

CHAPTER NINE

—STAGING—

Jekotian Naval Fleet, Three Kilometres from South Islands Coast October 13th, 2985

Peace. Quiet. The last words one would expect to use to describe the largest naval movement in recorded history. Yet it was so. The Jekotian fleet gently sailed south, emitting little noise. The sun had just risen, and the ocean sparkled with a blinding light. Whales and dolphins lazily swam by the ships, occasionally making one of their melodic calls. Schools of fish became separated in the warship's wake, and pelicans and other ocean birds swooped down to claim their meal from the frigid water. Thirty warships, lead by three Raven Spear's whose size defied logic, sailed south.

"Jekotian Fleet Commander Denise Ralis to Southern Alliance Naval Defence, respond on frequency Alpha-Thirty Zulu-Five Omega-Six, over."

"SAND here, blanks loaded, cannons calibrated, we're ready to stage the defence. Standing by, over."

Now turning to one of her officers, Denise said, "Offline all countermeasures. Pass the message to the rest of the fleet. The show is about to begin."

"Yes, ma'am, countermeasures offline, passing message to the fleet." After a short pause, he continued, "Confirmations across the board, countermeasures are offline fleet wide.

"Ralis to SAND, commence the staging, we're ready, over."

"Affirmative, cannons are live, SAND out."

Countermeasures; a broad term used to describe any system designed to counter an incoming attack. Normally these systems could be suppressed, prevented from firing but still operating. This was not the case. Due to the Brenodi's skills with electronics, normal countermeasures would normally be hacked by field technicians, elite hackers trained in combat, and either destroyed, or turned back against the Jekotians. For these reasons, Jekotian countermeasures, in extreme cases such as TOVR, were shielded from all outside influence, including the very systems that control them. For these reasons, it was conceivable, even likely, that the ballistic missiles on the fleets 'missile boats,' small battleships with extreme range rocket artillery, would launch themselves at SAND's coastal cannons, destroying them.

SAND; Southern Alliance Naval Defence. The Southern Alliance's first, last, and only line of defence from naval attack. Founded in 2942, when both Jekotia and the Brenodi Empire were at full scale war, SAND was a necessary defensive network against the weekly raids. This was before the Southern Alliance signed trading agreements with both nations, when both nations were desperate for more resources and weapons. When created, the network consisted of a single 50mm cannon every coastal kilometre. Over the years, the network had been drastically upgraded to consist of a defensive array every kilometre. Each array consisted of five 150mm cannons, two anti-air flak batteries, a command center, a communications array,

and machinegun and rocket bunkers for arrays located near the shores. It was an even more formidable defence than that of Bren. A defence that would be sheer suicide to try to penetrate.

SAND staging their defence against a Jekotian fleet was the penultimate way to fool the Imperials into thinking that the Southern Alliance was at war with the Republic. And so it happened. As personnel on the outside decks of the Jekotian fleet took cover inside, cannons boomed in the distance. Plastic shells rained down, disintegrating on impact with the decks, or vanishing into the sea. The fleet responded with plastic shells of their own, coming short and harmlessly landing on the beaches of the island. The staging went on for twenty minutes, an endless commotion of cannons, before the Jekotian fleet sharply sailed west, away from the islands, feigning a retreat.

“SAND to Ralis, we’re dispatching dropships now. Your missiles should arrive momentarily, over.”

“Ralis here, good to hear sand. I trust we didn’t hit anything. None of your shells did any damage, over”

“No, we’re good. Every shell hit the beach like planned. We’re recovering them for recycling now, can’t have the Imperials finding them, SAND out.”

“Ma’am, Alliance dropships coming in heavy, ETA three minutes, they have the ordinance,” an orderly informed her.

“Good. Have the ‘missile boats’ activate their landing lights and have crew on standby to take the missiles on,” Ralis told the orderly, now turning to her communications officer, “As soon as Alliance dropships are clear, have the fleet reactivate all countermeasures and follow the pre-established route south. We have a long voyage ahead still, I don’t want us losing any time.”

“Yes ma’am, notifying the fleet now. The missile boats have responded as well, they say they have a communications link with the transports and the crews are ready. They estimate that the loading will be finished in roughly fifteen minutes.”

“Bring it in a little lower. A little more. Perfect! Release the clamps, your clear, have a nice day,” Dan shouted into his headset. They had been taking on missiles for the last twelve minutes, carefully moving them into position so that they would rest in the cradles. Dan walked over to the ten missiles, each approximately four metres in diameter and fifteen long, connected a power supply, and then tested the internal mechanisms. Small hydraulics activated, extending the casing fourteen metres, past the tail. Inside was plenty of room for construction supplies. Closing the casing, Dan then moved to the tail of the missile and tested the parachutes. One kilometre from its destination, the rockets would cut out, and the parachutes would deploy for half a kilometre before detaching. This would cause the missiles to slow, lessening the forces of its impact. Satisfied, he carefully folded the parachutes back into the missiles and closed the panel. He instructed the others to check the other nine missiles, and ascended the ladder to the bridge, reporting to the ships captain that the missiles were secure and undergoing final inspection. Looking to the east, he could see the other ‘missile boat.’ They were already finished, and the missiles were being lowered into the hold by a surface elevator. In the distance, he heard a massive horn sound; the auxiliary signal for the fleet to change bearing farther west.