

## CHAPTER 28: PATIENCE

**Log date:** August 24, 10,000 of the Eternal Era

**Location:** The Artilect homeworld

**Log note:** Sometimes the best plan is the easiest one

IT TOOK THREE DAYS for all six Administrators to assemble on the Artilect's homeworld. Although finding the lost world of the race that built the *Vaugn* was a high priority – so much so that the entire universe was following the story – each person had their own tasks that they were working on. Life in the Eternal Era was full of wonder and discovery. Each day brought with it new opportunities. There were countless trails to follow and none of them led to destruction or death. The old world of sin and suffering was gone forever and it would not be coming back.

At three o'clock that afternoon all of the Administrators finally reached the Administrative Tower. When Victor Stryker arrived he saw that Professor Grimes was already present and deep in conversation with the Sentinel. The professor rarely visited the Artilect in person; in fact, Grimes never set foot on his homeworld during the days of the old universe. Grimes was a scholar, not a technician. It was unusual for him to come here – but his expertise was always appreciated.

The next people to arrive were the Stryker twins. A few minutes later Nehemiah Temilotzin appeared, who was accompanied by Dr. Mazatl. Timothy Stryker was the last to reach the meeting.

Once everyone arrived Professor Grimes asked them to take a seat around the conference room table. “Thank you for coming today! I will try to keep this short. I realize that all of us have much to do. Fortunately, the answer to this riddle is quite simple.”

“Have you really figured it out?” Amanda Stryker asked.

“It's rather obvious if you think about it. Let's take a step back and review what we know, shall we?”

Grimes made a small gesture in the air, and a holoscreen appeared. The screen showed a timeline. “Although this case has many unknowns, there are some things that we have firmly established. First of all, there is a race of beings somewhere in this universe which we have not yet located. We know that they are there but we cannot find them. This is because, for whatever reason, this race has not revealed itself to us.

“Now, it is difficult to determine why they are hidden. Perhaps it is due to their planet's unusual location, or perhaps they have shielded themselves the way that Tau Ceti was one shielded. Personally I believe that the latter option is unlikely. There are no enemies in the universe and there is nothing to guard against. This means that no one has any motivation to hide. After all, what is there to hide from? Therefore I think that this race did not hide itself on purpose. My guess is that they are in some sort of subspace pocket that we have not been able to detect and penetrate.”

“If so, it's certainly not for lack of trying,” Dr. Mazatl commented. “Even the Artilect couldn't find this hidden world. Penetrating the barrier that cloaks their home is apparently impossible.”

“Impossible for us – but *not* for them,” Grimes pointed out. “After all, they were able to launch the *Vaugn*. It left their homeworld and entered into our space, where we were able to find it. We do not have the means of reaching them but they *can* reach us. This opens up a number of intriguing possibilities. Did this race just gain the ability to cross into our space? Since we have never seen a ship

like the *Vaughn* before, that is a strong possibility. The other question we must ask ourselves is how much this race knows about our universe. The evidence is strong that they have detected the U16b anomaly and are trying to cross over into it. It is possible that they thought the technique that let them cross into our space would also enable them to reach U16b. However, we need to remember that the galaxy which is home to the Stryker singularity is uninhabited. This race may not be aware that we exist. It is entirely possible that they believe they are alone in the universe.”

Amy spoke up. “But surely they noticed us on the *Vaughn*! After all, Velvet Dawn saw them.”

“That depends on a number of factors. We don't know how their bodies work – or if they have bodies at all. They may have seen your friend and then dismissed her because she was not what they were expecting. We have learned quite a bit about the ship they built, but we know nothing about them. We don't know how they think, or what they care about, or what they are able to perceive. We don't even know if the creatures you saw are the same sort of creatures that built the *Vaughn*. For all we know they might have been some kind of robots or artificial construct. We simply don't know.”

“I see your point,” Amanda said.

Grimes continued. “What we *do* know is that this mysterious race desires to cross over to U16b. They created the *Vaughn* in order to study that anomaly and relay their findings. The *Vaughn*, however, did not cross over into that anomaly and is no longer relaying data. This leads me to believe that the ship has accomplished its purpose and, therefore, the race that built it has stopped using it. Yet its greater goal – to cross over to U16b – was not realized. Therefore we can assume that the race is going to try again.”

Victor spoke up. “So you think they're going to create another ship?”

“Certainly! This race has now acquired more data – data that they went to great lengths to obtain. I have no doubt that they are going to use this data to correct their past mistakes and make another attempt at crossing over. This means that eventually they will send another ship into our space. Now, I do not know how long this will take; it may be years before they have come to understand their findings and are able to build a new ship to take advantage of them. But I think it is a very strong possibility that they *will* try again.”

“Then this whole matter becomes quite simple!” Nehemiah Temilotzin exclaimed. “All we have to do is wait until they reappear and then contact them.”

“Quite so,” Grimes agreed. “It's just a matter of being patient.”

The Artillect spoke up. “Then I will continue to closely monitor the target area. When another alien ship appears I will notify all of you immediately.”

Amy spoke up. “Thanks! That sounds like a good plan to me. But I'm still a little confused. At one point the *Vaughn* had a crew. Then its crew disappeared – but the *Vaughn* stayed here. How did the crew get back home?”

“That is an excellent question,” Grimes replied. “We would have to know much more about their physiology before we could give a reasonable answer. However, *you* are able to travel through space without requiring a spacecraft. In fact, all of us have that ability. Perhaps this race can do the same thing.”

“Then is it possible they will just zip straight over to U16b without a ship?” Amy asked.

“That is unlikely. If they had that innate ability then I am sure they would have simply done that and never bothered to build a ship at all. Now, it may be that you are right. Perhaps they will take the data and upgrade themselves. After all, that is what we would do if we were in their position – and if that happens then we will never see them, unless we find our own way into U16b and meet them

there. But since they built a ship once I think we can expect them to build a ship again.”

Victor spoke up. “All right. So let's suppose they *do* build a ship and one day it appears in space. The Artilect contacts Amy and Amanda and the two of them zip over to the *Vaughn*.”

“With Velvet Dawn,” Amy added.

“Right. So once they meet, what happens next? Do we have a plan for first contact?”

“Do we really need a plan?” Amanda asked. “I mean, we can just talk to them and explain who we are. Then we can ask them who they are. I don't think this will be hard. It's not like it's the first time we've ever met a new race of aliens.”

“Do we know that we *can* talk to them?” Victor asked.

“Well, not really, I guess,” Amanda replied. “But we can try. Once we find them I think we can work something out.”

Amy spoke up. “And once we're friends I'm sure we can get them to show us their home.”

“I think they have a great deal more to offer than that,” Grimes remarked. “As I recall, the Diano Corporation has been trying to reach U16b for some time and has never come close to succeeding. Perhaps if we join forces with this new race we will be able to jointly bridge the gap and reach that mysterious area.”

“I'll be sure to mention it,” Amy said.

Dr. Mazatl spoke up. “So Grimes, I take it your plan is to just wait for them to show up again?”

“My prescription is for patience and vigilance. I propose that we keep scanning that area relentlessly, year in and year out, until we see them again. We wait with determined anticipation and never give up. Then, when the aliens appear once more, we immediately take advantage of that opportunity and introduce ourselves. I believe this plan has the best opportunity of succeeding while consuming the least amount of resources.”

“It's also quite simple,” Timothy Stryker replied. “I thought you were going to come up with something bizarre and complicated!”

“It's easy to come up with a complicated plan,” Grimes said. “Anyone can do that. It takes a great deal more effort to design a solution that is simple and straightforward. Those plans tend to be the best.”

“Then that is what we'll do,” Nehemiah Temilotzin replied. “I think we have our course of action.”

The Artilect nodded. “I will continue to scan the area and will let you know what I find.”

“Thanks!” Amy replied.