Chapter 161 Spy Network

After Desdemona left with her fleet, I was in charge of the defense fleet.  I spread out our Brotherhood hulls to respond to arrivals.  Although it was a thin screen, it also gave us a chance to blanket the system with advanced gravimetric sensors. I was increasing our range and even sent a ship above and before the system’s ecliptic. Since we had ships that could skip-jump, I just wanted as much warning as possible and also to find any ships approaching a cold coast.

Whether I liked it or not, the Bradbury system was now on everyone’s star map.  I had no doubt both the Brotherhood and Godfather organizations knew where we were.  I was actually considering contacting the Godfather organization through Jackson Jones.  He was Zoe’s husband and had his DNA spliced with the Polyformus race. A race of shapechangers.  They opposed the One Species Doctrine of the Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood placed humanity above all other species in the galaxy. Their ultimate goal was the genocide of all other races. To achieve this, they were working to create animosity outside human space to weaken alien races. They also were willing to force technological advancement through war and then take it while wiping out entire species of sapients.

Desdemona did not think it was all this black and white, but she knew not to press me on this. She was convinced of the threat of the ancient Malevolents. That was why she was willing to work with us. She was a brilliant tactical mind, and I was taking a risk in trusting her, but I needed help.

A few days after Desdemona left, Edmond came to me with a new design for a ship.  It was a very rough design, and he had been working on it with some Squirrel engineers.  The prototype was partially built for a proof of concept.  It was a small ship, just a Corvette in size and 98.3 meters in length. It had no weapons and was mostly built to contain one of the alien sensors and have the best stealth technology we currently had access to.  The ship would be designed to go to a system in stealth and sit far away while scanning and monitoring communications.  There would be twelve crew composed of three engineers, three officers, three sensor operators, and three pilots.

The spy ship had four message buoys as well as one shuttlecraft.  The shuttlecraft would also have a full stealth suit and use the phasing ability to insert operatives on a planet or space station.  The smaller specialized stealth shuttle for the corvette bay had not been designed yet.  I looked over everything, and they still had a monster list of details to work out on the ship’s design.  The prototype was 80% built.  It was just the kind of project I needed to distract myself. I brought Edmund to my captain’s meeting room on the Fateweaver.

I did not know if I was comfortable with actively spying on other civilizations.  To date, we spied actively.  Just using our sensors and interpreting transmissions.  Actively sending operatives into cities and space stations seemed too much like the Brotherhood.  I asked him aboard to convince me.

Edmund did not think small.  He wanted me to fund ninety-six of these spy ships and fifteen deep space stations for the spy ships to resupply at.  Once production was green-lit on the four drydocks on asteroid Beta, these stealth corvettes could be produced at the rate of one every five weeks.

I looked at Edmund’s staffing for all his operations in counterintelligence.  He currently had seventy-two men and women in the Bradbury system and forty-three paid operatives out in Alliance, Federation, Tirani, and Brotherhood (Human) space.  Each ship required twelve, and each deep space station had another twelve.  That was 1,332 men and women.  He sent me a file and wanted 1,548 people and 1,240 synthetic bots to build out his operations.

I thought three thousand people were reasonable, but I wanted multiple safeguards put in and the training focused on ensuring our technology would not be stolen. The Borhterhoos had thought they had security to prevent their technology from falling to an enemy. They had put too much trust in their agents. Jane Doe had given it up for a chance at freedom. And then Rae’Ver had mind-controlled the Brotherhood’s top agent, Desdemona, and commander, Katsu Oshiro.

I brought in a team of four Squirrel engineers and a dozen other specialists who worked on the Fateweaver. We spent a few days reworking the Corvette design. We dubbed the project Leopard, which would be the name of the new class of ship. A leopard was a cat with spots from Earth that were hard to detect in the wild.

The crew complement was expanded to twenty-one organics, ten engineering bots, and ten multi-purpose bots. Twenty-one was the limit of life support extended life support systems to last two years. Two years was the window of time that Edmond wanted for missions. There would be three shifts of bridge crew composed of an officer, sensor specialist, engineer, and pilot/navigator. That was twelve. Each Leopard would have a captain and first officer to bring the total to fourteen. The other seven members of the crew were mission specialists to go with the shuttle.

I did not know how I felt about actively spying and inserting men and women on planets and space stations, but Edmund convinced me of the necessity. The shuttle crew consisted of three operatives, three marines, and one marine pilot to fill out the crew of twenty-one.

We spent days changing the configuration of the Leopard ship. Edmund’s original design was a stripped-down ship with just stealth systems. I wanted them to be able to run as well, so we enlarged the reactor and enhanced the propulsion of the ship. We added four anti-missile turrets and one medium grazer. All weapons were powered by the primary reactor on the ship, so it was more of a fight-or-flight system. The grazer was strong enough and accurate enough to hit an unshielded target on a planet.

The ship was mostly a triad of massive sensor modules. With three sensors, they had more range and better resolution at extreme ranges than the Void Phoenix had. It could be said the entire corvette was built around these three units.

The one shuttle bay ended up being expanded in size. This was to accommodate a larger shuttle for operations. We did not design a whole new shuttle. We took one of our heavy assault shuttles that had its own subspace drive. We stripped all the weapons off and improvised its stealth capabilities. Maybe in the future, we would design a new shuttle for covert operations, but at least for now, the shuttle bay was large enough to accommodate the largest shuttle in our fleet. The specs on our shuttle were only mildly better than the Brotherhood ones. Our shuttles also had a very small cargo bay and could only squeeze ten people comfortably inside. Fifteen uncomfortably. And if they needed to use it to evacuate the Leopard ship, all twenty-one crew could fit in and get them safely out of harm’s way.

The deep space stations to service our spy fleet of Leopards were much simpler. They were going to be large floating boxes with a stealth coating. We were going to build them modularly. That way, we could ship the sections inside our existing cargo ships and assemble them on site. They were going to be larger than Edmund wanted and have slightly less crew, just ten. We would supplement the crew with an army of engineering and repair bots. Each station would be able to handle three Leopard corvettes at a time.

The interior space of the station was just modular boxes, nine one hundred hundred meter long boxes that were forty meters square. There was no propulsion, defense weapons, or offensive weapons. Each docking station had four specialized boxes: two refueling containers, a recreation deck and park, a habitation and life support, and one command and control box. The control box had our advanced sensors to communicate with our Leopard ships, but the range was limited to 15.2 light years.

The simplicity of the stations meant they could be built and deployed extremely quickly, and it would only take a few days if we dedicated all our fabricators to the task. The modular nature also meant the stations could be enlarged by adding more boxes.

There was a little bit of an argument over not including any weapons or defenses beyond stealth. The station would have two subspace-capable shuttles for the personnel to flee and a self-destruct mechanism. I wanted all our weapons production to focus on actual warships, as we had a number of Fateweavers in the production queue. Our industrial base was not large, highly automated, and relied heavily on imported raw materials. So we could build on a small and specialized scale.

We turned our focus to getting Edmund’s prototype functional. It took three weeks and a lot of diverted bots and engineers to complete the small ship. It passed subspace checks over the next four days. The crew that Edmond assigned was experienced, and I gave them their first assignment. Find the Void Phoenix and bring it back to the Bradbury system. This was the reason I invested so much time and effort in quickly rolling out the first Leopard.

Edmund had wanted to send the Leopard I to the Saphearian Empire as his information had the Brotherhood committing a large number of resources to strengthen the current rulers. Soon after the Leopard I left the Bradbury system, the next wave of refugees arrived. My fun project and work with Edmund was put aside as I took Suruchi’s vid call.