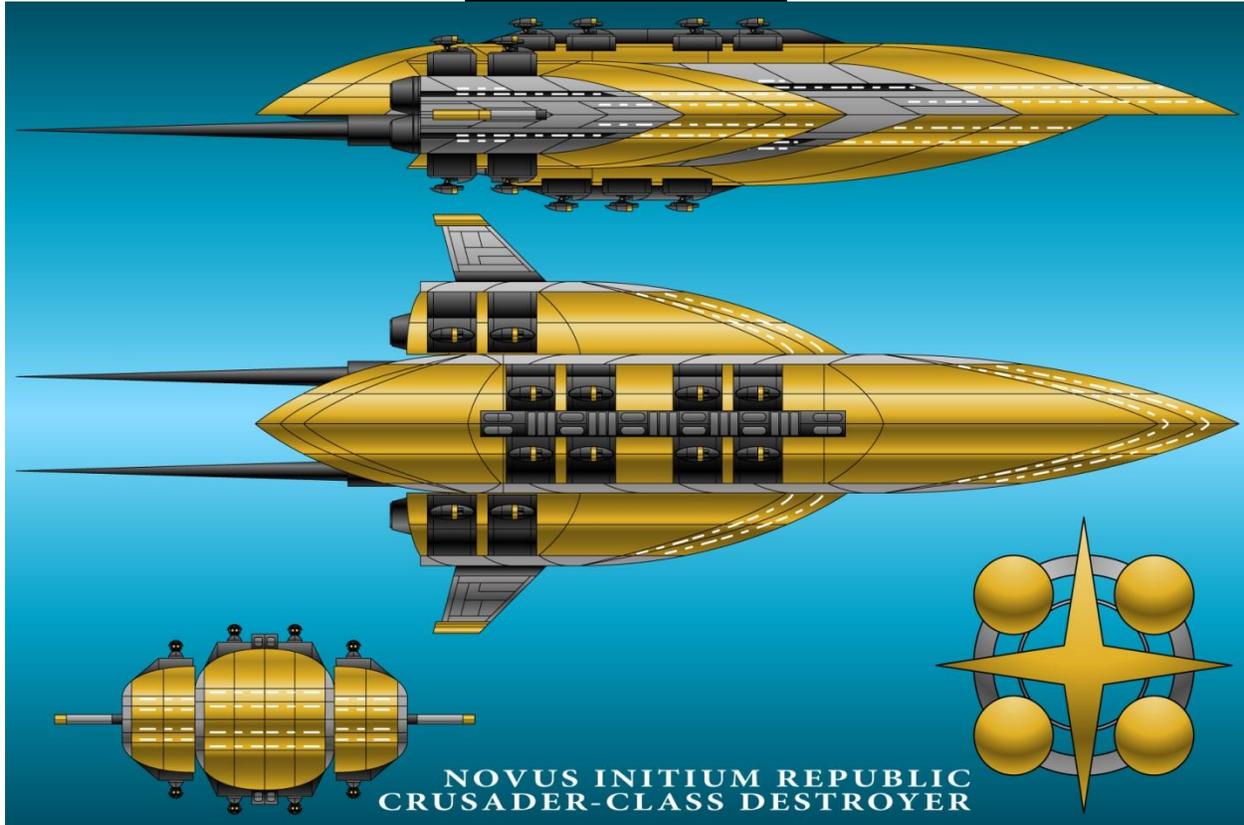


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode I: Alone Yet Not



PART 3

*Private Residence of Sheryl, Northgate District, City of Cisco
Voluptas IV, Voluptas ("Pleasure") System, 6 Jumps Southeast of Lumen
6:17pm, May 11, 5433 A.D.*

"This can't be for real."

Sheryl reclined in her chair, trying to comprehend the appearance of not one but two alien fleets in Tranquillus that she had just watched on NBS News. This was a historical event for the Republic and yet it was far too convenient for the Republic's Eleventh Fleet under the command of Vice Admiral Trent to be in that system when this occurred. There was more going on with the deployment of that fleet than the government or the military were leading people to believe. There was a chance that the government or even the RCIA were somehow aware of these races or their militaries from afar and took measures to not only hide their existence from the public but knew that they were close enough to warrant the deployment of one of the Main Fleets. There was a chance that Trent was ordered to lie about the real reasons for the fleet's deployment. If that was the case, she should not hold him responsible for those orders.

Regardless of the reasons, the fact of the matter is that now Humanity knows without a doubt that they were no longer alone in the universe or rather this star cluster. Thoughts will start to form as to whether or not these races are the only ones or if there are more of them in the star

cluster. Despite the size of the star cluster, the Republic only takes up less than half of the cluster primarily expanding from its center and have worked their way outward during the Expansion Era. If they had come across these races during that time when the military was still thinly stretched, there would have been serious complications depending on whether they were spacefaring at that point or not.

Sheryl continued to watch the news station, though they were still on commercials. Part of her wondered how Laura felt knowing that Trent may have known about what had transpired. She found out that Laura was Trent's wife after meeting Trent a few years ago. Laura was a celebrity in her own right due to her being on-the-air for the noon and evening news broadcasts. This level of "stardom" as the term goes may not be on the same level as Sheryl and her friends, but she does have her own set of fans and admirers.

As the commercials were coming to an end and the news was about to continue, Sheryl's phone suddenly went off next to her. She picked it up and looked at who was calling. The ID showed it was her fellow pop idol Maxine. She went ahead and answered the phone.

"Hey, Maxine," Sheryl said. "Let me guess, you're calling about the news?"

"Yeah," Maxine said, sounding like she wanted to surprise Sheryl with what had transpired but ultimately failed. "*So what are your thoughts about this?*"

"About the aliens?"

"*Well, that's part of it?*"

"Wait, 'That's part of it?' What's the other part?"

"*What are your thoughts concerning the real reason for Trent's fleet being in that star system?*"

Sheryl could see where this call was going. Not only were they told that Trent's fleet was going to Tranquillus by Governor Michelle for "military exercises," but they reported the same thing on the news just prior to the appearance of the alien fleets. It was obvious now that there was a reason other than "exercises" for Trent's fleet to be there in that exact system when the aliens showed up. However, she had a good idea why they were all told it was for exercises to begin with.

"While I am not too thrilled that we were all lied to by either Trent or his superiors, one has to look at the big picture of things in this situation."

"*What 'big picture' are you talking about?*"

"Think about it, Maxine. What would the public have thought if they were upfront with the alien presence?"

"*Well, they would...oh. Right...*"

"Yeah, we saw the holoreels by this point. Everyone would be concerned about what the aliens would do, what their purpose was, or if we were going to be overpowered by them and become enslaved or wiped out. Mass hysteria would have gripped everyone everywhere."

"*I guess that would be true. I just thought that Humans would have done away with such secrets and lies when it comes to such things.*"

"If only that were true. If it was, the RCIA would not be around..."

Sheryl came to realize something as the words left her mouth. Almost everyone in the Republic has heard of the RCIA in some form or fashion through the news. They made headlines a few years ago when a large group of dissidents who used to do peaceful demonstrations started

amassing weapons in order to be taken more seriously. They felt that peaceful demonstrations were not allowing them to get what they want, which was the impeachment of the current Supreme Chancellor of the time. The Supreme Chancellor was involved in a scandal with a couple of women and his case was eventually dismissed due to lack of evidence. However, the women involved managed to rally supporters to their cause. However, when their peaceful rallies proved to be ineffective, some of the members started turning to the use of weapons and arming themselves in order to make a more profound statement. However, the RCIA had a couple of undercover agents among the group when they heard said rumors and managed to reveal where the weapons were being stored before they could be used. The RCIA informed local law enforcement who managed to bust in and apprehend the people for possession of firearms without a permit. After their apprehension, the movement died out rather quickly since news about how some of their members were arming themselves for future movements got out. Less than a year later, Drew became the current Supreme Chancellor after the previous one reached the end of his term without wanting to run for a second term. This was one of the few times the RCIA made the news.

On the other hand, while this publicity put the RCIA in a good light at the time, many which have had dealings with them know them for shadier assignments. The RCIA has been known for covert operations that never see the light of day. Until today, this dealing with aliens would probably have not made the news. It was only by chance that NBS News was doing a live broadcast at the time the alien fleets showed up.

“As I’m thinking about it, I’m beginning to think the RCIA is somehow involved with the Eleventh Fleet’s deployment.”

“You think they knew about the aliens before they showed up?”

“Well, it would explain why the fleet was deployed and why Trent could not say the truth about it, either. Based on Laura’s reaction on the news, she knew nothing about it at all.”

“But I thought the RCIA was a civilian agency? How were they able to authorize the deployment of military force for this?”

Sheryl thought about it for a little bit before the answer hit her.

“There is only one person who the RCIA answers to who is also in the position of deploying the military.”

“And who would that...be...wait a minute! You cannot be seriously implying who I think you are implying?!”

“I am. I believe Supreme Chancellor Drew was informed of these aliens and decided to deploy the Eleventh Fleet at the request of the RCIA to Tranquillus in case they showed up. I’m willing to bet that the sudden appearance of an NBS field reporter was not part of their plan and they could not do any information control during a live broadcast.”

“So the Supreme Chancellor knows. Who else do you think knows?”

“I don’t know. At this point, it doesn’t matter now that everyone knows. The only questions I have now are whether or not the aliens will be friends with us and why they are at war with each other?”

“The answer to the latter question is what I am worried about.”

* * * * *

Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
6:30pm, May 11, 5433 A.D.

“That was bad timing, indeed.”

Drew sat at his desk, his elbows on the table and his head resting in his hands, as he watched the NBS News broadcast that ended their program for now. He could not believe the bad timing of the broadcast itself. The reporter in Tranquillus almost wrapped up her report when the alien fleets appeared. If they had only waited a few more minutes.

Drew then realized that even if the fleets had waited a few minutes, the reporter would have easily gotten in touch with her agency somehow unless the RCIA managed to intercept the transmission. The RCIA would have had better control of the information involving the aliens if there was not a live broadcast. This would have given Drew, the Senate, and the military a chance to iron out the alien situation without having the public know about it just yet. After the broadcast, Drew quickly sent orders to Commander Trevor to have his fleet in the Tranquillus System suspend all civilian traffic in that system as well as lock down the local star gates to prevent more from showing up close to where the alien fleets were located.

This was probably the worst-case scenario involving information control in the history of the RCIA. Everyone in the Republic was told just now that the Eleventh Fleet was in Tranquillus for military exercises but it would not take a genius to figure out how overly “convenient” it was for that fleet to be there and come up with their own speculations. Indeed he sent the fleet out after being informed by Head Agent Aja of the RCIA of the potential alien threat or trespassing into Republic space based on what they had gathered. Now it may come back to bite him and his career because ultimately he was the one that gave the order. However, if things go well with the aliens, it may not be an issue in the end after all.

Not too long after news of the alien fleets appearing was broadcasted, Drew’s terminal started going off from messages coming from senators who wanted to call a meeting to talk about the aliens. Drew was sending the same response to all of them: *We will be calling a special session of the Senate once we have established contact with the aliens. Ambassadors are already on-site for any diplomatic meetings.* Drew regretted adding that last part because that brought about a whole other set of questions asking *why* they were already there. He will have to explain himself later in front of the entire Senate assembly.

There was a message on his terminal from his secretary whose desk was just outside his door. Considering how soundproof the room was, it was necessary for her to call into his office.

“*Supreme Chancellor,*” his secretary said, “*your wife is here to see you and she brought you your dinner.*”

Drew pressed a button on his terminal.

“Thank you,” he said. “Please send her in.”

He heard a click from the doors in front of him as the doors unlocked. One of the doors opened and in walked his wife Kotori with what looked like two orders of ancient Chinese food. That sort of food was always healthy depending on how it was prepared and looks like she chose that for dinner in the end after all.

She closed the door behind her and walked up to his desk.

“I heard the news in the car on my way here,” she said as she got the food containers out of the bag she was carrying. “Is that what you were referring to earlier about your decision?”

Drew looked at her surprised that she knew what was going on already. He did not expect the news to be sent through audio music feeds already.

“Now that they have appeared,” Drew said, “yes, that is what I was referring to. I sent that fleet out there on reports from the RCIA who have been both monitoring and jamming their signals into Republic space. Most of the fleet officers and crews think the fleet was only deployed for exercises based on my orders. However, Vice Admiral Trent, Captain Shannon, Colonel Blair, and a trio of people sent as ‘representatives’ from the RCIA are the only people who know the real reason why I deployed that fleet.”

“I’m surprised you told me all of that,” Kotori said surprisingly. “I thought all operations involving the RCIA were kept confidential?”

“Considering the circumstances, that is no longer the case now that the alien fleets have appeared on a live broadcast.”

“Yeah, I guess once the secret is out, so is the possible confidentiality. Does anyone know the real reason the fleet is out there right now?”

“I have not made any such announcements, but the public and the Senate are no doubt skeptical now about why the Eleventh Fleet was deployed to Tranquillus. I also blundered when the Senate asked about sending ambassadors to Tranquillus and I told them there were already representatives on-site. Needless to say, they now want to know *why* I had already sent them there. I have a lot of explaining to do.”

“Sounds like it,” Kotori said as she opened the containers and handed Drew a pair of chopsticks. “So what is your take on this situation with the alien fleets?”

“I’ve received a preliminary report from Vice Admiral Trent concerning them. Just like what the RCIA had detected from afar, the two fleets began to exchange fire with each other the moment they were in the Tranquillus System. This leads us to believe that these two forces are at war with each other. What those reasons are won’t be determined until we are able to communicate with them. However, that is not the oddest part of this situation.”

“What do you mean?” Kotori said as she started eating.

“Well,” Drew said as he started to dig into the food, “their weapons systems appear to be of a design much like how Humans would have designed them. One group has projectile artillery cannons while the other uses missiles. The design of the ships themselves also seem like Humans would have made them in a lot of aspects. None of them are far-flung or organic looking like what is seen in the holoreels.”

Drew took a few bites.

“That seems a bit off,” Kotori said.

“Not entirely,” Drew said after he finished his bite. “It could be that they came up with the same basic principles of weaponry that Humans did a long time ago. If one looks at it from that aspect, if we encounter any other race in the star cluster, they might have done the same thing or use the same design philosophy. Other than that, it may also depend on that race’s aesthetics.”

“I see. However, from what you are saying, we have already run into a problem.”

“Oh?” Drew said, surprised at her comment. “Could you elaborate?”

“You said these two alien races are fighting each other, right?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Even if we are able to communicate with them, the one possible outcome depending on how talks go is that we could end up allying with one of them while becoming enemies with the other. Have you thought about that?”

Drew looked at Kotori with a stern look on his face.

“I was so excited about there being other races that I overlooked that possibility,” Drew said. “We could be making a new friend as well as a new enemy.”

“Hopefully, they will respect our sovereign claim to our systems and continue to fight outside of our territory.”

“My concern then would be what do we do if one starts to overpower the other? Do we stand by and watch or do we act to protect the losing nation?”

“A lot of that will depend on the causes of their war. For now, it is best to wait until we are able to communicate with them before we make judgements and decisions.”

“You’re right. Now the only thing I have to worry about is addressing the nation as well as the Senate.”

“That is one job I will be leaving you to handle. Politics have never been my strong point or speeches.”

“Fair enough. According to Trent, they sent over a dictionary of our language along with a message. Hopefully, they will know how to translate it or this could take a very long time for us to talk with them.”

“Have they sent their respective dictionaries to us?”

“That was what Trent’s message to them was asking for. However, it will take us longer since we will have to translate two languages instead of one.”

“That is, of course, if one or both races are nice enough to provide us with the translations afterwards.”

“That would definitely make things easier.”

“Well, you better eat up. You’re going to need your strength for what is to come.”

* * * * *

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
“First Contact” Point Alpha, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
6:48pm, May 11, 5433 A.D.*

“Well, I hope you are happy with yourself.”

Tora sat in front of Trent’s desk with Colonel Blair sitting in the chair to her right. Wade and Autumn, the two ambassadors from the Senate, sat on the couch and could only look on as Tora was fuming from the situation they were in concerning the public knowing about the aliens.

Trent also knew that Tora was contacted by her superiors about her conduct earlier today with Trent. Trent told Blair what had happened a few minutes ago and Blair laughed for a couple of minutes before Tora came in. While he was trying to hide it, Trent could still see the slight smirk on Blair’s face as Tora came into the Ready Room very upset.

“You can’t blame me for their timing,” Trent said. “They appeared on a live broadcast on the news. There was no way to know that was going to happen.”

“And yet it did,” Tora said. “Now we have to deal with the public who by now not only knows about the alien presence but the public will also no doubt realize that your fleet was in this system for reasons aside from military exercises. That sort of thing will start leading to investigations which will result the fact that the RCIA knew of the aliens long before now.”

“While I am sure Head Agent Aja had figured that this would eventually happen, the fact is that the RCIA for the most part brought this on themselves for hiding such things. This brings me to another matter at hand.”

Trent activated his terminal, pulling up something out of the view of everyone else in the room. Once he was finished, he turned the terminal around and showed the jamming satellites that were on the edge of the system.

“With Aja’s approval,” Trent said, “these have all been turned off the moment we made contact with the aliens.”

“What?!” Tora said. “Why?”

“The jammers work both ways. If the alien fleets want to contact their capitals for instructions on how to proceed with establishing contact, they need a clear signal. The jammers would have prevented such communications.”

“Fine,” Tora said, sounding defeated.

Blair was starting to have an even more difficult time hiding his smirk. Unfortunately, Tora noticed this.

“You think this is funny, Colonel?” Tora said.

“Do you want me to be blunt?” Blair said.

“What is it you find so funny? Is it the fact that I’m practically being humiliated like this that you find so amusing?”

“Considering our past relations, you’ll forgive me if that alone is the reason I find your predicament so amusing.”

“You smug son of a…”

“Let’s try to keep things professional, shall we?” Trent interjected. “Whether you like it or not, what has happened has happened and now we need to move forward.”

“Very well,” Tora said turning back to Trent. “Has there been any word from either of the alien fleets?”

“No, not yet. Depending on how fast their computers function, it could take a while for them to translate our language. I find it rather amusing that neither of these races are more highly advanced than our own. I guess all of those alien holoreels that were created no longer matter.”

“I’m beginning to think it would be best to destroy any copies that are not privately owned,” Blair said. “If we make friends with either of these races, it would be best for them not to think of us as xenophobic.”

“Are you joking again, Colonel?” Tora said.

Blair looked at her, but with a serious expression on his face.

“I’m not joking this time, Tora,” Blair said. “If these aliens see such videos, this could cause a lot of problems for us.”

“We’ll see about sending such a request to the Supreme Chancellor shortly,” Trent said. “Colonel, I know we were rushed to get to the rendezvous point as soon as the aliens were spotted in this system. How many of your SAGATs are still onboard?”

“Only a third of my troops are still onboard. If we are to host a meeting, provided the aliens don’t attempt to shoot us down first, I would recommend using them to provide security detail from the landing bays to the main conference room.”

“Alright. Let’s see how things play out first.”

“Admiral Trent to the bridge,” Shannon’s voice said over the intercom.

Trent had a puzzled expression on his face as he got up.

“I wonder if we already have a response?” he said as he headed for the door.

Blair, Tora, Wade, and Autumn got up from their seats and followed Trent out of the Ready Room.

“Report,” Trent said as he was making his way to his seat.

“Sir,” Shannon said, “we got a response from the fleet to starboard, the one that uses missiles.”

“It took them almost thirty minutes?” Trent said as he sat down. “I was sort of expecting it to take longer.”

“It could be that since they have communicated with the other fleet or at least that race in the past that they have the means to translate rather quickly.”

“That may be so. What was their response?”

“Lieutenant Commander Ro?” Shannon said looking in Ro’s direction.

“The message is text only at the moment,” Ro said, “but I will put it up on the main screen.”

A separate screen popped up in front of the main screen as words in English started to appear.

It is our wish that this is translated correctly. We are still working on the verbal translation of your language and ours as it will take longer than sending this by text. I am Grendfir Bridneo Bur’Frouner of the United Vitam State battleship Ve’Nir. We’ve managed to translate your message and we sincerely apologize for invading your sovereign airspace. We are currently engaged in a war against the Royal Lykan Kingdom whose fleet is in front of us. If the message was translated correctly, you stated that we are the first foreign races your nation has encountered, correct?

“So they are known as the United Vitam State to starboard and the Royal Lykan Kingdom to port,” Trent said. “At least we have names to associate with them now. Communications, send the following in text to make it easier for them to translate.”

“Speech-to-text is ready, sir,” Ro said. “Also, it appears that they sent us the translation files as well so we will be able to translate on our end. The computer is working on the verbal translation as well though it may be a while.”

“For the former, that’s good. For the latter, I understand.”

“Wait a moment,” Tora said. “This should be resolved with our ambassadors rather than the Vice Admiral.”

“Except that we are dealing with a military officer currently,” Trent said. “We can request a diplomatic representative from their nations shortly but let’s at least open a dialogue first before we change who it is they are talking to.”

“I concur with the Vice Admiral,” Wade said. “Let’s see how this plays out first between the fleet commanders or flag officers.”

“Alright then,” Tora said. “Go ahead, Trent.”

“Alright. Send the following message: That is correct, Grendfir Bridneo Bur’Frounter. The Republic is made up entirely of a race called Humans like myself. We have never encountered intelligent alien races before, so both of you fleet and the Kingdom’s are the first ones we have encountered. Am I to assume that the names Vitam and Lykan are the names of both of the races that are here right now? Also, is any part of that name you provided a rank? My rank is Vice Admiral, which is the third highest rank in our Navy.”

Trent gestured with his right hand that he was finished with his message. Ro cut off the recording.

“Message is being translated,” Ro said. “Fifteen seconds till completion and transmission.”

“I hope it is translated correctly.”

As the message was sent, everyone on the bridge waited patiently for a response from the State battleship. After a few minutes, the communications panel made a sound.

“Looks like we have a response,” Ro said. “Putting it up on the screen.”

The previous message that was up was replaced with the new message that was translated.

Yes, Vitam and Lykan are the names of the dominant races of both nations, though there are other races in both nations. My rank is Grendfir which holds the same position as yours based on position. We are updating our translation program to reflect this as you might do the same to make it easier. So your race is called ‘human?’ I’m becoming more curious about your Republic as I have no doubt you are about our State. I did have one question though. Have the Lykans contacted you yet? Their computers should have already translated your language by now.

“So, he is the same rank as I am,” Trent said. “That’s good to know. He is right about our curiosity, but I am more curious why the Lykans haven’t contacted us yet.”

“Could they be having problems translating our language?” Autumn asked

“Maybe, but we will see. Communications, respond with the following response: No, we have not heard from the Lykans yet. We are hoping to hear from them soon so that we could understand why you two are fighting in the first place.”

After a brief pause, Ro waited to see if there was more Trent was going to say.

“Anything further, sir?” Ro asked.

“Go ahead and send that for now,” Trent said.

“Yes, sir. Translating message and sending it.”

As the message was sent, Trent looked over at the Lykan fleet to port. So far that fleet has been unresponsive both in words and by actions. Trent was beginning to wonder why the Lykans have not said anything. Before he could do any further thinking, Ro’s station gave a sound again.

“Another message from the Vitams, sir,” Ro said. “This time they are sending two packs of data, one of which is similar in size to the one they sent with their language. We have a message as well.”

“Display it,” Trent said.

The message on the screen once again removed the previous message and a new message appeared.

“We figured as much. The Lykans are being very cautious and with good reason. We are sending you their language and their translations to our language. This

should help in translating their language so you can contact them directly. We are also sending a little bit of our histories and relations with each other. Please take your time to review our histories. We can go into more details once verbal translations are established. We also sent some pictures of what both we and the Lykans look like so that there are no surprises. Could you please send some pictures of what you look like as well?"

"I'm curious to know what they look like. Could you bring up the pictures? Also, go ahead and send them some pictures of our race including both genders and various skin tones. Also, send them as brief of a history as you can."

"Yes, sir," Ro said. "The computer is now adding and translating the Lykan language. I'm gathering pictures from our database right now, but here are the pics of the Vitams."

The screen changed from the previous message to a picture of what looks like a family. Everyone was surprised. The Vitams closely resembled bipedal foxes and other pictures showed them with other color variations. Another picture showed what looked like the founders of the State, but not only was there a male Vitam in the party, there were a few other different races as well. Of the five races presented in the pictures and aside from the aforementioned Vitam, three of the other races present were also bipedal while the fourth one looked like they were descended from snakes but have two arms. The computer identified them as such: the Zaurions for the large bipedal lizards, the Kittrane for the bipedal felines, the Esmu for the bipedal equestrians or horses, and lastly the Arjaf for the snake-like race with the two arms. It was quite the picture and this surprised everyone on the bridge. This meant there were at least six alien races including the Lykans that resided past Republic space and in the outer regions.

"So these five races in the picture formed the United Vitam State according to this," Wade said. "I'm curious to read their history."

"Here is the picture of the Lykans next," Ro said.

The images changed to another race, this time it appeared to be bipedal wolves in regal looking clothing. At this point, the regal attire was not a surprise but the fact that the race was made up entirely of bipedal wolves seemed a bit surreal when one considers that it was a war of foxes versus wolves. These wolves like the foxes also came in different colors. However, a couple of images that were displayed after that one were a bit disturbing. It showed the races seen in the State pictures working as slaves and soldiers for the Lykans. Everyone was in slight disgust over what they saw but did not know whether these pictures were doctored or not.

"I've sent the pictures and our history," Ro said. "Should I bring up their history? According to the information, it is requested we read the Lykan one first."

"Read the Lykan history first?" Trent asked, a little skeptical after seeing the Lykan picture with the slaves. "Alright, then. Put it on screen."

"Yes, sir."

Ro pressed a few buttons and the history of the Lykans began to appear on the main screen.

On a planet whose star system is right on the edge of the star cluster, a nation by the name of the Royal Lykan Kingdom had discovered after being in space for over two hundred years the means of traveling to other star systems using purple "jump" crystals used to create wormholes. With this newfound ability, the Lykans set forth with a single decree: to claim the star cluster in the name of their deity. What united the Lykans so long ago was a message given by one of their most

revered prophets simply known by the name Ka'Thro who stated he had received a word from their deity. This message was to unite their people who have long since been at war with each other and to claim all that they can see so that all would serve their deity with the Lykans ruling over them in his name. This gave the Lykans clarity and soon their entire planet had been united.

However, that was not enough for the Lykans who could see the star cluster at night for most of the year (the remainder of the year, there was no stars visible due to them being on the edge of the star cluster). To them, the prophet was not only talking about the planet, but also the star cluster before them. This drive was what eventually led them to find a means to go to other systems using the "jump" crystals in what was called "jump gates." After managing to expand into several star systems, they came across other races that they quickly enslaved and subjugated in order for them to work off their "sins" and worship the Lykans' deity. Among those races were the Vitams who had only managed to reach into space themselves before being enslaved. The Lykans saw some potential in the Vitams as engineers and technicians as the Vitams went from Industrial Age to Space Age within a very short timeframe. Indeed, the Vitams were keen on technology and took interest in studying as much of the inner workings of the Lykans ships as they could.

By over a hundred years ago, the Lykans were the dominant force in that part of the star cluster and had enslaved dozens of races who were unable to fend them off at all. Many of the slave races they had conquered dreamed of the day they could be free but there was no means for that to happen. This all changed as the Lykans holy mission of conquest soon came to a resounding halt. The Lykans decided to start venturing into the (Northern Region) after detecting transmissions of artificial origin and decided that they have stumbled across another spacefaring race that they deemed needed to be conquered and serve their deity at his altar. The nation they came across was the Camino Star Empire, an amphibious bipedal race whose ships and technology were on par if not better in some aspects to that of the Royal Lykan Kingdom's ships. The Lykans announced their intentions and immediately opened fire on the Imperial ships, an act that to this day they wish they did not do. The Lykan Royal Navy had never suffered a loss at the hands of anyone since its formation but on that day, the Lykans lost 65% of their fleet to the Empire who lost only 48%. The Lykans attribute this loss to the fact the Empire fielded battleships in the battle whereas the Lykans did not, thinking they would not need them.

This loss sent a demoralizing wave throughout the Kingdom since it was their first loss and the only response the Kingdom could come up with is to mobilize a larger force, this time with battleships in the fleet, against the Empire. This mobilization drew ships from key worlds and installations. This gave the Vitams and other slaves the opportunity they needed to finally rebel and get away from their "masters." Suddenly seeing an uprising of slaves across the kingdom, the King at the time decided to call for an uneasy truce with the Empire in order to call their ships back to stop the uprising. Many of the slaves managed to capture navy ships and freighters in order to flee as many of their people as they can. The Vitams led the way with enough crystals for a few dozen jumps to get away. Around two-thirds of the entire slave population managed to get away before the Lykans could regain control of the rebellion. Seeing as their slave labor had drastically dropped, the Lykans had to resort to automation in areas that were completely without slave labor while at the same time halting any further means of expansion. The Navy was deployed to look for the slaves that managed to escape. They were eventually found over fifty years later but by this time the slaves had managed to create their

own nation and military under the name of the United Vitam State. This began a long war between the Royal Lykan Kingdom who wanted their slaves back and the United Vitam State who wanted to free their remaining brethren. This war is still ongoing to this day as the Kingdom is keeping as many vessels on border defense with both the State and the Empire, and can only spare so many to fight against the State.

Trent looked over the entire history and was rather shocked at what he read. If what was stated here was true, not only are the Lykans practicing slavery, but they were attempting to conquer the cluster for religious reasons. Even more shocking, the translation indicated that in the Northern Region, and again it was loosely translated, there was yet another race in the outer regions by the name of the Camino Star Empire. This Empire was responsible for the turn of events in the Lykans goal of conquest and led to the freedom of most of the slaves that were under their control. This made Trent at least feel uneasy knowing that this may have something to do with why the Lykans have not said a thing or responded to Trent's message. They have the State towards the south, the Empire to the north, and now they have found out there is another nation to the west of them. They were completely boxed in and the State, by their perspective, was the weakest of them all.

"Alright, Ro," Trent said in a low tone. "Bring up the Vitams' history."

"Yes, sir," Ro said, pulling it up.

The Lykan history suddenly changed to that of the United Vitam State.

Over five hundred years ago, the Vitams who had only recently managed to go into outer space soon came across another race from another world. They were known as the Lykans of the Royal Lykan Kingdom. It was soon made clear once they arrived in the Vitams' home system that they were there to conquer the Vitams and the Lykans did so with little effort against the technologically inferior Vitams. The entire population was put into slavery to serve the Lykans and their war machine in conquering the star cluster in the name of the Lykans' deity. A good number of Vitams were tasked with the mechanical maintenance of the Royal Navy's ships while others were tasked with more remedial work. For over the next four centuries, the Vitams continued to be the servants of the Lykans along with other races but they all were waiting for the day the Lykans would do something to let their guard down and allow the slaves to be free.

That time came almost a hundred years ago when the Lykans at the height of their kingdom came across the Camino Star Empire and waged a large battle against the Caminos using only destroyers and cruisers. The battle was intense and the Lykans lost almost two-thirds of their fleet versus the Empire losing less than half. The Lykans' choice of not using battleships in the battle gave them a bloody nose and the first loss in the history of the Kingdom. The Kingdom's response was to send another force with battleships against the Empire. However, the loss left the Lykan officers demoralized to the point that the Vitams and any other slave race began to take action against their oppressors. The Vitams installed triggers and bypasses throughout several Royal Navy ships to either incapacitate or terminate the Lykans on the ships with their own security system. The Slave Revolt, as it was soon called, saw several military and civilian ships being hijacked and evacuations of the slaves throughout the Kingdom. The King called for an uneasy truce with the Empire in order for them to address the Revolt as best they can. Stocking up on "jump" crystals in order for their ships to perform several jumps without the need of the Lykans' jump gates, the Vitams led the way towards the (Southeast Region) to gain some distance from the Kingdom. The Lykans, still demoralized and

attempting to keep other slaves from fleeing, did not pursue. Only two-thirds of the slaves were free from the Kingdom, a fact that was both impressive and disheartening at the same time. They knew that someday they would need to go back to the Kingdom and either free the remainder of their brethren or defeat the Kingdom outright.

The former slaves jumped a few more times before they came across a system with a habitable world. From there, they started to build homes and fortresses to protect their newfound freedom. They got together a committee of different races that were enslaved to find out how they wanted things to run in terms of a government, military, civilian operations, or even a name. The name was the easy part as the Vitams were the ones responsible for the freedom of so many from each race. It was decided that the nation they would create would be the United Vitam State. The State's government was focused on the idea of a council with the elected heads of each of the races representing them after comparing the histories of all the races and what would work best for their situation. This Executive Council would serve as the leaders of the nations and would fulfill the roles similar to the president of a democracy. A Representatives Parliament would become the lawmakers and representatives of their various districts. Finally, a court system was in place to enforce the laws. Over the course of the next fifty years, the State grew as many contributed their knowledge and knowhow to develop the planets both in and around their new capital. Most of this was thanks to one of the race's use and development of advanced automation that skyrocketed their society. The State now expanded to over twenty systems to help house all of the people that were freed from the Kingdom and the next two generations.

However, the State knew that the Kingdom would eventually manage to get their situation stabilized and come after the former slaves. Vitam engineers who had studied the Lykan ships dismantled the ships they had stolen and began to work on effective designs to counter the Lykan war machines. After a few months, they designed ships that were smaller, heavily armed, and modular in order to quickly repair sections. After coming up with the ships as well as the weapons and defensive systems, the automated factories quickly got to work on the new ships and built as many as they could within that timeframe.

The resource gathering sector of the State was quick to find more "jump" crystals to allow them to create their own version of the Lykans' jump gate in order for them to get to other star systems nearby that were quickly colonized. They also gathered and rationed the crystals to each ship in order to ready them for the day that they can try to get the rest of their people without using jump gates that could potentially lead the Kingdom right to the State. However, the State Council knew that someday the Lykans would once again darken their space in hopes of reclaiming the former slaves and their families now numbering over 53 billion people. That day came over sixty years ago after the Kingdom managed to track them down, but even the Kingdom was caught unprepared for a well-equipped and equally matched State fleet. The battles that ensued have continued in a prolonged war that has been nothing much more than a stalemate, a fact that both the State and the Kingdom have been highly upset about.

Trent looked over the Vitam history and realized that this war was not quite what he had thought. This was not a war for territory but rather a war to reclaim what was lost on both sides. The only difference between them is that the Lykans want to reclaim their slaves and workforce while the Vitams want to reclaim their still enslaved brethren who still remain within the Kingdom. However, the State is still fairly small compared to the Kingdom based on the facts since the edge of the star cluster in the Eastern Region is still quite a number of Light-years if not

jumps away. The only saving grace for the State is that the Kingdom has yet to field enough ships to successfully attempt an invasion into State territory because of the defense of their own assets and borders, especially if the Camino Star Empire is as powerful as the reports say. Unlike the Kingdom who is fighting a war with the State, the Empire is unburdened by any conflict and most likely have a good size fleet ready to go despite the truce that has been ongoing between the Kingdom and the Empire. It is unknown if the State has tried to form an alliance to the Empire or not, but considering the distance between the two nations, it may not have happened. This is very true when both parties would have to cross Republic space in order to meet. There is also the possibility the State wants to attempt to liberate their brethren from the Kingdom with their own strength.

Then it hit Trent. This battle the two were having in this system was far from their original borders. This engagement was intentional not for the Kingdom to outflank the State's forces, but to thin the State's defensive lines!

As Trent realized this, he pounded his arm into the console which shocked everyone on the bridge. Everyone was looking at him with puzzled expressions.

"What's gotten into you?" Tora said.

"If the facts we are presented are true," Trent said, "this battle they are having here only serves to thin the State force's lines to make them easier to penetrate. The Lykans here may be communicating with their headquarters to explain the situation but also their progress of moving one of the State's fleets away from their main defensive positions."

"Wait," Shannon said, "are you saying they are only here just to attempt an invasion of the State?"

"We are about to find out. Communications, is the Lykan translation fully installed?"

"Yes, sir," Ro said. "We now have both dictionaries and translations installed."

"Good. I want to send a message to the Lykan fleet translated in their language."

"What are you going to say?" Tora asked. "You're not going to threaten them, are you?"

"No, I won't. I'm just going to inquire why they have not responded to us since the Vitams have already done so by text. It's just a harmless inquiry."

"Let's hope they perceive it the same way."

"Communications, take the following message: This is Vice Admiral Trent of the Eleventh Fleet of the Novus Initium Republic to the Royal Lykan Kingdom fleet. We are inquiring why you have yet to respond to our request to communicate with us. The United Vitam State fleet has already managed to translate and send by text their response and language as well as your own for us to speak with you. Will you please respond?"

"Message is being translated," Ro said. "Standby to transmit."

"Now that did not sound bad, now did it?" Trent said to Tora.

"No, I guess not," Tora said. "Hopefully, they will respond in kind."

"Message has been transmitted in their language, sir," Ro said.

"Now we will see if they will respond," Trent said.

Everyone on the bridge waited patiently for a few minutes for the Lykans to respond. After about four minutes, a sound from the communications station went off.

"We are getting a response, sir," Ro said. "Translating it now."

"I'm curious to know what they have to say," Trent said.

After about a minute, a new message appeared on the screen.

“My apologies for not contacting you earlier. We of the Royal Lykan Kingdom have been somewhat weary of contact with other races due to our past history with one race in particular.”

Trent figured he was referring to the Camino Star Empire and how that encounter turned out.

“I am Admiral Gurino Vel-Dinicoria, fleet commander of the Fifty-Fourth Naval Fleet of the Royal Lykan Kingdom. I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Vice Admiral Trent.”

Apparently the system was already translating the rank to those used by the Republic to make things easier.

“We were hoping to speak verbally rather than by text. Also, I’ve been in contact with our headquarters as I am not authorized by my government to speak on their behalf. We are trying to get a representative who is authorized to speak on our behalf to this location right now to speak to you all. I have been asked to know what all did the so-called State tell you?”

“That is not good,” Trent said.

“What is it?” Tora asked. “They are sending a representative of their government to speak with us. What’s wrong with that?”

“That was not the part that worries me. It’s the part where he mentioned the ‘so-called State’ in such a manner.”

They all looked up at the message again and noticed what Trent was talking about. When someone uses a term like they did, it means they do not view a nation such as the State as a legitimate entity. If the history they were given was true, the Kingdom most likely views the State as a bunch of “rebels” rather than a legit government.

“Communications,” Trent said, “prepare to send both histories to the Kingdom along with the pictures they sent of the Lykans with the following message: The State fleet sent us the following information along with the associated pictures. Do you also wish for us to send our history and pictures as well?”

“Translating message and preparing to send the appropriate files,” Ro said. “Standby...”

“Are you sure that was wise to be sending them that information?” Tora asked. “This could upset them.”

“Maybe so,” Trent said, “but I figured that it would be best for them to defend themselves from what sounds like accusations of enslavement. My only concern is if they are correct or not.”

“The message has been sent, sir,” Ro said.

“Now, let’s see how they respond.”

After a couple of minutes, a response came through on Ro’s station. At this point, Ro and everyone else knew the routine and waited for the message to be translated and displayed.

“We have forwarded what you sent us to our representative. We were not authorized to look at it. As far as pictures and your history, our representative would rather like to talk to you all face-to-face. However, the representative will not be arriving for (one hour). We should have audio translation devices ready by then. Please be ready for their arrival within that time as they stated they would like to meet aboard your ship. Our representative has expressed his approval if a representative of the State is there as well so that we may be able to answer questions about our histories.”

“So we will be having a face-to-face meeting with them,” Trent said. “This could get a bit volatile. Communications, send the following: We will prepare to accept your representative who is on their way. There are two bays for shuttles on the left side of our ship. They can land on the forward bay of the two. In order not to complicate matters, we will be requesting that the State send a representative to the bay on the opposite side of our ship. They will be escorted to our conference room once they arrive.”

“Sending the message,” Ro said. “What about the Vitams?”

“Here is what I will say to them: We managed to get in contact with the Lykans and they are sending a representative from their nation to speak on their behalf. We are requesting for a representative of the State to also be present at the meeting that is to be held aboard this ship. How soon can a representative make it here to this system?”

“Sending that message as well. We have a response from the Lykans. They are acknowledging our message.”

“Understood. Now to see what the Vitams say in response.”

After a couple of minutes, Ro’s station made a sound indicating they were receiving a response.

“The Vitams responded,” Ro said. “I’m putting it up on the screen.”

“I have been authorized by my government to speak on their behalf so I will fly over once the Lykan representative has arrived. However, we have gone over your history and I must say that I’m very surprised at how your race came to be in the cluster that you have named Novus Initium. We never had a name for the cluster and the name in your ancient language calling it ‘New Beginning’ actually suits our nation in a way. Your appearance based on your pictures was also a bit of a surprise but a nice one. Your Republic is very impressive in size and scale and I will look forward to meeting you all in person. However, I do have some concern for when the Lykan representative arrives. Did you send them your history as well?”

“He has concerns?” Trent said rather puzzled. “Go ahead and send this, Ro: We have not as they wanted their representative to read our history when they arrived. What concerns do you have?”

“I’m sending it to them now,” Ro said.

Trent was beginning to wonder what the Vitam fleet commander was getting at. What is it about the Republic’s history that would cause the Vitam fleet commander to be concerned when the Lykan representative would arrive?

Ro’s console went off with a response from the Vitam fleet. It was promptly displayed on the screen.

“It would be a bit hard to explain but part of your history may upset the Lykans provided they have not changed their mentality after the Slave Revolt. As you no doubt read, the Lykans are highly religious and view the star cluster as their promised domain. It was already humiliating for them to lose against the Camino Star Empire, but now they have your Republic to deal with when it comes to their co-called ‘birthright.’ What adds to their insult is the fact that your race came to the cluster completely by accident. We recognize that the circumstances behind your people coming to the cluster was completely by accident but you all have made this cluster your home and as such you are more than welcomed here in the eyes of the State. The Kingdom on the other hand will no doubt view this fact as being no different than pestilence that has robbed them of a sizeable part of their claim. I

don't recommend changing your history to appease them but rather, if you want, explain and state your claim of the systems you currently hold. Your ancestors may have come from elsewhere, but you all now have made this cluster your home and you all are as much a part of it as we are. I look forward to meeting you all shortly."

"Well," Trent said as he leaned back in his chair, "this is going to be an interesting encounter."

"So the Lykans would consider us as 'pestilence?'" Autumn said. "This might be a tough meeting."

"If the Lykans view us as outsiders based on what the Vitams have told us," Wade said, "communications are going to break down rather quickly. They may not want to have anything to do with us or worse yet they may want to wage war against us."

"We won't know that until we talk to them," Trent said. "Besides, militarily speaking based on what we were provided, the Lykans don't have the resources or the manpower, so to speak, to wage a campaign against us with a weakened military. They are protecting their northern border against the Camino Star Empire and they are at war on their southern border with the United Vitam State. Committing a military campaign on their western border with us is militarily unsound."

"Trent has a point," Blair said. "To fight a war on multiple fronts with weakened military forces would be suicide if things go wrong for them against both us and the State."

"Might I make a recommendation before we start to speculate any further?" Tora asked.

"What is your recommendation?" Trent asked.

"I suggest we send the information as well as our conversations to the Supreme Chancellor, the Head Agent of the RCIA, the Senate, and the Joint Chiefs. We may need to get a more objective opinion of the situation from them. We need to update them on the situation anyway."

"On that I can agree with. Communications, please relay a message to the respective parties. I, along with the representatives and Colonel Blair, will be in my Ready Room. If you receive any further communications from either alien fleets or parties, relay them into the Ready Room as well."

"Understood, sir," Ro said.

Trent got up from his seat and headed for his Ready Room with Tora, Wade, Autumn, and Blair right behind him.

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*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
7:19pm, May 11, 5433 A.D.*

"So that is what we are dealing with?"

Drew sat in his office. His Joint Chiefs were in his office as well. They were called in on a conference video session with the whole Senate, Head Agent Aja of the RCIA, and the group in Trent's Ready Room on the *Renaldo*. Everyone was brought up-to-date with the current situation. The people who were the most surprised about the situation were the senators who had no idea this was going on behind the scenes. A good number of them were in an uproar but they

quickly settled down knowing that the reasons behind the secrecy were in the best interests of protecting the public.

Knowing now what they are dealing with, some of those in the conference were starting to become concerned about how the Royal Lykan Kingdom would react once their history was known. Some of the senators suggested changing the history that was provided to the Lykans but that was dismissed by others as they felt that “lying” to a race in order to appease them would not have looked good either, especially in light of the fact the United Vitam State knew the truth after getting the history of the Republic.

“Yes, Supreme Chancellor,” Trent said. “As far as we can tell, we may be looking into a conflict with the Lykans ranging from passive aggression at best to all-out conflict at worst. However, according to the State, when they fled from the Kingdom and took two-thirds of their kin with them, the Kingdom lost a great deal of its workforce and military troops. It took them a while to switch to automation as well as to stabilize their situation before the Lykans went searching for their runaway slaves. However, their military strength is already split three ways. They have to use some of their fleet to enforce their rule within their borders after the Slave Revolt. Another portion of the fleet is being used to defend their borders with the Empire along their northern border. The rest of their forces are currently engaged in conflicts with the State along their southern border which is what led them to our territory.”

“If I may ask,” Grand Admiral Mikey said, “what brought them into our system to begin with?”

“From the perspective of the Vitams, they most likely think this was some means for the Kingdom to outflank their forces. However, I believe this is just a ploy by the Kingdom to spread the State’s already small force even thinner along their defensive lines. This leads me to believe that the Kingdom may be committing its small force for a major offensive against the state.”

“What is the likelihood that the Kingdom would draw its military force against us? Are they aware of our military strength?”

“No, not yet. We have barely managed to speak to someone from the Kingdom to get a better understanding of them. All of our current information is just based on what the Vitams have told us.”

“And that alone has me a bit concerned.”

“Would you care to elaborate, Grand Admiral?” Drew said.

“All of our intel at this time is coming from one source who is at war with the nation of interest. From what I have noticed, the Slave Revolt happened over a hundred years ago and unless the Vitams have someone in the Kingdom to gather intel, their knowledge of the Kingdom since then is rather limited. How are we certain that the Kingdom’s military capabilities are still weakened? This move of theirs to spread the State’s defenses rather thin leads me to believe the Kingdom’s fleet may no longer be weakened but instead may be as strong now as it was before the Slave Revolt, maybe even stronger.”

“And these assumptions are based on what?”

“The Republic Navy has been looking into automation for quite a while. The only reason we have not is that automation would cause the loss of jobs and being solely reliable on machines has shown to have issues. The only reason our drydocks and assembly lines are totally automated was to reduce the time it would take to repair or rebuild new ships. Using automation

in combat was problematic at best. This is why we haven't looked at using fully automated combat drones because of their lack of reliability."

"And you think that the Kingdom may have found a way to make that possible on the scale of a ship?"

"The only way to know is to scan one of their ships, namely a destroyer. Vice Admiral Trent, can you accomplish this?"

"Not without them detecting the scan," Trent said. "If I attempt an active scan of one of their ships without their permission, they may take offense to it and we are still trying to open a dialogue with them."

"I understand," Mikey said. "The last thing we need to do is offend them before their representative arrives. It would be rather...rude to do so."

"Had to find the right word for that, Grand Admiral?" Drew asked.

"One that was appropriate, yes."

"If it helps any," Head Agent Aja said, "we could probably use the communications traffic as a reference. The RCIA has been monitoring their transmissions for a while and we have them on file. Vice Admiral, can you transmit the dictionaries you have received as well as your computer's progress on their languages?"

"One moment," Trent pressed a few buttons on his terminal. After a few seconds, Aja's console made a few sounds indicating it was receiving the information.

"Thank you," Aja said. "I'm going to have my best agents dissect the transmissions and information from the languages and dictionaries provided. Hopefully this will be ready shortly."

"Thank you, Head Agent," Drew said. "Now, I wish to open the floor to the Senate. I'm sure they have a few choice words. However, I must point out that we only have so much time before a representative from the Kingdom arrives on the *Renaldo*, so let's try to keep this brief."

Four of the senators immediately raised their hands. Drew pointed out one of the four senators.

"Senator Irma from Oceanus," Drew said. "What is your inquiry?"

"Vice Admiral Trent," Irma said, "do we know whether or not there are any diseases these races may have that we should be aware of?"

"We will inquire about those as well as atmospheric requirements shortly," Trent said. "Thank you for reminding me about that."

Irma said nothing further.

"Senator Chardanai from Tranquillus," Drew said, pointing her out.

"Supreme Chancellor and Grand Admiral," Chardanai said, "with Tranquillus being the system where this meeting is held, I have to inquire about the safety and security of the civilians in the system should things not go so well in those talks."

"Rest assured," Mikey said, "the Eleventh Fleet is more than sufficient in handling the situation should things go bad. They also have the Tranquillus Defense Fleet in the system to assist in the defense of the system should there be any complications."

"Considering the time it would take for another Main Fleet to arrive in the system," Drew said, "this will have to do for now should things not go well."

"I understand," Chardanai said as she looked like her inquiry was answered.

"Senator Kamari of Viridis," Drew said, looking her direction.

“Supreme Chancellor,” Kamari said, “the Viridis System is located on the edge of the Eastern Region, making it the closest system where the Kingdom is located, and is also the location of the regional military headquarters in the area. What guarantees can you give those that live in Viridis as well as other systems located along the border with the Eastern Region that we will be protected should the Kingdom decide to wage open war against the Republic?”

“Should the Kingdom decide to wage war against the Republic,” Drew said, “we will deploy as many of our forces as we can to the border systems. This may include two of our Main Fleets, three at most.”

“Should the civilians be evacuated if that occurs?” Kamari continued.

“An evacuation of that scale would be time-consuming and may put the civilians at risk of attack once they are past any defense forces. Considering the circumstances, we will look at implementing planetary defensive shields and satellite turrets much like those found here on Luminaire on those worlds to better protect them. The military will attempt to keep civilians out of harm’s way. Should anyone want to leave those worlds of their own volition, they will be free to do so.”

Kamari did not look quite satisfied with Drew’s answer but she could not think of anything else to ask. Drew looked and pointed at the last senator.

“Senator Melissa of Serenus,” Drew said. “You will be the last senator to ask any questions right now.”

“Thank you, Supreme Chancellor,” Melissa said. “I do have one question that I’m not sure whether anyone here has thought about yet. As you know, the Serenus System is on the Northern Border and also functions much like Viridis as location for the regional military headquarters. We have talked about the Royal Lykan Kingdom and the United Vitam State since the fleets of those nations are currently inside our borders. However, my concern is about the nation they both made reference to: the Camino Star Empire. We have a ‘neighbor’ to the north that I have yet to hear how we want to address them or their potential threat to the Republic. What do you intend to do about the Camino Star Empire?”

Drew looked over at his Joint Chiefs who were suddenly put on the spot. No one had really discussed the Camino Star Empire because everyone was talking about the more immediate concern of the Kingdom and the State. Drew looked back at the screen with the Senate as Melissa and the rest of the Senate were waiting for an answer. Drew took a deep breath after a moment.

“I will be honest and say that we have not discussed about the Camino Star Empire at this time,” Drew said. “However, based on what little information we have or know, as long as we do not encroach on their territory, they will not view us as hostile towards them. Only if they appear in Republic controlled space will we address them in the same manner as he have with the Kingdom and the State. We will look into making contact them after the situation with the State and Kingdom is dealt with. Otherwise, everything will be status quo for the time being.”

“Alright. I was just concerned if there was anything we were going to do involving the Empire, but we will have to wait till then. Thank you.”

With that, the screen with the Senate disappeared. Drew sat back in his seat.

Alright, everyone,” Drew said. “What do we do about the Empire?”

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