

HELIOSPHERE 2265



REVELATIONS
ANDREAS SUCHANEK

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“Revelations”

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Sol System, Kuiper Belt, CAVE Research Station, 20 January 2266, 08:30 hours

Admiral Yuri Michalev added his signature to the final report of the day and pressed the “Send” icon on his pad. With his paperwork done, it was time for a drink, he felt. Stretching his stiff back and shoulders, the admiral stepped across to a sideboard crowned by a tray holding a variety of crystal decanters and flasks. Reaching for a flask filled with a golden yellow liquid, he poured himself a tumbler and returned to his desk. Michalev activated the massage function in his contour chair, before taking a nip of the 80-year-old vintage Wegan whiskey. Its peaty aroma flattered his palate, warming his throat and stomach.

When his reverie was broken by the signal tone of the desk intercom, Michalev was tempted to ignore it. He was tired and having difficulty focusing on his work. If his incompetent adjutant had come to deliver yet more bad news, he would throw the man from the nearest airlock himself. It was a course of action that he had often considered.

Michalev glanced at the display, and then stood abruptly in astonishment. A few drops of whiskey spilled onto his trousers. Ignoring his clumsiness – the smart fabric would repel the liquid – Yuri barked: “Come in!”

The door panels slid into the wall with a *hiss* to reveal the disheveled form of Florian von Ardenne. The scientist had been assigned to Michalev’s research project a few days ago and was tasked with driving the project forward.

“Please come in, Doctor”, said Yuri, beckoning impatiently to the thickset and rather rotund man. “Please, take a seat.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Von Ardenne took a seat across the desk from Michalev, lacing his fingers over his belly. As usual, his snow-white hair was a tousled mess, lending him the appearance of a dazed genius emerging from his lab.

“I hope you’ve got some good news”, said Yuri. Instinctively, he pushed his whiskey tumbler aside. Drinking real alcohol was frowned upon in the fleet. The bars on most ships, he remembered, were stocked exclusively with a selection of foul-tasting vitamin-caffeine drinks. Florian von Ardenne was known to enjoy a tippale and occasionally knocked back a tumbler in the lab. Michalev was willing to turn a blind eye as long as the scientist delivered results. “Care for a drink?” He pointed at the tumbler.

The scientist hesitated and then shook his head. “No thank you, Sir. Although I could certainly do with one. I’m afraid I’ve got some bad news.” He rubbed his eyes in exhaustion. “Building on Doctor Petrova’s work, we’ve carried out a number of scans in the hope of identifying a way to sever the connection.”

“And it can’t be done”, said Michalev tiredly.

“Not at present I’m afraid. I have no doubt that this problem can be solved, but we need more time.”

“We don’t have more time, Doctor.” Yuri all but hurled his tumbler at the wall. Struggling to contain his fury, he threw back his head and downed the generous measure of amber liquid in a single gulp. “Your security clearance grants you access to all of the documents submitted to the Admiralty from this project. Read between the lines, Doctor.”

“Do you think there will be a war?”

Michalev bellowed with laughter. “No! And *that* is the problem. There will be no war. Those useless farts in government will debate this to death. They’ll hold some speeches and impose some sanctions, but they will never fire the first shot. Not under President Ione Kartess. She knows the score – she’d never do anything to risk her popularity ratings.”

“But shouldn’t we be grateful for that?”

Michalev liked von Ardenne. The man was arrogant and had an exaggerated opinion of himself, but he didn’t kowtow and he wasn’t afraid to speak his mind. “I thought as much until now. But now you’re here to tell me that it will be months before a viable solution can be rolled out. We don’t have months.”

“But why?”

Instead of replying, Yuri activated his desk’s integrated holo-projector. A swarm of pixels glided upwards from the surface of the desk, coalescing into an image that floated in mid-air. “This is a recording of an engagement involving the interlink cruiser HYPERION and a Parlid vessel in the Elnath System. The images were shot by one of the ship’s exterior cameras.” Yuri stopped the recording just as a barrage of torpedoes struck the Parlid vessel. “*That* is why we can’t wait any longer. What do you think will happen when the public learns the truth?”

“The President will dispatch a fleet ...”

“... of diplomats - and what else could she do? Once the press gets involved, she will have no other choice. But as long as this information remains secret, the President could assemble a task force to attack the Parlids.”

“I can’t imagine that she would do that.”

“No, presumably not.” Yuri rose from his chair. “But I think the time has come to give our politicians a wake-up call.”

“What about Skolberg? Shouldn’t he know about ... Well ... You know what I’m referring to”, said von Ardenne.

For once Yuri felt something akin to pity for his rival. Since he and Admiral Elias Skolberg had met, the two had been at loggerheads on the Admiralty Council and in the corridors of power. But this was different. Weeks ago, Yuri had promised Doctor Irina Petrova that this was one weapon he wouldn’t use against Skolberg.

And if things worked out as he hoped, that wouldn’t be necessary. But if things went awry, he had a contingency plan to fall back on. Either way, the moment of decision was upon him.

He activated the internal comms system and ordered his adjutant to convene an extraordinary session of the Council. “And invite the President to attend”, he concluded.

Before Randall could voice his surprise, Yuri killed the line.

The doctor said his farewells and departed with a look of concern. Von Ardenne could sense the gathering storm.

Yuri paused a moment to gaze out of the porthole, then poured himself another tumbler of whiskey. *Rien ne va plus ... The die is cast.*

*

NOVA Space Station, Alzir System, 21 January 2266, 08:30 hours

“Sir, Concluding interlink flight in thirty seconds”, Lieutenant Peter Task reported in his typically lethargic manner from the navigation console.

Relaxing, Jayden leaned back in his contour chair and watched the holotank in the center of the command bridge. Moments later, the drive status icon on his console marked the ship’s transition to Pike drive. Still traveling at 0.45 LS, the cruiser sped towards the system’s inner planets, decelerating at a steady 3,700 m/s².

“Sir, establishing contact with FTL platforms”, reported Lieutenant Kensington from the tracking console. “Our code has been accepted, phase comms established.”

Ordinarily it would take hours for a signal from the ship to cover the more than 16 AU that separated the edge of the system from its inner core. To overcome this obstacle, a web of stationary FTL platforms covered