

***Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga***  
***Episode V: The Fox's State and Mandate***



**PART 1**

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship  
Dellino Star Gate, Sanctus System, Novus Initium Republic, 1 Jump Northeast of Lumen  
12:13pm, March 14, 5434 A.D. (Six months later)*

“I forgot how boring things can be after so long.”

Trent was looking over the reports from the daily flow of traffic from vessels that were using the Dellino star gate to travel between the Holy Lykan Republic and the Novus Initium Republic. Trent was reinstated into the Novus Initium Republic Navy less than a week after what is now called the First Interstellar War had concluded since the Lykans no longer had Trent's DNA on file. However, he went on vacation for a couple of months with his wife to Paraíso De La Sol on Luminaire before he came back to work.

He was happy that he was placed in command of the battleship *Renaldo* again after so long. The crew had gone so far as to throw him a “Welcome Back” party the moment he got on board. Trent missed his crew and found that some had left the ship after the war had concluded. This did not surprise Trent as he heard that a good portion of military officers and enlisted had left the service after the war. He doesn't blame those that left. Humans in the star cluster had not been involved in a war for over three thousand years and who knows how post-traumatic stress disorder would affect Humans after so many years of peace.

A lot has changed in the past six months involving every known nation in the star cluster. For the first time in Human history, there are now military ships patrolling the star gates that lead to other nations. These fleets, such as the Eleventh Fleet that Trent commanded, serve as customs

ships to help monitor and track imports and exports between the nations that have open trade agreements with them. The Viridis Open Trade Agreement was established in October last year and the signees of the agreement were the Novus Initium Republic, the Holy Lykan Republic, the Camino Star Empire, and a new recently established “nation.” The only nation that did not sign agreement nor were they present for the signing was the United Vitam State.

The “nation” in question that was recently established wasn’t entirely a nation on its own, but rather a semiautonomous nation that was established by the Holy Lykan Republic. When the First Interstellar War concluded between the former Royal Lykan Kingdom, the Novus Initium Republic, and the Camino Star Empire, the reformed Lykan government now called the Holy Lykan Republic was required in their surrender to release all the slaves still being held in their charge. The intent was for the slaves to return to the United Vitam State and hopefully ease their aggression towards the Lykans to the point that the State would stop their war. However, an unexpected dilemma had occurred followed by some insight as to why not all, or at least more, of the slaves left during the Slave Revolt decades ago. It was discovered that not all Lykans treated their slaves harshly. It turned out that among the remaining slaves in the former Kingdom, almost ninety percent of them were treated very well by their masters. Those Lykans found that if one applied a softer touch when it comes to the work of their slaves, they ended up being more productive and far less hostile. This practice had been ongoing for a while and explained why the slaves did not want to leave their masters. Why would they when they were provided adequate housing, food, and clothing when they did their tasks with little to no trouble?

When it came time for the freed slaves to leave in the reformation of the Lykan government, some wanted to stay with their masters. However, most of their masters, now forced to pay their former slaves if they worked for them, could no longer be able to afford for their former slaves to work for them. Their former masters did allow them to keep the things they were provided such as clothing and hygienic tools as they sent them on their way.

However, the former slaves soon found themselves in a dilemma. They harbored no ill-will for their former masters while they were slaves and understood that they were forced to be released so that they could return to their fellow races who live in the State. However, the former slaves found the State’s stance of wanting the Lykans extinct proved to them that the State’s interests and position did not align with their own. Because of this, the former slaves did not wish to go to the State at all, much to the surprise of all the galactic powers. The former slaves requested the Lykan government along with the Novus Initium Republic for assistance in settling star systems that were outside the State, possibly within either Lykan or Human territories. Both Republics got together in an emergency summit in Viridis with an elected official of the former slaves to work out the details which did not take long at all. It was decided that the territories that the Lykans were given back by the Humans would be converted into a semiautonomous nation that was answerable to the Holy Lykan Republic. This nation would be called the Liberigi Mandate, Liberigi meaning “set free” in the ancient Human language of Latin.

The Liberigi Mandate would be governed by a consulate whose power and authority is regulated by the Holy Lykan Republic government. Since none of the former slaves held political positions before, it was best to educate those who were interested on the bare aspects of government. The currency used within the Mandate would also be the same as the Lykans to make trade and commerce easier. Much of the education in the Mandate would be provided by the Lykans with an emphasis on each of the former slave races’ histories that had been retained. The former slaves had long since adopted the religion of the Lykans including the recent interpretations that led to the Lykans reforming themselves. In effect, the Mandate was designed

more as a means for the former slaves to be taught in ways to self-govern themselves sometime in the future, though it is not known how long this would take or when this would happen.

However, while there is a significant amount of Lykan influence in the Mandate, there were also aspects of the Novus Initium Republic found as well. A lot of the Humans' influence comes from the structures and bases both in orbit and planet-side left behind by the Humans when they gave the territory they occupied during the war back to the Lykans. Some of what was left behind included music, movies, and literature intentionally left by Humans that provided the races of the Mandate with the building blocks to create their own culture. Because of this cultural influence, the Mandate began talks with the Humans to allow more of the Human culture to be imported to help expand the Mandate's cultural input. The Lykans had no objections of this cultural import into the Mandate and soon the Mandate felt like a mix of Lykan and Human cultures that have been intertwined to create a rather unique culture of their own.

The military of the Mandate is not too different from the Lykans at first glance. The new designs of the Lykan ships that were created by Human designers, which was public knowledge, and the technology involved are also seen in the Mandate with two very notable exceptions. The first of these exceptions is the fact that the Mandate ships exchanged the gold hue of the Lykan ships for a blue hue to distinguish them from their Lykan counterparts. The second of these exceptions were the weapons and this is where the Mandate ships combat abilities are drastically different from their Lykan counterparts. While the Lykans intend to stick with the projectile cannons they have been familiar with for ages, the Mandate wanted ships that did not require ammo due to the slow reload times of the Lykans' artillery cannons or the State's missile launchers. While hybrid cannons were faster to reload than either of those options, the Camino Star Empire that makes those turrets has focused more on their own nation's military technology development and deployment since the war due to the State's actions. Thus, they were no longer a viable option. Seeing that the Humans' laser weapons did not require ammo and that the guns were on average smaller than that of their Lykan counterparts, the Mandate chose to purchase the laser weapons of the Novus Initium Republic for use on their ships, contributing even further to the mix of Lykan and Human influence in the Mandate. Again, the Holy Lykan Republic did not object to this decision by the Mandate as they also saw benefits in the laser weaponry, especially against the one enemy the Mandate may eventually fight.

To accommodate the power requirements for laser weapons, the cargo holds that were designed to store ammunition was converted to hold additional capacitors and reactors to help power them. This conversion was rather easy since the modular aspects of the design based on what Human engineers devised during the design process made adding the new power systems that much easier. Because the weapons were smaller in size than artillery and autocannons, more guns could be fitted on the ship in the same space or section. While the Novus Initium Republic ships don't have as many guns on their ships compared to Mandate ships, part of it was due to the power consumption of shield boosters and armor repairer systems. Since the Mandate ships only have armor repairer systems, that allowed for more power to be supplied for the number of guns that the Mandate installed on all their ships. However, to ensure that the Mandate ships don't run out of available power from firing so many guns at once, the ships will generally fire at one target per size at a time with the available guns it can use depending on the size of the target. That means using the anti-battleship guns against an enemy battleship while using the anti-cruiser guns to attack an enemy cruiser and so on. While they may have more guns, Mandate commanding officers are more mindful about their power usage during prolonged engagements. Much like their counterparts in the Novus Initium Republic, the laser turrets of the Mandate also

can change out their lenses for different ranges and strength of damage. While the Novus Initium Republic was initially concerned with the larger number of guns on each of the Mandate ships, they quickly realized that the Mandate would not be engaging either of the Republics. Instead the Mandate would be using the laser weapons against State ships that currently threatened the Lykans in case the cold war the two nations were in suddenly turned hot. The increased laser weaponry was essential for use against the shield booster-equipped vessels the State was using. The debate about whether the shield boosters should be considered “stolen” or not is up for debate in the Novus Initium Republic Senate after the State had initially broken ties with the Humans immediately after the war and the current political situation between the two.

The last distinction between the Lykan and Mandate ships were the names used for each class of vessel to tell them apart. Thus, the Mandate ships were called the Retribution based on the Punisher Destroyer, the Zealot based on the Omen Battlecruiser, and the Absolution based on the Harbinger Battleship. Many of the qualities of these variants remain the same with their Lykan counterparts with the only differences being the laser weapons and the number of ships deployed.

While the Holy Lykan Republic has tried what it can to appease the State to cease any hostilities even during their cold war they have with each other, the Lykans ended up developing a variation of their Omen Battlecruiser that has the State in an uproar. While the Omen-class Battlecruiser on its own is an impressive ship with impressive firepower, the Lykans found that the modular nature of the designs thanks to Human engineers allowed for other weapons to be installed as evident of the Mandate ships that took advantage of that design aspect. This meant that they could test experimental weaponry including one weapon system they had based on another piece of salvaged technology: missile launchers from the United Vitam State. Before the NIR, which is an acronym for Novus Initium Republic to help distinguish between the two Republics, and before the Empire entered the First Interstellar War, the former Kingdom and the State had been at war with each other for decades with each side winning and losing battles. During those battles when the State had lost, some of its ships were salvaged by the Kingdom to analyze and find weaknesses to their designs. However, the technology of the State was essentially the same as the Kingdom and thus nothing came to fruition from the research. The missile launchers however were still intact and researchers had long since analyzed them and the missile payloads for possible weaknesses, countermeasures, and implementation on Kingdom ships. At the time though, funding for the research was put on hold and put towards other more promising projects. The launchers were brought out of mothballs when the Holy Lykan Republic was created and new ships with new technologies were being developed. The missile launchers were reverse-engineered as were the missiles and soon several Omens were used as testbeds for the newly developed launchers. These Omen variants were given the codename of “Sacrilege” due to it being an “unorthodox” version of the battlecruiser. While the defenses of the Sacrilege were the exact same as the Omen, the weapons were all changed out for the new launchers with the quad-barrel artillery cannons exchanged for heavy missile launchers for anti-cruiser combat, and the dual autocannons replaced with light missile launchers for anti-destroyer and anti-frigate combat. While the missiles were slow compared to the quick and hard-hitting projectile cannons, the destructive force and self-flight capabilities meant the missiles will always hit their marks for the duration of their flight time. When the Sacrilege was introduced, the United Vitam State was livid of the fact that their launchers were being built and used by the Lykans. However, the Lykans were quick to point out that the launchers were salvaged from wrecks left behind during their war and that the State has no room to quarrel from what was developed due to their

abandonment of their technology. This matter still does not sit well with the State, adding further hostility in the current cold-war between the two nations.

The fact that NIR engineers were the ones responsible for designing and engineering the ships that both the Holy Lykan Republic and the Liberigi Mandate has not been lost on the United Vitam State and its relations with the NIR. Ever since the NIR helped the Lykans to reform their government, their culture, and their religion, the State has been more retracted in their affairs and relations with the NIR. The Supreme Chancellor had already recalled any Republic citizens in the State in anticipation of the State's reactions to the NIR's aide of the Lykans before the war ended and this decision was well-timed. The State had ordered that all Republic citizens be deported after their aide was made public and the State attacked NIR forces in Dellino prior to the war's end. While the NIR wanted all but their ambassadors to return, even the ambassadors were deported. The political tensions between the State and the NIR lasted for months before Ambassador Wade and Autumn could return to New Vita and Drino to Luminaire. However, the tension is still there and both sets of ambassadors feel like unwanted guests because of the continued political hostilities. The only reason why the State would even allow NIR ambassadors within their nation much less talking with the NIR is due to the NIR's assistance in helping the Liberigi Mandate get situated after they were released by the Lykans despite what they perceived are the actions of their "misguided brethren." The Supreme Chancellor has been working tirelessly to smooth over the relations between the HLR, the State, and the Mandate but it has not been easy during their cold war. From what Trent heard, it was becoming downright impossible. He found it an achievement to even get Drino and Forneido in the same room without arguing with each other. There was an ambassador for the Mandate as well which only added further to the tension, namely with Drino.

So far, the biggest issue that is still a hot point in their meetings is the State's plans of exterminating the Lykans near the end of the war on select planets on their border with the Lykans before they reformed. That loss of life despite the NIR informing the State to hold from advancing was unwarranted and unacceptable for any civilized race to do. Even the Empire found the State's actions demeaning and unacceptable. This created tension between the State and the Empire to the point that their arms trade came to a stop and now they must create their own versions of the weapons they were trading along with the ammo for them. The HLR has requested some form of reconciliation from the State in the form of the return of the planets they had done this barbaric act against but the State refused stating they were spoils of war. The State has yet to budge from this position and both the Lykans and the Liberigi have yet to find a resolution that would benefit all. This had led to increased security along the borders of the HLR, the Mandate, and even the NIR as an increasing number of ships and NIR-supplied planetary shield are being assigned to those planets to prevent any further loss of civilian lives. Once again, the NIR has found itself acting against the State but the NIR stood by these actions as more of a deterrent to keep the State from performing any further acts of genocide against those that are trying to commit to change.

Aside from the hostile political arena, the only other matter that Trent hasn't kept up with lately is the fact that the *Templar* that he used to command is now on a mission of exploration along with her sister ship to explore the Southwest and Western Regions respectively. The Senate and the RCIA decided it was time to see if there were any other nations out there and try to make themselves known to their neighbors considering the war that the NIR was forced to be a part of. So far as Trent knew, they hadn't found anything yet, but their mission only started a few months ago. The *Templar* and the *Cavalier*, as the sister ship was called, became public knowledge prior

to their exploration missions so that the people of the NIR knew about them and what they were meant to do. Obviously, they would be out of touch for a while for anyone wanting to try and acquire the sustainable warp drive the ships were equipped with as it was the main point of contention when the ships were being approved by the Senate. Anyone with that drive can bypass the star gates and the defenses in place at said gates which would lead to security issues. With them on their exploration missions, no one with such intent could get to them now.

The reason they were going out to explore those regions and not the Northwest and Southern Regions were due to some oddities found in those regions. There were very few stars in the Northwest region and even then, they were very far apart from each other save for at least one “constellation” of stars. The Empire had not done any exploring out there due to the distance involved in trying to jump out to the closest star to them. The Southern Region by comparison has a gap between it and the rest of the star cluster that is filled with an unusual amount of gravitational distortions that would affect both the warp drive and jump drives of ships that attempt to cross it. Until it can be determined as to what is causing the phenomena and how to bypass it, the Southern Region will remain unreachable for the foreseeable future.

With these events unfolding around Trent, he suddenly felt a bit depressed as he was no longer a part of them after so long. However, he realized that his fleet would not be alone in all of this. He also had to remember that his fleet switches out with another after a few months to resupply and provide shore leave before being reassigned to another post to relieve another posted fleet. These rotations started to become necessary to keep some fleets “fresh” and ready at a moment’s notice should they be needed. Considering that Sanctus was only one jump away from Lumen, it meant that Trent could see his wife after this post was completed. Laura had to get used to these rotations and the posts lasting for a few months at a time. She saw him a few weeks ago before the *Renaldo* and the rest of the fleet was posted to this system. The first posting was at Viridis a couple of months after the Open Trade Agreements.

While the Viridis System is still a few jumps away from the newly established border after the former Defensive Zone was annexed into NIR territory, it is still a major trade hub for transport ships of both the NIR and the Mandate to meet. A small detachment fleet of destroyers acted as the customs ships at the actual border while the Eleventh Fleet served to protect the Viridis stations of both the regional military headquarters and the major trade station along with the Viridis defense fleet. Now the Thirteenth Fleet is fulfilling that role as the Eleventh Fleet is now stationed in Sanctus.

Occasionally, Trent would think about some of the old members of the *Templar* crew and wonder what they are up to. While Sheryl and Natalie went back to Voluptas to resume their “normal” lives, the other crew members either continued to serve aboard the *Templar* due to their exceptional skills during the Kingdom incursion mission or went back to their normal lives as well. Apparently, Sheryl had a lot of catching up to do in her performances and appearances which has left her out of touch with Trent and Laura. Both knew how busy she would be upon returning to her career and left her to it. Natalie, however, “retired” upon returning to Voluptas claiming that she had another “job” to do. Obviously, she went back to the RCIA but for what purpose could only be left up to Trent’s imagination.

The only real surprise when Trent got back on duty was the fact that former-Commodore-now-Captain Shannon, his second-in-command and the commanding officer of the *Renaldo*, was pregnant! This shocked him greatly but she went and visited her husband after the war. Considering what has happened, it is a safe assumption that they had a rather intimate night. She was now six months along and about to enter her third trimester. Trent was of course very happy

for her and her husband. The female crew members wanted to hold a baby shower for her in a month or so. Trent could not refuse such a request under the circumstances.

Trent thought about his only daughter on more than one occasion and this baby shower brought up those thoughts once again. His daughter, named Amarria, is now twenty-five years old and has a job as a historian at the Grand Central Library of the Republic in the city of Luminous. She has always been a history nut and finds the history of Humans from even before Luna came to the star cluster very fascinating. She does admit that she has wondered what happened to Humankind back on Earth after Luna left, knowing that the Earth would have gone through a lot of changes because of Luna's disappearance. Scientists in the past believed that these range from very short days to the extinction of species due to the loss of the tides that they relied on. Regardless, it has been her dream to work in the Central Library and studied for just such a degree in college. While there are not exactly "books" in the library, it is in fact a huge data archive that is accessed by terminals within the library. The data can be copied to a portable storage device for a small fee which has helped fund the library along with taxes.

Since the Library was only a few blocks from the news station where Laura works, the two go out to lunch occasionally, though it depended on their lunch schedules. Amarria lived in an apartment in one of the suburbs on the opposite side of Luminous from where Trent and Laura lived. She visits on occasion but usually during one of their birthdays or the holidays. She hasn't been involved in a relationship yet, but Trent doesn't know if that is due to her job, her lack of interest in starting a relationship, or if the men are afraid of her father who is a Vice Admiral. Trent gets some amusement thinking that it is the last one on occasion but he knows she will find someone someday.

Unlike his daughter, he could not dwell too much on the past right now as he had to focus on some of the reports. He looked them over and sipped his Crystallis soda. He had to restock the mini-fridge after removing all the drinks when he had to leave the *Renaldo* after his DNA was used to make a clone that infiltrated the military during the war. Thankfully, Captain Shannon has done a good job of keeping things clean despite the lack of any personal items of Trent's in both the Ready Room and his personal quarters. When he came back, he placed his items in the same locations where they were before to feel like he was truly back.

As he looked over the reports, he noticed that another small Lykan shuttle had come through the Dellino gate today that headed for High Sanctus. That made six in the past couple of days heading for that planet. The Lykans were becoming more intrigued with the different religions of Humans and the High Sanctus Council decided to hold a week-long conference with key religious figures of the Lykans to give them a better understanding of those religions. Even Mandate clergy figures were attending but they had to come from the NIR eastern border all the way to Sanctus as there was not a direct star gate like there was between Sanctus and Dellino.

With both Lykans and Mandate religious figures in attendance, the need of military security was high. There were some rumors that the State felt the Mandate clergy were responsible for teaching the Lykan religion to their estranged brethren and they much like their government was answerable to a higher Lykan authority. In other words, the State would be better off with the Mandate clergy dead which would make it easier to "reclaim" their brethren from what they perceive as a "delusion by the Lykan faith." While the Sanctus System is far from the State border, the military should not be any less strict in security as the State still has a few citizens in the NIR including Drino and his own security detail that accompanies him.

In all honesty, even though Trent was bored, he preferred boredom than having to fight another war. People are trying to rebuild their lives after the First Interstellar War and the fact

that Captain Shannon is pregnant shows how some are trying to create new life after the loss of so many during the war. He could only hope that the State keeps to themselves and just work on their own nation that has been war-torn for decades. They had been without a culture of their own and the NIR was making real progress in helping to establish their own cultural identity. With the Republic citizens being deported, though, reports came in that any semblance of culture including music and art were completely stripped away deeming them as both distractions and a reminder of what the Lykans took from them so long ago. All this did was feed the need for revenge among their current generations. Trent tried to imagine such a lifestyle of no art, music, or any semblance of a culture. He couldn't imagine it despite how hard he tried. The citizens of the State would be born, raised in strict households, educated, sent to military training for a few years, and either stay in the military or have a job that supported the nation and its citizens. They would live for the State rather than for themselves, forever being a cog in a war machine working towards the extinction of the Lykans. Even the Liberigi Mandate functioned better in a cultural aspect, having a culture to speak of compared to the State. This further explains why members of the Mandate don't want to be a part of the State. Forcing that lifestyle and lack of culture on them would be worse than when they were slaves that were treated well by their former masters.

Trent could only hope that a peaceful resolution would be found soon before the State attempts to do anything rash under the current circumstances.

Trent's door suddenly chimed, indicating that someone wanted to see him. He needed the break from the reports and his thoughts.

"Enter," he said.

The doors opened and Captain Shannon was there as she entered the Ready Room with a tablet in hand. Her belly was definitively showing at this point that she had to unbutton her uniform coat. Under normal circumstances, this would be considered being out-of-uniform but military regulations state that if an appropriate size coat is not available for someone who is with child that they could do this until one was found. Why one was not delivered yet for her to wear was due to the supply being suddenly short. Not many women in the military have kids all at the same time but that was a different story once the war ended. This was even more so for those in command positions. Trent was more lenient about the dress code with Shannon because of this shortage and stated she could wear it unbuttoned until they get a coat. However, at the rate the shortage is going, she could have the baby before they even delivered the coat!

This did not help his earlier thoughts, seeing her with child but she was here for a reason.

"Greetings, Captain," Trent said. "I have to ask first, but how are you and the baby today?"

"We are doing well," Shannon said. "The baby is already kicking a little bit, though. He's got a lot of energy the past couple of days."

"I bet. What brings you in today?"

"Apparently, headquarters will be assigning smaller fleets to run as customs ships. They sent this communication to us just a moment ago."

Shannon handed Trent the tablet as Trent was puzzled by the orders. He looked them over as Shannon continued.

"They feel that smaller fleets would be less intimidating when ships come through the gates on our borders," she said. "They want to shrink them down to a couple of destroyers and cruisers. From what they heard, the Empire, the HLR, and the Mandate are also following suit."

"Obviously the State is the exception, right?" Trent asked.

“Despite what the Supreme Chancellor has done to reduce the tensions between the State and the HLR, they refused to reduce their forces on all their borders, including the one they share with us. The Supreme Chancellor is keeping full sized fleets on that border until the State reduces theirs first considering the citizens who reside on that border.”

“Like Tranquillus, I imagine. Considering the size of that system’s population as an example, I don’t blame the Supreme Chancellor for wanting to defend our borders in that regards. I take it one of these small fleets is coming here?”

“They will be arriving later today. In fact, they will be here in an hour.”

“I see. We will need to let the rest of the fleet know. Do we have any idea where they are sending us to next?”

“Based on the orders, they are having us go to the Yintaka System.”

“Yintaka System? That doesn’t sound like one of our systems.”

“It isn’t. It is a Lykan star system that is on the border with both the State and the Mandate.”

“Why are we being sent out there?”

“The Lykans had requested for a couple of the planetary shield generators for two habitable worlds that are in that system from our nation. These are the last planets along their border that need those generators to deter the State from attacking the civilian populations. Our fleet is assigned to escort the transports carrying the equipment.”

“I see. I’ve heard that other fleets like the Fifteenth and Eighteenth Fleets were deployed for such missions. I guess it is our turn, though I don’t feel very comfortable about this.”

“Is that because of the fact we will be on the border between the State and the HLR during their cold war or the fact we are once again helping the HLR over the State?”

“It would be both of those, actually. It also puts us away from the capital once again and Laura would not like to hear this news. I assume that another fleet will be maintaining the security of High Sanctus while the conference is going on?”

“The Fourth Fleet will be arriving along with our relief ships to handle the security here.”

“The Fourth Fleet will be handling the security here? That seems a bit much, don’t you think?”

“Maybe the rumors we have heard have some truth to them.”

“Maybe they do, but I understand our orders. My guess is we will be going through the very star gate we are currently guarding to head for our destination, right?”

“It is the shortest travel time compared to heading there through our territory and the Mandate’s. The HLR has been made aware of our deployment among their forces and we will be greeted by the battleship *Vidoria* when we arrive. That battleship is part of the defense force assigned to the Yintaka.”

“I understand. Inform headquarters that we have received and confirmed our orders. Let the fleet know as well. I will have to send a message to my wife to let her know what is happening. She would be in the middle of the noonday news right now.”

“Understood, sir. This will be the first time this fleet has ever been in Lykan space. Is there any knowledge you would like to share about what we would expect to see while we are there?”

“While the actual missions I was on with the *Templar* is still considered classified, I can tell you that when we get to Dellino, you will be surprised by the lack of stars in one direction. When I first saw that, it felt like you are leaving the safety and security of having so many stars around you. It was also a bit disheartening as it seemed like you were staring at a dark sea on the

edge of land that could not be crossed. It will only be for a short while as we would be traveling back into the star cluster from that point.”

“I see. That may still be a sight to see for some. I will go inform headquarters of our confirmation of the orders and the fleet of our deployment.”

Shannon saluted before turning and heading out of the door. As soon as the doors closed, Trent looked over at a picture of him and his wife from their vacation some months ago. Trying to figure out how he was going to tell his wife of this development is the one thing he could never get used to doing.

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*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
12:41pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“I see that Drino is running late...again.”

Ambassador Orbinai of the Camino Star Empire could not help but let out her frustration with State Ambassador Drino’s tardiness to their meeting. Supreme Chancellor Drew had called for their weekly meeting with each of the ambassadors from the Empire, the HLR, the Mandate, and the State to keep tensions from rising any further than they already have. However, Ambassador Drino has always been late to these meetings and Drew knows why.

Ever since Ambassador Forneido from the HLR joined these meetings, Drino has been late to them as an act of defiance on his part. This got worse when Ambassador Korveco, a male Vitam who represents the Liberigi Mandate, joined in the meetings as Korveco was a constant reminder to Drino of his people falling for “misguided beliefs.” The State wants their “misguided” brethren back but the people of the Mandate don’t want to go to the State due to their aggression towards the Lykans and the lack of culture that the State is strictly enforcing. Everyone in the room knows what the State wants and no one is going to give it to them. Korveco has at one point expressed his embarrassment that members of his own race act in such a “childish” manner. Drino’s rebuttal is that their own kind in the Mandate are still enslaved by the Lykans in a way that would make the Lykans the “good guys” and the State the “bad guys.” Unfortunately for Drino, everyone else in the room is hardly convinced that the State can be considered the “good guys” based on their actions alone.

“I’m beginning to think that I need to adjust these meeting times at some point,” Drew said. “We would decide the meeting time and announce it to Drino to be thirty minutes earlier than that. Then he would show up on time.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” Forneido said. “On the other hand, we could always engage in casual conversation in the meantime, such as what we all have been up to as of late.”

“Maybe so,” Orbinai said, “but this tardiness is starting to become a little too routine. I’m beginning to think that we should start the meetings without him if he is going to be this tardy.”

“In my opinion,” Korveco said, “we might as well leave him out in the lobby with the doors locked if he is refusing to participate or take these meetings seriously. I doubt any politician or government representative acts in such an immature matter.”

“This does give me a chance to ask this question while he is not here,” Forneido said. “Supreme Chancellor, has your forces started to head for Yintaka to commence delivery of the last planetary shield generators to both of the habitables world there?”

“They will be leaving in a little over half an hour,” Drew said. “I’ve assigned the Eleventh Fleet to serve as their escort.”

“The Eleventh fleet? Isn’t that Vice Admiral Trent’s fleet?”

“It is. His fleet is already by the Dellino star gate so it makes sense to send his fleet on this escort and delivery mission. Is that a problem, ambassador?”

“No, but I’m willing to bet he is not going to be happy about entering our territory again. At least it is nothing like the mission he was assigned to when he went through with the *Templar*. I’ve already told my government and our military to expect an NIR fleet to be passing through with a couple of transports. They harbor no ill-will towards Trent after the reformation so even if he goes through, there won’t be any problems.”

“I figured there wouldn’t be any problems considering that Trent did help in the long run with your nation’s reformation into something better than it was before. I’m just concerned how the State will take our actions and if they will take action because of it.”

“I would hope that the planetary shield generators would be enough of a deterrent on their own to keep the State from doing anything against our nation at all after their genocidal attack on some of our worlds near the end of the war. My people want peace now between all of us and the State is the only one that does not want any part of it from us.”

“It would also appear that nothing we can say or do would help change them either,” Korveco said. “We had to resort to those same planetary shield generators just to keep the State from trying to ‘liberate’ us from our territory. I for one do not want my children to be raised in the State with their stringent military lifestyle and lack of any culture.”

“Wait,” Drew said. “You have children?”

“Yes. As you know, the Lykans have been working with those within the Mandate to generate offspring that combines the DNA of the parent donors, considering we do not possess any reproductive organs while we were enslaved. The next generation however will have them so this process will only need to be done to our generation. After that, we will not need the procedure anymore.”

Forneido looked a little ashamed when Korveco had brought up about the lack of reproductive organs among the former slaves. Drew could understand why and didn’t need to ask Forneido how he felt about the topic. Ambassador Orbinai also noticed Forneido’s reaction but said nothing about it as she knew nothing really needed to be said, either.

“*Supreme Chancellor?*” the receptionist said through Drew’s terminal. “*Ambassador Drino has finally arrived.*”

Drew could tell that the receptionist, much like everyone else in the room, was not too thrilled with Drino’s tardiness. Drew pressed the button on his terminal.

“Have him wait a moment,” Drew said. “We will be done shortly.”

As Drew released the button on the terminal, the other ambassadors looked at Drew with a little bit of surprise on their faces.

“Are you sure that is wise to make him wait?” Orbinai asked. “He could take that as an insult.”

“Considering he made us all wait while he willfully made himself tardy in an act of defiance, I consider that an insult to all of us.”

“The Chancellor has a point,” Forneido said. “I may understand his people’s frustrations and he also endures them, but it does not help him or his people by being late to these meetings which were meant to be beneficial to all parties here.”

“I will be having a talk with him about his tardiness after you all leave and make my position clear on this matter. In the meantime, please keep me informed about any developments in your nations should anything require our attention. Thank you all for coming.”

All three ambassadors stood up and bowed before turning around and heading for the door. As the doors opened, they could all see Drino standing close to the doors almost upset as the other ambassadors looked at him briefly before they continued out of the office. Once they left, Drew stood up from his seat.

“Ambassador Drino,” he said in a rather upset tone. “Come in. I would like to have a word with you.”

Drino walked into the office with the doors closing behind him. Drino did not look very happy either knowing that he missed the meeting entirely.

“Take a seat,” Drew said as he sat down in his own seat behind his desk.

Drino sat in one of the seats in front of Drew’s desk. Drew looked Drino squarely in his eyes.

“Ambassador Drino,” Drew continued, “Do you mind explaining to me why you have been tardy for these meetings?”

“Per my government, since you don’t appear to be taking our nation seriously or our interests when it comes to what we are wanting from the other nations, it seemed only fitting that we don’t take these meetings seriously either. Considering nothing goes the way of the State regardless, there is not been any need to change this perspective or routine.”

“You seriously think that this has been helping your nation or its representation here by being tardy all of the time? I’ve already concluded my meeting with the other ambassadors for the first time today because we decided to proceed without you. The interests of the State were not taken into consideration at that point at all so you tell me how that helps you and your nation with your tardiness?”

“I thought you sent them away to talk to me in private. You already finished the meeting for the week?! What did you talk about?”

“Does it matter? The State was not represented in the meeting so there is no reason to go over it with you since you chose not to be part of that discussion.”

“What kind of attitude is that to take with me, Supreme Chancellor?!”

“The same attitude you have been taking by not showing up to these meetings promptly and on time so that the interests of the State could be taken into consideration, Ambassador! It doesn’t feel good, now does it?”

Drino looked like he wanted to say something otherwise to that effect but couldn’t as he realized Drew had a point.

“I’m going to put this as best as I can so that you understand what happens the next time you are late to these meetings, Ambassador,” Drew continued. “If you are late to another one of these meetings, you will not be permitted to enter at all and will be asked to leave this office, thereby not discussing the interests of the State with me or any other ambassador. This will happen each time. In other words, if you are tardy, you forfeit bringing up the State’s interests and concerns before us until the next meeting. Your brethren in the Mandate have called your actions rather ‘childish.’ Considering you said that your government ordered this of you, I had hoped that this attitude of yours was not shared throughout the rest of the State.”

“What my brethren in the Mandate think is only based on their misguided beliefs that they are fed by the despicable Lykans,” Drino said.

“Yet you and the State are doing very little to prove them otherwise so far. Not even my ambassadors to the State Executive Council meetings are late, but I have heard that they are not permitted into the chamber until they are almost done with their meeting, so I can see where this is stemming from.”

“Then maybe if your Republic can take our requests and interests more seriously, they would be permitted to enter at the beginning of their meetings.”

“It works both ways, Ambassador, and I have given you my request before you made yours so now it is up to you oblige my request before we can oblige yours. Is that understood?”

“Completely, Supreme Chancellor. Before I go, I have a question for you that is strictly relating to your Republic.”

“Very well. I will answer depending on what the question is about.”

“I know for a fact that your Republic has been delivering planetary shield generators to both the Lykans and the Mandate along their border with our nation for some time now. I can only surmise that this is a form of deterrent against our forces to enter and either exterminate the Lykans or retrieve our misguided brethren.”

“I already know the position of both parties involved when it comes to what they think of the actions the State wants to take as you do. That is why they requested the generators.”

“That is true. We have been monitoring those planets and the shipments your nation has been making. Therefore, I would like to ask you one simple question. I noticed two such transports like the ones used to deliver those generators upon my return from my trip back from the State recently. I don’t suppose those ships are bound to the only system we noticed is lacking those generators, that system being the Yintaka System, correct?”

Drew didn’t realize that Drino knew about the transports or that the Yintaka System was the last system that needed them to solidify the HLR’s defensive perimeter. Without realizing it, his facial expressions were all the confirmation that Drino needed.

“I thought so,” Drino said. “Thank you for your time, Supreme Chancellor.”

Drino got up from his seat and headed for the door.

“Drino,” Drew said, “I hope that the State is not about to do something rash and detrimental to their relationship with any of the nations in the star cluster. We just obtained peace. Don’t make it go away now after so long.”

Without turning around, Drino replied to Drew.

“Your Republic, the Empire, and the Lykans along with their ‘puppets’ may have obtained peace, but the State has not nor will we obtain it until we have achieved our goals. You already know what those goals are and we will achieve them with or without your help.”

Drino walked out of Drew’s office. Drew knew what was going to happen and he needed to warn the appropriate parties. Hopefully it is not too late to do so.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship  
Dellino Star Gate, Sanctus System, Novus Initium Republic, 1 Jump Northeast of Lumen  
12:59pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“Please tell me this is some sort of joke, sir.”

Trent did not know whether to take the news he was just given as serious or in jest. Supreme Chancellor Drew had just contacted Trent about the possible problem his fleet might be facing upon their arrival in the Yintaka System. It would seem as though the State knew the

Yintaka System was the last star system along their border with the Lykans that remained without a viable defense on the two planets' current residents. If the State knows that fact and knows that the NIR was about to deploy a fleet that had such generators to deliver, it may very well take this chance to turn their cold war into a hot war by attacking the two planets in the Yintaka System before NIR forces even arrive.

Trent really did not want to end up in the middle of a warzone again but his fleet may very well find itself in one.

*"I'm sorry to be the bearer of this sort of news,"* Drew said on Trent's terminal. *"We had accomplished such deliveries in the past without any incident but the State may want to attack the Lykans through the only remaining system that lacks planetary shield generators."*

"Have you managed to inform Forneido and Korveco of this possible attack?" Trent asked.

*"I did before I contacted you. They said they would talk with their leaders about increasing the defense of the Yintaka System but there are problems."*

"What kind of problems?"

*"As you know, the Liberigi Mandate has a rather small fleet compared to the Lykans. I believe the last I heard was it was a five-to-one ratio of HLR ships to Mandate ships. They may not have enough ships to spare to help defend the Yintaka System. There is also the issue with the current Lykan fleet."*

"What seems to be the problem with their forces?"

*"While they can produce the ships they need, they are still trying to train newly enlisted military personnel to operate the ships."*

"They still have this problem after six months? I thought they would have the soldiers they needed after such a long period of time."

*"I thought so too but apparently there are those that wanted to work in more peaceful professions after the war. The life of a soldier wasn't exactly their sort of profession when in the past it was done by ships that have little to no crew on board. Now they must crew every ship and that is the problem they are running into right now. The Prime Minister has considered calling a draft but wants to wait on doing so until the need arises."*

"It seems as if their fleet is in more trouble than I thought."

Trent thought about the scenario that he was about to enter but then realized that something was off about the State attacking Yintaka.

"Supreme Chancellor, let me ask you something. Did Drino say the State was going to attack the Yintaka System or that was something that seemed implied?"

*"It was more implied than him outright saying it. Why do you ask?"*

"If the State is aware that the system is lacking the proper defenses and Drino knows that we are about to commence a shipment of the planetary shield generators, that would normally mean that the State is about to attack that system correct?"

*"Yes, it would mean that."*

"Then why would he bring it up or imply of the State's intention involving that system? Tactically, it would be better if the attack was a surprise attack but instead, by implying that they are targeting Yintaka, they are giving us a warning of a possible attack. They are allowing the HLR to prepare their defenses with aide by the Mandate nearby if needed."

*"But that doesn't make sense now that you bring it up that way. Do you think they are trying to be noble and give the defense fleet a fighting chance to protect their citizens in that system?"*

“I don’t know but a bigger question is whether their intent is Yintaka or not.”

*“What do you mean? You think this is some sort of diversion?”*

“I don’t know. Are you certain, sir, that Yintaka is the ONLY system without planetary defensive shields in place.”

*“I am certain of it. I checked with both the HLR and Mandate ambassadors, and they have confirmed that there are no other defenseless systems other than Yintaka.”*

“I can’t help but feel that there is more to this. I have a hard time believing that Drino would let it slip, even if it was implied, that the State has an interest in attacking Yintaka.”

*“Maybe so, but if they are planning to make an attack on Yintaka as part of a diversion and attack another system on their borders, they won’t be able to get past the planetary shield systems. It would take a lot of firepower to take one down and unless the State is committing a lot of ships for such an attack, it would be foolish.”*

“Maybe you are right. I still have that feeling and experience is only feeding that possible notion.”

*“I understand how you feel but for now, I want you to focus and make sure that those generators are delivered before the State really does attack those planets.”*

“Understood, sir. Is there anything else?”

*“Only one other matter. How has your wife taken the news of your deployment?”*

“She got done with the noon news just a little while ago. She sent me a message shortly before you contacted me that she understood and that she will tell our daughter Amarria that I said hello.”

*“I almost forgot about your daughter. How has she been doing?”*

“Good, last I checked. She has been so busy with the Central Library and its history section that my wife can only see her during their lunches when they coincide with each other. I talk with her whenever I can.”

*“I understand. I won’t keep you on the line for too much longer. The freighters will be departing soon and will rendezvous with your fleet along with the relief fleet shortly. Just keep an eye out for any trouble when you arrive in Yintaka. I personally hope that Drino was just inquisitive about Yintaka and isn’t planning something with the State.”*

“I hope not, either, for everyone’s sake.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Jovian Cafe, North Market Street, Capital City of Luminous  
Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
1:10pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“Good to see you made it.”

Amarria was sitting outside the Jovian Café waiting for her mother Laura to arrive. The café was one of many on the popular “restaurant row” of North Market Street found a couple of blocks west of Main Street. The café got its name based on the ancient Roman name of Jove which is another name for Jupiter, one of the planets in the Sol System where ancient Earth was located. Apparently, the ancestors of the current owners were those who explored Jupiter before they moved to Luna prior to the accidental “exodus” of Luna to the star cluster. The restaurant itself was only established ten years ago but the food it served was based on a combination of Italian and Greek foods which made it both unique and popular among those in the downtown area. The atmosphere was also rather retro in design. Apparently, the owner wanted to theme the

restaurant, the dishware, and the uniforms on very old designs from the mid-Twentieth Century concepts of space travel. Amarria, being the history enthusiasts she was, helped the owner achieved that feel. Obviously, in the realm where science fiction back then is science fact and commonplace now, many would laugh at how Humankind thought space travel would be back then. This allows for the feel of the restaurant to be rather amusing to those that eat there and to reflect how much has changed over three millennia.

Laura only arrived a moment ago as she walked the distance from the broadcast station to the café. Instead of being inside the café, Amarria waited for her outside.

“I’m sorry about the delay,” Laura said as she came up and took a seat at Amarria’s table. “Matt seemed eager to bring up a couple of news reports he wanted to cover before I went to lunch.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Amarria said. “He seems to always catch you at those moments.”

“He’s good at his job and wants to remain that way, I guess. Have you already ordered?”

“I did, and I also went and ordered your usual if that is alright?”

“The Europa Salad? Yes, that is fine.”

“So, how is dad doing? Is he still assigned to the Dellino star gate patrol?”

“Surprisingly, he contacted me before I got here. Apparently, his fleet will be escorting a couple of freighters into Lykan space to deliver planetary shield generators to a system on their border with the State.”

“He is going to the HLR-State border? Isn’t that a bit dangerous of a mission for him to go on?”

“His fleet was selected at random and other fleets that performed the same duty also faced the same risk. So far, the State is behaving themselves but I’m concerned for how much longer that will continue.”

“Did dad say anything that might make you think otherwise?”

“Not in his message, no.”

“I see. Speaking of work, I was going through some historical archives when some articles came up that I had not heard about.”

“What do you mean?”

Amarria got a tablet out of her purse and activated the screen. She scrolled through some entries before stopping on one article that was published over six hundred and fifty years ago. The headline said “The Tenebris Sacrifices Humans, Military Takes Action.”

“What in the world is this?” Laura asked.

“I wondered the same thing when I skimmed through the file names and saw this,” Amarria said. “I had not heard of such a thing before. I read this before checking this article out so that I can show you. I was going to ask dad about this as well since the military was involved but I will have to wait till he is back from his assignment. The content was part of the reason I wanted to eat out here and not inside where others would hear this.”

“Yet, those who pass by may hear it instead.”

“They will think I am reading some sort of fiction as they pass by but I can tell you now that this is not a work of fiction. This was found in the historical non-fiction section.”

“So, what does the article say?”

“According to the article, six and a half centuries ago during the Expansion Era, a planet was colonized in a system to the southwest of Lumen by an odd cult following based on the Great Maker faith.”

“What was odd about it?”

“Apparently, it was a large group that consisted of six large families who grew up under a perverted hybrid religion of the Great Maker faith and some form of tribal mysticism that included blood rituals and the burning of ‘sinful’ sacrifices.”

“What did they consider ‘sinful’ sacrifices?”

“Animals at first but it got worse. They eventually resorted to kidnapping Humans from neighboring systems and using them for their sacrifices.”

“Are you kidding me?!”

“I wish I was but there was evidence of such things occurring. While the military did nothing at first due to the fact they could not be called to act if it involved religion when they were sacrificing animals, they did become involved once the six families started abducting Humans.”

“Who were these six families, anyway?”

“The families at the time were named after the ancient animals of Earth. In the order from the largest family to smallest, they were called Draco which is ‘Dragon,’ Lupus which is ‘Wolf,’ Tigris which is ‘Tiger,’ Pistris which is ‘Shark,’ Aspergillus which is ‘Gorilla,’ and Aquilam which is ‘Eagle.’ While the Republic back then promoted tolerance and acceptance for all forms of religion, none of the religions in the Republic condone such things as the Tenebris had promoted. In case you were wondering, the word ‘Tenebris’ means ‘Dark’ in the ancient Latin language.”

“That is an interesting choice of names considering that it is the opposite of Lumen which means ‘Light’ in the same language. So, what happened to the Tenebris? You said the military got involved?”

“The military was deployed and tasked with rescuing those who had kidnapped and to bring those associated with Tenebris to justice for their crimes of kidnapping and murder. However, there was a problem.”

“What sort of ‘problem’ did they find?”

“The Republic fleet was ordered by military headquarters to destroy the city by orbital bombardment once they rescued those that were kidnapped. However, upon their arrival, they could not detect those that were kidnapped with the DNA of those that were taken. Once that was confirmed, the fleet opened fire and the city was destroyed. The problem was when an RCIA investigation team was sent to investigate the remains, there was no signs of anyone, alive or dead. There was not a shred of evidence that the Tenebris were even there. Apparently, the RCIA agents at the time decided that their remains were vaporized by the particle beams used at the time and labeled the case as ‘closed,’ and everyone moved on with their lives believing the Tenebris were gone.”

“What about the planet the Tenebris had settled on? What happened to it?”

“It was eventually resettled after a couple of decades once surveys were completed to make sure that the Tenebris had not settled in an underground shelter that was undetectable. The new settlers are no doubt unaware of the history of that planet but there have not been any reports from that world of anything out of the ordinary.”

“What is the name of that world now?”

“It is called Crepusculum now.”

“Isn’t that the Latin word for ‘Twilight’?”

“It is. The RCIA renamed the planet. The colonists who settled there afterwards did not know of the planet’s history nor did anyone know why it was named that.”

“Amarria, why do you bring this story up now?”

“I brought it up because after I read it, I began to wonder why the RCIA had left such a huge mystery the way they did. I also began to wonder what else was handled this way or if the Tenebris had managed to survive by evacuating in advance.”

“That was over six hundred years ago. There is a chance they either died out or they settled elsewhere that was inhabited without practicing such a horrific religion again.”

“Mom, you know as well as I do that everyone’s DNA is taken at birth and if a criminal is on the loose that their DNA can be scanned in every system in the Republic. Everyone in the Tenebris was on file and their DNA was never detected after their colony was destroyed or on any other Republic world. They are either someplace between star systems developing their own society without interruption or they have gone past the current borders of the Republic.”

Laura took a deep breath.

“I’m not going to say that your theory doesn’t have merit,” Laura said, “especially since you have all this information and there is a lack of remains from anyone involved with the Tenebris. You may very well be right and they could be between systems or outside Republic space. If it is the former, they have managed to keep to themselves this entire time and have not attracted the attention of the military out of fear. If it is the latter, then in all honesty, I say ‘good riddance’ considering their actions. I’ve never known you to be afraid of such an article before. For that matter, you haven’t seemed this afraid since you were a kid.”

“Part of me is concerned about their descendants still being at large,” Amarria said. “However, that is not what concerns me. What I am concerned about is the lack of knowledge people have about this happening and how this was handled by the RCIA back then.”

“What do you mean?”

“This was a major issue in the middle of the Expansion Era and shows that the dark side of Humanity and religion was still present after so long. It should have been taught to avoid a repeat of the same thing in modern times. Yet, for some unexplained reason, it is not brought up at all in history books as if someone doesn’t want the current generations to know about them.”

“Maybe, rather than teach people about those cultists and their activities, they found it best to not bring them up at all so that no one would follow in their footsteps?”

“That is a possibility, but as a history major, I find this rather upsetting.”

“I understand and I am glad you wanted to bring this up with me since something this unsettling would cause you concern. I’m guessing the lack of closure about this matter is also what is disturbing you, isn’t it?”

“Yes, for both the matter and the families of those afflicted at the time.”

“Well, we can blame that on your father’s stubbornness. He is always one to see things through to the end.”

“I guess you are right.”

“By the way, I noticed that we haven’t gotten our meals yet.”

Amarria looked at the doors to the café and noticed that no one had come out at all with their meals.

“You’re right,” Amarria said. “They are normally rather quick to fulfill orders regardless of the time of day. I wonder what is taking them so long today?”

“I might have something to do with that,” a female voice said from the side of the table opposite of the café.

A large dark-skinned lady stood there in a black suit with sunglasses, her arms folded. She had a slight smile on her face. As both Laura and Amarria looked at her with curious

expressions on their faces, Laura was quick to realize who this woman worked for based on her history with their involvement with her husband.

“You’re with the RCIA, aren’t you?” Laura asked in a serious tone.

“I am,” the lady said as she sat down at their table. “I am Head Agent Aja.”

“Aja? You’re Tora’s superior?”

“Mom, do you know who this lady is?” Amarria asked.

“I do. This lady is the head of the RCIA and Agent Tora’s boss.”

Aja took off her glasses and put them into her coat.

“A pleasure to meet you both in person for the first time,” Aja said. “I’ve only meet Trent in person before but I never had the opportunity to meet the two of you before.”

“So why is the head of the RCIA here and why did you put a hold on our lunch?” Laura asked.

“It has to do with the article your daughter Amarria decided to look up and check out. That article was flagged by the RCIA and it alerted us to her accessing it. When we found out who she was related to, I decided to handle this personally rather than having one of my agents come here. Besides, I like this café as well.”

“Why did you flag the article?” Amarria asked. “Is it due to the nature of the article or is it due to the involvement by the RCIA back then?”

“It’s both, actually. The events that happened involving the Tenebris cult have been lost to all except for the RCIA and the article you checked out. The RCIA has not forgotten about them completely. However, while I am generally knowledgeable of key events the RCIA is involved in, I have to admit that this is the first time I have heard about the Tenebris. This concerns me.”

“Then maybe you can answer this for me,” Laura said. “If the article is sensitive or problematic for others to read, why not delete it from the Central Library records?”

“It is because they can’t,” Amarria said. “The contents of the Central Library were designed to where they cannot be deleted or removed due to the way the database was designed. As part of the effort to never lose the history of Humanity, every copy of every book and article is not only unable to be removed, they are stored on backups to prevent their loss should the primary database no longer function for whatever reason. The RCIA cannot change that fact.”

“That is correct,” Aja said. “However, the files can be marked by our agency should sensitive material be accessed to let us know when that occurs. We do this to make sure someone isn’t using said material to recreate something that should not be recreated.”

“How many times in the past has this article been accessed?” Laura asked.

“According to the Central Library records, five times before me,” Amarria said.

“So, what happened to those people?” Laura asked Aja.

“In the past, an agent would confiscate their tablet and remove the article from it,” Aja said. “They would also make sure that the person was unable to check out the article again for the rest of their lives since DNA encoding is required to check out a book or article. Obviously, they would not be refunded either for the cost. We never bothered to ask for their reasons behind them checking out the article.”

“So, is that what is going to happen to me, then?” Amarria asked rather concerned.

Aja looked her square in the eyes.

“Let me ask this first,” Aja said. “What do you intend to do with that knowledge?”

Amarria looked at her tablet with the article still presented on it.

“I have this feeling that the Tenebris are still out there,” she said. “The article makes it clear that their remains were not discovered on the planet they once resided on.”

“Then are there any clues as to where they went?” Aja asked. “Historical logs show that they didn’t go through any star gate out of the system and we would have found them if they resided between that system and any of the surrounding systems.”

“The Library may hold the records and the clues based on those who were among the Tenebris families. For example, if any of them are engineers with knowledge of advance warp capabilities, then the only logical theory that would fit the facts as to where they went is that they modified their old colony ships to use sustainable warp drive.”

“An interesting theory, but are you sure? Sustainable warp drive was only invented recently.”

“As far as we know right now, that is. They could have created it long before now and we would never have known. The article stated no such sightings of their colony vessels and they didn’t have time to convert or recycle them between the time they settled on the planet and the time the military was sent after them.”

“You make a valid point. The RCIA back then assumed that they were gone after their colony was destroyed. However, if this theory of yours is correct and the Tenebris are still alive, then this case needs to be reopened and investigated. Why the RCIA back then closed it without being so thorough is something else that needs to be investigated. If they are still around, then I need to get in touch with the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* as they might run into them.”

“You mean in the Western and Southwestern regions? Why not the Southern Region?”

“The Southern Region is inaccessible due to the gravitational disturbances that surround it. The Tenebris would not have been able to access it even back then.”

“So, should I go back to the Library after lunch and look up those families that made up the Tenebris? If my theory holds true, then at least we will know what happened to them.”

“Speaking of lunch,” Laura said, “I’m hungry and I only have so much time left before I have to get back to work.”

“I’ll let the waitress know we are ready,” Aja said. “They know my usual order as well. However, I must ask both of you to keep this Tenebris matter to yourselves for now. If Amarria can confirm that there were members of the Tenebris families with the possible means to create a sustainable warp drive, it will be the first clue to their whereabouts in centuries.”

“First my husband and now my daughter?” Laura said. “I’m beginning to think the RCIA has something in it for my family. Why can’t the RCIA look up this information on their own?”

“We may have the means but the knowhow and the knowledge of where to look for such information in the Central Library is best accomplished by a historical librarian. Let’s call this a deal, Amarria. If you can find the information, you can keep the article and we won’t revoke your access to such information. You know the alternative.”

“I understand,” Amarria said. “I’ll think of it as a challenge when I get back. First, though, I’m starving so let’s hurry up and eat before our lunch breaks are over.”

Aja nodded in agreement and gestured to the waitress who was looking through the window to deliver their orders. Laura, however, was not too thrilled that the RCIA wanted to involve Amarria in their operation, but Amarria did find the article on her own and dug it up which led to this. She was, however, concerned about the Tenebris cult. If they were out there in the cold reaches of space, what have they been doing all this time and what would they have planned if the Republic found them again?

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