

DISSONANCE

AURORA RENEGADES: BOOK TWO

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PART I:

LIMINALITY

*“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible,
make violent revolution inevitable.”*

— John Fitzgerald Kennedy

PORTAL: AURORA

(MILKY WAY)

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ANDROMEDA

INDEPENDENT COLONY

Galactic domination wasn't so difficult.

Olivia Montegreu's transport landed on the roof of the Andromeda Government Administration Center. It met with no aerial resistance, as the building's meager defenses had been disabled by her people on the ground an hour earlier.

Target 100% secured. Local defense force eliminated. All personnel accounted for. Casualties: 27%.

She exited the small ship and, instead of entering the building via the service access, strode to the low wall running the length of the rooftop.

An aquamarine ocean stretched to the horizon, and a salty breeze sent wisps of her hair dancing across her face. Andromeda. The colony had been aptly named: like the mythological princess, all it did was stand around being beautiful.

Worth little from a direct financial perspective, it nevertheless held substantial strategic value. Now that the pesky Metis Nebula problem was out of the way, many interests were looking to explore and expand into the Norma Arm of the Milky Way and beyond, toward the Galactic Core. From here, she'd be well positioned to *assist* in those ventures. The fact it also gave her yet another colony crowding in on the Federation's border? A nice perk.

Front-line recruitment of mercenaries and enforcers up 203% in the last three weeks.

Increase acquisition of Daemons, grenades and micro-bombs accordingly. Allocate additional cargo transports to deliver weapons as required. An unarmed mercenary is a useless mercenary.

She'd crushed the domineering personality of her Artificial in a matter of days. It now bent to her will, obeyed her commands and provided her a continuous stream of status updates without so much as a snide retort. She had no need of its opinion; she only needed its power.

She sensed the access door open at the other end of the roof, and it prompted her to peer over the edge. The street below was rather a disaster, what with the blood and bodies and barricades piled high. Galactic domination may not be difficult, but it did on occasion create a bit of a mess.

At the sound of multiple feet coming to a stop behind her, she finally turned to greet her guests.

A sweaty, bruised, beaten shell of a man sagged between the two men who held him upright and in their control. An open cut across his forehead dribbled blood into his left eye, causing him to blink repeatedly in a futile effort to clear it. The crumpled shirt beneath his jacket hung in tatters. Such a brave man, to have fought so valiantly.

"Good evening, Governor Karas. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Olivia Montegreu, and you work for me now."

His eyes widened in horror—a common enough reaction to even hearing her name these days—causing the stream of blood to divert down his nose. He jerked backward and tried to wrench away.

One of the guards produced a baton. A swift strike dislocated a knee, eliciting a howl of pain from the governor.

“Charming. Do as I say, and I’ll allow you to live. Attempt to cause further trouble, and you’ll join the rest of your administration.”

He struggled to stand tall and proud, but collapsed when his now useless leg gave way. “I won’t take orders from thugs.”

“Suit yourself.” She slid the hilt of her gamma blade down her palm, activated it and with a single flick of her wrist sliced his throat open.

“Throw him over the side. Let the news cams see him. Let the galaxy see him.”



A darker-than-black void stared back at Olivia from outside the viewport. She spent far less of her time at her primary headquarters on New Babel these days. Able to execute all but the most particular elements of her strategy with a simple intentional thought, she could be anywhere at any time and control what she wished.

So she did.

Twenty-four crates of Skies+ shipping out from Argo Navis per day.

Four initial distribution center destinations: New Babel, Atlantis, Pandora, Requi, diverging to thirty-six final destinations.

Divert 17.6% of production to Lab 2B at Dolos Station.

She had moved first against the independent colonies scattered along the northern border of the Senecan Federation, because they were quick and easy, providing maximum return for minimal investment. Small, with skeleton governments and barely token defenses. Zelones had long maintained a strong presence on each of the colonies—Cosenti, Argo Navis and Andromeda—and it was a trifling manner to topple their leadership and install her own.

The greater efficiencies and economies of scale she’d uncovered and implemented throughout her organization since joining with her Artificial were translating into money, and a lot of it. She was spending the windfall in equally large sums. On increased defenses for New Babel, so there would not be a repeat incursion by military forces. On new ships, new weapons, new worlds.

Forty-two crates of Daemon mode-locking mods and laser fiber upgrades shipping from New Babel and Cosenti every week. Increase of 42.3% in the previous two weeks. Projected 127% increase by the end of the month.

Upgrade assembly line 4C at New Babel plant and line 2A at Cosenti plant using prototype nanobot fabricator units: projected throughput increase of 12.3%.

Her next move, in truth already well underway, was to create chokepoints between the southern border of the Federation and the rest of settled space, including virtually all Earth Alliance worlds. This wouldn’t be done through outright colony control. As powerful as she was, she was not yet powerful enough to topple the leadership of Pandora, Romane, Atlantis or Pyxis, though some of the smaller, more distant worlds were on the list.

But through effective domination of the black market, on the ground and in the trading lanes, she would not merely be the ferryman to whom the toll must be paid. She would be the only arbiter left standing.

Eight new cybernetic mods developed at Dolos Station this week. Demand is now outstripping supply by 31.7%.

Expand Dolos Station manufacturing space by two new modules.

Funds allocated. Materials ordered. Job assigned.

Acquire suitable existing manufacturing facility on Argo Navis and repurpose for cybernetic mod production.

Estimated time until first run: 6 days.

Pandora had long fought her attempts to grow beyond her allotted share of its market, but there was nothing the colony's handlers could do to stop her if her competition no longer existed. Those competitors were now collapsing under the force of increased manpower, weapons, goods and credits. As well as the occasional targeted assassination.

Romane posed a more formidable challenge. But its citizens and government were nothing if not practical, and when the time came they would do what they must in order to survive. And the time was coming very soon.

She'd already bought ownership of the entire black and gray markets and criminal trade on Atlantis, even if no one, not even the law enforcement there, knew it. The magnitude of the proceeds which flowed from the wealthy spending their credits on illicit sins impressed her. The investment would pay for itself in—

5.2 weeks.

She glanced down at her arm, admiring the way the fine quantum circuitry glowed and pulsed. The web extending throughout her body had been painful to grow, but once it was done she enjoyed unprecedented access to all her quantum processes, plus a few valuable tricks. She hid her skin only when necessary, for in most encounters it served as a useful unspoken threat.

People feared what they did not understand, and they without a doubt did not understand her. Those who believed they did least of all.

She was something new.