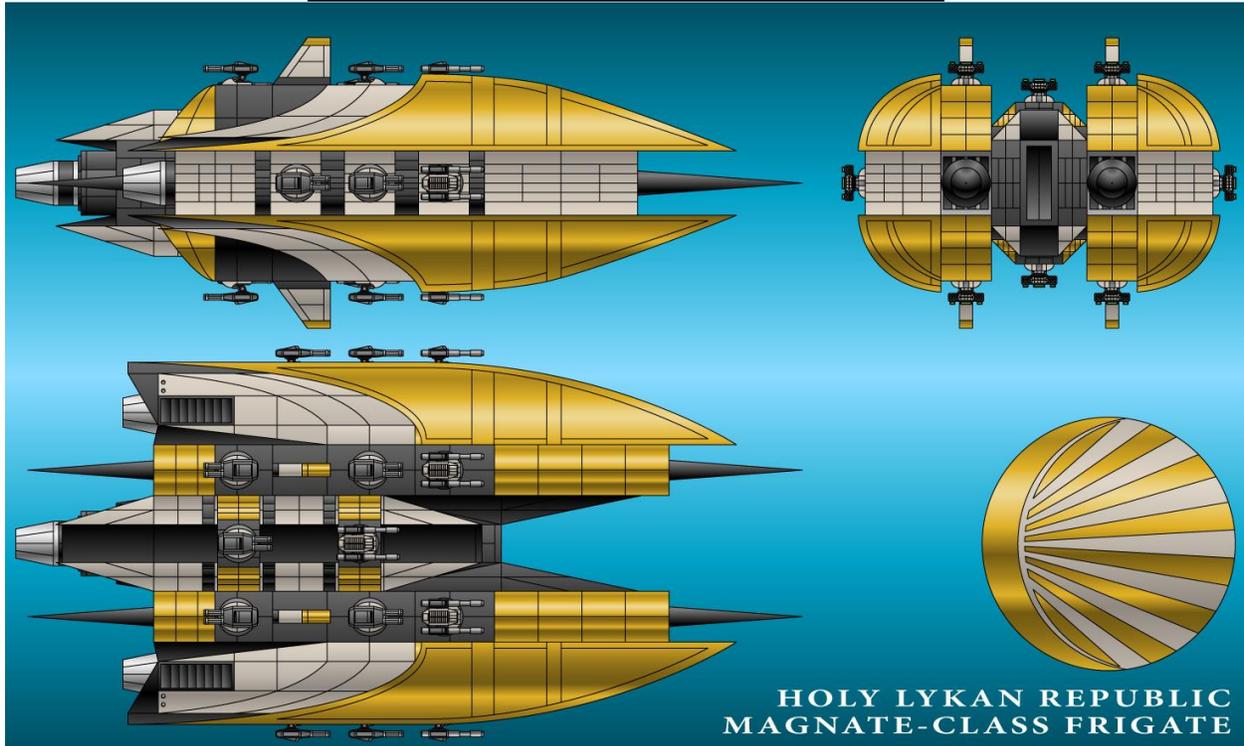


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VI: The Nations of Blood and Darkness



PART 2

Office of Admiral Trent, Novus Initium Navy Fleet Headquarters
Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen ("Light") System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:26am, September 24, 5434 A.D. (The Next Day)

"They should be arriving here shortly."

Admiral Trent was exhausted after the events that had occurred yesterday. He was promoted to the rank of Admiral, he promoted Captain Shannon to the rank of Rear Admiral to take over the Eleventh Fleet, and he met his new Commanding Officer Captain Dani from the Seventh Fleet. After that, things got a little "heated." He had received a call from his wife Laura who told him that Aja was at the restaurant that Laura and Amarria were eating at for lunch. Aja informed them about Trent's promotion before he had a chance to do so. Laura ended up practically talking his ear off about "secrets" but Trent made it clear that he only found out that morning and knew she was busy at work with her noonday broadcast.

That was when she told him about Aja wanting to recruit Amarria for a future mission involving the Tenebris. Trent was rather irate about Aja wanting further assistance from Amarria. However, he made it clear that Amarria is a grown woman and that she was old enough to make her own decisions including assisting the RCIA. Trent knew that the RCIA would only be selecting people that were among the best in their field of expertise, so if they were asking for Amarria, there was usually a very good reason for them doing so. Amarria ended up taking Aja's offer to help the RCIA, though from what Trent was told later by Laura, Amarria was looking for something to do that was exciting. It looks like she got her wish.

They did, however, go out to dinner to celebrate Trent's promotion. They went to a Japanese-style restaurant located on the edge of Crystal River in downtown Luminous. Crystal River is best known for the multitude of fancy and popular restaurants and retail shops along both sides of the river. Afterwards, Trent went to one of the shops to look for the refreshments on the list provided by Captain Dani of what the senior staff preferred to drink. He took them home to get them cold before bringing them to his office to serve once they arrive. Trent put them in a miniature cooler to keep them chilled for when they arrive, which should be any moment now.

Trent was personally curious to know how different the bridge crew of the *Marshal* would be individually compared to the bridge crew of the *Renaldo*. Based on his interaction with Captain Dani, he had a feeling that they would be just as strict as she was due to how their former Flag Officer had treated them. He was willing to bet they all had odd expressions on their faces when Dani asked them about their favorite drinks. He was expecting those same expressions when he tries to get to know each of them better in a more relaxed setting.

Because he was expecting more people, he requested additional seats for the sake of this meeting. They were delivered a moment ago by maintenance staff and they would be taken out of his office once Trent notified the staff when he was done. He had the seats arranged in an arch in front of his desk including the two seats that were originally in the room. There were six seats in total, which was a bit of a surprise when he ordered the chairs and the drink list. Not only was there a Commanding Officer, there was also a tactical officer, communications officer, and a helmsman. The other two he was not expecting was an engineering officer and a science officer with stations on the bridge. Apparently, the *Marshal* was one of the few ships whose bridge was converted to remove the operations station from the bridge and replace it with the engineering station. The science station was a completely new addition to the bridge and sat opposite of the tactical station in relation to the command station. These additions were being tested on the stealth vessels but apparently the flagships of the first ten main fleets got these additions recently. Trent had not heard whether the *Renaldo* was getting these changes or not, but the new arrangement may make things confusing at first when he steps onto the bridge for the first time.

His door soon chimed, indicating that someone or rather some people were waiting to enter his office. Trent checked the time on the clock on his desk. They were right on time.

"Enter," Trent said as he stood up from his seat.

The doors soon opened as five ladies and one gentleman in uniform stood in the doorway. One of the ladies was Captain Dani that Trent met yesterday. They walked in and formed a line standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Dani on Trent's far left. They all saluted as the doors closed.

"Captain Dani and the *Marshal's* bridge crew, reporting as ordered, sir," she said.

Trent tried to keep his emotions in check. He never saw such protocol being used. Admiral Coleman's institutionalization was going to take some time and effort to remove. He knew this was going to be the case, but he didn't know how bad it was going to be. Even the bridge crew of the *Renaldo* was not as bad as the *Marshal's* bridge crew.

Trent decided to return the salute.

"I welcome you all," Trent said. "I am Admiral Trent, former Flag Officer of the Eleventh Fleet aboard the *Renaldo* and your new Flag Officer of the Seventh Fleet."

Trent brought his arm down and directed their attention to the chairs in front of his desk.

"Please, take a seat and relax," Trent said. "Protocol is nowhere near as strictly enforced in my office as you all have been used to under former Admiral Coleman. You can relax here."

The bridge officers, excluding for Dani who expected, this looked at each other in bewilderment before everyone approached the seats. Even as Trent sat down, he could tell they did not know how to react to his lenient attitude.

“So,” Trent said, “before we begin, Captain Dani and I met yesterday, and I requested for her to get drink orders from you all. I have them right here.”

Trent opened the cooler by his desk and took out the first drink. He took the liberty of putting their names on the drinks to help get to know them by name.

“So,” he said, “which one of you is Kristi?”

“I am, sir,” the lady third from his left said as she raised her hand.

Trent bought up a bottle of water from the cooler.

“So, you wanted just water?” he asked.

“I try to avoid drinks that would upset my stomach,” Kristi said.

“I can understand that. Here you go.”

Trent stretched his arm out with the bottle in hand towards her. She seemed a bit confused at first but got up to get the bottle. Once she grabbed it, she turned around and sat back down, still looking confused as was everyone else.

“Just so you know,” Trent said, “I am very approachable. I was like this on the *Renaldo* and I intend to be that way on the *Marshal*. I kept a full mini-fridge with drinks to provide for anyone in my Ready Room and I intend to do the same on the *Marshal*. I did forget to mention this after handing the first drink out to Kristi, but I would like to know your rank and your position on the bridge if you would. I already know Captain Dani’s, which reminds me. Hang on a moment.”

Trent reached into the cooler and pulled out a bottle of strawberry-flavored milk with her name on it.

“Here is your strawberry-flavored milk,” Trent said as he handed it towards Dani.

She was suddenly embarrassed as she got up to get the drink from Trent.

“Is something wrong?” Trent asked as Dani got the drink from him.

“I was hoping you were not going to announce the drinks,” she said.

“Why don’t you want me to? You knew the drink orders of the other bridge officers since they had to tell you. It only seems fair that they know your choice as well.”

Dani looked at the other members of the bridge crew who all had expressions of curiosity on their faces. Dani sighed.

“It is a drink that I have enjoyed since childhood,” she said. “I was concerned that it was a bit too ‘girly’ for a Commanding Officer to have so I usually drink these in private.”

“I know a thing or two about childhood drinks,” Trent said. “I’m pretty sure the rest of the bridge crew knows how that is. I personally have no issues what one drinks if it is not something that affects your job. If you want to drink strawberry milk, then do so. I’ll make sure to keep some fresh in stock in my Ready Room once I have settled in.”

“Thank you, sir,” Dani said.

She then returned to her seat. Trent looked at Kristi.

“Now then, Kristi,” Trent said, “what is your rank and position?”

“My rank is Lieutenant Commander,” Kristi said. “I am your Chief Engineer.”

“So, you are manning the Engineering Station on the bridge. I’m still trying to get the reasoning behind having a station on the bridge since my last ship does not have one of those.”

“It was decided by the Admiralty after reviewing bridge operations after the war that it is easier for situation reports relating to that department to have the station on the bridge to keep

the Commanding Officer aware of that department's situation since Engineering is obviously important to ship-wide functions."

"That is understandable. How long has that station been on the bridge?"

"It has been there for a couple of weeks now."

"I see. It is good to meet you. I better get to the rest of the drinks for the rest of you."

Trent reached into the cooler and pulled out another drink, this time a can of green tea infused with payora, a fruit similar in shape and flavor to the apples of Earth that is grown in abundance on several planets. They come in multiple varieties of colors and flavors ranging from sweet to sour. This can was labeled with the name Sierra on it.

"The name Sierra is on this can," Trent said. "You like green tea with sweet payora?"

The woman second from the right raised her hand.

"That's me," she said as she stood up. "My rank is Lieutenant Commander in charge of the Communications Station."

"Is there a story behind this choice of drink?" Trent asked as he reached out towards Sierra with the can in hand.

Sierra walked up and grabbed the drink.

"Unlike Kristi who doesn't want something to upset her stomach," she said, "I have a very sensitive stomach that results in me having a very specific diet. Carbonized and dairy drinks are drinks I cannot have but teas have always been my favorite drinks as they tend to relax me."

"What about the sweet payora that is mixed in?" Trent asked. "That doesn't cause any problems?"

"No, it doesn't. In fact, it eases my stomach, so I guess you can say it acts like a medicinal additive. I drink at least one of these a day after each shift to help relieve stress."

"Is the position that difficult, or was it how Admiral Coleman ran things?"

Sierra looked a bit scared to answer the question. She looked at the rest of the bridge crew to know whether she should answer that or not. It was not hard for Trent to notice her hesitation.

"I promise you that you will not get in trouble for your answer," Trent said. "Like I said, this is a relaxed meeting. You are free to speak your mind."

Sierra looked back at Trent and took a deep breath.

"It was how Admiral Coleman was running things," she said. "It always felt like we were under constant supervision, that he was watching us all the time. There was never a chance to relax."

"Was there any proof that he was watching all of you all the time?" Trent asked.

"There was one time when he was in his Ready Room and I felt like starting up a casual conversation about a topic I figured that we would be able to talk about. We were not in any situation that required us to be focused on our task, so I figured if we talked about something that would be engaging for all of us, it would help pass the time."

"That seems reasonable. No one wants to be bored and if you are not doing anything highly important, some casual conversation would help pass the time."

"Unfortunately, that was not the case with Coleman. He had a video and audio feed of the bridge in his Ready Room to monitor us while he was doing whatever he does in there. The moment I started that conversation, he immediately chimed in over the speakers of the bridge and told me to cut the chatter, that the bridge was a place of duty and not idle useless chatter."

"He did that? Even I don't monitor the bridge like that nor would I tell my former bridge crew to be silent if it wasn't important."

“He did, and I was always scared of my actions since then, whether good or bad. I think we all were like that when he was on board.”

“Well, I can tell you all this. I have no reason to monitor the bridge unless I’ve been given a very good reason to do so. If you want to stir up a conversation when there is downtime on the bridge, you go ahead and do so. For that matter, you can do so while I’m on the bridge. Believe me, I get bored occasionally, too, if I have nothing to do.”

Sierra let out a sigh of relief. It appeared as if a large weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Trent was starting to feel good about how things were going with his meeting based on Sierra’s reaction thus far. He was breaking down the wall they had, and they were starting to open up to him.

“We will take you up on that,” Sierra said.

She turned and returned to her seat. Trent looked back into the cooler and pulled out another drink. This time the drink was iced coffee with vanilla and caramel. Whoever wanted this drink obviously needed a pick-me-up to get through the day. The name on this drink was easy to identify who this was for. Trent looked at the only male bridge officer in the group who was sitting second from the left between Dani and Kristi.

“You must be Glenn, I take it?” Trent asked.

“I am,” Glenn said as he stood up. “My rank is Commander and I oversee the Science station.”

Trent stretched his arm out with the coffee in hand.

“So, you are Dani’s second-in-command of the *Marshal*, then?” Trent asked.

“That is correct,” Glenn said as he walked up and grabbed the drink.

“I’m curious though about the importance of the Science station on the bridge, though. I heard that it was to reduce the responsibilities of the Tactical station.”

“That is partially correct. Sensors used for spatial awareness when it comes to tactical purposes are rather limited. Having a dedicated science station tied to some recently installed highly sophisticated scanning equipment allows for better readings not only for the sake of more accurate identification of other craft in the area but of any spatial anomalies in the area as well that would affect our ship and fleet functions.”

“I see. I’m surprised it was not installed a lot sooner.”

“Originally they were installed in dedicated science and research vessels as well as colonial vessels during the Expansion Era. It was thought that they didn’t need to be installed in military vessels and for a long time that was true. However, in the advent of the First Interstellar War when our forces did not have the luxury of sending such vessels into hostile territory, it was decided to install the equipment should the need arise to jump into unknown space once again.”

“I understand. Thank you for the explanation.”

“Not a problem, sir.”

Glenn returned to his seat. At least now it made sense as to why the Science station was added to the bridge. However, the explanation Glenn gave made Trent wonder if it was needed for a possible future conflict with the Tenebris. Obviously, the bridge crew of the *Marshal* had no idea about them at all but who knows how long that will remain that way. Hopefully it will be a long time before that happens, if it happens at all.

Focusing back on the task at hand, Trent reached into the cooler for another drink and pulled out a bottle of vitamin-enriched water that was cherry flavored. It had “Diana” on it.

“I have a bottle of cherry-flavored vitamin water for Diana?” Trent asked.

“That would be mine,” the lady third from the right said as she raised her hand.

She stood up from her seat.

“My rank is Lieutenant Commander and I am the helmsman,” she said.

“Rather straightforward,” Trent said as he reached out to hand Diana her drink. “I tend to enjoy vitamin water every morning.”

“Unlike caffeine in coffee, I tend to rely on the B vitamins found in those drinks for natural energy.”

“I figured you were the coffee drinker considering you are the one piloting the ship, at least during your shift.”

“Some people think that but unlike Glenn, caffeine makes me crash. That’s figuratively speaking, of course. I can’t get through my shift drinking coffee at all. I tried it one time and I wanted to fall asleep instead.”

“Well, whatever works for you, I guess. Your health is just as important and if coffee doesn’t work, at least you managed to find an alternative.”

“Thank you, sir, and thank you for the drink.”

Diana turned and headed back to her seat. Trent could see that there was only one person left in the entire group and she was sitting on the far right. She looked a bit nervous.

“I guess you are the only one that remains,” Trent said as he reached into the cooler.

There were only two drinks left, one of which was his. He could tell which one was his based on the shape of the bottle, so he grabbed the bottle that did not feel like his. He pulled it out and looked at it to confirm. He grabbed the correct bottle. Trent read the name on the bottle, and then looked at the woman again sitting on the far right.

“So, your name is Khara?” Trent asked.

“It is,” Khara said as she stood up. “My rank is Lieutenant Commander and I oversee the Tactical station.”

“So, you were the one that ordered this rather interesting drink?”

“Yes I did, sir.”

Trent brought it up for everyone to see. It was a bottle of almond-flavored soy milk.

“I’m guessing you are lactose intolerant?” Trent asked.

“I am,” Khara said. “Since we have not had any parties on the *Marshal*, it has not been an issue except when it comes to meals. The ship’s cooking staff knows of my condition, so they make sure that some of the food is made to where I can eat it. This is especially true for anyone else with food allergies.”

“Wait a moment. Let’s back up for just a moment. Did I hear you say that there have not been any parties at all on the *Marshal*?”

“That’s correct, sir.”

“Why are there no parties on the *Marshal*?”

“I think you already know the answer by this point as to who didn’t want them, sir.”

“I guess I do. I have never known someone so strict with their command that they don’t even entertain the thought of celebrations for events with the crew. Are you saying that he didn’t even throw a party for either Republic Foundation Day or for any national holiday?”

“His idea of a ‘celebration’ is an inspection of the crew throughout the fleet. He apparently believes that such events such as parties were a waste of the military’s time and resources that could be better used to ensure of the military’s combat readiness when needed. This was unfortunately reinforced during and after the First Interstellar War.”

“Has he not heard of a little thing called ‘morale’?” Trent said as he handed Khara the bottle. “Based on what all you have told me, he ran a VERY tight ship, more so than he really should have. Do any of you know why he was like that?”

“Considering that he never really opened up to anybody,” Dani said, “none of us know for sure why he acted the way that he did. I doubt any of us ever will know the reason as to why since he recently retired.”

Trent sighed as Khara returned to her seat.

“I have a lot to undo of his strict regiment,” Trent said. “I need to get the crew’s morale up and for them not to be so strict anymore. Adherence to protocol is one thing when you are in combat or in the middle of a war, but that does not need to be the case when we are not in either of those scenarios.”

“So, that is the goal for your entrance you were planning for tomorrow?” Dani asked. “You want to help the crew unwind from that state of mind while Coleman was in charge.”

“What entrance are you talking about?” Glenn asked.

“That was something else I wanted to talk to you all about,” Trent said. “Before we begin, though, I have one more drink in the cooler.”

Trent reached in and grabbed his drink from the cooler. It was a bottle of Crystallis, a soda based on the ancient Japanese ramune drinks that were clear or colorful depending on the flavor and were lightly carbonated. He set the bottle on his desk.

“Just so you all know,” Trent said with a smile, “Crystallis is my favorite drink. Now we know each other’s favorite drink.”

“I take it there is a reason for you getting those drinks, correct?” Dani asked.

“Well, I needed to know what to stock up on in the fridge in my Ready Room. The other is for you all to know something about yourselves that your fellow crew members did not know about you before. Do you all feel a bit better about having others know something about you while finding out what the other person prefers, too?”

All six of the bridge crew officers looked at each other with curious expressions on their faces, but soon started to smile and feel a bit relieved. Dani looked at Trent.

“I think I can say with certainty ‘yes’ to that question for all of us,” she said. “You were trying to get us to open up to you and to each other, weren’t you?”

“That is correct,” Trent said. “I did the same thing when I took command of the *Renaldo* years ago. Now their new Flag Officer, who was once the Commanding Officer under my command, will be carrying on that method of morale boosting for the Eleventh Fleet. Starting with you all, I intend to help boost morale within the Seventh Fleet and the entrance I intend to make tomorrow will help with that. Allow me to go over that in detail with you all...”

* * * * *

Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:33am, September 24, 5434 A.D.

“I wonder how she would react to me telling her about this.”

Drew had looked over the results of his inquiry into Head Agent Aja. He had requested for an investigation to be done by the Republican Bureau of Investigations, a separate entity from the Republic Central Intelligence Agency. Head Agent Aja would not be aware of this investigation nor would she have any control over it since she is not the head of the RBI. This

would allow them to conduct their investigations without interference from the RCIA. Drew was surprised how fast the RBI could get results from their investigations, but that agency has always been known to be fast, efficient, and very thorough. As Drew looked over the tablet with the results, he had already requested for Head Agent Aja to come to his office for a private meeting. He did not give her any details about the matter, only that he had something important to talk to her about.

After reading the results of the investigation, it was becoming quite clear what was driving Aja's investigation of the Tenebris cult.

"*Supreme Chancellor*," Drew's secretary said through his terminal, "*Head Agent Aja has arrived.*"

Drew pressed the button on the terminal.

"Send her in," Drew said as he turned off the tablet's screen.

The doors soon opened as Aja stood there with a rather somber expression on her face. It was unclear why she had that expression, but it may be because she had no idea why she was called to his office.

The doors closed behind her as she walked into the room.

"Head Agent Aja," Drew said. "Thank you for coming. Please, have a seat."

"Why did you call me here today, Supreme Chancellor?" Aja asked as she sat in one of the seats in front of Drew's desk. "I'm waiting to see if the *Cavalier* has gotten a clearer signal from the transmissions the ship first detected."

"I understand but this is rather important. You and I need to have a talk about your odd obsession with the Tenebris cult."

"What more do you want to know? I already told you that due to the lack of a proper investigation of six centuries ago, a potentially dangerous and disturbing religious cult could be continuing to practice their religion outside the Republic's law and jurisdiction."

"That may be so, and I know you hate how that whole event was handled, but there is more to it than I think you are letting on."

"What sort of pointless speculations are you going on about now?"

"Tell me something, then. When you were at the Central Library with Amarria, how much of the genealogy of each family did you investigate?"

Aja was surprisingly quiet for a moment. It looked like Drew may have been on the right track with confronting Aja about the results of the investigation.

"Only enough to see who all was responsible at the time of the event," Aja finally said.

"Are you sure?" Drew said. "The surveillance cameras at the Central Library showed you focused on the genealogy of one of the families specifically, namely the Aspergillus family."

"Well of course I focused on them! They had family members in the Republic forces that were deployed to the Tenebris colony that aided in their escape from the law!"

"Of that I can understand, but the question I have is whatever happened to those particular descendants?"

Aja was quiet for a moment once again. Her expression changed to that of curiosity.

"Why would knowing what happened to their descendants be that important after so many centuries have passed?" Aja asked.

"Oh, I was wondering how those that descended from those traitors must feel knowing that their ancestors were accomplices in their distant family's escape from Republic justice?"

Aja was quiet, this time for quite a while.

"Something wrong, Aja?" Drew asked. "Are you contemplating my question?"

“I...,” Aja said hesitantly, “...am not sure how they would feel, sir.”

“Would they feel sick in their stomachs?”

“I believe so.”

“Would they feel like they were guilty of what their ancestors did?”

“I believe they would be, yes.”

“Would they feel...well...vengeful enough to make things right by going after those that they helped escaped in the first place?”

“Chancellor, may I ask why are you asking me all of this?”

Drew turned the tablet around that he had and propped it up for Aja to see. It was a family lineage dating as far back as one of the officers who helped the Tenebris escape, a member of the Aspergillus family. At the other end of that lineage was a very recognizable name.

That name was Aja’s.

Aja’s eyes suddenly widened as fear suddenly started to take hold of her.

“I had the Republican Bureau of Investigations research your family’s history,” Drew said. “It did not take them long to uncover this bit of information. It appears the records were being tampered with as if someone was trying to change them. Thankfully the RBI are just as good at their jobs as those in the RCIA.”

Drew set the tablet down on his desk as he brought his hands together, his fingers intertwined.

“You uncovered this bit of history during your initial investigation into the Tenebris with Amarria,” Drew continued. “I’m willing to bet that you were not expecting for this connection to appear when you first discovered it. For that matter, Amarria was so focused on her own research she didn’t notice how long you were gone, but the cameras caught your reaction and that was where the RBI started from after they were able to see what you were reading. I have no doubt that when you saw that family connection that you felt sick in the stomach, knowing that all your service to the Republic and the RCIA would be in vain if word about this connection to the Tenebris ever got out. So, you requested for me to send the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* in search for the Tenebris. If they were truly gone, your reputation and position would be secure. If they were found to still be alive and active, you would come up with measures to no doubt eradicate them from existence in some form or fashion. Am I hitting the mark so far?”

“I would say you may even have hit a bullseye,” Aja said. “So, now the question is what do you intend to do now that you know of this information?”

“I don’t count the actions of your ancestor against you, considering that none of his descendants were even aware of his actions. However, making this matter into something personal is something you should reconsider heavily. I’m concerned that this would affect your judgement in dealing with the Tenebris if they were actually found.”

“What about the rest of the RCIA or those in their service such as on the stealth ships? Are you going to tell them about my ancestry, too?”

“Right now, there is not a need to do so. The only time this would need to be brought up is if it is really necessary in any operations or possible negotiations involving the Tenebris.”

Aja was about to say something, as if to object to the thought that Drew had said. However, she withheld what she was about to say as she knew her words would be based on how she felt personally towards the Tenebris. This would have only served to prove what Drew had just said a moment ago.

“You make it sound like they had formed their own nation,” Aja said. “Are you certain that is the case?”

“No modern civilization can thrive without a form of government or structure to help keep them together. Even a form of social contract is enough to make sure that they would not destroy each other over the years. What that nation or government consists of is something we don’t know of yet, but rest assured we will learn what that is soon enough.”

“Am I to assume that my position is still intact for the time being?”

“It is for now. If you don’t take the matter personally or take it into your own hands without my consent, it will remain that way. I want you to remain in charge of the investigation, but I want you to do so without taking your genealogy into account. Bear in mind, you did nothing wrong and while your ancestor may have committed treason, it is not your responsibility to atone for what they did. We will leave that up to those who continue to practice that religion that was sick and twisted. Is that understood?”

“I understand, Chancellor. Will that be all?”

“That is it for now, Aja. I only ask that you take what I said to heart. You are a great agent, but I don’t want to see you fall down the wrong path because of your ancestry. If we were all guilty of crimes by our ancestors, I’m pretty sure we would all be accountable.”

“I understand, sir. I will do my best to continue this investigation objectively. Am I to assume that we will speak again when the *Cavalier* has any further developments?”

“Correct, unless something else important comes up before then.”

“I understand, sir. I will see you later then.”

Aja got up from her seat and headed out the door. As soon as she left, and the doors closed behind her, Drew leaned back in his chair. At least the mystery involving why Aja was so focused on finding the Tenebris was made clear. It was left to be seen if she would still approach the matter objectively once that cult was found.

That answer would hopefully be made clear once the *Cavalier* reached its destination.

* * * * *

Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier
On Route to Transmission Source, Southwestern Region
12:43pm, September 24, 5434 A.D.

“What did you just say?”

The *Cavalier* was more than a day into its trip towards the star system where transmissions were being detected. The communications officer decided to inform Luke about a few developments in the transmissions they were detecting. Now that they were closer, the transmissions were not as garbled, but they were still hard to make out.

“I can confirm, sir,” the communications officer said. “The transmissions are showing two distinct points of origin in the star system we are heading to. They seem to be close together.”

“You wouldn’t be able to determine how close they are together by chance, can you?” Luke asked.

“Not from this distance. We are still a couple of days away from the source. Hopefully the closer we get, the better their proximities to each other can be determined.”

“Do you have any idea why the transmissions are still hard to determine their content?”

“These may be short-range transmissions meant for others nearby within the system. In other words, they were not meant to traverse this distance while remaining clear in their content.”

“So, these transmissions were not meant for our ears but for whoever is nearby the broadcast. You said you noticed a couple of other things in the transmissions.”

“I did, sir. While I cannot get complete sentences from the transmissions, I did notice that there were English words in the transmissions that I could get.”

“Did you say they are in English?”

Luke drew a deep breath.

“Then it is them,” Luke said. “The Tenebris are still around. Are there any other words that you are getting?”

“Yes,” the communications officer said, “but it seems rather odd the words I am getting, though.”

“What is odd about them?”

“Well, it sounds like commands. It is as if they were fighting something.”

“Fighting something? Are you picking up any alien transmissions in the mix?”

“That’s the strange thing. Despite the static, I have not detected any other language in the transmissions that I am receiving.”

“Then what or who are they possibly fighting against?”

“Wait, I just heard a phrase just now. I’m hearing something about a ‘Tenebris Dominion’ in the transmissions.”

“The Tenebris Dominion, you say? Well, at least we know they formed some sort of government but how it runs remains to be seen.”

“Wait a moment. That can’t be right.”

“Did you get another phrase from those transmissions?”

“I did, but I may want to check just to make sure. Thankfully these are being recorded. Let me back up a moment and see if I heard that correctly.”

Luke was beginning to wonder what the communications officer had heard in the transmissions that would require rewinding them. The communications officer listened closely though their headset.

“I don’t get it,” the communications officer said. “I heard another faction name just a moment ago.”

“Could it be who they are fighting against?” Luke asked.

“Possibly, but it would not make sense. The name of the other faction I just heard was the ‘Draco Federation’!”

“Did you say Draco?” Luke asked, shocked. “That is the name of the largest family of the Tenebris cult! The Dominion is fighting the Draco family?”

“I can’t determine that or not but considering the names I am hearing, it cannot be just a mere coincidence based on the name.”

“What in the world is going on here? The Draco family according to the report was the most powerful and influential of the six families that followed that cult. For that matter, it was the head of that family that preached the cult’s views involving the use of blood to begin with! What could have possibly happened between them all after they fled?”

“Should we report this to the RCIA?”

“Not just yet. We need solid information as to what is going on. Based on what you have heard so far, the information would lead me to believe that the so-called Tenebris Dominion and the Draco Federation may be fighting each other based on the combat commands you seem to be hearing and how close the transmissions are. However, we don’t know why they are fighting and

for what reason. As odd as it sounds, I hope they are continuing to fight by the time we get there so that we can determine what is going on and get a better understanding of the situation.”

“There is one other thing to consider when we arrive there,” Yuki said from her Science Station.

“What’s that?” Luke asked.

“We know that the cult had some of the brightest minds in their fields among their families. These fields could extend to other things than just biology as we are already aware of. We know that they have warp engineers based on how they got out here. Who knows what advancements they may have made that may or may not be inhibited by Republic law?”

“So, you are saying that blood and engines are not the only things we should be concerned about?”

“They have had over six centuries to develop into a full-blown society and science would obviously not be as hindered to meet their needs. This extends to their military as well. Their ships may have propulsion systems, weapons, and shields that may be equal if not superior to our own. There may be a chance that even our cloaking system could even be detected.”

“Maybe, but that is a risk I am willing to take for us to understand what is going on between them. How we would get that information will depend on our hacking team and if they can crack their systems without them knowing we are there.”

“Why would you want to hack their systems?”

“Somehow, I doubt that either party is willing to tell us what has happened on their own. Let’s not forget that the Republic was responsible for their exile in the first place.”

“Fair enough but we may want to make sure that our redundancies and failsafe systems are online and functional by the time we get there. There is always a chance for us to get back-hacked by them as well.”

“That is a very good point. We will check those systems immediately before we arrive. Communications, I want you to keep monitoring those transmissions for any other piece of information that we can get. I want to make sure that we still arrive before the fighting is over so that we can still be able to gather information on both parties.”

“I’ll keep monitoring the transmissions, sir,” the communications officer said.

Luke leaned back in the command chair as he stared at the main screen. The thought that the Tenebris may be fighting each other would work in the Republic’s favor as it meant that they would not be expecting any Republic vessels all the way out here nor would they be focusing on the Republic in general. However, a thought suddenly hit Luke.

If the rest of the Tenebris were indeed fighting the Draco family and focusing on their own conflict, would they really be the ones responsible for the accused action of somehow brainwashing the United Vitam State’s Executive Council recently? The RCIA and the Supreme Chancellor both believe the Tenebris were somehow responsible for using some unknown form of brainwashing through electromagnetic radiation not only on the State’s leadership, but also on the Lykans’ king that was responsible for promoting slavery over four centuries ago. Would they really be focusing on the matters of others if they are focused on their own battles against each other? It could be that those parties only started fighting recently, though, so they could still have been responsible, but the odds were beginning to go against that thought.

For now, it was best to leave speculation behind until they know for certain what is going on between those two factions and their involvement or lack thereof.

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*Hallway to Prime Minister's Office, Parliament Building, Capital City of Holy Charity
Planet Lykana, Heronia System, Capital of Holy Lykan Republic, Eastern Region
1:57pm, September 24, 5434 A.D.*

“I wonder what the Prime Minister wants to talk to me about directly?”

Ambassador Forneido was walking down the hallway towards the Prime Minister's office. It was not his first trip to the city of Holy Charity after it was constructed following the destruction of the orbital city of High Charity near the end of the First Interstellar War. However, the last time he was here was after the formation of the Holy Lykan Republic to be the official ambassador of the HLR to the Novus Initium Republic. A lot of meetings and communications between him and the Prime Minister were done by transmissions. It had been a while since he had been home but for some reason the Prime Minister wanted him to return home for a meeting that could not be transmitted.

As he approached the Prime Minister's office, he noticed that he was not the only Lykan ambassador being called by the Prime Minister. Sitting to his right near the doors to the Prime Minister's office were Ambassadors Foisnie, appointed ambassador to the United Vitam State, and Keocnei, appointed ambassador to the Camino Star Empire. Both ambassadors were appointed their positions only within the last couple of months as the State and the Empire started allowing Lykan ambassadors within their respective nations. The Liberigi Mandate was instrumental in their negotiations with those two nations after the Yintaka Conflict to allow the Lykans to send ambassadors along with representative of the other nations. The Mandate knew that it was important to improve relations between the nations to prevent another war from happening between them. The Mandate presented this point to the State and the Empire who were quick to agree with them that opening peaceful relations with the Lykans was better than the alternative. Of course, both the Empire and the State had their own rules for the ambassadors to follow, especially regarding the Lykans' religion and trying to promote it in their own nations. However, the Lykans had made it clear they would not promote or force their religious views on others because of how it was “forced” in the past on subjugated races, namely those that make up the State and the Mandate.

The thoughts of how much the Lykans had changed in such a small timeframe made Forneido both humbled and proud. However, there was no doubt that many Lykans have found themselves feeling regret for their actions while under the misguided rule of their past kings. Such remorse would take a long time before it would ever truly go away. However, schools still teach that part of their history do so not for the sake of tradition but to prevent such ways of thinking from happening again. Many beings had lost their lives in the First Interstellar War and the loss of the orbital city of High Charity that was deemed their race's first truly technological marvel were severe blows for the Lykans, some of which were Forneido's own doing. However, the Lykans were going down a suicidal path towards destruction and it took a huge revelation from the eyes of Humans to make them realize their mistake. It has not been determined yet who is truly responsible for setting the Lykans down this path when King Kseriki the Third over four centuries ago made his enslavement decree with the Vitams being their first victims. There were some rumors that the Humans have their suspicions as to who was responsible for the EM radiation, but he figured that if they truly knew who did it, they would have told everyone whose nations were affected by that form of mind manipulation.

For now, though, it was best to see why the Prime Minister called all his ambassadors back to their capital and why it was so important for them to be present in person.

Foisnie and Keocnei both noticed Forneido approaching and stood up to greet him.

“Greeting, Forneido,” Foisnie said. “It is good to see you again after all this time.”

“It is good to see both of you in good health,” Forneido said. “I trust things are going well in both the Empire and the State?”

“That depends on how you look at it,” Keocnei said. “The Empire is still rather distant towards ambassadors from other nations, including myself. They do try to meet our needs when it comes to certain things we require but they still don’t seem all that friendly to foreigners among their general population.”

“You have to keep in mind, Keocnei,” Forneido said. “They have been isolationists for a very long time. This mindset of theirs was further reinforced because of our race’s actions towards them in the past. They have been wary of outsiders for a long time and that was made apparent with their cloaking technology. They may understand now the circumstances as of late, but they are still a rather secretive and cautious people that are not quick to open their form of hospitality towards visitors in their nation. This mindset seems to be different when it comes to those Camino who visit or are representing their nation in other nations, such as the female Camino ambassador I know.”

“At least it is not as bad as those in the State,” Foisnie said. “Despite the fact that it has been made public about someone manipulating our king over four centuries ago and the State’s Councilors recently, they are still a bit reluctant to have any Lykan around, such as myself. I harbor no ill feelings towards them at all, but I cannot say the same for them.”

“Look at it from this perspective,” Forneido said. “While King Kseriki the Third made the decree to enslave the Vitams when they were first discovered, it was our ancestors that still followed his orders blindly while our own religious leaders didn’t even bother to question his interpretation of the holy scriptures. We are just as responsible for what happened to their races as Kseriki was for issuing those orders, regardless of why he issued them. I can understand that the State is still reluctant to trust us despite that revelation six months ago. That is why it is our responsibility to try to make amends for our actions. Our scientists are working diligently to find a full antidote to the drug that was introduced to the State’s ancestral home planets.”

“What about the scientist who developed the drug in the first place?”

“I have not heard all of the details but apparently he was deported to the State for his actions and sentenced to life imprisonment for developing the drug that led to the deaths of millions. His research was destroyed by his own hands a year ago when the Humans sent a covert unit to Dellino III near the end of the war. In other words, our scientists have to start all over again on the research of the drug and the means to counter its effects.”

“What happens if they do manage to find the antidote to the drug? Do we give the State those planets which are deep within our territory?”

“You haven’t heard? We have an agreement with the State that should those planets become cured of the drug that citizens of the Liberigi Mandate will help to restore the worlds and maintain them. Any pieces of culture that may have remained on those worlds will be given to the State after making sure the drug has not contaminated them. State citizens can visit those worlds or apply for visas to help redevelop those worlds, but it has been made clear that those worlds are part of the Holy Lykan Republic for the foreseeable future. We can at least work to restore and maintain them as atonement for our actions.”

“Since you seem to have the answers to our questions,” Keocnei said, “do you have any idea as to why the Prime Minister would have called the three of us back to Lykana? It was a rather long trip for Foisnie and me unlike yourself who only had four jumps.”

Forneido knew that Keocnei was referring to the jump gate at Dellino as it connects to the Sanctus System within the Novus Initium Republic directly and it only takes four jumps to go between the two capitals. However, neither the State nor the Empire has considered the same option and it did not look like that would build such gates anytime soon. There were plans to make a similar long-range jump gate linking the capital of the Mandate, but that was still a work in progress. The engineers in the Mandate were still not familiar enough with jump gate technology to build one on their own. Instead, they maintained the former Lykan-built ones within their jurisdiction. While the Lykans could build it for them, the Mandate Consulate was adamant about learning and building one themselves. Forneido found their determination to learn about advance technology inspiring albeit a bit stubborn in attitude.

“As to why the Prime Minister asked us here,” Foreido said, “I do not know. I’m assuming it must be important enough to ask us here as he did not want to transmit his message to us due to some sensitive information. What that must be, I would not know. He hasn’t told me or hinted at anything that I would have considered sensitive in nature.”

“Do you think it is some sort of proposal to present to the other nations?” Foisnie asked.

“Perhaps. Hopefully we will find out soon enough.”

Forneido looked towards the doors to the Prime Minister’s office. The door was flanked by two guards in protective armor. He remembered in the past how the Throne Room of the former King was once flanked by Royal Guard soldiers. The guards that protect the Prime Minister’s office were far from being adorned like the Royal Guard was, but the guards now were wearing functional equipment to protect them. Such adornment like in the past was deemed unnecessary as it would only serve as a reminder of the heinous past of their people. That is why the Prime Minister and the Parliament members wear anything “flashy” as the Humans put it. They all know this is a position of representation to the people for a certain period of time, not a position of power to rule like the former King and the Royal Court that was permanent. They used the model Humans have used for millennia including their attire when the Lykans converted over to a democracy and admittedly a lot of them liked how things are run now knowing they have a huge responsibility to the people who elected them into their positions.

The guard to Forneido’s left suddenly got a message in his earpiece, as evident when the guard raised his left hand to his ear that the earpiece was in.

“Yes, sir,” the guard said, followed by him lowering his hand. “Ambassadors, Prime Minister Voenis will see you now.”

The guard stepped back and to his right, revealing a door control panel that was behind him. He pressed the button to open the doors, which began to slowly slide open. The ambassadors slowly approached the doors as they began to reveal the Prime Minister’s office.

Forneido had been in the Prime Minister’s office before, but it always impressed him how large it was compared Supreme Chancellor Drew’s office. It was over twice the size of Drew’s office with a brown carpet, cream colored walls and arched ceiling, and gold accents on the arches that support the ceiling. The columns under the arch supports were made of laser-cut marble. Skylights in the ceiling allowed a lot of natural light to shine into the room. It was a bit extravagant in looks but Parliament decided on this look when they approved the design.

There was a long “coffee table” as the Humans called it in the middle of the room with two brown couches on each elongated side of the table. Cabinets lined the walls between the columns with pictures of the Lykana landscape above them. The Prime Minister’s desk located at the far end of the room was rather large and contained a glass surface with holographic projectors and controls embedded. The desk otherwise was made of marble just like the columns.

Six chairs were placed in front of the desk. A large set of sliding doors were behind the desk against the back wall. Those doors led right to the Parliament chamber to the Prime Minister's podium. That was the only way in to or out of to the Prime Minister's podium.

Prime Minister Voenis was sitting in his chair behind the desk looking at a holographic screen in front of him. He noticed the ambassadors entering the room and shut down the screen he was looking at. He stood up from his chair. Much like those in Parliament, his attire was like the suits worn by Humans but with a few exceptions, namely the gold-colored accents and lining on his cream-colored coat indicating his position.

Forneido had heard of Voenis while he was the Head Advisor to the King and the Royal Court. Voenis was the governor of the Xenian System located eight jumps away from the Heronia System. The policies he had put forth during his tenure as governor were questionable by the Royal Court due to the fact it was to help improve the lives of the slaves at the time. Voenis was secretly one of those Lykans that did not agree with the slave policy of the old Kingdom at the time, though this was not as secretive as he had probably hoped. However, it was no secret that when Forneido broadcasted the King's intention of abandoning his people on the frontlines, Voenis was one of those who voiced against that decision. His actions and his anti-slavery policies both before and after the fall of the Kingdom had won him much respect from Lykans and former slaves alike. Voenis threw in his candidacy for the office of the Prime Minister and was elected by more than eighty percent of the population.

Since then, his policies and ideology for the Holy Lykan Republic have earned him a well-deserved reputation of being the "founding father" of the nation. Indeed, he has played a pivotal role in the nation's foundation before being elected as the first Prime Minister. Some have even wanted to make him a saint, a status that has not been bestowed on anyone in a long while. However, Voenis has declined multiple times stating that he was not worthy or interested in the title. Rather, he wants to be a servant of the people, not someone who they would idolize or praise. Voenis has seen what putting someone in that position has done, namely the King and the Royal Court, and wants to avoid a repeat of what such power could do.

"Greetings, Ambassadors," he said with a smile that Forneido could tell was genuine. "I'm glad you all could make it here."

The three ambassadors lined up side-by-side. Forneido stood in the middle with Keocnei to his left and Foisnie to his right. They bowed at the Prime Minister.

"Greetings, Prime Minister Voenis," Forneido said as they raised themselves back up. "It is good to be back home, even if it may be for a short period of time."

"Please, have a seat," Voenis said as he sat back down.

The three ambassadors approached the seats in front of Voenis' desk and sat down.

"I know I asked for you all to take the long trip back here without giving you all a valid reason for doing so," Voenis said. "Granted, Forneido's trip did not take too long by comparison, but the point is you all are here and would like to know why, correct?"

"That has been on our minds, Prime Minister," Keocnei said.

"Then allow me to answer that question for you: there is a proposal that I would like you all to take back to the leaders of the nations, one that would help improve our relations between each of our nations."

"A proposal?" Foisnie said with a puzzled expression. "What sort of proposal are you wanting us to present to the other nations?"

"Currently, our relationship with the other nations range from being okay to excellent. However, I have noticed that there are still tensions when it comes to international matters."

“Such as?” Keocnei asked.

“Many have concerns when it comes to international trade and commerce, law enforcement, customs, and civilian travel such as tourism and work visas. There are also a few companies from a couple of nations that want to set up a branch of their operations within our borders, but they are concerned about international regulations.”

“So, we are looking at this from the standpoint of civilians and the economy.”

“Correct. We all have our own ways when it comes to those fields, but those ways tend to cause a lot of anxiety that others will say or do something that is acceptable in one nation but considered unacceptable or even taboo in another.”

“So, what is this proposal that you want us to bring to the attention of the other nations’ leaders?” Forneido asked.

“I want to see about the creation of an international agency, one that will serve to help regulate and manage these matters.”

“An international agency?” Keocnei said. “Who would this agency be answerable to and what authority would they have?”

“The agency would have selected representatives from all five nations to help manage and direct the agency in the enforcement of local laws and customs.”

“In other words, you are making this more about law enforcement but managed by a committee.”

“The Humans have a word for such an agency,” Forneido said. “They are called ‘police.’ That is the term used for those who help enforce the laws and protect the peace of their citizens.”

“An interesting term,” Voenis said. “However, a different term may be used for those that work for this agency.”

“That brings up a lot of questions,” Keocnei said.

“I figured it might. What is your first question?”

“Who exactly would be working for this agency? Is this solely being run or employed by people of one nation or are you looking at having other races employed with this agency?”

“I knew that question would be asked. Thankfully, I already have an answer. Because this agency would be an international entity with management from members from the five nations, it would also be best for all of those races to be able to work together in the same workspace.”

“So, you want there to be members of each nation to work for this agency? Never mind the dietary and accommodation requirements of each race in each nation, but have you considered the hostility that may be present in each race towards others such as the Vitams and us Lykans? This alone would create a hostile work environment!”

“I’m aware of the possibility, but let us consider that there is always room for change. Putting everyone in such an environment would allow them to understand each other better, to work past our differences. This may be the best way to look past our past aggressions towards a better future for us all.”

“If this agency you are proposing is serving as a law enforcement agency,” Forneido asked, “are they going to enforce the laws in each of our nations?”

“No, that won’t be the case. I only want them to enforce the laws on the borders between our nations. Past that, it will be up to the military and local law enforcement groups to enforce the local laws.”

“So,” Foisnie said, “are you looking at this being a military-run agency or a civilian-run agency?”

“I would like to see this run by civilians, though if it consists of military personnel and vessels who work for the agency, then that would be both preferable and acceptable.”

“That leads me to ask a very important question,” Keocnei asked. “Exactly WHOSE ships would be used for this agency?”

Voenis looked at over at Keocnei and realized that all three of them had curious expressions on their faces waiting for him to answer that question. Voenis took a deep breath.

“That is the one aspect that I would need to discuss with the leaders of each nation directly,” Voenis said. “That topic is a sensitive one as some ships from one nation being seen in another nation would cause some issues to say the least. However, if we all agree on a single type of vessel, it would go a long way to make it easier on all of us.”

“If you wanted to speak to the leaders directly,” Keocnei said, “then why call us here?”

“I called you all here to inform you of what I had in mind. I also wanted to give you each a physical copy of the proposal to give to the leaders of each nation. I brought this in front of Parliament already and they are ready to ratify the proposal once the other nations agree to it.”

“If you didn’t want to talk to them directly by long-range communication because of the sensitive nature of the material before calling us here, why would you be willing to do so afterwards?”

“That is because when I said I wanted to speak to them directly, I didn’t mean by long distance.”

“Wait a moment,” Forneido said. “Do you mean you want to MEET each of the leaders in person?!”

“That is correct. I want to show my sincerity by speaking to them in person.”

“How are you going to arrange that, Prime Minister?” Foisnie asked.

“I intend to have a conference with the leaders to be held at a location that would be best for us all and that we all can agree to meet at. I already have a location in mind.”

The three ambassadors looked at each other, wondering where this location was that Voenis had mentioned. Forneido was quick to realize where that was.

“You are talking about the Liberigi Mandate’s Consulate building, aren’t you?” Forneido asked.

“You are quick to figure that out, Ambassador Forneido,” Voenis said.

“Why there of all places?” Keocnei asked.

“I know why,” Forneido said. “The Mandate is located between all of the nations and shares a border with each one of them. Give or take a few jumps, it is centrally located, and everyone would take just as long to get there as the others except for the Mandate leadership. The Mandate also harbors no ill-will towards any nation and to the best of my knowledge the reverse is the same. This is especially true between the Mandate and the State after the State’s Councilors were replaced following the Yintaka Conflict. They are in better relations, though the topic of the Mandate following our religion is still a little bit of a sore spot for the State.”

“I take it that you know of the standings between the State and the Mandate from Ambassadors Drino and Korveco respectively, correct?” Keocnei asked.

“That is correct, Keocnei. Those two have gotten along a lot better since the Yintaka Conflict and they have both told me that their nations have been getting along as well.”

“I have my concerns with each of the leaders meeting in on location, though. Anyone who still has issues involving the First Interstellar War, the Yintaka Conflict, or even past racial aggression would find that meeting a very promising chance to get revenge for any of those. Last I checked, most of those issues are still being directed at us.”

“I understand your concerns, Keocnei,” Voenis said. “However, I still feel compelled to have that meeting to show my determination to make it happen, for us to finally have some common ground and for a chance to get past our differences to work towards a brighter future. We are all sharing this star cluster with each other, so the last thing we need to do is ruin it with conflict between us all.”

“I understand,” Forneido said. “While I can understand Keocnei’s concern, I also understand the importance of what you are proposing for the other nations.”

“Thank you, Forneido,” Voenis said. “I understand the concerns you three have towards this proposed agency and the way I wish to convey my intentions involving this proposal. However, I can ensure you all that I am looking at a bigger picture and I hope that the Supreme Chancellor, the Emperor, the Executive Council, and the Consulate Assembly can agree with me as well.”

Voenis reached into a drawer on his left and pulled out three tablets. He placed them on top of the desk near the ambassadors.

“These tablets contain the proposal that I have for each of the nations,” Voenis said. “I have already spoken with the Mandate representative that was here earlier and he has already taken the proposal back to the Mandate for review. I would like for you all to take these tablets and present these to the other leaders for them to review and present to their respective law-making entities if any.”

The three ambassadors got up from their seats and grabbed a tablet each. They looked at the screens and saw the proposal displayed.

“If you want,” Voenis said, “you can take some time to read over the proposal so that you know what it fully entails before you present it. Bear in mind that the proposal cannot be modified on the tablets, but any adjustments or modifications will come once I am able to talk with the other leaders. Let them know that this is effectively a rough draft until then.”

“We will,” Forneido said.

“I know you all just got in recently, so if you want to wait to depart by a day or so, you are more than welcome to do so, but I would like you all to return to those nations’ capitals as soon as possible.”

“Yes, sir,” the three ambassadors said in unison.

They bowed to Voenis before turning around and walked out of the Prime Minister’s office. Once the door closed behind them and they walked halfway down the hall, Keocnei let out a frustrating sigh. Forneido and Foisnie stopped to look at Keocnei.

“Something the matter, Keocnei?” Forneido asked. “I noticed that you had a lot of issues in there with the Prime Minister’s proposal.”

“I will be blunt,” Keocnei said, “I think this proposal by the Prime Minister is foolhardy at best, disastrous at worst.”

“Why is that?”

“I don’t believe everyone will be as open to the idea of such an agency existing as he thinks they will be.”

“Are you talking about your experience while you have been in the Empire? You don’t think the Caminos are up to the idea that the Prime Minister proposes?”

“The Mandate may have been instrumental in having the Empire open up its borders for trade and tourism but their laws for both are highly regulated and strict. They are still very wary of the prospect of working with other races in any sense and that they only tolerate other races so that they are up-to-date in the affairs of others.”

“So, you think that they would be more against the proposal than the State would possibly be by comparison?”

“Most likely from what I have seen. I can’t speak for the other nations but the prospect of having others regulate and monitor each nation’s borders may not sit well with the Empire who have done their part to protect their own borders. I don’t think any other nation even knows the Camino anatomy and I’m pretty sure they want to keep it that way by avoiding work situations with multiple races.”

“That seems a bit odd. Any reason why they don’t want us to know about their anatomy? Our race knows the anatomy over every other known race including Humans.”

“Do you not recall that project of yours during the First Interstellar War to use a virus against the Humans? The research into their anatomy led to that development and I am sure the Caminos are fearful of any possible repeat of that happening again.”

“We have already made it clear and illegal for that sort of research to ever be developed again. I personally made sure of that. However, I can see how the Caminos may still be weary of the thought. Regardless, we have been tasked to present this proposal to the other nations. If the two of you wish to stay a day or two to rest from your long journeys as the Prime Minister has offered, you are more than welcome to do so. I, however, need to return to Luminaire with this proposal as soon as possible.”

“Why are you rushing back already? You’re not going to stay a day or two as well to see the city or visit the countryside?”

Forneido took a deep breath.

“As you have pointed out,” Forneido said, “I have other ‘crimes’ I have committed that I must atone for. One of those was the eventual downfall of High Charity. While that in of itself is not a crime as it led to our reformation, we as a people were not to set foot on the soil of Lykana again except for a select few. Yet, here we are in a city on this holy soil once again. I cannot look at this city much less take a tour or call it home knowing that we broke an old law long before we as a people were manipulated by some unknown party.”

“The Prime Minister acquitted you of all charges of treason both holy and Lykan-made, Forneido,” Foisnie said. “No one faults you for helping to open our eyes to the truth.”

“That law was something we as a people agreed upon a long time ago before we met any other race. While everyone here seems to be fine with us returning to Lykana soil, I know in my soul it is a great burden to be here and a reminder that this may be the price I have to endure.”

“Forneido, I can say with utmost certainty that this is not a burden you need to bear on your own shoulders. You already have a burden as much as we do in representing our reformed nation. Being separated from our ancestral home only made us as a people want to seek the homes of others and you can see what that has caused. We are here, now, on our home world to admire its beauty once again. For that, I am very thankful to bear witness to this once again and you should too.”

Forneido smiled at Foisnie’s words as Foisnie had a point. Maybe there really was no point of Forneido carrying such a burden on his soul when Lykans such as Foisnie were happy to be “home.”

“Very well,” Forneido said with a smile. “If you insist, I will stay at least for a day to admire Lykana and its beauty. Who knows? Maybe it will do me some good and heal my soul.”

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