Chapter 158

As the Federation fleet formed and started moving to draw the ships in the system to them, we launched our attack.  The Cloud Jumper launched its Slipstream fighters to disable a quartet of battleships in a passing run before moving onto nearby smaller ships.  The Cloud Jumper also launched its first armageddon missile.  As expected, the quadrupeds started launching dozens of subspace disruptors on the fleet and Cloud Jumper to prevent our escape.

The Fateweaver, at my command, launched two Armageddon missiles at the two largest shipyard facilities.  Our Slipstream fighters were queued for an attack run on a massive row of unmanned destroyers.  I had decided to hold them in case the quadrupeds had a surprise for us.  They did have a surprise as most of the destroyers began to power up remotely.  We were certain they had no crew on board.  Also, their AI lacked the sophistication required to run a ship on its own.  They also had limited sophistication in their bots and relied on organic labor.

Sensors indicated the first shipyards had been popped.  Since their atmosphere was water, it looked like it had just burst apart on the sensors, completely destroyed.  The fragments of ice and metal scattered in an expanding cloud.  Sensors indicated another surprise.   The quadrupeds subspace disruptors had a massive range.  They achieved this by sending some type of pulsing gravimetric waves out.  I was not concerned as we could always outrun the enemy ships, but this new type of disruptor was playing havoc with our alien sensors.

The two shipyards the Fateweaver had targeted imploded, and the debris blasted into dozens of smaller ships nearby.  The Federation fleet was still three hours from the engagement range.  Seeing the threat already in their midst, ships were being turned around to deal with the Cloud Jumper and Fateweaver.  I ordered my Slipstream fighters to attack the moving destroyers.   I thought they might be a decoy, and I was right as they did not fire off any defensive measures.  As the fighters tore through the destroyers, the first comm message arrived from the planet.

The message asked us to cease hostilities and talk with the planet’s governor and system, who was called K’mande.  Normally, I would just send a video of the Squirrel Marines charging into battle, but the Admiral was on my bridge and asked to talk with the alien quadruped’s leadership.  I ordered the attack to continue while the communication officer worked with the Admiral to establish communication.   At least it would not be my face the genocidal aliens would see.

The fighters had expended their fuel and ammo and were returning for reloading and refueling.  I checked the Cloud Weaver, and they exceeded my damage to the enemy by a good margin.  Kenji was a smart captain and was maximizing his time before the enemy organized. He also had the battleship and cruiser shipyards on his side of the system.

I launched my third missile at the last of the massive shipyards.  This one was the least important as it produced freighters.  It had slips to build eighteen freighters at once and was full of ships in different stages of production.

The Admiral had started talking, and I wanted to listen in so I turned over control to Franics, the first officer, to continue the attack.  Francis was already seated at a terminal and had been tracking the battle.  The entire bridge crew had their terminals notify them of the change, and I changed my focus. I kept my eye on the evolving battle, but I was curious why the Admiral wanted to talk.

The governor had dark red skin and a flat face with predatory teeth.  His eyes were yellow and oval.  The translator was working and started by berating us for the unprovoked attack.  Admiral LaRoche liked to be in a position of power as the quadrupeds were helpless, just like when they overran a system.

The Admiral retorted that his species had been responsible for the deaths of over two hundred million humans in the Federation and had invited us to retaliate by their actions. This got a curious response from K’mande. He said his species had claimed all the stars in this arm of the galaxy nearly half a million years ago. He would send us proof if we stopped the attack. He would even be generous and allow our species to vacate the systems they owned in the next year.

The translator device had translated that a year in their time was about seven hundred Earth days. Even though we did not accept the data, he sent it anyway, and the AI Julian quickly translated and summarized it for the Admiral. The species referred to themselves as the ‘Anointed Chosen’ in their language. It came back to their idea that only one of an entire brood could live—all others were expendable. That extended to other species as well—everyone was expendable.

Their history was based on their ancestors achieving space flight and crashing on a planet. The environment had been harsh, but they survived. The planet lacked resources to get them back into space, so for hundreds of thousands of years, they were ‘trapped.’ Three hundred years ago, an alien spacecraft landed, allowing them to reclaim what was rightfully theirs.

That explained why they were only just now reaching our space. I was surprised at their lack of technology if they had been conquering star systems for seven hundred years. Their ships were slightly less effective than the old Union spacecraft, and they achieved victory by numbers. While we digested the information, the Admiral had muted the governor. The Admiral postulated that the Anointed were just not concerned with technological advancement and that their crews were inferior.

Zoe, from her station, asked what would happen with all the Anointed, the ones that survived their siblings, if these ships were not crewed by them. If they were not the ones who were crewing the spacecraft, then they must all be somewhere. The Admiral thought for a moment before guessing a single Anointed commanded each fleet. The math did not add up. There had to be millions or billions more out there if this was the case. If we found that planet of star system, then maybe the government would collapse on itself. Unlikely but possible. The war machine was too expansive.

Julian’s hologram added to the discussion on the bridge. The data they sent indicated the Anointed matured in just one year’s time—about seven hundred Earth days. Their fast reproductive cycle definitely led them to overpopulate. It was probably a result of the first ship crashing on the inhospitable planet. Their survival had forced them to only allow one of their offspring to survive—the strongest. Reaching space again allowed them to not kill the others in the brood and instead use them as crew. But only to have one surviving child each cycle meant had been engrained in their heritage now.

Julian managed to figure out how many Anointed were in the system from coopting their transmissions and surface hacking. Thirteen thousand, seven hundred and four. Almost all of which were in a single city on the planet. The Admiral had been correct in his assessment that only one Anointed was in command of each fleet. There were seventy-one ‘fleets’ in the system.

I brought up the city in question and took more time to focus on the city for more detail. For the industrial planet, it was about as idealistic as you could get. The Anointed population’s focus was on reproduction, as each living unit had a growing brood. The structures extended far into the planet’s crust to protect from possible attack. I queued up an Armageddon missile and targeted the city.

I spent a few minutes debating my decision as the Admiral talked with the governor in the background. Based on Julian’s estimates, I would be killing four to five million people if I launched the missile. About thirteen thousand of their precious Anointed would be included. I sent the order, and the missile launched three seconds later.

I returned to the Admiral and K’mande’s conversation. The Admiral was only trying to ferret out information from the governor as the Anointed did not communicate with others. The missile impacted, and K’mande’s image flashed on the screen. He returned a moment later, and I guessed he was not in the city. The city was a crater of expanding debris. The small missile had hit at a fraction of light speed but had transferred enough energy to do immense damage.

K’mande was talking to someone off-screen as he received reports, and it looked like fury clouded his face. Elias informed me that every ship in the system, military and civilian, was headed for our position. It was like a ripple effect as the message reached ships. Thousands of ships were going to make sure we did not escape for our actions. It was all pinned on the Admiral who had been talking with K’mande.

K’mande ended the call. Elias was giving me an update from the planet, and the Admiral was angry that I did not consult him before attacking the planet directly. I just shrugged and said I had heard enough, and they were not going to negotiate anyway. The planet was going to be inhabitable for a few hundred years, but I was okay with my decision. The Anointed were never going to stop their expansion, and it was good to know how they reacted to the attack.

Hundreds of subspace disruptors were launched at us to prevent the Fateweaver from fleeing. It was time to clean up this system and rendezvous with Desdemona and Samantha.