

CHAPTER 16: UPGRADE

Log date: February 23, 10,000 of the Eternal Era

Location: The New Jerusalem

Log note: A new perspective

AMY AND AMANDA STRYKER spent two weeks in the New Jerusalem, showing the wonders of that magnificent city to Velvet Dawn. Velvet was astonished at the things that she saw. It was unlike anything on her world – and, in truth, it was unlike anything that was on any other world. No other city would ever rival the glory of the New Jerusalem. That golden city had one thing that no other city would ever have: the holy presence of the Eternal One. The Most High God dwelt there, and the city was lit by His glory. No other metropolis, however large and wealthy, could ever even come close to rivaling it. It would forever remain as the premier city in the universe, for all the endless ages of eternity.

After a glorious two weeks in the capitol city of the universe, the Stryker twins finally received the message they had been waiting for: the Sentinel had made a breakthrough. He was ready to connect the wisp to the network.

Amy told the good news to her friend. “Are you ready to head back to the Artillect?”

“Sure,” Velvet Dawn replied. “I know we need to continue our mission, and I want to help. But why would anyone ever want to leave this paradise? This city has everything that anyone could ever want – love, joy, peace, and the presence of the Lord. If I lived here I don't think I would ever go anywhere else. There is simply no reason to. Nothing that is out there could possibly be better than what is right here.”

“But there *is* reason to,” Amanda said. “There is work to be done. We weren't created to sit around and do nothing, you know! We were created to serve the Lord and bring Him glory. To do that often means going to other worlds and working.”

“Right,” Amy agreed. “And in this case we have a *big* job to do! We need to learn the secrets of the *Vaughn*, and in order to do that we need your help. The Sentinel thinks he knows why you could see things on that ship that we couldn't. He wants us to go and talk to him.”

“I think it's because I have eyes. At least, that's what I've been told.”

Amy laughed. “C'mon, let's go. He's waiting on us.”

Velvet Dawn glowed agreeably. A moment later the three of them vanished, and reappeared in the Administrative Tower on the Artillect's homeworld. When they arrived they saw that they were not alone. A well-dressed man in a gray suit and hat was waiting on them.

“Thank you for coming,” the Sentinel said warmly. “It is good to see you again.”

“It's, um, my pleasure,” Velvet Dawn replied. “I've been told that you don't allow a lot of visitors to come here. So, thanks.”

The Sentinel nodded. “There are few people who have reason to come here. The Artillect is fully capable of operating on his own. The only ones who come here are those who are in authority over the Artillect and who have need of his services – along with the power to command them.”

“The Administrators,” Velvet Dawn said.

“That is correct. Since you are working with two Administrators, and since they need your help

in order to accomplish their goals, that gives you a reason to be here. And so here you are.”

“Right,” Amanda said. “So you said you had made a breakthrough?”

The Sentinel nodded. “I have analyzed your friend's physical structure and have come to understand how she works. She is a remarkable creature. There is far more to her than it appears.”

“Thanks,” Velvet Dawn said.

“So you can reproduce her sight?” Amy asked.

“I can. It was not an easy task, for her vision works completely differently from yours. She has eyes, but they are not like your eyes. You see by means of electromagnetic radiation, which is received into your eyes and processed by your mind. This allows you to see some things, but other things are hidden – such as wavelengths that your eyes cannot receive, or forms of matter that do not interact with light.”

“But we do have the nanites,” Amanda pointed out. “They give us much broader range.”

“That is true. But even they work on the same principle. They are much more complicated, of course, and they use some clever tricks to enable you to see things that are light-years away, but in the end they are not so different. But Velvet Dawn's eyes work on a completely different principle. Her eyes do not receive information; instead they actively probe the universe on a very fundamental level to see what is really there. She can see forms of matter that we cannot detect – or that we can only detect with machinery that is too complex for our nanites.”

“Really? How is that possible?”

“We can study the exact mechanics later,” Amy interrupted. “The bigger question is this: can you upgrade the nanites to give us that same ability?”

“I believe so. Originally it would have been impossible to do this, but by copying the mechanisms in your friend I have been able to devise a solution. It seems that mankind still has some things yet to learn. I have tested this ability on a limited scale and can now see more equipment on the *Vaughn* than was visible at first. However, I do not know if this will enable us to view the creatures that Velvet Dawn saw. The ship still appears to be empty, and I have no way of knowing if it is truly empty or if there is something there I cannot see. I also do not know if we will be able to communicate with this new race of aliens. You must find one first and then we will make an attempt. Are you ready for the nanite upgrade?”

“Sure,” Amy said.

“Sounds good to me,” Amanda agreed.

The Sentinel turned to Velvet Dawn. “How about you? Are you ready to be connected to the network?”

“Of course. I want to help, and if this will help then I want to do it. Everyone has been so very good to me. This is the least I can do in return. If this will help us track down whoever built the *Vaughn* then I'm in.”

“Very well,” the Sentinel said. He paused for just a moment. “It is done.”

In that brief moment the Sentinel did several things. He connected to the nanites that flowed through the twins' bloodstream and upgraded them. In less than a second the nanites were reconfigured to have Velvet Dawn's sight capabilities. The twins would now have the option of seeing things that had been hidden from them before.

Once that upgrade was completed, the Sentinel deployed another set of nanites into Velvet Dawn. These nanites were not the same as the ones in the twins. Since Velvet Dawn was not human, she needed a very specialized type of nanomachine – one that would integrate into her body and

mind. It had taken the Sentinel a great deal of effort to create a new class of nanite and give it the same abilities as the ones used by the twins. But, with the help of the Artilect, he had accomplished his goal.

The Sentinel watched carefully as the nanites were deployed throughout her body, to make sure that there were no problems. To Velvet Dawn it was the process of just a moment – something that happened in the blink of an eye. The Sentinel, however, was aware of the passing of each nanosecond. To him it was a long and detailed process.

But it was a process that worked. He had tested it millions of times in simulations that perfectly replicated Velvet Dawn's biological structure. It had worked then and it worked now.

When the nanites took effect, Velvet Dawn gasped. The world around her instantly changed in ways she had never even imagined. The wisp darted around the room at high speeds, glowing ever brighter. “This is *amazing!* I can see everything. Not just the things on the surface, but the things under the surface. I can see things that are nearby and that are really far away. I feel like I can touch everything and go anywhere I want. It's – it's so strange! I'm not just *looking* at things anymore. It's as if the universe is made up of lots of blocks and I can rearrange them in any way that I want.”

“That's because you can,” Amanda said.

Velvet Dawn flew back to the twins. “I have so much knowledge now. I could create shapes before, but now I can do so much more! I can make ships, and chairs, and tables, and houses. I understand things that I didn't understand before. I can even understand things that I didn't even know existed! Is this what it's like to be you? Have you always been like this?”

Amy laughed. “Not always. There was a time, a *very* long time ago, when we didn't have the nanites. But they are nice, aren't they? The nanites give us lots of options.”

“They really are. I never imagined it would be like this! Oh, Sentinel, thank you. Thank you very much. This is an amazing gift. I promise I'll use it well.”

“You are welcome,” the Sentinel replied. “It is always a pleasure to be of assistance.”

Amanda spoke up. “I think it's time to get to work. Velvet, can you take us to the *Vaughn*?”

“Let me see,” Velvet replied. “Oh! That is amazing. I know right where the ship is in relation to where we are. In fact, I can actually *see* the ship! In my mind. And I *do* know how to take us there. Why, it's easy! All I have to do is—”

In that instant the three of them vanished and reappeared on the *Vaughn*.

“—do that!” Velvet said triumphantly.

“Nicely done,” Amy said. “Thanks. Now it's time to track down some life forms!”

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The group began by searching over the ship from top to bottom. The nanites were working splendidly. They could see all sorts of things now – things that had been hidden from them before.

“This is really remarkable!” Amanda said. “Who could possibly have built this ship? Who knew that this type of construction was even possible? The Sentinel had never seen anything like it before. It was even new to the Artilect.”

“Whoever built this has a completely different take on science than we do,” Amy agreed. “Which is difficult to understand, really. How could there be a race that is this advanced and yet is still completely unknown to us?”

Velvet Dawn spoke up. “Maybe they don't leave home very often. If they never went out to

explore then how would you ever meet them?"

"But we've explored the entire universe!" Amanda pointed out. "The Artilect cataloged every planet, every star, every comet, and every asteroid. If this race was out there somewhere then we would know about it."

"Maybe it's hidden," Velvet Dawn suggested. "The universe is a big place, after all. If they live in that pocket universe then that would explain how you missed them. Their home may be in a place where you just can't reach."

"That's possible. What we really need to do is find them and talk to them."

"And that means waiting for one to show up," Amy replied.

So they waited. While they waited they explored the new machinery that they could now see. Their primary goal was still to catch sight of another alien, but no one appeared.

Days passed, and the days turned to weeks. No one ever appeared. The ship remained empty, save for the three of them. Eventually the group ran out of things to study.

"I don't think there's anything else here that we can learn," Amanda finally said. "We've gone over this equipment a dozen times. It's fascinating and it's well-designed, but none of it gives directions back to the alien homeworld. There's also no indication of how this ship could possibly have crossed the barrier between universes and reached this place. It just doesn't seem possible with this equipment."

"So what should we do?" Velvet Dawn asked. "Do we just stay here and keep looking?"

Amanda shook her head. "I don't want to give up, but I don't think our continued presence here is very productive. My suggestion is to leave behind some nanites and have them alert us if anyone shows up. As soon as we get the message we can zip right back here and take action. In the meantime we can have the Sentinel conduct a full investigation of this ship. If there are any secrets here that we missed, he'll be able to find them."

"Sounds good to me," Amy said. "Besides, the reunion is coming up soon. We need to get ready for it."

"The reunion?" Velvet Dawn asked. "What's that?"

"Reunions are something that people do," Amy explained. "Every so often we all take time from our busy schedules to gather together into one place. We eat and talk and rejoice in the goodness of the Lord."

"Right," Amanda said. "We have a lot of friends and relatives that we don't see as often as we would like. Reunions give us a place and a time to come together."

"This reunion is May 3rd of this year. It marks the ten thousandth year of the existence of the new universe."

"It's hard to believe that we've been here ten thousand years, isn't it?" Amanda remarked. "It doesn't really seem that long."

"You two are *super* old!" Velvet Dawn exclaimed. "And to think that you even existed *before* this universe was created. That's amazing."

Amy laughed. "Age doesn't seem to matter as much as it used to. Maybe the years just aren't heavy anymore. Time just isn't a burden."

Amanda spoke up. "Speaking of which, Velvet, you've been away from home for a pretty long time. Would you like to go back to your homeworld? You can rest there and visit with your friends and family. Once the nanites on the *Vaughn* tell us that something has changed we'll come and get you."

"Or you can just tell me and I'll come to you," Velvet Dawn pointed out. "After all, I can *travel* now! It's pretty awesome."

Amy grinned. "That you can."

"Then that's what we will do. Thank you so much for bringing me with you! I've had a wonderful time. It has been kinda boring in a few places, but mostly it's been wonderful. Just let me know when it's time to begin the search again."

"We will," Amanda promised.

Velvet Dawn glowed at them one last time and then vanished.

"So what now?" Amanda asked.

Amy deployed the upgraded nanites throughout the *Vaughn* and programmed them to alert them both if they found anything. "Now we go to the Sentinel and ask him to conduct a thorough search of this ship."

"Which is probably something we should have done sooner."

"Probably. I just hate asking him to do things that we can do ourselves. Anyway, after that I think it's time to pay some people some visits."

"Sounds like a great idea to me!"

The twins then vanished, leaving the ship empty and alone.