

Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode II: The Star to the North



PART 2

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Grange, Paladin-Class Battleship, Local Docking Station
Planet DP-42-C, Defense Perimeter-42 System, 2 Jumps East of Viridis System, Eastern Region
7:02am, June 3, 5433 A.D. (Next Day)*

“How are the structural repairs going on the rest of the fleet?”

Nora looked over the repair reports as she sat down at her desk with her cup of coffee with a few espresso shots in it. Dennise sat in front of Nora’s desk as both were looking over the reports on the ships of the fleet that needed structural repair. So far, the two destroyers that had to retreat during the battle needed the most work on their structural integrity while only a few other ships needed minor work. If the Lykans had fielded more ships in their engagement yesterday, the results would have been very different.

“So far,” Dennise said, “the repairs are going smoothly albeit slowly. We requested more materials for repair work from headquarters but they said it was going to take a while to arrive.”

“I’m no engineer,” Nora said, “but if the armor is repaired, does the structural integrity of the ships really need to be worked on?”

“Of course,” Dennise said. “The armor may be repaired but without the structure behind it, the armor could buckle completely with a single well-placed shot. You didn’t know that?”

“Like I said, I’m not an engineer. I’m just curious how long we have for repairs until the next Kingdom fleet decides to attack our position.”

“If the Kingdom continues to probe the DP Zone, they will most likely continue north of our position for the time being. However, I think we are the first Republic fleet to defeat their battleship so they may reconsider or delay any further incursions.”

“In other words, this is a good time for our forces to recoup and regroup to be better prepared for their next assault.”

“We can only hope.”

“So what news is there from Lumen? Was there anything interesting?”

“I heard on the news that the Senate is meeting to discuss some topics that have been brought forth by the Supreme Chancellor and the State ambassador. This has something to do with the State’s interest in importing our culture and technology.”

“You told me about that yesterday. I guess they are going forward with that after all.”

“Don’t you watch the news?”

“At times but usually I watch some comedy to help relieve my stress.”

“Now I’m curious, but have you ever been to Voluptas?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“It’s probably one of the best places for stress relief if you want to be active.”

“I was there a couple of times when I was a child but the last time I was there was for my nineteenth birthday. I reserved a room at one of the hotels and partied with my friends throughout the night. It was a lot of fun if not pleasurable.”

“What do you mean by...?” Dennise suddenly stopped herself. “You know what. It’s probably best not to know, but you haven’t been back since?”

“I’ve been busy since then. I would love to go back and unwind again.”

“You and me both.”

“When was the last time you went, Dennise?”

“I went a few years ago with my boyfriend. We had a great time and it was very romantic.”

Dennise said the last sentence with a look of pleasure on her face. Nora was curious but figured not to ask out of respect for Dennise’s privacy.

“I know these ships have entertainment facilities on board,” Nora said, “but it is better to go out to such events with a group of family and friends that are not in the military.”

Nora took a sip at her coffee and looked at her pad. She suddenly noticed a message on her tablet.

“What’s this?” Nora asked as she opened the message.

“What is it?” Dennise asked.

Nora looked over the message briefly before looking back at Dennise.

“I’m getting a transfer notice for one of the destroyers in my fleet.”

“For which ship?”

“Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine.”

“The one that had the shell embedded in its hull? Where are they transferring it to?”

“According to this, the ship is being reassigned to the Serenus System.”

“Near the Northern Region? Why?”

“Apparently it is for a special assignment in that area.”

“Who issued the orders?”

“The orders are from Vice Admiral Trent.”

“Trent? That doesn’t make sense. Why is he issuing orders for that ship in particular?”

“I’m not sure, but the order is authentic. His DNA approval is on these orders and he is a superior officer. It is possible that these orders are going through him in order to keep the enemy from intercepting transmissions and finding our headquarters.”

“True. Do we need to verify these orders?”

“If his DNA is on these orders, they’re already verified. I wonder if there’s something about the battle that destroyer was in that they want to investigate in away from the frontlines.”

“There is that possibility. Are you going to let the crew know?”

“I have to because these orders say they want the ship there by the end of the day. That means repairs or no repairs that ship is going now. I’ll send them the order right now so that they can get underway.”

* * * * *

*Storage Room #53, Deck Five Section D, Destroyer-829, Local Docking Station
Planet DP-42-C, Defense Perimeter-42 System, 2 Jumps East of Viridis System, Eastern Region
7:30am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Attention all hands, this is the commander.”

As the commander of the ship started making the announcement over the entire ship, the intruder in the EVA suit looked over the data tablet he had in his hands, seeing the confirmation of the orders he had just sent to Rear Admiral Nora, the flag officer of the Republic fleet. He began to laugh quietly knowing how easy it was to dupe her into launching the destroyer he had managed to infiltrate to where he wanted the vessel to go.

“We have just been given orders for deployment to the Serenus System,” the commander continued. “We do not know the reasons for the deployment but we will be continuing repairs on the ship’s structural integrity on the way to ensure we make it to our destination in one piece. We will be reinforcing our structural integrity field to help ease the repairs while traveling. We are deploying right now to reach our destination as soon as possible by the end of the day.”

The intruder quickly started typing up a message to send to the local military headquarters in the Serenus System. He needed to make sure they were aware of the destroyer’s arrival without trying to contact Vice Admiral Trent to confirm the orders. As the engines started to be heard powering up throughout the ship, the intruder sent the message. The destroyer would arrive and dock with the station, allowing the crew to disembark. This would allow him to take command of the destroyer to proceed with his mission.

“According to our helmsman, the trip will take almost four hours to reach Serenus. Engineering teams, please keep a constant check on all damaged sections and repair what you can before we arrive. Out.”

As the speakers turned off, the intruder was getting hungry again. He pulled out another meal bar from his pack. He had a couple yesterday but the bars were rather tasty. Usually rations tasted bad, but the ones who deployed him for this mission knew it was better to have something that tasted good than bad or he would be making sounds of disgust without realizing it. Those sounds could lead him to be discovered. Of course, he would only need to endure the rations until his mission was completed. Then he could eat a meal again in his “original” body.

The intruder made sure that the door to the storage room was “malfunctioned” and would require further maintenance for anyone to open the door. However, the room only had cleaning supplies for the most part and the crew was more focused on making sure the ship was kept in one piece than focusing on the door or cleaning the ship. Once they reach their destination, he can finally take the EVA suit off to proceed with the next stage of the mission he was given.

Until then, he had four more hours to go over the details of his mission in his head.

* * * * *

*Main Senate Chamber, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
7:58am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“The senators seem rather lively this morning.”

Before Drew could even opened the door to enter the Main Senate Chamber, he could hear pieces of the conversations from the senators going back and forth about the topics they were provided ahead of time. It was hard for him to determine between those in favor of the topics versus those that were opposed. He knew some of these topics were going to be difficult to work with the war the Republic was in with the Kingdom but they needed to be addressed.

Drew looked over the tablet he had in his hand with the topics he was going to address to the senators once more. He then took a deep breath and put it back to his right side before opening the door. He could see his podium from there and the light that was directed on it from above. As he walked out and the door closed behind him, the senators noticed him and began to settle down while taking their seats. Once he was at the podium he looked around at the Senate to make sure everyone was in their place before he began.

“Good morning,” he said. “This meeting of the Senate will now come to order. Yesterday, I forwarded to you all the agenda of what we are covering today. I hoped you all looked them over so that you all can give your opinions and votes for the matters being addressed. I want to start with the topics that relate to the Republic strictly before we go to the topics in regards to the United Vitam State and their proposals.”

Drew tapped on the first item on his tablet, which was the report from Vice Admiral Trent about the download of the map from the *Renaldo*’s database. This report appeared on two large screens on the wall behind Drew, one on each side.

“As many of you have asked,” Drew continued, “an investigation was done to discover how the Kingdom discovered our eastern border so quickly within weeks when analysts from both the Republic and the State predicted they would have taken months. Vice Admiral Trent of the R.N.S. *Renaldo* has completed the investigation and discovered that Lykan Ambassador Forneido, when he was on board the battleship, used a recording device that allowed him to access a map of the Republic while he was using the same terminal to read our history. The scanners on board the ship were primarily looking for a weapon but did alert the ambassador’s guide of the device. The ambassador did say it was a recording device but we did not know what it was ‘recording’ until now.”

“Do we know what information the map contained?” Senator Irma of Oceanus asked.

“We believe it only contained general information of the Republic. It did not contain sensitive data such as base locations. I believe this map was to be used if things went well with

the initial meeting and it would show both the Lykan Ambassador and Vice Admiral Bridneo of the United Vitam State the territorial claim the Republic has within the star cluster. However, considering the information included the size of the populations and the listing of capital locations for each system including Luminaire, the Kingdom would no doubt attempt to hit the largest populations and/or political targets as their high priority targets. Because they have this information, this leads me to the next topic of discussion.”

Drew pressed the next item on his tablet which appeared on the screens. It showed a list of fleets and resources.

“Since we now know what information the Lykans now possess involving our territory, we need to quickly deploy more ships to the DP Zone to protect and reinforce that region from further incursions from Kingdom forces. We’ve had several battles take place within the DP Zone, the latest conflict happening in the DP-Forty-Two System. That battle saw the destruction of a Lykan battleship after it self-destructed when our forces attempted to board it once they immobilized the vessel. However, a few ships received some internal damage and our forces are working to get them repaired, but they are working with limited resources and we need to ensure that they can be properly supplied to keep the Lykans at bay and away from populated areas.”

“What about the defense of the international star gate at Tranquillus?” Senator Chardanai who represented Tranquillus asked. “I heard that you or Grand Admiral Mikey were intending on recalling the Eleventh Fleet from that system.”

“The Eleventh Fleet was only intended to be in the Tranquillus System for the initial meeting with the alien races under the guise of doing training exercises. They are going to be recalled but another fleet, though smaller, will be deployed to protect the gate. The DP Zone will prevent any further Lykans from returning to Tranquillus. There is also the fact that the Lykans are not aware of the international star gate and thus may not have a need to return to that system anytime soon. Are there any questions about the transfer of ships and resources?”

A few senators raised their hands. Drew knew that was going to happen but figured he might as well answer their questions.

* * * * *

*Bridge, Cruiser-242, Guardian-Class Cruiser, Eastern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Viridis IV Orbit, Viridis (“Green”) System, 32 Jumps East of Lumen System
8:15am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Sorry for being late.”

Captain Ren was embarrassed with how late she was reporting to the bridge. She had overslept past her alarm which she had not done since the academy. She had to quickly get up and get dressed before reporting to the bridge. The tactical officer and her second-in-command Commander Amber could only give a slight laugh.

“Thankfully,” Amber said, “we were able to get underway without anyone in flight control realizing you were not on the bridge but I don’t think we can cover you next time it happens.”

“I hope it doesn’t happen again,” Ren said as she sat in her command chair. “So what do we have going on so far? Do we have any further news from the DP Zone?”

“Not since the battle involving Rear Admiral Nora’s forces. Taking and modifying an old Earth saying, it’s ‘all quiet on the eastern front.’”

“Very funny. So what else has been going on?”

“Do you want the news from a military perspective or a government perspective?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“The Senate is currently in session about a few things. Apparently the Lykan ambassador that visited Vice Admiral Trent’s ship managed to download a map of the Republic.”

“So that’s how they found out about our eastern border so soon.”

“Correct. The Supreme Chancellor is also trying to convince them to send more ships and resources to the DP Zone in light of the fact that the Lykans know our major population planets and their capitals including Luminaire.”

“So in other words, traffic around here is going to get rather busy if and when they approve the Chancellor’s request. At least it will make things busier around here.”

“Speaking of which, I noticed something rather odd earlier and wondered if you heard about it?”

“What do you mean by odd? Can you be specific?”

“Well lately the military ships have travelled to the DP Zone while logistical vessels go back and forth. However, almost fifty minutes ago, a Republic destroyer came from the DP Zone.”

“A destroyer was coming from the DP Zone? This is the first time I’m hearing of it. Was it just the one ship?”

“Yes, ma’am. We were expecting a fleet to follow behind it but that was not the case.”

“What was the destroyer’s number and fleet assignment?”

“Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine assigned to Rear Admiral Nora’s fleet.”

“Was it coming here for repairs?”

“That was the odd part. According to their orders, they were heading for the Serenus System.”

“Serenus? You mean towards the Northern Region? Why in the world was that destroyer heading there?”

“They don’t know for certain why they were ordered there, either. Their order for deployment was given to them by Vice Admiral Trent with his DNA verification stamp on it.”

“Trent issued the orders? Why would he issue the orders when he is still in the Tranquillus System?”

“I don’t know the answer to that either but if it has his DNA verification stamp, do we still question the orders?”

Ren thought about it for a moment. With a DNA stamp on the orders, the orders themselves are not question. Ren’s issue is the motive for having a lone destroyer travel from the DP Zone to Serenus when there are plenty of other destroyers in the area.

“Maybe not,” Ren said, “but I do wonder why?”

“Do you think it has something to do with the Camino Star Empire?”

“The Empire? How so?”

“I wonder if there is something about that ship that makes it more than qualified for a diplomatic mission to start talks with the Empire.”

“But the last thing I heard involving talks with the Empire is that the Senate was holding off on getting them involved with our conflict with the Kingdom.”

“Maybe the mission is being conducted in secret?”

“Maybe it is, but all we can do is speculating on the matter.”

“What about sending a message to the Vice Admiral inquiring about the vessel’s deployment?”

“I guess I can do that if it is a general inquiry. I’ll go to my Ready Room and send him a text-only message. I still look like I just woke up and I don’t need to let a vice admiral see me like this.”

“Understood. I’ll let you know if anything further happens.”

Ren got up from her chair and headed for her Ready Room. She pressed the door button on the door frame and the doors opened. The Ready Room on a cruiser compared to a battleship was smaller by twenty-five percent so it was not as spacious. It lacked the couch that was found on the battleships’ Ready Rooms because of this. However, there was still a fridge for drinks for the commanding officer and guests.

Ren went around to the other side of the desk and sat down. She turned on her terminal and began to type out a message to be sent to Vice Admiral Trent. After a few minutes, she sent the message. She waited a few minutes and was about to get up from her seat when she had received a reply. She opened up the message. It read:

Captain Ren, the ship in question was selected at random for a special assignment involving the Northern Region and the Camino Star Empire. I am aware the ship has some structural damage but this mission it is going on is important and we find the crew is more than capable of completing the mission. I am not cleared to give you the details of the mission however but once the mission is completed you will get all of the details. End message.

Ren sat back in her chair and scratched her head. Guess that makes a lot of sense and why the destroyer was going on such a trip. Ren turned on some music and decided to finish looking decent before going back on the bridge.

* * * * *

*Storage Room #53, Deck Five Section D, Destroyer-829
On Route to Serenus System, Estimated Time of Arrival: 3 hours
8:19am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

The intruder put down his pad. That was too close for comfort for him. With the DNA verification, the intruder had access to the military email system for Vice Admiral Trent. He was able to send the orders involving the destroyer’s deployment using that method and was able to deter people’s inquiries about the ship’s mission. The only problem the intruder could see is if the vice admiral ever looked at his messages on his end. However, the intruder made it to where all messages are read upon receiving them and thus the vice admiral would not receive notifications of the new messages. The intruder is also deleting the message both receiving and sent to ensure Trent would not be aware of the intruder’s actions involving his account.

Hopefully, Captain Ren’s inquiry is the last one the intruder has to deal with for a while.

* * * * *

Main Senate Chamber, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
8:22am, June 3, 5433 A.D.

“Are there any further questions?”

Drew was starting to get a little bit bothered by the questions being asked involving the deployment and resource costs. However, he managed to get them answered to the best of his abilities while satisfying the senators to the point that hopefully they will approve the funds for further military deployment and resources for the DP Zone.

Now he had to discuss the “fun” topics.

“If there are no further questions on the current topic,” Drew said, “we’ll move on.”

Drew brought up the next topic on his tablet titled “Sustainable Warp Drive Recon Vessel” which also appeared on the two monitors behind him. The moment that showed up, the senators started to murmur amongst them. Drew knew this would cause some debate amongst them due to the nature of such a craft.

“I know this is sudden,” Drew said, “but this thought came to mind during my discussion with Ambassador Drino. While we know the Lykan home planet is located on the edge of the Eastern Region, we do not know its exact whereabouts. The races of the State also do not know as no slave is allowed in their home system. Because of this fact and that recon could not be done without going through star gates or using an excessive amount of crystals, I would like to see about the funding and development of a sustainable warp drive reconnaissance class of vessel to circumvent the Lykan defenses and star gate network in order to search out their home planet.”

“What would be the point of finding their home planet?” Senator Melissa of Serenus asked.

“The point of finding their home planet would be to find a means to keep them from promoting any further conflict with both the Republic and the State by showing them their own home system is susceptible to attack.”

“Are you suggesting we go on the offensive?”

“I’m suggesting we put a quick end to the war that the Kingdom is waging against us in the quickest and most efficient way possible. If that means we have to strike at their military targets in their home system to get the point across, then I say it is worth the risk. The development of a sustainable warp drive system would also allow for deep space exploration in other areas of the cluster without the need of using the Salire Purpura Crystals after the current conflict is averted.”

Many of the senators looked at each other. The idea of such a drive has merit but the thought of the Republic being the aggressor all of a sudden goes against a lot of principles for which the Republic stood for. However, the Republic itself has not been in a war since its formation so a lot of its principles and morals are already being put to the test against the Kingdom.

“I will leave it for you all to discuss and decide much like the rest of the topics today. A decision does not need to be made today unless you all feel like you need to make it. If there are no further objections I would like to go to the next topic.”

“I have a quick question to ask before we do so,” Irma said.

“Go ahead?”

“Even if the technology for sustainable warp drives became a reality, what keeps Republic civilians, allies, and enemies from acquiring the same technology?”

“Can you elaborate more on the question?”

“For over a thousand years, we have used the star gates as a means to control the traffic within the Republic. This allowed local law and traffic enforcement to limit the number of people going between systems including criminals from trying to flee. This also allowed the military to keep potential enemy forces from going further into our space without them using the Salire Purpura Crystals. If the technology in question ends up in the hands of the civilian population or our enemies, what would prevent them from abusing the technology to their own means?”

Drew hated to admit it but Irma had a point. If the technology got into the wrong hands, it would allow certain people and groups to circumvent the current security measures that are in place. However, the need of this technology is too great. Drew had to think of something to ease the minds of the senators, and thankfully it came to him quickly.

“I intend to limit the development of this technology for use on only a few ships within the military. Should the ship that possesses the technology fall into the wrong hands, we will see about having the ship’s computer programmed to self-destruct. I will also see about having the engineers and programmers develop other failsafe measures to prevent theft of the technology. That is the best solution I can offer at this time.”

“Alright, Supreme Chancellor. Let’s hope that will be enough.”

Drew could tell that she and a few other senators did not look as satisfied as he wanted but it was the best he could come up with on the fly like that. For now, it was best to move on to the next item of business.

“If we have concluded with this topic of discussion,” he said, “let us move on to the next topic.”

Drew looked at the topic list and decided to save the exchange of destroyers and the EM warheads for last. He needed to change the mood of the senators with how they are feeling right now about the drive system. He decided to bring up the cultural export to the State as the next topic to get them in a better mindset. As he selected the topic, it appeared on the screens.

“As we have all been made aware,” Drew said, “the races of the State have lost much of their history and culture when they became enslaved by the Kingdom. The small amount of their culture and history that they have managed to hold on to has not given them much of an identity to work with outside of what they had developed from scratch to form the State. Many of their younger generations have suddenly become interested in the culture of the Republic including but not limited to entertainment, music, and fashion. They see the current State culture as ‘uncreative’ and have been drawn to our culture like the proverbial ‘moth to a flame.’ Not everyone in the State, however, feels like they do. I have been informed that there are traditionalists within the State that feel as though they need to develop their own culture without being influenced by an outside culture like the Republic’s. I do have concerns about extremists among this group should we allow for a cultural export into the State but the ambassador I spoke with yesterday said that they want to do a ‘trial run’ first with a few stores and media imports at their capital to see how things go before expanding upon them.”

“Do we know which stores and media they want imported?” Lumen Senator Toni asked.

“The ambassador did not make any recommendations. He probably figured it would be best for the businesses and companies to decide that amongst themselves since the government would not be the ones regulating businesses like the ones that are in the State.”

“The State regulates their businesses?”

“From what I understand, the State’s business sector is owned by the government so the State itself is run much like a socialist or communist entity. They chose this due to necessity but so far it works short of the cultural issue they face. I looked over the proposal from the ambassador and the State will allow Republic-based companies that get established in the State to run independent of the State, though they may still have to pay State taxes while operating within that nation which is understandable. However, we do not have information on their taxes or on the cost of imported goods which is something we would have to discuss with the State further before businesses and companies agree to open in the State. Are there any questions?”

Drew looked around and saw no one had questions about this topic for now. He looked at the last two topics and knew they would be just as much of an issue as the sustainable warp drive topic but these had to be addressed.

“I would like to point out that I know how much of a hot topic these last two items are,” Drew said, “but I want to go through them and explain why they were brought up.”

Drew selected the topic on the exchange of destroyers first on his tablet which appeared on the screens.

“As many of you know, the State has expressed interest in our shield booster technology and our laser weaponry. They have reached out to the companies that make these pieces of technology in an attempt to acquire them. While we have approved of negotiations between the State and the companies here in the Republic, the companies themselves want what the State considers excessive amounts of money for the technology. In order to cut the costs, I have proposed the notion of an exchange of destroyers. They will have two of our ships for study while we have two of theirs to research for ourselves.”

“So you are using the pretense of an exchange for them to steal our technology?” Irma asked.

“It is not considered stealing if we openly admit to the fact that the exchange is to research the vessels themselves and they will be fully fitted for that reason.”

“You realize the companies will not be happy about this little bit of maneuvering from making a profit from the State, right? This could effectively void our contracts with them.”

“I looked over the asking price the companies are asking the State and they are charging for more than what they ask from us for the same technology. If the companies want to complain about us sidestepping them in such a manner, they should not have tried to extort the State like they did.”

“How much more are they asking for?”

“Between fifty to seventy-five percent more.”

“Are you kidding?! Why did they want to charge the State so much?”

“I do not have an answer to that question without asking them directly. However, this could be due to the lack of copyright laws across national lines which are something we will have to discuss at some point in great detail.”

“So is it safe to assume that the State is looking to reverse engineer the technology and develop their version of that technology?”

“In the end, that is what it looks like.”

“Then let me ask this: what are we to do with the destroyers we would be getting from the State?”

“We will be analyzing the destroyers for a couple of reasons. The first is the fact that the ships use modular construction for simplified construction and maintenance. While we have the same thing for our ships when it comes to the internals, they use this modular construction to build and add on to existing ships. If this could be done for our ships as well, it would make construction and maintenance more simplified than before. Also, I would like to use the missile launchers for tests involving the next topic. I want to see about a joint development project with State weapons researchers in the development of electromagnetic warhead equipped missiles. The State lacks the technology to develop EM weaponry which as we have seen works best against the shields of the Kingdom thanks to our lasers. Either way, if the State can utilize either the laser turrets or the EM missiles, their fight against the Kingdom will go a lot easier for them.”

“So the destroyers we are getting in the exchange are being used to test fire these new warheads?” Senator Chardanai asked.

“That is correct. Since the Republic does not have any missile launchers on our ships, it is easier to have ships already built and equipped with those weapons to test fire them with. Also if anyone here is about to raise concern about those weapons being used against our ships, I will go ahead and say this. While our shields are just a vulnerable to such weapons as the Kingdom’s, our shield boosters can repair the shields and our armor has an anti-EM coating to keep such missiles from damaging our systems.”

Drew looked around. Looks like he was right as he noticed Senator Irma had her arms crossed. She may have been ready to bring that up much like the sustainable warp drive technology issue. Thankfully he stopped her from bringing up that issue before she could say something about it.

“Just like with everything else,” Drew said, “we will make a finalized decision on these topics tomorrow morning. I would suggest you all look over these topics and if you have any questions to have them ready by then. For now, ladies and gentlemen, I bid you all to enjoy the rest of the day.”

With that, the light that shined on the podium went dark. Drew grabbed his tablet and proceeded to walk out of the room the same way he came in. There was a slight murmur among the senators as he went through and closed the door behind him. He took a deep breath. It was always nerve-racking to speak in front of all of those senators, especially when the topics would be as volatile as those presented. At least they were out there and hopefully none of the senators had any further questions. Usually during this phase of such deliberations, the senators would speak amongst themselves both in the chamber and call each other afterwards on their thoughts. All Drew could do at this point is relax for the time being and deal with the more immediate problems of the Republic.

At least, the ones he knows about.

* * * * *

Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
9:16am, June 3, 5433 A.D.

“I guess I have to get up.”

Laura was not much of a morning person. She usually liked getting up later than eleven or so in the morning. However, she wanted to get home at a decent hour which was why she chose to do the noon and evening news broadcasts. Whenever her husband Trent was around, he usually helped her get up early, but part of that was due to when he usually gets up while on assignment aboard the *Renaldo*. Mornings like today though make her wish he was there to wake her up but she realized the importance of his work. She was happy though that he would be coming back in a week or so, but that time was dragging on longer than she had hoped.

She finally willed herself out of bed and opened the blinds of the patio window a little bit to look outside towards the south. She could see the tall buildings of Luminous in the distance with the glow of the sun coming from the east. The home was built along the side of a small mountain to the north of the city and provided a spectacular view of the city and the surrounding homes. The community was also gated as the homes were usually occupied by important and/or popular people.

The home her and Trent resided in was three stories tall but the bottom floor was halfway into the mountain and only the south side offered windows and a means to go out into the back yard. There is a guest room and entertainment room downstairs for any guests they received. The second floor functioned as the main floor with the garage, kitchen, living room and dining room on that floor. The top floor had four bedrooms though Trent turned the second largest room into his office while one of the two smaller bedrooms was converted into an arts and crafts room for Laura. The other small bedroom was another guest room, but it was originally Amarria's bedroom before she moved out. Obviously the master bedroom was for Trent and Laura. The laundry room was also located on this floor.

Laura turned away from the spectacular view and got her phone off its charger on the nightstand next to the bed and looked at it. She looked at the time and checked social media before looking for any interesting news. She decided to go ahead and hop in the shower but not before she ordered the kitchen downstairs to prepare breakfast. The kitchen had a built-in robotic system to help cook meals in case the homeowner was in a hurry. Robotic arms came out of concealed panels on the walls and surfaces and took out ingredients to make scrambled eggs with cheese as well as waffles and coffee that Laura had ordered. As Laura took a shower, the kitchen was full of activity as the arms used the kitchen utensils and appliances to create Laura's breakfast. By the time Laura had finished showering, got dressed, and put on makeup, her breakfast was on the table still warm from being prepared.

As Laura began eating her breakfast, she had a holographic display appear showing her emails from work and the current listing of headlines that were to be reported at noon today. As Laura looked at the emails, she looked at the time and realized she had to leave in less than ten minutes to get to work on time. She quickly finished up her breakfast and coffee, gathered her belongings, and headed towards the garage. Her Millennium SE Coupe was parked closer to the door she entered from but Trent's car was parked right next to hers. His vehicle was newer than hers. He owned a red 5431 Fuji Motors Fenrir Hypersport, a sports car with a high output and

horsepower electric engine faster than Laura's car. She takes it out once in a while with his permission to ensure it gets some use while he was away. She generally tends to drive the Fenrir once a week on Saturday, though she tends to be careful due to how powerful and quick the car was while driving. She also doesn't take it to work because her car's ID was in the system for her garage, not Trent's.

Laura walked around to the Millennium's driver side door and got into the car. She pressed the garage door opener and that door opened as she started the car.

"Destination: NBS News garage," Laura ordered the car.

The car gave a confirmation noise as the vehicle backed out of the garage. The garage door closed automatically after the vehicle backed out of the driveway and onto the residential road. The car put itself into drive and started heading down the road. At one point, the car turned onto a winding road that headed down the mountain. After a couple of minutes, the car reached the end of the road at a cross street where the gate was located. A force field was active both at the entrance and exit. As the car reached the gate, the transponder in the window was scanned and the force field went down allowing the car to pass. As soon as it passed, the force field became active again.

The car continued to drive towards the closest highway from there. As the car continued to drive itself to NBS News in downtown Luminous, Laura continued to look at her emails and messages that were displayed on a screen in the middle of the console. As she looked through her messages, one of them caught her attention. It was a message from Christina, the field reporter that was assigned to the Viridis System next to the DP Zone. She was also present when the Republic first met the State and Kingdom in the Tranquillus System. As Laura opened the email, she began to read some of the details Christina had received since yesterday. There was not much to report since yesterday but one item in particular got her attention. For whatever reason, a destroyer from the DP Zone was seen going through the system and heading away from the DP Zone. Christina thought that such a move was rather odd and contacted the local fleet commander, Captain Ren, for further details.

Christina was told that those details were not available for the public.

Normally the military is rather open about their actions unless they were told otherwise. To be told that the deployment of a destroyer away from the DP Zone was information not available to the public was odd to say the least. Laura decided to give Christina a call while she was on the road. She dialed Christina's number on the display of the car. The phone started ringing and after three rings, Christina picked up.

"This is Christina," she said over the phone. "Good morning, Miss Laura."

"Good morning. I just got your message. Are you certain that Captain Ren could not provide you information about that destroyer's deployment?"

"It seemed like she was ordered not to say anything about it. Either that or she doesn't know all the details either."

"I just find it odd that a ship would be requested to leave the DP Zone considering the military needs to send more ships into the zone."

"Would your husband know anything about it by chance?"

“I would hate to call and ask him about it. He may not even know about it for that matter. He also made it clear that anything we talk about with the military cannot be on put on the air. In other words, the moment we talk about it, it is off-limits from going on the air.”

“Why is that?”

“He does not want to be quoted anything that he is not authorized to report or comment on. It would get him in a lot of trouble otherwise.”

“I see. I would still ask him about it if he knows anything. If it is on a secret mission, then we’ll just drop it until they release an official statement.”

“I’ll check with him before I get into work and I will contact you about what he says.”

“Alright. I will talk to you again in a little bit.”

“Talk to you soon.”

The phone call ended and Laura was a bit nervous about calling Trent while he was still on assignment. The only thing she hoped was that Trent was in his Ready Room so that the call could be private. She dialed his number and the phone began to ring. After one ring, the phone was picked up.

“This is Trent speaking. I am unable to come to the phone right now...”

Laura hung up after hearing the voicemail system. Trent must have had his phone turned off. Part of her was relieved but at the same time wondering if he was busy in other ways such as being in battle. Hopefully that was not the case, but she would have to try him again later. She dialed Christina again who picked up after a couple of rings.

“That was quick,” Christina said.

“Unfortunately I got his voicemail so I was not able talk to him about it. He may be busy at the moment. That is usually the reason why I just message him. However, I haven’t heard from him at all in the past day which is unusual. I may give him another try here in a little while after the noonday broadcast.”

“Do you think his forces are under attack? They are guarding the international star gate and that would be a tempting target for the Lykans.”

“That may be the case but I haven’t heard of any attacks in Tranquillus nor have I seen anything of the sort in my emails. Like I said, I’ll try him again later.”

“All right. Talk to you later.”

“Bye-bye.”

Laura hung up the phone and looked outside. The car was already halfway to her office and had reached Luminous city limits by this point. She was beginning to wonder if Trent was alright or not. She decided not to wait and tried calling him again. However, the call went right to voicemail once again. She decided to give up for now and try again later.

* * * * *

Storage Room #53, Deck Five Section D, Destroyer-829

On Route to Serenus System, Estimated Time of Arrival: 28 minutes

10:47am, June 3, 5433 A.D.

The intruder kept monitoring messages being sent to Vice Admiral Trent but also managed to take the time to disable his mobile communications device that the Humans called a “phone.” He wanted to make sure that no one could contact him directly about the destroyer’s

deployment in order for the ship to reach its destination. So far the intruder has been successful in dodging any major inquiry about the ship's deployment. He also noticed a couple of calls coming in from his "mate" but again he made those go straight to voicemail. Thankfully no one major has tried to contact the Vice Admiral. The only channels the imposter did not have the means to stop are direct communications to his ship, but hopefully no one tries to contact him in that manner.

With only thirty minutes till the ship arrives at its destination, the intruder believed it was time to get ready to make an appearance. The intruder took off his helmet. The intruder looked exactly like Vice Admiral Trent. The intruder took out a mirror to look and make sure. The Lykans had managed to do an excellent job in making a clone of the Vice Admiral. The brain however was artificial and allowed for one's conscious to be transferred from his Lykan body to this clone and back remotely. This was beneficial for the imposter as once his mission was completed he would transmit his consciousness back to his Lykan body just before he destroyed the cloned body to get rid of the evidence.

The imposter continued to take off the EVA suit and he was dressed in a Republic Navy uniform exactly like the one Trent wore. No one would have suspected that he was not the real Trent unless they did a full scan and detected the artificial parts. The imposter laughed under his breath.

The Camino Star Empire who came up with this cyber technology in this clone body, salvaged by the Lykans after their loss, was more useful than the Lykans gave credit.

* * * * *

*Bridge, Cruiser-158, Guardian-Class Cruiser, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:15am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"So this is the 'mysterious' destroyer."

Captain Mandy came onto the bridge of her cruiser as the destroyer from the DP Zone made its way towards the Northern Republic Military Headquarters station after coming out of warp from the direction of the last star gate it went through. She sat in her command chair as the ship started to pass by the fleet.

Mandy was surprised about the orders of deployment she had received earlier today that concerned that destroyer. It still did not make any sense to her that a ship from the DP Zone would travel all the way here, but the orders came from Vice Admiral Trent and they were verified among other officers who saw the ship pass through their systems.

"The destroyer is passing our fleet, ma'am," said Commander Danielle, the tactical officer and second-in-command of the cruiser. "I know they have orders but do you want them to stop for a scan to make sure there are no surprises?"

"As much as I would love to have that done," Mandy said, "there is no valid reason to do so. Besides, what would we expect to find on board? That ship left the DP Zone after it went through some repair work to its structure. Rear Admiral Nora confirmed that much in her report when I asked her a little while ago once I got the orders."

"You spoke with Rear Admiral Nora already?"

"Yes, I did. Since it was involving a ship of her fleet, I had to make sure about the odd request for one of her ships being deployed here. The orders for the ship have not been made clear yet, either. I have no idea why that ship was deployed here and from what I can gather neither does the crew of that destroyer."

“Hasn’t anyone tried to confirm with the top brass about these orders?”

“The orders state that the ship was going to be used for a special assignment and many people don’t tend to question Vice Admiral Trent’s orders. He has yet to give anyone a reason to question him or his orders. That may be the reason why no one has contacted the higher-ups. However, for him to issue the orders and not the Admiralty raises a flag or two about the odd nature of those orders. I may contact them in the next hour or so about the orders, though to go straight to them over the Vice Admiral’s head would put me in a precarious spot.”

“It may not be just you then. I’m willing to bet others in your position feel the same way about going over the Vice Admiral’s head. I guess for now we just let things play out and see.”

“I hate the fact of having this curiosity and not having it explained but for now, you are right. We’ll let this go for now and see how things play out.”

Mandy looked back at the destroyer on the screen as it approached the station. By now dock control would be guiding the vessel in.

* * * * *

*Observation Room #3, Main Docking Bay Juncture, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus (“Sere”) System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
11:20am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“I feel like this is a waste of time.”

Brenda, the local field reporter from NBS News, leaned against the railing looking out through the massive floor-to-ceiling windows where observers can see ships both military and civilian coming and going out of the space station. She was not alone in observing the ships coming and going though. Marina, her friend and journalist from Illuminated Times was there to help her look at the ships as well.

Christina in Viridis put in a call to any of the field reporters after Anchorwoman Laura could not get a hold of Vice Admiral Trent about the deployment of a destroyer from the DP Zone. Since the military was less than willing to provide information on the deployment of the destroyer, it was up to the field reporters to spot the vessel and see where it was going. Hopefully they can find out why in the process. Thankfully, Christina was able to identify the destroyer specifically as Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine so that they know what ship they are looking for. However, while Christina made a few calls, it was still a shot in the dark as to where the ship would show up, if at all.

“You were complaining earlier that you were bored,” Marina said. “At least this gives us something to do.”

“Maybe,” Brenda said, “but if that ship doesn’t show up here, this would have been a complete waste of time. I’m beginning to wonder why that ship even left the DP Zone to begin with.”

“The only way to know is where it will end up.”

“And if the ship decides to end up here? What then?”

“If the destroyer ends up here, then it might have something to do with the Camino Star Empire close by. At least, I would hope so. It would mean that action would finally be taken to get in contact with the Empire.”

“If that was the case, then why not use a local ship here? That’s the part that doesn’t make any sense to me.”

“I know. Of course, if the ship went anywhere else, it would make more sense depending on where it went. From what I recall, if it was coming here, it would take less than four hours

from the DP Zone to get here. We will give it until noon. If it doesn't show up by then, we will let Christina know that it hasn't shown up here and we'll go out to lunch nearby."

"That sounds good. What would you be in the mood for?"

Before Marina could answer, they noticed a destroyer approaching from outside heading for the entryway into the docking bay. As the destroyer was about to cross the atmospheric force field, an announcement was heard through the speakers.

"Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine," a male voice said, *"you are cleared to dock in Bay Twelve. Autopilot will guide you in."*

Marina and Brenda were both in shock. The destroyer they were looking for actually arrived here! They looked at each other and nodded in agreement. Now that they have confirmation that the destroyer arrived in Serenus, Brenda needed to call Christina to let her know. Brenda got her phone and dialed Christina's number.

After a couple of rings, Christina picked up.

"Yes, Brenda," Christina said.

"Christina," Brenda said, "that destroyer you wanted us to keep an eye on? It just arrived at the station in Serenus."

"The ship went there? Are you sure?"

"Destroyer Eight-Two-Nine, correct?"

"Yes, that's correct."

"I'm staring at it right now through the observation window as the ship is docking."

"Now things are really not making any sense."

"What do you mean?"

"Why would a ship go from the DP Zone to Serenus? I'm going to get in contact with Laura really quick before she gets on the broadcast floor. She needs to hear this and try to get in touch with her husband. Thanks for letting me know."

"No problem. Do you want us to keep an eye on the ship?"

"Please do. Call me if it departs from that location."

"I will. Goodbye."

Brenda hung up the phone. Things were starting to become interesting around here.

* * * * *

Storage Room #53, Deck Five Section D, Destroyer-829

*Northern Republic Military Headquarters, Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System
11:25am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"Attention all hands: we have now docked."

The imposter smiled as he straightened out his Republic uniform. He managed to make it all the way to his target destination in the Serenus System. Now he had to wait for the crew to leave the ship before he could leave the storage room. This could take a few minutes before that could happen. He had his tablet programmed to transmit the requested data that he was also ordered to get. His superiors were very interested in the weapons and defenses of the Republic and wanted the imposter to get that information if possible.

Of course, this information was secondary to his primary objective. He also needed to keep deflecting any attempts for others to get in contact with the real Vice Admiral Trent but he knew that once he began his primary objective, he will no longer be able to do so. However, by that time, his cover would already be exposed and he would be accomplishing his primary objective at that point.

The imposter accessed the internal sensors and patiently waited for the crew to leave.

* * * * *

*Office of Anchorwoman Laura, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen (“Light”) System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:27am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“The ship is WHERE?!”

Laura could not contain her surprise which attracted the attention of everyone just outside her door. She was on the phone with Christina who just told her where the destroyer that left the DP Zone was located.

“It is in the Serenus System,” Christina said. “That ship just took a four-hour trip from the DP Zone to get there. Does that SOUND like an order that Trent would give?”

“No, it doesn’t,” Laura said. “He would not have any reason to issue or even relay such orders for a deployment of that nature or distance.”

“Have you had any luck in contacting him since you got to the office?”

“None at all. I contacted the phone company about his phone and they had received a request via email for his phone to be disconnected. He would have no reason to do that.”

“What about getting in touch with him by email?”

“I tried that and got nothing but the message ‘I’m busy right now.’ He would at least tell me more than that like why he was busy. This isn’t like him at all.”

“Have you tried other avenues to get in contact with him?”

“What other avenues are you talking about?”

“Have you tried getting in contact with his superior officers like the Admiralty, the Grand Admiral, or even the Supreme Chancellor?”

“I would rather not go that high if I can avoid it.”

“But don’t you know the Supreme Chancellor before he was elected? I remembered you saying that you attended his wedding and that you as well as Trent are good friends with him.”

“That is true though Drew likes to keep his distance since he serves as Commander-in-Chief. I will get in touch with him really quick since I need to head to the broadcast floor as soon as possible. I’ll let you know what I find out after the noonday broadcast.”

“Alright. I hope everything is alright.”

“Me, too.”

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:31am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Supreme Chancellor, you have a call from Laura from NBS News.”

Drew was trying to relax after the rough morning he had with the Senate meeting. He wanted his secretary to hold all of his calls except for a select few. Thankfully, Laura was one of those few. He was hoping though that she was not calling for a last minute story to put in their noonday broadcast.

“Put her through,” he said as he straightened up.

Her image appeared on his terminal as he tried not to look so tired.

“Miss Laura,” Drew said. “To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?”

“Thankfully this is not a business call for me,” Laura said. *“I need your help.”*

“My help?” Drew asked in a curious manner. “My help with what?”

“I have been getting strange reports from this morning about the deployment of a destroyer that had just arrived at the Serenus System just a few minutes ago.”

“I thought you said this was not a business call for you?”

“It isn’t but it might be for you. That destroyer was deployed there from Rear Admiral Nora’s fleet in the DP Zone.”

Whatever tired feeling was in Drew suddenly went away the moment Laura had said that.

“Wait a minute. Let me make sure I heard you correctly. Did you just tell me that a destroyer just took a four-hour flight from the DP Zone to Serenus?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You wouldn’t happen to have heard who issued those orders by chance, did you?”

“That is part of the reason why I am calling you. I found out those orders were issued by my husband, Vice Admiral Trent.”

Drew didn’t know if he was shocked or angry. Maybe it was best to be both. However, he decided to let cooler heads prevail. He needed to know what was going on first before figuring out how to proceed.

“As you can tell, this is the first I have heard of this matter. Have you contacted him?”

“I called him but his phone was disconnected. I tried to send an email but he keeps telling me he is busy.”

“This doesn’t make any sense. Someone should have questioned him on those orders long before the ship was deployed.”

“My field reporter in Viridis tried to contact the local fleet commander there but denied commentary saying it wasn’t for public knowledge. They may have been ordered to keep its deployment secret.”

“They won’t from me. I’m going to get in contact with the *Renaldo* directly and get to the bottom of this. I know you have to get ready for your broadcast. I will let you know what is going on afterwards.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry if this seemed like a personal request but I’m concerned about how these actions that he has taken.”

“It’s okay. Thank you for bringing it to my attention. We’ll talk later.”

Drew disconnected the call. Something was going on without his knowledge and it was time to get to the bottom of the situation. He activated his terminal’s military frequency.

“Get me the *Renaldo* on the line right now.”

* * * * *

*Ready Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
International Star Gate #1, Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
11:35am, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Why can’t I get this to WORK?!”

Trent was becoming increasingly frustrated throughout the morning. He kept trying to get his email to work on his terminal but the system kept saying that his email account was opened at another location. Trent went back to his quarters to see if they were opened there but they were not. He went back to his Ready Room and tried to call headquarters through his phone but his phone showed he had no service. He wanted to use the shipboard communications to contact headquarters but he wanted to wait until he could somehow resolve the matter himself. He was about ready to give up.

“Why in the cluster is this happening?” he said in desperation. “There were no problems yesterday.”

“*Vice Admiral Trent,*” Captain Shannon, the ship’s commanding officer, said through the speakers, “*you are needed on the bridge. The Supreme Chancellor is on the line for you.*”

Trent looked a bit puzzled. Why was he getting a call from the Supreme Chancellor of all people? He got up from his desk and walked out of his Ready Room. He noticed Drew was on the screen already as Trent walked over to his chair. Trent decided it was best not to sit down.

“Supreme Chancellor,” Trent said trying to calm his technical frustrations, “to what do I owe the honor of this call?”

“*I have to ask you a very specific question, Vice Admiral,*” Drew said with a tone that made Trent begin to worry. “*Did you or did you not this morning send orders to Rear Admiral Nora’s fleet in the DP Zone to deploy one of her destroyers to Serenus?*”

Trent raised an eyebrow. He could not tell whether Drew was trying to pull some kind of prank or not. If he was, this would explain why his phone and email had stopped working. However, that thought was brief as Trent could see that Drew had a serious tone on his face and that the question he had asked sounded more like he was accusing Trent of those orders.

“Sir,” Trent finally said, “what are you talking about? I have not been able to send email, much less access it, all morning. I keep getting messages that it is being accessed from another location but I’ve gone back to any device I’ve used and they say the same thing.”

Drew looked at Trent, more puzzled than anything.

“*Do you have someone to vouch for that?*” Drew asked.

“I can, sir,” Shannon said. “I saw this message on the Admiral’s terminal and have attempted to help track down the issue for him. From what I can tell, it may be possible that it is being accessed from some other location other than this ship.”

“*Is that even possible? Doesn’t it require his DNA in order to access his messages?*”

“It does and that is what I’m trying to figure out,” Trent said.

“If I might make a recommendation, Chancellor?” Shannon asked. “I would like to send a message to the Vice Admiral but I would have a tracer attached to it. If we can track who is accessing the Vice Admiral’s messages, we may be able to see who is issuing those orders and figure out how they were able to access it.”

Drew thought about it for a while before he gave an answer.

“*Do it,*” Drew said, “*but I really hope it is someone else, Trent, because if it is not, expect a full investigation into your activities.*”

“I understand,” Trent said nervously as Shannon was typing her message.

“I’m sending the message,” Shannon said. “Now let’s see where it leads us.”

* * * * *