Chapter 166

Desdemona had left the Human Federation fleet in the last system and pressed on to a new quadruped system. Without Deven Wellspring here, she was free to make her own decisions. Things were running much smoother now. She had left a very manageable amount of ships for the Federation to handle. She needed to get ahead of the flow of information the aliens were sending back as their ships fled further into their territory.

It was an old battle tactic called Blitzkrieg. This involved going as deep into enemy territory as fast as possible and doing as much damage as possible before they could mount a concerted defense. She could not fortify and hold the systems, but she was a cataclysm wrought on the quadruped. Whenever she could, she targeted the Annointed of their species, the ruling class. That usually drove them into a frenzy, and they made more tactical errors.

Desdemona reviewed the sensor feed from her captain’s chair.  The advantage of these gravimetric sensors made battles unfair—for the enemy.  She had superior ships, tactics, and technology, and long delays in knowing ship movements limited her opponents.  Communications could even relay orders by oscillating the gravimetric sensors rapidly, so positioning her three Fateweavers and deploying her Slipstream fighters was swift.  Her first officer got her attention on her left and sent the updated reports of the destruction her fleet was doing.

The quadruped shipyards were all but destroyed in this system; only the single massive repair platform remained.  She had risked some Marines to capture the facility.  A subservient aquatic race built and ran it.  The station did not have any technology that she wanted, just navigation data.  She had found the quadrupeds concealed their network of controlled systems extremely well, their navigation data was restricted to regions on each ship leading a fleet.

The aquatic race followed the same protocol, but when they moved to a new region and deleted the old data, their computer hydrocrystals had ghost images of erased data.  Her scientists were sure they could recover the data as long as it was not overwritten.  If she captured this station, she just might glimpse how expansive the quadrupled Kingdom was as these massive repair stations seemed to be built near their core systems.

The battle log scrolled on another screen, and Desdemona frowned.  It looked like the Marines were going to take the station, but the number of quadruped ships that escaped this time was immense.  Twenty-six battleships and hundreds of smaller combat and support ships.  The quadrupeds had learned and disseminated that the Arcadian ships were unbeatable.  So whenever they appeared now, they immediately began an evacuation.  It meant she was pushing the quadrupeds back and forcing them into a critical mass. Eventually, they would take a stand when she reached a system they decided to defend.

The similarities between the Brotherhood and the quadrupeds were not lost on Desdemona. Both wanted to have their race dominate the galaxy. And both went about it through conflict. The Brotherhood was more subtle, using pawns, while the quadrupeds used blunt force. She had to admit to herself that she was starting to find value in other species of sapients. Part of her change of heart was learning that she carried the DNA from the Sylvan species.

She had not been shocked. Her father had told her she was engineered when she was young, but she had not realized that she was one of the Brotherhood’s test subjects when alien races. As she had dwelled on it, she assumed it would mean that she would have never been able to take a seat on the Brotherhood Council that decided the fate of humanity. She did not know this for sure but guessed it for the truth.

In her position as a top Diamond Agent, there had been very little she had not been allowed to know. She knew the next hundreds of years of plans by the Council, each member responsible for expanding humanity further and further across the Milky Way. They had not yet fathomed being able to travel between galaxies—but she knew the Malevolents could.

A notification flashed in her vision. The Marines had secured the mobile shipyard. Two Marines in Gecko suits had been killed in an explosion, and seven injured. She tapped on her console and sent of death notifications, and prepared a funeral service. The loss did not affect her, but she knew she needed to pretend it did when dealing with the crew. She would be stoic but grieve.

That completed she sent her science staff to the ship to see if they could get the information she wanted from the hydrocrystals that composed their computer memory core.

The enemy had all but fled the system in full retreat. Only small, non-sub-space capable ships buzzed around the lone inhabitable moon in the system two days later. Forty million quadrupeds remained on the moon. All the Anointed had fled, but this was her biggest dagger yet in the quadruped fleets. This planet was the first planet they encountered that trained crew for their spacecraft. It was a larger naval asset than the shipyards. Millions of potential engineers, technicians and officers were trapped on the planet.

Desdemona was deciding how to exterminate them with an Armageddon missile or planetary bombardment. The Armageddon missile would make the surface uninhabitable for millennia, if not forever. Planetary bombardment was costly as her munition supplies were already low and fuel reserves as well. There were tens of thousands of worlds in this galaxy that could support life and even more that could be terraformed with effort.

Still, something inside her made her want to keep this planetary moon capable of hosting life again. She sent requests to her two weapons officers. They would bomb the major population centers for twenty-four hours. Sensors were already tracking high-priority targets from the ship training centers. Quadrupeds being escorted to false safety.

Her PerComm beeped, and she looked at it curiously. Normally messages would be routed through her ship terminal. It was her lead scientist, a Squirrel named Gander, his team had downloaded what navigation data he could and extrapolated the data into a readable format. They had been lucky as the mobile shipyard had been old and extensively traveled in the Quadruped nation.

She flicked the data from her PerCom to her active screen. Her eyes continued to get wider and wider. The Quadrupeds had been busy. Gander seemed to think they originated near the center of this galaxy and were expanding outward. There. That was their homeworld…or at least the one their explorer spacecraft crashed into eons ago, giving rise to this version of their species. It was too far, almost fifty days travel in subspace, even with their advanced drives. She should be able to convince Deven to send a mission to attack the system. If it held their Anointed leadership, it would create chaos.

Desdeomna approved the firing patterns for the planet and let the Slipstream fighters launch to take down the smaller craft buzzing about the planet. The Fateweaver’s opened up with grazers and dropped one hundred black widow bots in the planet from orbit. The capacitors on the Excalibur began cycling and firing over and over again. She shifted in her chair, knowing each impact was killing hundreds of aliens.

She turned her focus to the Black Widow Bots the Marines were directing. Her goal was not to kill every quadruped on the planet, just the important quadrupeds. She also wanted to retrieve the Black Widow Bots after the twenty-four window expired. It appeared the bots gave the trapped quadrupeds something tangible to fight. They grouped together to combat them only to find their concentrated mass a target from a Fateweaver.

Desdemona turned over command and returned to her cabin. All major threats had been neutralized, and she needed to practice meditation and rest after the grueling three days of fighting in the system. Her ability was slowly growing; at least, she assumed she was stronger than when she gained her freedom from Rae’Ver. She would keep pushing if there was no limit to how strong she could become. Her fate was her own.

After the fleet finished the bombardment, they jumped to the next quadruped system with heavy activity. They were disappointed. It had already been abandoned by the Quadrupeds. It appeared the system had no habitable planets, and the traffic was due to the heavy metal deposits in the asteroid belt. Dozens of abandoned mining stations were scattered around. She met with her captains, and the decision was a unanimous decision to Bradbury. She knew they were stretched too thin, so having a vote showed she cared about their input, even though she would have made whatever decision she planned in the end.

When they returned to the Bradbury system, they had invaded five quadruped systems and destroyed massive assets. With Desdemona’s new knowledge, she knew it was just the tip of the quadruped spear. If the data Gander had translated was correct, then they had maybe pushed them back from five percent of their territory and destroyed an estimated ten percent of the quadruped forces. But the quadrupeds were growing by that annually in strength unless there was another alien species out there that was effectively fighting them as well.

Dropping from subspace, a battle was raging in the Bradbury system. Desdemona took just a brief moment to take everything in. Not a battle but a standoff. Two Sylvan city ships had launched over sixty War Chariots and had formed a wall. The Fateweaver, Deven’s ship, was not in the system, a nervous sensor operator reported. In fact, only the Indomitable, the newest Fateweaver-class cruiser, was present.

A Drusi named Taariq was in command of the Indomitable, and Desdemona’s mind was beyond confused. What the hell had Deven done, and where was he? She focused her mind. She would turn this to an advantage. Maybe she could shift some of the loyalty of the Bradbury inhabitants to her. She still felt it was too early to move against the engineer, but she had been laying the groundwork since she had been released.

Her reports showed the Deven was off rescuing his daughter—so that little ploy she had orchestrated had worked. The Sylvan had two city ships here, the Ponffir and the Shaffir. Their demands were at least simple, complete surrender and turn over the First Citizen Rae’Ver. Well this was going to be an interesting negotiation.