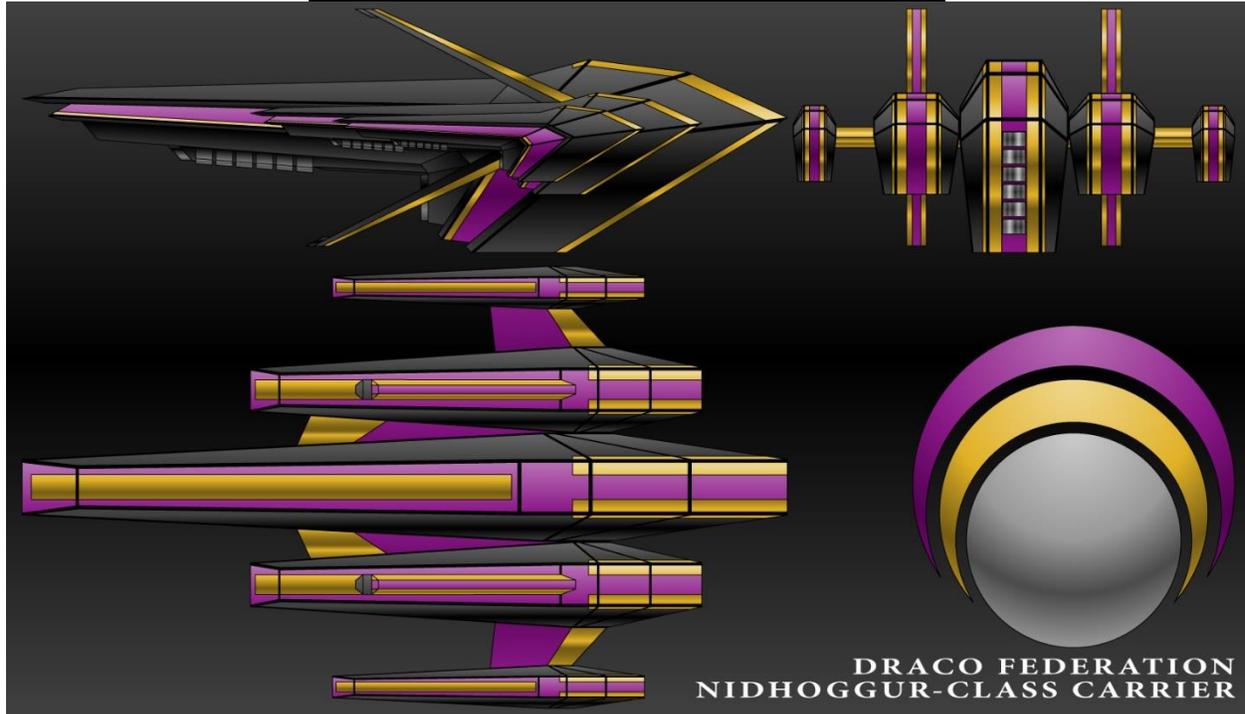


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VI: The Nations of Blood and Darkness



PART 6

Bridge, R.N.S. Marshal, Paladin-Class Battleship
Ruber-to-Griseo Star Gate, Planet Ruber VIII Orbit, Ruber System
12:37pm, October 4, 5434 A.D. (The Next Day)

“We have arrived in the Ruber System, sir.”

Lieutenant Commander Diana announced the *Marshal's* arrival in the Ruber System as the battleship began to clear the star gate it jumped out of. In the ancient Latin language, “ruber” means “red,” and the system was named that for one specific reason. Near the edge of the system located along the border was a large red nebula. It was a visual means to know where the Novus Initium Republic ended and where both the Southwestern and Western Regions began. The nebula could be seen from nearby star systems with little effort. Thankfully, the nebula appeared to not affect the stealth ships’ warp drives when they pass through it.

To Trent, however, it felt more like the fact that the Tenebris, whether the Federation or the Dominion, were behind such a veil. Considering it was red and the Tenebris worshiped blood, the color was far too appropriate. Trent was becoming more concerned about his daughter Amarria volunteering for this mission. While he could have talked to her about it while they were on their way here, he felt his place was on the bridge till they reached their destination. Besides, he had never been to this edge of Republic space, though he had never seen all the star systems that make up the Republic either.

The *Marshal* had to keep moving as the rest of the fleet in groups would soon be jumping through the star gate behind them.

“Understood,” Trent said. “Continue on to the RCIA station. You have the coordinates?”

“Locked in, sir,” Diana said.

“Then let’s see what such a facility looks like. Engage warp drive.”

“Engaging warp drive now.”

The *Marshal* turned its bow in the direction of the nebula, but Trent had a feeling they would not be entering the red gaseous cloud. As the *Marshal* engaged the warp drive, the swirls and streams of distorted space surrounded the ship as it flew towards its destination, leaving the star gate it just came through behind.

“Lieutenant Commander Sierra,” Trent said, “inform the cruisers to head for the Ruber IV station. The destroyers and frigates will head for the Ruber V station.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Sierra said.

Trent had done his research on the system before their arrival. The Ruber System may be on the fringe of Republic space, but that does not mean it isn’t populated. Two habitable planets orbit around the large orange star out of thirteen planets. The inhabited planet closest to the star, Ruber IV, is home to nearly seven hundred million people. However, the only attraction the planet has for any possible tourists is the view of the red nebula during certain times of the year at night. Many of the planets on the edge of Republic space have a hard time having some distinction and draw of both tourists and those wanting to move away from the highly populated “core” worlds that they sometimes must create unique attractions or reduce the cost of living on those planets to bring in more people. When Trent was stationed in Tranquillus, there was not a lot of draw to that system either before the State and former Kingdom forces arrived there. While that system now serves as a “gateway” system to the State and draws more business, many systems on this side of the Republic don’t have that luxury or attraction.

Considering who was on the other side of that red nebula, Trent doubted that anyone in this system wanted that kind of attention if war broke out.

The other planet, Ruber V, is further from the star but still in the “habitable” zone. It is one of the few icy worlds that people could still live on. While the number of permanent residents there equal two hundred million, it is the only local location that offers a variety of winter-like sporting options on this side of the Republic due to the year-round winter. There are areas around the planet’s equator that don’t have ice and snow and most of the permanent residents live in that zone. It is believed by many that the combination of both the red nebula and the winter sports options of Ruber V are the main attractions to this system.

However, there is a small fleet stationed here in the system. There is a military installation above both planets, but the fleet only consists of eight destroyers and four frigates. Systems such as these are finding their destroyers being exchanged for a pair of frigates due to their lower cost and their short operational range. This system originally had ten destroyers, but two have already been replaced with four frigates. The exchanged destroyers are sent to strengthen the borders of the Republic along the borders with the Empire, the Mandate, and the State in the event and war would, for whatever reason, break out again. The thought of a full-size fleet in a system such as this one would raise a lot of panic and suspicion considering the “Tranquillus Scandal” as some have come to call it. Unfortunately for Trent, he knew that their suspicions would come true once word of the Tenebris-based nations became known.

Thankfully, Grand Admiral Mikey has informed the local forces in the system that the Seventh Fleet was here to serve as a “precaution” should the stealth ships find something in the Western and Southwestern Regions. It was no secret that the stealth vessels operated out of the Ruber System to be as transparent with the public here as much as possible. The only thing Trent foresaw as being a problem would be the two military stations in this system being able to house

and supply his fleet and their crews. Grand Admiral Mikey had stated that increased supplies and logistics would be directed to this system to accommodate, but the Grand Admiral also made it clear that the local forces were only to participate with the Seventh Fleet if the need arose. The main responsibility of the local forces is the safety and security of the local civilian residents and their worlds. Trent can bolster their defenses with his fleet, but he cannot order the local forces away from the planets unless it was vitally important. Trent understood this and accepted it along with the local fleet commander. Trent had not been told who this fleet commander was but considering the duration of time the stealth ships would be away on their missions, that would give him time to become acquainted.

“We are approaching the RCIA facility now, sir,” Diana said. “Dropping out of warp.”

The *Marshal* began to decelerate. The swirls and fluctuations of space began to disappear as the ship approached a planet that was labeled Ruber XII. The planet was a gas giant with shades of blue and aqua and a small ring of asteroids in orbit. The RCIA facility quickly came into view as the *Marshal* finally dropped out of warp. The structure was in the shape of a geometrical black diamond with the outermost edge lined with windows and ports. The top of the station was covered in spires, most of which were communications equipment for long-range transmissions. The station was not very large in size so there were no hangars large enough for ships. Instead, ships had to dock externally as evident by the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* being visible on the outside, connected by said docking ports.

“Hail the station,” Trent said. “See about requesting permission to dock.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Sierra said.

“Do you think they will allow us to dock, sir?” Captain Dani asked. “This is an RCIA facility, and they may not want our ship to do so.”

“Maybe,” Trent said. “I’ve been wondering about that on the last stretch of this trip. Of course, I thought the station would be bigger.”

“I have to say, though, this is the first time we get to see the stealth vessels. You were in command of the *Templar* during the majority of the First Interstellar War, correct?”

“While I’m sure the RCIA still wants me to deny that even now, I was in command of that vessel during our incursion into the former Kingdom territories.”

“Do you miss being in command of her?”

Trent paused for a moment to reflect on that matter.

“While I know I was instrumental to our victory in the end with that ship,” Trent said, “I don’t miss her that much. I made mistakes while in command and the only reason I was given command of her in the first place was due to the Lykans developing a clone of me and forcing me to withdraw from the Navy to stop the clone. I was only able to return to the Navy after the war concluded because one of my teams destroyed the cloning facility and my DNA code along with it. To me, that ship is just a reminder of my actions, both good and bad, and the fact I was forced to work with the RCIA once again.”

“That’s right, I forgot about the fact that the ship was responsible for the destruction of stations in orbit of the State’s original home planets, stations that used a pseudo-antidote for a drug introduced through the air on the population. Their destruction was the cause of millions of lives being lost.”

“Exactly why I don’t miss that ship. I’ve been relieved of responsibility since there was a lack of information involving the drug and the pseudo-antidote when we investigated those stations, but that action has affected me for the longest time. I guess you could say that was the worst decision I had ever made in my career.”

“Sir,” Sierra said, “the station is refusing to allow us to dock. They want the RCIA group to use a shuttle to land on the station. They only want a pilot to go along to bring the shuttle back aboard.”

“I’m not surprised,” Trent said. “Why would they allow for an entire battleship to dock when a shuttle would be faster to go in and out to hide any further secrets? Sierra, tell them we acknowledge their request. I will pilot the shuttle. I want to have a moment with my daughter before I see her off. Dani, hold the ship here till I return.”

“Yes, Admiral. I wish I could see your daughter before you and her leave. My I join you in the hangar at least?”

“I don’t see why not. Commander Glenn, you have command until Dani returns.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” Glenn said.

Trent and Dani got up from their seats and headed for the elevator. Trent pressed the call button and after ten seconds, the elevator arrived. The doors opened and the two of them stepped inside.

“Hangar Two,” Trent said.

The elevator gave an acknowledgement chime and closed the doors. The elevator began to move downwards some distance, and then it began to move sideways towards the midsection of the battleship.

“So,” Dani said, “I never did ask about your family as I did not feel like it was my business, but what does your daughter do for a living?”

“I don’t mind answering that,” Trent said. “She works as a historian at the Central Library in Luminous. She always had a thing for the history of our nation.”

“Would you say she is passionate about it?”

“Oh, very much so. Her favorite part of Republic history is the Expansion Era, the push for colonization and exploration into the frontier of the star cluster. I can sympathize with her; it must have been an exciting time in the lives of those who ventured forth into the unknown.”

“An excitement that has been lost since the Senate put an end to further expansion. Even now, exploration is not as exciting as it is terrifying based on what you told us about the Tenebris and what the stealth ships found out there. It feels like the further out we go from the confines of our Republic, the more likely we are to find something dangerous out there. It makes me wonder what is beyond the magnetic barrier that surrounds the inaccessible Southern Region.”

“We all have wondered about that for a while but if we cannot get through, I doubt whoever or whatever resides there cannot get through, either. As for the part about the exploration, you may be right. I have to say, though, that thanks to the maps of both the Federation and the Dominion, the clear majority of the Western and Southwestern Regions have been explored. It kind of takes the excitement out of what is out there, though there are systems neither nation has explored yet. There is also the Northwestern Region, though we all know how sparse the number of stars there are in that region.”

“I have to ask, but aside from learning the history of the Federation, is there another reason why your daughter volunteered for this mission with the RCIA?”

“It is because she was the one who brought them up again when she was researching the Expansion Era. It was apparently flagged by the RCIA and she got involved with that agency because of it. She feels a bit responsible for bringing them back up. Personally, I think it was inevitable. The RCIA did quite a bit to cover them up but even they cannot alter or falsify records in the Central Library. If we had never found out about them again, they could have been right on our doorstep and we would not have a clue who they were, why they would attack us, or wonder

why in the world Humans have made a nation outside the Republic. Granted the public at large doesn't even have a clue about them at all and it will remain that way until we have more information about both the Dominion and the Federation. The RCIA has given permission for my wife, Anchorwoman Laura, to broadcast a special report on them once all the information has been obtained."

"Laura is your wife? That surprises me."

"It does? I thought a good number in the military knew about that based on how she reacted on the news that one time when my clone was stealing that destroyer?"

"We never saw the news. Another one of Coleman's restrictions he called 'propaganda spreading garbage.' The only news we got was from Navy headquarters when we needed it."

"I figured that would be the case."

"Still, the fact that Coleman was a descendant of those that helped the Tenebris escaped was a bit surprising, and yet for seem reason not as much."

"You now have a reason for his actions and behaviors along with his grandsons. It just was not the reason you and the rest of the bridge officers were expecting to hear."

"Maybe so. I was guessing it was something more to do with his childhood or something along those lines. The fact that his actions were that deeply rooted for generations is something I'm having a hard time wrapping my mind around. It also has me concerned about how the Tenebris Dominion or the Draco Federation really are. The footage you showed us only gives us so much based on their actions, but their motives and agendas are still a mystery. I guess that is the mission all those people including your daughter are undertaking for those very reasons, right?"

"Exactly. Still, to think that both nations have not only survived but thrived in those regions without any outside help, at least in the case of the Dominion since the Federation has shown it has aliens among their nation."

"You're just surprised that there are those who might have the strength to oppose the Republic who are also Humans. There has not been another Human-created nation to oppose the Republic since its formation three thousand years ago, and yet here are not one but two nations that have developed apart from the Republic for over six centuries. It was one thing to fight aliens who were bent on our extinction, but to have to face fellow Humans whose nations have similar combat abilities as our own after living in peace with each other for so long almost feels like a return to Humanity's old destructive ways before the Luna Jump."

"I know, and that is what scares me. Granted, those nations' ancestors were the ones' who followed a perverted and detestable cult faith which led to these actions. If they were destroyed back then or at least arrested, we would not be facing such a scenario as we are now."

"So, what are your thoughts? What should be done about them?"

"I honestly don't know. There are so many things we don't know about the development of each nation. The major question we all must be asking ourselves is why they are fighting each other to begin with? Until we have the answers we need, we cannot make rash decisions."

The elevator slowed down as it reached Hangar Two located on the *Marshal's* port side. When it stopped, the doors opened to an adjacent hallway where the doors to the right led right to the hangar. Trent and Dani walked out of the elevator and towards the hangar bay doors which opened when they got close. Inside, a shuttle was resting on a raised platform near the outer hangar doors. Some of the people just outside of the shuttle's right-side door were waiting and chatting with each other. These were the same people at the meeting held at the RCIA headquarters including Blair, Tora, and Amarrria. Trent was starting to have some second

thoughts about flying these people over to the RCIA station knowing where they were going and what they were about to get themselves into. However, it was something he had to do. Hopefully nothing happens to his daughter on this mission, but he wanted to at least say some things to her in case this was the last time he sees her.

Amarria was the first person to take notice of Trent and Dani approaching the group. Everyone else looked their way after seeing Amarria glance their direction.

“Admiral Trent,” Tora said. “Did you come to see us off?”

Trent and Dani stopped short of the group.

“Actually,” Trent said, “I will be the one flying you all there.”

Everyone was surprised to hear Trent say that. For Amarria, the surprise wore off quickly.

“I understand,” Amarria said with a smile.

“Captain Dani,” Trent said, “this is my daughter, Amarria. Amarria, I want you to meet Captain Dani, Commanding Officer of the *Marshal*.”

Amarria approached Dani and extended her hand.

“A pleasure to meet you, Captain,” Amarria said.

Dani reached out and grabbed Amarria’s hand in a handshake.

“Good to meet you, too, Miss Amarria,” Dani said.

Both let go of their handshake.

“Admiral Trent told me a few things about you on the way here,” Dani said. “You have an appreciation for history. Of course, he also told me that your appreciation led to curiosity which eventually led to the situation we are facing right now.”

Amarria looked at Trent with an expression of dissatisfaction. Trent raised his right eyebrow and smiled because he knew she was not happy since he was right about what Dani had just said.

“That is true,” Amarria said while still looking at Trent, her tone being somber.

Amarria then looked back at Dani.

“However,” Amarria continued, “as I have stated, it was probably a good thing I did so. Otherwise, we would have continued to be oblivious to what was lurking in those regions until it was too late.”

“Personally,” Tora said, overhearing the conversation, “it is already too late when the Tenebris, regardless which group we are talking about, managed to establish their own government and military comparable to our own. They should have been obliterated along with their colony.”

“You say that,” Trent said, “yet the RCIA back then never bothered to continue the investigation after the Tenebris colony was destroyed, instead just covering it up. Should we highlight that epic failure by the RCIA that also led to the formation of said nations?”

Tora was about to say something but stopped herself as if she had no retort to Trent’s comment. By now, anyone involved in the RCIA with knowledge of the Tenebris knew of this failure by their agency in the past, especially Head Agent Aja who was alerted when Amarria was researching the subject. Tora may be proud of the agency she works for, but even she is not immune to the effects of such a failure.

“Regardless,” Tora finally said, “we need to depart. We have a mission to accomplish and we are wasting time with idle chatter.”

“Very well,” Trent said. “Everyone, please get aboard the shuttle.”

Trent turned to Dani.

“Captain,” Trent continued, “take the *Marshal* to the station at Ruber IV where the cruisers will be stationed. The shuttle has a warp drive system, so I will join up with you all there momentarily.”

“Understood, sir,” Dani said. “Have a safe flight.”

Dani saluted. Trent returned the salute. Dani turned and walked off the platform as Trent boarded the shuttle. As Trent walked up towards the cockpit from the center aisle, he was checking everyone’s seatbelts to make sure they were secure. It was an old habit of his from when he was a cadet many years ago. Amarria was near the front door to the cockpit.

“Amarria,” Trent said as he stopped at her row, “can you sit up front with me while we are in flight? I would like to talk to you one last time before I drop you all off.”

Amarria looked a bit puzzled at Trent’s request.

“Okay,” she said as she removed the seat belt harness.

Trent opened the cockpit door and stepped over to the left seat. Amarria came in after him and sat in the right seat as the door closed behind them. Once they strapped in their seat belt harnesses, Trent began the preflight checks to make sure the shuttle was ready for takeoff. Amarria didn’t have to do anything on her side as Trent could operate the shuttle on his own since it would be a short initial flight. As soon as the shuttle was active and ready to go, Trent activated the communications system on the shuttle.

“Shuttle Two-Seven-Six to *Marshal* Flight Control,” Trent said. “We are ready for takeoff.”

“*This is Flight Control,*” a female voice said on the intercom, “*You are cleared for departure. Have a safe flight, Admiral.*”

“Roger, Flight Control. Now departing hangar bay.”

Trent pulled back on the control stick on his left side, lifting the shuttle off the platform. He turned the shuttle to his left towards the hangar bay doors which were now open, the atmospheric shield preventing air from exiting into space. Trent moved the right throttle stick forward, making the shuttle move forward out of the hangar bay. Once the shuttle cleared the atmospheric shield, Trent turned the shuttle towards the right in the direction of the RCIA station. He increased the shuttle’s speed towards the station’s hangar bay.

As the shuttle started to make its way towards the station, Trent and Amarria noticed the *Marshal* turning right slowly, heading towards Ruber IV. While they would not see the ship going to warp once it faced that direction, a slight reflection of light appeared on the station’s surface indicating the activation of the *Marshal*’s warp drive.

Amarria looked towards her father.

“So, what did you want to talk to me about?” Amarria asked.

“While your mother had a hard time trying to get the words out during the meeting yesterday,” Trent said, “she and I both agree that we are very proud of you.”

“Really? You two are not mad about me going on this mission?”

“If there is one thing that we know, you crave the excitement and the intrigue of the Expansion Era. Going to an unknown foreign nation in an unexplored region of space would sort of qualify in that regards. Don’t get us wrong, we are terrified that you are going on this mission considering we don’t know the circumstances to the war being fought between the Dominion and the Federation. We are afraid of what happens if you get caught by local Federation forces while you are there.”

“I know, and I already have a plan in place if that happens. The biggest challenge I think we are going to face is how both nations are culturally. We know they cannot be the same as the

Republic. Most likely, the SAGATs will have to investigate their culture from a distance or while cloaked. They have to do that anyway considering that we need to create local attire to blend in openly.”

“You all will have fabrics and people to create the outfits?”

“We have the fabrics, but the clothes will be done through an automated method. The RCIA did not want to bring anyone else on board with the operation that they didn’t need to come up with some cover story for them.”

“Heh, makes sense.”

“I would also be lying if I said I wasn’t afraid of going. The historian in me is eager to learn about the history of the Federation but I’m scared of being in that setting without knowing what the Federation’s stance on the Republic is. Do they hate us, or do they even remember us? Do they even know we are still around?”

“Those are good questions. There is also one thing that has been bothering me since that briefing, though.”

“What’s that?”

“One of the reasons we went forward looking for the Tenebris in the first place was the possibility that they were responsible for the mind manipulation of the Lykan King a few centuries ago and the State Executive Council recently. However, they look like they have been at war with each other for a while now. Would either party really be focusing on us when they have their own affairs and conflicts to deal with?”

“Are you saying you think they are not responsible?”

“It is a possibility in light of what we watched yesterday.”

“Well, they could have done it to reduce our force’s numbers in a war with other nations to be on equal strength with their own forces if not weaker.”

“True but bear this fact in mind. If they are advanced enough to be able to manipulate the mind, they would also be able to use stealth craft like ours to travel to those worlds in secret. Those rifts or portals they use would not go undetected or unnoticed.”

“You make a valid point. The Lykans from back then would have detected such a rift and so would the State of today. However, if that is true, it raises the question as to who would have been responsible if not the Dominion or the Federation?”

“That is what scares me the most if they were not responsible.”

The shuttle began to enter the atmospheric shield of the RCIA station’s hangar bay. As the shuttle approached a landing platform and Trent set the shuttle down, he took a deep breath.

“Since I know I cannot disembark the shuttle here,” Trent said as he kept the engine running on the shuttle, “I will tell you to be safe, Amarria. I hope you don’t get discovered, but if you do, I hope that plan of yours will see you through.”

“Thank you, dad,” Amarria said as she removed the seat belt harness.

She went over and gave Trent a hug. While Trent could not return the hug, he brought his right hand up and lightly gripped her right arm that was over his chest. The hug was brief but meaningful to Trent and Amarria. Amarria backed away from Trent, waved goodbye, and proceeded out of the cockpit. Trent looked up at the cabin screen and saw her make her way out towards the right-side shuttle door. By this point, everyone else had already disembarked from the shuttle. Trent switched the view to the camera facing the right side of the shuttle as Amarria stepped down the ramp. Once she was clear of the shuttle, Trent pressed a button to close the door and retract the ramp. He took a deep breath to remain calm, hoping this was not the last time he was going to see her.

Fighting the tears that were trying to escape, Trent lifted off the platform and proceeded to exit the hangar bay. Once he exited the bay and flew to a safe distance, he laid in a course for the station orbiting Ruber IV and activated the warp drive, leaving the RCIA station and Amarria behind.

The tears won the fight during the flight.

* * * * *

*Hangar Bay #2, Covert Operations Station, Republic Central Intelligence Agency
Planet Ruber XII Orbit, Ruber System, Western/Southwestern Region Border
12:51pm, October 4, 5434 A.D.*

“I’m willing to bet he is in tears by now.”

Amarria smiled slightly, trying to fight back her own tears as the shuttle Trent was piloting warped away from the station. She took a deep breath and steadied herself. Now was not the time for tears as she needed to be determined for the upcoming mission. She turned and noticed her luggage that was unloaded from the shuttle before it departed. Everyone had grabbed theirs and was proceeding out of the hangar bay. She had a feeling that once they left the hangar bay that about half of them were going to a different ship than her. She then remembered that she had something to give to Brenda, the person who volunteered to go to the Dominion.

Amarria ran to her bag, grabbed a tablet out of the front pocket, and ran pulling her luggage behind her to catch up with the rest of the group.

“Brenda!” Amarria yelled out.

Brenda stopped and turned to face Amarria. Everyone else stopped as well to see why Amarria yelled out. Amarria caught up with the group and took a moment to catch her breath.

“Before I forget,” Amarria said, “this tablet contains a list of information that will be needed involving the Dominion as well as some of their existing information based on the original colonists.”

“A list of information?” Brenda asked as she received the tablet from Amarria. “Are we not just getting their history to understand the reason for their current war?”

“That was my understanding as well,” Tora said. “What more could we possibly need?”

“A nation is more than its history,” Amarria said. “A nation has a culture. This includes arts, foods, entertainment, literature, scientific discoveries, governmental structure, and historical and/or influential figures. If one wants to know how a nation managed to develop into what it is today, it is best to get ALL aspects of that nation.”

“Do you intend to use this information when a report is eventually given to the citizens of the Republic by your mother?”

“My mother will report what is needed in her special report, but this information will give us a better understanding as to who and what we are dealing with. Besides, doesn’t the RCIA specialize in having ALL of the information they can get their hands on?”

Tora raised an eyebrow and smiled.

“You make a rather valid point,” Tora said.

“Like I have been told,” Amarria said, “I’m excellent when it comes to history including that of the RCIA.”

“Very well, Amarria. We will get all of the information that we can but bear in mind that if we take too long getting the information or become too inquisitive in getting the information,

we will be discovered and have to abandon the mission, taking any information we were able to get.”

“I understand. Both nations’ histories will come first with everything else coming second in terms of priority.”

“As long as you understand that, then we are good to go.”

Tora looked over the entire group.

“Everyone,” she said, “once we pass through those doors out of this hangar bay, we will be going our separate ways for the duration of our mission. If you have anything further to say to one another before we go, now is the time.”

Everyone looked at each other. Amarria, not one for wanting to remain silent in this circumstance, looked over at Brenda and extended her right hand.

“I wish you luck, Brenda, in your mission,” Amarria said. “Make it back safe, okay?”

Brenda looked at Amarria and the hand she extended. She then smiled and took Amarria’s hand.

“You too, Amarria. We will see each other after this.”

They shook hands for a few seconds before letting go. Luke smiled.

“I concur with their sentiments,” Luke said. “Let us all make it back alive and see each other again.”

Everyone but Tora nodded in agreement. Tora looked over at Luke.

“What’s with the motivational statement?” Tora asked.

Luke looked back at Tora.

“I almost lost some of my SAGATs when we first discovered the Dominion and the Federation during a mission to recover data from the wrecks of ships from both nations. I don’t want any losses on my watch.”

“I see. It makes me wonder how you would handle yourself in a situation if such a thing were to occur?”

“That is none of your concern. I suggest we get to our ships. According to the map we were given, it is going to take the *Cavalier* over two weeks to reach our destination from here. Apparently, the Dominion decided to use their name of Tenebris for the name of their star system while calling their capital Tenebris Prime. Talk about a lack of originality.”

“It seems like it will take us that long to reach the Federation capital system of Draconia. The planet that is their capital has an odd name, though.”

“What’s it called?” Amarria asked.

“The world is called Propitius Esto,” Tora said.

“Propitius Esto? That means ‘Forgive Us’ in the ancient Latin language. Why wasn’t this mentioned in the meeting yesterday?”

“It didn’t seem important to mention it at the time.”

“Of course, it was important! You don’t just name a planet like that without good reason! Don’t you see what that means?”

“Now is not the time for...”

Before Tora could finish her sentence, Luke put his left hand on Tora’s right shoulder.

“Tora,” he said in a stern voice, “I want to hear what she has to say. Go on, Amarria.”

“When you are naming a planet ‘Forgive Us,’ it generally means you have done something wrong, something that you don’t want future generations to forget. Let’s look at the scenario we are presented with involving the Dominion and the Federation. The Draco family or

rather its descendants are fighting the Dominion who appears to be made up of the other five remaining families that followed the same cult religion.”

“That has been established, yes,” Tora said.

“Here is my theory. Considering how far their capitals are from each other, there is a chance that the Draco family proceeded on their own path away from those that once followed them. Doctor Armani Draco, the cult’s leader, died before the attack on their colony world. What if his son who did not see eye-to-eye with his father chose not to follow in his footsteps when they evacuated the planet? What if he felt some responsibility for allowing the kidnappings and the murders to occur because of his father’s research into the Human blood? What if he would go so far as to take his family and go their separate ways from the rest of the Tenebris followers?”

“Wouldn’t the rest of the Tenebris just follow the Draco family when they evacuated?” Luke asked.

“There is a possibility that they somehow managed to slip away without being noticed. It is hard to say what exactly happened in transit after their exile from Republic space. However, I doubt that if the Draco had been following the same cult views as Armani Draco that the aliens that have become a part of the Federation would have followed them.”

“Then are you saying that the Draco abandoned the cult they themselves first created?” Tora said. “How do you know that it is not the other way around?”

“Because the Dominion capital is still called Tenebris,” Luke said. “I said that a moment ago or were you not paying that much attention?”

Tora realized that Luke had indeed stated the Dominion capital name a moment ago. Feeling embarrassed for quickly forgetting that detail, she cleared her throat to dismiss her embarrassment.

“Then are you saying that the Draco named their planet as they did because they turned away from the cult religion they created as a means of recompense?” Tora asked.

“That does appear to fit the facts,” Amarria said.

“Then the big question is this: if the Draco have veered away from the religion that they had created, what are they worshipping now?”

“That is something we don’t have an answer to, at least not yet. Hopefully, we will get those answers on this mission as well as the details of what occurred that separated these two groups the way they are now. What I can say is that if my theory is correct, there is a good chance that the Draco could be seen by the Tenebris as traitors and heretics for dismissing the cult faith they bestowed on the rest of the Tenebris. This war may be the Dominion’s way of trying to bring the Draco family descendants back into the fold.”

“Or it could be their means of punishing the Draco for abandoning them.”

“Not likely,” Luke said. “I witnessed that battle in the Miranda system. If the Dominion wanted to punish the Draco outright, they would have attacked the cities from orbit directly. However, they did not do so at all. The only time they attacked the surface was when they were aiming for military bases on the ground. You saw the footage, Tora. I think what Amarria said could very well be the cause of their war based on what we know. However, we need facts not speculation. Now, we need to get going. It’s going to be a long flight to get there and the sooner we get moving, the sooner we will get there. We will see you all in one month’s time.”

Luke began heading for the door that led out of the hangar bay. Everyone assigned to him followed. As Brenda followed, she turned towards Amarria, smiling and waving at her, bidding her farewell. Luke turned left after entering the door with the rest of the group, including two

female SAGATs she was not familiar with along with Brenda, following close behind him. Tora turned towards her group, which only consisted of Blair, Benja, and Amarria.

“Well,” she said, “you heard Luke. Let’s get going.”

Tora turned and walked towards the door with the trio following right behind her, Amarria being the last one as they entered the door and turned right. The door closed right behind Amarria as she started looking around the corridor, curious about the RCIA facility. As they continued to walk, Blair looked behind him at Amarria who noticed his gaze.

“You know,” Blair said, “I’m surprised at how well you knew the ancient Latin language enough to know what ‘Propitius Esto’ meant.”

“Since I study history,” Amarria said, “there was a need to know that particular language considering that it was being used to name the star systems of the Republic. This way, I didn’t have to go looking for a translator whenever I needed to know what the name of a system was or why it was called that name.”

“I see. You’re definitely as bright as your father.”

“I’m also aware of your relationship with him as well, Colonel Blair.”

“Oh, you gathered that much from our meeting yesterday?”

“Actually, I heard about you from my father well before that. I also know that you and he were involved in a mission with the RCIA some time ago before the war and that the person responsible for that is the one who is leading us right now.”

Tora stopped and turned to look at Amarria with a shocked expression on her face.

“Your father told you about me?” Tora asked.

“More like my mother, ma’am,” Amarria said. “She had some choice words about that situation and believe me, I would rather not repeat those words right now.”

“Good grief,” Tora said as she turned and kept walking.

“So, let me ask you this,” Blair continued. “Do you really think that the Federation, or rather the Draco, really feel remorse over the actions they caused centuries ago?”

“I have this gut instinct that they feel regret in knowing that they can no longer be a part of the Republic. However, if their descendants have abandoned that cult and have led their lives like those in the Republic, I don’t see why we could not get along. The members of the family who could have committed those crimes have long since passed away. If they are not practicing any aspect of their heinous religion, then there is no one to punish for the crime.”

“How about the crime of creating an unsanctioned Human-controlled nation in the star cluster?” Tora asked.

“What are you talking about?” Blair asked.

“I know what she is referring to,” Amarria said. “I actually forgot about that part.”

“What ‘part’ are you talking about, Amarria?”

“When the Articles of the Republic was created, to prevent any division between those Humans who transitioned to this star cluster along with the moon Luna, the Articles clearly stated that there is to be no other Human-controlled nation created in the star cluster. This was meant for us not to turn on each other and bring war to the cluster between Humans.”

“And now we face not one but two such nations,” Tora said. “Even worse, the very reason that part of the Articles was made is what we are facing with the Dominion and the Federation being at war with each other. The Federation has even involved alien races who have joined their nation in their war with the Dominion. If it were up to me, we would arrest the leaders of both nations under charges for war crimes. Humans are Republic citizens and thus

must be treated accordingly, not as some foreign dignitaries. Those nations should not even be recognized as such at all.”

“Tora, you know very well that we cannot do such a thing. Even the Supreme Chancellor sees that there is no viable way to bring either nation back into the Republic unless those people are willing to do so. However, they have had over six hundred years to develop in their own way and their way of live may not coincide with the Republic’s. Whether we like it or not, this is a mess that the RCIA nonchalantly covered up back then and this is the result. Even Head Agent Aja sees that and knows this has to be rectified.”

“She only knows that because she descended from one of the traitors that allowed them to escape in the first place. At this point, this argument does no one any good. I know it will be up to the Chancellor and the Senate to decide how to act towards those two factions once we have that information.”

Amarria took notice of the fact that Tora did not choose the term “nations,” but instead “factions.” She seemed very determined to not call these warring factions “nations” but that would only legitimize their existence and sovereignty. Amarria decided to drop the topic for now as they were approaching the docking tube that extended out towards the *Templar* that was docked right outside the station.

As they began to walk into the tube and towards the *Templar*, Amarria tried to think of another topic to discuss. She managed to find one.

“Come to think of it,” Amarria said, “I have a question concerning yesterday’s meeting, Colonel Blair.”

“Before we go any further,” Blair said, “I have one thing to tell you.”

“What’s that?”

“While on the *Templar*, Benja and I don’t go by our names except in private. We go by our call signs. I am known as Ghost One while he is known as Ghost Two.”

“Why do you only go by your call signs?”

“Confidentiality and deniability if we are caught.”

“I see. Then do I need a call sign?”

“You shouldn’t. The only reason the SAGATs and I need call signs is because we will be leaving the ship namely for covert operations. From what I can gather from our meeting, you will be going down to the Federation capital hiding in plain sight. Using a call sign then would be ludicrous. If one of the SAGATs including myself went with you, we may also be using our own names.”

“I see. Well then, I have a question for you then, Ghost One, concerning yesterday’s meeting that I didn’t understand.”

“Go ahead, Amarria.”

“Yesterday, the talk about ship defenses was brought up and I heard things such as ‘thermal’ and ‘kinetic’ damage. What were they talking about?”

“I take it while your knowledge is mostly about history, military technology is not among that knowledge.”

“Only in terms of the history of said weapons and their development. I know of their destructive power, but I’ve never heard of ‘damage types’ before yesterday.”

“So, you want to know what they were talking about, huh? Very well. Throughout Human history, many weapons were created to do harm to one another long before we emerged in this star cluster. Even then, the development of weapons continued as the possibility of discovering other sentient beings in the star cluster remained. However, even after several thousand years of

developing weapons, there remained a constant throughout time: the type of damage upon impact. We have determined there are four types of damage during that time. The first is electromagnetic, or EM for short. When nuclear weapons were developed in the Twentieth Century, it was discovered that, when detonated from high altitudes, it released a powerful electromagnetic pulse that could destroy unprotected circuits. Bombs and missiles of that nature were developed just prior to the Luna Jump and were still present in the early years of the Republic. The only weapons now with that type of damage are our lasers, but the State and Empire both field missiles with EM warheads while the Lykans have developed EMP shells for their weapons.”

“From what I gather, shields are highly susceptible to that type of damage, correct?”

“Yes, which is the biggest problem for the State and for our Republic if it were not for the shield boosters. I believe the Republic’s weapons development department was working on plugging up that ‘hole,’ as it were.”

“So, what is the next type of damage?”

“The next one is a bit more common. It is thermal damage, as in flash-heating a target. This is primarily found in energy, particle, and plasma weapons as either intense energy or energized particles hit a target. This type of damage melts metal either instantly or after several impacts. Our lasers also deal this type of damage. Other weapons that deal in that sort of damage are the railguns and blasters of the Empire, and I’ve heard the State is developing a thermal warhead for their missiles as well as the Lykans with their ammo. I believe that the State and Lykans are using plasma for those types of weapons. Obviously, if the armor of the ship is weakened from exposed heat, the pressure from inside of the ship at that weak point will ‘pop’ open, resulting in explosive decompression. The Republic used to have particle cannons in the past during the Expansion Era, but obviously those weapons are now being used by the Dominion and the Federation.”

“A weapon that flash-heats its target. We obviously saw what happens when particle cannons hit their mark.”

“Exactly the point which is why the Republic stopped using them. Although, particle cannons, railguns, and blasters have another type of damage they deal, which leads to the third type. This type can be found as far back as the Stone Age, but this type is kinetic.”

“Oh, you mean the impact of a solid object at various speeds, right?”

“Exactly. Remember that particles even when energized are still solid matter. Therefore, those cannons can also deal this type of damage. Missiles and projectile ammo are also included in this matter, though the State are making an advanced version of a warhead specifically designed to deal this type of damage. However, while the Empire, the State, and the Lykan Republic all have weapons that deal kinetic damage, our Republic and to an extent the Mandate don’t possess weapons that deal this sort of damage. Of course, the reasons behind that is due to the law that forbids the use of such weapons due to the waste of natural resources they would produce.”

“You’re talking about the Resource Conservation, Preservation, and Recycling Bill of 4761 A.D., aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Do you wish we dealt that type of damage?”

“Personally, no. It took a long time for Humans to shift away from bullets and the likes to using laser weapons that don’t waste resources when fired. If the tradeoff is not being able to deal kinetic damage to targets, I think it might be worth it.”

“I’ve heard of all three of those types of damage in the meeting yesterday, but it makes me wonder what the fourth and final type of damage is?”

“The fourth one may be the most hazardous of the bunch because Humans have used weapons of this damage type in the past. The last damage type is labeled as ‘explosive’ and several weapons exist that use this type of damage.”

“Explosive? Do you mean like missiles and bombs?”

“Exactly. This type of damage has existed for a very long in explosives, hence the name. The worst of these was nuclear bombs that left areas that could not be inhabited for centuries. The only nations that use weapons that utilize this type of damage are the State with specialized warheads and the Lykans’ projectile ammunition. The Empire may use missile launchers, but they don’t use those warheads due to what the State uses in them.”

“What do they use?”

“A miniature nuclear warhead.”

“WHAT?!”

“The State used these in their war against the Royal Lykan Kingdom after our nation intervened. Those warheads are highly restrained in their explosions, meaning that there is very little in terms of nuclear materials in them. There is only enough to have the desired damaging effect that they wanted without causing a massive shockwave or an electromagnetic pulse that could have affected both sides. Of course, there is some radiation on the wreckage of the Lykan ships, but generally it is small enough that an EVA suit would protect someone from it. The only reason they started using those after we intervened was after the realization that the Lykans were using their slaves as living computer parts. In the past, they would try to minimize the damage to Lykan ships in the hope that they could recover their brethren from the wrecks that were still alive if possible. Once that was no longer the case, the State decided to maximize the damage of their warheads while keeping the radiation levels within acceptable limits. Of course, we were not aware of them using those warheads until long after the war. By then, the State still seemed determined to use them on the Lykans when the Executive Council members were under some outside influence. They were used during the Yintaka Incident months ago but your father who was leading the Eleventh Fleet to deliver planetary shield generators to that system didn’t notice their usage. Thankfully our ships’ armor can buffer and resist the radiation provided they don’t penetrate too deeply, but it was after the fleet returned that we discovered that fact.”

“Does the State still have those warheads?”

“Once the members of the Executive Council were replaced, the new members stated that they would keep the warheads, but only their battleships would carry them in case they were ever needed. All the rest of the warheads are in storage facilities somewhere in the State. Obviously, we are not aware where those are. The State did say that they were not on any inhabited planets so that may be the only good news concerning them. I’m just surprised anyone at this point would still use nuclear weapons such as those after all Humans have done to rid ourselves of that dark time in our history.”

“You know, the part that surprises me is that you and your team have been out here on the frontier of space for a long time. How is it you know about all of this?”

“We get reports from the RCIA with updates such as those. It’s their business after all.”

“You make a valid point. Based on the briefing, we know both sides use particle beams, but I did see that the Dominion uses missiles. Do we know what kind of warheads they were using in those?”

“From what we could determine based on the damage of the wrecks we were sent to investigate, it appears that the Dominion is using a form of particles like what is in their beam weapons in their warheads, so they are dealing mostly in thermal damage. However, I believe their missiles only supplement their particle cannons in a way that would affect both the Federation’s ships and their drones. Whether those warheads are the only ones they possess is still a mystery. I don’t expect the *Cavalier* team to find that information when they go to the Tenebris Prime, though. I doubt such information is kept in a public library.”

“Probably not. That sort of thing would only be in a library once the designs are no longer in service, much like the Republic’s prior ship designs. Thank you for explaining all of that to me, though. However, now I have to figure out how to pass the time for the next two weeks.”

“You didn’t bring any reading material with you?”

“Oh, I did, but I like to find things to do outside of reading so that I’m not being anti-social. That’s why I go out to lunch with my mother most of the time I can do so depending on her schedule.”

“Then I have a recommendation and I think this might benefit you for this mission as well. There is a training facility on this ship that allows for hand-to-hand combat and firearms training. How proficient are you with those skills?”

“I have some training in Taekwondo and with a small laser pistol as a recommendation by my father.”

“That’s a start. If you want to, our hand-to-hand combat sessions are at six-hundred hours each morning and our firearms training is at eighteen-hundred hours in the evening. Both last for two hours.”

“So, six in the morning and six in the evening, huh? Well, it will give me something to do. Are you starting tonight?”

“No, I will have a briefing with my team instead at the same time. I would like you to be there. If you do join us, as a matter of decorum, we may end up giving you a callsign much like us to use primarily during training or just in general while on this mission. Any thoughts to a callsign you might want?”

Amarria thought about it for a moment. A callsign that would be uniquely hers was difficult to come up with. She laughed when one came up.

“Tell me,” she said, “does the other team on the *Cavalier* have a name?”

“They were the Specter Team. They were originally on this ship but both teams were switched for this mission.”

“Then, sticking to the naming terms both teams are using, I will go by Phantom One. Will that work?”

“Sounds like a good match to me. Very well, I will call you Phantom One for the duration of this mission, except for when we are infiltrating the Federation library. Are we clear?”

“Yes, Ghost One.”

“Excellent. I will see you at the meeting later tonight. Your quarters are on Deck Six, Room Four. I will see you later.”

As Colonel Blair walked away, Amarria realized that Tora was no longer with them. Most likely she had gone elsewhere aboard the *Templar*, such as the bridge. They had talked so long that she didn’t realize how far they went. Amarria looked behind her and saw a long corridor but no sign of the docking port that they first walked through. Either she was really focused on the subject or she just wasn’t paying attention to where they walked at all. That was when she

realized something else. This was her first time aboard this vessel, so she had no clue were everything, including the elevators were!

She ran to catch up to Blair. Obviously, she needed directions on where to go. The last thing she needed was to get lost on the ship.

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
1:04pm, October 4, 5434 A.D.*

“So, they’ve departed?”

Drew sat at his desk and looked at his terminal. There were two things displayed on it: the time and Head Agent Aja. He knew it was close to time for the stealth vessels to depart and decided to contact Aja to verify.

“Yes, Supreme Chancellor,” Aja said. “Captains Luke and Tora have confirmed their departure from the station in Ruber and are proceeding towards the capitals of both the Dominion and the Federation respectively. It will take them approximately two weeks to reach their destinations.”

“That doesn’t include the time it would take for them to complete their mission and the return trip,” Drew said. “Factoring those in, that is over a month that they would be gone. I know you provided cover stories for everyone who went on that mission, but do you think those stories will hold up for that entire duration? What if their friends try to check up on them?”

“I know you have your concerns, but I selected those people based on several key factors. Brenda, for example, is a field reporter and has been known to be out of contact occasionally, such as when she is on an assignment. Her cover story is that she is undercover on a story and she will be out of touch for a while. This will prevent her friends, family, and even the journalist named Marina she met in the Serenus System from contacting her.”

“I see. Then what about Amarria, Trent and Laura’s daughter? What’s her cover story?”

“I will admit her cover story was a bit tricky. We told her supervisor and their workforce at the Central Library that the RCIA needed her services in relation to some historical archives and documentations that were sensitive in nature and that she would be away for a while. Due to the sensitive nature of the request, she would be out of touch for about a month at one of our orbital facilities. They agreed to the request and put her on special leave since this was a request from a government agency, sort of like a civic duty so to speak.”

“I see. At least that would work for a while.”

“By the way, on a different topic, I heard of the proposal from Prime Minister Voenis about a joint agency for the sake of border and trade between nations that Ambassador Forneido brought with him. How did the Senate take to it?”

“How did you hear about that?”

“Word tends to get around in that building you are in. So, how did the Senate take to it?”

“I guess some things don’t get around. The Senate didn’t take to it at all because I haven’t told them about it yet.”

“Oh? Why is that?”

“I don’t think that now is the time for such an agency to exist. There are a lot of questions and complications that I can see in such an agency existing. There is also the fact that the war was a year ago and the Yintaka Incident was over six months ago. These events are still fresh in

the minds of the populace of all the nations and there would be a great deal of opposition in the notion of races who may still harbor ill-will towards others be serving together, whether that is on a ship or a station. Such a proposal would best be brought to the attention of the Senate and the other nations after more time has passed and things start to settle between each other. I would be surprised if the State and the Empire agreed to such a thing.”

“It would be a rather big shock if they did, given their current standings of their governments. However, I do see a possible advantage to such a joint agency in roles that may extend past that point.”

“What do you mean?”

“If either the Dominion, the Federation, or both came after us, I would see the benefit of some form of mutual defense of the nations against an enemy that would threaten all of us.”

“You are talking about is a mutual defense pact between the nations. That is not the same thing and that would also cause a problem. Remember, right now the State, the Empire, The Holy Lykan Republic, and the Mandate have no idea about the existence of the Tenebris, be it the Dominion or the Federation. I want us to be able to handle this matter as it is Humans we are dealing with, not another race.”

“Don’t forget, Chancellor, that the Federation is not comprised solely of Humans. There are three other races involved with that nation that are alien in origin. We still don’t know their involvement with the Federation, but their existence alone means this is not just a Human-based matter. There is also the possibility that the Dominion also has some alien races, though none were aboard that dreadnought whose data was salvaged.”

“I’m aware of that fact. Nevertheless, I will only bring this up with the other ambassadors once we know how we stand with those two nations, and not before that time.”

“I understand, Chancellor. I must attend to other matters that require my attention. I will let you know of any developments as soon as we hear something.”

“Very well, Aja. I will talk to you again later.”

Aja nodded in agreement before her image disappeared from the terminal screen. Drew turned and looked at the documents on his desk that awaited his review before leaning back in his chair. He began to think about the previous Supreme Chancellors that preceded before him and what they would think about all the secrecy and actions that have transpired so far. The Republic in his opinion was not founded on such things though everyone knew that agencies such as the RCIA were necessary based on history to deal in matters that the public did not need to know. However, this matter with the Tenebris, both the Dominion and the Federation, was involving more people that did not need to be involved. Drew was having second thoughts about the operation. Questions are bound to be raised if anyone really got curious about those on that mission. The answers would cause more problems than needed.

He needed to talk to someone about how he feels, but his wife is unaware of the situation. There was only one person he could talk to.

For that matter, there were two...

* * * * *

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Marshal, Paladin-Class Battleship, Docked at Ruber Fleet Station
Planet Ruber IV, Ruber System, South/Southwestern Border of Novus Initium Republic
1:29pm, October 4, 5434 A.D.*

“So, yes, I did cry after I left her there.”

Trent was not ashamed to admit to Laura who was on his terminal in a video call while she was at lunch about what happened after he dropped Amarria off at the RCIA station less than an hour ago. He knew she would understand his feelings on the matter. She smiled back at him, trying not to cry herself. Trent could tell she was in her office, a change of pace for her but that is only because she is used to going out with Amarria on a day like today.

"I can understand that, dear," Laura said. *"This is the first time both of you are on a mission, but in her case, she is going further away than either of us expected."*

"Just to be safe," Trent said, "is the door to your office closed?"

"It is so no one can overhear me."

"Good. I just wanted to make sure. Based on the time it would take for them to get there, get the information, and get back, it would take them about a month to return. Part of me wished there was a way to keep track of them to know how things were proceeding, but that is next to impossible without compromising their mission."

"I think the hardest thing for the both of us is the realization of how much Amarria has grown up this whole time. She made this decision and now we just have to live with that choice, hoping that she will return safely."

"That won't be easy, that much is for certain."

Trent's terminal started to indicate that a call was coming in. Laura was looking at something on her phone on her end. Both Trent and Laura had surprised looks on their faces when they saw who it was.

"Are you getting a call from him as well?" Trent asked.

"I am but why us?" Laura asked.

"I don't know but let's see what he wants to talk to us about."

Trent and Laura both answered the incoming call. On Trent's terminal, the screen split down the middle vertically with Laura's image on the left. The image on the right was Supreme Chancellor Drew who appeared to be at his desk in his office. He had a slight look of concern on his face.

"Supreme Chancellor Drew?" Trent said. "To what do we owe the honor of this call?"

"You don't have to worry too much about the formalities," Drew said. *"I'm calling the both of you because you two are the only people I know that I can talk openly about what I have to say."*

"Is this about the assignment our daughter is on?" Laura asked.

"It is in relation to that, yes. I've been having thoughts about how things have been going lately, but it isn't something I can talk with my wife about because she does not know any of the details at all. I'm sorry if I am bothering the two of you but it looks like you two were already on a video call."

"It's not a problem, sir. Laura and I had our own thoughts on the matter that I don't think either of us would mind that we shared, provided that this is off the record."

"Considering the nature of the subject, I don't mind and it will be off the record," Drew said. *"The matter that has been bothering me the most is the amount of secrecy that we are facing right now involved with the Tenebris and how we have been handling the matter. Yesterday, I was surprised by the number of people involved in the matter that honestly should not be going on that mission to begin with. A matter as classified as the Tenebris should not involve more people as this starts to raise questions about their whereabouts with anyone who is close to them. The secrecy behind this matter echoes the scenario in a fashion to the Tranquillus Incident, but the RCIA as far as I know does not see the issue as a problem."*

“They are a group that enjoys their secrets, but I fear those secrets will come back to haunt everyone involved. A good example of that is the Tenebris themselves. I must agree with you, though. This mission was supposed to be strictly involving RCIA personnel and those that volunteer for it. However, they are now involving people that really should not have to be brought in to begin with. It’s making things a bit more complicated when they have to create more cover stories to explain their absences from their family, friends, and coworkers. The secrecy is starting to run abundant with that agency.”

“I’ve always had issues with the secrets the RCIA kept,” Laura said. *“There was one mission that Trent went on for them along with Colonel Blair that, to this day, I still know nothing about! It’s aggravating!”*

“A mission for the RCIA?” Drew said, puzzled. *“Trent, what mission is she talking about? This is the first time I’ve heard about it.”*

Trent took a deep breath.

“Since it is the Supreme Chancellor asking me about it, I will tell you both. The mission Colonel Blair and I were on involved a delusional scientist that believed that Humans were too large in number and had developed a virus capable of decomposing Humans in an instant.”

“What?!” Drew said. *“Didn’t the Lykans develop something like that during the war?”*

“Yes, but this virus was a bit more potent. The RCIA became aware of his activities and both my ship and Blair’s squad were the closest to the station where this was developed at the time. Blair’s team arrived first to apprehend the scientist while my ship orbited outside as a precaution if he escaped. However, the scientist in a desperate act released the virus on the station. Thankfully, Blair’s team sealed off the bay before just as the virus was released but they had to evacuate. Once his team was clear of the station, I was ordered to have my ship burn the entire station to molten slag. The virus burned away along with the rest of the station.”

“Great Maker!” Laura said. *“THAT was the secret mission you went on?”*

“Why is this the first time I’ve ever heard about this?”

“The point is that while I know you two have issues with the RCIA, the fact is that if the public became aware of that mission, there would be a great deal of panic. There are some things that the public does not need to know for them to go about their daily lives peacefully. Right now, the Dominion and the Federation fit that scenario. While the public at large may suspect that other nations may exist in the star cluster, the possibility of two of them being Human-based outside of the Republic would raise a lot of questions without first knowing how those two nations developed first. I know you two don’t like secrets. Believe me, I hate them as well. However, some secrets need to be kept for the good of the people until such a time we can present them in a calm, peaceful, and informative manner while at the same time reassuring everyone’s safety and security as best as possible.”

Drew let out a deep breath, then he smiled.

“Leave it to you to be the voice of reason,” Drew said. *“Thank you, Trent. I needed that clarity after talking with Aja prior to calling you. I know that some secrets are needed to be kept for the sake of the public. I just hope that when we do reveal the Dominion and the Federation, we don’t end up with a riot on our hands.”*

“You and me both, sir,” Trent said.

* * * * *