Chapter 174 Admiral Kincade

The Brotherhood had been pushed out of the Rim worlds by the failures and exposure of its agents.  A Diamond Agent had even defected, which was unthinkable.  The Council had met and decided on a course of action.  They would assemble an unstoppable fleet and regain their control in the Rim.  The Diamond Agent, Desdemona, would be executed, and then their Grand Design for humanity to reign supreme could continue.

They spent twelve years building the fleet and training the crews.  Pulling from the best humanity had to offer in the core systems. This was no ordinary fleet.  It had technology the Brotherhood had kept secret for centuries.  They needed to initiate a catastrophic attack and exterminate the issue.  They manipulated the four largest governments together to attack in order to create a distraction.

As the war raged, the Brotherhood fleet jumped closer and closer to its target: the Bradbury system.  Once the fleet reformed, they would make the last jump together as they swept through the system like a raging fire.

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Admiral Kincade of the Brotherhood battleship, Unhindered, seethed.  His intelligence of the Bradbury system was incomplete, and even the prisoner, Lazarus, had been useless.  He was amassing his fleet three light years from the system, and he had been discovered almost immediately.  Not even twenty hours into the arrival of his first ship, he was attacked.

He had even set up a perimeter and early warning with the most advanced sensor buoys in the core worlds.  With deep space operations, a fleet was always in danger of the enemy appearing in their midst.  It was a calculated risk with no gravity well of a sun limiting their subspace jump. His ships had been servicing FTL equipment when the nine cruisers emerged from subspace.  He immediately assumed they were from Bradbury, as their profiles matched.

He was thinking out the deployment of his ships and programming out his orders to be sent. Kincade was used to space battles where things tended to evolve very slowly toward a point of action. Three carriers blew up as he ordered his ships into a Spartan Line.

His highly trained crew quickly figured out they had skip-jumped missiles into the ships.  The confusing piece of data was they had been traveling at thirty percent light speed on emerging from subspace.  That had to be impossible.  Inertia was always lost on exiting subspace, or the ship would tear itself apart.  The damage was too real to ignore.  He could not lose all his carriers and played his biggest trump card.  Three more cruisers were destroyed, and he ordered them to redline generators to slip into subspace themselves.  This left a shadow in real space, but the next missiles passed through, missing.

If his attackers had more missiles, this was going to be over very quickly. His unstoppable fleet would be destroyed without inflicting any casualties.  Even if he turned the tide now, he would be removed by the Council for losing so many ships—so many trained men and women. The attacker had chosen to attack the carriers smartly. They had the highest concentration of personnel, and two of the carriers he targeted had his heavy, deep space fighters.

The debris cloud from the six carriers was also causing major havoc. Shields were being taxed and emitters blown. Many ships had not even spun up shield generators to battle strength yet. That would have been a waste of fuel. Now, he was paying for it. Voices rang out on his bridge, sending reports and analysis of the battle unfolding. His crew was well-trained and prepared to adapt.

He decided he would fight this one out. The enemy had not launched subspace disruptors, so maybe they were unloading and planning to flee. He ordered the subspace distortion field activated on all battleships capable. It took tremendous power to generate the waves, but would prevent all subspace emitters from working.

The battle progressed, and six of the enemy cruisers were fake. Some type of density hologram. Sensors now knew what to look for and would not be fooled again. His battleships were all equipped with heavy particle cannons. The range was twice that of anything else in the arsenal of humanity’s energy weapons. With these, they should be able to chew up ships from range.

When the first cruiser finally succumbed to the focused fire, the bridge cheered, and he did not reprimand them. The enemy was trying to flee. More of his battleships arrived, stopped by his own field as if by divine province. The Convergence and Restitution had blocked the enemy’s retreat, and they had not fired any more of their **Heaven’s Smiting** missiles. They might stand a chance to turn the table if they were out.

The scales were in his favor. Admiral Kincade would win this day. The next hours were a chase as the Admiral canceled the subspace distortion and had his only two battleships and one carrier ready for the micro-jump. His engineers could cycle the subspace drives in about twenty hours, much faster than anyone should expect, but most of his ships had only been here a few hours before being attacked.

One of the enemy cruisers launched missiles with some Armageddon Bot variant at the carrier. Only a few made it on board. Admiral Kincade was confident the captain could repel the boarders. What concerned him more were the enemies’ heavy fighters firing thrusters for one of his battleships.

Those fighters had to be almost out of fuel and ordinance as they had not docked since engaging his support ships. They had been burning on a vector out of the system and probably meant to rendezvous with another ship to be extracted since their mothership was too far away. He watched in abject disbelief as the fighters slammed into the shields of the battleship. He had thought it would hold, but enough emitters overloaded from the quick succession that the last two got through. The fighters penetrated deep into the hull, the bridge command staff were all killed, and the ship suffered extensive damage.

The second enemy cruiser finally broke apart, leaving just one remaining. His losses were staggering when compared—six carriers, one battleship, twelve screening corvettes, nineteen frigates, and thirty-two freighters. And the enemy lost just two cruisers?

His personal communication officer turned and informed him the carrier, Nightswarm, had failed to contain the arachnid bots. The bots were spider and nature, and the Marines on board tried to hold them back, but they raced toward the power core and destroyed the ship’s core. He saw the carrier break apart. A seventh carrier. He only had three left, and they were all damaged from debris when the other carriers were destroyed.

How was he going to attack the Bradbury system now? The damage reports, and losses kept coming in. The last cruiser was going to escape his net as it had started picking off smaller ships. He tried a bluff. He opened communications and demanded their surrender and the surrender of the Bradbury system.

The man on the screen was familiar to the Admiral. He had read the reports. The elusive engineer and captain of the Void Phoenix. At least he was in the right place. He tried to rattle him by having Lazarus in the background. Maybe he could make the man think the Human Federation had betrayed him to the Brotherhood.

He watched on sensors as the cruiser pulled out of effective firing range. It was over. He only had one battleship that could micro-jump, but he would prefer to salvage what he could instead of continuing his pursuit. He ordered the disrupters cut and watched the cruiser jump and all the shuttles from the destroyed ship as well. It was going to be days sorting through the battle data to figure out what they were up against.

He moved four battleships to the perimeter and had them cycle the subspace disruption field. Tactical indicated the skip-jump missiles would not work in the field, so it should be a defensive measure. He was still waiting for one battleship, three frigates, and two freighters.

It took three days for the rest of the ships to arrive, and they salvaged what they could. The skip-jump missiles that traveled so fast were beyond deadly. The entire crew was killed in the shockwave from the strike, and the debris field flung large chunks of the ship away at railgun speed. Even with most of his battleships, his fleet was only at fifty percent strength.

All the new technology in his fleet had amounted to little in the engagement. The intelligence from the Brotherhood network was incomplete. The enemy had superior ships, weapons, and willingness to sacrifice. He had been tasked with seizing the Bradbury system and all assets for the Brotherhood. Now, he was licking his wounds and trying to decide if he would retreat.

Forty-nine thousand, seven hundred fifty-six was the butcher’s bill from all his ships, with another ninety-five in critical condition. Of that number, eight thousand elite Marines were lost on the carriers with their specialized phasing shuttles. The plan had been to occupy the asteroids. The Brotherhood had thought themselves clever in figuring out the science behind the disappearing asteroids. But Deven Wellspring had more tricks, maybe if he had jumped directly to the Bradbury System instead of stagging in deep space.

All his ships had arrived, and the last ship was the battleship, Gaia’s Vengence. On board was Council member Leonardo Gallo, which was unexpected. Admiral Kincade was sure he was about to be relieved of command.

Leonardo did not communicate for six hours, and the Admiral was certain he was reviewing the battle reports and accessing the losses. When he finally did contact him, Lenardo asked one question: Can we win? The Councilman was in the same situation as Kincade; failure was not an option. He had assumed command of this region after Katsu Oshiro had gone missing with a small Brotherhood fleet in this region. Thye know knew the Sylvan First Citizen Rae’Ver had taken command. That was about the only useful information Lazarus had given.

Admiral Kincade answered honestly. No.