Chapter 131 Andromeda (POV Chapter)

Andromeda walked onto the bridge of her battleship, The Remembrance.  The battleship was built by Eladrin elves during an upheaval civil war a few millennia past.  Andromeda had seduced the Eladron Emperor at the time into giving her command of this flagship.  It was a behemoth of the space lanes and one of the most powerful ships in this corner of this galaxy.  Even though Andromeda was imposing in her own right, this battleship was her true sword.  She abandoned her duties as admiral of the Eladrin fleet. During her exodus, she took two other battleships, and left the Emperor to his fate in the civil war.

Her other two battleships were also of Eladrin construction but half the size of The Remembrance.  After absconding with the massive warships, she had them captained by two succubi servants, Desarae and Eshanya.  Desarae had been with her the longest of all her servants, and Andromeda knew she yearned to take Andromeda’s place.  She would exile Deserae to a planet if she had someone competent to take her place in the captain’s seat.

Eshanya, the other captain, was turned from an Eladrin elf. Eshanya had been her first officer when she had taken The Remembrance.  She was perhaps Andromeda’s favorite lover.  But she learned long ago never to let her passion cloud her judgment.

She scanned her bridge. Most of her current crew were Eladrin elves.  She preferred to crew her ship with the longer-lived races rather than subspecies of demons. Also, the Eladrin had strong aether cores and versatile magic.  The Remembrance also needed the crew to help feed its insatiable appetite for aether.  Many systems, including the FTL drive, ran off aether from the Source.

Training the crew to an acceptable level of loyalty had taken a few generations.   Over the millennia, she also had bred out their need for being connected to the Fey Wild and acclimate to life on a spaceship.  It was one of her most noted achievements, as she had created her own subrace of the Eladrin elves.

The only other race prevalent race on her flagship were humans.  With aether and technology, she could extend human lifespans to almost three hundred years, which was nothing compared to the Eladrin’s lifespan of over three thousand years.  But humans reproduced quickly and learned quickly.  She used them as combatants: pilots, marines, and some were exceptional enough to join the Eladrin crew.  But generally, humans, with their shorter life span, were expendable.

She had stopped birthing offspring and creating new servants after Eshanya.  She had been betrayed too many times and knew that Deserae and Eshanya would one day also think themselves greater than her.  That was why she was surprised when she converted a young human male who made contact with her mind through the layers.

It was easy to tell the boy was special.  With the angelic abilities from her prior life, she could see it.  He had exceptional potential in his aether core, unlike anything she had ever seen before.  Impulsively, she convinced him to let her convert him into a newborn incubus.  She gave him as little guidance as possible as she found the best way for young to thrive was to seek answers on their own. He proved this point well, milking the human and demi women of Earth for more life essence than he would have gained by bursting a partner’s core. It seemed his efficiency had to deal with his abnormally strong vortex, a byproduct of his aether core’s high potential.

Somehow, she was now serving him!  She had been checking in on him from time to time, and he suggested Mercanious was going to cut from the Source.  So, she volunteered her fleet to go and investigate.  Oh, she had been curious, but still, she had jumped to help him as she had done time and time again.  She gave him a method to enhance his followers. Then she gifted him a fragment of her own aether core to create a purifying essence to extinguish death essence. It was almost as if he had some power over her.

The sensor operator turned in her chair to address Andromeda, “We have arrived at the coordinates.”  Andromeda swung the screen in her captain’s chair.  The transit thread glowed in the advanced sensors.  Taking a ship the size of The Remembrance into a transit through a portal was incredibly dangerous.  Normally, she would travel alone, but what she found on the 17th layer had concerned her enough to risk it.

Deserae opened a channel, “I disagree with this action, Andromeda.  We should not risk it.  If we were to risk entering a transit, it should be to go to a higher layer, not a lower one!”

Andromeda looked at her creation, born from a halfling she caught trying to steal from her a very long time ago.  Deserae preferred to appear in her child-like form of a halfling.  She appeared innocent but was far from it.  She crewed her battleship with brutes from myriad races and took great pleasure in bringing the more violent ones to her bed.  They would abuse her in a state of uncontrolled lust, and she would rupture their core during the peak to harvest everything she could from him.  When she was first elevated, Deserae had been loyal to a fault.

As she grew her powers, Deserae wanted to be free of her contract and the tax of life essence she harvested.  But, Andromeda had nurtured Deserae for too long to let her go.  She had even chosen her among all the servants to command the battleship Eternity.  Deserae had been given the ship and the power to crew it how she saw fit.  The Eladrin on Deserae’s ship were not much more than aether batteries, which was a shame.  The Eladrin species she had created had a lot of potential than that.

Andromeda held her anger for now, “Deserae, this is my fleet.  It goes where I order it.  If you want to relinquish command, I can call another from a lower layer to take command.”  The threat worked as Deserae backed down.  Even though the Eternity was smaller, it was a formable ship, and Deserae had spent centuries cultivating her crew.  She had a sizable population under her authority, nearly four thousand souls.  Much smaller than the fifteen thousand Andromeda commanded on The Remembrance.

“You are making a mistake,” an irate Deserae said again as she ended the communication.

Eshanya appeared immediately after, having listened in.  “She grows bolder each year, Andromeda.  You should replace her.  Bring one of your incubi or succubi from the twentieth layer and be done with her.”

“Patience.  She has only voiced her mind and not acted against me.  It will be centuries until she thinks she is strong enough to challenge me.”  Andromeda paced in thought, “After we enter the transit, I want you on board The Remembrance.  Plan to stay with me until we return to the seventeenth layer.”

Eshanya looked uncomfortable.  Her entire crew was her people, the Eladrin.  She had made the mistake of having children without incorporating her gifted demonic blood.  Now, after generations, half of her crew were her descendants.  She felt protective of them and hated leaving them.  Andromeda had eleven children in her lifetime, and only three still lived.  From those three, she had dozens of grandchildren she had never met.  She had long lost her sentimentality to her descendants.  It was a lesson Eshanya would have to learn in time.

“I want you on board The Remembrance,” she stated again, this time as an order. “You can share my bed while you are here,” Andromeda smirked.  Eshanya nodded, conceding to her request.

“Fine, but I am bringing my court with me,” Eshanya asserted.  Andromeda rolled her eyes.  Eshanya still maintained a court like an Eladrin Queen.  She only ruled over one battleship and five thousand subjects.  It was not that Eshanya’s ship, the Shadowfall, was larger than the Eternity to have a larger crew complement, it was just maintained better than the Eternity.

It took six hours for the three battleships to align to the transit thread above the planet and transition. The massive drain of aether stores to open the massive portal shook the thread like on a stringed instrument, like harmonic rupture would only last a few moments, and all three battleships pressed through.

Damage reports came through and were filtered to her station. The Remembrance was a tough old gal and had done this dozens of times over the millennia. The crew was well-trained, and minimal damage had occurred. She looked at the reports from the Shadowfall and Eternity. The Eternity had sustained heavy damage to its shields. She briefly considered sending her own engineers to assist but withdrew the thought and turned to the transit lands beneath her fleet.

A sprawl of villages led to a city in the distance. The race appeared to be primarily orcs and were already fleeing from the judgment in the skies above them. The threat assessment board on her bridge had populated and was slowly eliminating possible dangers. The powerful scanners picked up a deep underground cavern with a hibernating purple worm. It was stirring from the disturbance her arrival had created. If it surfaced, then all the towns would be destroyed.

The next threat was a tier-four core in the city. Most likely, a powerful local mage or even an angelic in charge of this region on the transit. A sensor operator was tasked with specifically with tracking the tier four core’s movement.

Deserae opened communications; she was not happy, “Andromeda, my port shields have failed. I will need a month to repair them!”

Andromeda considered Deserae on her screen. Her ship was probably damaged intentionally so she would not have to follow to the other side of the transit and transition to the eighteenth layer. Deserae’s average engineers would need a month to repair the damage. She briefly considered sending help again and decided against it. “Remain here. The purple worm will likely surface, and you can slay and harvest it. After that, you can play with the locals to your heart’s content, Deserae.” She considered for a moment before giving an order. “I expect you to be here on our return trip Deserae.” She tapped some commands on her armrest. She was sending an alert to her spies on the Eternity to make sure her orders were followed.

Deserae was reviewing the sensor data feed from The Remembrance. Deserae looked up, “It is old and over two hundred feet in length. It will yield a considerable harvest.” She sounded slightly placated. The blood of the beasts was sought after for enriching the soil to grow plants requiring aether to mature.

An alert was sent to her screen, and Andromeda reviewed it. The tier four aether core was fleeing the city. It was not a surprising development. On her ship alone, there were hundreds of tier-three cores and thousands of tier-two cores. Andromeda herself was lower tier six, and that alone was powerful beyond the tie four abilities to handle. But most likely, they were fleeing the city-sized battleships.

Aether cannons from the Eternity began to pound the ground outside a small village. Deserae was trying to still the worm awake and to the surface. She shook her head at the heavy-handed tactics of her subordinate.

Eshanya was on her way over with her court. When the transport docked, Andromeda ordered both battleships forward. The lands of the transit passed beneath the massive bulk. People fled, but Andromeda was not here to harvest the transit this time.

Eshanya arrived on the bridge alone, “How is the aetheric density?”

Andromeda put the data on the screen. “There are no issues. It is high enough to keep the ships powered. We should not run into a problem until we reach the nineteenth layer.”

A shocked look appeared on Eshanya’s face, “Why are we going so far? You could lose everything, Andromeda. If the battleships cannot sustain themselves on the ambient aether, they will fall from the skies!”

“We should be able to function on the nineteenth layer without issue, Eshanya. I am more concerned with the data I received when we transitioned here.” Andromeda brought it up on the large screen.

Eshanya stuttered, “This is not possible!” She looked at Andromeda. “These oscillations? How?” The data showed a magnitude much higher than normal for the fleet. All the battleships should have sustained significant damage.

“Someone is playing with the transit anchors. I think it is a ripple effect from the lower layers. The boy was right,” Andromeda said confidently.

“The babe incubus? We are here because of him?” Eshanya soured slightly. “We do you even care, Andromeda? Whoever is orchestrating this is extremely powerful. Why play in their backyard? Are we looking for a fight?”

“Do you know what happens when a thread is broken?” Andromeda asked.

Eshanya nodded, “Everything before it is cut from the Source and dies.”

“And,” Andromeda asked.

“I don’t know. Everyone in the transit is killed, I am presuming,” she guessed.

“That is true too. But also, the new bottom layer saturates with aether, like a bathtub without a drain, as it can no longer flow to the lower layers. It bleeds off quickly into the universe, but the planet at the new terminal end becomes a utopia,” Andromeda explained.

“So you want to control that planet? Don’t you control enough planets on the seventeenth layer? I have a bad feeling about this path we are on,” Eshanya counseled.

Andromeda did not fear much, “Whoever is doing this, I want to know how they are doing it. The why is of secondary concern. This knowledge could be our path to the sixteenth and even fifteenth layer!” Andromeda showed emotion. “I am actually content to leave Deserae here. This knowledge is not something I was her to be aware of.”

“Understood,” Eshanya echoed. She was already dreaming about reaching the closer to the Source.

The flight to the other end of the transit was relatively unhindered, and they went at a leisurely speed to absorb enough aether to recharge their ships. The transits were richer in aether so they wanted to be at capacity before they exited above the planet. An ancient black dragon briefly flew toward The Remembrance before fleeing when getting close enough to understand the size of the battleship.

They brought both battleships close to transition into the eighteenth layer from the transit. Andromeda talked to both bridge crews at once, “As soon as we transition, I want to find the portal to the transit to bring us to the nineteenth layer.” The crews nodded and prepared to transition. Each transit only connected two layers. You needed to exit and find the correct portal going down to the next layer.

As soon as the battleships exited in low orbit above a blue-green world, alarms started flaring. Andromeda methodically reviewed the incoming data. A sensor operator announced, “Two angelic cruisers in high orbit above us!”

Another sensor operator announced, “There is a fleet orbiting the moon as well.” He paused, “Two battleships and six cruisers. All angelic manufacture.”

“Quite the welcoming party,” Andromeda murmured. She said, “Any luck locating the portal to the lower layer?”

There was no response for long seconds, “Cruiser is firing on us!”

“The portal?” Andromeda asked impatiently.

A sensor operator replied, “Nothing! Not even the transit we just emerged from is on my screens. I think they have obfuscated them with illusion magic!”

“Fuck,” Andromeda rasped as she turned her attention to combat. “The two close cruisers would be flies to The Remembrance. The Shadowfell could also handle their fire but would sustain significant damage unless we could get into open space. The gravity of the planet was hindering movement.

She looked at the battleships, and other than their aesthetic design indicating they were most likely angelic manufacturer, she did not recognize the type. Eshanya was leaving the bridge, “I am going to the Shadowfell!”

She was already gone, and Andromeda had too many problems to counter her departure. “Bring up the aether cannons!” The order was dooming her battleship to stay here. If she entered this fight and expended the aether stores she needed to enter the transit, she either had to win or get into space. “Move us on this plot!” She sent navigation data to the pilots. “Open comms and see if they will talk.” That seemed unlikely since their attacks were already thudding against her shields.

“The transport has been shot down!” Came a cry from an operator. Andromeda followed the transport carrying Eshanya as it crashed into the planet below. It was going to be a hard crash landing, but Eshanya would survive with her magic. She was probably safer on the planet at the moment anyway, as the two battleships were moving to intercept The Remembrance.

“They are firing!” a defense station indicated the battleship. “It is aetheric disruptors!” he said, somewhat panicked.

Andromeda ordered the shields to cycle forward. Aetheric disruptors would halt her ship’s ability to use aether. She was still too low in the gravity to the planet. Any strikes on her antigravity engines would be catastrophic. And that is exactly where the strikes landed as the cruisers knocked the shields low enough for the disruptors to reach her engines. The port side of the massive warship dipped and it rise out of the atmosphere stopped.

The Remembrance was massive and broke the laws of physics with aetheric-technology. Without that functioning, it was a massive hunk of metal. The other battleship added its own fire, and the once mighty battleship was on its inevitable course toward the planet. Andromeda could only send the Shadowfell off in the other direction as all fire was focused on The Remembrance.

Andromeda braced for the impact with an assortment of spells and covered her bridge crew as well. Whoever had shot her down was going to face a reckoning.