Chapter 136

Desdemona took her ship into the range of the asteroid in the Dantares system.  She transmitted the codes and waited.  Lazarus was in the co-piolet chair and watched intently.  This was their fifth raid on a Brotherhood cache.  At one of the caches, the automated defenses had fired on them, but Desdemona had sent a stand-down order to the base’s AI, and it worked.  The base’s AI had received a data dump which had ended Desdemona’s access to Brotherhood sites.  It had taken over two months to repair the damage to their ship.

They were trying to gather enough funds for the Diamond agents to purchase a ship at these resupply caches.  The problem was that they took weeks to get to and sometimes had less than expected.  Desdemona did not want to move toward the core worlds until she could clear her name.  Clearing her name involved unmasking Rae’Ver, the Sylvan mind-fucker.  Her words, not his.

She had done everything she could to leave anonymous info drops to also harm Katsu Oshiro’s name.  She hoped it would eventually be enough for his support to be cut off and leave the fucking elf on an island.  She knew enough of the elf’s mind to know his own people had exiled him and that he was passionate about the galaxy-breaking technology that the Void Phoenix carried.  She was going to make sure he never got his hands on it.  And if he did, she would pry it from his dead hands.  Lazarus groaned as when she got this angry; he could feel the hate emanating from her, which affected his own disposition.

The asteroid welcomed them, opening the concealed entrance, and Desdemona was soon suited up and searching the small base.  Lazarus and his engineer, Broderick, followed and stopped when she opened a second cargo container. Inside were neatly packaged bars of rhodium.  The container was massive.  Broderick asked if this was finally enough, somewhat exasperated from being jerked around the galaxy and working endlessly on maintaining the ship.  Desdemona nodded absently, doing the math in her head.  She thought she would now have enough to purchase, outfit, and crew a decent heavy cruiser.  She had also been picking up pieces of Brotherhood technology at the caches.  Now she needed to get to Silverstream Station to progress her revenge.

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The uniform felt funny, the smell, feel, and look.  She had never thought she would wear a uniform again. She had been promoted by Grand Admiral LaRoche in just a few months. He needed good commanders, and Samantha had demonstrated her competency repeadedly.

She was now in another engagement. Lower Admiral Samantha Kirov swore as her tactical officer relayed the positions of the enemy cruisers.  She was in charge of the Leopard Task Force.  Her task force of twenty-nine heavy corvettes was responsible for responding quickly to aid-friendly systems that came under attack.  All her corvettes were equipped with new weapon batteries and upgraded drives.

The enemy had six cruisers from the Republic of Scandinavia.  The cruisers were old but extremely durable.  The Republic was making an opportunistic attack on this system to take over the mining operations.  The asteroid belt was producing vast quantities of heavy metals needed for starship construction. The only good thing with Republic was they would not eradicate the mining operations if they lost this battle. They were one of the few remaining star nations that operated somewhat ethically.

Samantha prepared her task force to start the attack run, cycling ships to the arrowhead to ship out and spread out the incoming fire.  Tactical said the Republic ships had launched a salvo of missiles, 220 in the first wave.  The Republic used a lot of dummy missiles in the first wave of their salvos to burn up opponents’ defenses.  She ordered deep scans to target just the strongest signals first. Her captain’s began a coordinated priority list of targets as sensors detailed the most serious threats.  She watched as the missile screen was quickly thinned, but not all of them.

As the wave of missiles reached her ships, two of her heavy corvettes were damaged, and she ordered them to withdraw.  She would not risk her ships, as any second strike on those corvettes would destroy them. Her own ships opened with their fast attack missiles.  They were the new missiles and highly evasive.

She had her ships retreat at speed and form groups as the second wave launched from the cruisers. She would keep her distance from the heavy weapons with short range on the cruisers and just let them expend their missiles.

The dance continued for fourteen hours, and Samantha lost one corvette and had six others damaged. The enemy fleet was in much worse condition. Two cruisers had lost subspace capability, and the other four were damaged. She was hoping they would retreat soon. Then a dozen subspace signals flared on sensors.

The sensor operator said six battleships and six cruisers had arrived. The battleships were ours, including Admiral LaRoche’s flagship. The cruisers were part of the Republic. When they did not fire on each other, Samantha also ordered all her ships to halt. She knew what was coming. Admiral LaRoche was soon broadcasting to all ships. The Republic had joined their United Congress. She had known negotiations were in progress but didn’t think they would have been completed this soon.

A civilian government was forming. Each star system was allowed to be its own State but governed by a set of universal laws still in the process of being agreed on. Each colonized star system could send one senate representative to the United Congress. That senate representative had voting rights based on their population size. A vote could be weighed as 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 points based on population. This meant that six small mining systems with maybe two hundred and fifty thousand people among all of them would have more voting power than a system with five billion people. It was an imperfect government, but it was a start.

Samantha did not follow the politics, she followed Admiral LaRoche. That was the best thing about the United Congress. Every member supplied 3.3% of their GDP to the United Navy to use as the admiral saw fit. They also paid the salaries of one Navy officer for every one million people of their population. The Navy was still establishing its own training academies, and so far, the current fleet was drawn from member nations and freelancers like herself. The Navy, so far, was an independent entity of the newly forming government. She knew it would not last forever and only worked as long as the leadership in the Navy had integrity.

Admiral LaRoche contacted her personally to review the battle and praise her for minimizing losses. It was her strongest ability, do as much damage as possible while taking as little as possible. The only problems arose when she had to defend stationary targets like planets and stations. LaRoche finished the communication with was to head to the Arendale system for repairs to her corvettes. She was also being given two heavy missile frigates and one small cruiser-sized carrier to add to her fleet.

She had lost twenty-three men and women in this engagement. Being responsible for more lives…when she couldn’t even take care of one. The Void Phoenix was a constant topic of discussion, and she had kept what she knew to herself. She just hoped the engineer was keeping her son safe.

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The Void Phoenix shuffled almost the all the crew we rescued from the tanker to the battleship. The battleship had been waiting for us to return and a mini-revolt was on board. It was led by their elected official, Gordan Farsmith. They wanted to establish a colony here in this system under the Alliance banner and not continue onward to the Bradbury system.

Suruchi was barely holding the civilians in check with their demands. I was fine with letting them leave the ship and establish a colony, but they also wanted all the pre-fab modules on board. That was not something I was willing to give up. I needed all the equipment on board if I was going to establish a safe haven in the Bradbury system.

We had two weeks where things were very tense as the ships resupplied. It was Edmond who came to me and advised me what to do. He had a list of fifty-nine names and their families. The people who were leading this revolt against my authority. He said I should package all of them and the seventy-four additional people we had with suspect loyalty and abandon them in this system. We could give them enough Alliance credits to establish their own microcolony. But he strongly advised me to cut bait with the troublemakers.

When you included the families, the list of one hundred and seventy-eight names in total was on my data pad. Did I have the right to do this? I stewed on it and asked for advice from Gwen, Abby, Danielle and Surchi. Of course, they were split 50-50. Gwen and Suruchi thought I should just force them to come with us. The quality of life we would offer them would exceed anything they would find in the Alliance as they eeked out an existence.

Abby and Danielle agreed with Edmund. Cut away the rebels. In the end, I rounded them up into a cargo hold on the battleship and went to give a speech. I tried to make the Bradbury system out as the best option for everyone. But I would respect their decision to leave but each person needed to make their choice, come with us and contribute or leave. I would give each person or child the equivalent of 5,000 Sol credits. That was more than five years’ worth of wages for an academic professor, which many of them were.

There was a lot of yelling as my Marines immediately separated the group and began to ask what their decision was. The 178 became 109. A lot of families broke apart from this process. Edmund also slipped me seven names that had decided to stay, but he thought they might have a connection to the Brotherhood. He asked for my permission to have them missorted and sent away with the others. I put Edmund in charge, and he did not let anyone change their mind once they decided. No one was elected to replace Gordan Farsmith after the culling.

A good portion of the funds we paid actually came from us selling the salvage rights to the tanker. Not that I needed the credits, but I felt it was fitting.

The Alliance species in this system were mixed race, so they welcomed humans to the planet. This system was on the edge of their space and had been a joint colonization effort. The liaisons I worked with said it was one of the fastest-growing systems in the entire Alliance. It had already passed twenty-five million people.

We found we had enough goodwill with the Alliance to earn a personalized escort. Six support ships and two destroyers cycling back to an Alliance system for resupply. It was not our planned destination as it was a shorter nine-day subspace trip for the battleship, but fuel would be cheaper, and there was a good chance they had tankers for sale. Half the capacity of the one we had abandoned, but they were newer ships and could easily be outfitted to handle our needs.

I did get some bad news after Edmund searched the others where JJ and Zoe had turned off the ship cameras to have sex. He found traces of spy equipment. We searched his quarters and found the devices he was using to try and hack into Julie. Under questioning, we learned he was not part of the Brotherhood. He was part of an offshoot organization that opposed the Brotherhood, called the Godfathers. Edmund knew nothing about them. JJ said they did not really operate in this region of space, or even in the Rim. He knew the Godfathers had once been part of the Brotherhood but splintered hundreds of years ago.

Doc ran more scans on JJ after she removed his PerCom. What she came back with was kind of shocking. JJ, Jackson Jones, was not 100% human. His genes had not yet been sequenced for the SNAIL treatments as he was still in his mid-20s. That seemed to be the disconnect between the Godfather and Brotherhood organizations. The Brotherhood was focused on humanity while the Godfathers were apparently open to incorporating aliens into our culture—and genome.

JJ was quite open with us, trying to recruit us to his organization, but he had told the truth too late and under duress. I needed to make a decision on what to do with our captured spy.