Chapter 125

My xeno specialist, Dr. Zaire, had made many friends in his time on the station. One of those friends was a Glyph. Dr. Zarie was petitioning to get him added to the crew. I thought it was too much of a coincidence that my tour guide was of the same race. Edmund did a cursory interview, and it gave me enough grounds to refuse. Edmund’s evaluation was the candidate had enough signs of being a spy that drew red flags. Knowing the Alliance did have spies and was attempting to get more of the technology on the *Void Phoenix* was somewhat—reassuring.

That may sound counter-intuitive, but I would have been even more suspicious if they hadn’t made some effort. The Alliance, on its face, was a consortium of races banded together under strict laws that governed themselves and outside parties. From Edmund’s viewpoint, the unbiased nature of these and their enforcement held the Alliance together. So they were seeking backdoors around the laws of their Republic. A crew member would have been free to come aboard and explore our technology and learn everything they could. The end result was I had no plans of ever taking on any new crew associated with the Alliance.

When the devices were delivered to the *Void Phoenix*, they were massive.  Three cubic meters each.  The engineering plans were transmitted digitally and already translated to a script.  I could build the electronics with my fabricators, but we would have to start from scratch with the programming.  The project gave me an excuse to spend half my day working on the devices.  I had dozens of ideas on how this technology could be used.

The projected hologram strength reflected how much energy was supplied, but on visual inspection and at long-distance scans, we didn’t need much substance to reflect scans.  I was thinking of making missiles that could act as actual decoys of the Void Phoenix and other ships. It would be a shock if the *Void Phoenix* was suddenly had battleships appear out of nowhere and come to our aid.  We could also disguise our hull again without bolting on a shell.  We could use it inside the ship for recreation.  Our Marines could use it to project clones in the field or objects to trick our enemies.  Or they could disguise themselves as other races.  There were endless possibilities, and the ideas kept coming.

Two Squirrel engineers joined me on the project as we set up our work lab for the holo projectors. Our first goal was to work on miniaturizing them. Downsizing the devices was a priority before manufacturing. As I became absorbed in my work of miniaturizing the solid-state projectors, Damian finally confirmed we were ready to depart.  We had been here for sixteen days, and it was one of our journey’s most hospitable stays.  The crew was refreshed. The *Void Phoenix* was refueled, resupplied, and ready. Our next stop was Kelvin-33P.  It was an ice world but had numerous races from the Alliance living in it.

Kelvin-33P had dozens of ice-mining towns for the various races. It was mostly to resupply starships passing through this region of space. The only other industry in the system was massive orbital farms that grew water-intensive crops. Most races in the Alliance still preferred organic produce. So much so that Dr. Zaire had been able to sell our fruit-producing bush from the planetoid. Apparently, the fermented wine that it produced had been a huge hit. In fact, two of the orbital farms in the Kelvin-33P were going to switch over to producing the berry bushes.

As we left the Helliphante system, the crew morale was high, and we had cultivated a good reputation within the Alliance, making our future stops within their controlled space hopefully go smoothly. We did have one planned stop on our way to the ice world. It was HJW-549, an out-of-the-way system with no value to anyone. Our goal for the stop was to manufacture the phased fuel and test the theories on pushing a ship in subspace to higher and faster bands.

There was a lot of excitement from Damian and the Squirrel physicists. If this actually worked, then space travel could be changed permanently. A journey that once took a month could be shortened to just two or three days. It could make stars out of the arm previously unfeasible to colonize now viable. If even higher bands were discovered through this process, traveling between galaxies might be possible. The nearest star in the Canis Major Dwarf Galaxy was 25,396 lightyears away. Currently, a 63-year journey in subspace, impossible to carry that much fuel and remain in subspace for that period of time. With our new drive, that could be reduced to just six years. Then the journey turned into being improbable. A massive, specially designed spacecraft could probably make it.

So it was with great anticipation that we spent five days on the edge of the HJW-549 system and began our testing. The first test was canceled with Elias and Zoe piloting due to a minor concern that was quickly rectified. Then I saw my old Union Marine drop shuttle do the impossible. Make a subspace jump at 2,400 times the speed of light. The Squirrel were flummoxed as the test should have just yielded a speed of 1,950 times the speed of light. The only reason they could explain this was the higher the band, the speed started to increase exponentially.

So at their highest projected band, the new theory was we could travel at 8,800 times the speed of light. I checked their math, and they wanted to try their theory immediately. Scale up the phased fuel conversion and even install the new emitters on the *Void Phoenix*. Travel an entire light year in less than one second? It was thought to only be possible with a wormhole, and the shearing forces inside a wormhole made it impossible.

I gave the Squirrel permission to start manufacturing the new emitters for the *Void Phoenix* at the current tested band. It would increase our subspace speed by a factor of six. I was still having Zoe and Elias go through medical observation and check out the shuttle for any discrepancies. Of course, my two pilots were unbearable as they claimed to be the fastest humans alive.

We resumed our course to the ice world. Then an incident occurred that I did not want to deal with. Julie had brought it to my attention, and I was at a loss for what to do. Dr. Andie Niaz was pregnant. I had given her and Will Swain permission to have a child on board, so that was not the issue. What was at issue was Andie had used the equipment to genetically engineer her child using the SNAIL equipment. She had tried to keep it from Will and Julie, but Julie had gotten creative in her spying operations on the crew. Julie used her Chloe bot to examine the records on the medical equipment and confirmed her suspicions.

I knew the Brotherhood created superior genetic soldiers, which was out outlawed in all of human space. According to Edmund’s findings, the Brotherhood soldier modifications were all physical, though. According to Julie, Andie was trying to give her child, a girl, increased intellectual capacity and reasoning skills. I let my anger simmer for a while before approaching Andie. She didn’t deny it at all. She was actually proud of giving her child the best opportunity to succeed in a hostile environment. Currently, only two people on the ship knew, Andie and I. Andie tried to convince me she would never be found out as she had removed all the genetic markers that would show the gene splicing. This distraction caused me to ignore my work on the holo-projectors for days. I spent more and more time with Celeste, Amos, and Tora’s twins while trying to come to a decision. Children were our genetic imperative, the reason why we existed. So what right did I have to deny Andie this?

What I realized I didn’t like was the fact that Andie had cheated in the genetic lottery for her offspring. Andie was just three weeks in when I made my decision. I allowed her to bring the child to term and then ensured that she had concealed everything about what she had done. We purged the SNAIL computers. The only remaining issue was that if the child was genetically sequenced and compared to both Andie and Will, it wouldn’t result in a match.

There were enough genetic markers to show the child as being Andie’s niece, so that is what we went with. Andie’s sister had been killed seven years ago, and there was a record of her having her unfertilized eggs frozen. So we changed the ship’s records to show Andie’s sister as the mother and an unknown donor as the father. I then had Danielle go and lock Andie out of all SNAIL equipment that could do this again. Danielle didn’t ask why I had her do this, but she looked suspicious. Thankfully Danielle was so engrossed in sifting Julie’s code I don’t think she would delve furtherI had decided to let Andie keep the child. I hoped this wouldn’t come back to bite me.

It had cleared my mind slightly but not my conscience. I had done the same thing for Eve. I had stepped past acceptable boundaries and given Eve enhancements beyond acceptable norms. The *Void Phoenix* harbored numerous crimes against humanity; what was one more?

I used work to ignore my conscience and focused on the holo projectors. Since Danielle was busy with looking up Julie’s skirt, I had to bring in another programmer to design and write the software for the projectors. We had one Marine with some programming background—Bob ‘Tech’ Dragon. His recon specialty was hacking and breaking code.

He was not very apt at writing code, but all it took was a pay raise to motivate him to work on the certifications. By the time we reached Kelvin-33P we could project a one-meter box in any color. The density of the image was enough to trip sensors. We could even get the image to project up to 2.3 meters away from the emitters. Now that we had proved the device worked and that we could program software for it, we started working on downsizing the devices.

The massive 3-meter cubes the Pyvuk had used had been used to create large environments and had multiple layered emitters on them. My proof of concept for the solid-state projector was going to be a device that could be incorporated into our battle suits on the forearm. I wanted to extend the effective range to be five meters. The Squirrel engineers thought it was a fun project, but it also meant we were going to have to give each combat suit an upgraded AI to control the holograms. Right now, the AIs were dumb AIs tasked with monitoring the suit’s functions.

The new AI would allow some sentient processing ability, allowing the AI to animate the projection to fit the operator’s needs. Julie also wanted her holo projectors on the ship upgraded as well. I wasn’t so keen on the idea. The last thing I wanted was to wake up to a hologram in my bed that could physically touch me.

When we dropped out of subspace and started our approach to the ice world. There were only a handful of Alliance frigates and dozens of transports in the system. Our scans moved to the planet on our approach, and we got a surprise. One of the ice mining communities on the planet was human. The data feed from the local government said one hundred and two thousand humans were living in the enclosed city. A query found it was a very old undocumented human colony that had been assimilated into the Alliance. It was a curiosity that needed some investigation.