Chapter

The planet Gladium was the homeworld of the Tirani race.  It was the only planet in all of Tirani space that did not allow non-Tirani ships to approach.  At all their other population centers, they welcomed trade with all races.

When we entered the star system, the plot showed dozens of stations over the uninhabitable planets supporting mining operations.  When I logged in the Fateweaver with their system nav buoys using my Deven Wellspring code, I had to go through multiple identification verification steps.  I thought they were just overprotective of their homeworld, but it turned out it was due to my half-ownership of the purple grass.

Just like on the Tirani station, I was a bit of a celebrity.  We received permission to dock at one of the military space stations over Gladium Prime, the only planet in the system with a breathable atmosphere.  Billions of Tirani lived there, and it was the largest concentration of Tirani in all space.  According to Mozzie, the Tirani were ruled by the five heads of the largest clans by population.  I was being invited to meet with them after I had docked.  My Tirani business partner would also be there, so I assumed this was a request regarding the grass.

We had a number of families to pick up as well.  The Bravados clan was relocating to the Bradbury system.  We sent out the array of communications they had given us and began planning for their arrival.  Francis was in charge of facilitating the cargo that they would be bringing.  He allocated one metric ton per family member.

I was preparing to head to the planet when Francis commed me.  The family members wishing to come were slowly ticking up from our original number…we were now looking at three hundred seventy-eight on the total number of family members. The news was spreading that the Bravados clan was working for one of the owners of the purple grass.

We had the capacity so I approved of the additional passengers.  This was also an opportunity to spend more of my Tirani wealth.  Rather than have migrants board the Fateweaver, I purchased six heavy transports and hired crews for them.  Although these ships were typically used by the mercenaries, I would load them with trade goods and the families of the Bravados clan.

With my notoriety, it was easy to purchase them. The transports were relatively new and designed to deliver mercenary clans to their assignments.  I planned to fill them with cargo to make the Tirani transition to the Bradybury system easier.   I paid a slight premium over the normal bulk purchase rate for goods.

One of my objectives was to set up one of the five hundred agricultural domes in the Bradbury system to grow food that the Tirani preferred based on their biology.  I set the goal to be able to service ten thousand Tirani stomachs in the future.  I wanted the Tirani that did relocate to our city to have all the comforts of home.

When we docked, a formal escort at the station greeted me.  I planned to take my shuttle down to the planet, but they insisted I travel in one of their shuttles.  I brought Abby, Mozzie, and Luna with me to the surface.  We were all dressed in our formal naval uniforms.  As we descended to atmosphere, Mozzie explained five artificial mountains surrounded the Tirani capital.  It symbolized the Tirani’s steadfast and industrial nature to move ‘heaven and earth’ to fulfill their missions.  As we flew over the mountains, they were definitely impressive.  They were five thousand meters in height and made a unique pentagon formation in the otherwise flat plain. The sprawling capital was located in the center of this formation of mountains.

All the buildings in the city only had five floors above ground and five floors below ground.  Mozzie explained the number five had a significant religious context for his people before they achieved space flight.  Their space flight capability was actually given to them about fifteen thousand years ago by an alien race.  This race, which Mozzie could not identify, crashed onto the planet.  It brought his ancestors together to stop in-fighting and rapidly pushed science ahead in his culture over the next century to reach into space.  The sacred nature of the number five was one of the few things that had survived the millennia.

We landed on top of the largest structure in the city. A pentagon-shaped building built from a red stone. An honor guard was there to meet us and escorted us inside. The audience room was also a pentagon, and the ruling five awaited us. A familiar Tirani was seated on the Council. My business partner was part of the Council that caught me off guard.

We were all seated and sat through the Tirani version of a diplomatic introduction. The accomplishments of each of the five were given and how long they had served. My business partner, I noted, had been a member for nine years. With the formalities concluded the Tirani council wanted to discuss my dealings with the Tirani as a race.

The secret of my advanced technology had leaked over the last two decades. It had started with the Tirani envoys, but Tirani mercenaries throughout space had trickled information back to them. They were interested in powered combat armor and ship sensors in particular. The problem was they had nothing to offer me. I was already beyond wealthy with my holdings.

The Tirani were a relatively minor race when compared to others. They controlled only a handful of habitable planets and had dozens of large space stations throughout space, serving as depots for trading and their mercenary opportunities. I had not come here hoping to recruit their entire race in the fight against the Malevalents, but I changed my mind.

As I wove the tale about the planet-sized ships that moved from star system to star system, wiping out all life, they looked dubious. The only proof I had was that Desdemona had seen the visions when she had been in Rae’Ver’s mind. That was when he had dominated her with his ability.

The conversation quickly turned to the Sylvan people and their city ships. The Tirani wanted to confirm the existence of the Malevants by conducting a diplomatic mission with the Sylvan. I tried to argue them back from the edge. My dealings with the Sylvan had not been pleasant to date, and I had destroyed one of their city ships. I did not mention this to the Tirani.

I had not been able to dissuade them from their course of action for two hours. I wished Suruchi had been with me on this mission. She would have been able to stop them. I tried to focus on the perhaps establishing a colony of Tirani in the city of Arcadian. I was upfront with my goal to recruit Marines to the systems navy to fight the Malevalents in the future.

We discussed my efforts so far with the Bravados clan and pulling their families. One of the council members was willing to send one of his sub-clans to Arcadian. They were merchants and technicians, not mercenaries, though. It could be a play to try and obtain some of our advanced technology.

The one flaw of the Tirani race was their lack of deception. Whether that was from a sense of honor or just in their genetic nature did not matter. The sub-clan had almost five thousand Tirani. They operated a dozen cargo ships that specialized in ore transport.

There were some stipulations. I would have to pay to relocate the sub-clan, called the Fossores clan. The clan would also need to be contracted for their work. Mozzie added just because the clan were traders, there would still be members who joined the Marines. The challenge and rush of combat were part of the nature of the Tirani. I agreed to take on the Fossores clan.

As we talked further, the problem for the mercenary sub-clans was the leaders did not want to give up their authority over them. With the Fossores clan, I would be paying them, and they would still answer to their clan leaders further up in the hierarchy. I could see why. If these leaders were appointed due to their clan size, then they did not want to lose members.

Food was brought, and we talked about adding Marines rather than mercenaries to the Bradbury system. The solution came when one of the Mozzie got frustrated and said he should just start his own clan outside the purview of the Tirani Council. That was what the Bravados brothers had done—separated themselves from the clan.

There were millions of Tirani with no clan affiliation were on the planet and throughout space. It was considered a stigma in the past, but they were now accepted as members of society. If Mozzie registered a clan, he could accept members into it. Then, he could release members of his clan to serve in the Marines in the Bradbury system.

It seemed like a very roundabout way to recruit Tirani to the Bradbury system, but it fit into the clan system. The Council was willing to help Mozzie as long as it did not affect their clan. I gave Mozzie access to my Tirani accounts. We were going to leave him behind on Gladium. He would form his clan and recruit. Then, Mozzie would migrate them to the Bradbury system. Luna would stay with him to help organize.

We had spent almost eight hours with the Clan leaders. I had made some misteps. They were going to prepare a diplomatic mission to the Sylvan. I did not sense this going well. I was also leaving Mozzie and Luna behind. I was also bringing in five thousand Tirani, whose loyalties may be suspect. Still, the risk was worth it. If the Sylvan came and were hostile, I believe our system defenses could repel them.

I left the Gladium planet, hopeful we had added another ally. We still had time to reach the Bradbury system before Samantha’s battleship as well.