PREPARATIONS

Chapter XXI

Vice-Admiral Quaid moved to his command post and gave his first order,

"Prepare all ships for battle. Sound the battle alert. All personnel to battle stations!"

Dr. Xelco explained to Vice-Admiral Quaid about the concealment device they had enabled on the *Pegasus*.

"Mark Cooter, a shuttle pilot who was captured by the Reidforcians, invented a device, that can make anything under its influence completely invisible to sight or sensors. The CPU has adjusted the settings so that the Reidforcian sensors will not be able to track you. This technology will make our entire fleet invisible to the enemy and they will never know what hit them. It's kind of like the old boxer Mohammed Ali used to say 'Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee'," Joseph responded to the question with enthusiasm.

Vice-Admiral Quaid realizing that he needed to evaluate the changes to his entire network invited the guests to help him get the systems coordinated and operational. Dr. Xelco went over to the science officer's station and began monitoring the data feeding into the memory banks. The screens were going crazy with activity, so much so, they couldn't understand what they were seeing.

"Are all of the Forodian class ships set up the same way?" Dr. Xelco asked the science officer.

"Yes, with the exception of the *Triad*. She's been outfitted with a new Bronstine

reactor. It's still pretty new, but she's been able to keep up," the science officer replied.

"What do you mean 'keep up'," Dr. Xelco questioned.

"They have had some minor difficulties keeping the proper combination of the primary elements at a steady level," the science officer replied.

"I was involved in that project. I didn't think it was operational yet," Dr. Xelco responded. "We had trouble balancing the copernicium and bronstine in the same chamber ourselves. I guess I was gone longer than I thought. Has the new power plant been successful?" Dr. Xelco questioned the young officer.

"It's still very experimental, but early indications are that it has great potential," responded the lieutenant.

Dr. Xelco continued to scan the console for new settings.

"What is that concealment device you spoke of," the science officer interrupted Dr. Xelco.

Dr. Xelco repeated the information to the science officer who had been too busy to listen in when he explained the device to the Vice-Admiral.

"Everything checks out here," Denise called up to Dr. Xelco. "The next update shouldn't take anywhere near as long now that the CPU is familiar with the fleet's CPUs. The others shouldn't be as complicated since they won't be the command ship."

"What next one?" asked Vice-Admiral Quaid.

"We plan to outfit every ship in the fleet before we go into battle. Your CPU is now familiar with the updates and will be able to do most of the retrofitting on its own," Dr. Xelco informed the crew of the *Pegasus*.

"I think we need to radio each of the ships before we begin so we can save them the panic you felt while your system began to go crazy on you," Dr. Xelco suggested

"Computer, how long before we encounter the enemy?" Vice-Admiral Quaid asked his new CPU.

"We should make scanner contact in approximately twenty-two minutes seventeen point three seconds, at their present speed and course. Should I take diversionary action?" the CPUs soft voice asked.

"No, hold our present position until we are ready to fight. Give me a status report on all systems," Vice-Admiral Quaid interacted with the CPU giving a shrug of his shoulders as he began to get comfortable with his new equipment.

"Fuel consumption currently at point one percent per hour, fuel levels at eighty-six point six percent; life support currently running at one hundred percent, life support supply levels at ninety-seven point two percent; trazer power at one hundred percent; Ralston torpedoe count is fifty-two, all armed and ready to fire; concealment device installed and operational for thirty-five minutes twenty point one seconds; food dispensary at seventy-six point two percent….," The CPU rattled off the statistics on the ship.

"That's pretty amazing," Vice-Admiral Quaid said as he relaxed in his command console. "I wonder why the Reidforcians haven't discovered this."

Thinking about what Vice-Admiral Quaid had just said about the Reidforcian technology and if allowed them to monitor the CIG ships, Dr. Xelco thought out loud, "Hmm…. The Reidforcians might have a lot more technology than we thought. You know, you might have a point there,"

Dr. Xelco suddenly became somber. "Computer, is it possible for the enemy to track or monitor your signals?"

"Yes, if I were to reopen the common frequency ranges, the enemy would have complete access to all of my files and could transpose them into their data banks. However, I have anticipated this problem and have changed the configuration of my original programming so that the Reidforcians will no longer be able to accomplish that. If you wish I will reconfigure them back to allow the scanning of my memory," the CPU responded to the question.

"No! Continue to protect your system, Dr. Xelco was surprised.

Vice-Admiral Quaid quickly jumped up, "Computer, you said that you changed your original programming to keep the Reidforcians from scanning your memory banks. Was that possible before you changed your programming?"

"Yes, the Reidforcians have had the capability to anticipate most of the actions taken by the CIG for more than two years. You did not know this?" the CPU's enhanced traits

were now beginning to show.

"Computer, what information do they have that would put us at risk?" Vice-Admiral Quaid continued to question the knowledge of his new CPU.

"The Reidforcians are completely aware of your armaments, tactical plans, staff, and speed capabilities," the CPU answered the question.

"Does that mean that they know about the McMarian Hyper-Warp system?" Dr. Xelco jumped in.

"Yes, but they have had trouble interpreting the data from our memory banks, because the information in our own data banks was not completely reliable. They have had trouble duplicating the system. Parts of the relational degrees of aptitude were purposely left out of the programming. The information is now stored in a discreet file that the Reidforcians cannot scan. Would you like me to create a diversionary file?" the CPU answered.

"Yes, that would be a good idea. What about the Greco-Light system, how is that working?" Vice-Admiral Quaid asked.

"The needed programming changes are now in place so our Greco-Light drives are now at maximum efficiency.

Vice-Admiral Quaid was impressed by what the CPU was telling him, but at the same time very concerned about the repercussions.,

"How much faster will be able to go?" he asked

"The improvement is approximately one-hundred fifty point 5 percent over the past performance," the CPU responded.

Turning to Dr. Xelco he stated, "WOW, that is fast! However, we didn't have any idea that they were able to intercept our programming! Have they been able to do anything else we may not be aware of?"

"Don't ask me, ask your CPU," Dr. Xelco responded.

The CPU replied to his question. "The Reidforcians have had the ability to unscramble your transmissions, monitor your hyper frequency communications, and anticipate your next military moves by tapping into the CPU system on any of the ships it

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encounters. All of these problems have now been eliminated by restructuring the bilateral conduits...”

“Thank you, computer; that's enough for now,” Vice-Admiral Quaid interrupted as he stood motionless in shock over the latest news.

“Wow, that explains a lot about what has been happening to us the last few years. We haven't been able to outmaneuver them in any of our encounters. This CPU changeover is more critical than we thought. I'm sorry for being so short with you in the beginning,” Commanded Quaid said very surprised.

“May I request something of you Vice-Admiral Quaid?” Joseph asked.

“Sure, what is it?” he replied.

“I was wondering if we could have five of the Ralston torpedoes mounted on our ship. We used the ones we had escaping from Sigmata,” Joseph requested.

“Ensign, make sure the ZX/2 is armed with five Ralston torpedoes,” Vice-Admiral Quaid directed one of his officers. “Is that good enough for you?”

“Yes sir. Thank you very much,” Joseph replied

The crew of the *Pegasus* and the guests from the *ZX/2* were busy reconfiguring the onboard systems, and monitoring the transmissions back and forth from the other ships to make sure that all of the commands that the new CPU was sending to them were compatible with the ones on the *Pegasus*. Slight changes and modifications were needed in order to allow the individual ships independent action while working as a team, with the main strategy CPU remaining on the *Pegasus*.

“All ships are reporting increased power ranges and scanning abilities. Only the Triad seems to be having some difficulty getting its programs coordinated,” the communications officer reported.

“Computer, why is the Triad having problems with its systems becoming fully operational?” questioned Vice-Admiral Quaid.

“The newer Bronstine reactor is very delicate. The correct component balance was so far from optimum that the entire field surrounding it had to be recalibrated and the fuel cells reduced. The power grid should be one hundred percent in approximately three

minutes forty-six point nine seconds," the CPU reported.

"Could you put the new readings on the science station screen for me?" asked Dr. Xelco.

"As you wish," the CPU responded as Dr. Xelco moved back to the science officer's station and reviewed the new data that came up on the screen.

"Computer, with this new configuration, what would you estimate the top speed of the Triad to be?" Dr. Xelco was amazed at the complexity of the calculations that were buzzing by on the screen.

"Maximum speed would be approximately thirteen point three times the speed of visible light. Additional data is needed to be more precise," the CPU replied.

"Dad, that's as fast as the *ZX/2*!" Joseph couldn't believe his ears. "What about the auto-navigations system? Will it be able to maneuver at that speed?" Joseph continued.

The CPU responded, "I have made the necessary adjustments. The gyrospector system will have no problems avoiding any space debris or planets."

"We knew we had something with those Bronstine power plants, we just never dreamed it would be like this," Dr. Xelco kept staring at the console in amazement. "With this kind of speed we can run circles around the Reidforcians, even if they do have the transporter dome for their use."

"A transporter dome, what is that?" questioned the science officer.

"We found a device capable of transporting a person anywhere in the galaxy when we were down on Reidforcia. Lord Froth has used it to move from one place to another. That's how he escaped off of the *Burmi* with the Molteri named Jonasah." Dr. Xelco explained.

"You guys found out a lot about those tyrants when you were down there didn't you?" the science officer seemed impressed.

"There is more, but we'll file that in our report when we are finished here," Dr. Xelco responded still glued to the screen watching the changes as they flashed on the monitor, amazed at the new information.

"The Reidforcian armada is now within scanning range. All ships are now assuming

combat readiness. All weapons are armed and ready. Transmissions between ships indicate that they are confused over their lack of ability to monitor our actions. They seem to be totally confused, however they are ready to do battle," the CPU gave its assessment of the situation.

"Did you say you could monitor the transmissions between the Reidforcian ships?" the science officer asked in surprise.

"Yes, the modifications allow us full access to all of the Reidforcian frequencies. Would you like me to put them on the speaker?" The CPU replied.

"No, just keep us informed of any changes in their status," the science officer gave directions to the CPU.

"As you wish," the CPU replied.

Vice-Admiral Quaid moved to his command post and gave his first order, "Prepare all ships for battle. Sound the battle alert. All personnel to battle stations!"

"Computer, compute our best offensive strategy and prepare each ship's CPU with its own battle plan," the orders continued.

"This is going to be interesting. We haven't engaged in a successful offensive maneuver in over two years. Let's get this going and let's kick some Reidforcian tail right out of the galaxy!" Vice-Admiral Quaid sat in his chair ready for the battle ahead far more confident than he had been when they first arrived in the Colonus sector.

The Vice-Admiral was busy preparing his crew for the conflict that lay ahead; when he looked up to get some input from his visitors, he noticed that they were gone.

"Where did Dr. Xelco and the others go? They were here a minute ago," Vice-Admiral Quaid said as he looked about the room and couldn't find them.

"The crew of the *ZX/2* is now leaving hanger 4-C," the CPU responded to the question.

"What are they doing out there? Don't they know that they will be killed? They won't stand a chance against the Reidforcians," Vice-Admiral Quaid exclaimed as he jumped up to watch the tiny vessel move out of the protection of the *Pegasus* on his forward monitor.

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"Computer, are we still tied in with the control systems on board the *Pegasus*?" Joseph asked the more familiar CPU on the *ZX/2*.

"Yes, I have been in contact with the *Pegasus* since we arrived. The system's programmer who originally set her up had made some serious errors in programming. With the new configuration the *Pegasus* should be more maneuverable and better able to engage the enemy in battle, as well as blocking the enemy's ability to scan the memory banks," the CPU stated patting itself on the back.

"You are certainly confident of yourself, aren't you?" Joseph responded.

"I had you for a teacher, Joseph Xelco," the CPU retorted.

"Touché, mon l'ordinateur (my computer)," Joseph answered in jest.

"Enough of this bantering with the CPU, we've got work to do," Dr. Xelco admonished the both of them.

Denise, Fragon, and Regis were preparing the ship for its mission. Fragon was making sure that all of the materials that had been scattered about the ship were secured. Denise rearranged the medical supplies along with her parents, and prepared some food in the dispensary. Regis jotted down notes from the information he was getting from the navigational screen on the location and movements of the Reidforcian ships. Yendor and Somat took an inventory of the supplies using the X-Tablet.

Mr. and Mrs. Wantis helped wherever they were needed.

"Computer, put me in visual contact with the ship Lord Froth is on," Joseph asked the CPU.

"Lord Froth is on board the *Fristle*, a Parrady class ship, at the rear of the armada. Hailing the *Fristle* now," the CPU was becoming more efficient than ever as it responded to Joseph's request. "On screen now sir."

"This is Lord Froth, who hails me?" Lord Froth in his usual directness replied to the call.

"It is I, Joseph Xelco, of the CIG ship *ZX/2*. We request permission to come aboard the *Fristle* and negotiate a peaceful end to these hostilities. We are willing to give ourselves as hostages in order to accomplish a peaceful resolution between the CIG and the Potentate of Reidforcian," Joseph surprised everyone on the *ZX/2*.