

***Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga***  
***Episode III: The Siege of the Light***



**PART 2**

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
9:13am, September 2, 5433 A.D. (Three Days Later)*

“He should be arriving there soon.”

Laura got up early even though she had the day off today from work. The report that she was given by the RCIA agent a few days ago told her that Trent and his ship was heading for the system where the clone infiltrator that was used to infiltrate the Republic military was created. According to the report, the system was close to the edge of the star cluster, meaning that Trent was probably close to the capital of the Kingdom. Considering the value of such a facility and possibly others in the same star system that facility was located in, it was a likely assumption that he would be close to their capital.

Of course, Trent had his own reasons for going to that system considering the clone that was used to infiltrate the Republic was of him thanks to his DNA being scanned. Because to that, Trent could not re-enter the Republic military until his DNA was wiped from the Lykans’ database. Completion of that mission would allow him to do just that, hopefully.

However, while Laura was not concerned at first, her worries started to mount up when she realized that there was likely a rather large military presence the closer he got to their capital. While she did not doubt the capabilities of the *Templar*, all it would take is a Lykan with a keen eye to spot that ship should it have its cloaking device off when engaging any targets. She had some trouble sleeping last night because of those worries. She was glad she had the today off so that she wasn't so tired before a broadcast.

She grabbed some waffles and eggs for breakfast and headed back up to the master bedroom upstairs to relax and eat on the bed. She needed to watch some programs to get her mind off of things and to relax. As she got into the bed and put the tray with her breakfast on her lap, she turned on the monitor and switched between channels looking for something to watch.

As she switched between the stations, her phone began to ring. She turned off the monitor and reached for her phone on the nightstand. She looked at the identification of the caller and saw that it was Christina who was calling her. It was odd that Christina would be calling her from all the way in the Viridis System near the Defensive Zone in the Eastern Region, but Laura was assuming at this point that this was a social call. She answered the call.

"Hello?" Laura said.

"Hey, Laura," Christina said. "*How are you doing today?*"

"I'm tired if anything. I had a rough night trying to get to sleep. Guess I have a few things on my mind. What's up?"

"*Well, I was hoping that you could verify something for me through your husband.*"

"I don't have an easy means to get in touch with him right now. What is it you want to verify with him about?"

"*Well, the military forces here in Viridis seem to be rather puzzled by something they noticed on their long range sensors, though whatever they picked up was well outside the star system.*"

Laura began to get concerned about what Christina was talking about, thinking that the *Templar* was returning to Republic space. However, if Trent was returning, she would have known about it. The ship would also have been cloaked to avoid detection even in Republic space due to the secretive nature of the craft. If it wasn't the *Templar*, then what was it?

"What was it that they picked up?" Laura asked.

"*It was very brief but it looked like something massive jumped into Republic space near this system but then just as quickly as it appeared, it jumped away.*"

"Something 'jumped?' You're saying something used crystals to jump near the system?"

At this point, Laura knew it wasn't Trent but something else. While she was no longer concerned that it was Trent's ship that was being detected, she was now concerned what could have been jumping near the Viridis System without trying to use the star gates.

"*Correct. Unfortunately, it was too quick to get a reading as to what it was, where it came from, or where it was going. From the sounds of it, you haven't heard of anything similar on your end.*"

"No, I haven't. Do you know if the military forces in that system have already reported this to their superiors?"

"*I'm sure they have by now, but they obviously would not tell me anything about it.*"

"Alright. It may be nothing, though. Bear in mind the amount of crystals that are used to make a jump. Whatever it is, I doubt it will go very far."

"*Yeah, you have a point. I just wanted to check with you and see if you knew of anything. Hopefully, this is nothing to worry about. You have a good day.*"

“You, too. Bye-bye.”

“Bye-bye.”

Laura ended the call and turned the monitor back on. She was still a bit concerned about something jumping into Republic space but considering the amount of crystals needed, whatever it was would not be able to jump very far.

At least, she hoped that was the case.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Office of Advisor Forneido, Lykan Royal Palace, City of High Charity (translated)*  
*Lykana Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom*  
*9:28am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“I can’t believe I’m nervous about this project after all of this time and effort.”

Advisor Forneido looked at the timepiece that was displayed on his desk. One hour ago, he authorized the start of Project Beta after the tenth ship was prepared to deploy. Forneido ran the projected scenario through his head several times. He had to in order to repeat it to all those involved with the project.

Project Beta itself involved the delivery of a biological weapon. Thanks to the DNA that was used to create a few more clones of Republic Vice Admiral Trent, all of which were “dumb” meaning they did not have any brain activity, Kingdom scientists managed to create a viral compound designed to specifically target the DNA of a Human and cause rapid cellular decay within a minute of infection. The chemical is airborne and is highly concentrated meaning that once the chemical disperses across a planet, the entire Human population of the target world is wiped out leaving the rest of the planet intact. While the Lykans could have done something similar to the races that make up the State, they see those races as “slaves to be reclaimed” versus Humans that are inevitably “vermin” to be exterminated.

While Forneido ordered for a lot more of the virus to be delivered, ten destroyers were fitted with the biological payload that took up their entire cargo hold. This means however that the ships had no storage for ammo. Forneido ordered their weapons removed in order to save on weight and not waste fully functional weapons. These ships would go on a run towards the target planet, whether flying over or crashing into which did not matter, and release their payloads into the planet’s atmosphere where the virus will disperse. These ships would be escorted by other destroyers and cruisers so as to not draw attention to it.

The method the ships would use to get to their destination is the part of the project that is the trickiest under the circumstances. A pair of jump gates was created where one is designed to stay in the star system of origin and the other would “travel” to the target destination. The gate that would travel has been loaded with enough jump crystals separated in portions to jump several times to its destination. In order to reduce the number of times it jumps, the mobile gate would be collapsible and travel through existing Kingdom-controlled gates till it got close to the contested systems. From there it would execute the series of jumps it needed to reach the target system. Once it reached the target location, the gate would deploy and connect to the gate still in the staging star system to send the ships in “waves” to the target world.

The target of Project Beta was the Republic capital world of Luminaire.

There were also concerns about the project from some of the Royal Court and those concerns are well founded. The Heronia System is only two jumps away from the Dellino System where the stationary jump gate is located. With the mobile gate located at the heart of the Republic, should the Republic get control of both gates somehow, they could bypass the frontline

defenses of the Kingdom and attempt to reach the capital.

While this concern was genuine, Forneido reassured the Royal Court of two crucial points. The first point is that the Republic would have to get control of BOTH gates in order to access the Dellino System. The computer system of the mobile gate, which is using the same cybernetic brain system like their ships, was instructed to self-destruct their gate should it look like it could become occupied. This can be overridden by the operators of the stationary gate if needed but thankfully that should not have to be done. Should the Republic get control of the mobile gate, the operators of the stationary gate could cut off all access preventing the Republic from using the gates to get into Kingdom space.

The second point that Forneido made to the Royal Court is the numerous battleships that are currently stationed in both the Heronia and Ciscio Systems, the latter of which is located in between Heronia and Dellino. Unlike Republic battleships, Kingdom battleships were designed to engage ships of all sizes so there was no need for cruisers and frigates that are operated by the minds of slaves to taint their home system. If the Republic dared to send ships into the heart of the Kingdom or close to it, they would be overwhelmed by the sheer firepower of all of the battleships the Kingdom had at its disposal. The battleships in Heronia belonged to the Royal Guard, the elite of the Royal Lykan forces who are only answerable to the King.

Both counterpoints had put the minds of the Royal Court at ease but this was long before Forneido began to suspect or receive reports of stations being destroyed by an unseen enemy. If the Republic had succeeded in building a ship capable of circumventing the Kingdom's jump gates and attacking Kingdom assets without detection, then this puts the project and their own security at risk. The latest reports he had heard were those involving the stations that orbited the home planets of the races that make up the United Vitam State being destroyed. The most recent one that was destroyed was the one that orbited Vita. They all had the same method of destruction: a single shot right through a weak spot hitting the reactor directly. This design flaw in the stations has become increasingly apparent and needed to be addressed. Forneido did not know if the Royal Court or the King were made aware of this problem or not since military reports generally went through Forneido before being forwarded to them. Forneido had done his best to keep the destruction of the stations from their knowledge, but eventually he will have to deal with the issue or inform them about the possible intrusion into their space. If the project goes well and the objective is achieved, Forneido can only hope that the intruder will turn back around and head back to Republic space.

Forneido looked at the timepiece again. By now, the mobile gate would have passed the Republic's military sub-headquarters in what was called the Viridis System jumping towards the Lumen System. It would take the gate almost an hour or so to reach its destination.

This period of having to wait, though, has made Forneido question things he had not questioned before, namely his faith in their god and in the words of the Prophet Ka'Thro. Ka'Thro said that he had heard the word of their god to unite, go forth, and claim their planet and the stars they could see in the name of their god. This alone gave the Lykans the driving force to become a kingdom and expand into space after centuries of long and bloody feuds and wars. They all had something to believe in, a cause that was worth fighting for. Because of that divine decree, the Lykans were able to spread their faith and their law to dozens of "uncivilized" worlds and make them work off their "sins" for a higher calling as decreed by King Kseriki the Third based on the Ka'Thro's words when they found the Vitams. This enslavement provided a cheap workforce with the divine promise of freedom once their race has fully accepted the Lykan faith and their standing that they will be second-class citizens within the Kingdom. Obviously, no race

had achieved this yet, especially in light of the Slave Revolt that eventually occurred.

With their expansion unopposed for a long time, this further fueled the divine drive the Lykans had to conquer the star cluster. However, when their forces were defeated by the Camino Star Empire and the resulting Slave Revolt led to the creation of the United Vitam State, the Lykans saw this as a test of their faith to bring both of those nations under the rule of the Lykans by bettering themselves and their military capabilities. Then they discovered the Novus Initium Republic full of Humans who “migrated” from another galaxy by accident and “infested” the center of the star cluster. Unlike the State, whose military was small, or the Empire, who the Kingdom previously had a truce with, the Republic’s military capabilities were on par if not superior than the Kingdom’s and was not hindered by an existing war like the Kingdom’s were.

Forneido was there as the ambassador for the Kingdom during those first talks with ambassadors from the Republic and the State. It was his own words and actions that put them at war with the Republic and his eventual actions that led to the Empire joining the war after the failed infiltration attempt by his clone agent. It was his pride and faith as a Lykan that led to this war that has pushed the Kingdom’s forces back a long way and unable to push back despite the numbers. Forneido in retrospect was beginning to regret his actions that have put such a strain on the Kingdom’s fleet. This was where he began to question his faith.

If there was a divine decree for the Lykans to conquer the star cluster in the name of their god, WHY then are they losing this war so far? Was that decree just the delusional ramblings of a crazed Lykan? If it was indeed a divine decree, did their god suddenly forsake the Kingdom for their actions somewhere along the way during their conquest? Why were things going so wrong for the Kingdom?

Forneido had so many questions running through his mind that there were times that he thought he would go mad trying to ponder the universe around him and the actions he had taken. The entire Royal Court and the King have been expecting positive results from Forneido during this entire war and he has tried to deliver to the best of his abilities. He had put into play the use of cloned brains from prospective slaves to implement them into their ships to reduce the need for Lykans and full-body slaves on board. Thanks to that, they have been able to send in more ships in order to offset the allied forces of the State, the Empire, and the Republic. This has kept them in a stalemate at best for a month now. However, whatever was attacking their facilities has started to slow down the Kingdom’s ship production capabilities. If it continues, the stalemate will not last for very long. Forneido had to move ships from other systems to compensate for the slowdown in production and make their enemies believe that they are still producing ships at near full capacity. Eventually, the Kingdom is going to lose more ships than it can produce and the enemy forces would soon push their way through the front lines. Forneido wasn’t concerned at first a few days ago but when he reviewed the logistical reports after the attacks on their facilities, it showed that the decline in production was more severe than he had anticipated. While more facilities could be built and established, the lack of abundance of slaves to build those means it would take three to four weeks before they would be operational, more than double the time it would normally take. If Project Beta did not succeed for some reason by then, they would only go online long enough for enemy forces to reach them and destroy them after breaking through the frontlines. That was only if whoever or whatever was going through their territory destroying the facilities that were already built did not get to any new ones first while those facilities were under construction. Those two reasons alone were why he did not order those replacement facilities to be built. He had neither informed the Royal Court nor the King about this development at all and it is only a matter of time before they become aware of it.

Now Forneido had put all of his hopes into Project Beta in order to have the Republic forces withdraw in the midst of a crisis in their own territory. If there is one thing the Republic would not handle well, it is a huge death toll as well as the loss of government and military capabilities. If the Kingdom can capitalize on the chaos and focus its efforts towards the State and the Empire while the Republic is distracted, they can push the enemy forces back to their original borders at least. Then a truce could be signed to allow the Kingdom to rebuild its forces to full strength and then some. Where they go from there will depend on the King.

However, Project Beta also came with a price, and a rather steep one at that. In order to jump the mobile gate that far so many times in succession required a lot of crystals for the mass of the jump gate and using the same portion for each jump in between. That was a lot of jump crystals and the supply available to the Lykans has been greatly reduced as their forces were pushed back. There were not many planets, asteroids, and moons that still have crystals on them within the territory the Kingdom is currently holding. Much of the crystals used were either from existing reserves or ships that were deemed as not needing them. The trip the mobile gate was making was one way which was why it was unoccupied. It would have been a suicide mission otherwise if crewed. The fact is that the war with the State using the crystals to get to their territories was more taxing than was expected. It wasn't a problem if the Kingdom had all of its holdings intact with the fresh mining sites that were made available but now that was no longer the case. The situation that the Kingdom was finding itself in was worse than Forneido had imagined and as far as he knew, the King and the Royal Court were blissfully unaware of the situation.

Hopefully things change in the next hour for the Kingdom. Otherwise, things are only going to get worse and he would have to be the bearer of bad news to the King and Court.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1  
Planet Dellino XII Orbit, Dellino System, Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region  
9:47am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“We have arrived in the Dellino System.”

Rei's announcement marked the end of the three day continuous trip for the *Templar* from Vita to the Dellino System. During the trip, information on the surrounding systems was analyzed until the name of the system was finally determined. With the name now known to them, it was the hope of the crew that they would finally track down the Kingdom's capital system of Heronia. Before the *Templar* manages to finish their mission, they will hopefully have info on the location of the Heronia System.

“Finally,” Trent said. “I can't believe we have finally reached this system. The fact that the mind of that clone travelled all the way out here still surprises me though.”

“It is still quite a feat,” Tora said from her station. “However, what is also a feat is that we are now the first Humans to have traveled this close to the edge of the star cluster.”

Trent and the rest of the bridge crew looked at the screen as the nose of the ship was pointing towards the edge of the cluster. Sure enough, one or two stars appeared on the screen as everything ahead of the ship was black with a few galaxies in view but obviously millions of Light-years away. This was the first time any Human had been to the edge of a celestial body such as a galaxy or in this case a star cluster. For whatever reason, Trent was beginning to feel the sensation similar to being “closed in” like being in a confined room despite the fact that he was in a ship. Not once has Trent felt like this before but it was understandable. Trent took a

deep breath and shook the feeling off as fast as he could.

“I’m beginning to see how the Lykans must feel during certain times of the year,” Trent said. “If you had to look at such an expanse for half a year at night, it can be very disconcerting.”

“If Humans have never seen the edge of the galaxy,” Tora said, “the fact that you realize that you are staring at an expanse you cannot cross does feel rather constricting to the point that one would want to move away from it.”

“Believe me, right now I want to. However, we have a job to do here and we need to get it done. Sheryl, are you getting a lot of chatter from military and government frequencies?”

“Yes on both of those,” Sheryl said. “I’m trying to trace them right now to see if I can get a point of origin both in the system and outside of it. However, I am a bit surprised about the amount of communications on the military frequencies, though.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is not much in terms of military communications in this system. I was expecting more the closer we got to their capital. On the other hand, the communications I am getting from within the system appear to be centered in one specific area right now.”

“Where are they centered?”

“They are centered bearing three-four-one mark zero-seven-two; distance eighty-five AU’s.”

“All the way up there? Is that in the orbit of a planet?”

“Not from what I can determine.”

“Haley, I want you to send out a drone to those coordinates and have it recon the area. I want to know why they are in that area of space.”

“Understood, sir.”

“Go ahead and launch the other drones as well to each planet in the system. We need to recon this system like the others.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well that is strange,” Tora said.

“What’s strange?” Trent said as he turned around to face her.

“As we were making our way here, I was putting together a report on the military deployment of the ships found in Kingdom territory, but I am seeing the most peculiar trend.”

“Which is what?”

“I’m noticing that there is little to no ships in these systems.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I’m noticing that the Kingdom’s military forces the closer we get to their capital were decreasing. I’m beginning to think that maybe we are having an effect on their forces on the frontlines after all. They may be relocating their existing forces to defend their current holdings.”

“That may explain the lack of forces we encountered at worlds such as Vita. While I am glad to see that we are having an effect on their means to deploy more ships at the moment, it may not last for very long. They may decide to build more facilities before this is over.”

“There is one other factor to consider as well. There is a chance that the Kingdom may not have deployed their remaining forces to the frontlines. The fact that there are possible ships still in this system is proof of that.”

“I don’t doubt that. No nation would be that foolish.”

“So then,” Natalie said, “how do we proceed? Do we go after the fleet that is here in the system or wait for the reports from the drones to find the cloning facility? Whichever location gets attacked, the other may become suspicious and take the appropriate action.”

“A valid point,” Trent said. “However, our objective is the cloning facility. The fleet that is here is not our concern right now unless they become one.”

“Understood, sir.”

“Sir?” Haley said. “The drones will arrive at their destinations in less than a minute.”

“Very good,” Trent said. “You know the drill. Begin surveillance of those locations. Let’s see where the Lykans are hiding that cloning facility and what else they do in this system.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ll go ahead and ask this,” Tora said, “but when did you want to send the report this time? The RCIA and the Joint Chiefs had requested information on this system like the others.”

“Once we have a general layout of the system and what all is here, that is when we will report that information. It should not take too long. While we wait for the drones to complete their objective, I need to see if you and Sheryl can track and trace those military communications as well as any political transmissions. If we can use those to find the Heronia System, then we can find a way to force the Kingdom to surrender once they realize we know where their capital and home system are.”

“Understood, sir.”

Trent looked back at the screen and the near void that was in front of them. It didn’t affect him as it did at first now that he was accustomed to it rather quickly. He thought of it as if one was at the coastline of a continent and the void was the ocean that could not be crossed without a ship. That mentality helped remove that feeling he had earlier. However, knowing that the Kingdom capital was close by and that the end of the war might actually be in sight filled him more with excitement than anything else right now. Of course, he had to make sure it didn’t show to the rest of the crew.

Of course, Trent figured everyone else among the crew had the same feelings as he did.

After a minute or so, Haley’s console began to become active as the drones she had sent out were beginning to relay data back to the *Templar*. As the information from the drones’ recon began pouring in, Haley was beginning to act a bit surprised.

“Sir,” Haley said. “You may want to see this.”

Haley pressed a few buttons. A holographic screen soon appeared in front of the main screen. On that screen was a rather large Lykan fleet in front of a star gate. The drone identified that there were one hundred and one ships. Among the ships were thirty cruisers and seventy destroyers in sets of ten fleets. The last vessel, a battleship, was “parked” next to the gate. The gate itself looked fairly new compared to the other gates that they have come across.

“That is a good size fleet,” Trent said. “That star gate looks like it was recently constructed. Do we know where that gate leads to?”

“I’m not detecting any transmissions to or from the star gate,” Sheryl said. “It could be that the destination gate is not operational yet.”

“It might go online pretty soon,” Natalie said. “A fleet like that would not be so poised to go through like that one is.”

“Haley,” Trent said, “does the drone see anything odd about any of the ships?”

“Actually, yes,” Haley said. “Let me zoom in on one of them.”

The camera on the drone zoomed in on one of the destroyers located within the fleet in front of the gate. While it did not look odd at first, Trent soon realized what was missing from the destroyer that was being focused on: its guns. This was the first time he had ever seen a Lykan ship without weapons.

“Why in the world is that ship missing its guns?” Trent asked aloud.



“Could it be a troop transport or logistical vessel?” Natalie asked.

“Hard to say,” Tora said. “There have been no such reports of destroyers used for those purposes that we know of. We haven’t spotted any such vessels behind enemy lines, either.”

“How many ships like this one are there in that entire group?” Trent asked.

“I have spotted ten such ships,” Haley said. “It appears as though those ships are in the center of each group of ten so whatever they are, they must be important.”

“Have the drone keep an eye on those ships for now. We will include this in our report. I still wonder where that gate is supposed to go but I guess we will find that out at a later time. What about the planetary surveys?”

“I’m getting the preliminary reports right now. The reports show that there are twelve planets in the system. Planets one, two, five, eleven, and twelve are all rock planets. Planets six through ten are gas planets. Planets three and four however are terrestrial worlds. The drones there are detecting signs of civilization on both planets.”

“Then one of those two worlds will have the cloning facility we are looking for. What about installations in orbit?”

“There are four over the third planet and seven over the fourth planet.”

“This might make things tricky. Continue to rely on visual scanning on both planets. We cannot risk an active scan with those installations in orbit. Tora, can you help her out on identifying the facility?”

“Not a problem,” Tora said. “Haley, send me the feed on the drone at the third planet. You can check out the fourth planet.”

“Understood,” Haley said. “I’m sending the feed to you now.”

While Haley and Tora looked over the feeds from the drones, Trent looked back at the screen that still had the enemy fleet near the inactive gate. That fleet was there for a reason and it has something to do with those ships that are unarmed. What were they waiting for, though? Why was the gate inactive and where does it lead? These questions were going to bother Trent for a while, at least until that fleet does something other than just sitting there.

He figured it was best to let Blair and his SAGATs know they had arrived in the system.

“Usatame,” he said, “please get Colonel Blair on the line.”

“Yes, sir,” she said.

After a brief moment, Blair appeared on a separate holographic screen in front of the main screen.

“Yes, Trent?” Blair said. “*Have we arrived at our destination?*”

“We are in the system, at least. We are using visual scanning to determine which of the two habitable worlds the cloning facility is on. I would suggest having a terrestrial infiltration team put together with the optical camouflage ready to go. They will be called upon at a moment’s notice.”

“*Understood. Anything else?*”

“Hopefully not. There is currently a fleet that is in this system that seems to be poised to go through a recently built star gate but the gate is not active so we do not know where it goes.”

“*Hopefully it doesn’t lead into allied space, but for now, we’ll focus on the task on hand. We don’t need to be attracting that much attention.*”

“Alright. Be ready to deploy them as soon as possible.”

“*I’ll make sure they are ready. Blair, out.*”

The screen with Blair on it disappeared, leaving only the screen with the enemy fleet and the main screen. Trent was hoping they would not get involved with that fleet but only time will

tell if they have to or not.

“Tora,” Trent said. “Once we find that facility, send a report back to headquarters of our progress. Let’s let them know what is going on so far.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*War Room, Republic Military Headquarters Station  
Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
10:12am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“I hope this is good news, gentlemen.”

For Drew, to walk into his office on the planet surface only to be called up to the Republic Military Headquarters in orbit over the planet without much warning was one of those things he was not very fond of. Normally the Joint Chiefs would come down to his office for meetings but if they called him up to headquarters then it had something to do with the war against the Kingdom. The Joint Chiefs also requested for the State and Imperial ambassadors to come up as well due to the nature of the meeting. This only led Drew to believe that this may have something to do with the *Templar* or they wanted to look into a coordinated military effort involving all three nations against Kingdom forces.

Regardless, it was a bit amusing to see the expressions on both of the ambassadors’ faces to see both fleet command and the war room. It was his guess that neither nation had such a setup when it comes to fleet coordination in combat.

The war room itself is set apart from the rest of the fleet command stations and is normally sound-proof to allow those inside to speak without yelling out over the crowd. The room has thick walls and a thick set of sliding doors to protect it from any enemy fire should anyone board the station. There was a large table with monitors and displays for up to nine people. In the middle of the table and the ceiling above was a pair of holographic projectors capable of displaying in between them locations and fleet arrangements in real-time. Right now, the star cluster as a whole was viewed, though detailed information of each star system was limited to what the Republic had gathered so far. The stars were color coded to identify holdings: gold stars were Republic systems, blue for State systems, silver for Imperial systems, and red for Kingdom systems as far as they knew. The systems that were fought were in green with the systems blinking as the ones where there was still conflict.

The Joint Chiefs stood up from their seats when Drew and the ambassadors walked in. The doors soon closed behind the three.

“Supreme Chancellor,” Grand Admiral Mikey said. “Ambassadors, welcome to the War Room. I’m sorry for calling you here on short notice but we needed to update you about a couple of things. One of them is in relation to the *Templar*.”

“I see,” Drew said as he approached one of the seats. “Please be seated.”

The Joint Chiefs and the ambassadors sat down at the same time Drew did. Drew looked around the room and noticed someone was missing from the meeting since the *Templar* was involved.

“If we are talking about the *Templar*,” Drew said, “then why is Agent Aja not here?”

“She is at the RCIA headquarters monitoring the second topic we wanted to discuss,” Mikey said.

“I see. What news do we have from the *Templar* this time? Have they reached the target system they were heading to?”

“Yes, sir,” Mikey said as he passed a couple of buttons at his terminal.

The holographic image of the star cluster began to zoom in on a specific star system near the outer edge of the Eastern Region. The remaining stars of the star cluster disappeared after they passed the hologram's edge. The system's colors for the celestial bodies changed from red to their actual colors. The star was a blue star with twelve planets and numerous moons. A blue arrow appeared past the orbit of the outermost planet. It indicated that it was the *Templar*.

"We had received this outline of the system from the *Templar* a few minutes after they scanned the system," Mikey said. "According to the report, the system's name is the Dellino System. This is the system where the consciousness of that clone infiltrator was transmitted to."

"Have they identified the planet where the facility is located?" Drew asked.

"Yes. There are two planets that are habitable in the system. Dellino III is one of them and based on optical observation, it has several research and military facilities there. The *Templar* is about to check the planet to make sure which facility it is so that an infiltration team can go in, wipe the data, and destroy their ability to produce clones."

"What is on the second habitable planet?"

"It appears to be a colony world. There are cities and agricultural centers all over both planets. They were able to identify other races other than Lykans on both planets, though."

"Then some of my brethren are on those worlds," Ambassador Drino said, "as well as other slaves."

"Correct," Mikey said. "So far, this is the most number of slaves as well as Lykans encountered by the *Templar* on both the planets. There are orbital installations over both of those worlds as well as industrial centers on the other planets. However, it appears that those centers are no longer functional."

"No doubt those other planets were strip-mined of their resources a long time ago. It takes a lot of resources to build ships and weapons, so it is no surprised that star system doesn't have much after a few centuries."

"I don't suppose you would know if their home system is in the same state of lacking resources by chance, do you?"

"Of that I do not know. Information on their home system is sketchy at best. I wouldn't be surprised if they used the resources of other planets to restore the planets in their own system from whatever industrialization they did to it centuries ago."

"Getting back to the topic about this star system," Drew said, "what about their military deployment? What forces are we looking at in this system?"

"Before I get to that point," Mikey said, "I noticed a rather interesting part of the report that we were provided by the *Templar* in terms of the Kingdom's military deployment."

"Go on."

"Apparently the results of their actions are having an effect on their forces after all. The Kingdom's military appears to be deploying ships from other systems to bolster their defensive positions on the frontlines instead of being able to build enough ships to replace the ones that our forces have destroyed thus far."

"That is good to hear," Ambassador Orbinai said. "Our government can only spare so many ships without compromising our own defenses. Hearing this news means that the Kingdom will either run out of ships or eventually pull back to consolidate their defenses."

"The State has fewer ships than either the Republic or the Empire," Drino said. "I was afraid that we were going to run out of ships we can spare in the fight. This news will help bolster our troops' morale."

"But now there is some news that I need to share with you all," Mikey said. "It has to do

with the report we got from the *Templar* about the military deployment in that system and about reports we are getting from Republic-controlled systems.”

“What are you talking about?” Drew asked.

“Look at this, please.”

Mikey pressed a few buttons at his terminal. About four red cones appeared in different places across the system near select planets except for one of them that was far “above” the system.

“These cones represent the star gates that are found in the Dellino System,” Mikey said. “The ones near the planets are not the ones I want to focus on but rather this one that is far from any of the celestial bodies in the system.”

Mikey pointed at the cone near the top as the hologram enlarged the cone. Once it enlarged to that object, the cone changed shape to that of a rather large and recently built star gate. However, it looked like it was pointing inwards towards the star cluster rather than away.

“As you can see, this gate looks to have been recently constructed and is pointing into the star cluster rather than away. The *Templar* also noticed these near the gate.”

Mikey pressed another button at his terminal and several ships appeared in formation in front of the gate.

“The *Templar* has confirmed these ships in formation appearing as though they are about to enter this star gate. We have counted one hundred and one ships, one of which is a battleship next to the gate. The other ships are arranged in what looks like ten smaller fleets of ten vessels with three cruisers and seven destroyers in each fleet.”

“That is an odd formation,” Drino said. “Usually there are two destroyers for each cruiser but it surprises me to see a cruiser in each fleet would have a third destroyer.”

“We thought so too, but then we noticed something odd about the seventh destroyer.”

Mikey focused on one of the destroyers in the fleet in front. This one was missing its gun turrets.

“You’ll notice something is missing from this destroyer in particular,” Mikey said. “For whatever reason, this ship is without its gun turrets. I have asked the *Templar* to do a more detailed scan of that ship’s interior when we reviewed this report. There is one of each of those ships without their guns in each of the fleets in that system. Ambassador Drino, do you know of any reason why the Lykans would have such a ship without weapons?”

“No, I don’t,” Drino said. “This is the first time I have heard of such a ship.”

“You don’t think it would be for logistical support or ground deployments by chance, do you?” Orbinai asked.

“Deployments of that nature require a battleship as they have the means to deploy far more troops,” Drino said. “A destroyer was not designed for that purpose.”

“Here is a question that needs to be asked,” Drew said. “Where does that star gate lead to?”

“That is hard to tell right now,” Mikey said. “The *Templar* has not detected a transmission link between this gate and another. It could be that the connecting gate is not online yet.”

“Do you have any idea where they are building the connecting gate?”

“I don’t think ‘building’ is the word that fits the situation. I think the word ‘traveling’ is what may be happening here.”

“What do you mean when you say ‘traveling’?”

“That is what leads me to the second topic. There have been a series of reports that state that, for a brief moment, that a large object has jumped near a star system only to quickly jump

away before it can be identified. These reports started from near Kingdom systems where our forces are still fighting and have currently been reported heading into Republic space.”

“Are you sure that these were actual jumps and not just some random sensor echos or interference?”

“We’ve considered those possibilities due to the distance the readings were taken outside the systems where it was detected. However, there was a timeline to these readings that correlate to where it started and where it was last detected.”

“So you’re telling me that these were seen in sequence from one star system to another? I guess it could be something jumping from one system to another, but how would that even be possible? Wouldn’t it take a lot of crystals to do a continuous number of jumps like that?”

“It would, so whatever is doing all that jumping would have been loaded with a LOT of crystals.”

“Correct me if I am wrong but would the Kingdom have enough crystals to make so many jumps? According to the reports I’ve seen, we managed to seize a lot of crystal mining operations in the early part of the war.”

“We did. According to the records the State has provided us, there would not be much in terms of such operations on the Kingdom’s side of their defensive lines unless they expanded to other systems or used their reserves. Even then, the amount of crystals needed would still be rather high.”

“When was the last report?”

“The last report of such a sighting came in a couple of minutes before you entered and here is the path the object has been taking thus far.”

Mikey pressed another button on the terminal and the map expanded to the edge of the cluster from the Eastern Region to just a few systems “west” of the Lumen System. Dots suddenly appeared in sequential order from just behind enemy lines to ten systems away from the Lumen System. Lines appeared between the dots marking the path of the sightings. It was not a completely straight line, but it did give a general idea as to where whatever was jumping was heading to.

“As you can see,” Mikey said, “it’s heading to this system.”

“That is not good,” Drew said. “It would appear that the Lykans had a similar idea of attacking our capital but we still don’t know what it is that is heading here.”

“Earlier I had mentioned about the gate in the Dellino System and how I mentioned that ‘destination’ would actually be ‘traveling,’ correct?”

“Yes, you did say that. Wait a moment. Are you telling me that the object traveling here is a star gate?!”

“That seems to be the only logical conclusion to send only one object towards Lumen. That fleet in Dellino would be an invasion or assault force for use against us.”

“Are the First, Second, and Third Fleets still in the system?”

“Yes they are. What are your orders?”

“First, how long do you think it will take for it to arrive here in the Lumen System?”

“At its current pace, it will arrive in about ten minutes.”

“Are we able to contact the *Templar* to see if they can infiltrate that star gate in the Dellino System to prevent those ships from going through?”

“Right now they are checking out the planet that they suspect the cloning center is on. If we contact them now when they are that close to an enemy planet, there is a chance the transmission would be detected and would reveal their location.”

“We may have to risk it. Send an order to the *Templar* to try and infiltrate the enemy star gate as soon as possible. In the event that they are not able to stop the gate from sending some of those ships through before they can infiltrate it, I want to go ahead and have the First, Second, and Third Fleets on alert. Also, have the planetary defenses and shields ready to activate at a moment’s notice. We don’t know what those destroyers that don’t have weapons are designed for but if they arrive in the system, they will be our first target. Are the new warp disruption field generators ready for deployment?”

“All three of the Main Fleets have the generators. Once we detect where the star gate will appear, we can try to deploy them in their path between the gate and this planet. It’s obvious they intend to attack our capital so if we can prevent them from reaching here, it will be easier for us to take care of them.”

“Wait a moment,” Drino said. “Warp disruptor field generators?”

“This is the first time I think either of us has heard of such a thing,” Orbinai said.

“We have been testing this technology for quite a while,” Mikey said, “even before the war began. The military and law enforcement agencies have been looking into ways to prevent criminals from escaping justice by preventing them from entering warp as soon as they could do so. These warp field disruptors will do just that.”

“When do you think you will have them deployed on the frontlines?” Drino asked. “They sound like an effective way to keep the Kingdom from deploying their fleets against us and to help back them into a corner.”

“We only have the ones that were deployed with the first three Main Fleets. We don’t have enough yet for frontline deployment.”

“We can talk about those later,” Drew said. “Right now, that object is jumping closer to this system and we need to get ready for an attack. Make the preparations, Grand Admiral.”

The Joint Chiefs stood up and saluted.

“Yes, sir!” they said in unison.

Drew stood up and saluted in response for a couple of seconds before lowering his arm.

“If you all could please clear the War Room for a moment,” Drew said, “I need to make an announcement to the public. Please show the ambassadors to the communications room where they can contact their governments concerning this matter.”

“Yes, sir,” Mikey said. “Ambassadors, please follow us.”

The Joint Chiefs left the War Room followed by the ambassadors. As soon as the doors closed, Drew went to the head of the table. He turned off the hologram of the star cluster and turned the lights on. He then brought up a hologram behind him with the logo of the Republic against a blue background. A camera drone emerged from one of the walls and hovered in front of Drew. Drew took a deep breath.

“Computer, activate the Emergency Broadcast System.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
10:24am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“What in the world?”

Laura was relaxing in her bed after she ate breakfast and was watching a comedy program when her monitor changed and displayed the Emergency Broadcast System. Laura sighed when that appeared.

“Seriously?” she said. “A test now?”

Laura was about to reach for the remote control to turn off the monitor when the image of Drew suddenly appeared. At that point, she realized that this was not a test of the system, but instead was the real thing. She began to think back about what Christina had told her earlier about a strange object jumping near the Viridis System. What if there was something about that object after all?

*“Ladies and gentlemen of the Republic,” Drew said. “I have received word that there is an object that has been jumping just outside star systems coming from Kingdom space and is on course to arrive here in the Lumen System in roughly five minutes. It is believed that this object is some form of mobile star gate constructed by the Kingdom in order to circumvent our defenses and launch an attack directly on our capital by transporting ships from their space into ours.”*

Laura was beginning to panic and she knew she would not be the only one. Everyone on the planet and in the system would start to freak out about this news and this would not be good.

*“We are mobilizing our forces and our defenses in preparation for this invasion,” Drew continued. “The First, Second, and Third Fleets are moving into defensive positions to intercept enemy forces. At this time, I am requesting a complete stop to all civilian traffic in the system for the safety of our citizens and for those that are off-world to seek shelter in any and all stations within the system. The star gates will be closed to prevent enemy forces from spreading to other systems and will only be activated if additional forces are needed. I ask that the public please remain calm as we deal with the enemy forces and we will continue to update you all with information on this matter as soon as possible.”*

As soon as Drew finished, the image went back to the Emergency Broadcasting System logo with the Republic logo behind it. Soon, news stations were going to start reporting about the situation to the entire Republic.

If Laura didn't feel fear before, she did now. She can only hope Trent is able to do something about this situation somehow before the Kingdom starts to invade the heart of the Republic.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1  
Planet Dellino III Orbit, Dellino System, Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region  
10:28am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“What was that?”

Trent could not tell whether he was hearing things or if this request was legitimate. Sheryl had received a communication from headquarters requesting for the *Templar* to infiltrate the star gate where the enemy fleet was located and take control of it as soon as possible. What bothered Trent was the fact that headquarters sent the message at the risk of enemy forces and installations detecting the *Templar*.

The ship had just reached Dellino III after finding the cloning facility on one of the northern continents. Trent had requested for Colonel Blair to send some of his SAGATs with the optical camouflage to infiltrate the compound, delete all of the DNA information that was gathered, and then destroy the clones along with the compound. They would then be extracted from the planet. The operation would be led by Lieutenant Colonel Benja. They were about to deploy the troops in a dropship that was designed with stealth technology much like everything else on the *Templar* before this communication came in.

“Can you confirm that message?” Trent asked to make sure he heard it correctly.

“Confirmed, sir,” Sheryl said. “Headquarters want us to send an infiltration team to the star gate where the enemy fleet is located and take possession of the gate.”

“We’re still getting an analysis from the scans we took on the ships that don’t have guns that they requested not too long ago. I wonder why they want us to take possession of the gate.”

“There is more to the message, sir. According to reports, there is an object that is doing continuous jumps towards the Lumen System due to arrive any minute. They suspect that the Kingdom has loaded a mobile star gate with a very large supply of crystals and it has been jumping just outside each star system which is how they detected it.”

“The Lykans are possibly jumping a star gate from system to system all the way to Lumen? That has to cost the Lykans a lot of their crystal supply to be doing that.”

It then hit Trent as to why they were ordered to infiltrate the star gate.

“Wait a minute,” Trent said. “We confirmed earlier that the star gate that fleet was at was not active or tied to a receiving gate, correct?”

“Yes, sir,” Tora said. “I sent that part of our report to...wait, you’re not saying that the gate in this system is supposed to be tied to the one heading for the Lumen System, are you?”

Everyone turned to Trent when Tora said that.

“That is exactly what I am saying,” Trent said. “We are looking at an invasion fleet meant to attack our capital.”

“But that’s crazy!” Natalie said. “Their fleet may have a hundred ships but they can’t be stupid enough to think that destroyers and cruisers are enough to take on the First through Third Fleets of the Republic or for that matter our planetary defenses!”

Trent thought about it for a moment before another thought hit him.

“There is a distinct possibility that the destruction or disabling of our military at the capital is not the objective of that fleet. I need a rush on that analysis on what those unarmed ships are carrying!”

“Yes, sir!” Tora said. “I’ll inform the analysis team.”

“Usatame, get me Colonel Blair right now.”

“Yes, sir,” she said as she pressed a few buttons.

After a brief moment, a holographic screen appeared and Colonel Blair appeared on it.

“Trent,” Blair said, “*my SAGATs are ready for deployment.*”

“I want you to deploy them as soon as they are ready,” Trent said. “We got orders that require us to head for the star gate that the enemy fleet is near.”

“*Why are we heading there?*”

“We have been ordered to seize that gate and keep the fleet that is there from entering it or as much of the fleet as possible. The Lykans have decided to do a bold maneuver and have managed to jump a mobile star gate all the way to the Lumen System and it’s supposed to connect to the gate located in this system.”

“*Tell me you are kidding?*”

“Sir!” Sheryl said. “That star gate is getting a signal to connect!”

“Blair,” Trent said, “I wish I was kidding.”

Blair’s face showed an expression of shock before getting serious.

“*I’ll deploy the compound infiltration team at once! I’ll get a second team ready!*”

The holographic screen disappeared. Trent can only hope that they can reach the star gate in time before that entire fleet went through it.

\* \* \* \* \*



*War Room, Republic Military Headquarters Station  
Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
10:31am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“Do we have confirmation it is the Lykan star gate?”

The Joint Chiefs had just returned to the War Room when the proximity alarms started going off less than a minute ago. The hologram in the middle of the table started to show the Lumen System as well as the placement of all of the stations and fleets in the system. While the planets were in blue and the ships were in green, there was one object that appeared over the system over fifty AU’s away from Luminaire almost straight up that was designated in red.

“We’re getting long-range telescopes to focus on the object to confirm,” Mikey said.  
“Shall I send one of the fleets to that location to intercept?”

Drew thought about it for a moment before coming to a decision.

“Send the First Fleet to intercept,” Drew said. “However, I want to make it clear that I want the star gate to remain intact and if at all possible seized.”

“I’m ordering the First Fleet to warp to that position right now,” Mikey said, “but why do you want to seize the gate? I noticed you wanted the *Templar* to do the same at the opposite gate. Why do you want the gates intact?”

“Bear in mind that right now the Kingdom is trying to send ships from a system that is well beyond their defensive lines and possibly near their capital. If we can seize the gates on both ends, we can bypass their defensive lines and possibly establish a base of operations deep in Kingdom territory.”

“I see. So you want to turn this invasion of theirs the other way around.”

“Yes, but they may have a failsafe or two in place in case of such a situation. That is why I requested for the *Templar* to seize it on their end. There is a chance the gate here is not crewed considering it is most likely a one-way trip after using all those crystals. If that is the case, then the gate in the Dellino System has the controls for this one here. If the *Templar* can access that gate’s controls, we will be able to send ships past their frontlines.”

An alarm soon sounded as the object in red on the holographic map began to show ten new signals from one end of it. The First Fleet was still on route to that location. By the time they would reach that location, the enemy fleet would already be warping to Luminaire.

“Grand Admiral,” Drew said. “Have the First Fleet drop a warp field disruptor behind them and have the Second Fleet proceed to those coordinates. That enemy fleet will be warping out before the First Fleet arrives and I want them intercepted before that happens.”

“Understood,” Mikey said. “Sending the order now.”

As the First Fleet approached the location of the enemy star gate, a sphere appeared behind them indicating the activation of a warp field disruptor. The Second Fleet began to warp to that position, but the enemy fleet began to move and warp towards the field unsuspectingly. The two fleets would soon meet in the field as the First Fleet was arriving at the enemy star gate.

The terminal was soon beeping, indicating an incoming communication. Mikey looked at who was calling.

“We are getting an encoded message from the *Templar*,” Mikey said.

“Have they reached the enemy star gate in the Dellino System yet?” Drew asked.

“They are reporting that they just deployed the SAGATs for the infiltration operation into the cloning facility. They are also reporting that they have the results of the analysis from what is on board the unarmed ships.”

“What are they saying?”

Mikey looked over the report before his face started to go pale.  
“Grand Admiral?” Drew asked, puzzled. “What’s wrong?”  
“No,” Mikey said, his voice shaking. “Great Maker, no...”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1  
Planet Dellino III Orbit, Dellino System, Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region  
10:34am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

“It’s a biological weapon?!”

Trent was just as shocked about the result of the analysis as everyone else was when the report came in. No one on the bridge could believe that the Lykans would resort to what would be considered “barbaric” weapons. However, the results were conclusive of the payload the Lykans were deploying to the Lumen System.

“I wish there was better news,” Tora said, “but that is what they managed to conclude.”

“What is it supposed to do?” Trent asked.

“According to the analysts, the viral agent inside of the weapon was designed to break down the cellular bonds that hold together Human DNA. If those bonds break down throughout the Human body, the body will disintegrate into nothing more than our basic compounds.”

“You have got to be kidding me! How is it dispersed?”

“It’s airborne and it is concentrated. If even one of those ships managed to break through our defensive lines and disperse it in the atmosphere, every Human on the planet will be dead within a day or two without any harm to the environment.”

“It’s like a pesticide for them to use against insects. They considered us an ‘infestation’ from the start and now they have managed to create something to remove the ‘infestation’ without harming the planet itself. I can’t believe they went so far to make such a thing!”

“What do we do?” Natalie asked. “I do not doubt the capabilities of our fleets in Lumen but if they fail to stop even one of those ships carrying the virus, then everyone on Luminaire will die and the planet would have to be under quarantine for the foreseeable future.”

Trent looked back forward to think about the situation for a brief moment before he had an idea.

“Haley,” Trent said. “How many fleets has the drone seen going into that star gate?”

“So far?” Haley asked. “Only one has gone through and a second one is in position to go through the gate.”

“What are you planning, sir?” Tora asked.

“We are going to proceed to taking control of the star gate,” Trent said. “However, we are also going on the offensive by taking out those ships with the viral agent payload.”

“Wait, you want to attack them?! Sir, this ship was designed for covert operations, not to go toe-to-toe with an enemy fleet! The moment we attack those ships, we will be outnumbered and outgunned!”

“If this ship was a regular Republic vessel, I would agree with you. However, I was the one that designed this ship. When I did so, I designed it to have turrets in the event that it had to go toe-to-toe with Kingdom ships. Also, the ship is equipped with not just a cloaking device, but as you recall it also has ECM and ECCM capabilities. If the enemy ships cannot lock onto our position even when we are not cloaked, they cannot harm us.”

“I was aware of those abilities, sir. That is why I think this is risky. If the enemy ships managed to compensate for the ECM’s we were hitting them with, then the odds will not be in

our favor. Also, we have not established control of the other star gates in this system. The enemy could call for reinforcements at any point if they got past the jamming field we would most likely have deployed at that point.”

“Even if we got control of the gates, that would not stop them from simply jumping into this system, provided they have any crystals left in reserve. We don’t have the time to argue about this right now. We need to stop those ships and that gate before our forces are overwhelmed in Lumen.”

“Alright. You at least have a point.”

“Usatame, please let Blair know that we are about to warp to the enemy star gate and to have his infiltration team ready.”

“Yes, sir,” Usatame said.

“Helm, warp us to that gate.”

“Understood,” Rei said.

As the warp drive began to start up, Trent began to worry about those on Luminaire, especially Laura and Amarria. All he can hope for is that the fleets are able to stop the enemy ships that have made it through.

\* \* \* \* \*

*SAGAT Holding Bay, Republic Stealth Dropship  
Planet Dellino III Upper Atmosphere, Dellino System, Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region  
10:36am, September 2, 5433 A.D.*

*“We will be leaving the upper atmosphere in one minute!”*

The pilot’s voice came through on the speaker as the dropship began to descend into the lower atmosphere of Dellino III on route to the cloning facility that was identified by Tora. Once they had identified the location of the facility, Colonel Blair ordered that Lieutenant Colonel Benja lead the team that would infiltrate the compound and wipe the data as well as destroy any existing clones that remained. They would then destroy the facility to prevent any evidence or DNA information from being used again. This included the workers and scientists in the facility whether they were civilian or military personnel. If they had a hand in the biological weapon’s creation, they needed to be taken out to prevent their knowledge from being used again.

However, if this facility indeed created the biological weapon, then Benja and his team needed extra protection in case the weapon was deployed inside the facility against them. While the team would have active optical camouflage, it would not take long for the security personnel in the facility to realize someone was there that shouldn’t be. In case that happens and the weapon was used, the team wore fully enclosed combat suits with their own life support system. They would be protected unless the suit was compromised. Hopefully that is not the case as Benja was told the weapon was very nasty based on the analysis that was done.

Benja looked around the hold at the other SAGATs that were with him. There were a total of ten men and women locked into holding cradles to keep them in their seats while the shuttle made its way through the upper atmosphere. The helmets were fully enclosed where you could not see their faces but their names appeared on Benja’s heads-up display or HUD through his helmet’s optics. Because of that, Benja could not tell the expressions on their faces knowing the kind of situation they were getting themselves into.

*“We have entered the lower atmosphere,”* the pilot’s voice said over the intercom. *“We will be reaching our destination in two minutes.”*

Benja pressed a communications button on his helmet.

“Understood,” Benja said. “Make sure to drop us off just inside the compound as quietly as you can. I want to make sure that we are not detected the moment we hit the ground.”

*“Understood. Standby for drop.”*

Benja and the rest of team pushed the harnesses off of them as they got up from their seats. They checked their rifles. While laser-based rifles were the standard weapon of the SAGATs, these rifles were simple carbine rifles with silencers at the end. While ammo was needed for these types of rifles which they had to carry extra on them, the SAGATs on previous missions hardly had a need to fire them unless needed. Hopefully that is the case here.

They clipped the rifles onto their backs, pressed a button on their wrist that activated their optical camouflage, and gripped the handles on the ceiling of the bay. Once the camouflage is active, Benja’s optical displayed an outline of the suits of each of his teammates to show where they are. Only if someone had the same optics as one of these suits had installed would anyone really see them without bumping into them.

*“I’m coming up on the facility,”* the pilot said. *“I have the engines running silent as we are approaching. It appears the best spot for entry is on the rooftop. I see guards on the walls but none on the roof.”*

“Good,” Benja said. “Drop us off there and find a secure landing site for extraction.”

*“Understood. Drop in thirty seconds.”*

Benja looked down at the floor. It was in fact a large double door but it was designed to slide open rather than open outward. This way the optical camouflage would not be compromised when the SAGATs were dropped through the opening as the doors would have gone through the field if they dropped downward. An alarm went off and the doors suddenly slip open while the SAGATs were holding onto the rails above them. They could see the ground below them which was primarily forest and grass. The dropship was rather high up from the ground so the SAGATs had to hold on for a little longer.

Soon the walls that the pilot mentioned passed beneath them and the grounds of the compound soon after. The building itself was soon underneath as the dropship came to a halt. A green light went off without a sound in the bay and all of the SAGATs released the rails they were holding on to. The drop was about ten feet but thanks to the suits they were wearing and their physical training, it did not hurt them much at all to drop from that height. Benja could see the silhouette of the dropship through his optics flying away from them towards the local forest. Hopefully there was a clearing for it to land somewhere among all of the trees.

Benja and his team stood up and grabbed the rifles off of their backs as they surveyed around the rooftop and the complex. It was lightly guarded considering the amount of research being done here. Most likely the guards were at the walls to keep those Lykans or slaves who were curious as well as wild animals away, but not an infiltration team such as their team. They spotted a door at one of the corners of the rooftop and walked over to it. One of the SAGATs who specialized in electronic surveillance scanned the door for trip alarms, but indicated there were none. She was able to unlock the door through the electronic lock, but she made sure that the sensor did not notify their security that someone was entering. It wouldn’t sound an alarm nor log someone entering otherwise.

As the door opened, Benja took a deep breath. Now was the time to fulfill the mission they came halfway across the star cluster to do.

\* \* \* \* \*