Chapter 156

The alarm sounded off on the bridge.  I looked up from my captain’s terminal for a report.  The young man in the sensors station informed me that a probe had just been launched from Desdemona’s ship.  The probe was a message capsule using the higher bands of subspace.  It was packed with our advanced technology and was designed to send messages back to the Bradbury system, not to send messages to other entities.

As the reports came in from Desdemona’s ship, I was shocked to learn that Broderick had sent the message.  He was in the process of being transported for questioning.  I already had recordings in front of me from security cameras.  I watched as Broderick met with Lazarus and then immediately left to send the probe.  As the projected plot came up, I grimaced.  The message probe was sent to the Kurashi system.  That was one of the few systems that was known always to have at least two Sylvan city ships.

The Kurashi system was a fuel refining system for the elves in this sector of space.  It was completely off-limits for any other races. Non-Sylvan ships would be fired upon when entering the system.  The best case scenario would be that the Sylvan destroyed the probe before it relayed the message Broderick had programmed.

It took five hours of questioning a confused Broderick to find out what that message detailed.  He had obviously been subverted by Lazarus, which made no sense to our Paranormal Scientists who studied the mind control ability in Desdemona.

They were certain a person could not learn how to manifest the ability, as it was encoded genetically.  Lazarus suddenly became much too dangerous.  Samantha understood our concerns, and four hours later, he was sent back to the penal asteroid with Rae’Ver.  He would be facing the death penalty as soon as a legal representative from Samantha’s Federation arrived to administer it.  The bureaucracy was alive and well in human space as Samantha wanted his death to be done by the book for her son. I did not want to delay, but I had given him to her Federation as a gift for judgment of his crimes.

My focus was now on the message probe. The probe had the best subspace drives we manufactured. Therefore, we could not catch the message probe, but we did send one of the Fateweaver-class ships to the Kurashi system to destroy it. It would arrive nine hours after the probe, so we would not be able to stop its transmission, but we would at least prevent them from obtaining the technology. The issue was we were going to down one of the assault cruisers for the joint mission with the Federation on the quadruped shipyards and mining facilities.

The probe would take twelve days to reach its destination.  If the Syvlan responded, reaching us from the Kurashi system would take months.  It could be less if they sent a Sylvan City Ship that was closer.  Now, the diplomatic mission the Tirani was sending would hold more importance.

Desdemona did not plead for her husband, Broderick.  He was sent to live on the planet with their children and never allowed again on combat starship.  We just did not know how far the programming went that had been implanted in his mind by Lazarus.  He passed all tests and appeared to be free of the influence, but we would not allow him near any sensitive ships or systems on the planet. The possibility of Sylvan arriving gave new urgency to the completion of the Fateweaver cruisers.

The days stretched, and I worked closely with Desdemona and Samantha on the preparations. I was ignoring almost everything else in my orbit and was surprised when Celeste commed me. Generally, we had a meal together once a week to discuss her academic and certification work. I realized we had not had this dinner since before I left on the diplomatic mission to the Federation. I silenced her comms and showed her that I had been staying abreast of her progress. I detailed everything she had done in the last four weeks and motivated her by telling her where she needed to improve.

When I unmuted her comms, she had a look of shock on her face. The Void Phoenix was shown on screen exiting the civilian shipyards. She had a glossy black hull, and it looked like they removed the belly cradle in reading the scans. She looked beautiful, and I said as much. Then Celeste said the entire Squirrel people and most of the system were watching my reaction, so I added some energy to my praise of the ship. In the back of my mind, I was a little angry at the resources they had diverted. At least I had a number of Tirani trade ships coming loaded with materials. Once they arrived, we could get our production on track to meet expectations.

The remote scanners would not penetrate the Void Phoenix hull, which meant they used the naval hull fabricators. That almost got me to vocalize my disappointment. We did not have to waste resources on a luxury passenger liner at this point in time. Then Celeste asked me for permission to take the ship for a shakedown cruise. Absolutely not!

I would have been more vocal about it, but I knew the entire system was watching—maybe that was Celeste’s plan as she was a good manipulator. Besides, we did not have the resources or crew to send out the Void Phoenix for what amounted to a joy ride. The fuel projections for the expanded fleet had been giving me a headache for days. I would make it up to her after I returned from the mission. I ended the call, thanking her and her team for their efforts.

We continued to work on the fleet projections for the dual attack. Our hope was Desdemona’s fleet detachment could liberate some of the alien slave labor in the mining system. We still lacked a large amount of skilled technical labor and maybe some of the prisoners would relocate to the Bradbury system after being freed. Our reliance on bots was going to cause us problems eventually. The ideal ratio was one bot per four organics in the workforce. We were currently half and half. Julie was adamant that many human civilizations had collapsed if they reduced the workforce too far as innovation and drive fell. Based on thousands of years of data, the ideal ratio is four humans to one bot in the workforce and domestically.

The departure date rapidly approached. With the Fateweaver ship New Horizon in pursuit of the message probe, we decided to take some of the system defense ships with us. Desdemona was commanding the Excalibur and three of our Brotherhood cruiser replicas. I had the Cloud Jumper under my command with the Fateweaver and would be rendezvousing with Admiral LaRoche. We were going to attack the larger of the two shipyards.

Samantha would take her battleship and leave with Desdemona’s fleet to a rally point for their attack. They planned to attack the mining system first and then moved on to the second system, the suspected shipyards.

I knew Celeste was angry with me because I did not hear from her during all the preparation. I planned to make it up to her. Celeste needed to choose a career path soon. Her nineteenth birthday was going to be coming, and I had hoped she would have either entered the Naval Academy or attended the University in the city of Arcadian. Instead, she just caused trouble in the space facilities with her friends. We will definitely have a talk when I return. She had been spoiled for too long.

The Cloud Jumper and our support transport Circadian Rhythm got into formation. The captain of the Cloud Jumper was a Squirrel Captain named Kenji. Desdemona personally vetted him, and he was an impressive strategist in the few sims we did together.

We would arrive at the rally point in deep space seven days before Admiral LaRoche. We would then train with them for seven days before making the trip together to the suspected shipyard system deep in quadruped space.

When we arrived at the coordinates, I let Kenji work with the two wings of Slipstream fighters from both of our cruisers. I was too distracted and angry. I had received a subspace message from Bradbury. Celeste and all my children had stolen the Void Phoenix and left the Bradbury system. They were headed for Alliance space. Danielle was the most upset as Eve had abducted the twin girls and our younger son as well from the planet. She blamed me for Eve’s actions, thinking I had played a role.

I had a mind to track them down in the Fateweaver, but I was committed to making this joint operation with the Federation work for now. We needed allies against the Malevolents, and the Federation was strong. Also, the Squirrel wanted their vengeance on the quadrupeds. My daughter was too selfish, and she was putting people at risk and risking exposing the technology we had accumulated in the last two decades.