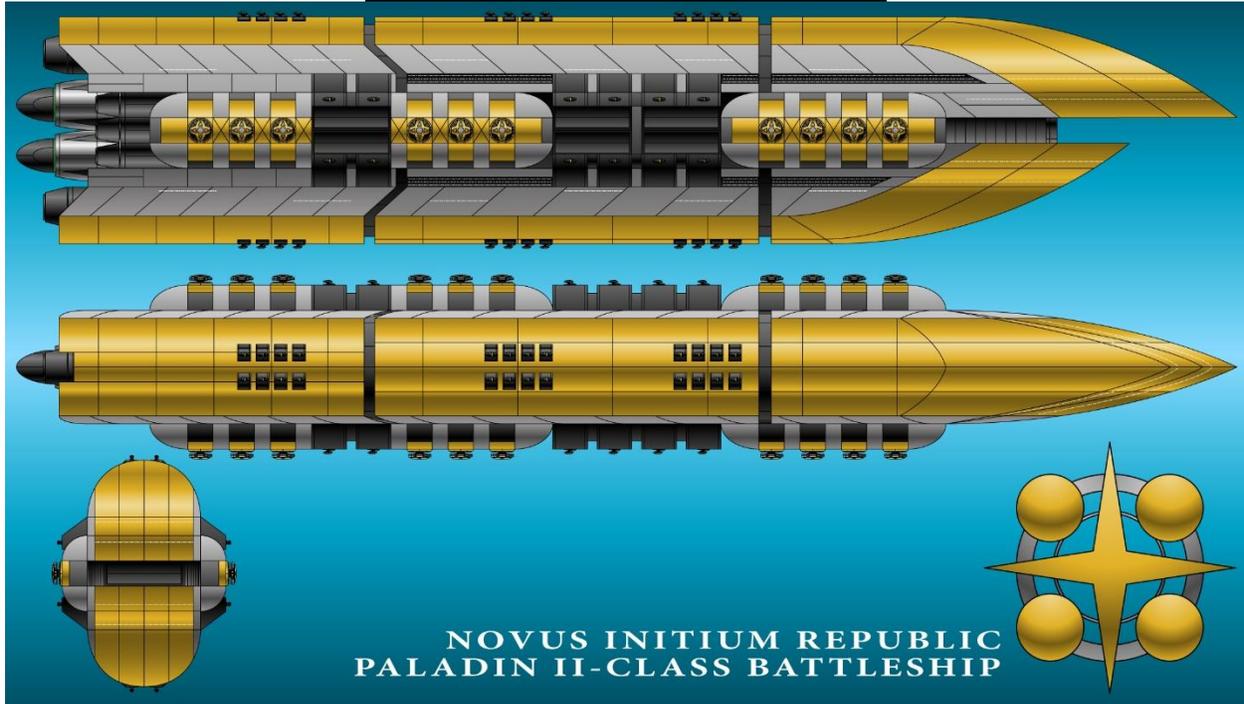


*Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga*  
*Episode VII: The Tiger and the Dragon*



**PART 10**

*On Route to Private Residence of Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
11:07am, November 3, 5434 A.D. (8 Days Later)*

“It will be good to be home again.”

Trent was driving up the road into the familiar neighborhood where his house resided, built on the slope of the northern mountains facing towards Luminous to the south. He had not been home in weeks since he was originally deployed to the Ruber System to transport his daughter and other essential personnel to the stealth ships *Templar* and *Cavalier*. The last thing he expected to do was to get transported to Tenebris Prime and occupy the former Dominion’s capital. A great deal has happened in the past eight days since the Dominion’s forces attacked Lumen and Sanctus.

Supreme Chancellor Drew announced that same day, shortly after the Dominion’s leader Armani Draco was assassinated, the existence of the Dominion and the Federation along with their history relating to events from six hundred and fifty years ago. It was no surprise that both Drew and the RCIA came under a great deal of criticism from the Senate for hiding such information, but thankfully for the Chancellor, he was able to legitimize his position on the operation by stating he needed to “evaluate the potential threat the two rogue factions posed on the Republic and its citizens without causing panic.” From what Trent could tell when he saw that broadcast after the fact, the Senate chamber was quiet for a moment. The senators were quick to realize that if they had known about the Dominion and the Federation in advance, they would have panicked once they found out about their military capabilities before any form of relations would have occurred.

Their concerns on the matter were also quieted after Drew mentioned that he had established contact with Federation President Shea and that the Federation currently harbors no ill-will against the Republic. While there were some within the Senate that called for the Federation to dissolve in violation of the Republic Charter a few days after deliberations, the vote to allow the Federation to remain an independent and sovereign nation was passed with eighty-four percent in favor. Much of that was due to the alien citizens within their borders who also provided testimony for each of their races involving their history and status. The move to approve the Federation's sovereignty was also pushed by members of the Liberigi Mandate who see the Federation as the end-result to the Mandate's eventual sovereignty from the Holy Lykan Republic. Thankfully for the Federation, many senators agreed with that notion of a multi-racial nation being developed.

The Tenebris Dominion, however, was another matter. The Dominion attacked the Republic, but thankfully there were no losses among Republic forces or civilians. However, unlike the Federation, the Dominion had multiple issues that worked against them. The first was they were a theocratical tribal faction run by a sole dictator for more than six hundred years with little to no basic Human rights or freedoms for most of the population. That same population were made up of clones with no means of reproducing on their own and they ingest enriched blood as a form of nourishment. The ruling "head families" of the five tribes who were direct descendants of those that fled the Republic also ingested blood, though they were able to have children through some inhuman methods according to the former Tigris Chief Miya.

If those issues were not bad enough, the Dominion strip-mined numerous planets and moons to fuel their war machine for the day they would eventually destroy the Republic along with the Federation. While that did not happen due to the actions the late Armani Draco took in killing off his own military manpower in the form of the Aspergillus Tribe, the ecological damage that was done was very devastating. It is not currently known whether the Dominion ever encountered any sentient alien races in the Southwest Region only to wipe them out over resources, but the fact that restoration of those moons and worlds to their former state was almost next to impossible without a few hundred years of effort.

While the technology behind the Dominion's portal drive and solar particle generators were advancements that could benefit the Republic, it was quickly determined that the damage these two pieces of technology could do needed to be corrected. The solar particle generators were missing key components to make them self-sufficient causing them to create toxic particles that would cause environmental damage just being in near proximity to them. Their lack of self-sufficiency also explained why even gas planets in the Dominion looked to be nearly depleted of valuable gases, leaving inert gases and almost leaving their cores visible in some cases.

The portal drive did not prove to be any better. The creation of the portals the drive establishes is so forceful on the fabric of space and time that the areas that are affected left residual traces of anomalies that only went away after a day or two. Continuous use in the same location reveals that the damage was so extensive that a rip in space-time was almost evident that could not be repaired. Thankfully, the technology exists to "heal" these affected areas, but modifications would need to be made including to the Federation's current line of ships to make the use of the drive more feasible and less damaging. Efforts were already being investigated implementing a new line of star gates that could use the portal system as studies show there to be no damage to space-time if a portal is securely established at each end of a connecting corridor.

The one piece of technology that was new to the Republic and was not controversial at all was the shield hardeners that reduced the amount of damage shields could withstand based on

the type of damage that was applied to them. While the Dominion and the Federation both had the technology at their disposal, the type of damage they were protecting each other from was thermal and kinetic based on the particle beam weaponry they were using. If this same technology can be used to adapt to electromagnetic and explosive damage as well, the need for having the shield boosters on Republic ships to continuously be active in combat would not be as much as it is now. For that matter, the primary shields could last longer in battle before an aggressive force's weapons could even result in the activation of the secondary shields, let alone touch the armored hulls of Republic ships. The Senate saw potential in this technology and wanted it to be implemented on Republic vessels immediately.

With the death of Armani Draco, the one solely responsible for ruling the Dominion could not be brought to trial for their actions and violations to the Republic Charter, basic Human rights, and environmental protection laws. Instead, the three remaining Chiefs that were loyal to Armani were being brought to trial for being accomplices to his actions. Because the use of enriched blood would be halted and the fact their stomachs could not handle solid food, enriched protein and vitamin drinks would be supplied and manufactured within the newly designated "Nature Restoration Zone" that was once the former Dominion's space. For their efforts in trying to subvert Armani and bring him to justice, the former chiefs along with Miya and Ebony were sentenced to work their remaining years as directors of the NRZ to restore the worlds the Dominion had either destroyed or strip mined. The remaining members of the head families were sentenced to work on the restoration along with the remaining clones. No more clones were to be produced either. This process would be overseen by an Oversight Committee consisting of members from the Federation and the Republic.

Chancellor Drew did bring up the peacekeeper force to the Senate that the Lykan Prime Minister proposed a couple of weeks ago to both patrolling the borders between the nations and as the overseer of the Nature Restoration Zone prior to the Oversight Committee being formed. To sweeten the offer, he mentioned that the former Dominion's dreadnoughts could be recycled and rebuilt into a new line of ships that could use the technology recovered from the Dominion once the technology was improved. The idea of using a new line of ships that would not deplete the Republic forces and would not require an increase in resource harvesting was very appealing. After Drew had mentioned that the plans for the new ship were already developed during the initial investigation of the two rogue factions and that automation would allow the new ships to be made quickly, the Senate approved of their construction. This approval, however, came with two conditions with the first being the Nature Restoration Zone falling under the jurisdiction of Oversight Committee leading to its foundation. The second condition was that the same technology would be implemented on existing Republic designs.

Drew agreed to both conditions, which has led to Trent being able to return home. It did not take long for Republic engineers researching the portal drive and solar particle generators to reduce their size and power requirements, allowing battleship-class vessels to use them. Engineers from Horribilis Industries who developed the current line of Republic ships took the new pieces of technology and developed a new drive section for the Paladin-Class Battleships, designating them as "Mark II's" or simply Paladin II-Class Battleships. There was also word of other changes being made to the battleships, but Trent has not heard what those changes will be.

With the help of the Federation dreadnought *Heaven's Arrow*, Trent's battleship, the *Marshal*, was returned to the Republic to undergo the refit along with all existing battleships at the shipyards in the Horribilis System, the namesake of the company located three jumps by star gate to the "northwest." The remainder of Trent's fleet would return once the first joint

operations vessels, recently announced as the Enforcer-Class Battleship, were deployed to the Nature Restoration Zone in the next few days along with the first portal generating star gate. This meant that the *Marshal* would remain in Republic space for the foreseeable future and Trent would have time to take care of things at home, especially since he had not heard from Laura since his return to Republic space. Amarria also returned to the Republic a few days ago after the Federation was recognized as a sovereign nation, but she hadn't said anything about Laura to Trent even though he had assumed the two of them managed to talk to each other once she returned home.

Once he entered the Tacoma suburb, he could feel the temperature get cooler outside the car. While Luminaire had seasons much like ancient Earth, the tilt was just over twenty-one degrees, so they were not as apparent in some areas. However, it still got cooler during the late fall months, especially once someone drives into the northern mountains. The snow was starting to appear on the peaks of the mountains, but thankfully, his house was far lower in elevation.

Trent soon saw his house as he approached from down the street. He knew that Laura would be working today, so the likelihood she would be home was slim to none. He would surprise her once she got home by making dinner. Hopefully, the ingredients to his favorite dish were in stock at home. Otherwise, he would have to go to a grocery store even though he just got home. As he pulled into the driveway and pressed the button in the car to open the garage door, he saw another vehicle parked on the right side of the garage. This vehicle was not Laura's, but he did recognize it as Amarria's two-door blue coupe. Puzzled by seeing her car in the garage, Trent parked his car on the left side next to her car. He powered down the vehicle and exited the car, making his way around to the inside door to the garage. He pressed the garage door control to close the garage and took out his key to unlock the inside door.

The door was already unlocked when Trent turned the knob to open it. Puzzled even further, he went inside and closed the door behind him.

"Amarria?" Trent said aloud while looking around the house from his vantage point.

Amarria soon appeared at the end of the hallway from the right where the front living room was located. She looked like she had been crying.

"Amarria?" Trent asked again. "Is everything alright? What are you doing here?"

"I waited for you to return today," Amarria said, her voice filled with sadness. "There is a message to you from mom on the keyholder right next to you."

Trent looked to his left at the keyholder, and there was an envelope with his name on it. Trent grabbed the envelope with his left hand and proceeded to open the letter. As Trent began to read it, his shock was becoming more apparent on his face to the point he almost fell over in disbelief at what the letter had said.

Laura left him and was filing for divorce.

Trent looked at Amarria who was beginning to cry again.

"I called her when I got back," she said. "She told me that she left the house on the same day the Dominion attacked prior to their invasion. She also told me why, which I'm sure you read in that letter. She took all her things, leaving your things and all the non-perishable food. She wasn't about to let you starve when you came back at least."

"I knew she was getting increasingly concerned about my deployments recently," Trent said as he put the letter back in the envelope. "This got worse after you moved out as you were no longer around to keep her company after she came home. I guess once you left for Propitius Esto on the *Templar*, that was either her final straw, her opportunity to leave, or both. I take it that after you talked to her, you kept quiet to me until I read this letter for myself, correct?"

“Yes. I didn’t want you to have to think about this while you were still deployed at Tenebris Prime. She did tell me that since she already took all of her stuff and she found an apartment downtown close to work, there wasn’t much remaining of hers for her to ask for in return when her lawyers started to draft the decree.”

“Our bank accounts were already separated to make paying our bills easier, so that is also one less thing to be concerned about. I guess I better contact my lawyer as well, but I wasn’t expecting to do this when I got back here. My guess is you came here so that I was not alone or to make sure I wasn’t about to blow up in my own house, huh?”

“Something like that. I knew you needed someone to talk to once you saw the letter, so I arrived here before you did to make sure.”

“Thank you, Amarria. It does help to soften the blow with you being here.”

“If you want, I can go get us something for lunch nearby and bring it back here? This will give you some time to process this whole matter in private for a little bit.”

“What about you, though? What are your thoughts on all of this?”

“To be honest, I wished this never happened. I don’t like the thought of the two of you being separated like this. If I ever get married and have kids, what am I going to tell them?”

“You tell them the truth. I don’t want you to ever lie to any children you have about this or anything for that matter. Lies and secrets lead to despair, and that is quite evident when it comes to recent events, am I right?”

Amarria chuckled a little.

“You make a valid point,” she said.

“Alright, then. There is burger place nearby near the base of the mountain. I haven’t had a good burger in weeks.”

“Are the cooks not very good on the *Marshal*?”

“They are, but they make things lean and ‘healthy’ so that we remain in top physical form. I want an honest-to-goodness wholesome bacon double cheeseburger with fries and a chocolate shake.”

Amarria smiled.

“I guess that is the reason they call it ‘comfort food,’ huh?” she said.

“It’s a dated term, but still applies.”

“Alright. It will be my treat. I’ll take my time, though, so that you can have a moment alone for a little while.”

“Thank you. I’m going to look around the house and see what needs to be replaced.”

Amarria walked down the hallway to Trent and gave him a hug.

“I love you, dad,” she said.

“I love you, too, dear,” Trent said, fighting back the tears.

Amarria pulled back from the hug and walked by Trent’s right side to go to the door to the garage. Trent walked down the hall towards the front living room as Amarria went through the door to the garage. As he heard the garage door open and Amarria’s car power up, he looked at the front living room. He noticed a few pieces of furniture, namely the two chairs and the coffee table, were missing and remembered that Laura had bought those.

From there, he began to inspect the rest of the house, going through the front office and formal dining room first before walking into the kitchen and den. He was quick to spot that many dishes and cookware were missing, which was no surprise considering how much of that she bought when she wanted to cook without the need of the automated systems in the kitchen. He proceeded downstairs to the spare room and entertainment room to investigate only to find that

nothing had been removed as he furnished those rooms. He went back upstairs to the main floor before proceeding to the top floor. He started with the master bedroom and noticed a chair and the two dressers were missing with his clothes on the bed still folded. Surprisingly, she did not take the bed sheets with her, but he assumed that she was getting a smaller bed for herself and did not need the king-size sheets and comforter. He checked both the bathroom and closet, not surprised that all her toiletries and clothes were gone. He walked out of the master bedroom and checked the rest of the rooms. Nothing was taken from the spare rooms and his main office.

Trent headed back down the stairs and towards the den, making his way to one of the seats that was facing the monitor in the room, but did not turn the screen on. During the whole house tour, he struggled to fight the tears that were trying to form in his eyes, but he couldn't hold back any longer once he finished looking over the house. He leaned forward in the chair, cupping his face in his hands. He had not cried in a long time, but he never expected to come home to something like this. He never felt so alone in his own house before.

Trent didn't know how long he cried before he could hear the garage door opening and a car pulling in. He went to the kitchen to get a small towel to wipe his eyes, but he knew that when Amarria comes in, she will know he had been crying. He heard the door open to the garage and Amarria walked into the kitchen with food and drinks in her hands. She saw him standing there, his eyes red.

"I had a feeling that was going to happen," Amarria said as she put the two small bags of food down on the island counter along with the drinks. "Are you okay, dad?"

"I will be," Trent said. "I went around the entire house to see what was gone and what remained. Your mother focused on some of the furniture in the living room and bedroom, the kitchen and cook ware, and her personal items in the bathroom and closet. Either she didn't want the other items, or she had no need for them wherever she moved to."

"I haven't had the chance to see her new place. I wanted to wait for you to return before I would process this whole thing. I wish I saw this coming before I went to the Federation. I would have brought it up and see if you two wanted to go through marriage counseling at least."

"It isn't your fault, Amarria. I was the one who should have seen this coming. I just wish your mother said something before it came to her pulling off something like this. She could have at least waited until I returned so that we could talk about this rather than her disappearing and avoiding me like she did. I wonder if she did so to avoid confrontation."

"I don't have an answer to that. I wish I did, but now I'm trying to figure out how this will affect my visits like on the holidays. I now have to choose between you and her when I want to see you two and that isn't fair."

"I know it isn't. I had hoped that if our marriage ever got to such a point, we would never put you in such a situation. Whether Laura knew this or not when she made this decision is irrelevant at this point. All I can say is that I hope that you're not viewing this as your fault. Your mother and I should have worked this out long before it reached this point and we failed to do so. At least I can say that I know that we both still love you. Now we just need to go through this whole process and finalize this divorce so that we can move on."

"Do you think you or her will find someone else after this?"

"I only just found out about this divorce a moment ago, dear. I haven't given that idea a great deal of thought just yet. Of course, I wasn't expecting to in the first place. Now, let's go ahead and eat before the food gets cold and my shake melts."

"I'll get the plates, provided there are any left."

"Only the recyclable paper ones. She took all the good dishware with her."

“Alright,” Amarria said as she walked over to the pantry where those plates were stored. “Are you going to call mom after she gets off work today?”

“I’ll send her a message letting her know I got her letter,” Trent said as he pulled the food out of the bags. “I will also let her know that we will talk more about this after I call my lawyer. It is likely we will meet on her next day off. I would not recommend being there if we do meet. It would be best if your mother and I handle this between us.”

“I understand,” Amarria said as she came back with two plates.

Trent and Amarria placed their food on their plates and walked over to the dining table near the back door, sitting down near each other.

“I haven’t asked this yet,” Trent said, “but were you able to resume your work at the Central Library downtown?”

“I have,” Amarria said, “but the rest of the staff there are going frantic after the Supreme Chancellor’s address last week. They are looking through all the history books about the Tenebris cult and its origins, wondering how they were missed. I was told by Head Agent Aja that the books were opened multiple times before I returned since they were still flagged by the RCIA. I guess the staff wanted to know why this was never brought to their attention. It figures though that when I returned, they had a lot of questions for me.”

“I can imagine. I assume they were able to piece together where you went all this time.”

“They did, and they had a bunch of questions about the library in the Federation.”

“That reminds me. Is the Federation going to allow their history to be on record at the Central Library here?”

“Yes, provided we supply them with the entirety of the Central Library after their ancestors were exiled. Call it an exchange of knowledge, if you will.”

“Is the Supreme Chancellor okay with that?”

“He agreed to it the following day yesterday. We along with members of the Federation’s main library will be working to get the information in a portable format to be transported to each other’s location for upload. It will take a day or so to complete.”

“Are you going back to the Federation with the information?”

“No, not this time. They will be sending a ship here to deliver their database and collect ours. We are also working on setting aside a section of the Central Library to hold their database for retrieval by those interested in reading about them. We will look into finding a way to link each other’s databases so that any new data will be uploaded automatically without resorting to the delivery of physical copies.”

“Makes sense. It will be good to keep both nations in touch with each other and what they have been up to.”

“Have you heard anything about the other nations’ position on the Federation?” Amarria said as she was about to eat the burger she ordered.

“Only rumors, but I know they were all surprised to find out about the Federation and the former Dominion. The Liberigi Mandate was the one that pushed the Senate to approve of the Federation’s sovereignty because they see themselves reaching that point in the future. I would not put it past the Empire to start looking into the Northwest Region for any other nation, provided they could manage to jump there at all considering the distance between the stars.”

Amarria stopped just short of taking a bite, looking over at Trent. Trent noticed her sudden reaction and was puzzled by her reaction.

“Is there something wrong?” Trent asked.

Amarria set her burger down on her plate.

“I don’t want this to spread outside of this house right now,” Amarria said. “President Shea stated that the Federation had intercepted some transmissions when they were investigating the Northwest Region for possible colonies a couple of weeks ago.”

“Transmissions? So, there is another nation or civilization in the Northwest Region?”

“Yes, but the messages were very garbled. The ship that was investigating only received a few words and phrases. Those phrases were in English.”

Trent’s eyes widened when he heard that.

“That can’t be. Don’t tell me there is another Republic colony vessel or colony group that disappeared from our history books!”

“I have a hard time believing that there is another group unaccounted for out there. When I looked over the information on the Tenebris cult, I checked for any other possible wayward colonies that went missing. Unless their tracks were better concealed than that of the Tenebris, there wasn’t any other colonies or vessels that went missing. I’m just as dumbfounded about this development as President Shea is about it.”

“Why did she tell you about these transmissions before you came back here?”

“I can only assume that she wanted me to see if there was any information or data that I might have missed if another rogue faction developed like the Dominion and the Federation. Even though I went over the records again during the Expansion Era when I got back here, the only way there could be another Human nation out there is if their files were erased from the Central Library’s records.”

“Is that even possible? I thought those could not be erased.”

“They shouldn’t have that ability since the database was designed to not allow the deletion of records, but that is not to say it is not in the realm of possibility.”

“As disturbing as this development is, what is Shea going to do about them?”

“She wants to inform Drew about what they had found, but last I check she wanted to wait until things settled down first from the Dominion’s attack. She may want the Republic to investigate due to our resources and the fact that the Federation has a ‘questionable’ history.”

“I see. With our battleships getting the upgraded drive section over the next week or two among other things from what I hear, we should be able to make that sort of jump into the Northwest Region once the refits are complete. That means I will have some free time for a while, but I guess you and I both know what I will be doing in the meantime.”

“Any chance you can ask for some additional time off due to the circumstances?”

“I will get in touch with headquarters tomorrow. I need to rest and relax while letting all this information sink in. Do you have anything else you need to do today?”

“No. Technically, I didn’t have to report for work for another few days, but I went yesterday to do my research. Why?”

“Because as it stands, I am short on a few things around the house, such as dishware and cookware after your mother took it all. I need to shop for those items as well as for groceries depending on what’s left. I need to look after lunch, and I could use the help for both tasks.”

“Sure thing. I already did my grocery shopping when I got back.”

Amarria looked out the window towards the back of the house and could see Luminous in the distance. Trent noticed her gaze and looked out that window as well.

“You missed that view, too?” Trent asked.

“I did. I took it for granted when I was little since my room’s window faced the same direction. There are days I missed it while I was in the Federation, though the view from the government’s tower was just as magnificent.”

“Maybe I will see it one day that view, but for now, let’s eat. I’ve been in the mood for a burger for a long time and I don’t want anything else to stop me now.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
1:23pm, November 4, 5434 A.D. (The Next Day)*

“How reliable is this information?”

Grand Admiral Mikey was called to Supreme Chancellor Drew’s office for a matter that could not be discussed over any channel, secure or not. Drew wanted to make sure that there was no possibility of the information he was giving Mikey could be leaked. If the information ever got out, it would cause an uproar in the Senate and among the public.

Yesterday, Federation President Shea got in touch with Drew about a matter that she wanted to bring to his attention. Not too long after the Federation managed to implement their new portal drives that were reverse engineered from Dominion ships, they discovered transmissions albeit degraded when they entered the Northwest Region for possible colonization during their war with the Dominion. They could only get words and partial phrases, but they were in English, indicating another possible Human colony or nation. The Federation did not explore any further into the Northwest Region, but they did set up jammers to prevent their own presence from being detected. There was no more information than what they know concerning this new and unknown Human faction in the Northwest Region.

Drew brought this up with Mikey not too long after he arrived, which caused Mikey to question the validity of this information.

“As far as I know,” Drew said, “the crew of the ship that first detected them were quite certain that it was English they heard in the transmissions. They recorded the transmissions they were receiving, and I heard some of it myself, though they are correct in how garbled it was.”

“Was there anything in those transmissions that you or the President could tell that might identify who these Humans are or where they are from?” Mikey asked.

“While I didn’t catch it at first, I did hear one word that might be part of the name of their nation or faction. The word I heard was ‘Union.’”

“Union? Not much for us to go on as an identifier if they are from the Republic.”

“I know.”

“Why would President Shea bring this up with you now?”

“I think she wants us to establish or rather reestablish contact with these Humans. The Draco Federation’s history is not exactly pristine when you consider how it was formed, not to mention the fact that this other faction may not be aware of the Federation compared to the Republic. They’ll know about the Republic and hopefully they won’t be hostile towards us.”

“So, am I to assume that once we have completed the refits on our battleships that we will be sending an expeditionary force into the Northwest Region close to where those transmissions were first detected?”

“That would be correct. It would be a good place to start.”

“I have to ask but why not send the stealth ships to that region? If they were upgraded with the portal drive as well, their trip would be severely shorted compared to prior trips.”

“Right now, the stealth vessels are being repurposed for other matters according to Head Agent Aja. The Senate has deemed their use to be strictly exploration in systems not yet explored

in occupied regions. There are still systems in the Southwest Region the Dominion that have not been explored or catalogued. The *Templar* and the *Cavalier* are being fitted with the new drives as well as the expense of their weapons to make room in the existing hulls. This will make trips to and from the Republic far less taxing. They are also going to be under the supervision of the newly established Exploration Committee. This is a multinational group so that all races are involved in the exploration of the star cluster. It also gives the project validity of exploring regions mostly occupied by other nations.”

“I see. I won’t ask who will be commanding those vessels, but I am sure Aja was not too thrilled about that decision. Considering that exploration was their original role, it does seem fitting for them to fulfill their mission role they were built for. Speaking of which, we need to figure out which fleet to send to the Northwest Region to investigate those transmissions.”

“I will have to see who is the most qualified to send on such a mission. They will need to be able to establish contact and be backed with the authority of the Republic. I’m rather hesitant of sending Admiral Trent after he just got back from the NRZ yesterday morning.”

“I wouldn’t send him either right now, especially after the request I received from him earlier today for an extended leave of absence.”

“An extended leave of absence? Is everything alright with him?”

“Unfortunately, no. His wife Laura moved out of their house nine days ago and is filing for a divorce, stating he did not help contribute to their marriage due to his involvement in his military career.”

Drew raised his right eyebrow.

“Isn’t there some sort of law against filing for divorce while someone is on active duty and absent from the proceedings?” Drew asked.

“No, there isn’t to the best of my knowledge,” Mikey said. “However, we haven’t had anyone gone longer than two weeks at a time prior to the First Interstellar War. Ever since that war and the invasion of the Dominion, our pre-war rotations haven’t been restored yet.”

“Add to the fact that Trent was deployed on at least two occasions for prolonged periods of time and I can see why his wife was upset that she eventually filed for divorce. What I don’t understand is why she didn’t voice an objection about his deployment when we had our meeting about the Dominion and the Federation after they were first discovered?”

“She knows that if a superior officer orders him on a mission, her objections are not valid without due cause. She didn’t object to her daughter going to the Federation either, which begs the question of whether she was at her limit and waited till they were gone to leave their house.”

“Regardless, it is a private matter between them. Allow him all the time he needs to finalize what he needs to get done. I’ve had to go through that myself recently and it is not fun.”

“Understood. I will pick get another fleet for the mission to the Northwest Region.”

“Speaking of which, how long until the refits are completed?”

“We are still looking at a timeframe of five days at least, seven at most if any problems occur during installation of the new drive section and the ‘extras’ that are being installed.”

“Good. What about the new Enforcer-Class Battleships that are being built for the NZR? How are they progressing?”

“Construction is on schedule and the first wave of twelve ships will be deployed in the next few days. The fact that most of the design was finalized some time ago is impressive, but the fact that you wanted to leave room for the portal drive and the solar particle generators was quite the foresight.”

“Initially, that space was only for the portal drive, but since it can be downsized, the solar particle generators being installed was a bonus. The blaster turrets in the original design will make use of the particles those generators produce and will make them long-range as well.”

“I’m sure you got a lot of questions from the Camino Star Empire, the Holy Lykan Republic, and the United Vitam State on the looks and weapons of the Enforcer, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did,” Drew chuckled. “The design was meant to be a collection and fusion of all our technologies put together. I wasn’t surprised once it was unveiled that I would get inquiries from those nations about its appearance. Based on the timeframe of the refits and the Enforcer’s production, I take it this means that the recycling of the former Dominion’s dreadnoughts is proceeding smoothly?”

“It is along with the reclamation of the remaining dreadnoughts in the NRZ. We are working with the Federation to get them transported to the recycling centers after the crews who were still alive on them are evacuated. Once we reactivate and override their computers, we immediately use their portal drive to reach their destinations. There are so many of them, though, that I question if we all of them can be recycled by both us and the Federation.”

“I wondered about that, too. We may have to investigate other options depending on what dreadnoughts remain once we have fulfilled the quota of the Paladin refits, the Enforcers, and the Federation’s dreadnoughts and supercarriers. That brings up another question, though. How are the former Dominion citizens taking to what has transpired in their now dissolved nation?”

“That is where things get a bit tricky. There are many who are still loyal to Armani’s cause and religion, causing some disruption and civil unrest.”

“Is this also caused by the shutdown of the blood farms and having them rely on a liquid diet by chance?”

“Maybe, but the blood farms were destroyed and the bodies that were used were cremated since they were practically brain dead. They will never be used again. The Federation forces sent to enforce the laws set by the Oversight Committee are doing what they can without disrupting operations, but the sooner the Enforcers are deployed, the better.”

“I take it the directors under Oversight Committee are having trouble ‘keeping the peace’ in their own former territory?”

“They are trying, but I can easily understand why they are having problems. After all, can you think of anyone willing to follow the orders of someone who they consider ‘traitors’ to Armani? I have been meaning to ask, though. Do we know what we are going to do once the remaining clones have died out? Despite the orders to restore the planets back to their original state if possible, they do take up most of the population that currently resides in the NRZ.”

“It will take many years before the youngest of those clones grow old and die. Right now, the deceased clones of the Tigris and Aspergillus are being retrieved and cremated as well as those on any dreadnought that have gone without power or sustenance for a few days. As to what happens after all the clones have died, I do not know. I can only hope that the Senate by then will consider colonization efforts in the region before then, but restoration must come first. I know the Federation is more interested in the worlds that were taken by the Dominion at the start of the war, but I do not know what their plans will be afterwards for the region.”

“Very well. I need to get back to headquarters. The new drive system requires our personnel to train the helmsmen of the battleships in their operation and the engineering teams to operate and maintain those new systems including the particle generators. There are also the ‘pilots’ to consider for what else is being installed on those ships. That is a lot of people to train and I still need to familiarize myself with the new systems as well.”

“I understand. You may go. Let me know as soon as possible which fleet you are sending so that I can inform them what is going on. Remember, there is to be no word of this operation until after we find out who resides in the Northwest Region.”

“Isn’t the Senate and the RBI watching your actions as well as those of the RCIA closely after what happened with the Dominion and the Federation?”

“The Senate will be notified in advance of the deployment of a fleet to the Northwest Region. I’m not about to give them something that they could use to impeach me, even though I defused the situation involving the Dominion and the Federation.”

“Understood. I will take my leave then.”

Mikey saluted Drew, then turned and headed out the door. Once Mikey had left the room, Drew leaned back in his chair. Drew may have managed to hold his position this time around, but he hopes that whatever is in the Northwest Region won’t cause him to resign if things go badly again like they did before. Worst-case scenario, they could find themselves in another war if that unknown Human nation is anti-Republic in their views like the former Dominion.

He and the rest of the known nations will soon find out what awaits the chosen Republic fleet that will enter the least-dense region of the star cluster in search of what may be another Human-based faction. Great Maker help them if they are hostile as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

*NRZ Oversight Council Chamber (Former Tribal Council Chamber), Central Tower,  
City of Plena Tenebris, Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region  
2:00pm, November 4, 5434 A.D.*

“Today’s meeting will come to order.”

Chairman Miya sat in the middle of the chamber on the podium once reserved for Armani Draco when he was still in power. The top of the podium was redesigned to accommodate a series of consoles with projecting holographic displays. They lined the entire top of the podium enclosing Miya inside. For Miya, she was happy the fear of a possible fall was not present anymore. Her seat was fixed to the platform that brought her up into the chamber’s central podium so that she did not have to stand. The chair can rotate for her to face any of the five directors that now stand on the alcoves where the former Chiefs of the Dominion once stood. Each of the five directors oversees a specific sector of the former Dominion’s space. Those sectors were divided evenly with one handling the central sector and the other four in charge of the surrounding sectors. Miya had personally selected the five directors. They were the four former Chiefs that assisted in her escape from Armani and Ebony who also aided in their endeavor. While the six of them would be considered “traitors” by the remaining head family members and clones of the former tribes, no one outside their council would dare harm them as they had the backing of both the Republic and the Federation.

While Miya was selected as the one to head the restoration project, she had to report to five people who were selected by the Republic and the Federation to oversee the progress that was made on the Nature Restoration Zone, or NZR for short as the slang has become for the former Dominion space. These five were the true members of the Oversight Committee. Miya did not know their names, nor were their names provided for their security. Miya did not blame them for that. If anyone who still harbored animosity towards either the Federation or the Republic, and she knew there were, they do not want to be tracked down and killed to make a statement. Therefore, they went by code names that were displayed on large holographic screens

that were placed between the alcoves of the directors. The only thing Miya knew about them was that, based on their attire, two were selected by the Federation while the remaining three were from the Republic.

The former Dominion's way of live had changed considerably in the past week after the Novus Initium Republic made the decision to dissolve the Dominion only to turn it into the Nature Restoration Zone. Miya cannot fault the Republic's Senate for this decision, nor the Federation's subsequent approval of the zone's creation. Armani's war machine had devastated multiple planets and moons over the past six hundred and fifty years, including those in the Tenebris System. The level of natural devastation by strip mining and harsh resource extraction was extensive, and restoration may not be possible everywhere. In those cases where using simple restoration techniques was not a viable option, it was suggested to use alternative means to repair the damage, such as the use of crushing asteroids to fill in moons or starting agricultural projects on those worlds that supported life. The possibility of restoring those gas planets that were affected by over-extraction of the "fuel" needed to run their dreadnoughts was next to impossible as there was no viable means available to replenish such a resource.

Analysts had estimated that the amount of time it would take to restore all the destruction on all planets and moons in such a large section of space would take a few centuries before all the work could be completed or in some cases any results at all. The problem with this estimation was that the existing stock of clones who were working on the restoration project would only last ninety years at best for the youngest generation. After that, there would be no more clones and any further assistance would come from the Republic and the other nations of the star cluster.

Thankfully, not everything had to be restored to its natural state on every planet or moon. The Republic Senate is allowing the cities that have been built to remain as habitats for the clone population. They will later serve as habitats for colonists that will eventually move to the NRZ, either from the Republic or the Federation depending on the star systems that are targeted for colonization. However, modern conveniences will need to be installed for the clones and future colonists to bring them up to par with Republic and Federation standards. This included but wasn't limited to individual housing and facilities, retail stores, grocery stores, entertainment centers, and others. Many of this is foreign to the clones who knew nothing more than to serve the good of Armani and the Dominion. While the clones were now on a liquid diet since the use of blood for nourishment was banned, the thought of entertainment from either the Republic or the Federation filled Miya with curiosity to see if any animosity would disappear. Miya had seen some of this entertainment in the past week from the Republic and she was intrigued. She is already working to get entertainment centers built to subject the clones to it as soon as possible. She only hopes it will be enough to smooth things over with the clones.

While the prospect of colonists moving into the NRZ from the Republic and from the Federation in the future is still far into the future, there will be better security in the form of a new multinational fleet that is to be deployed soon to the NRZ to police and enforce the laws of the region set by the Oversight Committee. This would relieve the current Federation fleet that is currently fulfilling this role and hopefully reduce the tension many have felt seeing those ships in orbit over many worlds. For some, it felt like the Federation won the war because they sided with the "devil" Republic. Miya was intrigued that aliens besides those that reside in the Federation that they know of would serve on those ships including Lykans, Caminos, and those from the United Vitam State. She only met the alien ambassadors of those nations once on Luminaire when she was being appointed by the Oversight Committee with Supreme Chancellor Drew present. Federation President Shea was only there remotely via a view screen in the room.

Between the meetings, Miya had been reflecting on Armani's actions throughout the duration of the Dominion to try and get a better understanding as to the motives of those who had manipulated him. She had also researched news articles and reports that were provided to her by the Supreme Chancellor to further her understanding of these unknown manipulators on other nations. Whoever it was that was responsible for his actions provided Armani with a vision that an angel had descended upon him, telling him to establish a cult religion based on his research according to his logs in his study that were seized and reviewed. That was also the same time Armani got the "artifact." These manipulators used religion as a testbed for providing a similar experience to one of the Lykan kings of the past, forcing them to enslave the Vitams and other races in the Eastern Region in the name of their religion. This wasn't the case when they tried to manipulate the State Councilors months ago who wanted to continue their war despite the Lykans reformation at the end of the First Interstellar War. In that situation, it was more like the Councilors blamed the Lykan religion for their plight, which extended to their kin that were part of the Liberigi Mandate. These manipulators wanted the war to continue but used religion as the target of the State's aggression since none of the State's five races have an established religion, a result of the Lykans' centuries of indoctrination on the State's ancestors.

The manipulators' agenda had suddenly changed when they decided to subject Benja, also known as Ghost Two, with the same radiation with a different strategy. He was forced to keep the Republic from making an instant win or stop of the war between the Federation and the Dominion by hacking Dominion computers. Initially, one would think this was to keep that war going and provide the Republic some hardship in combatting the Dominion's dreadnoughts. However, it was more of a ploy to get Benja into a position to kill Armani even though Armani was still receiving instructions through the artifact. Many have theorized that Armani continued receiving those instructions to not arouse suspicion of a sudden change in the plans of the manipulators or make him realize that whatever "usefulness" they had for him was at an end. Others believe that the manipulators had something else that required their attention and needed to tie up loose ends, forcing Benja to assassinate Armani to silence him. Unfortunately, any leads they had as to who these culprits were or what their agendas were for the star cluster disappeared like the artifact after it jumped away on its own. None of the known nations had any leads to follow until those who were responsible revealed themselves again. However, steps were being taken now to detect when that radiation is used again to minimize the actions of those affected.

The Chiefs Beverly, Nicola, and Gisselle that followed Armani's orders were going on trial as accomplices of Armani in a few days at the Republic Supreme Court in the capital city of Luminous. She heard that they were charged as war criminals by the Republic. It was decided in the interest foreign relations that they would only be tried by the Republic as extradition laws with the Federation had currently not been established after they were captured by Republic SAGATs. There was also the concern of bias if they were tried in a Federation court due to their long-standing war compared to the one-day battle that occurred in Republic space. While the mothers of the three Chiefs that were to stand trial were not happy with their daughters being arrested and charged as war criminals, they knew that their daughters could have chosen to help Miya in the same way Ebony did rather than follow Armani's orders. Their daughters' decision resulted in their mothers not assisting them by serving as witnesses of their character in their upcoming trial. Ebony received a reprieve for her assistance in helping Miya escape and standing up to Armani's tyranny, though it led to the deaths of the Aspergillus clones by Armani's hands. It also helped her case that she did not resist being arrested by Republic SAGATs when they found her in the forest in the outskirts of the city.

Miya knew that Beverly, Nicola, and Gisselle were afraid of Armani and his power over authority and faith in the Dominion. If they had resisted his will, they would have put their own lives at risk along with the lives of their Tribes' clones. Miya knew what that fear was like when she was ordered by Armani to have her mind "cleansed." On the other hand, if Armani had listened to Miya to begin with, the Dominion would have been at full strength if the Republic decided to attack the Dominion for violating the Republic Charter if they were not able to make peace with them. At least at that point, the Republic would have been the aggressor, not the Dominion. Hopefully, the three of them will have good lawyers who could explain the situation to the Chief Justices who may be able to provide a proper ruling. It would be better than what the Federation could come up with in the absence of Armani for his crimes against Humanity.

While the Federation promotes its peaceful national religion, Armani's actions has not been lost as to what he ordered the Dominion to do with the captured Federation Human citizens or their slain alien citizens. Unfortunately, the Federation fleet does not care that the orders were given by Armani or the manipulators as they see everyone in the Dominion as accomplices to his insanity. Their "enforcement" of order has not been very "graceful" to say the least. There were a few skirmishes in several locations in the beginning involving some of the clones expressing "displeasure" in having to submit to Federation occupational forces as they see it. The Federation forces in turn used unnecessary force to quell what they perceived as a revolt or uprising. Since then, the Federation forces have kept themselves in check to prevent being reported to the Oversight Committee who, in turn, reports back to both the Federation and the Republic. The clones, too, had to behave or they would not have access to their "free" liquid sustenance. Cutting them off from their only viable food option silences thoughts of rebellion very quickly. While Miya may not like enforcing such actions towards the clones, it was the only viable option for enforcement without resorting to violent measures.

Regardless, the "One-Day War" as some people have jokingly called Armani's attack on the Republic was a failure for the Dominion, and now they are an occupied people forced to make amends for what they have done to both nature and the nations of the Federation and the Republic. Miya wants to believe that this was some form of divine punishment to whatever deity the Dominion had pissed off with their worship of a "red god." Nevertheless, she can only hope that their descendants learn this valuable lesson: never follow a madman who suddenly has visions from a god and starts a cult following like "Tenebris Armani, The Mad Prophet."

For now, she must fulfill her role as the NRZ's Chairman of the Board of Directors, even if it meant that all the details on the day-to-day basis were going to be boring each day.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Private Residence of Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous  
Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
1:58pm, November 6, 5434 A.D. (Two Days Later)*

"Now it is starting to feel a little normal around here."

Trent had been spending the last few days replacing the items that Laura had taken with her when she moved out. While he wasn't so sure yet about replacing some of the furniture like those that were missing from the front room, he needed to replace the dishes and silverware that were taken. Eating using only plasticware was not a feasible option all the time.

Amarria had been coming over every day after work to check up on him and to keep him company while we worked out the details of the divorce that Laura had begun. Amarria had also

been seeing her mother during lunch as she did not want to pick sides or be forced to choose one parent over the other. Neither Trent nor Laura would want her to do that if it could be avoided. He knows this was going to be tough for Amarria for a while, if not for a long time.

Trent and Laura had a hearing at the civil court building tomorrow morning in downtown Luminous over the divorce. Since Laura took all her things with her and did not have anything more tied to Trent, the case should go rather smoothly and only take a day at best. Amarria did not have to be there as she is old enough and there is no legal custody of her to worry about. Trent would prefer Amarria wasn't there for the case at all, though. Amarria seeing the divorce proceedings right in front of her eyes would no doubt cause her to get emotional. That was the last thing he or even Laura would ever want Amarria to do.

While Trent was out shopping for dishware that better suited his taste, he had received a call from Rear Admiral Shannon, the flag officer of the Eleventh Fleet on board the *Renaldo* and his former captain. It had been more than a month since he last saw her much less spoke to her. She asked about stopping by and said she wanted to speak with him on a matter of importance. With the *Renaldo* undergoing a refit of its drive section like every other battleship right now, she came to the headquarters in orbit over Luminaire along with her bridge officers to familiarize themselves with the new pieces of technology being installed. She had some free time and wanted to see how he was doing. Apparently, word was already going around that he was getting a divorce and that was her reason for stopping by. Trent found that reasoning rather suspicious and began to wonder what her true reason for visiting was. He knows she does not have an interest in him as she was married. Trent figured she wanted to see her husband rather him, so either it was important or something else was going on.

Trent was expecting her around this time, though she had never been to his house before. Part of him wondered if she would get lost on the way here. As he began to think that, he heard a car stopping to park outside. Hopefully, it was Shannon and that she had parked in the driveway. Trent left the kitchen and began to walk towards the front door when someone rang the doorbell.

"Just a moment!" Trent yelled, making sure the person on the other side heard him.

When Trent reached the door, he looked out the peephole and saw Shannon at the door in civilian clothes. She wore a pink turtleneck, a thick white jacket, and blue jeans. Considering how cold it was this time of year in the mountains, it was good to see that she came prepared. He unlocked the door and opened it.

"Hello, Shannon," Trent said once he saw her. "Please, come in."

"Thank you, sir," Shannon said as she stepped inside.

Trent closed the door and locked it after she passed by him. He turned towards Shannon who was looking around his house.

"I must say," she said as she began to take off her coat, "this is a very lovely house in a very nice location."

She turned to Trent after she took off her coat.

"Where can I set my coat down?" she asked.

"You can toss it on the couch right there," Trent said, pointing to the couch by the staircase. "I never bothered getting a coat rack by the door."

"Alright," Shannon said as she turned and tossed her coat on the couch before turning back to Trent. "I'm sorry for coming on such short notice, but I wanted to talk to you. Is there someplace not by a door or window where we can speak?"

Trent was puzzled by this request by Shannon, but it must be something she wanted to speak with him in private about without prying eyes or ears.

“We can go upstairs to my office,” Trent said. “There is a window, but I can activate a sound dampening device I installed in it if this is supposed to be secret.”

“That will do, sir. Thank you.”

“You can call me Trent since we are off duty,” Trent said as he walked towards the staircase with Shannon following behind him.

“Thank you, Trent,” Shannon said as she followed him up the stairs. “I heard about what you and your soon-to-be ex-wife are going through. Word spreads rather fast at headquarters.”

“So, I have become the topic of gossip, huh?” Trent said as he reached the top of the stairs and proceeded towards his office to the left, opening the doors and turning on the lights.

“Not intentionally,” Shannon said as she walked into the office behind Trent.

“Well, regardless, it will be over after tomorrow.”

Trent walked over behind his desk by the window and pressed a button. A small hum could now be heard before it was silenced by the sound dampening field it was producing. Trent sat down at his desk as Shannon sat on one of the benches in front of it.

“So,” Trent said as he leaned back in his chair, “what is your visit about?”

Shannon looked a little worried as she looked around the office. Trent wasn’t sure if she was looking at his collectables or pieces of technology he had on the shelves. He doubted it was either of those items.

She turned her gaze back to Trent.

“When I reported to headquarters,” Shannon said. “Grand Admiral Mikey gave me new mission orders to be carried out once the *Renaldo* was finished with its refit.”

Trent was puzzled by what Shannon said.

“Grand Admiral Mikey spoke with you personally?” Trent asked. “It’s not like him to issue orders to Rear Admirals directly without going through the chain of command.”

“I know. I found it very odd as well. Nevertheless, those orders the Grand Admiral gave me both surprised and shocked me.”

“What were they?”

Shannon took a deep breath.

“Before I tell you, Trent, you need to promise me that you will not utter a word of what I have told you to anyone outside of this room.”

Trent leaned forward with his arms on his desk.

“Shannon,” Trent said, “if this is a covert or classified top secret mission, you shouldn’t even be telling me about it. Are you sure you want to risk informing me of such a mission?”

“I came to you, Trent, for advice considering your background. This isn’t some RCIA top secret assignment, thankfully. I’m just concerned about this mission and how to handle it.”

Trent leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath.

“Very well,” he said. “I promise you that I will not speak of this mission you are about to tell me, but you must promise me that whatever this mission is, you will not speak to anyone else about it who is not authorized to know this information. Alright?”

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“Very well. You may proceed.”

Shannon took a deep breath.

“Within a few days to almost a week after the *Cavalier* discovered Federation and Dominion forces in the Miranda System, the Federation began to explore into the Northwest Region for potential locations to retreat to if the Dominion advance could not be slowed by their new line of dreadnoughts and supercarriers.”

“Let me stop you right there,” Trent said. “Let me guess. One of their ships picked up transmissions coming from the Northwest Region, am I right?”

Shannon was in shock about what Trent just said.

“That’s right, but how did you know?” Shannon asked.

“Were there words and phrases in those transmissions that were in English?”

“That’s right as well! How do you know about this already?”

“Amarria told me a few days ago. She heard it straight from the Federation President. Shea wanted Amarria to know so that Amarria could comb through the Central Library for any information about another missing colony ship besides those that made up the Tenebris cult.”

“She was the one who brought up about the Tenebris to the Supreme Chancellor?”

“When it was discovered that the State Councilors were infected by that radiation, she found the records of the Tenebris which tripped an alarm with the RCIA. That information led us to act in finding them as we suspected they were responsible for the radiation, which in the end was not the case as they or rather Armani was a victim of that radiation as well. Now we’re finding out that there is another potential Human nation residing in the Northwest Region.”

“That may be the case, but it is hard to determine who they are or where they came from unless your daughter manages to find some information. After those transmissions were first discovered by the Federation ship, they set up jammers among the systems they had explored to prevent transmissions from them along with those from the Federation from reaching one another until a time where it was feasible to go exploring that region again.”

“From the sounds of it, now is that time, but why were you briefed on...”

Trent stopped when he realized very quickly why Shannon knows these details.

“You’re not serious,” he said. “Were you briefed on this matter because the Chancellor and the Grand Admiral wants you to explore that region rather than the Federation?”

“That would be correct, sir,” Shannon said.

“But why us or you for that matter?”

“I asked both of those for that same reason. According to the Chancellor, the Federation is reluctant to discover another Human nation due to their own history since their ancestors chose to exile themselves from the Republic due to the cult Armani had established. Not exactly the model beginnings I would want to flaunt to a new faction. The Republic was the better choice by comparison to establish contact with this new faction.”

“And what was the reason they chose you for the mission?”

“Well, the Chancellor and the Grand Admiral had thought about you at first until they received word about your extended leave of absence to handle your divorce.”

“I see. So, you heard about my divorce through them, not through some rumors.”

“Sorry about lying about my sources where I heard about the divorce. I wanted to make sure no one else was nearby to hear my conversation with you.”

“Understandable. So, instead of sending me, they chose to send you. I will be frank. Honestly, I am glad that they are not sending me after all the extended time away from home which is the cause of my divorce. I still want to know why they are sending you and not someone who is more experienced by comparison.”

“Just look at the history of the Eleventh Fleet while it was under your command. Our fleet was the one who first establish contact with the former Kingdom and the State over two years ago at Tranquillus. Since you and by extension the Seventh Fleet are currently indisposed of at this time, the Eleventh Fleet under my command was the next logical choice in first contact situations.”

“I see. I guess they must believe that since you were present with our first contact with those nations that you managed to pick up a few things from that event. It just goes to show that they must have faith in your ability to make contact.”

“I wish I had that same level of confidence. When we first encountered the Lykans and the State, we knew they were coming, and they entered our territory first. When it came to the discovery of both the Dominion and the Federation by the *Cavalier*, we knew what kind of people we were looking for based on their history, though that was mostly true for the Dominion compared to the Federation from what I heard. In this instance, we don’t know who they are, where they came from, why they are in the Northwest Region, or how they even got there to begin with.”

“In other words, it is our lack of knowledge as to who these people are or their society that is disturbing you about this mission. Am I right?”

“Yes. The only piece of information the Federation was able to gather from those signals is that they are known as the ‘Union’ whether that term is part of the name of the nation or is the name in its entirety. Worst case is that it is not the name of their nation at all.”

“I see. Well, I can think of one place to start looking for information.”

“Oh? Where?”

“Were you told where to jump to when you received your orders?”

“Not specifically. I would be told the moment we are ready to make the jump.”

“I see. My recommendation is to jump to the last system where that Federation ship first discovered those transmissions. You will need to get permission from the Federation first if they have claimed that system, but you will need them to disable at least one of the jammers for you to gather information about those transmissions.”

“That sounds like a good starting point. We try to get as much info as we can from the transmissions and piece together what or who we are dealing with. I will have to suggest that as the starting point in case I get orders to jump elsewhere.”

“Once you are in that system, your next step is to locate the source of the transmissions. We don’t know if this nation is only in one system out there or multiple systems, so once the source is found, you will want to jump just outside the system where the source is. We do not know if this nation has an early warning system dedicated to detecting ships appearing outside one of their star systems or not, so don’t jump into the system without knowing that fact first.”

“I understand.”

“I have to ask, but are you authorized to make first contact if you discover this nation or if they discover you?”

“They haven’t told me that yet, either. My guess is that the little I know before the mission, the less of a chance that my mission will be compromised.”

“I see. So, any further suggestions I make may not be helpful at all depending on the mission parameters. Is there anything else you can tell me about the mission?”

“Well, there is one thing you should know. It has to do with the modifications they are making to the refits.”

“Oh? You mean it isn’t just a new drive section with the portal drives and the particle generators that they are installing?”

“No. They are also adding multiple hangar bays to the battleships, going so far as to replace our primary weapon with a bay as well.”

“Are they installing hangar bays on the refit battleships? Are we expecting to have fighters and other small craft aboard our ships now?”

“It appears so. Thanks to the small craft the Dominion had in their possession and the fact the Federation has drone AI fighters, the Chancellor approved of the development of AI drone fighters for use on the refit battleships. The battleships are effectively becoming carriers.”

“That’s going to be interesting in any future combat. Let me ask one thing, though, before we go any further off topic. Of all the people you could have spoken to about your mission, why pick me other than our past working relationship?”

“Well, aside from our working in the past, I needed to talk to someone who has had his share of secrets and first contact missions. I wanted to seek advice and know what course of action is best to take in various scenarios I may find myself in.”

“Oh, I see. You wanted to seek wisdom to know how to handle recon and possible first contact situations.”

“That’s what I am here for. It’s one thing to command a single ship, but I am still lacking the confidence to command an entire fleet. We’ve been stationed in various systems for patrols since my promotion, to fleet combat is still new to me.”

“I understand. I remember being in your position when I made it to the rank of rear admiral many years ago. I was just as nervous, but the only difference is I wasn’t put in the position like you are now. I wasn’t being assigned to a mission to jump into the unknown, so I don’t envy what you are going through or experiencing. I also did not have to take small combat craft into the equation as well since they are now being used. However, I am willing to go over with you the scenarios that you will likely find yourself in and how to deal with those situations accordingly. You can either write these down, record them on your phone to go over them, or commit them to memory, but you need these solutions in your mind before going on this mission. Above all else, you need to show confidence in the decisions you make. If you show confidence, then you crew will believe in your actions. Do you understand, Shannon?”

“I do, and thank you, sir. I’m sorry to impede on your personal time like this.”

“It’s okay. It’s good to find out about your mission details including what else was being done to my ship. My daughter is coming over tonight to have dinner with me in a few hours. I will let her know shortly that you are here right now. Are you staying for dinner?”

“I can’t. My husband will be expecting me, but I told him I was coming to see you for advice and to keep you informed. It won’t take me long to get home from here.”

“Very well. Let’s begin going over those scenarios so we can get you ready.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*To be continued...*  
*END OF EPISODE VII*