rhys as soon as practical after reaching Azahar. Cohen would be required to submit periodic reports to Washburn's office in the Poseidon system until such time that a more direct command structure could be established.

Henry asked his concubines to review the reports submitted by the Civil Service representatives stationed at existing colonies. He wanted ideas from them. He also cautioned them to be ready to assist. There was a precedent for concubines working in an unofficial capacity, and he intended to put his to work as much as time, circumstance, and the AI would allow and/or require.

"Keeping my wick wet may satisfy the AI that you're earning your keep," Henry told his three ladies, "but I expect a great deal more from you than the satisfaction of my carnal desires. I also expect you to use your brains. I'm confident that all of you can be as creative outside the bedroom as you are within it."

His prize concubine, Tiffany, unbelted the short silk robe she was wearing. She gave it no thought as it slid off of her shoulders and onto the floor. It was her sole garment and she approached Henry totally naked with cat-like smoothness of motion from her delicate

bare feet to her short Afro. She was devoid of hair below her neck and Henry knew from experience that the dark chocolate-colored skin was as silky smooth as it looked.

Tiffany had never been embarrassed by wearing revealing garments in public or nothing at all where it wouldn't get her arrested. Nor was she reluctant to use her incredibly talented pussy to her advantage. She knew that Henry loved to eat it almost as much as he loved to fuck it. She reveled in the knowledge that she was Henry's favorite concubine. She worked on enhancing that position at every opportunity. Henry had been willing to trade all of his concubines for her, but Toby wasn't greedy and had only taken a young virgin in exchange. Not because she was a virgin, but rather because her roots had nothing in common with Cohen or his other concubines.

Toby was in no way unhappy with Tiffany, but knew that the former rich girl would be happier with someone from with her own social strata. He had made it clear that he felt selfish about denying Tiffany her full measure of happiness. She had often wondered how the gentle Toby had fared with his young virgin. The scenarios she played in her head when she pictured the timid Toby taking the shy Margaret's virginity always left her with lubricant running down her legs.

Sharing was a new concept for Tiffany, but she often encouraged her sister concubines, Stephanie and Rachael, to join her when riding Henry's enhanced pole or talented tongue. Sometimes her cheerleader background would show through as she inspired the other two from the sidelines, encouraging them to expand their sexual horizons with each other and with Henry. She had coaxed the other two into engaging in some outrageous antics with each other and some selected toys that both entertained and aroused their master.

Neither Stephanie nor Rachael were accustomed to being second in anything either, but they knew that challenging Tiffany was an exercise in futility. Both were resigned to being thankful for what they had and they did their best to support Tiffany's efforts to please Henry. All four members of the Cohen household were the offspring of very old money.

Tiffany was from Charleston while the other three shared a Boston heritage, which should have been an advantage for Tiffany's sister concubines. Charleston was one of the few relics of the Deep South that had retained both a spirit of independence and aristocratic arrogance in spite of being almost destroyed during the War of Northern Aggression. Having a long history in the Boston elite didn't impress Tiffany, stealing away one of the key advantages Stephanie and Rachael typically enjoyed.

Tiffany asked the AI to recline Henry's chair as she settled the junction of her slender thighs on his mouth without breaking eye contact. Henry felt himself being relieved of his pants and knew that it would be a while before his request for input about his Civil Service duties would be addressed. He was happy to be lost in the taste and feel of Tiffany's labia and the sight of her flat abdomen, perky breasts, and pleasure-filled face as he probed her with his tongue.

His breathing became ragged as two mouths began working on his own genitals from the perineum up and over his testes to the tip of his shaft. Henry became incapable of coherent thought when the mouth that had been deep-throating his length was replaced by a very tight and very wet pussy. He neither knew nor cared at the moment who his talented fellatrix had been, or who's pussy had replaced it. He promised himself that he would learn the most intimate details of his three ladies well enough to pick each one out blindfolded... some other time.

Decurion Cohen was immediately recognized by the receptionist in Governor Grayson's office suite. "Good morning, Decurion. Please go right in. The governor is expecting you."

Martha stood as her door opened and stepped around her desk to greet her visitor. "Thank you for coming by, Henry. You don't mind if I call you Henry, do you? If you don't address me as Martha I'll be very put out with you."

Henry smiled, "Please, do address me as Henry. I may have a bit of trouble calling you Martha, but I'll do my best."

Martha smiled and asked, "Do you think we can turn Demopolis into something we can be as proud of as we are of Boston?"

Henry shrugged, "It will never have the history and roots of Boston in our lifetimes, but we can be hopeful for the future, and with so many Bostonians here there *is* hope." Henry smiled, "I'll never get tired of talking about Boston, but I don't think that's why you asked me to stop by this morning."

Martha smiled and gestured toward a couple of chairs and low table, "Right; to the point then." After they were seated Martha took a moment to collect her thoughts. "I would like to add to your current responsibilities, but I'm also prepared to add to your resources as well. You're not schooled as an educator, but you are an educated man from one of the older families in Boston. What's your opinion of educational opportunities for children on Azahar?"

Henry was clearly intrigued, and suspected he knew where this was going when he replied, "They're dismal, Martha. There are no documented educational opportunities on Azahar outside of AI controlled sleep training. It's a condition that I find appalling and totally unacceptable." Henry smiled when he added, "What did you have in mind?"

"Education is something I can become totally immersed in. I can't afford to indulge myself to the level I would like and remain an effective governor. I need someone in whom I can place my trust that *every* child on Azahar will have the opportunity to improve themselves to the point that Azahar has more fourteen-year-old Confederacy sponsors per capita than any other colony in the Galaxy." Looking directly into Henry's

eyes she added, "Do you have the time to ramrod an education program if I provide you with a staff of administrators, educators, and suitable facilities?"

Henry held her gaze, "I'm just getting my arms around my duties as the Civil Service representative of a whole planet. Right now I believe that it's something my companions and I can administer without it occupying all of our time if we have the support of, say, the colonial governor." They shared a conspiratorial smile before Henry continued. "In all seriousness, I share your passion for education, but I also recognize that it's not important to everyone. As you said, I'm not an educator. However, I'm an experienced organizer and administrator. What do I have to work with?"

Martha smiled, "I don't really know. I'm sure we can get you whatever facilities and equipment you need. I've gone through the roster of immigrants and made a list of everyone with teaching credentials. You won't be able to contact most of them until we get to Azahar because the majority of them are on one of the other ships. Don't limit yourself to sponsors. There are quite a few highly qualified elementary and secondary educators who didn't make the CAP cutoff."

Henry nodded his understanding, "I'll get right to work recruiting those I can contact now."

Martha stood and extended her hand, "Thank you, Henry. Let me know what you need, including who needs to be leaned on."

Henry smiled, "Thank you for your trust and backing. I'll not disappoint you."

Commander Constance McKinsey had been apprehensive from the moment *Aurora* had entered the system and advised the CIC duty officer that the planetary governor should be arriving on *Zephyrus* before the day was over. Her apprehension only increased when *Zephyrus* radioed for approach and orbital instructions six hours later. Less than two hours after *Zephyrus's* arrival, *Chronos* entered normal space and began its own approach to a synchronous orbit.

Commander Tuan Nguyen shared some of McKinsey's anxiety. "The marines have taken over the CIC duties since Colonel Bryant arrived, which isn't actually all that bad for us. Working in an adjacent planning room has been an advantage. But we could lose control of the replicators with the arrival of a planetary governor."

McKinsey just nodded to convey her concurrence with the observations Nguyen had given voice to. Neither Nguyen nor McKinsey was sure of the appropriate protocol, but they had drafted a welcoming message to Governor Grayson that included updated status reports of all activities in the planetary system.

"There's an Admiral Grayson listed on the passenger manifest," McKinsey observed. "Should we alert Colonel Bryant?"

"I'm going to go out on a limb and say we should forward the entire passenger list to his office and let him decide what is appropriate," Tuan suggested.

Over a thousand pod anchorages had been prepared in the empty township of Demopolis in anticipation of the governor's arrival. The pods from the three ships would be connected to the tunnel infrastructure in less than an hour after leaving the ship. Each anchorage was equipped with an airtight door connecting it to the tunnel system. The collar on the door would mate with the main entrance of a pod giving them access to the breathable air in the tunnel system as soon as a seal was established. Several of the anchorages had been prepared to accommodate double and triple pod arrangements, both end-to-end and side-by-side.

The message to Governor Grayson included a map of the Demopolis anchorages, tunnels, courtyards, transporter connections, parks, playgrounds, and office buildings. The pods and their occupants could be accommodated as soon as site assignments were communicated to the CIC staff. A small fleet of lighters was available for any who wished to ride down with their habitat pod rather than take the transporter.

Governor Grayson met with a few key individuals in her quarters aboard *Zephyrus* to decide where each pod would be located, except for the eight mysterious pods requested by Captain Cooper of *Asimov*. Grayson had not given them any thought and was a bit surprised to learn that two of them were occupied by volunteers. This information was transmitted to the CIC in Barcino along with a message asking Commander McKinsey to postpone her dinner invitation until the following evening to give everyone a chance to acclimate their days and nights to the local time zone.

McKinsey chuckled when she read the inventory of the pods that had been transported at Cooper's request and wondered how the AI on the ships had been convinced to allow some of the items to be loaded. She immediately forwarded the information to Avalareddy and Brown asking them to recommend where each of the eight pods should be delivered.

The three colony transports were outbound with new pods the next afternoon with Second Platoon still distributed among the three ships. Commander McGregor was the only Marine to have disembarked with the new arrivals. His family would join him soon if all went well with the Home Guard Militia at Demopolis.

Governor Grayson had opted for the Home Guard Militia to be housed at Demopolis instead of with the marines at Barcino. She was risking alienating the marines stationed on Azahar, but didn't want the militia to be absorbed into the marine collective.

Admiral Grayson had been a bit embarrassed by the reception prepared by the contingent sent from the marine garrison of Camp Timmons. All that ceremony over a little blue

flag that he had to get from a replicator because he hadn't used one of the silly things in years, if not decades.

Commander Nguyen felt totally and completely out of place among the high ranking people gathering in McKinsey's parlor. Even McKinsey was feeling a bit intimidated by the eagles and stars on her guests' collars. She recognized Colonel Yujiro Tanaka as someone who had stuck his head into a meeting room a few years earlier. Governor Grayson's abdomen was a bit of a surprise. Clearly she had been pregnant before she was extracted from Earth.

McKinsey and Nguyen were almost relieved to see Colonel Bryant and Commander Kehoe arrive. Major Stoner had been the lowest ranking individual present other than the two engineers.

When McKinsey was certain that everyone was present she took a deep breath to calm herself before speaking. "I'm sure I speak for everyone when I welcome Admiral and Governor Grayson to Azahar. Commander Nguyen and I hope that our efforts to prepare Demopolis have met with your approval."

"The accommodations and facilities certainly exceed my expectations," Admiral Grayson answered for the couple. "I was expecting something far more primitive. This bustling planet hardly meets my concept of a beginning colony. I associate something considerably more crude and austere with the descriptor 'colony'. This place is a long way from log cabins and outhouses."

Governor Grayson took over, "One of the office complexes appears to be configured with classrooms and lecture halls while the other two are perfect for research laboratories, reference libraries, and support staff. Where did you get the floor plans? How were you able to complete such large facilities in less than a year?"

McKinsey turned to Nguyen who was clearly embarrassed by the attention of so many important people, but spoke with pride. "I outlined my understanding of the activities that would take place and turned the details over to my concubine Margret. She was an architect on Earth. Ensign Clark's concubine Sasha, a former urban planning student, helped her research similar campus arrangements in the AI archives. Margret then drew the plans for the three complexes in enough detail for the AI to direct the activity of several industrial replicators."

"I'm both surprised and pleased that you delegated the leadership of such a large project to a concubine," Governor Grayson admitted. "You must allow me to meet this person. Perhaps you can stop by my home with your family for lunch tomorrow?"

Nguyen almost stammered when he replied, "I'd be honored, Governor."

"Be sure to bring your children as well," the governor added.

Admiral Grayson couldn't resist asking, "Is Margret the only concubine who works outside of home?"

"No, sir," McKinsey answered. "Until the shipyard crews arrived from Frikat, all of our shuttle pilots were concubines."

"Really!" Admiral Grayson exclaimed. "If you have a pilot shortage and are willing to employ concubines, then I have a recommendation. Janet Olson's concubine Misty is an outstanding instrument-rated multi-engine pilot."

"Yes, she is," Governor Grayson agreed. "She's also two months pregnant with your daughter."

The Admiral turned beet red. "You didn't have to mention that. But since you have, you might want to add that you tricked me into a vulnerable position, and she took advantage of me."

Governor Grayson attempted to get things back on track, "As much as I enjoy needling the admiral, there are a few items that require all of us to work on together. The planet's oldest residents, Commanders McKinsey and Nguyen's families, have done an amazing job of developing the manufacturing capacity of Azahar. Several ships have been built in addition to the usual habitat pods expected from a new colony. There are impressive facilities not only in orbit and in the northern mountains, but also beneath the central plains.

"The reports that were forwarded to me when we left hyperspace indicate that you've even established a small outpost orbiting the system's only gas giant, Ammit, which sends large quantities of ammonia, methane, gold, silver, lead, uranium and even plutonium to Azahar every week using the *Stagecoach* vessels *Gersix*, *Diamond T*, and *Kenworth*.

"Your shipyard has completed a *K'treel* yacht, three stagecoach freighters, and an *Aurora* class colony transport ship as of a month ago. A *Tarawa*-class assault ship is almost complete along with a *Kilo*-class colony transport.

"Going forward we must develop a prioritized list of ships, weapons, and equipment for production. I'd like everyone's lists of those things you consider to be *needs* communicated to Colonel Yujiro Tanaka. I believe McKinsey and Nguyen should continue to focus their skills on improving and expanding the manufacturing capacity to stay ahead of the demands that will be placed on this critical resource.

"Colonel Bryant, you have an incredibly complicated training facility and a new assault ship for developing planetary assault tactics. As those tactics are reviewed you will undoubtedly have additional equipment requirements.

"One item that I'd like to add to your plate, provided it's appropriate, is to expand the training facility to include a program for developing and educating candidates for the officer corps.

"Commander Stoner, your group has been turning out an impressive number of ships including a number of specialized craft for exploiting the resources provided by the local gas giant. I believe we need to focus on a single transport class, a single assault class, and no more than three combat classes of ships and begin mass producing them."

Still directing her attention to Stoner she added, "Major Cooper is somewhere about and will be taking command of *Othello*, the *Kilo*-class colony ship currently under construction. I'd appreciate it if you could get with her and Lieutenant Williams to develop a recommendation for the class of colony ship we need to build and what features it should incorporate.

"Admiral Grayson, you'll be creating new and improved ships and weapons, but I ask that you select two or three items in the current inventory. I'd like to have McKinsey and Nguyen tool dedicated lines to manufacture your recommendations by the thousands.

"This should serve as fair warning to McKinsey and Nguyen that their skills are going to be tested over the next few months. I ask that you call upon Colonel Tanaka as soon as practical to brief him on what is possible and what is not possible. Dump the headaches into his lap. He's an experienced manufacturing manager who can keep the rest of us from wasting your valuable time."

"Whoa," Admiral Grayson admonished. "Don't sugar coat it, babe; kick them in the shins and give it to them between the eyes!"

"Actually," Governor Grayson added. "It's the rest of us who need to catch up with this pair." Looking around she added, "Who would have thought a habitat pod could be turned into something this comfortable. It reminds me of my home on Earth enough to make me a bit homesick."

"This place," McKinsey swept her arm to indicate her home, "is the result of an almost total breakdown that I had when Tuan and I were left alone out here light-years away from the nearest human outpost," McKinsey admitted. "Our two families were the only living things in a remote planetary system that only a few other humans even knew existed. I had a brief encounter with megalomania and have never taken the time to tone the place down. Now that I've been in it a few months I've kind of gotten used to it. I find that I really enjoy entertaining here."

The group was interrupted by Aswani announcing that dinner was served.

The next morning Tuan commented to Constance, "Well, it looks like we're about to lose control of the manufacturing facilities to Tanaka. It was only a matter of time before the bureaucrats stepped in and took over."

"I don't think so," Constance countered. "Tanaka was good about giving his engineers autonomy at the assembly plant he managed. I think he'll continue that philosophy here. What I expect from him is a prioritized list of items to be manufactured and a target date for any time critical items. What he'll expect from us is to create manufacturing lines dedicated to single products."

"You're right," Tuan said as an idea formed in his head. "The tugs are working very much like conveyors and robots in a classic production line, only a bit slower. Instead of having twenty-four industrial replicators building complete habitat pods we could have twelve building shells, seven building domestic replicators, four building power cells, and one putting everything together and sealing them up. The habitat pod could then configure itself with the standard internal floor plan while in storage. So what if it takes two or three days before it's ready to occupy."

"Let's try it," Constance agreed.

It took a few hours for them to explain to the AI what they wanted to do and why they wanted to do it. They had to adjust the mix, but the simulation showed they would be able to build 33 pods per day with 27 industrial replicators and have a few spare power cells and pod-size replicator units being stockpiled. The critical path was pod AI units. One of the units building shells would have to be switched to AI units a couple of times a month to keep the production rate at 33 pods per day. They started with 28 units to get a backlog of pod AI units before dropping to 27 industrial replicators dedicated to building habitat pods.

Kim interrupted her dad and reminded him of their lunch appointment with the governor.

Everyone was in the transporter room when Kim dragged her dad out of the CIC antechamber. He was a bit surprised to see Bobby and Roni, but it made sense from a certain point of view.

They were met at the door by Raul who escorted everyone to an enlarged kitchen and family dining area. It was much too large to be called a breakfast nook and not situated or appointed as a dining room.

It took some time for introductions, especially of the children who were in constant motion. Governor Grayson was particularly attentive when Tuan mentioned that Kim, Bobby, and Roni were attending classes with other dependents and sponsors who had not yet joined the Confederacy military.

"I had assumed that anyone reaching majority and achieving a qualifying CAP score would volunteer for service." Martha was mostly thinking out loud and added, "But if they were required to join, then they wouldn't really be volunteers, would they?"

Changing the subject she asked, "Who organized the schooling?"

"It's hardly organized, Governor." Tuan wished that Ensign Clark was here. "I'm not sure how it happened, but Jason Lawrence was extracted as part of Ensign Clark's household. One of Jason's concubines is, or rather was, a high-school teacher at the private school Jason attended. He's close to earning a high-school equivalency and the Confederacy seems to be giving him a chance to do that before accepting him into the Marines. Several other kids between twelve and fifteen go to Clark's pod every day to study with each other under the guidance of Donna, the former teacher."

"That's very encouraging," Martha remarked. "What about the younger children?"

Tuan admitted, "We don't have any qualified elementary teachers, but Beatrice here and Ensign Clark's Rebecca have joined forces to work with the younger set. Mostly in the parks, but they have also worked out a sleep training curriculum with the AI."

"Excellent!" Martha was clearly enthusiastic about the effort being made. "Before arriving at Azahar I asked Decurion Cohen to organize an education program. I'm sure that he has found several qualified individuals in the three crowded colony transports who can be of help. However, I don't think we should automatically put Beatrice and Rebecca into the amateur pool." The warm smile she gave Beatrice filled the working mother with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Martha's concubines, Raul and Susan, organized the dependents while she completed setting the adult's table herself. The small talk that accompanied lunch was mostly about family histories and plans for the future.

Tuan was pleased, and not particularly surprised, that no one batted an eye when he spoke fondly of the grandmother who raised him being the youngest daughter of a black sharecropper in Mississippi. There was genuine sadness when he spoke of the grandfather he had never met who was a shopkeeper in Hanoi.

As everyone was leaving, Martha asked Tuan, "May I have your permission to speak further with Beatrice about expanding the schooling opportunities of other children?"

"Of course, Governor," Tuan responded immediately. "She doesn't have an implant, but the AI can usually contact her and facilitate a conversation. She has free run of the colony facilities and can meet you anywhere you like."

Martha gave him a big smile as she nodded, "Thank you." She was getting an understanding of the deep personal relationships within this colonial family and hoped to see more like it.

Back at the CIC, Tuan found Constance and Sasha talking with a slender young man with a very clean-cut appearance. They turned to Tuan as he entered the room.

"Just in time," Constance said. "Tuan, this is Decurion Cohen. He's asking where he should set up his Civil Service headquarters."

"I'm pleased to meet you, Decurion," Tuan said earnestly. "Governor Grayson was just telling me a bit about you at lunch. I understand that you're going to expand our attempt to educate our children."

"Please, call me Henry," Cohen said as he shook Tuan's hand. "I have several volunteers and a few conscripts who have considerable teaching experience, but we need facilities and supplies. I was just speaking with Constance about where to locate my offices and the facilities for unattached concubines. Thank goodness that hasn't been an issue for you, yet."

Tuan's frown displayed his distaste. "I hope that we'll never need such a facility." He let out his breath in a soft sigh, "But, it will no doubt be necessary as we get new colonists directly from Earth and as the Marines living here experience casualties. What was that about conscripts?"

Henry laughed. "That's not as bad as it sounds. Some of the better qualified teachers are concubines. I had to ask their sponsor and they were directed to participate without volunteering, but I don't think any of them objected to the arrangement. Most of them were probably consulted before their sponsor responded."

Henry's smile evaporated as he addressed Tuan's observation, "I share your distaste for an unclaimed concubine facility and will do all I can to keep it from being necessary, but it's almost inevitable with so many sponsors in high-risk tasks who don't leave instructions for the disposition of their concubines in the event of their demise."

Constance told Tuan, "Henry's residence is in Demopolis, but he doesn't think that's where he should have the Civil Service brothel. Sasha agrees, right?"

Sasha was hesitant. This wasn't about sex, something she was becoming very comfortable discussing with anyone. This group of well-educated people was expecting her to contribute to a technical discussion outside of her comfort zone. She closed her eyes for a moment to focus and took a deep breath before speaking. "You typically want to segment business districts by clientèle. You wouldn't want to put a biker bar next to a playground. The brothel needs to be in an adult area and co-located with other adult attractions such as bars, casinos, and violent arena sports stadiums."

Both Tuan and Henry cringed even before Constance added, "Well, we're *expected* to have a brothel, Tuan. Remember, you almost came to blows with a certain lieutenant when *Sir Galahad* first arrived, Mr. Nguyen."

Tuan shrugged sheepishly, but didn't reply.

Henry suggested, "Perhaps we can add a tunnel to the downtown junction of Barcino to make it convenient to the marine and navy residential areas, but not pushed into anyone's face."

"That makes sense," Constance agreed. "The main transporter room is here in Barcino making it the logical place for transient services. What about school facilities? I don't think it would be a good idea to co-locate the schools and the brothel."

Sasha broke the silence by commented, "Schools are a neighborhood service. They should be as close as possible to the residential areas and cater to the younger family age group, especially families with younger children. Location is less of an issue for teens."

"Damn," Tuan remarked. "We've been grouping people by the wrong criteria."

"It's fixable." Constance wrapped things up with, "How about asking Celeste to draw up Sasha and Henry's ideas and run it by some of the others before we begin tunneling. There might be some issues we haven't considered, like the question of whether there should be separate marine and navy playgrounds."

"Are you speaking of the children or the adults?" Henry asked with a big smile.

Constance laughed, "I was thinking of the children, but I suppose it's the adults who can be rough on playground equipment."

"Enough foolishness. Some of us have work to do."

Henry left with a big smile at having pleasant people to work with, and confidence that his needs would be met.