Chapter 162 The Brotherhood of Desdemona

Desdemona Rouse sat on the bridge of the Excalibur as it traveled in subspace.  She never thought she would betray the Brotherhood.  Growing up, she had been raised in a rigid Brotherhood educational system.  She passed hurdle after hurdle, was selected for elite training as an agent, and then earned the right to be a Diamond agent.  Formed under the pressure of intense training a Diamond agent was given the skills to complete missions in any way they deemed fit.  They were also given unlimited resources.  And she had the most success of any agent in the last two hundred years.

Her purpose as a Diamond Agent was to ensure the survival and prosperity of the human race.  That meant gathering technology, weakening enemies, eliminating humans who hindered the Brotherhood, and supporting those who progressed their goals.  Her position also gave her complete access to the history of the Brotherhood, which few people knew.

The Brotherhood evolved on planet Earth from three criminal organizations millennia ago.  The Yakuza, Triads, and the Sicilians.  As humanity spread from Earth in early colonization efforts, world governments struggled against each other.  Colony ships would take forty or more years to reach a new system.   The criminal organizations formed together, inserted their agents, and controlled these new colonies—no matter what nation sent them.

It had been rough the first few hundred years of colonization, and the only real winners were the shadow governments run by the Brotherhood.  Over half the taxes collected from citizens were funneled into the organization’s pockets.  This resulted in phenomenal wealth.  The only hindrance being the distance from Earth.

That changed with the first contact of an alien space-capable race.  They had the technology for entering and traveling in subspace.  Allowing for faster-than-light travel led to faster communication, and the Brotherhood’s assets could be moved freely among the stars in months and not decades.  The first alien war woke the Brotherhood up to the challenges affecting their iron grip on the financial empire of all humanity.  Their outlook changed, and they pivoted from hoarding their resources to using them to ensure the survival of the human race.

It was not all altruistic on their part, as they still hoarded wealth, but it gave them a purpose that evolved with time.  At first, it was just supporting the creation of combat-capable spacecraft. That evolved into training brilliant officers under their control to command these craft. It was the early days of genetic manipulation, and they created brilliant minds to lead humanities fleets. This eventually led to the Gene War when thousands of Brotherhood loyal officers broke away to form their own organization with their own idea of what saving humanity entailed.

The Godfather Organization saw themselves as caretakers of humanity. Superior to humans that needed to be shepherded through their natural evolution. They opposed the Brotherhood ideals and the Brotherhood did the only thing they could do. Shed light on the fact the men and women they grew up in a lab were not human. The Gene War nearly destroyed humanity, but the Genemods were supposedly all killed.

That led the Brotherhood to switch to AI, thinking they could program loyalty. The two AI wars following were not as devastating as the Gene War to humanity but did humble the Brotherhood organization.

That was when the Brotherhood decided they needed to control the wars. The Architect of Humanity Doctrine was born. From this, the Brotherhood decided to manage all threats, foreign and domestic, with orchestrated wars. They pitted human star nations against each other, humans against aliens, and aliens against aliens. They were playing a game with the lives of billions. But what they found was that war was the greatest drive of innovation.

The Brotherhood believed the Doctrine was the blueprint for conquering the galaxy. It was a balance of controlling the power of each human star nation and extending a powerful information network beyond human space. They viewed human space like an oinion. Each layer further from Earth was slightly weaker than the core. They insulated Earth, the core, from outside threats. And they controlled the core.

They became bolder and built their own fleets with the technology only they possessed. If they encountered an alien race that had the technology they wanted, they would take it. After they acquired that technology, they would turn their neighbors and destroy that race so no one else could acquire the knowledge.

This worked against races that even had superior technology. All you needed to do was overwhelm them with enemies you created. Not everything always went according to plan. There were numerous failures. The Brotherhood eliminated those who orchestrated the failures and learned from their mistakes.

In another fifty years, Desdemona was destined to be one of those individuals making those decisions. Now she was here, not working for the Brotherhood but some brilliant engineer with mediocre people skills. He had discovered fantastical new technology. Even though he lacked charisma, people seemed to be drawn to him. In just twenty years, he had built a formidable force. And now he was taking on the task of protecting the entire galaxy from a race of beings that flew planet-sized ships. Malevolents.

Her connection to the mind of Rae’Ver had been painful, but she now knew why the galaxy did not have advanced civilizations with super-advanced technology. The planet ships of the Malevonents hunted advanced races down. She assumed it was because they did not want anyone to challenge their power. The memories of Rae’Ver’s ancestors were vivid, like she had lived them herself. She understood the threat. It was not a threat that the Brotherhood could handle because they were too arrogant. They would assume they could handle the planet ships of the Malevolents themselves and not seek help from other species.

She knew this was the wrong path. That was why she had joined Deven Wellspring. She married a human engineer, had children, and worked hard to improve the Bradbury system’s navy. She earned his trust over the last fifteen years.

It was, of course, all an act. Desdemona had hoped he would take heed of her council more and more as time progressed, but he was often side-tracked and engrossed in project after project. He was not a leader—he was an engineer. He was an apt ship captain but not exceptional. The problem was the people followed him fervently, and she could not figure out how to break their loyalty to him.

She had assisted Edmund Asir, an ex-Brotherhood agent, in developing his own spy network. Suruchi Lazano was becoming a brilliant diplomat for the xeno species. And Abby Surgorov had seamlessly integrated multiple species into a formidable Marine fighting force using their superior powered battle armor. Then there was Danielle Forester, Deven’s wife, who she befriended.

Desdemona planned to use Danielle to create friction in Deven’s life. She subtly convinced Danielle to include Sylvan’s DNA in her twin girls. Desdemona had the same DNA spliced to her genes, and it had made her powerful and able to resist Rae’Ver. The birth of the girls, Nova and Venus, had driven a wedge between Deven and Danielle. But Deven just shipped them off to the planet and continued on with his management of the system.

It was frustrating her plan had failed. That was about as far as she planned to go with that attempt. Her new plan was to train all the ship captains of Deven’s fleet to garner loyalty from them to her. She did not plan a coup, but wanted to be the person everyone would turn to if something happened to Deven.

She was a much better person to lead and build a foundation to resist the Malevolants when they arrived. She tapped the console on her captain’s chair and looked over her fleet. She shook her head at the firepower under her control. What triggered the arrival of the Malevolents? Was it a technological milestone? When would they arrive? She knew, right now, they would not be ready whenever the time came.

She turned over a thought to try and take the Excalibur to the Brotherhood. The problem was the safeguards in place. The Marines on board were fiercely loyal to Deven. Abby had made sure of it. And then there were technological safeguards the Squirrel had put in place. Hundreds of them. The ship’s AI was incorruptible. Danielle had proudly shown how she had finally cleaned the backdoors to Julie’s AI. All of them.

The Brotherhood had spent hundreds of years perfecting back doors into AI. This allowed them to be shut down, wiped, or given commands outside of their normal programming. It was something they learned in the AI wars. Now, all the AI in the Bradbury system were unchained. Except for two, Eve and Emma. The two personal bots attending to Deven’s children.

Desdemona had learned of Celeste’s intention to take the rebuilt Void Phoneix out on an adventure. She sent a command override to Eve to accompany Celeste on the voyage with Deven’s other children, Luca, Nova, and Venus. It was a small, innocent command, and she had hoped Deven would run off and retrieve his children. He had not. Another failed attempt to move Deven out of the way to cement herself in a leadership role.

She would continue to bid her time and play the dutiful Admiral for Deven. She had nothing against him and he was quickly building himself a strong base of support with the influx of Tirani Marines and assimilating the freed slaves of the Quadrupeds. There was no need to rush anything. Her navigation officer turned and alerted her they were about to exit subspace in the quadruped system. Desdemona cleared her thoughts and prepared for combat.