

The Price of Peace

Von chelle76

Kapitel 29: It's All Part of the Plan

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Chapter 28: It's All Part of the Plan

"We're approaching the ships, Saber," Amanda calls as she scans the screens. "The closest fighters are at about two o'clock, but I don't think they are quite in range just yet."

"Can you tell what types we have out there?"

"Looks like three renegade units, about a dozen fighters and the Tirpitz. The Tirpitz is hanging back though. Perhaps they weren't expecting to see us."

"We need to get rid of as many fighters as we can first, before we try to engage the renegade units. With any luck, perhaps we can get Fireball and Alex into the ship with us," Saber states. He turns to Colt, "Think you can wipe out a few of the fighters, cowboy?"

"Sure thing. We've got some amped firepower now. Let's see just how much better it is," Colt replies as he starts firing at the fighters. He makes quick work of more than half the fighters, but that draws the attention of the Renegade units. "Shit! Here they come."

"I'm going to try and get us closer to Fireball and Alex. Perhaps they can dock the ship inside our cargo bay. Then we only have to worry about protecting ourselves," Saber says as he cuts back towards the Outrider ship that Fireball is piloting. "Amanda, try and get him on your com-link."

"Got it, Saber," she replies and clicks her com-link. "Fireball, this is Amanda, come in."

A pause then Fireball's voice comes over the line, "Please tell me you're not on that ship."

"Yes we both are. I need to know if you think you can dock that ship in the cargo bay if we can get close enough to you," Amanda replies.

"Yeah, It'll be tricky, with the renegades coming, but I think I can do it," Fireball states.

"Roger that. We're on our way to you. Let's hope this works."

Saber focuses on trying to move closer to the transport ship and April just lowers the ramp when they are hit, knocking them a good distance back. "What the bloody Hell was that?" Saber asks, glancing to Amanda to check on her and seeking a reply.

Amanda manages to stay in the saddle unit and once they are righted, she starts hitting buttons in rapid succession. "I can't tell what hit us. I guess one of the renegade units. It was too strong to be one of the few fighters that remain." Her screen starts going haywire and alarms start going off. "We need to move and fast. It's the Tirpitz firing at us!"

"On in!" Saber replies and he cuts away from their current position sharply. "I thought Alex said they stripped the ship!"

"Evidently not completely," Colt quips. "We need to do something and fast."

"If we hit it, we're as good as gone!" Amanda says.

"Unless we move back a good distance," April replies.

"What?" the other three ask in unison.

"Our weapons system has been upgraded. We can be three times the distance we were able to be before and still hit a target. If we can get to challenge phase one and fire the cannons and the big gun, we now have the ability to pull up the armour like we do in phase two. That should help shield us. Start a minor offensive on the Tirpitz, the renegades should move closer to protect it. They don't want it to blow up close to them if they can help it. They want it closer to Calvary Command or at least one of the colonies. If we time it right, Fireball should be able to slip on. I've left the ramp down. He will have about sixty seconds."

"If he doesn't?" Colt asks.

"Let's not think like that, Colt," Amanda states. "Fireball, did you get all of that?"

"Yeah. I got it. We're cutting back to you now. We'll try and loop in from below. You focus on firing at the other ships," he replies.

"Okay, in sixty seconds, I'll initiate challenge phase one," Saber states. "Colt, keep your fire going towards the ship. Fifty nine...fifty-eight..."

Fireball cuts sharply down, causing Alex to fall from his seat. He then pulls up quickly and they hear a thud. Alex glances back and sees Erika's form slide across the floor

and into a wall. He flinches at the sight and turns his focus back to the screens before him. "Do you think we can make it, sir?" Alex asks, obviously nervous.

"I sure hope so, otherwise we're going to get hot really fast and die. Not the way I want to go out," Fireball replies as he pulls closer to the Bismarck.

"Thirty-two...thirty-one...thirty..." Saber continues his countdown.

Colt keeps firing towards the Tirpitz, two of the renegades moving closer to try and draw his fire away from the ship. "Just like you called, April." He continues firing at the ship, occasionally at the renegades.

"Where did the other one go?" Amanda mutters as she scans her screens. "It's like it just vanished." Suddenly a blip appears above them. "Damn it! Colt, shoot straight up and fast!"

Colt switches the main cannon up and manages to hit the unit just before it strikes them. "Gotcha! Good job, Amanda."

"That was too close. Sorry about that. Fireball, hurry up!"

"Five...four..."

"Landing now. Killed the engines, close the ramp!" he replies.

April closes the ramp just as Saber hits the button "Going to challenge phase one...now!" he calls.

The ship begins its' transformation and the renegade units break for it.

"Colt, use the blaster!" Saber calls as they complete the shift.

Fireball comes running into the control room, "I'm here! Where do you need me?"

"Here!" Saber calls as he moves so Fireball can take control.

Fireball climbs in, "Alex is still in the other ship. I think he's in a bit of shock. We have Erika," he says as he takes over the controls.

Saber nods and heads to his unit, "Amanda, could you-"

"On it," she says as she climbs out of his unit. "I'll see what I can do to help him." She turns and heads back to the docking area and boards the ship.

"Alex?" she calls and stops when she sees Erika's slumped form on the floor and Alex looks up at her unsure of what to say. She comes over and manages to kneel down beside the pair. "Is she?"

"I thought she was...but I think I saw her move a little," Alex replies quietly.

Amanda nods and starts feeling for a pulse. At first she can't find one, but then she feels a faint, but erratic one. "I've got a pulse. Get me a med kit, now," she says. Alex stares at her still in shock and she sighs, "Alex!" she says forcefully, snapping him out of his stupor. "Med kit! Go down the ramp and get one of the kits!"

"Right," he says sheepishly and runs out of the ship. He comes back quickly, a med kit in tow. Kneeling down he opens the kit, "What do you need?"

"She's having trouble breathing, we need to intubate her. Have you been trained to do that?" Amanda asks as she goes through the kit.

"No. We were not trained for that. Just basic first-aid," Alex replies.

Amanda sighs in frustration. "Well, we're about to attempt it," she says curtly. She takes a deep breath to calm herself, "I need you to hold her arms down with your knees and keep her head still with your hands. Do not let her move once I start this. I've only seen it done," she says as she reads the brief directions from the kit.

Alex nods and moves into position, bracing her arms against her and then cupping her head in his hands. "I've got her as best I can, Amanda," he says.

Amanda nods and carefully begins inserting the tube down her throat. The tube goes in with little trouble, only gagging her once, and she places the bag on it and begins forcing air. Erika's eyes fly open and she starts to struggle. Alex tightens his grip, not allowing her to move much. "Erika, I'm Amanda Rider. I'm trying to give you medical attention, please stop fighting me. When you can breathe without help, I'll remove the tube."

Erika relaxes and ceases struggling, so Alex loosens his grip slightly. "We need to get her to the med bay, Alex. We can strap her down there and work on her. Did you see a board we can put her on or anything?" Amanda asks.

Alex thinks for a minute then nods slowly, "I think I saw something we can use. Will you be okay for a minute or two?" Amanda nods and Alex jumps up and heads back out of the ship, returning a couple minutes later with a back-board. He places it beside Erika and kneels back down beside her next to Amanda. "How do you want to do this, you can't be picking her up."

"We don't have a choice, Alex. Besides, you'll help with the weight distribution. I'll be fine." The ship is suddenly jolted and it tosses both of them across the floor. Amanda manages not to land too hard and Alex gets up quickly and gets the board and lays it to where Erika slid. "We'd better hurry. This can't be good for her. Things could be getting worse, and I'd rather be in slightly closer quarters to have something to grab to brace with," Amanda says as she gets back beside Erika.

Alex nods. "Let's get her on the board," he says and leans down close to Erika's head. "Erika, we're moving you to a board to get you to a safer place. Don't fight us or you might hurt yourself or us." He looks up to Amanda who nods and they move her to the

board then carefully pick it up and head down the ramp. The ship shakes again, though not as violently and they manage to continue walking after a minute. They get into the med bay and place her on a table there and strap her in.

"Okay, her breathing seems to be fairly stable. Let's get the trach out so that we can put her on oxygen," Amanda says as she removes the bag. "Erika, we are taking out the tube, it won't feel good, but I'll do it as quickly as I can," Amanda says as she pulls out the tubing. She then grabs an oxygen mask and places it on Erika's face. "Now, we need to see how badly she's wounded. It looks like she's been shot a couple of times. One in her neck, once in her abdomen. We need to get these clothes off of her."

Alex looks shocked for a second then nods, "I'll do whatever you tell me to, Amanda."

Amanda nods and starts carefully removing the blood stained clothes, cutting most of the uniform off of her. "I'm sorry about this. We'll find you something to put you in later," she says to the unconscious Erika.

Alex forces his face to remain neutral and hands Amanda things to wash the wounds.

Amanda cleans the areas as best she can then leans into inspect them, "The neck would isn't as bad as I feared. She may not even need to be stitched. Some skin glue and a bandage. Lucky for her, the artery looks to be intact." She then moves to examine the abdomen, "I don't think she's going to be so lucky here. There's a lot more blood, and she may have internal injuries. Alex, see if she is running a fever, would you?"

Alex does as he's asked. "Thirty-eight."

"A little high, but not to be unexpected, considering her injuries. It appears she's been beaten a good bit too."

"She looked it when we found her in a cell. She saved our lives though. Perhaps she tried to stop whatever it is they were planning and they beat her for it?" he says thinking aloud. "I know that won't excuse what she's done, but perhaps it will spare her life."

"If she lives through this," Amanda states as the ship is rocked again and she is knocked off balance. Alex manages to keep her from falling.

"Good thing she's strapped to that bed," he says.

"We've gotten her as stable as we can. I suppose we should find someplace to sit and buckle in ourselves," Amanda says.

"I think I'll stay here. There's one seat I can fasten into," Alex says. "I'll call for help if I need it. I don't think she's going anywhere."

Amanda nods. "I'll head to the break room. I can fasten down there."

"Do you need me to help you get there?" Alex asks.

"No, I'll be fine. Thank you," Amanda replies as she heads for the exit.

Alex nods and fastens himself in, "I'll be here."

"Okay," Amanda says and she leaves heading towards the break room. She detours to the control area and stops in the entrance to the control room. Glancing at the screen, she sees them deep in battle with two renegade units. She clutches onto the door frame to maintain her balance, unable to turn away from the battle.

"Okay Fireball, we need to take out these units. Or at least draw them to the Tirpitz again," Saber says.

One of the units fires at them and they barely manage to evade the shot. Colt returns fire and hits one, knocking it back a good ways. They turn to fire at the second one only to see the third unit return. "We need a better plan or we're gonna get killed out here!" Colt says as he continues firing in rapid succession.

"That or we'll blow up the Tirpitz ourselves," April adds.

"I think that may be what they're trying to do," Saber adds dryly.

Fireball shifts quickly and they fire with full cannons towards the third renegade unit, causing it to explode. The other two act quickly, firing close to them. "We need to go to phase two," Fireball says.

"Not yet. I think I can knock off one more of those pests," Colt quips as he fires towards one of the remaining two. He knocks one back but the other fires and hits them knocking them back a good bit.

Saber gets knocked around in his unit, hitting his head. "Damn it! That was a solid hit."

"I hope Amanda and Alex are okay," April says quietly.

"He's with her. She'll be fine," Fireball says glancing over to Saber. "We can't keep this up, Colt."

"I know, I know."

"The longer this draws out the closer to the colonies that ship gets," Saber says as he shakes his head trying to clear it from the impact.

They fight back and forth for several minutes, each player taking minor hits, but no one really gaining the upper hand. Suddenly another hit tosses them again, but they are able to minimize the damage, getting a shield up in time.

"Go to phase two!" April says. "We don't have a choice."

Fireball hits the button and they shift into phase two. "You're in control Saber," April calls.

They draw the sword and the renegades attack. "Go at them directly, Fireball. I need to be as close as you dare to get," Saber says.

"What? Are you insane?" Fireball says as he charges one of the units.

"I may well be, but right now, I'm having trouble seeing my screens. I hit my head a bit ago. I can tell up, down, left or right, but we have to be close. I'm relying on you to get me close enough."

"Damn it! Okay I'll do my best," he replies and they move in dangerously close.

"Fireball, pull back. Saber, cut to seven o'clock now!" Amanda calls from the doorway. Fireball does as she says and Saber cuts in the direction she says and they manage to damage the unit. The other one attacks from behind, pushing them forward with enough ferocity to knock Amanda off balance and cause the others to grab the sides of their units to stay in.

"Amanda!" April and Saber yell simultaneously.

Amanda gets up fairly quickly and makes her way to Saber's unit. "I'm fine," she says with as much certainty as she can muster. "Here it comes again."

"I see it," Fireball says as Amanda grips tightly to the edges of Saber's unit, positioned so she can see the screens over his shoulder. Fireball again charges the unit.

"Get ready to duck, Fireball. Saber, on three swing, up at one o'clock. One...two...three!" Amanda says and Saber swings, managing to severely damage the unit and it charges towards them. "The other one is coming from the back and one from the right. Wait until they're close and fly up as hard and as fast as you can. Perhaps they'll hit and we can send them towards the Tirpitz."

"Right," Fireball says. The two units come close and he pulls them up, barely getting grazed by the two enemy units before they ram into each other. Fireball flips around as quickly as he can and shoves the two damaged units towards the Tirpitz before backing off as quickly as he can. "April pull up our shields and get ready to detonate the Tirpitz. I'll keep backing up as fast as I can. As soon as you think we're far enough, go for it."

"On it, Fireball," April replies and hits several buttons. "Five...Four...Three...Two...One..Ignition!" She hits the detonator and the Tirpitz ignites in a series of explosions, taking the renegade units with it. The shock waves from the blasts hurl the Bismarck backwards.

After a minute or so, Fireball is able to stabilize the ship. "Well, it looks like they won't be using those nukes," he says after a long silence.

"Aye," Saber replies sounding exhausted. "I suppose you could say we were successful." He gets up and looks to April, "Did you also detonate the explosives on the base?"

April nods. "They were all set to the same detonator, so they should have gone off at the same time the ones on the Tirpitz did," she replies. "The only way to be sure, will be to access the satellites when we get back."

Colt releases a long sighs and slinks back into his seat. "I hope we finally get a break," he mutters as he tips his hat over his eyes.

Saber comes around to where Amanda is standing silently and gently places his hands on her shoulders, "Are you all right, Love?" he asks into her ear.

She nods slightly. "I think I want to go and lie down," she says barely a whisper.

"All right," Saber replies and releases her.

Amanda heads for the sleeping quarters and lies down on one of the bunks and starts crying, the stress finally hitting her.

"Let's go home," Fireball says and turns the ship back to the outpost.

"Yes, I think all of us could use a break," April says.

Saber nods and then starts for the back. "I'm going to go and check on Alex, Erika, and Amanda."

"I'll check on Alex and Erika. You go on and see about Amanda, Saber," April says.

"Okay," he replies and goes back to the sleeping area. He hears Amanda before he sees her and he goes to the bunk and sits beside her. "Are you in pain?" he asks the concern obvious in his voice.

Amanda takes several minutes to get herself under control before she turns to face him, face red and eyes swollen from crying. "Maybe a little, but it's not too bad, all things considered. I'm just really stressed. I suppose everything just hit me all at once."

"I'm sorry," he says quietly as he pulls her into an embrace. "We're going home now. As far as I'm concerned, we're through."

"I've heard that before," she says with a weak smile.

He chuckles and sighs, "Aye, so you have. But if there is any choice, I will not go back out. They have Alex now, and the other cadets can also be trained. I do not see any reason we should have to go through this again."

"How is your head?" she asks quietly watching his face for a reaction.

He thinks for a minute before replying, "It's not as bad as it once was. I think once I rest I'll be better. I'll get checked if you wish. The headache I had is subsiding, and the vision seems to have improved slightly from what it had been when we were fighting." She nods and he continues, "I'm grateful that you came in when you did. It probably kept us from being decimated by those renegades."

"Well, I saw a solution that seemed a bit safer, so I called it. I'm glad that the others respect me enough to trust my judgement on a whim like that."

"You have more than proven yourself capable, Amanda. You have caught on quicker than any of the candidates. If you weren't pregnant, I'm sure that they would ask us both to stay on. You have a strategic mind, not something just anyone can do."

Amanda smiles weakly, "I actually learned from you. I picked up on how you think things through. You taught me that when you taught me to fight and defend myself."

"Then it has served all of us well," he replies.

"How is Erika?" Amanda asks after a long silence.

"I've not heard anything. I suppose I should go and check to see how she is. I don't even know the extent of her injuries," Saber replies honestly.

"I had to intubate her when I got to her. After I snapped Alex out of his shock. She was alive, barely. I got her breathing on her own again and treated the gunshot wounds, but she may have more damage that I can't see. I'm not a trained medic, so I did what I could for her," Amanda replies.

"You actually intubated her?" Saber asks surprised. Amanda nods. "That's no easy feat."

"It came with directions," she replies matter-of-factly. "Alex said that she saved them. That she helped them get away."

"Fireball said much the same thing. Perhaps that will keep her from death, if nothing else," Saber states.

Amanda slowly gets up, "If you think it's safe to move about, I think I'll go and check on both Erika and Alex."

Saber nods. "I think it's all right. Would you mind if I came with you?" he asks quietly.

Amanda looks at him surprised by the question, "Why would I mind?"

Saber shrugs, "I don't know. I thought maybe you needed some time by yourself. You've been under a lot of stress."

"I'm fine. A bit tired and a good bit sore, but I'll be okay," Amanda replies. Saber

stands up and they head towards the med bay. Upon arriving, they find Alex quietly sitting near Erika's unmoving form. He looks up when they enter. "Any change?" Amanda asks.

Alex shakes his head, "No change that I can tell. Her breathing seems to be about the same, and she hasn't really moved at all other than breathing."

Saber ventures closer to inspect her, "She looks like she took a pretty good beating. She's lucky the shot to the neck didn't pierce an artery. She would have bled out a long time ago."

"I think she may have liver issues," Amanda says coming up beside Saber.

"Why do you say that?" he asks.

"Look at her skin. It's taking on a yellowish hue. That's a sign of liver failure. It could be from the shot to the abdomen. If she's turning this quickly though, she needs real medical attention and quickly."

"How would you know such a thing?" Saber asks curiously.

"My father went through renal and liver failure. I'm familiar with the signs," she replies quietly.

Saber nods and turns towards the door, "I'll go see what our ETA is."

"I'd like to come along," Amanda states.

"Sure. Come on."

The two leave the room, leaving Alex alone once again with Erika. They approach the control to find April and Fireball talking and Colt dozing in his unit, hat over his eyes. Amanda manages a weak smile at the sight of him. The couple look up when they enter.

"Are you okay, Amanda?" April asks.

Amanda nods hesitantly, "Just sore and tired."

"What's our ETA, Fireball?" Saber asks.

"Less than half an hour. I've been given clearance to land. I told them that we have Erika and that she needs medical attention. Commander Eagle said they will have medics waiting," Fireball replies. He glances towards Amanda, "Do you need to be checked out? I know you've taken a few falls while on the ship."

"I'm fine. But I want them to check on Saber, as a precaution."

Saber goes to protest, and thinks better of it and nods. "I'll be sure to be checked,

Love."

Amanda nods, satisfied and goes and sits quietly in Saber's saddle unit.

April watches her and comes over to where Saber and Fireball are talking. "Do you really think she's okay, Saber?" April asks quietly.

"I think she's just tired. I don't think she would endanger herself of the children, so if she says she's okay, I'm not going to push the matter. The doctor may insist on a check up regardless, and that I would enforce, but as for me making her go just because I think she should, no. It's not worth getting into an argument over," Saber replies quietly, glancing over in her direction.

The rest of the return to the outpost is uneventful and upon landing, they are met by medics. They quickly take Erika out from the med bay and rush her to the makeshift triage area. A couple of other medics come to assess the other crew members, but then head back towards the medical facility, leaving them to walk freely to the commander's office.

They are met on the way by Commander Eagle who eyes them all carefully. "Let's talk in my office. I can call for medics if it is warranted," he says as they all enter his office.

They all take a seat and he looks to each one in turn, waiting for someone to speak. Finally Saber takes a breath and sighs, "Well, it appears that we have destroyed the nukes, sir. Fireball and Alex were successful in their mission and they brought Erika back. She was instrumental in helping them to escape. I would be interested in speaking with her once they deem her fit for interrogation. Our ship took a good deal of damage, so it will need repair. Otherwise, we are fairly unharmed. I knocked my head when we were hit one of the times, so my vision isn't as good as it was, and I have a bit of a headache, but that appears to be improving slowly."

The commander nods, pondering the information before choosing his words carefully, "There have been a few... developments here as well while you were all away. Things may not be entirely what they have appeared." They all look at him confused and he manages a small smile. "I thought that might interest you." He turns to Saber, "When we finish here, I want you to have a thorough check up, including scans of your head."

"Yes, sir," Saber mutters.

The commander then looks to Amanda, "That goes for you too. A full check up. I don't want you to have complications because of this."

"Yes, sir," Amanda replies quietly.

"The rest of you should at least be checked by the doctor, just as a precaution." The others nod and he takes a deep breath and pauses a minute before deciding how to begin. "While you were away, we had an Outrider fighter come onto our radar screens. It was flying erratically, and managed to crash land at the back of the property. It was met by half our forces all armed and weapons trained on it. When the

hatch opened, we found two humans inside. Neither one was in any condition to move." Everyone looks up in shock, but he continues before anyone can say anything, "The two people inside were Yuri Hido and Gabrielle Weber. They both needed extensive medical attention. How Mr. Hido is even alive is a mystery. I saw the same video you did. He was shot. However, from what the doctor has said it may have been a stun blaster set to it's highest setting, rendering him unable to move for an extended period of time. As for Ms. Weber, she had numerous physical injuries and some internal ones. Neither one has been awake since they have arrived. I am keeping them all separated, I do not want them to communicate with one another until after our investigation. At this point, they may not even survive, we will just have to wait and see."

"So they...all of them are alive?" Alex finally asks breaking the stunned silence that had fallen amongst them.

"Yes Mr. Mackenzie, they are. At least for the moment. After the others leave, I would like to talk with you about what happened on the Tirpitz, and also what happened on the Outrider base."

Alex nods. "Yes, sir. I will tell you everything I know."

The commander nods and looks to the rest of the group, "The rest of you go get checked. Saber, Amanda, if the doctor says it is safe for you to do so, you may return to your place. I know Amanda would be more comfortable there. The rest of you, I want to stay here for a few days, while I talk with you about everything that has transpired. I will talk to Saber and Amanda eventually as well. Also, keep in mind that some of you are still presumed dead, so be careful what areas you walk in and try and keep to your quarters. You are dismissed."

"Yes sir!" they all reply and they get up and head for the medical area.

Fireball and April follow Saber and Amanda out the door, Colt drags along after them. They all stop a bit down the hall, "Well, I suppose we should go and see the doctor," Saber says. "Are any of you going to be checked?"

The others shake their heads. "I'm going to call Robin, so she knows we all made it back. I'll have her tell Thomas and Elaine if you wish."

Saber nods. "I appreciate the offer, but if Elaine finds out that we actually went out on the ship, she's liable to have some choice words for the two of us when we return. I didn't tell her that we might be needed to go out," Saber says quietly.

Colt laughs, "I'll try and not let on then that you two were with us."

"Thanks," Saber says dryly. The others go their separate ways and Saber and Amanda quietly make their way to the medical office.

"Ah, Captain and Mrs. Rider. I thought you might be coming by. Come this way, please," Dr. Izumi says leading them quickly to a back area close to his makeshift

office. "Now, I need to know what if any issues you two are having."

"Well, I hit my head again and since then I've had a headache and my vision has been hindered a bit. It seems to slowly be easing off and the vision improving, but Commander Eagle was rather insistent that I be checked, as was Amanda," Saber replies.

Dr. Izumi nods and looks to Amanda, "And you, my dear?"

"I got bounced around a bit, so I have a few bruises, nothing too bad. I think I'm fine, other than being totally exhausted, but the commander and Saber both wish for me to have an exam to check on myself and the babies."

"Very well. Let's start with you first, Captain."