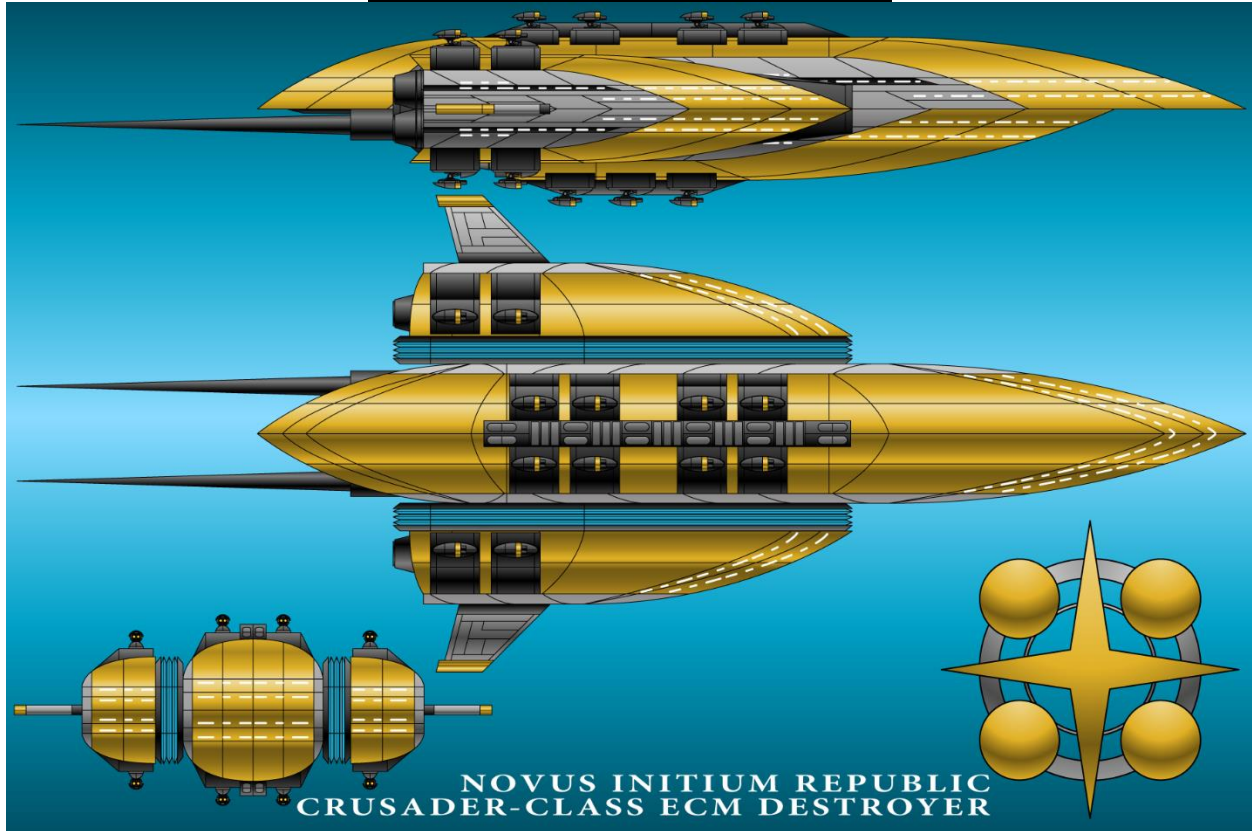


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VII: The Tiger and the Dragon



PART 5

*President's Office, Federation Capital Tower, City of Sanctus Draco
Planet Propitius Esto, Capital of Draco Federation, Draconia System, Western Region
3:14pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“You’re from the Republic?!”

Miya stood up from her seat in utter shock and surprise, nearly knocking the chair she was in over. As she stared wide-eyed at Amarria who kept her right hand out to greet Miya, Miya did not know how to react to this situation. She came here to talk to President Shea to help remove Armani from power in the Dominion, but the reality that someone from the Republic was here in front of her even though they were in the Draco Federation was something she could not fathom! Why was someone from the Republic even here in this office in the first place?

Amarria smiled while still holding her hand out.

“That is correct, Miss Miya,” Amarria said. “I was not born in the Federation. I was born in the capital city of Luminous on the planet Luminare in the Lumen System.”

“What is someone from the Republic doing here?!” Miya asked before turning to Shea.

“What is the meaning of this, President Shea?! Has the Federation managed to form some sort of alliance with the Republic?”

Shea gave a slight laugh.

“I wish that was the case,” Shea said. “How about I let Amarria explain why she is here?”

Amarria brought her hand back to her side as Miya looked back at Amarria.

“Let me give you as brief of an explanation as I can to explain my presence here,” Amarria said. “For starters, the ruse your ancestors did in hiding their escape succeeded. The Republic believed that the cult was wiped out from the orbital bombardment six and a half centuries ago. The planet had since been resettled and renamed. Over a century later, the Republic Senate agreed to put a halt on any further expansion and colonization, putting an end to the Expansion Era. This was due to the need for the Republic to solidify its holdings and insure that there were enough ships to protect those worlds from any possible foreign threats.”

“The Republic stopped expanding? Are you telling me that the Republic hasn’t expanded past those borders since then?”

“We did a short distance into the Eastern Region due to a war that we fought against a formerly aggressive alien nation in that region. We have since returned to our original borders.”

“I may ask about that part later, but if that is the case, then why are you here?”

“As I said in my introduction to you, I am a librarian at the Central Library in Luminous. I love to read history and I read a lot of personal accounts during the Expansion Era. I only came across details involving the Tenebris cult more than seven months ago. I realized this was an unsolved mystery as to what happened to them because there were things missing that should have been accounted for, such as the lack of bodies than were accounted for and colony ships whose wreckage was not found at the site of the bombardment. The Republic Central Intelligence Agency reopened the case as they flagged those entries long ago and discovered the forged sensor logs done by relatives of the Aspergillus family who remained behind.”

Miya and Amarria looked over at Tonya who was mildly surprised by this information. Amarria looked back at Miya.

“That evidence of forgery,” Amarria said, “was enough for the head of the RCIA to reopen the case, especially in light of events that occurred in two alien nations.”

Miya looked at Amarria with a puzzled expression on her face.

“What events are you talking about?” Miya asked.

“A king of the former Royal Lykan Kingdom in the Eastern Region over four hundred years ago suddenly decided to enslave another alien race near their home system, a decree that lasted for centuries until over a year ago when they lost the war against us and our allies. One of the allied nations during that war, known as the United Vitam State which consisted of slaves that managed to fight for their freedom, suddenly wanted to continue their war even after the Lykans were defeated and reformed. This was ordered by their Executive Council. After some investigations, it was found that the members of the Executive Council and the remains of that Lykan king shared one thing in common. They were both subjected to an unknown form of radiation that can change a person’s behavior and personality. This radiation was artificial as it targeted and altered their brains intentionally.”

Miya’s eyes widened along with her puzzlement.

“How was anyone able to tell they were subjected to such radiation?” Miya asked. “Better yet, how is it even administered?”

“We have yet to find an answer as to how it was administered. However, whenever any reasonable or rational thought comes to their minds that goes against that alteration or forced programming, the victims suffer from a severe headache. It was the RCIA’s theory that the Tenebris in general were responsible for this as their exile would predate both cases. However, one of our stealth recon vessels was not expecting to find what they did in the Miranda System.”

“The Miranda System?”

“I know what she is talking about,” Tonya said. “Our forces engaged the Federation fleet in that system, but it was also the first time the Federation deployed its own dreadnoughts and supercarriers. That battle was the first time our forces lost to the Federation.”

“Exactly, but our surprise was about the fact the Tenebris cult was split into two separate factions. A recon unit was sent to a wreck from each side to gather information and we managed to retrieve the locations of both nations’ capitals.”

“So,” Miya said, “you sent a stealth recon ship to each capital. You were aboard the vessel that came here, then?”

“Yes, and as you may have already figured out, one was sent to Tenebris Prime.”

Miya suddenly had a serious look on her face, borderline to anger.

“What were they trying to find?” Miya asked.

“They were looking for any proof that the Dominion or the Federation were responsible for the radiation cases that caused the Kingdom and the State to be hostile towards others. However, as I know by this point, the Federation never developed the technology nor do they have a motive. The question becomes, since I have not heard the results from the team that went to Tenebris Prime, does the Dominion have such means?”

“No, we don’t. When our ancestors went into exile, they remained isolated and built a nation in order to protect our way of life from the Federation. We were not even aware of the existence of alien races until we found the Federation who by then befriended three alien races in the Western Region. We also had no information about the Republic due to Armani fabricating our history, nor what has transpired in your nation in over six centuries.”

“If that statement is true, it means that we are back at square one over who is responsible for the mind manipulation radiation. In the meantime, however, my nation now has to figure out what to do with two factions that were formed outside of the Republic.”

“Considering that the recon ships you are using appear to not be using anything like our portal drive to travel from one location to another, it is easy to determine that they are utilizing a sustainable warp drives to traverse the uncharted systems in between our borders. I take it that propulsion technology hasn’t advanced much in six centuries?”

“Not when it comes to faster-than-light drives, no. Of course, there hasn’t been any need to do so. Sublight drives among other things have been more sustainable thanks to laws passed in recent centuries. Our ships get recycled and rebuilt into something new every century. We also don’t use weapons that use munitions much like your dreadnoughts. However, our ship sizes only range from frigates up to battleships as we had no reason for anything bigger.”

“Wait a minute. Back up for just a moment. What do you mean your weapons don’t use munitions?”

“We don’t use missiles, railguns, or particle beam cannons. Our ships utilize strictly laser weaponry. I can also say that our shields and armor are superior as well based on the combat data collected on Miranda, though I won’t say how.”

“Laser weaponry? Doesn’t that take a great deal of power?”

“Yes, but our ships can handle it with little to no drawbacks.”

Miya thought about this fact for a moment.

“Considering the circumstances,” Miya said, “would the Republic be willing to send a fleet to Tenebris Prime to help remove Armani from power?”

“I wish that were possible,” Amarria said. “However, only our recon ships could make such journeys as they were built for such trips. Our standard vessels can only use their warp drive within star systems. We still rely on star gates to jump between systems. Why?”

“Consider this for a moment. I know you have read up on Armani and his sudden change after his research was turned down centuries ago while he was in the Republic, correct?”

“Yes, I have. From our records, it showed he suffered heavy depression after his work was turned down.”

“And yet, at some point he radically changed, turning his work into a religion based on some ‘vision’ he had when he was asleep. Does this change seem abrupt to you, or rather, does this pattern seem familiar to you?”

“Wait a minute,” Amarria said with a surprised expression on her face. “Are you suggesting that Armani was also a victim of the same mind altering radiation the two cases that my nation has come across?”

“If you look at his history and his drastic change compared to the king and councilors you had mentioned, it would appear that he was also possibly affected.”

“Even if that were true, it brings up two problems we are facing. The first is the fact that you said he jumps to a fresh clone to maintain his virtual immortality as it were. The radiation is not genetic or transmittable, and that means his mentality would return to normal once his mind goes into a new clone. The second is that it would mean someone has been intentionally using him to begin this chain of events that would possibly cause a war with the Republic much like the Kingdom and the State. This would mean there is someone or something that is making these nations fight the Republic intentionally.”

“While I can’t say much about the latter, the reality is that Armani has not returned to having a sound mind as evident of his recent actions against the Tigris and Aspergillus Tribes, not to mention his willingness to want to wage war against the Republic after your recon team infiltrated our Central Database. I was one of those who was against taking such action, but he has effectively silenced my opposition at this point. If he hasn’t returned to normal after all this time, there is a possibility that his clones are either subjected to the radiation prior to his conscious being transferred or he has subjected to it willingly or unwillingly after the transfer.”

“Even if the possibility was true, you must also realize what you are asking. Right now, the only people who know about the Dominion and the Federation in the Republic are the Supreme Chancellor, the RCIA, and a select few civilians and military officers who have been helping with the investigation including my parents. The sovereignty of both nations has not been addressed in the Senate who hasn’t even become aware of both nations’ existences. I assume you are familiar with the Republic Charter?”

“Yes, but only recently. I know the Charter specifically prohibits the creation of another nation solely made by Humans in order to prevent a war between us. The Dominion and the Federation are in violation of that Charter.”

“The Dominion currently is, at least. The Federation is another story as their nation consists of more than just Humans. Official recognition for the Federation once addressed in the Senate may be easier because of that fact.”

“What you are trying to say is that once a Republic fleet is in Dominion space, it will not recognize our authority and we will be subject to the laws of the Republic even after Armani is removed from power, is that it?”

“This situation involving the Dominion’s sovereignty was an issue from the very beginning and would have been addressed in less than a week’s time once our recon ships arrived back in Republic space, but now you are having us face this matter sooner than expected. I assume you may also not be aware of Republic laws involving cloning, correct?”

“No, I’m not.”

“Human cloning is illegal under Republic law. While the Federation has veered away from this practice a few centuries ago once they no longer required it, most of the Dominion’s population is made of clones.”

“Are you are saying that they are not considered citizens under Republic law and must be terminated?”

“If this were a few clones, yes. However, we are talking about billions in this matter, and I do not know how the Republic Senate wants to address this matter. This is also an issue as Armani cannot be charged for genocide as clones do not have rights under our law. However, there is no statute of limitation on murder and he violated the Republic Charter. Those two alone will allow the Supreme Chancellor to act. We will let the Senate decide the rest afterwards.”

“Either way, this is going to cost us dearly, but considering our way of life was a lie from the start under the guise of a religious cult created by a twisted man, then I am ready to pay that price. He needs to pay for his crimes. However, we must hurry.”

“Why the rush?” Shea asked.

Miya looked at Shea.

“As you already know,” Miya said, “the Aspergillus clones were terminated, but that does not mean that Armani has some sort of backup plan in mind to refill the ranks of troops and officers. Otherwise, he would not have been so rash to make that decision to terminate them. If the Federation and the Republic were to strike Tenebris Prime while it is vulnerable, you may be able to catch Armani off-guard and capture him.”

Miya looked back at Amarria.

“There may also be clues to these radiation cases you spoke of there as well,” Miya continued. “If he is being afflicted, then he may possess something to help answer those questions of yours as to who is responsible for all of this.”

“If that is the case, then we may need to take action,” Amarria said.

“Are you sure you want to do this, Miya?” Tonya asked. “If the Republic gets involved, we may all be held responsible for the crimes that Armani had ordered us to take part in. Any authority we have will be stripped and the Dominion as we know it will be no more.”

“I know, Miss Tonya,” Miya said. “However, did we truly have the authority to even form the Dominion to begin with? Even if we did, Armani took my authority away this morning. What more do I have to lose?”

“What about all of the clones from our Tribes?” Misty asked. “Do they just forfeit their lives under Republic law?”

“There may be another solution,” Shea said. “Unless Armani decides to terminate all of the clones for some reason, the Federation can shelter them if the Republic Senate recognizes our sovereignty. All I can say is that it will be all up to how negotiations with the Senate and the Supreme Chancellor go. However, Armani’s reign needs to end so that his tyranny doesn’t take any more lives than it already has.”

“On that we can all agree,” Miya said. “Do you have direct contact with the Supreme Chancellor of the Republic?”

“I do. I will contact him and bring him up to speed with the current situation. However, I cannot make any guarantees that he will be willing to commit any of his forces, especially since they lack a portal drive like we do to even get to Tenebris Prime.”

“Oh, right, I forgot that Amarria had mentioned that fact.”

Amarria pondered that fact for a brief moment. How could the Republic send ships to Tenebris Prime when they have yet to acquire the means to use a portal drive much like the

Dominion and the Federation? Then a thought hit her about one way they could get there, but it would be up to the parties involved if they agreed to work together.

“Might I make a recommendation, Miss President?” Amarria asked.

Everyone looked at Amarria with puzzled expressions on their faces.

“What do you have in mind?” Shea asked.

“This may be crazy,” Amarria said, “but if the facts are presented clearly to the Supreme Chancellor, I can see this idea working out for all parties involved.”

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*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
3:53pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“You want me to take the fleet WHERE?!”

Admiral Trent sat at his desk reading over the daily but mundane reports that came in from all the ships in the Seventh Fleet that he commanded before he received a call from Grand Admiral Mikey at his terminal. What Trent didn’t expect was for Mikey to give him orders that did not make sense to him.

“I know it seems odd,” Mikey said, “but I got a request from Supreme Chancellor Drew to have the Seventh Fleet perform a jump into the star system designated W-001.”

“That star system is just outside of our borders,” Trent said. “Why does he want my fleet to jump there?”

“As you know, the Chancellor has been in contact with the President of the Federation. He got a call from her and got a progress report that he was not expecting.”

“What happened? Has the Dominion started pushing them back again?”

“No, just the opposite. It appears that the team aboard the Cavalier made a mistake in their extraction from the Dominion capital that alerted the Tenebris to possible intruders. Thankfully, no one on that team was captured but this had led to a series of events that has caused a great deal of problems, and that’s putting it mildly.”

“Could you elaborate?”

“Let me start with the biggest shock in this whole situation: Armani is still alive.”

“He’s WHAT?!”

“Prior to his death, those Draco loyal to him developed the means to transfer his consciousness in clone bodies. Once the Tenebris were settled on Tenebris Prime, he became the ruler and ‘Pope’ of the nation for all this time.”

“I have a hard time grasping this, but when you consider the Camino Star Empire has already developed this means for their ship pilots, I shouldn’t be all that surprised about such details. It’s the same technology the Lykans salvaged when they used that clone of me to steal that destroyer.”

Trent stopped himself when that thought came to mind. Other pieces of technology that he remembered being used by other nations started to pop into his head.

“I just thought of something,” he said. “If the order of things is correct, I’m starting to see a pattern based on what you just said.”

“What do you mean?” Mikey asked with a puzzled expression on his face.

“The Camino Star Empire has the same means to transfer the consciousness of their pilots when they die, but they developed that technology long after the Dominion did. Also, I

remember that the United Vitam State started to use shield hardeners to strengthen their shield defenses against the former Royal Navy ships once their nation was established. However, the Dominion also developed the technology long before the State as well. When you factor in the weapons used by the Empire, the former Kingdom, and the State as well as the fact all of the races we know thus far have the same biological immunities that Humans have, I get the feeling that there is someone or something spreading all of these to other nations. It may be the same ones who may be using that radiation. This all cannot be a coincidence.”

“I have to agree, but we won’t know the answers until we deal with Armani.”

“Speaking of which, how did President Shea managed to get a hold of that information that he was still alive? Did Amarria somehow discover it in the texts from the Dominion?”

“Apparently, when the possibility that our nation had managed to discover and infiltrate their capital, the Chief of the Tigris Tribe tried to propose peace with the Federation in light of a common enemy in the Republic. However, Armani called her words ‘heresy’ and tried to have her mind ‘cleansed.’ She managed to escape the capital with the help of some accomplices, but her guardian was killed by Armani. He then to wipe out all the Tigris clones in one fell swoop.”

“Wait a minute. What do you mean he wiped them out all at once?”

“The clones have a device at the base of their skulls that can sever their nervous system and fry their brains instantly. Armani can initiate it in all the clones of a Tribe at the same time.”

“He killed off that entire Tribe at the push of a button?! But that’s over twenty billion people! Even if they were clones, that’s genocide!”

“Yes, and it doesn’t stop there. The Aspergillus Tribe’s Chief, for whatever reason, decided to have members of their Tribe assist in the escape of the Tigris Tribe Chief and her accomplices. Because of that order, Armani killed the entire Aspergillus Tribe as well.”

“This is nuts! That’s over forty billion people killed in one day by one man!”

“Yes, and apparently those naturally born are hunted down and killed. When the Tigris Tribe Chief and her accomplices managed to escape Tenebris Prime, they jumped right into Federation space with the intent of being captured by Federation forces. They requested an audience with President Shea for assistance in removing Armani from power. Needless to say, Amarria was there at Shea’s request and Amarria managed to reveal where she was from.”

“So, that’s how we suddenly became involved?”

“Yes, it was. The Dominion is not recognized by the Republic. As such, Armani is subject to arrest under Republic law for the charge of establishing a nation and a military outside the Republic in violation of the Republic Charter. He will also be held responsible for the murders of those naturally born in the Dominion as clones have no rights in the Republic. He will stand trial in our courts and be prosecuted to the full extent of our law. President Shea has acknowledged that the Federation has no extradition rights until the Senate recognizes their nation. They have charges on him for war crimes involving kidnapping, mass murder of civilians both Human and alien, and cannibalism of Human Federation citizens. While they were not eaten, their blood was being ingested for nutrition and that was the closest charge they could find.”

“I would call that vampirism, but I doubt the Federation has laws against that yet. However, you and I were there for that briefing of the Dominion’s dreadnoughts and their capabilities. How can my fleet fight against those ships much less even reach Tenebris Prime?”

“For the latter, President Shea will have a dreadnought jump to the same system you will be jumping to. That dreadnought will open a portal directly to Tenebris Prime to join the main fleet of the Federation in a coordinated effort to reach the capital city of Plena Tenebris. With the Aspergillus clones now gone, the effective combat strength of the dreadnoughts has greatly been

diminished. However, while those who are still on board those dreadnoughts may not know how to operate the weapons and defenses, they may be quickly taught how to operate them in a matter of hours if they go through some crash-course learning.”

“Unless they have some form of automation that can take the place of the Aspergillus when it comes to controlling their weapons and defenses, in which case those ships would still be a threat.”

“That’s why we have the means to level the playing field or disable their ‘bite’ as it were. Do you remember when the First Fleet sent ships to the Dellino System in the last days of the war against the Kingdom that were equipped with ECM equipment?”

“I remember they had to hastily equip four destroyers with that equipment to use against the Royal Navy. However, I don’t have any such ships in my fleet.”

“Maybe not now, but that’s because none of your destroyers needed to be equipped.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ever since the war, our R&D department managed to develop the means and the equipment that can be quickly installed and uninstalled on destroyers throughout the Republic. It was more cost effective to have this equipment easy to install and remove instead of building a specialized form of ship. This equipment is already available at the Ruber V station and they can have up to eight destroyers equipped with the ECM modules in a matter of fifteen minutes for each set of four. That is not the only equipment you have available to you, either.”

“There’s more?”

“After the Yintaka Incident, the R&D department also developed a more secure method to deploying stasis field generators as well as warp disruption field generators. Just like with the destroyers, we developed modules that have these generators built in and can be protected by the ship’s defenses. However, due to the power needed to operate, the smallest vessels that can mount these are the cruisers. These can also be changed out in fifteen minutes, but your location has four pairs of those modules available at the Ruber IV station.”

“So you want me to have those installed immediately to some of the ships before we make the jump, correct?”

“Precisely. If Armani has a contingency plan for their dreadnoughts to be combat effective without the Aspergillus, the Federation along with your fleet will need as much of an advantage as they can get. Neither the Federation nor the Dominion have ever used such equipment in their war which means they may not be prepared to counter them. You still have SAGATs aboard your ships, correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Your mission upon your arrival in Tenebris Prime will be to capture and secure Armani. It is the opinion of President Shea and Amarria that Armani may have a device that is subjecting his clones to the same radiation that the State’s prior Executive Council and the Lykan king responsible for enslaving races were subjected to.”

“Are you saying he is a victim rather than the culprit of those cases?”

“They believe so. If he is still being affected by it after he is in a new clone body, it means the culprit or something related to those responsible will be there. The SAGATs are to search and secure that equipment if it is present. Whether Armani is or is not voluntarily subjecting himself to this radiation or if he is even aware of his actions because of the radiation, the fact is that his actions have violated Republic laws. I know that he has killed over forty billion clones, but the law does not consider clones as Republic citizens and thus do not have rights. However, the willing genocide of life of a ‘species’ is something that the Republic has laws for if we wanted to

push that. The courts will have to decide that as well.”

“I understand, but I have to ask: if the mission is to seize Armani, why not send the *Cavalier* back to Tenebris Prime to capture him instead of sending an entire fleet? It would be far easier to extract him covertly than announce our presence.”

“While I would agree with that statement and I wish we could send them back, there is a significant problem with trying to contact them.”

“What’s the problem?”

“We were informed that Armani has set up listening post along the border of the Dominion facing our direction. It appears he has been receiving unsecure transmissions from our civilian communications channels, so he is aware of current events. We believe he is also trying to decipher our military channels to get information such as our technological level in when comes to our offensive and defensive capabilities, but he has yet to decode them.”

“Okay, but why is that a problem contacting the *Cavalier*?”

*“While the Dominion has yet to decipher our military channels, they can still track and trace those communications. If we contacted them, they may be able to locate its position and send a dreadnought to either intercept or destroy the *Cavalier* before it reaches Republic space.”*

“I see. If that is the case, then what about the *Templar*? It is coming from a different direction and their presence is already known by the Federation.”

*“That is true, but those aboard are not aware of the layout of the Dominion capital. Without the intel from the *Cavalier*, they would be going in blind.”*

“What about the Tigris Chief and her accomplices? They’ve lived in the capital their whole lives and would have a better layout of the facility. If they are allowed to board the *Templar* and the ship is jumped into or close to Tenebris Prime, they could sneak down to the planet and locate Armani covertly without raising alarms.”

*“The only problem is that after the team from the *Cavalier* made their error leaving the Central Database, there is a chance that the capital is on high alert for any further incursions. It may be difficult for them to sneak back in if they are expecting them.”*

Trent thought about the situation for a brief moment before a thought came to mind.

“Then let me present this idea,” Trent said. “Why not do both plans?”

“Can you elaborate on that idea?”

“We use my fleet along with the Federation’s as a diversionary tactic. Meanwhile, the *Templar*’s SAGATs along with the Tigris Chief and her accomplices infiltrate the capital. If what you say is true and the Aspergillus are dead, their guard detail may also be lacking making infiltration that much easier. Their forces would be more focused on the enemies they can see that they may not even consider those that they cannot see.”

“I understand what you are saying, but do you think you would be able to hold out long enough while the team arrests Armani and retrieves any information on the radiation? The removal of the Aspergillus may mean that their military capabilities are severely hampered but that doesn’t mean they cannot fight in some fashion even when using the equipment that is to be installed on your destroyers and cruisers.”

“We have no choice but to hold out. If we can deal with the Dominion before things escalate into a full-scale war, it would be better for all of us.”

*“I concur. Very well. I will inform the Chancellor of this change in plans and to let President Shea know that your ships will be ready to jump by seventeen-hundred-hours our time. I will see if the Chancellor can contact Head Agent Aja and instruct the *Templar* to stop in the nearest star system by that time and await one of the Federation vessels to jump it to the*

rendezvous in W-001. You also have that much time to get those ships in your fleet ready and to bring your fleet's crews up to speed on the situation."

"I have the authority to discuss this matter with my entire fleet?"

"Considering the circumstances, there is no other choice. However, I must ask that you don't contact your wife on the matter at the moment as this mission is to be carried out in secret. Now, I need you to get started on the preparations. The sooner all of our preparations are complete and our forces are deployed to the Dominion capital, the sooner this whole Dominion matter is resolved, hopefully with answers to this radiation issue."

"Understood, sir."

The connection with Mikey turned off. Trent took a deep breath. He needed to quickly get preparations started. He pressed the button on his terminal that activated fleet communications.

"This is Admiral Trent to all ships of the Seventh Fleet. I have received an order from headquarters that we will be deployed on a mission at seventeen-hundred-hours. I need eight destroyers and four cruisers to volunteer for conversion into ECM destroyer and interdiction cruiser variants to be installed at the Ruber V and IV stations respectively. There will be a mission briefing once the conversions are complete. Trent, out."

Trent pressed the button again to turn off fleet communications. He leaned back in his chair, he began to count down from five in his head, as he knew what was about to come through those doors to his Ready Room. As he counted down to one in his head, his door chime went off. Trent quietly laughed.

"Come in," he said.

The doors slid open and Captain Dani stood there with a puzzled expression on her face. After she walked in and the doors closed behind her, she approached Trent's desk stopping only a couple of feet away.

"I had a feeling you would be coming in," Trent said.

"Why were those orders issued, sir?" Dani asked. "Did something happen concerning the stealth recon ships' missions?"

"Something along those lines, yes. You already know what happened with the *Templar's* mission, but it would appear that the *Cavalier* or at least the team assigned to that ship did something to make the Dominion aware that they were compromised. A series of events occurred since then and now the Federation needs our help. I'll go into more detail during the briefing, but we will be making an emergency jump into W-001. Please make sure that all ships have enough Salire Purpura crystals to make the jump to that system."

"What about the return trip?"

Trent just realized that Mikey never did state how they were going to return. Trent didn't have a viable answer for Dani.

"That wasn't discussed," Trent said. "My assumption is that either we will be dropped off in the same system by the Federation with a fresh batch of crystals, or an announcement will be made by the Chancellor that will reveal the Federation, thus allowing us to return in some fashion along with one or more Federation ships. If the latter occurs, representatives of the Federation would be able to plead their case in front of the Senate directly."

"I guess a lot of it will depend on how the mission goes. What kind of mission is it?"

"Capture and retrieve of the Dominion's head-of-state for crimes under Republic law."

Dani raised her right eyebrow. She looked like she was about to say something in relation to the matter, but she stopped herself.

"As I said," Trent said, "I will go into more details during the briefing in a little bit."

“Does your wife know about the mission?” Dani asked.

“No, and I have been ordered not to tell her anything about it.”

“Won’t that cause problems if she is unable to reach you?”

“You may not know this, but problems are already happening whether I contact her or not. Lately, my calls to my wife have started to become rather strained. I think all the times I am not around after my daughter left have started to make her feel more alone than ever. Now that Amarria is in the Federation and I have been stationed here in the meantime for the past three weeks, I’m beginning to wonder if she is starting to get tired of it.”

“Do you mean that she might leave you over something like this?”

“I was gone for months when I was captain of the *Templar* during the First Interstellar War, but Laura still had lunch with Amarria while I was away. However, Amarria did not stay at our house overnight. Laura knew what we were getting into when she wanted to marry a career Navy officer more than two decades ago, but before the war, I was only gone for a couple of weeks at a time due to fleet rotations. Since I’ve been deployed for longer periods of time, she may be at her limit. I can see it in her face during her latest news broadcasts.”

“Do you think that she would file for divorce after all this time?”

“She might. I know this needs to be addressed, but the reality is that I don’t feel like retiring from the military. I don’t exactly have many skills that would be considered useful in the civilian line of work.”

“You could always become a Naval Academy instructor.”

Trent suddenly let out a small laugh.

“Considering that people know my name after that clone the Lykans made stole that destroyer after the war began, I’d rather not take the chance that my actions while I was on the *Templar* get brought up. There were some...not-so-pleasant assignments that had to be done while I commanded the vessel.”

“I see. What happens if you two get a divorce?”

“The house is primarily mine since I bought it before we got married as is the sports car. Everything else that wasn’t mine prior to marriage would be split between us. Knowing her, she would find a condo or apartment in Luminous so that she is close to her job at the news station. It would be a shorter commute.”

“You sound like you know for certain that a divorce is inevitable.”

“Maybe it is, but we seem to be growing more and more apart lately. She and I will have a discussion about it when I see her afterwards. Wait...oh, no.”

Trent brought his right hand up to his face and did a face palm when a thought came to his mind, a consequence involving the mission he was ordered to do.

“What is it?” Dani asked.

“Laura was instructed to do a report on the Tenebris once the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* returned from their missions,” Trent said. “If this whole thing goes down now, all the time and effort she took into preparing that report would be wasted. That would really make her upset. Now I’m really not looking forward to starting this mission.”

“There was no way to know this was going to happen, sir. We’ll just have to deal with the consequences afterwards. If you will excuse me, I need to make sure all ships have enough Salire Purpura crystals to make the jump as you have requested.”

“Very well. I will be on the bridge in thirty minutes to make my announcement. This is not going to be easy for those outside the commanding officer position to accept or even understand, but it must be done. Please see to the preparations.”

Dani saluted Trent, brought her arm down, and headed for the door. After she exited the room and the doors closed behind her, Trent let out another deep breath. This day was definitely not how he expected it to go. He began to wonder how Captain Tora on the *Templar* was going to take this news...

* * * * *

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Unclaimed Space, On Route to Ruber System W-019 System, Western Region, 52 Light-Years from Ruber System
4:06pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Leave it to Trent to come up with this such a ridiculous plan.”

Tora sat in her command chair on the bridge of the *Templar* with Colonel Blair present to her left. Head Agent Aja was on the main screen communicating with the two of them about the plan Trent had presented of having the *Templar* participate in the incursion of the Dominion capital. Tora immediately put her face in her right palm as she felt a headache coming on.

“I can tell you are not happy with this plan,” Aja said. “However, there is very little choice but to have the Templar join in the incursion. The Cavalier is not an option as any and all communications from the Republic are being monitored by Dominion listening posts. If they can track any communications to and from the Cavalier, they can quickly dispatch a dreadnought to intercept the vessel and destroy it before it can even reach the Ruber System.”

“In other words, we are going to have to clean up the mess that Captain Luke has made of his mission, is that it?”

“Need I remind you that your mission didn’t go as planned, either, and now the Draco Federation is aware of our actions?”

“For the record, that was not my mistake but were the mistakes of both Amarria and of Colonel Blair, the latter who is present here.”

“The same can be said of Captain Luke. Mistakes were made on both missions and while the mission to the Federation could have gone worse, it didn’t. Luke’s team was not discovered from what I heard as there was only speculation by the Dominion that the Republic was involved. The point is that we have the means to deal with this whole Tenebris matter before it is reported to the Republic population.”

“So, let me make sure I heard all the details correctly. We are to hold our position and wait for a Federation vessel, presumably one of their supercarriers or dreadnoughts, to transport us to the W-001 System where we will meet with the Trent’s Seventh Fleet. We will be taking on the Tigris Chief and her accomplices who will be escorting our SAGATs in full optical camouflage through the Central Complex of the Dominion capital. We will be jumping directly into the Dominion in orbit over their capital of Tenebris Prime. Trent’s fleet and the Federation’s First Fleet will serve to distract the Dominion’s dreadnoughts while we launch our infiltration team to the surface. They are to secure Armani Draco and a supposed device that is capable of generating the same mind manipulating radiation we have seen in two cases. Is it really possible for him to have such a device?”

“Based on what we know, Armani drastically changed his way of thinking, converting his research into a religion. If his mind is being transferred in a similar fashion to how the Caminos have done it, he should have returned to a sound state of mind after the transfer. However, based on the Tigris Chief’s accounts, he seems to have not done so, instead still in the mindset that he was when he first founded the cult centuries ago. A scan of his mind would determine if he is still

being afflicted or if the radiation even exists to begin with. That is what Colonel Blair's team will find once they have secured the target. If it is proven, then his team will secure the device for examination to finally find some answers."

"Understood. What about the extraction from Dominion space? Am I to assume we will be returning the same way we arrived?"

"We don't have an answer to that yet. A lot of that will be based on what happens afterwards."

"Can you please elaborate?"

"As it stands right now, we know that the remaining three Tribes are going to be highly loyal to Armani due to his ability to kill their clones with a single action. If he is captured, the heads of those Tribes will either surrender to our authority or they will attempt to recover him. If the latter occurs and we jump right back to Republic space, the Dominion's dreadnoughts would be following close behind. We may have more ships, but we don't have a tally on the number of dreadnoughts the Dominion has at its disposal. There is also the fact that our presence in their space would justify Armani's claim that we infiltrated their space to retrieve information for an invasion which is exactly what we are doing with this plan. Doing so would make the other tribes further rally behind Armani's cause. Proving Armani's claim that we were going to invade being correct is something I would have liked to avoid. However, the fact of the matter is that we would have done so anyway in order to bring that man to justice for his actions both past and present."

"Then what happens if the Dominion forces decide they wanted to retrieve their Pope?"

Aja looked over at Colonel Blair, who raised his right eyebrow in curiosity.

"Colonel Blair," Aja said, "we have it on good authority that Armani is able to kill the clones from a tablet on his altar in his sanctuary. This tablet may be linked to the devices found in the clones that causes instant death. I want your team to connect a remote transmitter and controller to this tablet if it is not mobile. If the Dominion forces wish to retrieve Armani, you are to terminate the remaining clones."

Blair had a look of shock on his face, his mouth wide open. Even Tora was surprised at what Aja just ordered him to do.

"You want me to kill over sixty billion clones?!" Blair said. "That's more than what Armani killed today! How would that make me any better than him?!"

"Armani killed those clones under malicious intent. They did not want to follow him or his ideals, and he killed them for that. If the Tribes still want to follow someone who could easily terminate them even after we have removed him from such control, then in order to protect the Republic, we must stop them from threatening our nation. Once we have him, announce that he is in custody and for them to surrender. If they do not, then you can activate the system to terminate them. It will be their decision whether they want to continue to fight or not. Remember, clones have no rights under Republic law and we are not arresting him for genocide of those clones. We are arresting him for the murders of those kidnapped centuries ago, for violating the Republic Charter, and for the murder of Carol Tigris, the current Tigris Tribe Chief's grandmother as well as those Tigris and Aspergillus naturally born. He is also responsible for the kidnapping and effective cannibalism of Humans from the Draco Federation and the death of civilian aliens. That last charge can either be handled by us or by the Federation, but we will leave the politicians to decide. The fact is that I know you don't like that idea. If you want to have a clear conscience, you can set it up and allow someone else to press the button if needed."

"I will do it," Tora said. "My hands have been dirtied due to our line of work, so I have no issued doing it if Blair cannot."

Aja looked at Tora before looking back at Blair.

"Is this okay with you, Blair?" Aja asked.

Blair took a deep breath.

"I'm not fond of the idea at all," he said. "However, if they are given a warning and they fail to heed it, then we have no choice if it helps to protect us and the Republic."

"One last question, Head Agent Aja," Tora said. "Do we know what will happen to the Dominion's assets afterwards?"

"That topic has not been discussed yet. We know that the number of naturally born Humans in the Dominion is quite low. I heard that they number in the thousands at best. I also know that none of them have ingested anything but blood since they were born. These are topics that we can only speculate as to what to do with those that will remain, but I'm only concerned with getting the mission accomplished. Captain Tora, I will leave it up to you to inform your crew of the change in plans. Blair, have your SAGATs ready to deploy shortly. We know there is a recharge time for a Federation ship to jump of about twelve minutes or so. This means they will arrive at your position thirteen to fifteen minutes before the rendezvous with Trent's fleet. Be ready by that time."

"Understood, Head Agent Aja. We will hold our position by the seventh planet in this system and await their arrival."

Aja nodded, acknowledging what Tora had said before the transmission disappeared off the main screen. Blair took a deep breath and exhaled audibly.

"Were you trying to throw me under the bus as it were?" Blair asked as he looked at Tora. "You don't want to take responsibility for any failures, do you?"

"I was not the one who got himself discovered by the Federation," Tora said. "I was merely stating the facts truthfully. I was not at fault for what happened on your mission."

"Regardless, I will make this clear right now. After this mission, I'm done serving under your command. A good captain takes responsibility for the actions of their crew, something you have obviously not learned while in command of this ship. I'm going to be brutally honest with you, Tora. Trent sat in that chair more than a year ago and he was someone I still respect for commanding this ship under the circumstances he was in. You, however, don't display the fine qualities of a commanding officer. I suggest you do some research about treating those who you command with respect and know that a commanding officer is given just as much respect as they give to their crew."

Blair turned and headed for the elevator doors. Tora was furious and wanted to say something to him for his disrespectful words. However, she took a deep breath to calm her nerves. He may be right if she was a military officer commanding a military vessel, but she was an RCIA agent commanding an RCIA vessel. She may need to remind him of that fact after this operation was over.

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*President's Office, Federation Capital Tower, City of Sanctus Draco
Planet Propitius Esto, Capital of Draco Federation, Draconia System, Western Region
4:16pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

"Thank you for the update. We'll be ready."

President Shea just concluded her call with Supreme Chancellor Drew who provided her with an update from both Admiral Trent and Captain Tora involving their respective forces. After

the call concluded and her terminal turned off, she looked over at Miya who was still sitting in the chair in front of her desk right next to Amarria.

“I assume you heard all of that?” Shea asked Miya.

“I did,” Miya said. “I wasn’t expecting to find myself going back to Tenebris Prime, but I understand the reasons why. The Republic’s covert ops troops need an escort and I along with the former Chiefs know the complex. There is only one problem, though.”

“What is it? You all have to leave soon and any problems need to be addressed before we commit to this operation.”

“While each of us knows how to get around our residential towers and the Council Meeting room in the central tower, we don’t know how to get into Armani’s inner sanctuary.”

“None of you have been in the area of the building where he lives? Do we know if there is an entrance to get into that part of the building?”

“I know there is a way in. He personally left his inner sanctuary to go to the Tigris residential building to kill my grandmother. That means that there has to be an entrance in and out of that part of the tower. We just have to find it. The only other known way to enter is through the central platform in the Tribal Council Chamber, but there is no way to reach it as the central platform in the Tribal Council Chamber is on a platform that is too high for anyone to jump. It is also smooth so there is no way to climb its sides. Armani is raised up from the middle of the platform under an armor-plated hatch. I do not know how thick it is.”

“Would scans be able to get the layout of the central building?”

“The outer walls are too thick for scanners to penetrate. If there is one thing Armani is, it is that he is paranoid of anyone being allowed into a room that he feels his safest. He won’t allow anyone to find an entrance into his sanctuary.”

“Based on that fact,” Amarria said, “the entrance not be so obvious. It would blend into its surrounding where no one would suspect it was there. Thankfully, once our infiltration team gets inside, they will be able to scan the interior for any abnormalities, such as doors or hatches.”

“There isn’t a direct route into the central building except for the Central Database” Miya said, “but that would be detected easily now that my Tribe’s clones are dead. The only way to enter is to go through the residential buildings of one of the Tribes, which presents us with another problem. We already know that the Tigris and Aspergillus Tribes are considered ‘traitors’ by Armani, and anyone in those buildings would immediately be killed. If anyone were to enter those buildings, alarms would be raised as well.”

“It sounds like the team will need to enter through one of the other buildings,” Shea said as she looked at the former Tribe Chiefs still sitting on the couches behind Miya. “Is it possible for you all to enter into one of the other buildings without raising any alarms?”

“Entry is done by DNA scan,” Misty said. “If I along with the rest of us have been labeled as traitors by Armani, our DNA would be flagged in an instant.”

“That won’t be a problem,” Amarria said, looking towards Misty’s direction. “The teams that are aboard those stealth vessels are among the best. After all, the team managed to get into your Central Database and get the information before they screwed up the exit. Knowing them, there was no viable way to exit without setting off alarms otherwise. They are the same ones that allowed our forces to advance into enemy territory during the Republic’s First Interstellar War over a year ago by hacking into their systems and we are talking about systems made by completely alien forces.”

“If they are that good,” Tonya said, “we can only hope that they are able to get us in without setting off alarms like when they exited. I’m aware that the team on the stealth vessel we

will be boarding is different than the one that infiltrated our capital, so I can only hope that they are better than the one sent to our capital.”

“It is the same team as I mentioned earlier, led by a man known as Colonel Blair. He and his team will get the job done.”

“I will hold you to that.”

“That being said,” Shea said as she stood up, “we need to get you all back to the Dreadnought *Heaven’s Arrow* which will be jumping you all to the *Templar’s* position, the name of the Republic stealth vessel you will be meeting up with. It will also jump you all to the star system where the Republic’s Seven Fleet will rendezvous with the *Heaven’s Arrow* and the *Templar* before it makes the final jump to Tenebris Prime. I will be sending our First Fleet to Tenebris Prime to supplement our firepower with the Republic’s. I only ask that you all don’t take too long in getting Armani. The Republic will be using methods to even the odds against the Dominion’s dreadnoughts, but they can only hold out for so long before our combined forces are overwhelmed.”

“You and Supreme Chancellor Drew are counting on our success,” Miya said. “I want the faith that you all place in us to be justified. We won’t fail during this crucial moment.”

“I hope not, either. I look forward to hearing of your success in bringing that madman to justice for his crimes.”

Miya and the former Chiefs stood up and bowed in Shea’s direction. Miya turned towards Amarria and extended her right hand.

“Miss Amarria,” Miya said, “it is good to meet you. I apologize for my rudeness earlier.”

Amarria stood up from her seat, smiled, and took Miya’s right hand with her own in a handshake.

“I understand your reaction,” Amarria said. “I would have felt the same way. I hope we will meet again, Miya. I may help you adjust to eating food again.”

Miya laughed a little bit.

“We will see,” she said as she let go of the handshake. “Until we meet again.”

Miya and the former Chiefs put their veils back on to hide their identities once again. They began to walk towards the exit of Shea’s office. As they left with Miya being the last one out of the door, Amarria looked towards Shea once the doors closed.

“Do you think we will see them again?” Amarria asked.

“Great Maker willing, I hope so,” Shea said. “These five have seen the truth about Armani’s corrupt teachings and the error of following his ways. I’m not sure what will become of them or their clone population once Armani is arrested and your Republic is made known about both nations presence. I can only hope that our nation will be allowed to continue existing. The Dominion and its holdings on the other hand are a different matter.”

“I heard the charges that Supreme Chancellor Drew read to you upon Armani’s arrest. Those charges alone are enough for the Republic to take action in dissolving the Dominion one way or another. The only problem is what becomes of them and their holdings. Only the Senate and the Courts will make that decision.”

“One idea I would hope they take into consideration is annexing the territory into the Republic, especially when you consider the number of citizens you told me live in the Republic right now. However, the resources and funding to make that happen may be staggering if not time consuming.”

“The Republic will not accept clones as part of the population due to current laws. I would not be surprised if they decide to terminate them all since they are considered illegal.”

“You mentioned this earlier with Miya. Would the Republic Senate really order the termination over sixty billion people because of their law concerning cloning?”

“When the law was created, they assumed the matter would be limited to up to a few clones being created. Sixty billion clones being created is on a scale the Republic has never heard of before. While the Federation may have used cloning at first when your nation was created, you all have since stopped using that method to increase your population. If the Dominion had stopped using cloning the moment their population reached a level they were comfortable with, this matter would not be a problem. However, they didn’t stop because Armani wanted to maintain control of the population. There is also the matter of trying to train that many people to eat actual food than blood. None of them have ever been trained to do any form of traditional agricultural cultivation and farming. It would be easier and less time consuming for the Republic to train a few thousand than several billion, only adding to the need of terminating the clones. The only problem I would see of them terminating that many is the morality of killing more clones over legality than the number Armani killed out of spite.”

“Then it looks like I may have to plead our case to the Republic Senate when the time comes.”

“Case? What case?”

“I am going to get permission from our House of Representatives to allow us to harbor the clones and convert them into our society. As we don’t have any such laws against clones in our nation, I may ask to annex the Dominion into the Federation. Our borders already meet each other and it may not be as time-consuming to convert them. Think of it as our method of penance for the actions our ancestor Armani has caused to those in the Dominion and for his crimes against the Republic.”

“That would keep the blood of killing clones off the Senate’s hands. I just hope there is no backlash from the Senate for doing so.”

“It isn’t the only thing I have to discuss with them, though.”

“Are you talking about the recognition of the sovereignty of the Draco Federation?”

“Well, yes, but there is one other matter I have to discuss that affects both the Federation and the Republic. However, I will wait until I speak with the Senate before I reveal this matter.”

Amarria was suddenly puzzled by Shea’s words. Aside from the Federation’s sovereignty and the annexation of the Dominion once Armani was arrested, Amarria could not think of what it was that Shea would want to share with the Republic Senate that would affect both nations. Was there something that the Federation had discovered while they were in exile in the Western Region that merits both nations’ attention? Amarria wanted to speculate or probe for clues, but she knew that doing so was not the best course of action at this crucial moment.

All she could do was hope that the matter of which Shea spoke of is not something terrible. The Republic has already dealt with the First Interstellar War and now this matter with these two “unauthorized” nations. If there was something else that the Republic had to fight aside from whoever was responsible for the mind controlling radiation, she wasn’t sure how Drew and the Senate were going to react, much less her father.

“Amarria,” Shea said, “why don’t you go take a break for a little while?”

Amarria looked at Shea with a puzzled expression on her face.

“You seem to have something on your mind,” Shea said. “I can only guess what it is, but for now, go take a breather. There is still time before the operation begins. I will let you know once the operation is over what the results are.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Amarria said.

“Are you concerned about your father, by chance? You told me one time that he was in command of the Republic’s Seventh Fleet, the same fleet that is being sent to Tenebris Prime. Are you worried about him?”

Amarria was not even thinking about the fact that her father and his fleet was being deployed until Shea brought it up. Amarria was concerned but that was not the main reason why she had such a look on her face. Since Amarria did not want to push about the matter that Shea had mentioned a moment ago, she figured it was best to answer Shea’s question honestly.

“I wasn’t until you brought it up,” Amarria said. “My father has been in many battles during our war and hasn’t lost a ship yet under his command. However, this is different. Even after the Aspergillus were killed, there is a chance that the remaining clones from other nations on board the Dominion’s dreadnoughts can quickly learn how to operate the weapons and defenses of those ships. Either that, or they would resort to some form of automation as a stop-gap method. I’ve seen the footage of those dreadnoughts and I know of their capabilities. There is also the fact that there won’t be Republic reinforcements backing them up. While your nation’s First Fleet will be present in the operation and that does give me some relief knowing that your fleet’s dreadnoughts and supercarriers are able to go toe-to-toe with them, there is a chance that the Dominion under Armani’s orders will primarily be targeting the Republic fleet. Our ships are powerful and with ECM and interdiction equipment being present, it will help even the odds, but that equipment can only help so much against such opponents.”

“I know. There are too many things that can go wrong with this operation and both your Chancellor and I are aware of the risks and possible loss of life in this battle. All we can do is pray that justice and righteousness are on our side, and that this covert op team along with Miya and the former Chiefs can get to Armani as well as his clones.”

“I guess that is all we can do. I will take my leave for now and get some air.”

“There is an indoor garden located a few floors down. It is mostly used for prayer and meditation, but others do tend to use its serenity to help clear their heads.”

“Thank you. I’ll give it a try. I will meet with you again later today.”

“Until then, Amarria.”

Amarria bowed in Shea’s direction before turning towards the doors to exit the president’s office. As she exited, she began to wonder how her mother was feeling after all this time. She had not had a chance to talk to her directly in three weeks, only by text messages being sent to and from her parents. However, her mother’s messages sounded like they had a sad tone in the words and sentences she used. Amarria was hoping she was misreading them, but she was beginning to grow concern that her mother was feeling truly alone for the first time in years and that it was affecting her.

All Amarria could do as she left the waiting room of the president was tell herself that she was misreading those letters and that her mother was only feeling lonely.

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*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
4:29pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“That should be all of it, thank you.”

Laura saw the last of the movers carrying out boxes to the moving truck that was parked in front of the house. For the past week and a half, she started packing her things after looking

around downtown for an apartment or condominium to live in close to work. She found one that she could comfortably afford and began having things moved into her new place, purchasing new furniture as everything furniture-wise in the house was purchased by Trent.

She had enough of the lonely nights she had spent alone in that house. Her husband and daughter were gone to star systems she could not get to either due to work or the system was well beyond her reach in another nation not even known to the rest of the Republic yet. She had enough of the lies and secrets that she was either told or the lies she had to tell to keep things like the Dominion and the Federation confidential and classified. She could only tolerate so much of those secrets and lies from Trent and the RCIA. She knew that it was important to keep it all secret until an official announcement was made and she did her report, but that was still almost a week away. There was no guarantee that either Trent or Amarria were going to return home even after the Dominion and the Federation were made public.

How much more of her loneliness was she going to endure before this whole ordeal was over? She had been dealing with this loneliness at night for over two decades while Trent was deployed to other star systems on regular fleet rotations. He was able to come home each night for two weeks and be away for another two weeks. It wasn't that bad as she knew when he would be coming home. Amarria was still seeing her during lunch when she moved out after getting a job at the Central Library. She wasn't alone all the time and she was fine with that arrangement.

Then the First Interstellar War occurred and everything changed.

As cliché as that line was, it was true. Trent's fleet was deployed to the Tranquillus System as a cover for an operation to make first contact with the United Vitam State and the former Royal Lykan Kingdom. After that encounter, the war began and Trent's fleet remained in Tranquillus to protect the newly built star gate that connected the Republic to the State. However, unknown to everyone in that meeting at the time, Forneido who was the Lykan representative during the meeting scanned everyone's DNA in that room including Trent's. This led to the Lykans creating a clone of Trent and using that clone to steal a Republic destroyer to jump into the territory of the Camino Star Empire. This was supposed to ignite a war between the Republic and the Empire, but that ultimately failed thanks to requesting for his DNA to be removed from the military database. This stopped the clone but it also forced Trent to leave the military on a temporary basis.

Laura had hoped that she would be able to see Trent more often until the war ended, but that did not happen. He was employed by the RCIA to create a stealth warship with the goal of using it to advance allied forces through Kingdom space and finding the facility where his DNA and clones were stored. The RCIA knew Trent would take the assignment with that goal in mind. Once the vessel known as the *Templar* was completed, Trent was assigned to command the vessel for this task. He was gone for months with no means to communicate due to the covert operations of the mission. It was only after his ship completed the mission in the Dellino System did he come home for a moment but so did his bridge crew. A meeting was held at their house later with the Supreme Chancellor and the ambassadors of the Empire and the State, people she was not expecting to host. The day after, Trent and his crew left for the last mission against the Kingdom which resulted in the destruction of the orbital city of High Charity.

Trent was able to return to the military after the war, and things were returning to normal. However, the day the Yintaka Incident occurred soon arrived. Trent's fleet was ordered to deliver planetary shield generators to the Yintaka System, a Lykan-controlled star system on the border between the newly formed Holy Lykan Republic and the United Vitam State. The latter of the two was still engaging in hostilities with the former, and the planetary shield generators provided

by the Novus Initium Republic made relations with the State worse. Fighting eventually broke out between a fleet from the State against Trent's fleet, the Lykan defense fleet, and a fleet from the Liberigi Mandate, a nation consisting of former slaves who had no interest in returning to the State. That same day, not only was it discovered that the State Executive Council at the time was affected by a mind-altering radiation, but Amarria brought up about the Tenebris for the first time and the possibility that they could have survived. It was believed that they may have been responsible for that case and the one involving the Lykan King centuries ago whose corpse came back positive for the same radiation.

Trent and Amarria were still around while the *Templar* and its sister ship the *Cavalier* explored the Western and Southwestern Regions respectively, but the *Cavalier* found a battle between the Tenebris Dominion and the Draco Federation six months after the Yintaka Incident. Once they reported back, this three out of four-week period began due to the travel time to and from those nations' capitals. It was too frustrating for her after all that has happened.

That was when she decided that she had reached her limit. Calls to her husband was one thing, but knowing that he wasn't coming home for up to four weeks was too much for her. The fact that the only line of communication she had to Amarria was through texts in order for the Federation to remain confidential was also an annoyance since they could only communicate a few days at a time. She knew she was being selfish, but her marriage was not as great as it once was and she cannot go on like this.

Laura grabbed the last box on the sofa in the front room before taking one last look around. She had locked the front door and left her key on the table next to it. She proceeded back down the main hallway and to the left to head towards the garage entrance. On the shelf next to the door, she left a handwritten letter so that the moment Trent returned, he would see it. It was her farewell letter to him as well as a letter stating that she was filing for divorce the moment he gets the message. She did not leave him her new address as she felt like he would not need it. She may tell Amarria her new address if and when she gets back, but not before.

She opened the door into the garage, making sure to manually lock the knob latch before she would close it, and opened the garage door using the switch on the wall. She closed the door behind her as she made her way to the passenger-side door to her car. Trent's sports car was not in the garage as he drove it to the military spaceport before his prolonged deployment. She opened the passenger-side door of her car, set the box in the seat, and closed the car door. She walked around the back of the car to the driver side door, opened it, and got into the car. She powered it up and drove out of the garage. Tears were starting to form in her eyes as she pressed the button in her car to close the garage door. Once it was closed, she deleted the garage access signal from her car's computer.

She had spent more than two decades in that house, and she cannot deny that those years were some of the best she ever had. She began to cry, knowing it this would be the last time she would see this house that she spent all those years in, raising a family, and having wonderful memories. However, it was time for her to move on and to hopefully find happiness elsewhere as she could no longer find it here in this house where she was lonely.

After Laura wiped her eyes, she pulled the car out of the driveway, and proceeded to drive away with the moving van behind her, intending to never return.

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