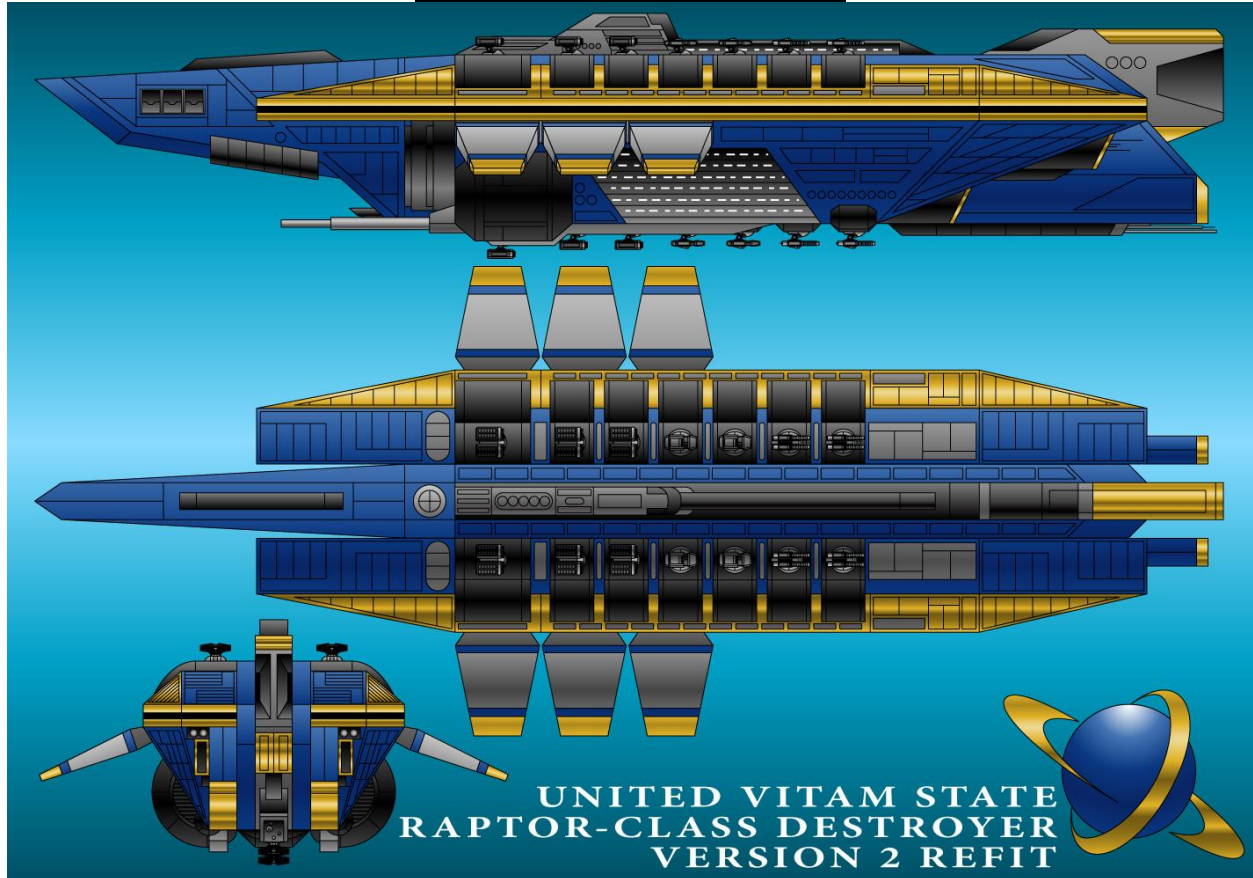


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode IV: The Star of the Wolf



PART 1

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:57am, September 4, 5433 A.D.*

“Lunch will be ready in just a moment!”

Trent had not been this relaxed in a while. He arrived at his home after his last mission to infiltrate the Lykan Kingdom’s territory in order to hinder their ship production capabilities, destroy his clones made by the Lykans, and to see if they could find the Kingdom’s capital. Trent’s crew was successful in all three objectives, but the mission had its twists and turns that were both good and bad. The fact that the Lykans were trying to deploy a virus against the Republic capital system of Lumen using a mobile star gate backfired on the Kingdom who underestimated the Lumen’s defenses. Now the Republic had a foothold deep in the Kingdom’s territory. Better still, thanks to a transmission from the enemy Thrasher-class battleship that oversaw the operation, the Republic now knew the location of the enemy’s capital star system.

The star system that was at the other end of the mobile gate was the Dellino System, the site of the Kingdom’s advance research and development facilities. One of those facilities housed the clones used to infiltrate the Republic based on Trent’s DNA along with the database that contained that information. The DNA was also used to create the virus which was also developed

in that facility. The facility was destroyed by a Vitam scientist that was forced to work at that location. However, this scientist also developed a drug that required the victims to take a pseudo-antidote daily or feel the negative effects that would lead to death by paralysis in three days. This was deployed on the five original home planets of the five dominant races that make up the current nation of the United Vitam State. Those races were the foxlike Vitams, the Zaurion lizards, the Kittrane felines, the Esmu equestrians or horses, and lastly the Arjaf who are a snake-like race with the two arms while all the others were bipedal. The *Templar*, the Republic covert ops stealth vessel designed for the operation that Trent was in command of, destroyed the stations that had the drones designed to deploy the daily pseudo-antidote without any knowledge of the stations' true purpose. Apparently, the local Lykans in those star systems were not aware of those stations' purposes and there was no information about their role in their database when accessed by Republic infiltrators. Unknowingly, the *Templar* had sentenced each race whose orbital station they destroyed to death and it was neither quick nor painless based on the symptoms. The Vitam that developed the drug was taken back to the State for questioning and most likely would be put on trial for working on the drug. The State doesn't blame Trent or the rest of the crew of the *Templar* for their actions based on the lack of appropriate information.

On the other hand, it was also found that the Kingdom removed the reproductive organs of the races that were not on their home planet in order to control the number of slaves within their domain. That meant that when the Lykans' existing slave population died out, they had no other slaves to replenish them with which would affect their economy and culture. However, the war would most likely end before that happened. Both pieces of news have given the State a new drive, though this drive is based on vengeance for what the Kingdom had done to their kind.

On the other hand, even the State knows when to show restraint and caution. They have not moved forward since the Kingdom suddenly withdrew their forces from the frontlines back into their territory. Most likely this was in response to Republic forces being in Dellino, two jumps from the Lykan capital system of Heronia. The Republic and the Camino Star Empire have not moved their forces forward either into Lykan space after the Kingdom's withdrawal. One reason for this was to resupply those frontline forces while the other reason was due to the star gates being locked. It was usually up to the *Templar* to unlock those gates but right now the ship is undergoing maintenance while the bridge crew relaxed at Trent's home for three days or seventy-two hours. So far, almost forty-two hours have passed.

The other reason for this timeframe was the fact that Supreme Chancellor Drew had requested for a fleet from the Empire and the State each to participate in a joint operation involving the Dellino System to establish a forward base of operations. They were also researching ways to bypass the Ciscio System that lies between the Dellino and Heronia Systems. They knew that the Ciscio System was essentially a "gateway" system, serving as the only way in or out of Heronia by star gate. They did not have information on the defenses of both star systems yet, but the captured Thrasher battleship should provide them that information.

Trent in the meantime spent this time enjoying some rest and relaxation. At least, what rest and relaxation he could get with his wife and his bridge crew here. There was obvious tension at first between Laura and Tora due to the missions Tora had put Trent through in service with the RCIA, but that was only when they arrived two nights ago. They have tried to be civil since then and so far there have not been any problems. However, the rest of the bridge crew was starting to get "cabin fever," as the term is called. Trent had decided that they needed to get out somewhere, some place away from the public view due to the celebrity status some of them hold such as Sheryl and Natalie who serve as the *Templar*'s communications and tactical officers

respectively. The question is where could they go where they would not be spotted? The better question is HOW was he going to get them there? They got to Trent's place by an RCIA transport van and neither Trent's car nor Laura's could accommodate them all. On the other hand, Laura took Trent's car to work since her car could accommodate more if needed but it only seated five people. He will have to work something out on both the "where" and "how" at a later time.

Trent could hear footsteps from downstairs coming up the stairs. Tora and Natalie, who work for the RCIA, stayed down there for privacy if they had matters involving the RCIA to discuss separate of the rest of the bridge officers. That was the reason why Trent put them down there away from everyone else.

Tora and Natalie soon appeared through the door that led downstairs and headed for the kitchen towards Trent.

"Good morning," Natalie said.

"Or what remains of it," Tora said.

Trent looked at the clock on the oven which said it was a minute to noon.

"Fair enough," Trent said as he turned back around. "How did you two sleep?"

"We slept very well," Natalie said. "I know it was only the second night but I haven't slept like that in a while."

"I missed the birds chirping outside," Tora said. "I stepped outside into the crisp fresh mountain air and it felt so good. I can't see why you live here. It is quite serene."

"It is good to get away from the city," Trent said. "Of course, we can't go too far away or it would take a long time to get to work for both Laura and me."

"Speaking of work," Tora said, "we got a rather interesting call from Head Agent Aja. We will be having some guests coming over in about an hour."

Trent was suddenly not too thrilled at receiving such news on short notice.

"Are we talking about more RCIA agents?" Trent asked in a rather upset tone.

"Actually, no," Natalie said. "It is Supreme Chancellor Drew and the ambassadors."

Trent was suddenly in shock. If he had something in his hands, he would have dropped it. He managed to say something after a few seconds.

"They are coming HERE?!" Trent said.

"We were only just told a moment ago about them coming here," Tora said. "They surprised us as well. They wanted to brief us personally about the upcoming mission."

"How are they going to get here without being noticed? You're talking about the Supreme Chancellor and two aliens in a car. That won't be hard to spot."

"Apparently the Chancellor has a vehicle whose windows make it hard for anyone to see inside. Law enforcement won't stop the vehicle for that either as the plate would instantly be identified as Drew's unless he is actually breaking any laws."

"There is still the front gate to this residential area to take into consideration."

"We gave him the gate code that he can transmit to the gate without rolling down his window or addressing the gate guard. We figured that this was the best way to enter."

"Okay, I'm not going to get upset as you all only just found out about it yourselves but I need to let everyone else know. Besides, lunch is ready now. Give me one moment."

Trent walked around the counter and headed towards the stairs that lead upstairs. As he went up the first set and rounded the corner that would lead him the rest of the way up, he stopped there.

"Ladies," he said, making sure his voice carried down the hall. "Lunch is ready but it

would appear that we have guests arriving within the hour.”

“Who is it?” Sheryl said from the room on the far left.

“The Chancellor and the ambassadors,” Trent said as he braced for the expected response.

“WHAT?!” the four bridge officers said in unison.

Sheryl and Haley popped their heads out from the room on the left while Rei and Usatame came around the corner on the far right. All of them had a look of surprise on their faces.

“I know,” Trent said. “Natalie and Tora just found out a moment ago. They will be here in less than an hour. They are coming to brief us about our next mission personally. Lunch is ready so come on down and eat while you have the chance.”

Trent proceeded to walk down the first set of steps back towards the direction of the kitchen. He could hear the footsteps of the others coming down the hall and soon headed down the stairs. Trent made it back to the kitchen as the others started to come around the corner. Tora and Natalie had already fixed their plates, though lunch only consisted of sandwiches and salads. Trent stepped aside as the rest of the ladies each grabbed a plate and started fixing their sandwiches and salads.

“Sorry there wasn’t much to make something more than sandwiches and salads,” Trent said. “Laura and I don’t usually stockpile food since most of the time Laura is home by herself unless I am here or Amarria is visiting. She will be getting some groceries on her way home so that we can have a good size dinner later.”

“We’re fine with the sandwiches and salad,” Haley said. “It feels more homely if anything.”

“Seriously,” Usatame said, “you can’t make a sandwich on your own with a spread of choices on a ship. You can only tell the chef what you want on it.”

“Well, I guess there is that aspect of a meal I did not consider,” Trent said.

“By the way,” Rei said, “have you figured out where you were going to take us and how? I feel a bit cooped up in here after a couple of nights.”

“I’m still working on that.”

“I thought we were not supposed to go anywhere in public due to the popularity of certain people?” Tora asked.

“After being on a ship for such a long time, only to be confined to a house for a while, people want some open space. A chance to enjoy things as it may. Granted, going to a mall or an event is not a good idea under the current circumstances. However, I believe there is a nature park nearby we could go to.”

“I was kind of hoping for a mall,” Sheryl said.

“Same here,” Rei said. “Being around people again oddly enough makes me feel alive.”

Trent sighed. That pretty much threw out that idea of his for the nature park.

“I’m sorry,” Trent said. “At least I tried.”

“That’s part of the job,” Tora said. “There I times I find that I cannot socialize in the same manner due to my own assignments. However, considering tonight is our last night here, we might want to try something to make it special.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Let me check a few things and I will let you know. For now, we need to eat and get ready for our guests to arrive.”

* * * * *

*Outside Control Room #3, Military Research and Development Station
Heronia VII Orbit, Heronia System, Capital System of Royal Lykan Kingdom
12:36pm, September 4, 5433 A.D.*

“Hurry, you two!”

For the past couple of days, former Head Advisor Forneido has been on the run from police forces that were looking for him after he failed to show up at the prison the King had ordered he be placed in for his insubordination. Little did the King and the rest of the Royal Court expect that the two armed escorts would assist him from escaping High Charity but not before Forneido grabbed some files and documentation for some of his other “projects” of which the King was also not aware of. One of those projects involved the Military Research and Development Station in orbit of the Heronia VII gas giant. There were very few places where Forneido could hide in the system since he cannot leave through the jump gate without being apprehended. This station was one of those places and the staff here was loyal to Forneido, especially in light of the conversation he had with the King.

The King saying that he would pull back the Kingdom’s forces from the frontlines and abandoning its citizens on those outlying worlds struck a heavy cord with the populace. Many were condemning him for abandoning his people. The police and the military have only set up barriers to protect high ranking members of society but have done little to actually stop the riots and mobs across several worlds. This is part of the reason why Forneido had managed to avoid capture was due to the fact that the military and the police were both busy with other matters and did not see a reason to detain a fellow Lykan who was responsible for putting the truth out there. The ships guarding the jump gate, however, were part of the Royal Guard of the King and their loyalties only lie with him. They would either detain or terminate Forneido, not caring if the latter made him a martyr or not.

Forneido’s goal now was to escape the system and at the Military R&D, there was a means for him to do so. The personnel had allowed Forneido and the two escorts, which have since been identified as Verno and Granio, access to the hangar where Forneido’s means of escape laid dormant. The control room and the docking bay outside the windows were both black, save for the controls on one of the panels.

Forneido hit a light switch by the door as he along with the two escorts walked into the control room.

“What is all of this?” Verno asked.

“Why were we brought here?” Granio asked.

“I brought us here because we need a ship to escape this star system,” Forneido said as he started pressing some of the buttons on the control panel.

“How are we going to escape?” Verno asked. “We can’t fight our way through the Royal Guard to use the jump gate and from what I remember hearing, the reserves of the jump crystals were now depleted.”

“That is only somewhat true. There are still crystals that remain.”

“There are?” Granio asked rather puzzled.

“Before I explain, let me ask you two a general question: how much of history do you two know?”

“Depends on the topic and how far back you’re asking.”

“I figured by now that the two of you have heard of our forces first battle with the Empire decades ago, correct?”

They both nodded in agreement.

“Good. I was concerned that they were no longer teaching that in school due to what happened. I was very young when that battle occurred. It was the first defeat of the Royal Lykan Kingdom’s forces against an alien force. However, while our forces were defeated, we did manage to gather some of the wreckage of the Imperial ships with some very interesting pieces of technology.”

“Are you talking about the cybernetic implants?” Verno asked.

“Correct. While we got the technology, our forces were busy with the Slave Revolt at the time so reverse engineering of the technology did not happen until much later. However, the cybernetic technology was not the only piece of technology we recovered.”

“What else was recovered?”

Forneido turned towards the escorts with a grin on his face.

“The armor repairer systems they developed,” he said.

Forneido pressed a button on the control panel which activated the lights in the hangar bay on the other side of the windows. The light blinded Verno and Granio for a moment as they shaded their eyes with their arms and hands. Once their eyes adjusted and they lowered their arms, they looked out the windows.

What they saw was the biggest Lykan warship they had ever seen!

The vessel was far larger than any Thrasher battleship by at least fifty percent, putting it at the same length as the Republic’s Paladin battleship! It appeared as though elements of the Thrasher were used in the central section of the vessel, though the exact center was tucked in and the whole section was elongated like there were two fat prongs. There were now two hangar bays on the front of the vessel on those elongated sections. There appeared to be less seams throughout the ship. On the sides near the front sections that contained the hangar bays were round bulbous sections that were similar to what would be seen on either Republic or Imperial ships. They had very few seams as well. At the back of the vessel, two elongated saucers flanked the engines offering far better protection. The engines were also recessed into the hull for additional protection from enemy fire. Protruding from near the center of the ship out the sides were two thick pylons and at the end of those pylons were weapons pods similar to the ones found along the sides of the Thrashers. Mounted on the pods were the ship’s battleship-grade guns while the cruiser and destroyer guns were on the main body. The battleship guns, much like the rest of the firepower onboard, were also increased in number by fifty percent.

This new vessel was truly a sight to behold. Both Verno and Granio were dumbfounded by what they saw.

“Do you like her?” Forneido said. “This is the experimental advanced battleship *Harbinger*, the first of her kind equipped with additional firepower and the new armor repairer system. She was just finished recently.”

“How in the world were you able to hide, much less build such a vessel without the King knowing?!” Verno asked. “The resources needed to build this vessel from scratch would have been noticed and reported to him a long time ago!”

“No need to shout. To answer that question, there was little in terms of the resources needed to build this ship. In fact, two Thrashers were, for a lack of a better term, ‘sacrificed’ to build this ship. I believe the Humans called this ‘recycling and reusing’ existing materials to build something new. Apparently the vast majority of Republic ships in service were built this way. It is not a bad concept, actually.”

“Two Thrashers were used to make this?” Granio asked. “I guess that is why the amount of resources needed was not as noticeable but still, you would figure that two battleships going

missing would definitely have been noticed.”

“The King doesn’t have as much control as you think over things,” Forneido said. “That is the reason that he disperses the responsibilities of various departments to advisors and department heads to run those tasks in his place. For me, I was in charge of the Ministry of War which included military research and applications. This ship was one of those projects.”

“Is this another one of those projects the King does not know about?” Verno asked.

“This is one of two he does not know about. This ship has an additional feature, though it works in tandem with an external component.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’ll tell you about it later. Right now, I need to contact some close friends in the military to help crew this vessel.”

“You need to find a crew? What do you intend to do with this vessel?”

Forneido suddenly had a straight face.

“Something has to be done about the King,” Forneido said. “Actually, something has to be done about this nation and its government.”

Verno and Granio suddenly had shocked expressions on their faces.

“You intend to use this ship to take over the nation?!” Granio said. “I know the King has made bad decisions that need to be addressed, but it sounds like you want to take over the Kingdom! What about the oath we made to our god to honor the anointed King of our nation?”

“I have questioned our faith ever since we started losing this war,” Forneido said. “For that matter, why did our forces lose to the Empire if we were ordained to rule the star cluster? Why is it that our Kingdom is still struggling in the wake of the Slave Revolt and the constant conflict with the State long before the Republic and Empire got involved? Faith may have been the social glue that has helped hold our Kingdom together, but it is also the reason we have become so arrogant and presumptuous. If it wasn’t for our faith, I would have reacted differently during my first contact meeting with the Republic. Instead, I labeled them as ‘vermin’ that needed to be exterminated and brought a powerful ally to the State into the war. My further acts made it where the Empire would also get involved.”

“So you are blaming what has occurred on our faith?” Verno asked.

“How else would you look at it? It seems like almost every decision I have made based on the faith of our kind has backfired on the Kingdom no matter what I do. Now innocent Lykans have to pay for them without any protection from our forces.”

“From what transmissions we have been able to intercept, none of the three enemy nations have advanced any further since our forces had withdrawn. Even the State is holding their position.”

“That could be for a number of reasons if not pressure from the Republic to not advance forward without more information. It is hard to say. However, while this battleship is indeed a powerful warship, I know it won’t stand up for too long against a fleet of Thrashers from the Royal Guard. Therefore, we need allies to assist us?”

“And from where do you intend to find such allies?” Granio asked.

“I hope historians will forgive me for this, but I intend to take this ship to Dellino in order to plea with the Republic for help.”

Verno and Granio were in shock from Forneido’s response.

“You want Republic forces to assist you in overthrowing the King?!” Verno asked. “Have you completely lost your mind?!”

“Maybe I have, but the fact is we need help and any military forces that are loyal to me

are outside of this system. We need to get out of this system and there is only one way to do it.”

“Okay, I can only speculate that it would have to do with the jump crystals but didn’t you say that all of the crystals in the Kingdom were used in the mobile jump gate that was sent to Lumen?”

“I also said earlier that not all of them have been used. This ship has one of the last remaining batches of the crystals on board. However, while this ship possesses those crystals, the way they are used is quite different.”

“What do you mean?”

“The research teams here have been trying to develop a means to both extend the range of a jump while at the same preserving the crystals during said jump. They succeeded in the development but had not tested the technology yet.”

“You wish to use untested experimental technology to get to Dellino? What happens if it doesn’t work?”

“I don’t know, but anything is better than staying here.”

“So how does it work?” Granio asked.

“I’ll explain it to you without all of the highly scientific jargon. This base is equipped with a graviton transmitter and receiver. Since the jump crystals appear to generate gravitons to create wormholes, it is believed that if those gravitons from the hub connect with the gravitons from a ship, the ship would be ‘pulled’ through the established wormhole. The crystals on both the ship and the hub would be shielded and would not dissolve in the process. Such a system would surpass the range of the usual jump by at least double.”

“Then if one of the hubs is here, is it safe to assume that considering where you want to go that the other hub is in Dellino?”

“Correct. The hub itself is automated in orbit over Dellino III and only needs a signal to activate.”

“A signal? Isn’t the Republic jamming all transmissions in or out of that system?”

“When it comes to our standard frequencies, they are jamming those. However, the hub’s communications system is specialized and direct using a laser transmission sent through a micro wormhole that generally is undetectable. Before we arrived, I asked the researchers to test the link to see if we could still access the hub in Dellino and they confirmed that it can still be used.”

“I foresee one problem with this plan,” Verno said. “Regardless of the system used, a wormhole would still be detected by our forces and they would come running to this location in anticipation of an invasion by enemy forces. They would spot this facility and investigate. They may even bring this hub offline preventing a return trip.”

“You make a valid point. Thankfully, this hub is mobile and it can be moved to another location within the system. Once the *Harbinger* departs, the researchers will move it to one of the other locations away from the eyes of the Royal Guard and the King. The hub here is not needed for us to use the system to leave so they will be safe when we open the wormhole.”

“That’s good to know.”

“However, I wish for the two of you to remain at this hub once the *Harbinger* departs.”

“What? Why do you want us to remain here?”

“While you two have been beneficial in assisting me in escaping the wrath of the King and his Royal Guard, you two are not trained in operating a vessel. Also, you two are still in your uniforms. If you two were to accompany me dressed like that, the Republic would not believe me about how I am on the run from the King. I need someone on this end to help keep this hub and the researchers here safe, and you two are just the ones to do it.”

Verno and Granio looked at each other briefly before turning back to Forneido.

“We understand, sir,” Verno said. “When do you think you will be departing?”

“If I can get the crew together quickly, I would say tomorrow at the earliest. This should give you two enough time to prepare this hub for relocation. I’ll show you around the place and introduce you to those here, but let me get the call out so that I can get a crew here quickly.”

“Yes, sir,” Verno and Granio said in unison.

Forneido turned towards the communications console. He needed to get the word out without the signal being tracked by the Royal Guard. Thankfully, he knew his way around encrypted messages to make sure that they wouldn’t be tracked. He can only hope that this crazy plan to contact the Republic will work.

For his sake, it has to work.

* * * * *

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminare, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
12:58pm, September 4, 5433 A.D.*

“They should be here any minute now.”

Trent stood by the front door awaiting the arrival of the Supreme Chancellor as well as the State and Imperial ambassadors. After they ate lunch and cleaned up after themselves, everyone was in the living room by the door to greet the VIP’s. For Trent, he had never had such guests at his home before. Not even Laura has invited people in such positions to their home before. He has always remained calm and collective when in Drew’s office, but in that setting he did not have to be nervous. Here, they were coming into his private residence and he had concerns about how he would be perceived based on his accommodations.

If Laura was here, he knew she would have a panic attack for having such people over on short notice. Everyone watched the noon news report that she was on alongside her co-anchor Matt. If he told her before she went on the air, she would be visibly shook up. He would have to tell her after she gets home from work about them coming over. No sense calling her before the evening news as she would still have a fit.

The blinds on the large window in the living room facing towards the front of the house were partially open to see outside when their vehicle would arrive. Since people such as Sheryl and Natalie would be easily recognized by those who might pass, not to mention possible news scandals should they be spotted in HIS home, it was best not to open the blinds all the way for everyone’s sake. Trent then realized at that moment that if those three were to park in front of his house, anyone who was looking outside or passing would easily tell who they were. How often does one see an alien in THIS neighborhood?

“I’m going to open the garage door and have them park their vehicle inside,” Trent said to his bridge officers as he walked away from the front door towards the direction of the kitchen. “If they are seen getting out of the vehicle in this neighborhood, there will be a lot of problems.”

Trent turned left into a small hallway that was across the staircases just before one reaches the kitchen. This hallway would end at the door to the garage. Trent opened the door and pressed the garage door opener just inside the doorway. As the garage door opened, Trent walked into the garage and closed the inside door behind him. The parking spot to the right of the inside door was empty and was where Trent’s car was usually parked. Laura’s car was parked right in front of him since she left it for him to use if needed.

The garage door was fully open by the time Trent walked up to it and stepped out onto

the driveway. The mountain air was still fresh and Trent took a deep breath since he has been cooped up inside for a while taking care of some matters in his office all morning. He looked around the neighborhood but he could hear a car approaching nearby. Seconds later, the electric hum of a car engine got louder from his left and he could soon see a black sedan with tinted windows roll up towards his house. It stopped in front of his house but flashed its headlights.

Not the most inconspicuous choice of vehicle and definitely one that would attract attention. Trent knew this was Drew's vehicle as Trent has seen it before. Trent waived the vehicle to come into the garage. The black sedan soon drove into the driveway and passed Trent into the garage. As soon as it parked and turned off the engine, Trent walked up to the driver side window.

"Is that you, sir?" Trent asked.

The window rolled down and Trent could see Drew in the driver's seat.

"Quick thinking, Trent," Drew said. "I forgot about the walk from the car to the door where we could be seen."

"Wait until I get the garage door closed before exiting the vehicle," Trent said as he walked away from the window and towards the inside door.

Trent pressed the garage door button and the door soon began to close. Once it was all the way down, Drew unlocked the car doors. He stepped out of the driver's side door. The two back doors opened and State Ambassador Drino came out of the driver's side while Imperial Ambassador Orbinai got out on the passenger's side.

"Welcome, everyone," Trent said.

"I have been curious what the dwellings of Humans were like for a while," Orbinai said as she closed the car door followed by Drew and Drino.

"Compared to those in the State," Drino said, "these accommodations seem rather large for two people."

"Considering the number of guests I have inside," Trent said, "it is a good thing my home is large. Do come in, everyone."

Trent opened the inside door and stepped aside to let the ambassadors and Drew step inside.

"Walk to the end of this hall till you reach the stairs," Trent said. "Turn right and my bridge officers will be in the living room."

Orbinai and Drino bowed to Trent as they entered his home. Drew stopped after passing Trent and stepping inside.

"Do you have someplace where everyone can talk that is not in the front of the house?" Drew asked. "I'm concerned about those who might pass by and hear us."

"We have the den by the kitchen and the downstairs entertainment room," Trent said. "I do have my office but it may not be large enough to accommodate us all."

"Does the den or entertainment room have monitors that allow for a removable storage device to connect?"

"Both do but the den would have more seats available if we use a couple of chairs from the kitchen table."

"It sounds like the den is our best choice. Is there any chance of anyone outside hearing our conversation and briefing?"

"That side of the house is two stories up from the ground since it was built on the slope of the mountain. While there is a patio outside and stairs leading to the backyard, the backyard is only accessible from either there or the entertainment room downstairs. It should be safe."

“Okay. I can hear your bridge officers greeting the ambassadors from here. Let’s go meet up with them and get everyone situated in the den.”

“Yes, sir. After you.”

Drew proceeded to walk down the hall with Trent following behind him. They turned right at the end of the hall and walked into the living room. The bridge officers noticed Drew and bowed slightly.

“Greetings, Supreme Chancellor,” Tora said as she and the rest of the bridge officers stood straight back up.

“Hello everyone,” Drew said. “Sorry to cut introductions short but we need get started with our briefing before a lot of people realize we are missing.”

Trent looked at Drew with a puzzled expression.

“You mean to tell me that no one knows you are here?” Trent asked.

“Only my secretary, the Joint Chiefs, and Head Agent Aja know we came here,” Drew said. “They can only hold off so many people who are looking for us for so long.”

“I understand. Everyone, let’s head to the den so that we can get started.”

“The ‘den?’” Drino asked.

“It is hard to explain but in short it is a place for family and friends to relax and unwind unlike the living room here which is more for formal meetings and special occasions.”

“I see. You had me wondering there more a moment if it was something else.”

“I understand. Now everyone, please follow me.”

Trent led the entire group from the living room to the den opposite of the kitchen. There were two couches and two seats. One of the couches that can sit three people was against a window that looks out towards the back of the house. The two seats were opposite of that against the wall that houses the downstairs staircase. The remaining couch that seated two was in between and positioned closer to the kitchen facing towards a large monitor over an electric “fireplace”, one of two in the house. The fireplace was in reality an electric heater with a holographic system making it look like an actual fire including sounds. Burning wood for heat inside a house was against the law unless under extreme circumstances. A coffee table was positioned in the middle of the seats. The seats were made of a white faux-leather material that was easy to clean.

Trent pointed out the two seats for the ambassadors to sit at. He then pointed to the two-seater couch to Tora and Natalie to sit at. He then pointed at the three-seater couch for Usatame, Rei, and Haley to sit.

“Give me one moment,” Trent said as he went to the dining table located between the den and the kitchen.

He grabbed two of the four chairs and put two of them behind the two-seater couch and had Sheryl sit in one of the chairs. He grabbed one more chair and put it over near the monitor.

“Here you go, sir,” Trent said as he indicated this seat would be for Drew.

“Thank you,” Drew said as he walked over to the seat but did not sit down. “Can I get some water, please?”

“Yes, sir,” Trent said as he walked over to the kitchen.

As Trent got a cup out of the cupboard, Drew pulled out a small stick that was a removable data storage device and looked behind the monitor for a port to plug it into. When he found one, he inserted the drive into the monitor which immediately turned the monitor on. A dark blue screen appeared with an outline around the edge of the screen indicating that the file being loaded was from the Republic Central Intelligence Agency. Trent came back with the glass

of water and put it on the coffee table in front of Drew. Drew got a small device out of his pocket that looked like the one used to help navigate through a presentation.

“Thank you,” Drew said. “I’m going to be doing a lot of talking so I wanted to make sure I had some water on hand. I know this is your house but please take a seat.”

“No problem, sir,” Trent said as he went and sat down in the remaining seat that was next to Sheryl and behind Tora and Natalie.

Drew looked at the monitor and pressed a button on the presentation device. An outline of a star system soon appeared on the screen. This star system and the celestial bodies that reside in it were soon labeled as being part of the Heronia System, the Lykan home system.

Trent and everyone else in the room soon straightened their postures in their seats. They knew where this information came from and this was the first time any of them have ever seen the layout of the enemy’s capital. Ambassador Drino leaned a little forward in his seat and had a slightly angry look on his face. Obviously this was the first time he had seen this and he knew what he was looking at: the enemy’s home.

“Now, then,” Drew said as he addressed the group. “Based on your body languages and what is being displayed on the screen, you all know exactly what this is. It has taken us a little while but we were able to recover this information from the captured Thrasher that was in the Dellino System, complete with the names of the locations. You are looking at the Heronia System, the capital of the Royal Lykan Kingdom.”

“So this is the system of these despicable slavers,” Drino said with a growl under his breath.

“Settle down, ambassador. I know what this means to you and the rest of the State but please allow me to finish our briefing.”

Drino reclined in his seat and took a deep breath.

“My apologies,” Drino said. “Everyone here is well aware of my kind’s hatred towards them and I’m letting that get to me. Please continue.”

“Now then, here is what we know about the system. There are currently seven planets in the system.”

Drew pressed a button and the planets on the map were enlarged of actual pictures to show what type of planet they were. Out of the rock and gas planets showing, only the fourth planet looked to show that it was able to support life with the water and plant life in the picture.

“As you can see,” Drew continued, “the fourth planet is the planet Lykana, the home planet of the Lykans.”

“So is it safe to assume that their capital is located somewhere on that planet?” Orbinai asked.

“A good question,” Drew said. “The answer to that is ‘no,’ though. I believe some of you are already aware of this, but the planet Lykana itself does not house the capital. Rather, the only Lykans there are those tasked with the upkeep of the planet’s natural flora and fauna. A lot of the resources from other planets in other systems were used to restore their world after years of war and heavy industry. Instead, their capital is located here.”

Drew pressed a button again and the images of all the planets except Lykana disappeared. On the image of Lykana, a box highlighted an object in orbit over the planet. The box zoomed in and a large orbital structure appeared. It looked like two golden flying saucers were connected one on top of the other with numerous spires and antennae jutting out from above, below, and from the edge of the structure. Whether the structure was made of actual gold or not remained to be seen but the structure was quite massive.

“This is the capital of the Royal Lykan Kingdom,” Drew said. “This is the orbital city station of what has been translated as ‘High Charity’ in our language.”

“That gaudy structure is their capital?” Drino said. “I was not expecting it to look so, what’s the word, tacky. Is that thing made of actual gold?”

“We don’t know if it is made of gold or is just using a similar color plating or paint. What we do know is that this is the center of government for the entire Kingdom.”

“So it is a safe assumption that the King and his Royal Court as housed there?” Tora asked.

“It is,” Drew said. “High Charity is massive, though, with a diameter of fifty kilometers. It was meant to hold a lot of Lykans but there are absolutely no slaves on it. Instead they rely on automation for mundane needs. We all know why there are no slaves in the system at all, correct?”

“Of course,” Drino said. “They find those who are not of Lykan blood to be ‘impure’ and not worthy to be in the system, much less set foot or other appendage on the ground of their planet. Their religion is nothing but a hoax in my opinion.”

“Funny you should mention that,” Tora said. “During our covert mission through Kingdom space, I have come across their religious texts to the point I have been able to form the book of what may be their complete works.”

“I would like to touch on that in just a moment, Tora,” Drew said. “Let me finish our briefing first but I do want to ask you about their religion if it helps us to find more than one method of resolving this matter.”

“Understood, sir. I would need to grab my tablet with those texts from downstairs but I will wait till you have finished.”

“Now then, currently we face a few obstacles when it comes to trying to reach this system with ships other than the *Templar*.”

Drew pressed the button again on the presentation device. The picture of planet Lykana went away and the map focused on an area near the seventh outermost planet. This time a star gate had been put into focus.

“The first of these problems is the star gate in that system,” Drew continued. “They only have one gate and it leads into the Ciscio System. This gate is heavily guarded by numerous battleships.”

“How many are we talking about?” Natalie asked.

“While this is subject to change based on the age of the information, the last record showed there were thirty-eight battleships on that side of the gate.”

Everyone suddenly had shocked expressions on their faces. Not once has any fleet faced off more than three battleships, but a fleet of thirty-eight battleships gave everyone in the room reason to be stunned.

“Never have I seen such a battlegroup of that size!” Drino said. “I knew they were serious about insuring no non-Lykans were allowed to enter their home system, but not to this extent!”

“The worse part of it is the fact that there are that many battleships on the other side of that gate in the Ciscio System,” Drew said.

“That’s a total of seventy-six battleships!” Natalie said. “It would take a great deal of firepower to get through defenses that heavy!”

“That doesn’t include the likely death toll our forces would endure trying to fight our way through,” Orbinai said. “I had no idea that the Lykans had that many battleships available.”

“We need an alternative method or a way to get a fleet there,” Trent said. “The only problem is even if we get a fleet to Heronia, we still have all of those battleships to deal with.”

“That’s not the only detail I have,” Drew said.

“There’s more?”

“From what we can gather, the ships on both sides of the gate do not belong to their regular military forces. They appear to belong to the Lykan Royal Guard.”

Drino’s fur suddenly went on end and his eyes were suddenly wide.

“No,” he said, his voice shaky. “Not the Royal Guard.”

Everyone looked at Drino with curious expressions on their faces.

“Drino,” Drew said, “you’ve heard of the Royal Guard?”

“I’ve heard the stories about them from those who survived an encounter with them during the Slave Revolt. The Royal Guard is considered the elite of the entire armed forces and are answerable to the King alone or the next in line to the throne should the King be incapacitated or dead. They fulfill every order they are given even if it meant costing them their lives. A large group of rebelling slaves took over a fleet a few jumps from the capital and sought to take out the capital in the confusion that ensued. However, the fleet did not even make it past a single gate in that direction as the Royal Guard was deployed to defend gates leading to the capital up to five jumps away. While the fleet the slaves had numbered in a couple dozen ships, the Royal Guard had three battleships and the knowledge of those ships weaknesses. The Royal Guard managed to destroy all but a few ships through coordinated strikes. The ships that fled reported what had happened once they got to what is now considered State territory, and that encounter left a fear to those troops that heard about it at the time. The only reason that fear has since subsided is the fact that the Royal Guard rarely travels far from the capital as well as the fact that the State no longer uses the Kingdom’s ships, instead relying on our own. If there are that many ships on both sides of the gate and they are all Royal Guard ships, there is no way our forces are going to walk away without heavy losses.”

“Then a straight-on confrontation is not the best course of action. That is why we need an alternative.”

“Have we taken an assessment of what is available in the Dellino System?” Usatame asked. “Maybe something found in the system would help. It was, after all, the location of their research facilities.”

“We are still looking things over,” Drew said. “There are a couple of odd structures that are still being investigated right now. Other than that, we haven’t come across anything out of the ordinary.”

“Sir,” Tora said, “if I may, there might be a way to either disrupt or persuade the Lykans to cease their hostilities altogether.”

Everyone looked at Tora with a shocked expression on their faces.

“I’m curious to know what you have in mind,” Drew said.

“As I had stated earlier, I’ve been gathering their religious texts for a long while in an effort to see if there was a means to undermine them from a religious standpoint considering their religion appears to be rather forefront.”

“More so than it ought to be,” Drino said. “My kind has been trying to wipe those so-called texts from our culture, considering how the Lykans wanted to drill it into our forefathers. Why are you bothering with those texts, anyway?”

“I have been looking them over and translating them. I’ve been reading them to get an understanding behind the Lykan mindset and psychology behind it. I’ve been reading it after the

translations were finalized while we were here.”

“That explains why you haven’t been very social,” Trent said, trying to be funny. “So, what is it you found in their texts that you think would be helpful?”

“I know this is going to sound weird but I have yet to see anything that suggested that their god ever wanted the Lykans to bring any race into slavery.”

“WHAT?!” Drino yelled, getting to his feet. “What do you mean there is no mention of slavery in their texts?!”

“From what I can tell, there is no mention of their god or their prophets ever saying that they were to go out and conquer other races to bring them into their faith. It appears that it was supposed to be by peaceful means.”

“Where does it say that among their texts?! Show it to me!”

“Certainly,” Tora said as she got up. “I’ll be right back with my tablet.”

Tora walked around the couch and towards the downstairs staircase while Drino sat down. He looked like he was beside himself and he was not the only one in the room. If what Tora said was true, then what compelled the Lykans to resort to slavery in order to “convert” those slaves to their faith? Something was not making sense.

It was quiet for a few moments until everyone heard Tora coming back up the steps. Once she reached the top of the stairs, she came around the corner with her tablet and a connection cord.

“I’m going to plug this into the monitor for all to see,” Tora said. “It will be in English so I will read it off to Ambassador Drino. Ambassador Orbinai, you are able to read English just fine thanks to your cybernetics, correct?”

“Correct,” Orbinai said.

“Very good. Could you excuse me for a moment, Chancellor?”

“Oh, certainly,” Drew said as he moved his chair and himself out of Tora’s way so that she could reach the monitor.

Tora took the cable and plugged one end of the cord into the monitor before plugging the other end into her tablet. While devices could connect wirelessly, physical connections were needed if the content is considered sensitive and/or private to broadcast where someone else could pick it up either accidentally or intentionally.

White text against a black background soon appeared on the monitor, namely a specific passage from the texts that Tora was talking about.

“This part of the passage is what I am referring to,” Tora said as she pointed to a specific passage. “These are the words of their Prophet Ka’Thro. I focused specifically on this passage as it was what he said that drove the Lykans into a unified kingdom. ‘As he stood up upon the hill, he cried out for all on the battlefield to hear him. Indeed his voice was loud enough for all to hear. As every Lykan stopped and looked, Ka’Thro raised his arms. *Hear me, for every Lykan has a purpose in the eyes of the Creator, a divine destiny that you all have long since forgotten. Our Creator gave us the breath of life to proclaim and worship him and his creations. He now proclaims this: to end all wars and to end all battles with your fellow Lykans. Borders are meaningless to him, only devotion to him and his creations. Go forth and proclaim his good faith. Seize those who do not believe in our Creator, confess their sins and transgressions, and turn them towards the faith of our Creator so that all will worship at his alter. Do this and you will be blessed and find peace.* And it came to be that the warriors on the battlefield were moved by his divine declaration that they put away their weapons and vowed to each other that they now have a new divine purpose in life, a new calling by a higher authority than any king, lord,

noble, or baron could proclaim. They bent their knees to beg for forgiveness from him as they would now venture forth into the world with a newfound mission to bring all of creation to their Creator's altar. Their Creator was now on their side.”

Tora stopped there to let those words sink in. Everyone was silent for a few moments before Tora spoke again.

“As you can see,” she said, “there is not a single mention of slavery anywhere in that text. It is one thing to ‘seize’ others to convert them to a faith, but it says nowhere to ‘capture’ or ‘enslave’ them. I have done a search for ‘slavery’ or ‘slaves’ throughout the entire texts and not once was it found. I then cross-referenced their history books for the same word to see when it started. It began when the Lykan fleet came across the Vitams. The King at the time proclaimed to the fleet from afar to ‘seize’ the non-believers into bondage. The slaves would confess their sins and work them off through hard work and determination till they worshiped their ‘Creator’ at his altar. The decree for slavery was issued by their King, NOT through their holy texts!”

“Are you kidding me?!” Drino said. “You’re telling me that their King at the time thought ‘seize’ meant ‘enslave’ and tried to use their religion as an excuse for a cheap workforce?!”

“That is exactly what I am saying. I’ve read the majority of their history in their religious texts. There were no wars to unify their planet. Every Lykan was tired of the endless wars and a divine calling was all that was needed for them to find a purpose in their lives higher than any Lykan in power. The current Kingdom as we all know it only came to be involved with enslavement because of a royal decree, not a holy one, and the descendants of those of royalty have been following that doctrine since then. They have been twisting their own words for centuries that even if a Lykan was to look over the texts, they would easily be told that this was how their scholars interpreted their texts. Until their first battle with the Empire and the Slave Revolt, they accepted this way of life because no one could resist their superior military power until that point. They believed they were in favor with their ‘Creator’ and thought nothing could stop them. Their history books have listed their first loss and the Slave Revolt as a ‘test of faith’ to try to bring their former slaves back under their religion. I’m beginning to wonder how our involvement in their war and the renewed hostilities with the Empire must be viewed among their people. I would not be surprised if some of them are beginning to lose their faith or they are reevaluating it in light of recent events.”

“Are you saying that we should use this information as some sort of tool to find a resolution with the Lykans?” Drew asked.

“I’m not sure, but it would give them something to ponder and rethink how their government has been run for these past few centuries. If we can do that, we may end up starting a revolution that would begin from within the very core of their beliefs. It could also cause them to be demoralized to the point that they would be unable to fight.”

“If we can simply get them to accept the errors and mistakes they have made over the centuries due to their misguided ways, it would be a start to the end of this war,” Drew said.

“Why are you all concerned about the Lykan’s beliefs?” Drino said. “It doesn’t matter if it was their King then or now, the fact remains they followed their leaders’ interpretation and enslaved several races in the name of their faith! Why bother trying to correct them now?”

“It is considered an option in order to find a possible peaceful resolution to this war,” Drew said. “Can you honestly say looking at that information earlier that our forces could win against that many battleships?”

“While we are that topic,” Trent said, “Chancellor, you came here to brief us about the situation, but didn’t you already come up with a solution before arriving here?”

“Actually, I have not. With all of those battleships in the system, I had a feeling a full-on confrontation was out of the question even if we could jump that far into Heronia. We were also looking over High Charity to see if your usual tactic involving a one-shot kill should it become necessary but the station’s structure is highly reinforced and the reactors are nowhere near vulnerable. However, even if there was a way, our task is to get their government to surrender by either threat or making them understand their errors. It is not to destroy them.”

“Are you serious?” Drino asked. “They have spread throughout the Eastern Region like a cancer, enslaving those who were not able to resist them in the name of their god, and you want to spare them the justice they so richly deserved for the arrogant and destructive ways? My people signed on with your Republic and the Empire to free our brethren and to put an end to the Kingdom, NOT to reeducate them on their own religion!”

“That is based on interpretation, ambassador,” Orbinai said. “Our Empire joined the fight as retaliation for the use of our cybernetic technology and their attempt to manipulate our forces. Our goal was to reduce their territory and contain them in order to prevent harm to others. Our forces have come across your fellow races and have freed them from the Lykans. They have even been returned to you. I know for a fact that the Republic has done the same thing, but the Republic is fighting for different reasons, right, Chancellor?”

“Correct,” Drew said. “The Kingdom sees us as a disease and wants to exterminate us. They even resorted to the use of biological weapons to that end two days ago. We want to stop their campaign and if it means freeing slaves on the way to make them understand and convince them to stop their actions, then so be it. However, if we can show them that their religion is not as it should be and has been manipulated by their leaders, they will stop their campaign and everyone here will be able to achieve their goals in the end.”

“Perhaps I didn’t make it clear what the goals of the State were when it comes to the Kingdom,” Drino said. “We free our brethren, take back our home planets, and get rid of the Kingdom. The State will not stop the campaign until those goals have been met.”

“Do you really want to go that far?” Trent said. “After reviewing the drug that was introduced on those planets, we found out it was administered by air and thus is airborne. The drug also doesn’t go away so quickly either after we interviewed Vistorio who created it. It gets embedded in the plant and wildlife on those planets so that it can be ingested by future generations of your people. Until he is able to create an antidote, we have to consider those planets quarantined to prevent the drug from spreading.”

“Then the creation of an antidote is lost. Vistorio stated that his notes, data, and research were all at the research facility on Dellino III which he destroyed after being freed by your infiltration team. He was subject to life imprisonment for being responsible for dooming all of our people on those planets to death. We can never again step foot on our home planets because of him.”

“From what I have heard from our ambassadors to the State,” Drew said, “you all seem to have made quite a new life for all of your peoples. It is not much different from Humans when you think about it.”

“Don’t lump what we had to endure to create a new home to your kind’s accidental exodus to this star cluster. Your home planet is in another galaxy who knows how far away but our home planets are much closer. We can return to them but now we cannot even set foot on them. Do you know how that feels to be that close but never allowed to set foot or tail on those worlds again? Do any of you know what that even feels like?”

Everyone in the room looked at each other, but no one in the room could answer Drino.

“That is what I thought,” Drino said. “My people want revenge for what the Kingdom has done to us and they want nothing short of them being gone.”

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

“Ambassador,” he said, “the Republic is willing to help free the slaves and force the Kingdom into submission and surrender. We may even look into possibly reeducating them involving their religion in order to neutralize them as a potential threat for the future. However, from the sounds of it, you are saying the State wants to commit genocide or go as far as making the Lykans extinct. Is that what I am hearing?”

“The Executive Council has made that their goal long before the Republic and the Empire entered the war. They are very appreciative of your efforts to force the Lykans back and freed the slaves that have been on the planets that have been liberated thus far, but the Lykans have been a plague to our people for too long and needs to be dealt with. Besides, if they are not dealt with, what would keep them from trying to exterminate your kind like they tried to do to this planet?”

“They may have resorted to such efforts but I am not about to bring this Republic down to their level by doing the exact same thing they attempted to do. I’m highly disturbed that the State would resort to genocide as even an option. Are you going to tell me that the State is not able to take the higher ground in such situations and find a better solution than extinction?”

“Sirs,” Trent said as he stood up, “while you two are in a position of power, I ask that you debate this matter in an official setting and not in my house? You both are still guests but right now we are getting off the topic at hand about how to proceed with the invasion of the Heronia System by talking about the consequences before we even planned out how to proceed.”

“I agree with Trent,” Orbinai said. “Let us give the *Templar* crew the information about the mission and the scenario for them to look it over and decide for themselves how to proceed. I think we all need to retire back to the capital before we are missed. At that point, we will discuss this matter about our agendas without Trent’s neighbors hearing us if we get too loud.”

“I agree,” Drew said. “I apologize, Trent, for my behavior in your home.”

“I must apologize for my own behavior within your household,” Drino said. “Orbinai is right, though. Let’s leave the information with Trent and his crew for them to proceed with a plan, and head back to the capital for now.”

“Very well,” Drew said. “Let us head back.”

Drino and Orbinai got up from their seats followed by everyone in the room.

“Trent,” Drew continued as he and the ambassadors moved around the coffee table towards the direction of the kitchen, “please take the time to look it over with your officers and let me know what you and your team decides on by tomorrow at the latest. Give my regards to your wife.”

“Are you kidding?” Trent said. “If I told her you and the ambassadors were here, she would freak out.”

“Yeah, I guess she would,” Drew said with a slight laugh.

“I’ll walk you out to your car. I have to open the garage door anyway to let you out.”

Trent walked Drew, Drino, and Orbinai back towards the hall that led to the garage and opened the door for them. The three of them walked through and Drew walked around to the driver’s side of the car along with Drino. Orbinai got in the rear passenger side of the car while Drew got in the driver seat with Drino in the back seat behind Drew. Trent pressed the garage door button once they closed their doors and Drew started the car. As soon as the door opened, Drew backed the vehicle onto the driveway and into the street, turning the back of the vehicle to Drew’s left. Drew put it into drive and drove it to his right as he proceeded down the street the

way they came. Trent closed the garage door and the inside door after that.

Trent walked back towards the den and saw that his bridge officers were sitting down in their seats but were silent as if they were lost in thought.

“Well,” Trent said to break the silence, “that was not what I was expecting to deal with.”

“Was Drino really serious?” Haley asked. “Is the State really set on the extermination of the Lykans?”

“From the sounds of it, they are serious about it.”

“Maybe we could follow what he had said,” Tora said.

“What do you mean by that?” Trent asked.

“I recorded his conversation if needed. It is a habit of mine to record important conversations such as this one.”

“Okay, but what does that have to do with what he said?”

“Listen to this.”

Tora took out the recording device she was referencing from her pants pocket. She pressed a couple of buttons to go back to a specific time on the recording before she let it play. Drino’s voice started to play on the device.

“Perhaps I didn’t make it clear what the goals of the State were when it comes to the Kingdom. We free our brethren, take back our home planets, and get rid of the Kingdom. The State will not stop the campaign until those goals have been met.”

Tora fast-forwarded the playback to Drino saying something else she found important.

“My people want revenge for what the Kingdom has done to us and they want nothing short of them being gone.”

Tora stopped the playback.

“I noticed he said they wanted to get rid of the Kingdom,” she said. “We can use that to our advantage.”

“How so?” Trent asked.

“He didn’t mention about getting rid of the Lykans in either sentence. If we are able to make the Lykans reevaluate their religion, this might change the political structure to where the Kingdom could no longer exist.”

“You’re talking about ‘killing’ the current Lykan culture and government by forcing them into realizing that they have strayed from the path of their deity. A clever notion and one that would give us room to maneuver in how we deal with both the Lykans and the State.”

Trent realized that the *Templar* may have a plan of “attack” after all. Trent went over to the monitor and switched it over to the outline of the Heronia System Drew brought with him.

“I think I have an idea that might play into what Tora has discovered,” Trent said. “We will obviously warp to the Heronia System directly but we are not going to attack using weapons. We need something like a video lecture that can be transmitted from the Heronia System to the rest of the Kingdom, something to show what we have discovered that they cannot ignore or resist.”

“You want to go on a cultural and religious assault using their holy texts against them?” Rei said. “How do we know they will understand and accept what we tell them?”

“Tora knows more about their texts and what their history books will show about how their royalty has either misinterpreted or twisted the words around. Therefore, she is the best candidate to do the video. Hopefully none of their texts are translated incorrectly or the words would not make much of a difference.”

“I foresee a few problems with this plan,” Sheryl said. “The first is the unlikelihood that

they will listen to us at all. For all we know, a ‘vermin’ saying their own holy texts could cause them to get more upset with us than before. The second is the fact that even if we transmit such a message, there is a chance for the broadcast to either be cut off or turned off by the people who may not be interested. The last problem is how are we going to transmit without being detected by their sensors? A broadcast of that nature will expose us easily if we are in their star system, leading to retaliation for being the first non-Lykans to be in their home system.”

“All very good points,” Trent said. “In terms of the broadcast itself, we will need to find a major transmission hub in the system to take over and broadcast from. This will keep the *Templar* out of harm. The hub will also need to transmit a signal to prevent any device receiving the broadcast from turning off, forcing the population to listen to it. The last problem, would they even listen to someone from the Republic, is still something that would have to be figured out.”

“What if we make Tora look like a Lykan in the video with computer generation?” Usatame asked.

“That would take too long to put together in such a short amount of time,” Trent said. “Besides, if it was rushed, the Lykans might be able to tell it was computer generated.”

“I would recommend not having me visually in it,” Tora said. “I’m still an RCIA agent and I would rather not be seen on any monitor, here or in a foreign nation. If I may, I can put together a presentation and have it translated to their language to make it easier both visually and audibly. They may not be able to tell the difference that way unless they have a keen ear to distinguish a native speaker and a foreign or computerized speaker.”

“We may have to go with that plan. Go ahead and get it started. Natalie and Sheryl, you two will assist her with getting the presentation outline together and prepared to translate. Usatame, Rei, and Haley, look over this map for any possible structure or hub that can be used to transmit this presentation from. If it means that we must infiltrate their orbital city of High Charity to do it, then so be it.”

“What about you, sir?” Natalie asked.

“I need to get in touch with Blair and Benja to tell them what we are planning to do. If we must infiltrate anything in the Heronia System, they are going to be the guys to do it. That and I have to keep my wife busy when she gets home later tonight now that we are working on top secret projects again.”

“Is she going to be okay with you leaving for a mission again tomorrow?” Sheryl asked.

“She knew this was coming but she was no doubt hoping to make my time at home last longer. Once we complete this mission and the Kingdom surrenders, I hope that I will be able to spend more time with her after the war. At the very least, I would like to have my old life back, and be in command of the *Renaldo* again. I haven’t heard from Commodore Shannon since I took the mission with the *Templar*. Maybe I should contact her to see how things are. Obviously, I’m not going to tell her about the *Templar* unless she already knows about it.”

“The military knowing of our existence is a bit of an annoyance,” Tora said, “but I guess it could not be helped considering what we were dealing with in Dellino. It is best if we get started with our assignments since we have half the day left to work on it. Let’s go.”

Tora, Natalie, and Sheryl walked over to the staircase leading downstairs while Haley, Rei, and Usatame looked over the map. Trent headed for the staircase leading upstairs to go to his office. He had a few calls and plans to make and only a short time to do them before Laura comes home.

* * * * *