

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



PART 7

*Office of Anchorwoman Laura, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen (“Light”) System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:08am, October 11, 5434 A.D. (One Week Later)*

“We have a second one who we know.”

Laura had clocked in for work less than ten minutes ago to review the upcoming news reports for today’s broadcast. Matt, her fellow anchorman, popped in through her open door with a small tablet in his hand. Laura let out a sigh as she knew what he was referring to.

“Let me guess,” Laura said, looking at Matt with an uncaring expression, “is it another missing person’s report?”

A few days after the stealth vessels left for the Dominion and Federation capitals, a missing person’s report involving her daughter Amarria had come in. The report was done by her close friends, not her employer who was given a cover story provided by the RCIA. Obviously, her friends were not told about her “activities” involving the RCIA which has led to the report being filed. NBS News tends to put these reports on their website for any leads of missing people and their whereabouts. However, Laura knows that the such “leads” would be next to impossible to follow involving Amarria considering she was far beyond the Republic’s border right now. Of course, she was one of the few people who knew that truth.

“Yes, it is,” Matt said. “This time, it’s Brenda.”

Laura wasn’t surprised when Matt said Brenda’s name. She knew that someone or some people would wonder where she was outside her family and NBS News, her employer.

“She is on a missing person’s report?” Laura asked. “Was it one of her friends who reported her missing?”

“More than one, actually. One of the people who reported her missing was Marina, that journalist who she worked with back in Serenus. Two others reported her missing. Their names are Nora and Dennise, former officers in the Republic Navy who she also friended while she was assigned to their battleship during the First Interstellar War.”

“I’ve heard of Marina, but I have not heard of those other two. Since Brenda is an employee of NBS, it is probably best to get in contact with all three of them and let them know that Brenda is working on an undercover story right now.”

“I’ll contact them for you, though it does make me wonder what it is that she would be working to get such a story. I know you are dealing with something similar with Amarria, right? Is she still working with the RCIA concerning some historical records and management?”

When Laura went to work the day after Amarria left to go on her mission, she told Matt that cover story that she was provided to anyone who asked about her. She had to tell Matt since he knew Laura most days went to lunch with Amarria. He would have started asking questions if she went out to lunch less frequently.

“Yes, she is,” Laura said. “From what she told me, the RCIA had several historical ‘holes’ in their records primarily during the Expansion Era. They asked for her expertise since that era was the one she is highly enthralled with.”

“Why is she so enamored with the Expansion Era, anyway?”

“She told me one time that she found the sense of mystery, excitement, and wonder in exploring the unknown to be exhilarating in a time when Humankind for the first time, even if it was not in our home galaxy, began to jump from star to star in search of new worlds and new life. I can see why she would have liked that era. It’s almost romantic in a way.”

“Of course, it wasn’t all fantasy. There were hardships, dangers, and hazards in exploring the unknown. Some colonies almost didn’t make it when they started out for one reason or another. My ancestors were among those that almost didn’t make it five years after they colonized their planet, but they managed to survive, and they still live there now.”

“You have family and relatives that were colonists?”

“Oh, yes. Have you heard of the Cessabit System?”

“Cessabit? I haven’t heard of it personally.”

Matt let out a small laugh.

“That is no surprise,” he said. “It is a system located seventeen jumps to the southeast. The name Cessabit comes from the Latin word ‘calm.’ Indeed, the world was quite a nice and calm place to live and the lands were quite fertile.”

“If the world was calm and fertile, why did they have problems five years in?”

“That part of my family history is a bit scary if not downright bizarre. Five years after colonizing the planet, there were sudden disappearances of key family members. Some stated they were likely taken by some local wildlife in the middle of the night. Many were in fear of this possibility, but evidence pointed to them being kidnapped by other Humans than by local wildlife. Eventually, the truth was made known when they installed a low-tech security system of traps that were carefully hidden around the colony’s perimeter. One night, one of those traps went off and they could hear a man screaming. The colonists, armed with farm tools and flashlights, had spotted a group of what they could tell were religious fanatics.”

Laura was beginning to think she knew who those “religious fanatics” possibly were. Considering the planet could have been in the same general proximity of the Tenebris cult’s

original colony in another system, the possibility did exist. There was only one way to be sure, though.

“How do you know they were religious fanatics?” Laura asked.

“At the time,” Matt said, “I read they were wearing dark red cloaks with black accents. They had their hoods on over their heads, so their faces were hard to distinguish but they were armed with stun guns and binders. The one who was caught in the trap was eventually freed by his fellow cultists as my ancestors ran after them. The cultists escaped into the nearby woods and a shuttle was heard taking off. One of my ancestors caught sight of the shuttle and made a call to the local Navy forces at the time.”

“Did your ancestors managed to catch the name of the cultists’ group?”

“They tried to get answers from the Navy after they made the call concerning them and our missing people, but they only told us that the cultists had used our people as part of a blood sacrifice for their heinous worship and that the cultists’ colony was wiped out for their crimes. They never gave us a name of the group. Just talking about it now though makes me sick. Why did you want to know about that cult so much?”

Laura had to be careful not to reveal too much about the nature of the Tenebris and their status in the present, but she was quick to come up with how she got that information.

“You know those ‘holes’ I told you Amarria was helping the RCIA with?” she said. “It turns out the reason Amarria was selected was that she stumbled upon one of those ‘holes’ in the Central Library that alerted them. That ‘hole’ relates to those cultists you mentioned about.”

Matt’s face was suddenly filled with shock. He looked around the outside of Laura’s office before completely stepping in and closing her door. He sat in the seat in front of her desk.

“Considering the RCIA is involved,” Matt said, “I figured it was best to talk about it in private. You know who they were, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Laura said. “Amarria told me one day about them. They were called the Tenebris which means ‘dark.’ They were a cult that based their beliefs on some darker aspects of the Great Maker faith, believing that the blood of Humans holds the secrets to longevity, immunity from all forms of diseases, and vitality. They were made up of six families who possessed advanced skills and knowledge in various fields of study from agriculture and biology to engines and weapons. I don’t know the exact location of their colony, but something tells me it was close to Cessabit for them to target your ancestors. The Tenebris must have seen some traits or features to make them think your ancestors were worth sacrificing for their gain.”

“Were they wiped out as the Navy report said back then?”

“The report stated they were, but Amarria has her suspicions. That is part of the reason she is working with the RCIA to uncover that mystery and others like it.”

“The Tenebris, huh? I really hope they are not still around. Granted, it’s been over six centuries since that happened, but it still makes me sick to think about that even happening.”

“Not to get too far off-topic, but if your family lives in Cessabit, what brought you to the Lumen System?”

“Oh, that? You may find it a bit silly, maybe even selfish, but while my family has grown and become the dominant household in that system, I yearned for a different path.”

“Is your family still farmers after so many centuries?”

“I guess you can say that. The fertile lands of Cessabit III made growing food very easy and soon became profitable. My family owns one of the largest produce and livestock companies in the Republic. However, I did not yearn for that sort of life. I wanted to make it on my own.”

“So, what led you to become an anchorman for NBS?”

“I acted in commercials for my family to help promote our products, but I soon realized that I had an uncanny ability to speak in front of a camera with ease, even though I know billions of people would be watching me. So, after high school, I went off-world to Ortner University on Voluptas III to begin my studies in the field of news reporting.”

“You were eventually hired around the same time as I was and we both were field reporters at the time. From there, the rest is history and here we are.”

“That is true. Speaking of which, we have thirty-six minutes before the broadcast and we need to be down there in six minutes. Before that, I want to thank you for filling in the ‘hole’ in my family’s history. I just hope the Tenebris are not still around.”

Laura tried not to give any facial expressions of the fact that she knew otherwise.

“Just remember, Matt. This information is not to be shared. It is still under investigation by the RCIA now that it was brought up again and I don’t want the information to spread.”

“I understand. It does make me wonder what other “holes” there are in the historical records that the RCIA is having Amarria research, but I guess we won’t know that until she is done. We better get to the studio floor before the Chief starts calling us and badgering us.”

“Alright, Matt.”

“Do you want to have lunch later? I know I’m not your daughter but I’m sure we can find things to talk about.”

“Like more details about your family?”

“Well, there is a lot to them I can talk about and, man, do I have stories I could share.”

Laura laughed.

“Alright, Matt. You go on ahead, I have something I have to finish before I’m on the set.”

“Alright, Laura,” Matt said as he got up. “I will see you on the set.”

Matt walked over to the door and opened it up. He left her office but left the door opened. Laura wasn’t too concerned as she got her phone out and started typing Trent a message.

“Matt’s family were victims from six hundred and fifty years ago. I will tell you more after work.”

Laura pressed “Send” and the message was sent. This was going to be an interesting topic for her and Trent to talk about later.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, On Route to Propitius Esto, Federation Capital W-26 System, Western Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
1:03pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.*

“Are we slowing down?”

Amarria was in her quarters after she had lunch a little while ago in the ship’s galley. For the past week, in between training with the SAGATs, eating, and sleeping, she had been reading up on more stories, logs, and records from the Expansion Era. For her, there really was nothing more she could do on this ship. She had no experience or training in any form when it came to ship operations, so the only thing she could do to not get in the way of everyone working on the ship was to read more about her favorite era. On the plus side, this gave her a lot of time to catch up on all of that reading. She didn’t have as much time as she would like to read while working at the Central Library in Luminous. She only read those stories and books during her breaks and even then, she followed those that intrigued her the most.

One of those stories she came across were the records and tales of those who live in the Cessabit System whose accounts tell of religious fanatics taking their people in the middle of the night. It didn't take long to realize who those fanatics were and why they were taking those people. She had been looking for other such records but had not come across them yet.

During her time aboard the *Templar*, she began to wonder about the time that her father, Trent, served as the ship's commanding officer. Over the past few days, she wondered how her father managed to keep his sanity over such long durations when going between systems. On the other hand, the distance between the systems were never more than a few days apart. Still, he stayed on the ship for months up to the end of the war, unable to leave due to his role on the ship. The only way he could have kept his sanity was due to his deployments on his last battleship. He was trained and had prior experience involving prolonged deployments.

Amarria on the other hand would have had cabin fever if it wasn't for all the reading she had been doing to pass the time outside of meals, training, and sleeping. Since news and entertainment could not be accessed without compromising the ship's mission, it was the only pass time available to her that she was aware of.

The constant hum of the ship, namely its engines, was new for Amarria as well. She had never been off of Luminaire, so she never heard such sounds until she boarded a shuttle and came aboard the *Marshal*. It was a sight to see. She went so far as to search for a window to get a scenic view of the trip, experiencing warp travel and jumping through star gates. Unfortunately, the *Templar* had no such windows for her to look out of at any point during this trip.

That constant hum of those engines that have remained the same for a week began to lower in pitch and sounded like the engines were slowing down. This caught her attention and she began to wonder why they were slowing down. There was still a week remaining in the trip unless she lost that much track of time.

She turned off the tablet she was reading and got up from her seat, heading for the door. As she opened the door, she caught sight of Blair walking by towards her right, heading towards the closest elevator.

"Ghost One?" Amarria said. "What is going on? Why are we slowing down?"

Blair stopped and turned around to face Amarria.

"That's why I am heading to the bridge right now to find out," Blair said. "If you want to find out why as well, you can join me."

Amarria nodded in agreement and walked out of her room, the door closing behind her. She walked behind Blair as they approached the elevator. Blair pressed the elevator call button and within seconds, the elevator arrived. They walked into the elevator and Blair pressed the button to go to the bridge. The console had a built-in scanner and detected both Blair and Amarria before giving a confirmation tone to Blair's choice. The elevator's doors closed, and the elevator began moving, going upwards at first but then moving sideways towards the bow.

"So," Blair said, "found anything interesting in your readings?"

"Aside from accounts of colonists throughout the Expansion Era, I did come across one account involving the kidnapping of colonists by the Tenebris before their exile."

"Really? I didn't think such a record would have gone unnoticed by RCIA by now?"

"The Tenebris were not specifically named in the record as the colonists were not able to get a hold of even one of the kidnappers before they fled. They did describe the kidnappers as 'religious fanatics' wearing red robes with black accents that were armed with stun guns and binders on hand."

"That would sound like them. Where were these colonists that were being kidnapped?"

“They were in the Cessabit System. Based on the location of the original Tenebris colony, this would put them one jump away from that system.”

“So, they were neighbors in a sense. I’ve heard of that system but only what they are now, not what they were back then. If they were primarily farmers and agricultural workers back then, then they were probably an easy mark for the Tenebris for their heinous rituals.”

“That is what I figured, but the Cessabit colonists had no idea why they were targeted or what happened to those that were kidnapped. When the Navy destroyed the Tenebris colony, the Cessabit colonists were not given much details, only that the kidnappers had been dealt with. The people that were kidnapped were dead prior to the Navy’s arrival.”

“No doubt to keep the true details of what the Tenebris were up to a secret to prevent others from following in their footsteps.”

The elevator began to slow down as they were approaching the bridge. It soon came to a stop and the doors opened. The first thing they noticed was that the ship was out of warp based on the lack of a visible warp tunnel and fluctuations on the screen. A slight alarm klaxon was sounding, but this was not the ship going to red alert. It was more like something went wrong on the ship, like a technical problem.

Tora turned around in the command chair to see who came onto the bridge.

“I take it the two of you could hear the engines winding down, too?” she asked.

“I think the entire ship did and wants to know why,” Blair said.

“I thought we were still a week away from the Federation capital,” Amarria said. “Why did we stop?”

“It stopped because we were about to run out of power,” Tora said. “The stealth ships’ warp drive only has a continuous operational range of sixty Light-years before the capacitors are drained. The ships have usually gone from star system to star system that were at most a few Light-years apart. I heard the *Cavalier* was close to running out of capacitor energy by the time it would reach the Ruber System.”

“What?” Blair said. “This is the first time I have heard about this.”

“Most likely Captain Luke did not want to bore you with the details concerning the ship’s warp drive.”

“It still would have been nice to know. Are we still cloaked?”

“We are. The capacitors are recharging now, but it is going to take a while.”

“How long is a while?”

“There are a lot of capacitors on board to keep the warp drive supplied with power for as long as it can. However, with the cloaking device still active, it will take six hours instead of less. The last thing we need is for that to be disabled, especially since we are in Federation territory.”

Both Blair and Amarria were a little surprised about Tora’s words about being in Federation territory.

“Does the map show that we are in their territory?” Amarria asked.

“It does,” Tora said, “but it isn’t the only thing that identifies that fact. Look at this.”

Tora pressed a button on her chair as she turned back towards the forward view screen. The scene changed from the forward view to another view. This view, however, showed a large vertically-inclined structure that was mostly dark gray in color with purple and gold accents. Its contours and shape were like the Federation ships that they saw in the briefing prior to the mission, but this one had dozens of antennae protruding from the top and the bottom of the structure. Upon first appearances, it looked like some form of communications array.

“Is that a communications satellite?” Blair asked.

“Not entirely,” Tora said. “Do you remember those jammers the RCIA deployed in Tranquillus to intercept and jam the State and former Kingdom’s transmissions so that the public would not be aware of them?”

“I do,” Blair said. “Are you saying that structure is like those jammers?”

“Yes, but it seems to be working both ways. It’s jamming transmissions from leaving the Federation while at the same time blocking any possible transmissions from the Republic.”

“Why is it blocking transmissions from both directions?” Blair asked.

“I know why,” Amarria said. “If they block stray transmissions from the Federation, they won’t reach the Republic and they can remain hidden from us. At the same time, they are blocking stray transmissions from the Republic, either to control any possible ‘foreign’ influence from the nation they were exiled from or they don’t want their alien compatriots to learn about the Republic. Without more information, their reasons for blocking our transmissions will only be speculation.”

“Still,” Tora said, “it is a good assumption. If content from the Republic made its way to the Federation, the ideals and culture of the Republic would have a detrimental effect on the Federation and its citizens. Depending on what the Federation has been using as slander against the Republic, the last thing they need is to somehow be proven wrong, even amongst the alien population.”

“Do you think that the Dominion has deployed something similar along their borders?” Blair asked.

“I wouldn’t put it past them to do the same thing. Neither nation wants to deal with foreign influence from the nation that forced them into exile.”

“However,” Amarria said, “if that structure is there, does that mean that there are Federation forces here as well?”

“If there are any,” Tora said, “then we better hope that we are on our way sooner than later. While we may be cloaked, we don’t need some patrol running into this ship physically by some astronomical chance.”

Amarria thought for a moment about the jammers and the possible presence of Federation forces when something else came to mind.

“You don’t suppose there are civilian population centers here, too, by chance?” she asked.

“We only just got into this system a moment ago,” Tora said. “We are also trying to reach their capital, not explore this system.”

“What I am trying to get at is that we are on this side of the jammers now. Wouldn’t that mean that any civilian broadcasts would be accessible to us?”

“Only if we are near a transmission stream and if there is a civilian population in the system. Let’s consult the map and see if there is anything nearby that we can do a short warp to. Tactical, the map, please.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the male Tactical officer said.

The Tactical officer was someone that Blair did not recognize. He looked around the bridge and realized he didn’t recognize anyone unlike when he was last aboard this ship. He thought that some of them would have remained on board after the First Interstellar War but that did not appear to be the case. Tora turned back towards the front as the map appeared on the forward view screen, but not before she noticed Blair looking around.

“I know you are looking for familiar faces, Blair,” she said. “However, when we returned to the Ruben System for resupplying three months ago, we switched out the crew who remained after the war for some fresh officers.”

“So, what happened to them?” Blair asked.

“They were paid quite well for their time and effort and sent out to do their own thing. Of course, they were not permitted to speak about the mission other than it being about exploration. I personally don’t know what each of them are doing, but you could always look them up once we return from this mission if you are that curious. Now then, as for the map...”

Blair and Amarria walked up closer to the screen, stopping just to the right side of the Science Station to the left of Tora. The system they were in was labeled “Essex” and contained six planets. The first, third, and sixth planets were barren worlds while the second and the fifth planets were gas planets. However, the fourth planet did contain a temperate world capable of supporting life. Indeed, the map showed that there were already millions of inhabitants on that planet. Three individual star gates were found near the edge of the system and were connected to nearby star systems. If communications were relayed through those gates much like the report from the *Cavalier* during its time in the Miranda System, then it is safe to say that one or more of those gates were relaying communications to that fourth planet and its population.

“It would appear that we might be able to intercept such transmissions after all,” Tora said. “Helm, do we have enough power to warp to that spot?”

“Yes, ma’am,” the female Helmsman said. “However, this may delay the recharging process of our capacitors by a few additional minutes.”

“That’s fine. If we can get a feed from their broadcasting stations, we may be able to get a sense of their culture including their attire that would help us to blend in.”

“That would reduce the time it would take to do a preliminary recon of the planet upon our arrival,” Blair said. “Since we must wait over six hours anyway, we might as well make the most of that time by studying their transmissions and broadcasts.”

“I find no problems with that idea,” Amarria said. “However, won’t we cause issues if we are close to the transmissions?”

“It will be fine,” Tora said. “The transmissions would be able to come in from any of the three gates should there be a disturbance in the transmission. It is no different for systems in the Republic should a cosmic anomaly start to play havoc on our transmissions. Helm, lay in that course and engage the warp drive.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The ship turned to the left by almost thirty degrees. As soon as the ship was pointing the direction it was trying to go, the *Templar* engaged its warp drive, though an alarm went off indicating that the capacitors were still low. The warp fluctuations around the ship began to appear as the ship made its way towards its destination. After nearly thirty seconds, the ship began to slow down as it closed in towards the closest broadcast stream. The warp fluctuations soon disappeared, and the ship came to a halt.

The only thing that Amarria could see was space, but of course the stream would not be visible to the naked eye.

“Communications,” Tora said, “can you put a visual representation of the stream on the view screen?”

“Yes, ma’am,” the male Communications officer said.

Suddenly, a bright blue near-horizontal line appeared on the screen. It was rather massive on the screen. Amarria did not know whether broadcast and data streams were supposed to be that big.

“I figured it would be that large,” Blair said. “That’s about as big as what is in the Republic.”

“Broadcast and data streams are normally that big?” Amarria asked.

“Of course. There are billions of people in the Republic with access to various forms of information and media consumption. It should come as no surprise that citizens in the Federation also have such access.”

“Communications,” Tora said, “access the data stream. Look for anything involving news, culture, and fashion. Download anything relating to those topics for us to review while we are waiting to get underway again.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the Communications officer said.

Tora turned to Amarria.

“Hopefully,” Tora said, “this will also give us some clues as to what kind of culture we are dealing with.”

“If we can access this information,” Amarria said, “are we able to access their history?”

“We are only receiving the information while it is in transit. If we attempt to transmit any inquiry into their network, we may set off some alarms and they could close off access or initiate a media blackout. It would cause a lot of problems and a heightened sense of alert by the time we reached their capital. That is the last thing we need.”

“I guess that would be a problem. I just thought to ask.”

“We’re going to record the broadcasts and data streams for up to three hours. We’ll let you know when we’re done and go over them for any information on attire and culture that would be helpful for when we arrive at the Federation capital.”

“Alright,” Amarria said as she turned and headed for the elevator.

She noticed that Blair wasn’t following. She turned towards him.

“Is everything alright, Ghost One?” Amarria asked.

“I’m fine,” Blair said. “You go on ahead. I wanted to speak with Tora for a moment.”

“Alright, then.”

Amarria turned back towards the elevator. She pressed the call button and the doors opened immediately as the elevator had not left. She walked in, pressed the button for the deck her room was on, and the doors closed.

Blair looked back at Tora after the elevator doors closed.

“Did we really run out of power in the capacitors?” Blair asked. “You and I both served aboard this ship during the war and I don’t remember us ever having this problem before.”

“We never traveled for up to a week at a time before,” Tora said. “This isn’t some ruse this time, if that is what you are thinking.”

“You’ll excuse me if our history leads me to think otherwise when it comes to you.”

“I know. Believe me, your suspicious nature is not lost on me in the least. However, we need more information involving the Federation before we arrive there. If the information in this data stream can help us prepare for our arrival ahead of time, it will make things go a lot easier for us. I am wondering what Amarria’s ‘backup plan’ is, though. I heard she had one if you two were caught. She hasn’t told you about it by chance, has she?”

“No, she hasn’t, and that is what concerns me.”

“Does it concern you because you would be with her when she is researching their library?”

“That and she is the daughter of Admiral Trent after all. If she has his keen strategic intellect, who knows what she has in mind.”

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier, SW-76-9 Orbit
SW-76 System, Southwestern Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
1:11pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.*

“It is a good thing we found this.”

Much like the *Templar*, the *Cavalier* also had to stop after a week-long trip to recharge its capacitors. Captain Luke was aware of this and made sure the ship had to stop when absolutely needed, primarily in a star system to make sure they had their bearings. The SW-76 System was located within Dominion control space, eight Light-years behind their border. When they passed the border, the *Cavalier* detected some form of jamming system that appeared to jam both incoming and outgoing transmissions. Apparently, it was designed to keep Republic-based transmissions out to avoid possible cultural “pollution” as Luke would guess from coming into the Dominion. It was also designed to prevent the Republic from detecting the Dominion’s transmissions which was how they went undetected for centuries. Luke figured the Federation may be using a similar system or else they would have been detected as well.

When they reached the SW-76 System, which the map labeled it as the “Oberth” System, they came across an interstellar communications array that was actively in use. It was located in orbit of the ninth planet in the system where the *Cavalier* dropped out of warp. They detected broadcasts and data streaming to and from the array. However, when compared to the information streams found in the Republic, it was almost half the size by comparison. Considering the size of the Dominion and its population, this made Luke wonder why it was only half the size. The only explanation is that the information was restricted to certain people or groups but who those were remained a mystery for the time being.

Luke ordered the *Cavalier* to approach the data stream to get some broadcasts and information that may be useful for when they arrive at Tenebris Prime. If they could find out anything about their culture, including clothing and social interactions, it would go a long way to ensure the mission was successful in the long run. Once they were within range, they started recording the transmissions and data going to and from the array. While the option to access the array would allow them to control the data they needed, they did not want to run the risk of alerting Dominion forces of their presence if their hacking proved unsuccessful. The last thing they needed was for a Dominion dreadnought to jump into the system.

He ordered the information being streamed to be recorded for three hours, which would hopefully be ample time to get the information that was needed. Provided the information they want is in the data they were recording, he will have the SAGATs and along with Brenda sort through the data.

“Sir,” the Communications officer said, “there appears to be a problem with the data that we are recording.”

Luke looked at the Communications officer with a puzzled expression.

“What is the problem?” Luke asked.

“The broadcasts and the data stream are encrypted, sir. We cannot access them.”

“Encrypted? Is this a military communications line?”

“I’m not sure, sir. Based on the size of the stream, if it is a military relay, there is a lot of communications going to and from the relay.”

“Dang it. Do we not have the means to crack the encryption?”

“The encryption appears to have bio-signatures embedded in the stream. This may require DNA samples of whoever this information was intended to for access. Without that, we cannot crack it without hacking into their system.”

Luke sighed.

“So much for that idea, but why resort to the use of bio-signatures? Are you able to detect any other relays or broadcast streams in this system?”

“No, sir. This seems to be the only relay.”

“Very well. We may have to send a team down to Tenebris Prime after all once we arrive to get that information. We still have less than six hours until the capacitors are fully charged, though. This is going to be a long wait.”

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*Brenda's Quarters, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier, SW-76-9 Orbit
SW-76 "Oberth" System, Southwestern Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
1:14pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.*

“I'm so bored...”

Brenda had been looking over the history reports of each of the Tenebris families up to the point of their exile several times during the trip to the Dominion capital to familiarize herself with the history and behaviors that may have developed among their descendants after so many centuries. However, the constant reading was starting to become tedious if not tenacious. She also wondered what the point of it was.

She knew the *Cavalier* had stopped to recharge its capacitors as Captain Luke announced it to the crew a moment ago. He had also stated that they were already in Dominion space and investigating a communications relay station for any information into the Dominion that they could get. That was the last she heard about it and it was the only thing that was different about her rather dull routine.

Aside from her eating, sleeping, and reading, there was really nothing else to do other than train with the SAGATs on board. The SAGATs were known as Specter Team and did not give their real names to Brenda. Apparently, this was to deny their involvement with their covert missions. Brenda was provided a code name while she was onboard and trained with Specter Team, calling her Revenant One to follow the “theme” of which both they and the Ghost Team on the *Templar* were following. She had to remind herself that the code name is what she had to respond to while on the *Cavalier*.

As she read the reports on the Tenebris one more time, she read one aspect of Republic society that always intrigued her. While Humans in the Republic at large no longer use the term “races” to define ethnic groups but instead uses “identities,” she noticed that a lot of the people “identified” in the reports were very specific. While she knew the reason why she was picked for the mission, she decided to read more about the Tigris family that she descended from to get a better understanding of her lineage. According to the report, the Tigris family were known throughout the Republic at the time for their artistic and cultural talents. The family produced the best artists, actors and actresses, musicians, and performers the Republic had ever seen during the Expansion Era. After the Tenebris' colony was attacked, those that were not part of the Tenebris cult fell into seclusion for fear of even being associated with them. Most of them had committed suicide in disgrace, but their ties were not brought to light as initially thought due to the RCIA covering up the whole Tenebris matter. Anyone that remained alive and managed to

avoid any possible persecution eventually married into other families and adopted new names in the process. As far as she can tell, only a select few descendants still pursue careers in the arts. To Brenda, the fact that members of her family committed suicide to begin with was appalling.

The records also indicated that the Tigris family's identity was "Hispanic," of which that was Brenda's identity based on the Republic consensus. What separated those of Hispanic identities from those who were of Spanish identities were their culture, dialect, accents, and social habits. This only mattered in the reports as the Pistris family, who were nomadic for reasons unknown in the Republic, were of Spanish identity. Brenda began to wonder if her ancestral ties to the Tigris were the reasons she became a reporter for NBS, much like how Head Agent Aja is a descendant of the militant Aspergillus family, of which their identities were "African" like she was.

Brenda set the tablet down and tried to see if the computer had more information on file about her ancestry. While this information would normally be accessed on public systems while within the Republic Central Library, she had a feeling that her record would be in the ship's database. Not surprisingly, it was in the database, but it required a security passcode to access.

While her search reached an end involving the ship's computer, she looked back at the historical and ancestral record for the Tigris family she was handed, looking down the family tree to see the names of her ancestors for anyone she may start to recognize. About four generations before her, she started to see names she recognized, namely her great grandparents down to her. If Aja had not told her the fact that she was a descendant of the Tigris, she would have been in shock at seeing this by now. However, this made a lot of sense as to why she was picked due to her ancestry along with her field reporting and information gathering expertise.

To think that there were a few trillion people in the Republic and somehow the RCIA managed to narrow their search down to her when they needed someone to help infiltrate the Dominion. Brenda began to wonder how many descendants there were of those who were either part of or were related to the Tenebris cult families, whether they knew it themselves or not.

She suddenly heard a door chime. Someone was at her door. She began to wonder if her inquiry into the ship's computer had come to the attention of a member of the crew involving information that she wasn't supposed to access. She turned off the tablet she was looking at and calmed her nerves.

"Who is it?" she asked aloud, knowing the terminal by the door would pick up her voice to play to the person outside.

"*This is Specter One,*" a female voice said through the terminal. "*May I enter?*"

Brenda was familiar with the name of the team of SAGATs that were assigned to the *Cavalier* and their peculiar way of calling each other by their callsign only. However, she had not met with any of them personally while she has been on board. Brenda did not know whether this person who would be that team's leader came to her quarters to inquire about Brenda's search or if this was just a social call. The only way for her to know is to let the SAGAT into her room.

"Come in," Brenda finally said.

The door opened after Brenda said those words. There at the door was a woman of African identity about the same height as Brenda dressed in casual clothing. Brenda was surprised to see this as she thought SAGATs were supposed to be wearing their military attire during their waking hours.

Specter One as she was called walked in and the door closed, but she could tell by the look on Brenda's face that she was surprised to see her in casual wear.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Specter One said. “I figured since we had not had a chance to talk personally yet that this might be a good time to do so.”

“Is that so?” Brenda said, still curious about the SAGATs attire. “What did you come to see me about?”

Specter One looked for another chair in the room but only the bed was available. She walked over and sat on the side of the bed, Brenda’s head turning to follow her.

“Captain Luke has instructed me to join you once our initial recon of the Dominion capital has completed and we have the attire to do so,” the SAGAT said.

“So,” Brenda said, puzzled, “you are going to be my bodyguard?”

“The funny thing is, I figured out pretty quickly why I was assigned to this ship and why I would be leading the ground mission. I assume you read up on all of the families that made up the Tenebris centuries ago?”

“I did, but I focused primarily on the Tigris family since I appear to be a descendant of that family according to my genealogy and Head Agent Aja.”

“I assume then that you have read up on the Aspergillus family among the history reports as well, correct?”

“I did look over them. I know that they were great agricultural specialists as well as military officers. They appeared to be rather good with their hands in both fields.”

“Do you recall what their identities were as well?”

“Their identities? Well, that family’s identity was...”

Brenda stopped herself when she realized what Specter One was getting at, and in a more somber voice continued.

“...that of the African identity, just like you and Aja are.”

“Correct,” Specter One said. “Just like Head Agent Aja, I also am a descendant of that family, or at least a descendant of one of the traitors that allowed them to slip away. I was told this after the mission began during a briefing. I’ve read up more on them since we left Ruber.”

“Does that mean you and Aja are related?”

“Not within the same family, no. Our relations only go as far back as when the Tenebris went into exile over six centuries ago. We would be VERY distant cousins, at best.”

“I see. Still, it makes sense that you would be going along with me. I assume you read up on the Tigris family as well?”

“Yes. They were a family of the arts and media. Unlike the other families, someone of their lineage should not raise suspicion of going into a library depending on how things have developed since then. Someone like me on the other hand might not usually be seen walking in. Depending on the situation we find once we arrive at Tenebris Prime, most likely I will stay just outside the library while you go in and recover the data we need.”

“So, you came here to go over the preliminary plan with me, huh?”

“Essentially. I’ve noticed while you and I are in training that you are experienced in the martial arts and that you normally practice on your own on a regular basis. I’m beginning to wonder if training with us is even needed.”

“I can hold my own if needed.”

“I also wanted to let you know that once we teach Tenebris Prime, we will not be using our callsigns when we arrive at their capital. It is not advised to use them in public.”

“Doesn’t that mean that I would need to call you by your name while we are at their capital?”

“Yes, it does. I think we would get some funny expressions if you called me ‘Specter One’ once we are there.”

“Then I must ask, what is your name? I won’t use it until we get to the surface of Tenebris Prime.”

“Very well. My real name is Lakia.”

“Lakia? That’s a pretty name.”

“Thank you, Brenda. I better get going before my squad misses me.”

Lakia got up and headed for the door. She turned her head to face Brenda.

“We will speak again once we arrive at Tenebris Prime,” Lakia said. “Until then, Revenant One.”

“Until then, Specter One,” Brenda said, making sure not to use Lakia’s name as she promised.

Lakia pressed a button on the terminal next to the door. The door slid open and Lakia walked out, the door sliding closed behind her. Brenda let out a sigh of relief but at the same time she wondered how much the RCIA was really letting on about the knowledge of the Tenebris. If they have gone through the trouble of finding those who were ancestors of the anyone related to those who followed the cult, it means they are taking this matter even more seriously than she first expected. They picked her out before the information on the Dominion and the Federation was even made available because of her ancestry. Obviously, the best infiltrators are those that are related, but this was one time she wished she was picked because of her expertise, not her lineage.

Regardless, she is here now and while the truth about her selection as well as others on board this ship is now known, she still had an assignment to do and complete.

Though, in all honesty, she wished she was back in Paraíso De La Sol right now, sitting on the beach in a swimsuit and enjoying an exotic drink. The sooner this mission was over, the sooner that would be a reality.

* * * * *

Amarria’s Quarters, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Draco Federation Border W-26 “Essex” System, Western Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System 5:41pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.

“Those outfits are exquisite!”

Amarria could not contain her enthusiasm as she browsed through the video feeds that were recorded from the Federation’s broadcasting system. They had finished recording three hours’ worth of footage half an hour ago and gave those in relation to fashion, culture, and history to Amarria. The remaining footage relating to the war and their political broadcasts were being looked through by Blair and his team. Amarria was taking as many notes as she could to collect her thoughts on the Federation and its culture.

The fashion the Federation had adopted, at least those who were Human, was what she called “concealing.” In other words, except for the head and hands of a person, everything else on the body was covered and loose fitting. No one was wearing anything form fitting except for swimsuits which looked like diving suits, albeit with different patterns to “spruce” up the look.

Based on what she could determine, the Humans of the Draco Federation seemed to find the showing of skin to be either disgraceful or distasteful. It seems to relate to their form of religion which, according to some broadcasts, appear to be a derivative of the Great Maker faith

but far more orthodox among the people. Much of their clothes feel like they were made by someone who served in their churches rather than from a modeling agency. While the base colors tend to vary based on the preference of the wearer, there were various degrees of gold-colored accents of artistic fashion on different parts of the outfits. These accents were what attracted Amarria the most as it gave those who wore them a sense of prestige and nobility. Even certain dresses made her want to wear them and feel dignified like she had come from a fantasy tale.

As for the religion itself, she could not find any other religion than this variation among the Federation. She also noticed that the alien races that are also a part of the nation were also following that faith, as their attire from what she noticed was also very similar. Without knowing their history, it is possible that the Humans of the Federation may have either coaxed these aliens into following their faith which led them to the stars or their own faiths were very similar to what the descendants of the Draco family were preaching and adopted it willingly. Whatever the cause or the reason, it was clear that the aliens follow the same faith.

She also noticed that there was a lack of one aspect of the Tenebris cult that was missing from the broadcasts: the use of blood. There was nothing relating to that aspect of the Tenebris cult that could be found anywhere in the broadcasts. While she wanted to be hopeful that the Federation is not using blood in some form or fashion when it comes to worship, she knew that such a conclusion would be ill-conceived until they know for a fact that they were not using it. However, she did have to admit that within that three hours' worth of broadcasts, there were quite a bit of religion-based broadcasts during that time.

Still, there was something nagging her after watching some of the broadcasts so far. Nothing she could see now would suggest a cause for the war that the Federation is in with the Dominion, at least not from the cultural standpoint. The only thing she can think of that would be the cause was a difference of opinion involving religion and if the son of Armani Draco wanted nothing to do with his father's twisted beliefs, but there was nothing to validate that thus far without knowing the Tenebris Dominion's religious stance. Until then, it was all speculation.

For now, though, at least they know how they can blend in once they arrive on Propitius Esto. As part of preparations for the mission, there was an automated sewing machine with a variety of fabric on board that only needed instructions on what to make. Amarria used something similar a couple of times in the past before to make historical outfits for events either at the Central Library or elsewhere. While there were still those who consider themselves fashion designers and seamstresses, much of the existing fashion designs in the Republic were created using this method since the outfits could be mass-produced. All someone needs to do is come up with a pattern and provide the measurements. The machine then takes it from there. The machine is expensive, and some early designers tend to do things by hand before they could afford such a machine unless they work for a major clothing brand. What she found funny is the fact she was only aware of how the fashion industry worked was due to her parents' friendship with people that her father rescued years ago from kidnappers who currently reside in the Voluptas System.

After looking at all the designs she watched on the broadcasts, she picked one that she liked the most that was not too "overbearing." It was a long-sleeve beige mock turtleneck top with a dark brown stripe down the middle both front and back. The stripe was flanked by gold pattern accents. The end of the sleeves at the wrists were also dark brown with the same gold pattern separating the dark brown from the beige. The rest of the ensemble included a knee-length beige skirt with a dark brown stripe on both sides with the gold accent pattern on top, dark brown stockings, and brown above-the-ankle boots. For the sake of time, she had the computer make a pattern based on the broadcasts and inputted her own measurements. Once that was

accomplished, she forwarded the pattern to the sewing machine located two floors down. The machine said the outfit would be ready in thirty minutes.

Amarria was a bit excited to try it on. However, she also got an idea to surprise a couple of people with the outfit once it was completed.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Draco Federation Border
W-26 "Essex" System, Western Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
6:36pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.*

"So, there you have it."

Blair and Tora had been watching some of the broadcasts involving the news on the war between the Federation and the Dominion as well as any political broadcasts they could find on the view screen. The picture being painted by the broadcasts were not looking too good for the Federation at first from their viewpoint, the past two weeks have shown some significant changes in the war effort.

"So," Blair said as he began to ponder, "the battle in the Miranda System that the *Cavalier* recorded was the first win for the Federation in a long time."

"Looks like it," Tora said. "It would appear that the Federation was losing the war for a long time, but that changed at Miranda. It seems that battle was the first one the Federation deployed its dreadnoughts and supercarriers. Since then, they have been able to come to a stalemate with the Dominion forces."

"That means that those ships were the first time the Federation ever deployed them. If that is the case, I'm willing to bet that rift engine was created by the Dominion first and the Federation managed to salvage the engine during a battle. This would fit why the Federation still has star gates instead of using that rift engine. However, it has also been made apparent that whenever the Dominion seized a system, they destroy the Federation's star gates in that system to prevent the Federation from returning. Neither the Republic nor the officially known nations has ever considered the destruction of the gates, but that is due to our reliance on them by the public to go from one system to another. They can be deactivated to prevent others from entering their borders but the thought of them being destroyed was never an option to be considered."

"However, as you and I both know, the Dominion does not use them since they can practically jump wherever they want with that rift system of theirs. Part of me is surprised that they don't destroy them first upon entering a Federation controlled system."

"Maybe they waited until they draw in enough Federation ships to destroy them all, thus reducing the Federation's military strength before shutting the door, as it were. Either that or the gates have considerable defenses that make their destruction time consuming. However, now that the Federation possesses the same rift drive as the Dominion, destroying the star gates would no longer stop them from returning to those systems. The only problem the Federation now has is having enough of their dreadnoughts and supercarriers to push the Dominion back."

"The only reason the Dominion would have now to destroy the Federation's star gates would be to cut off communications with that star system, isolating the civilian population from the Federation and forcing them to accept whatever way of life the Dominion pushes on them."

"I wonder, though. Why doesn't the Federation evacuate the civilians the moment the system or planet is attacked?"

“It is possible that the Dominion would appear over the planet unsuspectedly making sure that such evacuations cannot take place due to the possibility of being shot down by Dominion dreadnoughts.”

“You’re talking about having control of the airspace above the planet. That would make sense as that would complicate things.”

“The fact is that the Federation has now forced a stalemate in their war with the Dominion. I guess they had faith that they would turn the tide of this war. I did notice that their faith seems to play a big part of their society based on the news, though.”

“I also noticed their outfits tend to not be revealing at all. I wonder why that is?”

“Maybe I can explain,” Amarria said behind them.

Blair and Tora turned around towards the elevator behind them. There they saw Amarria, but she was dressed in an attire like what they have been seeing in the broadcasts that they were watching. Both were surprised to see the outfit, but Amarria also did her hair in a braided bun on the back of her head.

“Phantom One?” Blair said, trying to refrain from calling her by her real name per mission protocols. “You already determined the outfit you’re wearing on the mission?”

“Yes,” Amarria said. “It would appear that their culture is religious-based in a manner similar to the Great Maker faith but far more orthodox in its nature as far as I can determine. Because of this, their outfits are not revealing at all, including swimwear. From what I can determine, the showing of any skin aside from their head and hands outside the privacy of their home is considered sacrilegious. It also appears that they like gold accents because every fashion show I watched showed such styles.”

“I take it that for the men, they wear something like suits, right?”

“For the most part, yes, but it seems they can get by wearing long sleeve shirts as well. The aliens among their society also seem to have adopted this version of the Great Maker faith as they are shown wearing similar attire as well. The reasons behind this are not known to me at this time as nothing relating to their involvement or commitment to that religion was shown among the broadcasts.”

“We haven’t seen anything relating to this matter,” Tora said, “but could you determine if the Federation is still adhering to the use of blood in their religion?”

“Not from the broadcasts I saw,” Amarria said. “I want to be hopeful that they are not, but I know that there is the possibility that they simply had no reason to mention it in the three hours’ worth of recordings we have.”

“That is the best way to think about it. Until we have all our facts in order, we cannot assume anything. I will say though, that outfit makes you look prestigious. You look like you could be an ambassador or a highly dignified political figure.”

“That may be a good thing. I came up here to get Ghost One’s measurements, but I overheard part of the conversation concerning the war. So, both nations are at a stalemate now?”

“They are,” Blair said. “The Dominion had the upper hand with their rift drives as we are calling them until just over two weeks ago when the Federation deployed ships with the same drives. This could be a bad thing if either of them decide to attack the Republic as they can appear anywhere they want and retreat just as quickly, provided they don’t have limitations involving the use of that system.”

“I see,” Amarria said as she pondered this news.

“Bear in mind,” Tora said, “we really do not know who the protagonist and the antagonist are in their war. The last thing we need is to pick a side when we don’t have all the facts. Once we do, then we will proceed accordingly.”

“By the way,” Amarria said, “do we know who is the head of state for the Federation? Surely a name would have popped up on the broadcasts if you all were watching the news among the political broadcasts.”

“Actually, yes. The name and title of the head of state is President Shea. We saw her in a news broadcast for a social event. Her outfit was quite elaborate. We will forward that broadcast to your quarters. Considering we have more than two hours before the capacitors are fully recharged, Ghost One will go with you since you need his measurements. Ghost One, return here once you try on the outfit. I’m curious to see what you look like in it.”

Blair looked over at Amarria in her outfit before looking back at Tora.

“Considering it may look like what we have seen in the broadcasts,” he said, “why do you want to see me in it?”

“Because I want to see what you look like without a uniform,” Tora said with a smile.

Blair sighed and headed towards the elevator past Amarria.

“Let’s go,” Blair said towards Amarria with a groan. “The things I put up with for the mission...”

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*Spacecraft Development Center, Horribilis Industries, 70 miles Northeast of Luminous Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen (“Light”) System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
4:08pm, October 11, 5434 A.D.*

“Greetings, Supreme Chancellor.”

The chief engineer of Horribilis Industries, the company currently contracted to build the current line of warships for the Republic Navy, greeted Supreme Chancellor Drew at the door to the main research and development center within the company’s complex. Drew had contacted them along with the Republic Corp of Engineers to work on a joint development project a week ago. Drew arrived to personally see the progress of the project he along with Grand Admiral Mikey had requested, though Mikey was not present for this visit.

“Greetings, Mister Bradshaw,” Drew said as he walked into the center. “I trust your engineering team and the Corp team have made progress in my request?”

“We have,” Bradshaw said as he escorted Drew, the doors closing behind him. “We were able to come up with a base design after some problems were finally solved.”

“What problems?”

“There were issues with the power supplied for everything on the ship that you wanted due to the amount of space needed for ammunition, something we had never had to deal with before. We tried what we could to make it work but, in the end, we had to sacrifice the ability to take on small targets such as frigates and destroyers with the weapons on board.”

“You realize that this will be an issue, right?”

“Thankfully, we came up with another solution. I must say, though, I think some of us are still shocked about what we were told. The fact that the Lykan Prime Minister wants to have a joint agency to help regulate the trade and law enforcement between nations is a rather lofty request, but one that promotes cooperation between races. The design you requested will reflect

those ideals and would make for a compromise between the designs of all the nations. It is an absolute work of art.”

“Good to hear.”

Drew had requested such a design that would symbolize a union of all four officially known nations, minus the Mandate as it was using similar designs to the Lykans. However, Drew had only requested this as he knew that it would primarily be used against the Dominion and the Federation should they suddenly want to wage war against the Novus Initium Republic.

He had a specific set of requirements for the engineers to follow. The first was to incorporate as much of the weapons used by the other nations as possible. The second was that the ship needed to have design elements of all the nations so that the ship would be recognized as having some influence from each nation. The last element which may cause some problems is that it needed to be big and leave room in the engineering area for a new drive system. It was Drew’s hope that should the stealth vessels find any information on the rift engines the Federation and the Dominion were using that this vessel could utilize it as well. Of course, whatever was powering their engines, they needed large vessels to power them. Hopefully, the engineers understood that size was important because of the new engine’s power requirements, even if they don’t know what the engine was or the fact it had not been “acquired” yet.

“To be honest,” Bradshaw continued, “some of our researchers are trying to determine what this new drive system is that you were referring to and why the vessel needed to be as big as we made it. Is there any information you can give us about it?”

“I wish I could give you more information,” Drew said. “However, the engine is still classified pending testing and construction. I’m just making sure that once it is completed and everything checks out that we can use the new design to install it on. It will revolutionize space travel, I will tell you that much. Sadly, no individual nation will possess it due to the power requirements that are needed which won’t be finalized either until final tests are done.”

“In other words, we may not even have enough power in the design to power this new engine yet. At least we have a base design to work with until that is accomplished that we can still modify if needed. Hopefully this will be better than the stealth vessels so-called ‘sustainable’ warp drives.”

Drew stopped walking for a moment and looked at Bradshaw.

“What are you talking about?” Drew asked.

“The warp drives of the stealth vessels are sustainable when going a certain range,” Bradshaw said. “However, after sixty Light-years, the capacitors would be dangerously low and will force the ship to drop out of warp. The stealth vessels would need six hours to recharge their capacitors based on our calculations.”

Drew looked at his watch. If what Bradshaw said was true, then both stealth vessels would be doing this recharge period by now. Drew sighed.

“I wish I was told that, but I guess such a long flight had never been tested,” Drew said. “Anyway, what about this new design?”

“Right this way, sir.”

Bradshaw gestured to his right where a presentation room was located. They walked into the room that had no windows but had a long table with a holographic emitter in the middle of the table. As they walked in, the lights dimmed and the holographic emitter came to life.

“Would you like to sit, sir?” Bradshaw asked.

“I’ll stand, thank you,” Drew said.

“Very well. Here is the design we came up with.”

Bradshaw approached the table and activated the console. A holographic image soon came out of the emitter. The image at first appeared to be the central hull of a State vessel but was elongated. Suddenly, a shortened portion of the front and rear sections of a Paladin Battleship were attached to the rear flank of that hull, followed by the upper and lower sections of a Kronos Battleship attached dorsally and ventrally nestled between the Paladin sections. The forward side sections of a Harbinger Battleship were attached to the forward portion of the central hull. The saucers and wings of a Harbinger minus the weapon pods were attached to the sides of the Paladin sections. Sections of what appeared to be the Paladin's battleship weapons mounts appeared on the front section on the central hull in front of the Kronos sections dorsally and ventrally. They looked like they could mount up to eight turrets each. Another set of battleship turret mounts appeared and attached to the end of the wings. Those look like they can mount six turrets each. So far, the design was quite impressive on how they blended together.

The weapons soon appeared and added to the mixed look of the vessel. The turrets that appeared on the battleship mounts in the front section consisted of four railguns and four blaster going from front to back both above and below based on the Empire's Kronos Battleship guns. Laser turrets like the Paladin appeared on the wing mounts with six on each wing, but four more appeared in pairs towards the rear of the central hull behind the Imperial ship sections. Quad missile launchers from the State's Golem Battleship appeared on the sides of the central hull between the forward Harbinger sections and the rear Paladin sections. These launchers number twenty-eight with fourteen on each side! Cruiser size railguns and blasters appeared on the top and bottom of the Kronos sections while cruiser size laser turrets appeared on the top and bottom of the Paladin sections. Nothing else appeared to attach to the image after that.

Drew was shocked with the design and the visible combat capabilities of the design.

"We call this the Enforcer-Class Battleship," Bradshaw said. "The ship's defenses are the same as our ships with shield boosters and armor repairer systems intact. As you can see, we also incorporated the weapons systems from our Republic, the State, and the Empire. The only weapons we did not incorporate are the Lykans' projectile weapons due to what we considered was 'low-tech' weapons as well as the size of the ammo for those guns. We were able to add some cruiser weapons to help it engage those ships. However, to combat the small attack craft, we developed a pair of effective countermeasures in the form of drone fighters."

"Before we continue," Drew said, "how long would it take to build this vessel?"

"Once we have the engine that is being developed, it will take two weeks per ship at each shipyard. This ship is twice the size as the Paladin at two kilometers so it will obviously take twice as long, bar the limitations of the engine and how long it will take to build that as well."

"I just hope that ship will be big enough for the new engine. I've been told it requires a great deal of power and the hull has to be large enough to accommodate the power required."

"How much does it need?"

"I wish I can tell you, but even I don't know that."

"Sir," Bradshaw said, puzzled, "is that engine really being developed or is it still theoretical? Why are you wanting this ship developed?"

Drew let out a sigh. While he did not like the fact that more people know about the Tenebris than needed, he realized that he would need to explain to Bradshaw about the cult and its descendants as well for his further cooperation on this project.

"Bradshaw," Drew said, "what I am about to tell you is confidential, but it will explain why I want this ship developed for the safety of everyone in the star cluster..."

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