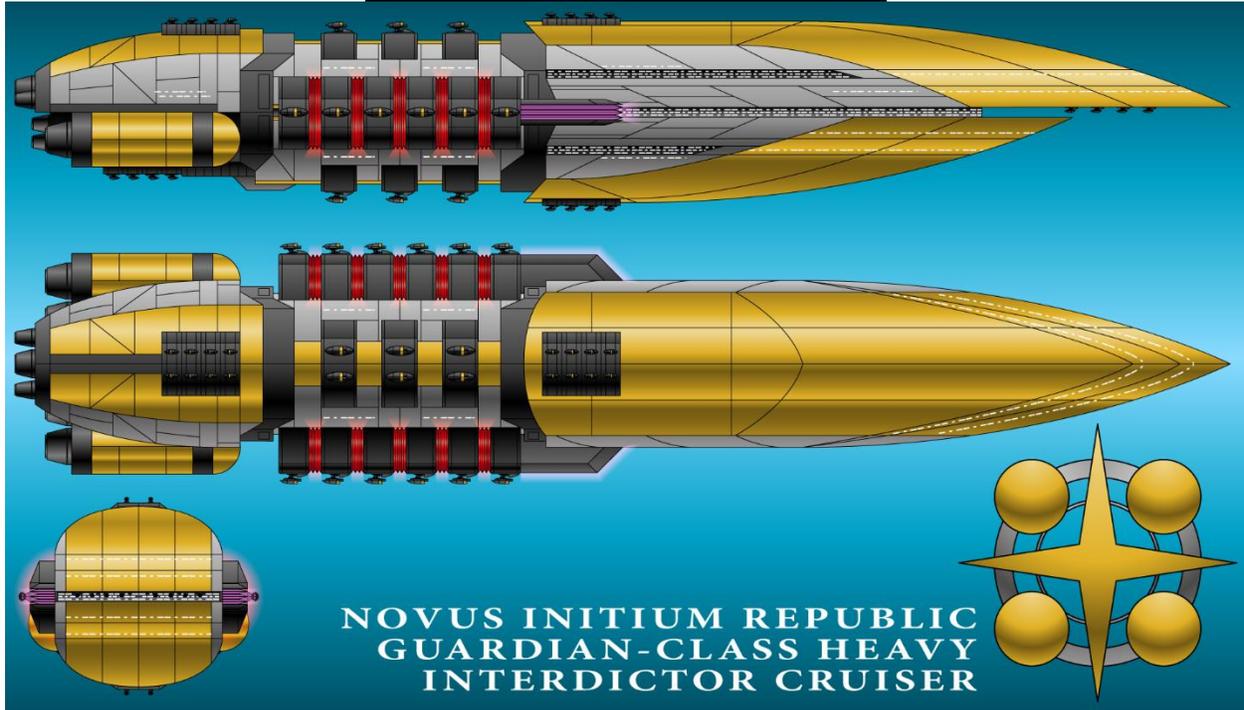


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VII: The Tiger and the Dragon



PART 6

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Unclaimed Space
Planet W-019-7 Orbit, W-019 System, Western Region, 52 Light-Years from Ruber System
4:44pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“We’re getting a reading, Captain.”

Tora sat in her command chair, waiting patiently for the Federation “escort” to arrive in the W-019 System. After the video call with Head Agent Aja, Tora grew aggravated over what Colonel Blair had said to her earlier, negatively comparing her actions and decisions while she was in command to Trent’s decisions when he commanded the vessel during the First Interstellar War over a year ago. She thought he was just blowing steam and that his words would not affect her at all. However, as she continued to think about that discussion more and reflect on their implications, Tora grew angrier and more upset.

She did not say a word to anyone on the bridge since then. She could have easily walked into her Ready Room and vented her anger in private, but she wasn’t provided an exact estimated time of arrival as to when the Federation ship would appear in the system. She had to be on the bridge in case they arrived early for any reason. When the science officer stated she was getting a reading, it snapped Tora out of her anger-filled trance, allowing her to focus again on their current task. She will have to focus on this situation with Colonel Blair after the current mission has been completed.

“Is it a portal being generated?” Tora said as she straightened her posture in her chair.

“Confirmed, ma’am,” the science officer said. “A portal is forming bearing zero-seven-six mark zero-one-seven off our starboard side. A ship is beginning to come through.”

“Give me a visual. Tactical, prepare to drop the cloak once we have confirmation that it is a Federation ship.”

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

The forward view on the screen changed to the *Templar’s* starboard side. A large circular portal had already appeared against the darkness of space, its rim was white with energy looking like it was flowing out from the aperture. From the *Templar’s* point of view, the bridge crew could partially see through to the other side of the portal with a habitable world in view. Based on what they could see and with the knowledge of where their escort is coming from, they could only assume that the world in the aperture was the Federation capital of Propitius Esto. Once the aperture reached its maximum size of over a kilometer in diameter, a Federation dreadnought started to slowly come through the portal. The massive purple-colored hull slowly made its way through the portal as Tora and the rest of the bridge crew looked on. While this was not their first time to see a Federation dreadnought, it was the first time they had visually seen one of those ships use their portal drives not counting the footage the *Cavalier* brought back from the battle in the Miranda System where those vessels were first deployed.

Once the Federation dreadnought was completely through the portal, the aperture closed in behind the massive vessel. The portal generated a small flash once it collapsed, then quickly dimmed. The dreadnought came to a stop soon afterwards.

“Tactical, deactivate the cloak,” Tora said. “Communications, stand by to hail the Federation dreadnought.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the tactical and communications officers said in unison.

The blue lights that were active on the bridge indicating the vessel was cloaked turned off as the *Templar’s* cloak deactivated. The background sound of a hum dropped in pitch until it was no longer audible. The *Templar* can now be visually seen by the Federation dreadnought.

“Hail the dreadnought,” Tora said.

“They are already hailing us, ma’am,” the communications officer said. “Shall I put them on the main screen?”

“Yes, put them on screen.”

As soon as Tora gave that command, an image appeared in front of the main screen. A male Human officer who looked to be in his late fifties dressed in a high-ranking uniform was on the screen. He had a rather stern look on his face, which did not surprise Tora considering the circumstances of why his ship was here.

“I am Admiral Tyler of the Federation Dreadnought Heaven’s Arrow,” the man said. *“Am I to assume that you are the commanding officer of the Republic stealth vessel Templar?”*

“You are correct in your assumption, Admiral Tyler,” Tora said. “I am Captain Tora, commanding officer of the *Templar*.”

“Greetings and blessings to you and your crew, Captain Tora. Sorry to cut pleasantries short but we are on a time schedule. We have the Tigris Chief and her entourage on board my dreadnought. Are you ready to receive them?”

“You may deploy their transport to our ship. Our communications officer will guide them into one of our hangar bays. Am I correct from what I heard from my superiors that your vessel takes twelve minutes to recharge your portal drive?”

“That is correct, Captain Tora. We are also giving your Republic’s Seventh Fleet time for their commanding officers to inform their crews about the situation and for them to jump to the system your forces have designated as the W-001 System. We also wanted to give you and your crew a chance to prepare the people of the Dominion for your infiltration into their capital.”

“Understood, Admiral. Please contact us when you are ready to jump to our next destination.”

“Very well, Captain. We will contact you again shortly once we are ready. Tyler, out”

The image of Admiral Tyler disappeared off the main screen. Tora reclined in her chair.

“Communications,” Tora said, “when the dreadnought launches their shuttle, instruct them to land in the starboard flight bay. Contact Colonel Blair as well and have him along with his team meet with the Dominion party who are coming on board. I want our ‘guests’ to provide us with as much information for the invasion of Tenebris Prime as they can give us. Make sure to tell him not to escort them through any sensitive areas! While they may be defectors, I do not trust them even under the circumstances.”

“Understood, Captain,” the communications officer said.

“You didn’t want to contact Colonel Blair and instruct him yourself?” the tactical officer asked. “Was what he said affecting you that much?”

“It is plainly obvious that he does not respect me enough to deserve a direct order from me,” Tora said. “Right now, I don’t want to see his face as much as possible while on this assignment after his insubordination. Is that understood by everyone here?”

“Yes, ma’am,” everyone on the bridge said in near unison.

“Good. Now, focus on your tasks. He have a major operation ahead of us and I want everyone to focus on the task ahead.”

Tora took a deep breath. Part of her was feeling like they were about to fly right into a trap setup by this rogue Tigris Tribe chief and her cohorts who were about to come on board. She was beginning to think that this was all some form of elaborate ploy to lure the Republic to the Dominion capital, allowing the Dominion to retaliate against a “Republic invasion.” She heard that the Aspergillus and the Tigris Tribes’ clones were killed by Armani Draco, the man who started the cult centuries ago and is jumping into a fresh clone body after a certain duration of time. This too could have been a ruse, despite the fact there was evidence showing their termination according to the Federation forces on the front lines and those that protected the defectors when they were captured.

This mission and all its aspects seemed too rushed in her mind. It may have been due to the nature of her job that she was suspicious of such actions being taken in a short amount of time. While she would normally not think this considering past experience, she could only hope that they were not about to fall right into a trap elaborately setup by Armani.

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*Cockpit, Federation Shuttle 1F-18389, Unclaimed Space
Planet W-019-7 Orbit, W-019 System, Western Region, 52 Light-Years from Ruber System
4:49pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“So, that is one of the Republic’s stealth vessels, is it?”

Miya and the former Chiefs were sitting in the back of the Federation shuttle which was sectioned off from the cockpit area after departing the Dreadnought *Heaven’s Arrow*. As they left the dreadnought, the shuttle proceeded towards a rather dark and angular vessel reminiscent of an oddly shaped arrowhead. They were able to view this on the two screens that flanked the door to the cockpit. Miya and Tonya sat in front of the left screen with Sandra right behind them. Misty and Mary sat in front of the right screen. Miya was not expecting for such a ship to be shaped like that on the screens.

“Not quite what I expected,” Tonya said. “I wonder, could all Republic ships look like that and possess stealth technology?”

“I cannot say,” Miya said. “However, if the Republic fleet fielded these ships in large numbers, it would have been quite expensive based on their monetary system. I read up that they, like the Federation, still use currency to trade for goods and services unlike the Dominion which is based on the workload from our clone population.”

“There is also the fact that one of their fleets is jumping to a nearby system, something this stealth vessel obviously does not use since that would easily be detected by our sensors.”

“Speculation at this point is irrelevant,” Misty said. “Our knowledge of the current Republic is so limited that it is best for us to just wait and see what their standard ships look like rather than guess.”

Miya and Tonya looked over at Misty, but could not find anything to say in response to Misty’s comment knowing that she was right. All they can do is speculate on the Republic’s designs and technology until they see it firsthand. They looked back at the screen, deciding to remain quiet for the rest of the short flight.

As the shuttle approached the *Templar* from the aft, the stealth vessel’s starboard “pod” or “wing,” whatever it was called, opened in front of them like some sort of flower starting to bloom. They could see an atmospheric barrier active in front of the flight deck. They could also see two columns of soldiers on the left side of the flight deck. Miya could also assume that this was their “escort” while on board the *Templar* if not their ground support and combat unit for the upcoming assault on Tenebris Prime. However, their presence on the flight deck as the shuttle began to pass through the atmospheric barrier began to make Miya nervous.

“It seems like ever since Armani sentenced me to have my mind wiped, I have been escorted every step of the way to this point,” Miya said.

“Considering the circumstances, it can’t be helped,” Tonya said. “In the Dominion, you are wanted for heresy and treason at this point along with the rest of us. You have effectively become a symbol of rebellion or revolution, depending on the point of view. Because of that, protection is needed to keep you safe.”

“And yet, we are going back home, leaving the fate of the Dominion in the hands of the Republic and the Federation if we succeed in removing Armani from power. I feel more like a destroyer of the Dominion than a savior at this point.”

“You are helping to destroy a dictatorship made out of malice towards the Republic that should not have existed in the first place. Armani lead our ancestors down a dark path with his delusions. If he is in fact being manipulated by a third-party, then hopefully we will find clues as to who is responsible. All we can do now is focus on the task ahead and help bring Armani to justice for his actions, whether those actions were his own or guided by another.”

The shuttle soon landed on the flight deck, lining up the left side boarding ramp with the two columns of troops that were waiting for them. As the shuttle landed, the speakers in the passenger section came on.

“We are letting you off here,” a male voice said over the speaker, most likely the pilot. *“This shuttle will be returning to the Heaven’s Arrow. You will be in the hands of the Republic until they determine what to do with you afterwards.”*

Miya wasn’t surprised by the pilot’s words. The Dominion has either killed or captured Federation military officers and crew in battle. There are some that probably wished she and her associates were dead, but those piloting the shuttle were given orders to deliver them safely to the Republic stealth vessel and they had to follow those orders.

“Understood,” Miya said as she unbuckled her harness.

The former Chiefs also unbuckled their harnesses and all five women got up from their seats. As they made their way to the left side door, Tonya and Mary got in front of Miya while Misty and Sandra got behind her. Once again, Miya was being “escorted” or “protected” by others, and it made Miya wonder when this would stop. For now, she had to bear this form of “protection” as Tonya put it as she knew how important she was to the mission.

The hatch hissed open as the door began to open, lowering the boarding ramp onto the flight deck. Miya could hear the engines of the shuttle still active but idling. The pilots were no doubt going to leave the moment the five of them are off the ramp. Whether the crew of the Republic stealth vessel were aware of this or if they ordered the pilots to leave after they dropped her and the others off was unknown but now was not the time to focus on such small matters.

She spotted the two columns of soldiers from what she could see between Tonya and Mary as they made their way out of the shuttle and down the boarding ramp. As Miya had suspected, once Misty and Sandra stepped off the ramp behind her, it retracted back into the shuttle and the door closed. The shuttle lifted off the flight deck and flew through the opened hangar doors at the bow of the ship. She hadn’t noticed that both the front and back hangar doors were opened to allow the shuttle to leave without turning around. Once it cleared the doors, both bow and aft hangar doors closed.

Miya turned her attention back towards the two columns of soldiers that were waiting for them. She noticed that all of them were wearing helmets that hide their faces, but she could tell based on body shape that they were made up of both men and women. She could also tell that none of them were alien unlike those among the ranks of the Federation.

One of the soldiers at the end of the left column stepped forward and stopped in between the columns, turning to face them. He was not wearing a helmet, which struck Miya as odd unless this was intentional to make them feel more at ease, though the rest of the soldiers did not help much either way.

“My name is Colonel Blair,” he said. “I am a member of the Starship and Ground Assault Troopers, or SAGATs for short, and I am in command of the team assigned to the Republic stealth recon vessel *Templar*. The captain of the *Templar* has put me in charge of overseeing you all while you’re on board. Who among you is the Tigris Chief known as Miya?”

Miya raised her hand, which was visible behind Tonya and Mary.

“I am Miya,” she said.

Tonya and Mary turned around to look at Miya, though they were not surprised that Miya responded so quickly to Blair’s inquiry. Blair soon approached the group, stopping five meters short of them. He brought up his arm to salute her.

“Sorry, ma’am,” Blair said, “but we are short on time and we need information regarding our infiltration on the capital at Tenebris Prime to arrest Armani Draco.”

“I understand,” Miya said. “Lead the way, Colonel. We’ll give you as much information as we can to put an end to Armani’s madness.”

Blair nodded in agreement.

“Follow me, please,” he said as he put his arm down.

He turned around and started walking towards the doors located thirty meters away. Miya and the former Chiefs followed behind him as the two columns of SAGATs came together and marched behind Misty and Sandra.

Whatever happens from this point forward, Miya can no longer turn back now.

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*Dominion Intelligence Room, Central Tower below ground level, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
4:53pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“I require some information for a military operation.”

Armani was quick and direct to the point when he entered the Intelligence Room, which surprised Alpha as he suddenly turned around. Alpha did not keep track of how many times Armani had entered the Intelligence Room today, but it had to be a new record as far as he knew.

“Greetings again, Your Majesty Pope,” Alpha said. “What information do you seek this time for military use?”

“I need to know the locations of the capital worlds of the three alien nations that are either allied or known by the Novus Initium Republic,” Armani said. “There should be information as to their locations in the broadcasts that have been picked up thus far.”

“Wait a moment, sir,” Alpha said, puzzled. “You want to know the locations of the Holy Lykan Republic, the United Vitam State, and Camino Star Empire? I have to ask, but for what purpose do you need that information for in a military operation? Are you planning to attack those nations’ capitals?”

“That is correct, Alpha.”

“But there is no evidence that any of those nations are responsible for the infiltration of our capital.”

“Their association with that nation of sinners called the Novus Initium Republic is enough reason for me to want that information for an assault. It is the will of our red god to send our forces to their capitals and to the Lumen System, the heart of that sinful nation. Our forces will burn the heart of each of those nations, and will continue to burn each of their worlds until there is no more remaining. The best part is that none of them have the means to reach our holy Dominion based on those transmissions.”

“It is true that none of those nations possess the means to move their forces instantly over vast distances like our Dominion’s portal drive. However, while I can understand the need to retaliate against the corrupt Novus Initium Republic, is it wise to provoke other nations in the star cluster who have not done our Dominion any wrong?”

Armani looked highly upset.

“You doubt the will of our red god?” Armani asked in an angry but stern voice.

“Excuse me for saying so, Your Majesty Pope, but this sudden act of aggression towards the Republic and all known nations is effectively making us the enemy of the entire star cluster. We don’t know anything about the military capabilities of the Republic, much less those of the other alien nations. I may not be a military strategist, but if we send ships to the capitals of all of those nations, there is a chance that we may lose all of our forces due to the lack of proper defenses against their fleets. We also haven’t had nearly enough time for those remaining aboard our dreadnoughts to learn how to fight in combat yet.”

“Then all they are to me is a hindrance to our divine retaliation against the heretics and sinners. Once I have the coordinates of those capitals, I will activate the Legion Protocol and wipe them out of existence for the glory of our red god.”

“The Legion Protocol? I’ve never heard of it before.”

“The only thing you need to know is it is a program that will lead the Dominion to complete dominance over the star cluster, allowing our red god to reign over those who are worthy. Now, do you have those coordinates for those star systems or not?!”

Alpha took a deep breath. Even though Armani was asking for that information, he knew he was about to give Armani some bad news.

“The answer is no, sir,” Alpha said. “While they have stated the names of those systems, they have not given precise coordinates for their locations. All they are stating in the broadcasts are the regions they are found in, such as the Eastern and Southeastern Regions.”

Armani was looking far more upset with that news, and Alpha knew Armani wasn't going to be happy to hear that.

“It seems all you have done is waste my time, Alpha,” Armani said. “If you did not have the answer to my question, then why did you bother to aggravate me with such drivel?!”

“You have visited this room multiple times today, but only after you condemned Tigris Tribe Chief Miya to a mind wipe. That fiasco was the catalyst that began this whole series of events beginning with the genocide of the Tigris and Aspergillus Tribes and leading to a possible invasion by the Federation if Miya convinces them to jump here directly. I'm beginning to think that if you had allowed her to state her proposal for peace with the Federation and later the Republic, we would not be in this situation that we are in right now with our military currently handicapped and the Federation possibly jumping right to Tenebris Prime!”

Armani along with everyone else in the room was shocked that Alpha spoke to His Majesty Pope that way. Alpha decided to continue before giving anyone a chance for a rebuttal.

“You taught us to be truthful in our ways and never utter a lie, heresy, or commit a sin. However, after what I have seen, you have done all three. You lied to all of us about our origins and how the Dominion came to be along with your cloning and mind transfer. You have also committed a heresy and a sin by taking the life of Carol Tigris along with over forty billion lives who have done nothing wrong to you other than being associated with their respective Tribes. You have weakened our infrastructure and our military strength by letting your personal feelings influence your judgement. Worst of all, you are letting fear and paranoia of the Novus Initium Republic who you have committed crimes against based on your actions hundreds of years ago affect your judgement as the leader of the Dominion. You are afraid of facing judgement and punishment by the Republic for those crimes, and I am beginning to think that those fears are the true reason our Dominion was created. You didn't start this nation out of the salvation of our red god. You started it to protect yourself from facing the consequences of what you had done!”

Everyone was still in shock, appalled at Alpha speaking what he did at Armani. Armani, however, was quick to come to his senses and was utterly livid at having a clone tell him, the Pope of the Dominion and its de facto leader, such blasphemous words! The anger on his face contorted it to the point that one would think he was possessed by a demon of rage.

“You are going to regret those words, Alpha,” Armani said, trying to restrain his anger.

“What are you going to do, exterminate the clones of my Tribe?” Alpha said. “If you want less people to protect you from the Federation and the Republic, go right ahead. They are coming either way, but if you want to make it easier for them to reach you, then by all means, be my guest. All I have to say is whether it is our red god or some other deity that you meet when that judgement comes upon you, you better hope that they are merciful on your soul, or is your fear of the afterlife the reason you keep transferring your mind to a fresh clone?”

Armani could no longer contain his anger. He turned and stormed out of the room, not wanting to say anything further to someone who was beneath him. After he left, Delta stood up from his seat, looking rather flustered at Alpha's actions.

“Sir!” Delta said. “Do you have any idea what you have done?! Our Tribe will incur His Majesty Pope's wrath!”

“Maybe so,” Alpha said, “but someone had to knock some sense into him, even if that means facing certain death because of his fears.”

“So what do we do now? Do we continue our work like there is no problem?”

“Far from it. Any work in removing the history and the footage Carol uploaded is to be stopped immediately. I am not about to have someone erase the truth of what happened here. Also, deactivate the jammers and the listening posts. It’s time we stopped hiding from the truth that we have been denied and from the Republic itself.”

“Sir, this is treason if we go through with this.”

“We were all betrayed when Armani founded this heinous nation of his in order to protect himself from Republic judgement. That was why his son did not follow in his footsteps centuries ago. He and his descendants know the mistakes that were made by Armani and chose not to follow that path. Now it is our turn to correct this mistake. If we don’t, we will no longer survive as a nation. If that means we hand Armani over to the Republic in order to preserve ourselves and our people, then so be it. Besides, I can’t find myself following someone who is willingly to kill so many out of anger towards one person. There must be something implanted in every clone intentionally for that purpose. We were his pawns from the moment we were created. I, for one, do not intend to accept such a fate. Now, please follow those orders as if they were your last. Also, I want to program the automated defenses network to shut down permanently at five o’clock today, citing maintenance purposes. If either the Federation or the Republic somehow invade here to capture or arrest Armani, I want to make it as easy for them as we can. Do the same for the security systems, too.”

“Sir, are you really sure you want to go through with this?”

“Yes, I am. I am still Alpha here, and you are to follow my orders till the end.”

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*Inner Sanctuary of His Majesty Pope Armani, Central Tower, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
4:57pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“That Alpha has no right to talk to me, his master, that way!”

Armani returned to his Inner Sanctuary after his brief meeting in the Intelligence Room. He remained highly irate about how Alpha talked to him. The audacity of a clone telling Armani what he did and did not fear! He began to think that the Dominion would have been better served by drones and automation instead of clones, but he needed a population of established servants and combatants to make his Dominion feel safe and protected by the size of the territory it had conquered. Of course, if he went with drones or automated forces for the military while the clones did all the remedial work, that would have worked out just the same. After Alpha talked to him that way, he began to feel like this should be the route to take going forward. If that was the case, the unborn clones of the Tigris and Aspergillus would no longer be needed.

In light of his argument with Alpha, maybe he needed to give that thought of his more validity when one considers recent events with the Tigris and Aspergillus Tribes. After all, he was in charge of the Dominion. The clones remaining on board the dreadnoughts could not serve as combatants without extensive training. It was best for them to be removed when he activates the Legion Protocol. He still had plenty of clones to go around to handle the remedial tasks.

However, it wasn’t going to be pretty for those clones remaining on board once the protocol was activated, but at this point, he no longer cared.

He went to the large tablet on the altar and activated the screen, bringing up the protocol marked "Legion." He activated the protocol, and the application asked for a list of targets. Since he was not able to get the capitals of the alien nations that have allied themselves with the Republic, Armani inputted the coordinates for the planet Luminaire, the capital of the Novus Initium Republic. He also inputted the planet of High Sanctus, the religious capital of the Republic, knowing its destruction will show that the will of the red god is true. He wished he had the location of the Draco Federation capital, but he will have to make do with pushing the front lines back into their territory. He no longer wanted to capture those traitors. He wanted them to burn like the Republic will. His last set of targets involved systems that were reclaimed by the Draco Federation after Dominion forces retreated when the Aspergillus Tribe was terminated.

The next question the application asked was how many ships were going to be deployed to those targets. Armani had to think about that for a moment. The protocol would select ships at random from all over the Dominion and he could not designate which ships to send. He doubted after this much time that Miya was able to convince the Federation, but he was no fool if she managed to do so. Out of the near seven hundred dreadnoughts that remain in the Dominion fleet, he wanted to overwhelm the defense forces located at each of the locations. He decided it was best to only send half of the dreadnoughts to those targets so that he still had more than enough to defend against any possible retaliation or against a Federation invasion if Miya succeeded in convincing them to launch an attack.

Armani started to feel giddy with anticipation as he put in the number of ships at each location. He would send fifty ships each to Luminaire and High Sanctus which was more than sufficient to overwhelm any defense forces at those locations. The remaining two hundred and fifty ships would be sent to the frontlines against the Federation's forces. Since the program would have the dreadnoughts not be taking any prisoners nor programmed to retreat, the ships would stay on the battlefield till the very end, but they would report their progress in their fights as they happened. Only he could deactivate the protocol, but he would have no reason to do so.

He looked at the time. There were two minutes remaining before five o'clock. The last question the protocol asked was when to deploy the dreadnoughts. He put five o'clock down and activated the protocol.

This would be the hour that Armani would finally get revenge against his enemies, or at least his foreign ones. The question he now had to deal with is what he was going to do about Alpha's actions. While getting rid of his Tribe would be a rather fitting punishment for his crime of insulting Armani, there was some truth in Alpha's words. Getting rid of the Lupus Tribe that Alpha was part of would be just as detrimental as losing the militant Aspergillus Tribe. Since the Lupus Tribe primarily are made up of technicians among a few other roles, their extinction would result in disrepair of the Dominion's technology. Also, this was the actions of a clone, not the Tribe's Chief like Miya or Ebony. He would have to think about Alpha's punishment a bit more thoroughly. He would normally send security to arrest and execute him, but with the security normally done by the Aspergillus who were gone, this was no longer an option.

Armani was beginning to think that Alpha may have been right about the hasty decision to execute the Aspergillus as well as the Tigris. Their execution has shown to be more of a problem to the Dominion than he had realized. What was he thinking?

Armani suddenly had a large headache, and he dropped to the floor holding his head in agony. He rarely had a headache, but when he did, it was due to his sudden doubts about his actions regardless of being in a clone body. Was this punishment from the red god for doubting his divine will?

Armani took deep breaths and tried to clear his head of doubt. The headache started to let up to the point he was able to get back on his feet, using the altar to help himself up. If the will of the red god was for those two Tribes to perish for their disobedience, the Armani needed to stop doubting the red god's actions and trust in them. Armani has gotten this far by following the red god's will, and he needed to continue to follow it in order for his Dominion to prosper.

There was no turning back now. His Dominion will destroy the heretics and sinners of the star cluster, and Armani will reign under the guidance of the red god.

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*Briefing Room, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Unclaimed Space
Planet W-001-5 Orbit, W-001 System, Western Region, 3 Light-Years from Ruber System
5:00pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“THAT’S what the standard Republic ships look like?!”

The *Templar* with the assistance of the *Heaven’s Arrow* had just arrived in the W-001 System to rendezvous with the Republic’s Seventh Fleet. As the two vessels transitioned into the system through the portal created by the *Heaven’s Arrow’s* portal drive, the Republic’s Seventh Fleet was waiting in orbit nearby.

Miya along with the former Chiefs were in the briefing room with Colonel Blair watching the jump from the screens mounted into the wall. While they were sitting down around the table watching the jump, Miya was on her feet when she saw the Republic fleet in front of them. The designs and shapes of the ships were nothing like what she expected, nor the gold and white paintjobs they had. They were completely different from the *Templar’s* design.

“You didn’t know they looked like that?” Blair asked, puzzled by Miya’s abrupt outburst.

“No,” Miya said as she sat back down. “I was expecting something similar in design to this stealth vessel.”

“This ship was built only a couple of years ago. Those ships, or at least most of those you see, have been around for more than three decades. Only the smallest ships you see in that fleet have been around for about a year by comparison.”

Miya studied the ships briefly before a small windowed screen appeared on the main screen. Tora was on it with a stern look on her face.

“Colonel Blair,” she said, “*we are going to link in Admiral Tyler of the Federation Dreadnought Heaven’s Arrow and Admiral Trent of the Republic Battleship Marshal to the briefing room. Is Miya and her entourage ready to begin the briefing?*”

“Yes, Captain,” Miya said. “We are ready to begin.”

“*Very well, Miss Miya. I’m linking them in.*”

Tora looked to her right and nodded at someone off the screen. Two other screens suddenly appeared on the main screen. One of them was a feed from Admiral Tyler who Miya and the former Chiefs had met. The other person was someone she had not met before. It was an older Human male, his uniform rather militaristic looking by comparison. Miya at that moment remembered a detail in her meeting with the Federation president. Amarria, the Republic citizen who was studying the Federation firsthand, was the daughter of the Republic’s Seventh Fleet’s flag officer. Was this gentleman that man?

“*Greetings, Chief Miya,*” Trent said. “*I am Admiral Trent of the Novus Initium Republic’s Seventh Fleet. I believe you have already met my daughter Amarria during your meeting with President Shea, correct?*”

“I have, Admiral Trent,” Miya said. “You must be very proud of your daughter.”

“I am, but we need to put that on hold for now. We all know why we are here, and that is to arrest Armani Draco. The question is what we will be expecting when we get there.”

“I have the rest of the Federation assault force listening in on my end,” Admiral Tyler said. “This way, they know what to expect when they arrive as well.”

“Very well,” Miya said. “Since we have over ten minutes, I’ll try to go over as much detail as I can.”

Before Miya could continue, she noticed Trent suddenly looking to his right at someone off-screen. Trent was suddenly wide-eyed as someone was speaking to him, though whoever he was talking to was not very distinguishable over the line.

“Is something wrong, Admiral Trent?” Miya asked.

Trent looked back at Miya with a serious look on his face.

“Whatever we are about to do,” Trent said, “we need to put a rush on it. I just got an emergency communication from headquarters. A Dominion fleet has invaded both the Lumen and Sanctus Systems.”

“WHAT?!” Miya said as she got on her feet again. “But...that’s impossible! There’s no way Armani would have been able to have those on board learn how to operate those vessels in such a short amount of time!”

“Whatever the reason, he was able to send fifty dreadnoughts to both locations. Between the First through Third Fleets and any other fleets at Luminaire as well as the orbital defenses and planetary shields, they should be able to handle that many dreadnoughts in Lumen. It’s the planet High Sanctus I’m more worried about as it is not as heavily defended in terms of ships. The Supreme Chancellor is calling in reinforcements to defend High Sanctus from neighboring systems.”

“But what is so important about High Sanctus?” Tyler asked. “Why that planet?”

“That planet is the ‘capital’ of every religion in the Republic including the Great Maker faith the Federation is based off of. If Armani is making this out to be a holy war, it seems only natural he would send forces to attack there.”

“I guess that would make...wait a moment.”

Tyler looked off screen for a moment as he looked like he was getting a report as well. Miya was starting to become concerned that the attack on the Republic was not the only nation Armani planned to attack.

Tyler looked back at Miya.

“We are getting reports of similar attacks on our frontline forces,” Tyler said. “Multiple dreadnoughts are assaulting Federation worlds that were recently abandoned when the Dominion first retreated. However, it seems as though seize-and-capture is no longer Armani’s plan for Federation worlds.”

“What do you mean?” Trent asked.

“The Dominion’s dreadnoughts are firing on any habitable world they come across in those systems. They are trying to decimate the entire surface of those planets and we don’t have enough ships on the frontlines to stop that many dreadnoughts.”

“I’m willing to bet the ships sent to Lumen and Sanctus have the same orders. The only way to stop this madness is by arresting Armani and get the dreadnoughts to halt their assault.”

“That’s only if they will listen once Armani is arrested,” Miya said. “I’m not sure how Armani was able to get so many ships fully crewed and operating to this point after he killed the Aspergillus Tribe, but the fact remains that he is still a threat to everyone in the star cluster.”

“Trent,” Tora said. *“There is something else to take into account in our case.”*

“What’s that?” Trent asked.

“The Dominion’s presence is now known to the Republic. That means the Republic Senate and the population is going to want answers and guess who they are going to ask now?”

“We’ll worry about that later, Tora. Let’s get started with the briefing and hurry to Tenebris Prime before things spiral further out of control. Besides, this might give us an advantage when we reach there.”

“How so?” Tyler asked.

“Depending on how many ships there are in the Dominion, there is a chance that this assault on two of our worlds and in the multiple systems on the Federation’s frontlines would reduce the forces present at Tenebris Prime.”

“I would not rely on that thought,” Tonya said as she stood up.

Trent, Tora, and Tyler looked at Tora with puzzled expressions on their faces.

“Who might you be, madam?” Trent asked.

“My name is Tonya, former Chief of the Aspergillus Tribe before my daughter took over the position.”

“I see. Am I assume you have knowledge of the overall size and strength of the Dominion’s forces?”

“That is correct. There are over seven hundred dreadnoughts in active service serving in the Dominion fleet last I checked.

Everyone on the screen and in the room except for Miya and the other former Chiefs were in shock upon hearing that number.

“There are *THAT* many dreadnoughts?!” Trent said.

“Why are you that surprised?” Tonya asked. “Doesn’t the Republic have that many ships in active service?”

“Well, we have more than that many ships but not of the size of those dreadnoughts! The problem is despite the number of Dominion ships attacking at multiple locations, the Dominion still has plenty to work with to defend their territory! The worst part is that more could arrive at Tenebris Prime if Armani suddenly calls for reinforcements. We would be overpowered quickly if we risk a prolonged engagement.”

“It would be in our best interest to jam communications,” Tora said. “This would give us time to complete the mission.”

“I can provide you with the military frequencies to optimize your jamming,” Tonya said. “This should help keep Armani from requesting any additional forces. However, Armani may use civilian channels or even the line used for preaching to request for help.”

“We can only jam so much before it affects our own communication lines either in part or in full, but we will do what we can to minimize any chance of additional ships arriving.”

“There is something that still bothers me,” Miya said. “How was Armani able to deploy so many ships so quickly when it should have taken more time to train people in the operation of those ships?”

“We will figure that out at a later time, Chief Miya,” Trent said. “Right now, we need to focus on our own operation. There is a chance we may find the answer to your question while we’re on the mission.”

“Very well. Let’s go over the layout of our forces and of our capital. We will tell you all we know so that you can capture and arrest Armani, and put an end to his madness”

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
5:04pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“I want every available ship to head here and to High Sanctus immediately!”

Drew was completely in shock. He knew that the operation to infiltrate and arrest Armani at Tenebris Prime was about to begin shortly, but the last thing he ever expected was for the Dominion to launch a preemptive assault against the Republic capital! He also never expected the Dominion to launch an assault on High Sanctus but he was quick to realize that Armani was making this out to be a war against both the state and the religions that forced him and his cult into exile. He wasn't overly concerned with the defense of Luminaire with five fleets currently in the system with two more jumping in from neighboring systems. There were also laser cannon orbital defense platforms and the powerful planetary shield which he knew the Dominion had no knowledge about.

His main concern was the defensive strength at High Sanctus. High Sanctus was an important location and there were defenses in place much like Luminaire, but despite the fact it was the location of the gate that connects to the Dellino System located in the Holy Lykan Republic, the number of ships defending that system were far less than at Luminaire. Only three fleets were present in that system: one that orbits High Sanctus, one on patrol within the system, and the last one serves as the customs fleet at the Dellino star gate. Even if the customs fleet and the patrol fleet were pulled from their duties to defend High Sanctus, none of the fleets are as large in number and composition to the ones at Lumen. While their combined numbers would have them outnumber the enemy ships, they were heavily outgunned and outclassed against fifty dreadnoughts in both size and armament.

Grand Admiral Mikey called Drew to inform him of what was transpiring in both locations, and Drew ordered for reinforcements from nearby systems to engage and repel the Dominion forces.

“I'm already on it, Chancellor,” Mikey said on Drew's terminal. *“I've ordered two more fleets to Luminaire, but I've ordered five more to engage enemy ships at High Sanctus.”*

“That's good, but will it still be enough against that many dreadnoughts?” Drew said. “My other concern is what the fleet commanders are thinking right now about these ships suddenly appearing and attacking us.”

“I told them to focus on defending our capital and High Sanctus for now, and that they will get a debriefing once the current crisis has been averted as to who they are.”

“That's going to happen regardless now. I can only imagine what Head Agent Aja is thinking about this situation. However, there is something else that still bothers me.”

“You told me about it earlier. The Aspergillus Tribe should have been exterminated rendering the Dominion's military strength severely hampered if not disabled. How is it then that they are able to launch such an offensive against us?”

“That is the concern I have, yes.”

“I'm wondering that, too. I'm getting reports that fighters and bombers have been launched from all of the dreadnoughts at both locations. Our frigates are picking them off at long range while the rest of the ships focus on the dreadnoughts.”

“I had concerns about anti-fighter combat, but at least it sounds like we have the means to engage them for now. However, I do want to have one or two dreadnoughts scanned at both systems. Is that possible?”

"It has been a few minutes since they arrived and we assessed the dreadnoughts' shield resistances accurately. They have little to no resistance to directed electromagnetic-based attacks and their shields are going down fast. Once they are down, I will order a couple of ships to scan them. I will try to get them to scan the fighters and bombers too, but what is it you are wanting them to scan for?"

"I want them to scan for lifeforms inside as well as genealogy of those on board. I want to see how fully crewed those ships are and if the Aspergillus were as wiped out as we were led to believe."

"Understood. Any word from the media agencies or the senators?"

"I told my secretary to screen those calls and to allow only you, Aja, or the ambassadors to communicate with me."

"I can understand me and Aja, but why the ambassadors?"

"With High Sanctus under attack and the star gate leading to Dellino in that system, I want to make sure that should the situation requires it that the Lykans are made aware of what is happening. I have already sent a request for the Dellino gate to be closed due to the assault and sent a message to Forneido about the situation. He hasn't contacted me yet."

"Very well. Let me get the order out about scanning the dreadnoughts and fighters. I will report their findings shortly."

Mikey saluted before ending the call. Drew leaned back in his chair to relax despite the current situation. We would never have imagined Armani launching this assault against the Republic so soon. If only the team on the *Cavalier* had not messed up on their exit from the Dominion's Central Database, they would not be in this situation.

Drew looked at the time. It would be another five minutes before the Seventh Fleet along with the *Templar* and the Federation Dreadnought that was with them would jump right to Tenebris Prime to arrest Armani. He was growing concerned that the ECM and stasis fields the Seventh Fleet would be using would not be enough if the dreadnoughts were as fully crewed and managed to reinforce the Dominion capital after they arrived. He could only hope that the infiltration team on the *Templar* is able to arrest Armani and bring a swift end to six and a half centuries of Armani's sadistic cult-based nation.

As Drew began to relax, his terminal activated, showing his secretary was doing voice only on the screen.

"Supreme Chancellor?" she said. *"I have Ambassador Forneido on the line. He wishes to speak with you urgently."*

Drew straightened up in his chair before pressing the respond button on his terminal.

"Put him through," he said.

A couple of seconds after saying that, Forneido's image appeared on the terminal screen. Forneido looked genuinely upset, but Drew did not know if it was due to the order to shut down the Dellino gate or the current attack by Dominion forces.

"Ambassador Forneido," Drew said. "I hope that this is important in light of the situation the Novus Initium Republic is facing right now."

"I've heard about these massive vessels attacking both Luminaire and High Sanctus," Forneido said. *"Any idea who they are and why they are attacking only those two locations? How did they even get this deep into your Republic's territory without detection?"*

"It's a long story, but these ships belong to a Human cultist nation that was created in the Southwestern Region over six hundred years ago. This cult twisted the Great Maker faith and believed that blood is the way to divinity going so far as to ingest it as their only means of

sustenance. I was not made aware of them or their possible existence until the time of the Yintaka Incident. We believed they may have been responsible for the radiation that can alter the mind, but we have recently determined that the founder of the cult is in fact currently being affected by the same radiation as well.”

“Wait, their founder is currently being affected? What are you talking about? I was told Humans don’t live past the age of one hundred and forty years without cybernetics, and even that only extends their lifespan so long.”

“You remember the cybernetic technology the Caminos use to transfer the minds of their ships’ pilots once a ship is destroyed?”

“Yes...wait. You’re not saying...”

“The cult developed the technology first but only for use with the founder of the cult to transfer his mind to a fresh clone body when his current body has aged long enough. However, you and I both know that radiation is not transferable which is why we believe this founder under the name of Armani Draco may possess something that subjects him to that radiation each time he is in a new clone. It may also be the reason why he transfers every twenty to forty years based on what we have heard. There is more to this story, but now is not the time to share it in its entirety. I will make an announcement once the current crisis is averted.”

“While I am confident that your forces here at Luminaire can defend this planet, I have my concerns about the forces at High Sanctus. I know those forces are not on the same level of strength as they are here.”

“I know, and I have ordered more ships to be sent there, but even I have my concerns if reinforcements don’t arrive in time.”

“That is the reason I am contacting you. My Prime Minister is aware of what is happening and is offering any military support he can against such large adversaries.”

“He wants to send ships against such vessels without knowing what the situation is? I’m sorry for saying this, but that seems rather foolhardy to do so, doesn’t it?”

“Maybe so, but he knows the value of High Sanctus and what those Humans from there have done to help revise and renew our faith. We owe those on that planet our divine gratitude and the Prime Minister is prepared to defend it for that reason.”

Drew took a deep breath. He needed all the help they could get right now, and they were only one jump away via the Dellino gate. If the Dominion or rather Armani was not prepared for what the ships of the Novus Initium Republic were capable of, there was no way he knew what the Holy Lykan Republic’s ships were capable of either.

“Very well,” Drew said. “I will open the Dellino gate and allow your forces to assist in the defense of High Sanctus. However, I recommend ammo that does EM and explosive damage. Those ships have shield hardeners resistant to thermal and kinetic damage but are weak against EM and explosive.”

“Understood. Are you okay with us killing the Humans who are on board?”

“Based on intelligence we gathered, they are only clones so there is no problem.”

“I have a feeling that when you found out about this cult, you sent the Templar and the Cavalier to gather this information, but we will discuss that later. I’ll let the Prime Minister know immediately of your decision.”

“Thank you, Forneido.”

Forneido nodded in acknowledgement of Drew’s thanks before the screen went dark. Drew took a deep breath. Whether this help from the Lykans will be appreciated by the public or not is something he is going to have to deal with. Before he could ponder how he was going to

handle this matter, Drew received a call again from Mikey. He wondered if Mikey had already gotten the results of those scans he had requested.

Drew pressed the respond button on his terminal and an image of Mikey appeared. Mikey was in shock when he appeared on the screen. Drew was puzzled as to why Mikey had that expression on his face.

“Grand Admiral?” Drew asked. “What’s the matter?”

“Sir,” Mikey said, “*we scanned the ships, but you are not going to believe what we found on board!*”

“Go on. Was I right about there being Aspergillus still on board?”

“*From what we scanned, you were completely off, sir!*”

“Please explain what you mean by that.”

“*Sir, we are reading people on board, but there are no lifesigns on board! Those ships and fighters are being completely automated!*”

“They’re WHAT?!”

Drew stood up on his feet out of his chair and slammed both hands down on his desk.

“Are you telling me there is no one alive on board those ships?!”

“*There’s no lifesigns at all! The fleet at High Sanctus is confirming that as well!*”

“That damn Armani! What did he do?! I want every one of those ships destroyed! Aim for the missile silos in their midsection to destroy them once their shields are gone! Tell the customs fleet to open the Dellino gate and join the fray. We are going to get reinforcements from the Lykans at High Sanctus and they will be along shortly. Make sure our forces inform them of this development.”

“*Yes, sir.*”

The call with Mikey disconnected. Drew looked at the time on the terminal. The operation into Tenebris Prime was about to start in one minute. There was not enough time to inform the infiltration forces of this development. Drew could only hope that the dreadnoughts at Tenebris Prime were not operated autonomously like the assault forces. If the dreadnoughts can fight at full capacity with their fighters and bombers active, their fight was going to be more difficult than they could imagine.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier, Unclaimed Space, On Route to Ruber System SW-021 System, Southwestern Region, 51 Light-Years from Ruber System
5:10pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Are you telling me this all happened within the past twenty-four hours?!”

Captain Luke was beside himself. While the *Cavalier* was to maintain communications silence until they reached the Ruber System, they had received a transmission from the RCIA headquarters in Luminaire. Head Agent Aja contacted the ship directly, bringing Luke and his crew up to date with the latest developments and the current situation that was unfolding in both Luminaire and in High Sanctus. Luke was practically beside himself. He knew that the mission Brenda and Lakia were on was a screw-up upon them exiting the Dominion’s Central Database, but he never knew that it would lead to the series of events that were transpiring right now.

There was some solace in the fact that the *Templar’s* crew also made themselves known to the Draco Federation, which means that both ships botched their missions. However, it was no excuse for what had happened.

It also appeared that the Republic was made aware of the listening posts along the Dominion border thanks to the Dominion's Tigris Chief who defected to the Federation. However, since the Dominion was now attacking the Republic, there was no longer a point of avoiding communications leading to Head Agent Aja to contact the *Cavalier* directly.

"That is correct, Captain Luke," Aja said on the main screen. "I know that the failure of your team to keep their presence from being known is frustrating, not to mention the purpose of your entire mission for that matter being redundant since we got the information from both the Federation and from the Tigris Chief. However, the fact is that we had to address the matter of the Dominion one way or another. Since they made the first move, they have legitimize the action we are about to take against them."

"What action are you referring to?" Luke asked.

"There is a joint operation that is about to take place between the Federation's First Fleet and our Seventh Fleet along with the Templar. They are to jump into the heart of the Dominion directly and place Armani under arrest for violation of the Republic Charter and for taking aggressive military action against the Republic. Any charges the Federation comes up with will have to be addressed once they are recognized as a sovereign nation, but that will have to wait until after the current crisis is averted."

"Then what is it you want us to do? We are still six days away from Ruber and we can't turn around in time to reach Tenebris Prime which is now eight days away."

"From what you have told me, there are some records that are lacking from the information the Federation was given, such as the blood farms for example. Transmit that data to Ruber as we will use that information to bring up further charges against Armani."

"My only concern is the possibility of him jumping to a new clone body while he is being arrested. However, I can only assume he needs some sort of implant or device in order to do so."

"Most likely he does need one, but that will be up to the team from the Templar to address. I'm just informing you of what is going on so that you all are not surprised when you arrive in six days of the events that have transpired. However, I do recommend you speak with both Brenda and Lakia about what that stunt of theirs has caused."

"I understand and I will. I will also transmit the data we recovered from the Dominion's Central Database immediately. Is there anything further that needs to be addressed?"

"I'm not sure if you do so being the son of a religious figure, but if you pray to either the Great Maker like your father or to another deity, please do so for the safety of both Luminaire and of High Sanctus. I would at least do it for your father who resides on High Sanctus."

"Believe me, I know and I am concerned about this assault on that world, especially the position he holds in the Great Maker faith. I was raised in that faith because of him while my mother guided me into my current military career. I can only hope and pray that our forces will protect my father from these blood-suckers."

"That is what we all hope we can do: protect against those who seek to do harm. I will contact you once we have resolved the current conflict. You all have a safe trip back to Ruber."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Aja's transmission disconnected. Luke leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath.

"Communications," he said, "transmit all the data we have from the Dominion's Central Database to our base in Ruber."

"Understood, sir," the communications officer said.

Luke quietly prayed to himself for the safety of his father from the Dominion's invasion. He knew his mother is too far away in the Serenus System near the Northern Region to aid in the

defense of High Sanctus, but it was probably better that way. He would rather not see both of them in the same system where either or both of them could end up dead at the hands of the Dominion.

For a moment, Luke contemplated the events that were unfolding in the Dominion, the Republic, and even the Draco Federation. Part of him wondered if some divine power or influence had put these events into play. He began to wonder if the Great Maker decided that instead of the Republic moving around in secret when it came to finding and dealing with the Dominion and the Federation, mistakes were made to make the Republic's presence known to the two "rogue" nations. The thought made him laugh a little inside as it would not be logical to blame the events on an unseen entity such as a deity.

However, while he was thinking about it, he knew he needed to address the two people who were responsible for setting in motion during their mission these events that were currently transpiring right now in relation to the Dominion's invasion. It was time to bring them up to date with what the consequences of their actions have caused.

He pressed a button on his chair's left console, activating the internal ship speakers.

"Lakia and Brenda," he said, "please report to the bridge immediately."

He turned off the speakers and reclined in his chair. It was going to be interesting to see their reactions to this turn of events.

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*Inner Sanctuary of His Majesty Pope Armani, Central Tower, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:10pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

"When did these sinners develop all of this technology?"

Armani was watching the feed from his forces at both the Planet Luminaire and at the Planet High Sanctus. What he was witnessing through the video feeds was not what he expected to see at either location. From what he could visually gather from the battles, the Republic lacked any ships longer than a mile in length. Their designs surprised him further with their curved hulls that were white with gold accents. These ships were drastically different than the ships the Republic used more than six centuries ago. Part of him expected the Republic's ships to be different in their design, but he never anticipated such gaudy designs. What also bothered him was the fact that every ship regardless of their size was identified as using laser-based weapons, and that his ships were registering directed electromagnetic strikes against his forces' shields. Their shields were dropping rapidly against that type of attack and there was nothing that could be done about it at this time as there were no shield hardeners developed for that type of attack.

The surprises for him did not stop there. There were orbital laser cannon defense platforms in orbit over both locations that were far larger than what the Republic ships were using, and their strikes were far more devastating against his ships than the lasers from the Republic ships. Four dreadnoughts at Luminaire and one at High Sanctus have registered complete shield failure and the Republic ships were aiming for the missile silos in the middle of those ships. Armani knew that if the missiles were detonated in that section of the ship, they would cause a chain reaction destroying the vessel outright. It was one flaw he knew about in their design, but he allowed it as it meant bringing more firepower against their enemies. However, it also meant that the Republic was well-informed about the dreadnoughts' armaments than they should be, convincing him further of their infiltration at Tenebris Prime.

The biggest shock, and the one was not aware would ever be developed, was the planetary shield at both planets. The dreadnoughts have been firing on the shield with almost everything short of their primary weapons, but the shield strength shows that there is little to no drop in strength at all. He also noticed this same trend with the Republic's ships. Their shields would begin to weaken but suddenly get strong again as if additional power was used to boost their strength. Between the strength of the shields of both the Republic ships and the planets, not to mention the laser weapons rapidly weakening the dreadnoughts' shields, the quick victory by sheer force and numbers that Armani envisioned was quickly fading at Luminaire.

High Sanctus, however, was a different story. While there were multiple ships at Luminaire, High Sanctus only showed one fleet until a couple of minutes ago when two fleets arrived. It was evident that High Sanctus was not considered a "high-priority target" to defend by the Republic, though it was enough for it to have a planetary shield and orbital defenses. If the fleets there can be dealt with somehow, he could at least achieve victory at High Sanctus.

The remaining Chiefs have been trying to contact him for several minutes. They were obviously told about the sudden absence of a few hundred ships in several areas, and that there were no communications from those ships about their sudden deployment. The Chiefs he didn't care to address right now, but he knew there would be no communication from anyone on board the dreadnoughts. In order to conserve power for combat, the computers on board deactivated life support and decompressed their interiors.

That is the function of the Legion Protocol: for unmanned ships to fight for the glory of His Majesty Pope without question or fear, and to remove the weak and fearful that are considered "extra baggage" from his mighty warships.

However, while he has received reports on successes on the frontlines against the Federation, this development at both Luminaire and High Sanctus was not expected. The only ones to blame is Alpha and his team's dismal attempt at gathering and deciphering information from the Republic. If he was better informed about the Republic's military capabilities, both battles against the Republic worlds and forces would be going quite differently. He was beginning to think he needed to send more ships to overpower the Republic's defenses.

As he pondered this thought, a notification displayed on his tablet. A proximity alarm had gone off in high orbit over Tenebris Prime indicating portals were opening above the capital's location. Considering that all dreadnoughts log their jumps in advance before jumping to any location using their portal drives, the fact the proximity alarms were going off made it quick for Armani to conclude that Miya was successful in convincing the Draco Federation to launch an assault on Tenebris Prime.

Armani brought up the video feed from one of the orbital surveillance satellites to see what kind of force he was dealing with. He spotted seven portals opening in upper orbit with dozens of Federation ships coming through. Behind them were a total of four dreadnoughts and three supercarriers that were responsible for generating the portals. Armani began to snicker.

"You all would jump into the home of those you betrayed with such a paltry force?" he said. "You are more foolish than I..."

Before he completed his sentence, he noticed another portal opening in low orbit just above the capital. He expected it to be another group of Federation ships that were coming through the portal, until the ships passing through were not Federation ships at all. Instead, the gold and white hulls of Republic vessels suddenly appeared, starting with small craft before a battleship-sized vessel passed through. It was followed by a Federation dreadnought that had opened the portal for them.

“No,” Armani said in shock before anger started to swell in him. “You traitors had allied yourselves with that sinful Republic?! I thought being traitors to my ideals was a grave sin, but now this?! You have allowed those sinners to darken my Dominion with their filth and for that you all will die this day!!”

Armani brought up the Legion Protocol once more on the tablet, preparing to activate it on every dreadnought that was in the Tenebris system. He quickly programmed the targets to be the Federation and Republic fleets in orbit over the planet and to continue to engage them until all targets were destroyed. He would record the footage as a sign for all those who defy his rule what happens to those do not follow the red god.

“With this,” he said maniacally as he was about to execute the command, “you all will die at the hands of the messenger of the red god!”

Armani pressed the button to execute the command. The system, however, responded with an error message on the screen. Armani was suddenly dumbfounded.

“What is this?” he asked, wondering what was going on. “Why am I getting an error?”

He pressed the execute button several times but continued to get the error message each time. Armani’s frustration began to mount once more.

“Why won’t this protocol execute?!” he yelled. “What in the world is going on here?! There can’t be a problem with the system! Not now!”

He ran a system diagnostic, wondering if there was a program error or a code error that caused it not to execute. While the diagnostic ran, he noticed that the footage was no longer active from orbit. The last thing he saw were the dreadnoughts that were still crewed with inexperienced combat officers and crew on board approaching the enemy fleets. He knew they were not going to last long against such a force. The Federation ships being here were bad enough, but the footage of the battles at Luminaire and High Sanctus were not shown to anyone else including the crew on those dreadnoughts. They had no idea what they were about to encounter once the Republic ships engaged them.

The diagnostic was soon completed and found no errors in the system or the program, but it did register an error in the communications system. It detected that there was an active jammer pointed right at the capital from an unknown source, thus communications were down including satellite footage.

Suddenly starting to panic, he tried to look at the feed of the battle at both Luminaire and High Sanctus, only to find they went dark as well. He had lost all communications with the attacking ships.

“Oh, no,” Armani said as he started to shake in fear. “This cannot be happening! Without an active signal to connect those ships with the system here, those ships will...”

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