Chapter 141 Victory at Cost

The enemy fleet was working to join up and combine to face the incoming threat of my battleship.  The enemy battleship was already on secondary power systems.  The Squirrel commandos had sacrificed themselves to cripple the Brotherhood battleship, but it would probably not be enough.  Even now, the battleship was again under power and behind the other warships working as a forward screen for it.  By Elias’ estimate, it would take five hours to reach the Void Phoenix.

The Brotherhood boarders had control of engineering and the lower decks.  Julie still had sensors, and she said they were being surprisingly careful in their takeover.  Five were injured, and thirty-five combat effective.  They were killing her sensors, but we still had the alien sensor feed from Elvis.  If they cut off power to the pair of alien sensors on the lower deck, we would be effectively blind.  All but two of my Marines had some type of injury.  We met up on deck nine, and I told them we needed to retake the ship before the three shuttles of reinforcements reached us.

JJ was going to spearhead an attack in engineering, and I was going to lead an attack into the research lab area where the majority of the invaders currently were.  A few of us wanted to switch into undamaged suits, so I gave everyone three minutes.  I rushed to switch my suit to a fresh Badger.  The attackers were waiting for their reinforcements.  Halfway through putting on the new suit, Elias commed me and told me Julie’s power had been cut, and the alien sensors were also down.  Long-range communications were running on battery power, and we had plenty of battery charge for a few days.

This rightly put us in a terrible position.  JJ was ready before me and was leading his assault with three men in Badger suits.  I took the service lift down with my two healthy marines, one in Badger armor and one in a Gorilla suit.  The bridge was now under the protection of injured marines and crew not trained in combat in the suits.  The best part was Elias was still on the radio and was calmly relaying orders to everyone.

My gorilla suit led the way off the lift under heavy fire as she barked laughter over her speakers at the enemy.  Her shields were doing a marvelous job, and the projection of a second marine in Gorilla armor was halving her incoming fire.  The heavier weapons of the Gorilla suit chewed through walls to get at the defensive positions.  Their men began to fall and then fell back.  My female Tirani pressed forward with confidence, the floor plating buckling with her every step.  It was not time to worry about damage.  After this battle, the Void Phoenix might not even be worth repairing.  I chided myself as I was still thinking I was going to get out of this.

JJ came over comms.  He had reached the damaged section of engineering and eliminated four enemies with his squad; the enemy was in retreat at position.  He asked what to do with enemies who were incapacitated.  I took just a second to order their elimination.  We did not have any spare men to guard them.

We had reached heavy resistance at my position, and they were throwing grenades at the gorilla suit.  The grenades shredded the floor, and the suit got lodged in cables and framework as it sunk up to its waist.  We moved to cover her, but the enemy rushed six men forward and forced us back.  Focused fire from the six men chewed the stressed shields, and they targeted the battle helmet.  More of their comrades came in support, seeing a chance to end the threat.

I took down one, and a marine to my right got another.  The Tirani in the battle suit, Aribara, took two more to their graves before her armor finally failed.  The enemy retreated after their victory, allowing us to reach her.  It was revolting.  The armor had been superheated, and she had been cooked inside.  She never screamed once over the comms.  I sent my Marines to secure the intersection and make sure the four Brotherhood enemies were dead and not a threat. I worked to get power back to the alien sensors.

As the power is restored to the sensors, one of the Marines said they had been packing up things in the labs. He did not believe they had taken anything yet, but they had torn out terminals looking for memory caches. All memory caches were on deck nine. But if they were looking for research, did the Brotherhood know what I had? Was that why they had not destroyed the Void Phoenix outright?

No, it had to be Rae’Ver, the Sylvan. He told the Brotherhood what I had and was working with them. Who had betrayed me? There were only a few people that made sense. My credits were on Samantha. The question was how far I would go to keep the technology out of the hands of the Brotherhood.

JJ interrupted my thoughts over comms. He was spinning up a secondary reactor and holding his position. I quickly informed him the enemy was after the technology on the Void Phoenix, so they would be hesitant to do major damage. That should help him in his fighting.

The sensors flared to life on the bridge, and Elias excitedly came over comms. One of our Marine shuttles was inbound, ETA 90 seconds! They had used the old converted Union shuttle to skip-jump into the gravity well. I asked if anyone was left alive as they could not map the gravity waves without the alien sensors. Two Squirrel physicists on board made their dangerous jump possible.

Abby came over comms and said she was fine. She had eleven Marines with her and was going to clear our ship. The good news ended there as the Brotherhood battleship had fired another chain disruptor missile, and the battleship and support ships were going to be trapped when it reached them in three hours. They were trying to intercept it, but that was unlikely with the Brotherhood technology and their terrible defenses. We were all trapped now.

Abby beat the three enemy shuttles, and twelve Marines in Badger suits joined the ship. JJ had already started an attack, and Abby came around to cut them off. Hopefully, they would surrender or at least not destroy the ship. I moved to help, and a few minutes later, we had the fifteen remaining Brotherhood boarders surrounding.

I got Julie back online and started to work frantically with only seven functional engineering bots to get our anti-fighter weapons online. I got the power to them by siphoning it from life support. I fired them repeatedly in the direction of the shuttles, and they veered off, not risking it. I had no way to get the controls back to the bridge or the targeting systems calibrated, but my effort still managed to scare them. To them, we were still caught, as our escape was unlikely. Their combined fleet would easily hunt us down as the Void Phoenix was at about 30% maximal thrust after the damage, and I was not going to be able to perform any miracles.

It was time to abandon ship. I asked how long before the shuttle could launch and do another skip jump to our battleship. The Squirrel on board said they needed two hours for the small craft to get ready. That was our ticket out of here. That was what I wanted to focus on. I had Elias jettison all the escape pods in a fan pattern and head toward the planet. Seventeen in total. I hoped to distract our pursuers with them, draw some of their assets away from us.

Half an hour later, Elias told me to come to the bridge, and I said he was too busy trying to keep the Void Phoenix in a semi-functional state. The Squirrel had a plan, and I needed to hear them out on the bridge. I set the bots to task and rushed to the bridge.

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Rae’Ver seethed.  The Squirrel had altered their phasing enough to get through the battleship shields.  They destroyed the Squirrle shuttle in short order, but enough Squirrle Marines got on board to cause havoc.  They got to one of the energy relay stations from the main reactors and detonated an explosive, killing themselves but also overloading enough systems to force an emergency shutdown on the main reactor.  It needed to cool completely before spinning back up, and the coolant lines had been damaged in the explosion. It took fifteen minutes to sort out backup systems before getting underway.  He ignored the engineering reports for now,

He needed to get his ship forward to contribute to the new threat in the system.  The enemy had dropped a battle battleship and three frigates of alien design.  They were obvious allies of the Void Phoenix.  There was no way his prize was going to get to safety, no matter what he had to sacrifice.

The battleship had launched a trio of shuttles, but it was going to take hours to reach the Void Phoenix—were they headed to one of the Squirrel asteroids? No—one of the shuttles jumped. His scientist on the bridge said that was impossible. Not only was the disruptor firing off gravity waves, but they were inside the star’s gravity field as well. He had lost two cruisers under much more favorable conditions for the skip jump.

The shuttle docked with the Void Phoenix, and the other two shuttles did veer off toward the nearest Squirrel asteroid. The battleship was flipping to escape. He ordered his only remaining chained disruptor missile to launch at the battleship. It was not going to get away.

Scans started to reach him about the enemy battleship, and he would have laughed if he was not so angry. The battleship had no heavy weapons mounts. None. The frigates were all transports. This rescue fleet was nothing!! He ordered all ships forward. It was over, and the detonation of the subspace disruptor near the battleship signaled he had won.

As his fleet closed, he considered asking for Deven Wellspring to surrender if he was still alive. Instead, he thought to let him suffer, knowing the inevitable. His bridge crew was finally relaxed. They realized the item that had tied them here for months was finally within reach.

There was a flurry of activity on the three Squirrel asteroids. Were they launching more shuttles? Scans came in, and they were just cargo shuttles. He had the new gravity sensors on the ships on high alert. Even if they got more Marines on board his ships, it would not stop his victory.

A heavy support frigate 6,000 kilometers ahead of him exploded from an impact. It had hit mid-ship and broke the keel causing two parts to drift apart. Secondary explosions ran through the ship. The scientist nearby said impossible again, and he lashed out at his mind, destroying it. It was obviously not impossible if it was happening!!

When a ship left subspace, it had almost no inertia. It should not be able to have the velocity that the shuttle had when it struck the frigate. How many shuttles he screamed at the sensor operator. Two more than the ships they had. He ordered every ship to full stop and full shields. It would only help minimally with the velocity and mass of those incoming shuttles. He realized the pilots of those shuttles would be paste when they exited at those speeds—no inertia compensator could account for that, but it didn’t matter. He admired the brave Squirrel as the aft of his battleship rocked from the impact of the shuttle.

Damage reports rolled in, and the shields had held. He watched the plot as the rest of his fleet was not so lucky. A second impact rocked the bridge, and he ordered the ship rotated to put intact shield emitters toward the threat.

Comms received a communications request from Deven Wellspring. He was requesting their complete surrender.