Chapter 150 Admiral LaRoche

I knew Admiral LaRoche was an aging man with tremendous charisma.  Edmond had only a handful of spies in his Human Federation, so we had limited knowledge of the political arena he was playing in.  I knew he maintained the military’s independence from the civilian government for almost twenty years.  From what I had seen in reports, he was honorable and even had broken far enough away from the Brotherhood that the xenophobia they pushed on humanity was fading in his governance.  This was noted as the Human Federation had started trading with some members of the Alien Alliance.

On the screen, Admiral LaRoche acknowledged me with Samantha next to him.  His first question was about the location of my fleet. He assumed I needed a fleet to liberate the system, which caused me to smile. I told him it was just this one ship. He asked how we arrived so quickly.

Rather than play twenty questions, I decided to let the locals do the publicizing for me.  I told the Admiral he could talk with the system’s government first, and they could let them know about what had transpired here.  I would be available to talk in one day’s time with him.  If he wanted to talk, then he could come aboard the Fateweaver.  We ended comms, and I set my crew to clean up our presence in the system and get everyone back on board.

I had a lot of reports to read through. The Marines had suffered minor injuries on the planet in routing out the quadrupeds.  We had a lot of combat data for our suits.  VR testing was great, but actual combat experience was key to finding areas that needed refining.  Luna wanted me to join her and Abby in the debriefings, but I refused.  This was her command, and she needed to take ownership of the actions of her Marines.

Zoe was operating as our CAG for our small group of pilots.  She reviewed and flew a number of the missions the Slipstream fighter pilots had completed and had a lot of notes to pass along to her fighter pilots.  Especially the pilot who got his craft wrecked.

Julian and Francis had sent me efficiency ratings of the crew and found that the majority of the Fateweaver crew operated between 91% and 93% optimal efficiency.

I did my own crew reviews for the Fateweaver and marked two crew to be replaced.  We had an engineer who focused on repairing one of the lifts during combat instead of moving over to help with the shield emitters.  The other member was a flight technician.  She had failed to run the SOP diagnostics on one of the Slipstream fighters when it came in for a reload and refuel.  It almost got the pilot killed as the belly shield emitters were close to burning out.

Admiral LaRoche waited exactly one day, to the second, before contacting me.  He was willing to come aboard, and I told him he could bring up to ten people with him, none of them armed.  His shuttle had already been prepped and was en route as soon as I approved the meeting.  I met him in the landing bay with ten Marines in the light Gecko armor.  I had four Squirrel, three Tirani, one Wren, and two humans.  I wanted to make a show that we were accepting of other races.

Admiral LaRoche and Admiral Samantha Kirov led the way off their shuttle, followed by three lieutenants and five Marines.  I moved and shook hands with the Admiral.  He nodded and said we had a lot to discuss.  The mixed Marines got many curious looks, but that could have also been their light-power armor. I brought his party to the forward viewing room, and we had a meal laid out for him.  Abby, Francis, and Mozzie were on my side of the table.  I had wanted to include one of the Squirrel, but they all refused.

We talked mostly about the Fateweaver during drinks and avoided the true reason for the meeting.  Samantha was quiet, and it was more of a back-and-forth between me and the Admiral.  He dove into my tactics for my rescue of the system.  He was trying to ferret out our true capabilities more than discuss naval tactics.  He finally asked how we managed to get here ten days before them.

I spent five minutes laying out the general subspace theory that allowed travel in the different bands.  He was fascinated and wanted to know more, but the physics were over him, and I was not going to give him the secrets.  My goal was to be on friendly terms with the Human Federation as we were with the Alien Alliance.  I hoped to recruit skilled men and women to the Bradbury system to expand our training pool eventually.

I asked how the capture of the two Brotherhood spy ships went after my men disabled them in the Concordia system.  The Admiral reclined in his chair.  He had a heavy tone.  The Brotherhood had approached him eleven years ago.  They offered him intel and technology in exchange for his support.  He turned them down at the time and had not heard from them again. To find them in his system…was disconcerting.

I told him what I knew about the Brotherhood.  Edmond had gathered some intel in the last fourteen years, but the Brotherhood had slowly changed its encryption and practices in the Rim.  We had also cleared every supply cache that Desdemona knew about it.  These caches had crippled their operations in Rim space.

Still, we knew the fleet that ended up in the Bradbury system was a significant portion of their hidden military strength. The Brotherhood controlled dozens of fleets throughout human space by controlling the rulers of those star kingdoms.  The fleet Rae’Ver took from the Brotherhood had their most gifted and loyal people on board the most advanced warships they could build. The loss had stalled the Brotherhood momentarily.

Edmund knew the Brotherhood was moving back into the Rim in the last five years.  He even located a new resupply cache in an asteroid field in a dead system.  We chose to monitor it instead of plundering it.  Our sensors were currently our best defensive weapon, and if we took the expertly concealed base, it would tip them about the powerful sensors.

Admiral LaRoche stewed, and I wished I had Desdemona here.  She could convince him better than me.  Almost every war in the Rim was the Brotherhood pulling the strings behind the scenes.  I explained their anti-alien propaganda next.  Their goal was to secure every piece of valuable alien technology for humanity.  I spent an hour detailing a few of their plots, ending with the Squirrel.   The quadrupeds were also an element of the Brotherhood.  They had fed the war-like, fast breeding, alien race advanced tech, knowing they would use it to try and conquer other species in the region.

Their plan had worked too well as the quadrupeds were now threatening human space in the Rim worlds.  Admiral LaRoche admitted they were one of his biggest headaches.  Their ships were not powerful, but they were durable and numerous.  The quadrupeds were slowing their genocidal mindset, according to the Admiral.  They were instead using captured people as cheap labor. He sent me a report of one of his scouts finding an entire system being mined by other races.  Dozens of the quadruped warships monitored the system as the ore was shipped to a processing center in subspace.

The Admiral had guesses as to where this center might be, and I had Julian, the Fateweaver’s AI, bring up a holo star map on the table.  I added where I thought the quadrupeds were building spaceships, and soon, we had the Admiral’s target system in a separate region of space on the map.  Two targets that might cripple the expansionist quadrupeds if targeted.

As we were exploring a mutual mission to attack both targets, Samantha suddenly interrupted us.  She informed the Admiral that she had abandoned me to die on a dark planetoid in order for herself and fellow crewwomen to abscond with alien artifacts.  The table was silent, and the Admiral studied her and then me.  I just nodded to confirm the revelation.

I was unsure if Samantha was trying to sabotage the alliance or get some guilt off her conscience. The Admiral asked for his Marines and lieutenants to leave the meeting for now.  I had two Marines escort them to the R&R room for the crew.  I let Samantha explain the events that led to the incident.  I did not interrupt her and let her explain it in her own words.  The Admiral sighed and paced the room.  I could tell he had his own moral compass he was fighting.

In the end, he stopped pacing and asked Samantha if she wished to resign her commission.  She did not respond for a long moment before saying no.  LaRoche asked me if I wanted her to pay for her crimes.  My response was people can can change.  That change could be for better or worse.  Only if a person continues down a dark path must they be punished.

I had a number of people in my circle that were being redeemed in my mind. Edmond and Desdemona were at the top of that list. The Admiral nodded but immediately told Samantha her fleet was being taken from her. She would remain an admiral on her flagship and serve as a liaison with the Bradbury system to help plan a coordinated attack against the quadruped infrastructure.  This seemed too convenient, and I guessed it might have been staged for Samantha to be planted as a spy in my midst.  Spy may be too strong a word.  Intelligence-gather better fit her role.

I was not going to allow it. I would have her battleship wait on the periphery of the Bradbury system.  Her inferior sensors would not pick up much, and if she tried to launch a stealth probe we would detect it.  I also guessed she would be occupied after I delivered Lazarus to her ship.  I was curious how that reunion would go.

We spent the next two hours discussing the plan to attack both quadruped fortifications simultaneously.  I would send two cruisers to each rally location to participate.  Admiral LaRoche would commit five battleships, fourteen cruisers, and an array of support craft to each rally point.  If these attacks succeeded, then the Admiral would submit formal papers of a mutual defense pact to the civilian government.

We had six months to prepare for the assault.  I escorted the Admiral to his shuttle, and he dispersed his fleet in the system to help the civilians and remaining naval assets.  We were free to leave, but before heading to the Bradbury system, I had to make one layover.   I needed to go to the Tirani and recruit some mercenaries that I hoped would join my Marines. The Fateweaver showed off her speed as we raced to a normal transition distance for subspace and entered.