

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



PART 4

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
10:34am, September 7, 5433 A.D. (Two Days Later)*

“How have things progressed in the past couple of days?”

The past two days have been rough for Drew. After the ambassadors returned from their meeting with Forneido aboard the *Templar*, Drino was highly upset and making demands of nothing short than continuing the war with the Lykans without aiding them in their “domestic” problems. Drew had expected this to happen after hearing what Trent had told him about Drino’s position, if not the State’s.

Not too long after, the State announced that it was going to continue to move forward into Kingdom territory now that they know that the Kingdom’s forces are not lying in wait for them. Both Drew and Orbinai urged Drino to have the State halt its advance as the only people in those systems now are civilians. The State ignored them both and stated that Lykan civilians are nothing more than “butchers” of the State’s people. Afterwards, reports were quickly coming in that the State jumped into Kingdom-controlled systems and was bombarding planets, killing the Lykan civilians after making sure that their fellow brethren won’t be harmed in the attacks.

Public outcry from both the Republic and the Empire was starting to become rampant as citizens were calling for action to be taken. The best Drew could do was order as many ships as available to get to those star systems ahead of the State’s forces in order to protect the Lykan civilians who had not been attacked yet. The State halted their advance but made it clear that if

the Republic did not vacate those systems within forty-eight hours that the State would proceed to attack those worlds as well, whether the Republic ships were defending them or not. That was less than twenty-two hours ago.

Drew knew the State was calling his bluff. Unless the State attacked the Republic ships directly, Drew could not order the Republic ships to open fire without provoking a war with the State as well. However, that did not stop Drew from ordering the deployment of planetary shield generators similar to those on Luminaire and other Republic worlds to help protect those Lykan worlds while Republic forces attempted to evacuate the planets. The Lykans were a bit hesitant to leave but when they were told what the State was doing, they were more than eager to flee for their lives to other systems under Republic protection.

Drew had received word from his forces that Forneido had transmitted the presentation that RCIA Agent Tora had created concerning the true meaning of the Lykan religion to everyone in the Dellino System. Practically all of the Lykans in that system understood and accepted what was presented to them, now knowing what needed to be done to change their ways and preserve what is left of the Kingdom. Drew needed for the rest of the Kingdom to see this presentation as it would help them when it came to future relations with the Lykans, but Trent's crew and Forneido are the only people with the presentation. He may have to ask Forneido for a copy of it since Trent's crew was still in transit to Heronia.

Drew was also told that Forneido had contacted the Fleet Admiral of the Royal Navy and presented him and the military with the presentation as well with the same results. Forneido had also explained to the Fleet Admiral of the joint operation with Republic forces to attempt an assault on the Heronia gate in the Ciscio System and the Royal Guard fleet stationed there. After knowing that the Republic fleet would be able to use jammers and ECM on those ships, the Fleet Admiral agreed to the operation. The Lykan Fleet Admiral would try to amass as much of the Royal Navy as he could, considering the size and strength of the Royal Guard fleet. However, when the Fleet Admiral heard what the State was doing to civilians and that the Republic was attempting to stop them while evacuating the planets, he also ordered some of his ships to help in the evacuation despite the King's orders. On the other hand, considering that the Fleet Admiral was no longer following the orders of the King, the Fleet Admiral cared very little for any retribution the King would have for him.

Drew's focus now was the readiness of the Second Fleet and the destroyers being modified for electronic warfare. Grand Admiral Mikey was present to give his report.

"The Second Fleet is loading the last of the supplies needed right now," Mikey said. "They will be ready to depart in thirty minutes."

"What about the destroyers being modified for electronic warfare?" Drew asked. "Those are going to be crucial in our engagement with the Royal Guard."

"They are already fitted and all systems are ready to go. We modified six destroyers which will be able to jam more than half of the Royal Guard fleet."

"That is excellent news. What about the *Templar*? Has there been any word as to their estimated time of arrival?"

"Based on our projections, they should have already arrived almost an hour ago. However, they have to be running silent in that system until the main Heronia sensor hub is offline. Then it will signal the *Harbinger* to jump while our forces jump into the Ciscio System and rendezvous with the Royal Navy at the Heronia gate."

"What about the gate to Ciscio? Is it unlocked and which fleet is guarding it on the Dellino side?"

“We have SAGATs that are operating the gate on our side and they have confirmed that the gate on our side is unlocked as is the connecting star gate. The fleet that is guarding the gate is still the Imperial forces. Have you talked with Ambassador Orbinai to make sure their forces won’t give us any trouble passing through?”

“I talked to her last night about the situation on the State-Kingdom border. I did tell her that our forces will be passing through for a joint operation to assist the Lykans in removing their King. She said that after talking with the Emperor about our planned operation, their forces will allow us to pass as it coincides with their goals. They will make sure that the State is not aware of our actions and they should not hinder our forces from entering the Ciscio System.”

“Then hopefully everything will go off without a hitch.”

“Have there been any actions taken from the State at their border with the Kingdom?”

“Not at the moment. The Lykan forces that were sent to help evacuate the civilians just arrived and began to evacuate their people but I don’t think we can evacuate enough of them in time with twenty-six hours remaining.”

“Do what you can. If the planetary shield can hold them off once that time has expired, then at least the State’s advancement can be slowed down significantly. Even with EM warheads, it would take a lot of missiles and firepower to bring down a shield that size, especially since that shield also uses shield boosters to help strengthen and replenish it.”

“True but once the shield is engaged, nothing can get down to the planet. Ships can still leave through the shield such as transports but neither we nor the Lykans can continue with the evacuations on any of those planets.”

“Then at that point we will be in a better position of negotiating with the State to halt their acts of genocide. The Kingdom by then will start to become a democratic republic similar to our nation if all goes well. If they could also keep the State at bay on their own, then there may be room for negotiation.”

“There is only one problem, though. We know that the unmanned ships use cloned brains of races that make up the State. Once the Kingdom ceases hostilities and becomes a republic, we will have to request that the Lykans no longer use ships with those brains. I think that between those brains and the release of the slaves, that should help improve relations between the State and the Lykans.”

“The only sour note at that point is their home planets and the drug that was introduced on them. Until an antidote is created, no one is allowed on those planets. I will need to bring this up with Forneido once everything has settled.”

“Are you nervous about what might happen or what the State will do if they realize we assisted the Lykans both in the defense of their planets on the border and at their capital?”

“I’m very nervous about that eventual possibility. I’m trying to help end one war but at the same time I feel like we are stirring the flames of another potential war.”

“Have Ambassadors Wade and Autumn said anything or reported in about what the State’s Executive Council will do next concerning the State’s actions that they are aware of?”

“The Executive Council has not seen our ambassadors at all as of late, especially once word about us trying to assist the Lykans in their reform was first brought to their attention. It was even worse after we sent ships to stop the State from killing more Lykan civilians. I’m beginning to think that we are suffering a breakdown in communications that is only going to get worse once our military and political assistance with the Lykans is made known.”

“Should we look at the idea of having Republic citizens in the State pull out of that nation?”

“If the State sees that happening, they will know we are up to something that they won’t like and it wouldn’t take long as to what that was. However, I don’t want them forcibly evicted once the State does find out. I guess we will have to risk it and have our citizens pull out.”

“Does that include the ambassadors?”

“Not yet for them. Once we see what the State does after the Kingdom becomes a republic, we will decide at that point about the ambassadors staying there or leaving.”

“Understood, sir. I will report back about the operation once it has concluded.”

“Hopefully I can keep Drino from finding out what we are up to in the meantime. We don’t need any more problems from the State’s forces during this crucial moment.”

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Throne Room, Lykan Royal Palace, City of High Charity (translated)
Lykana Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom
11:15am, September 7, 5433 A.D.

“The Royal Navy is gathering in Ciscio?”

King Ronimier the Fourth was still attempting to put out the flames of a rebellion that had spread across the Kingdom after Forneido’s broadcast a few days ago. The destruction of Vangirdi and the threat of force by the Royal Guard did not quell the protests. It did the exact opposite and made things worse. The King was trying to find ways to squash this rebellion but hearing that the Royal Navy was starting to gather in Ciscio was one of those situations he had not anticipated. He lost control of the Royal Navy after the Fleet Admiral refused to follow the King’s orders after the Vangirdi bombardment and now this development was brought to his attention.

The Royal Guard fleet commander in the Ciscio System contacted the King about the development that was taking place.

“Correct, Your Highness,” the commander said. “*In the past couple of hours, we have detected more and more vessels of the Royal Navy appearing in Ciscio.*”

“Do you know what they consist of?” the King asked.

“*We have detected twenty-five battleships, fifty-two cruisers, and almost one hundred destroyers. I believe the Royal Navy fleet is amassing their forces to engage this fleet.*”

“Even if they did, they are still outgunned and your forces know exactly where to hit them. Also, I’m granting you the ability to override their cruisers and destroyers with their command codes. I’ll have them transmitted to you immediately. You can use those ships to turn their guns on those traitors’ battleships. I want the rest of the Royal Navy to know that this treachery will not go unpunished. Everyone is to always obey their King and the Royal Court.”

“*As you wish, Your Highness.*”

The holographic screen that the officer appeared on disappeared. Today, the Throne Room was empty as the Royal Court did not need to be present for every interaction the King does. However, King Ronimier had one more detail to check up on.

He pressed an intercom button on his throne.

“Get me the fleet commander of the Heronia Royal Guard,” he ordered.

After he let go of the button, a few seconds passed before another screen appeared with a different fleet commander of the Royal Guard than the previous one.

“Yes, Your Highness?” the commander asked.

“Have you found Forneido’s conspirators yet?” the King asked.

“Not yet, Your Highness. I’m not sure how they are doing so, but they have managed to evade our scanners every chance they can.”

“I want them found within the hour, commander. We have a Royal Navy fleet amassing in the Ciscio System and while I am confident the Royal Guard in that star system will dispose of the traitors, I don’t want Forneido’s co-conspirators finding a way to complicate the matter.”

“I know I should not ask this, but what happens if the Royal Guard cannot find them?”

“Then the Royal Guard in this star system will start taking orders from a different commander while you are being executed for not being able to provide results! Is that clear?!”

“Perfectly, sir. We will find them.”

The screen disappeared again as the King was starting to develop a headache. At the very least, once the traitors are disposed of and his reign reinforced, he can focus on dealing with the State, the Empire, and the Republic once more. However, destroying that many battleships would actually be detrimental to the Kingdom’s defenses. He will need to find a way for the Kingdom, HIS Kingdom, to survive.

He started to wonder what Forneido was plotting and scheming against the King’s ordained rule. Whatever it was, it won’t last against the might of Ronimier’s Royal Guard.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1
Main System Sensor Station, Heronia V Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom
11:28am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“Haven’t they managed to shut it down, yet?”

Trent was starting to get a little antsy about the situation. The *Templar* had reached the main planetary sensor station in Heronia nearly an hour ago and deployed the Blair’s team of SAGATs to infiltrate the station to shut it down. This would allow the *Harbinger* to jump into the star system without being detected, and both the *Templar* and the *Harbinger* would reach the Ciscio star gate in this star system so they can attack the Royal Guard fleet stationed there.

The *Templar* managed to get a peek at the Royal Guard fleet at the Ciscio star gate as they passed by and Forneido was correct. Half of the Royal Guard fleet was missing, most likely looking for Forneido’s aides and the mobile station they were using. Some of them may also be at the orbital city of High Charity to protect it from attack by any hostile force. This meant that the King was prepared for an assault should Forneido returned but if all goes well, the King should not be expecting a combined fleet of Royal Navy and Republic ships. Either the King surrenders at that point with no more control of his forces or he would get killed trying to defend his position of power and authority.

The problem now is that it was taking a while for Blair’s team to disable the sensor hub. It should not take them this long to disable the system unless they were encountering some form of resistance either from the system itself or any possible staff aboard. Unfortunately, trying to signal them this close to the sensor hub would set off alarms and bring the Royal Guard here, ascenario the crew of the *Templar* did not need.

“We still haven’t detected the hub’s sensors shutting down yet,” Natalie said.

“They need to hurry up,” Trent said. “The Royal Navy must have gathered in Ciscio by now and the Second Fleet will be in Dellino waiting for our signal along with Forneido.”

“You must be patient, sir,” Tora said. “Their sensor hub no doubt has backups to prevent a complete shutdown of the system. That might be why it is taking a long time.”

“Maybe that is the case. I’ve just never known them to take this long except when we tried to stop the viral attack. Even then, it didn’t take them that long.”

“Maybe not, but you need to have more confidence in their abilities. They will get the job done. Maybe you should take the time to think more about what you want to do after the war.”

“I’ve already done that on our way here and I have to go over it with my wife.”

“Don’t tell me you are bored, then?”

“Maybe I am bored or maybe I’m just eager to complete this mission. Either way, we have people waiting on us. I’m surprised we didn’t just destroy the thing instead.”

Everyone looked at Trent and then at each other. No doubt everyone had the same question as to WHY didn’t they just destroy the hub in the first place.

Tora decided to speak up.

“The reason we didn’t destroy it first is that I wanted to get the sensor readings from the hub to get a better understanding of where everything was in the system,” she said. “Remember, the Royal Guard is spread throughout the system and I am curious how Forneido’s aides have managed to keep an entire station from being detected by them. I asked Blair to gather this information once his team was on the hub. That might be why it is taking so long.”

“You requested for them to do that?” Trent asked. “No wonder it is taking so long.”

“We might not have to wait for too much longer,” Natalie said. “The hub’s scanners are starting to power down. Complete shutdown should occur in less than a minute.”

“It’s about time. Do you think the Royal Guard will notice the drop in sensor scans?”

“I hope not,” Tora said. “Otherwise, we will be in the same situation as if we tried to communicate with Blair’s team.”

“Speaking of which, Sheryl, when the sensors are completely offline, inform Blair’s team to get back to the *Templar* as soon as possible. Once they are on board, contact both Forneido and the Second Fleet to jump to their respective systems.”

“Understood, sir,” Sheryl said.

“Rei, prepare to warp to the Ciscio star gate the moment we get confirmation from Forneido that he is in this star system.”

“Yes, sir,” Rei said.

Trent took a deep breath. This whole war may actually end today and Trent was feeling very anxious about it.

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*Bridge, R.K.S. Harbinger, Lykan Advance Prototype Battleship
Dellino III Orbit, Dellino System, Republic/State/Empire Occupied Space, Eastern Region
11:32am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“We have received word from the Republic stealth vessel.”

Forneido waited for a while for the Republic stealth ship to signal the *Harbinger* that it was safe to jump back into the Heronia System. The past two days have been very productive for him as he has “enlightened” those in the Dellino System and in the military about the true nature of their faith thanks to the presentation he was given by Trent and his crew. The Kingdom needed to know the truth and hopefully by the end of the day, they will all know.

Forneido was having a hard time believing this was really happening, but he quickly realized that maybe he was destined to fail in all his projects to get to this point so he would find

the truth and turn the Lykans back towards the correct path. If that was the case, then he would do just that.

“Based on the fact that they are communicating with us, am I to assume that they were successful in disabling the Heronia sensor system?” Forneido asked.

“Correct, sir,” the communications officer said. “I’m also detecting a communication to the Republic Second Fleet to proceed to the Ciscio jump gate.”

“Good. I informed the Fleet Admiral that the Republic Second Fleet would contact them once they are in the Ciscio System. From there, they will coordinate their efforts. Now we must get started on our task. Please contact Verno and Granio. Tell them to prepare for the *Harbinger*’s return to the Heronia System.”

“Yes, sir. Contacting them now.”

The communications officer pressed a few buttons, obviously meant to contact the research facility they launched the *Harbinger* from. After less than a minute, the communications officer received a reply.

“I have Verno on the line,” the communications officer said.

“Put him through,” Forneido said.

The screen changed to the image of Verno. He looked to be in the control room of the research station.

“*Sir,*” Verno said, “*I take it you were able to make allies of the Republic?*”

“By now, you must have noticed the sensor system for Heronia is offline. That is the work of the Republic’s stealth vessel which I overheard was called the *Templar*. The *Harbinger* is ready to jump back to Heronia. Together with the *Templar*, we will be engaging the Royal Guard fleet there while the Royal Navy and the Republic’s Second Fleet engages the Royal Guard at the Heronia jump gate in Ciscio. I would give you all of the details but we are pressed for time. Where did you put the station?”

“*The station is near Heronia I. Being this close to the sun, we figured we could hide the station from the sensor system. Thankfully the shields have held but it may not be wise to jump here. We will move it closer to the Ciscio gate.*”

“Please hurry. By now the Second Fleet has made it to the Ciscio gate here in Dellino.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Antario said.

“What are you talking about, Antario?” Forneido said puzzled.

“You’re not going to believe this, but the State forces in the system have just intercepted the Second Fleet at the gate.”

“They did what?! I don’t believe this. Verno, get the station there quickly. We’ll see if we can find out what is going on.”

“*Understood.*”

Verno’s image disappeared off the main screen.

“Communications, send a message to the *Templar*. Tell them we are waiting for the station to move to an optimal location before jumping but the Republic Second Fleet was intercepted by State forces near the Ciscio gate. We are trying to figure out what is going on.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer said.

“Then get in contact with the Republic Second Fleet and find out what is going on. Time is of the essence and the State is not helping the situation.”

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*Bridge, R.N.S. Bannon, Paladin-Class Battleship
Ciscio Gate Airspace, Dellino System, Republic/State/Empire Occupied Space, Eastern Region
11:35am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“What is the meaning of this?!”

Admiral Stephens had the Republic Second Fleet warp from the orbit of Dellino III near the advance Lykan battleship *Harbinger* to the Ciscio star gate after receiving word from the *Templar* that the sensor system in the Heronia system was down. This was the Second Fleet’s que to warp to the Ciscio gate and contact the Royal Navy fleet that they were working with to destroy the Royal Guard fleet in Ciscio. With the Second Fleet consisting of three Paladin Battleships, thirty Guardian Cruisers, and ninety Crusader Destroyers, the fleet of one hundred twenty-three vessels was quite a formidable fleet second only to the First Fleet.

The one variable that the Admiral was hoping not to deal with when they reached the Ciscio star gate was the State forces being there. It wasn’t a few ships either but the entire fleet that was sent to Dellino as part of the joint operation to occupy the Dellino System. Thankfully none of their Golem Battleships were present in the system but there were four Cerberus Cruisers and sixteen Raptor Destroyers in a blockade formation and all the ships were the “Version 2” types with the shield booster system and EM warheads provided by the Republic as well as the railguns and blasters from the Empire. This blockade wasn’t meant to go toe-to-toe with the Second Fleet as the State fleet was outnumbered six-to-one but rather it was an act of defiance or making a statement. Which one it was however was hard to tell.

However, Admiral Stephens was trying to figure out how the State knew where the Second Fleet was going? It’s one thing if the current State forces could detect the fleet entering the star system and guess where it was going from there, but the fleet stayed at Dellino III for a while instead of going to the Ciscio star gate. There wasn’t a need for all their ships to gather at this gate or know the current plans. The only thing that Stephens could determine is if Ambassador Drino knew what the Second Fleet was for and ordered the State’s fleet here in Dellino to establish the blockade. The absence of the Imperial fleet near the gate only shows that the State wanted to make sure that the Republic would not enter the gate without a third-party trying to stop the State’s forces.

There was only one way to find out how the State knew where the Second Fleet was going and what they hoped to achieve.

“Communications,” he said, “hail the State fleet commander.”

“It appears they are already hailing us, sir,” the communications officer said. “Shall I put it on the screen?”

“Go ahead.”

A holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen. On it was a male Arjaf, the snake-like race with two arms as their only appendages. Stephens had only seen a couple in video references but this was the first time for him to have any conversation with one despite their numbers in the State.

“I am Captain Giwh-Nidraj,” the Arjaf said through the translator. *“We have been informed of the Republic attempting to assist the Kingdom in some manner. The State will not tolerate this behavior from its allies. In response, have established this blockade. We demand you turn your fleet around and return to Lumen. Any further attempts to leave this star system to help the Lykans in any manner will be meet with armed force. This is your only warning.”*

Before Stephens could respond, the transmission was cut off. Stephens was not keen on being threatened but he also faced a dilemma. If he were to attack the State fleet, this would essentially put the State and the Republic at war. He cannot just sit there or turn back either as he had orders and an obligation to assist the Kingdom in removing its current government for its reform.

What was the best course of action? The State fleet was outnumbered but their numbers were not the problem. They must know that the Republic won't shoot them without the risk of becoming enemies. The question is should Stephens call their bluff?

"Sir," the communications officer said, "the Lykan battleship *Harbinger* is asking us what our current status is involving jumping to Ciscio. They have detected the State fleet blocking our path."

"They have some good sensors on that ship," Stephens said. "Tell them we are trying to get them to move. Have them proceed with their jump into Heronia as soon as they can. We will deal with this situation quickly."

"Yes, sir."

"Once you send that message, contact Grand Admiral Mikey. I need some advice on this situation."

"Understood, sir. Sending the messages now."

Stephens looked back at the blockade in front of his fleet. He looked at the gate as well. As far as he knew, there were still SAGATs operating the gate. That meant that if the Second Fleet could get past the State's blockade, they would be able to jump to Ciscio.

The thought then hit him. There was a way to get through the blockade without firing a shot. It would all depend on who would move first.

"Communications," Stephens said, "inform the Grand Admiral to disregard my last message and that I know how to handle the situation. Then send the following message to the State fleet and hope they get it."

"I've sent the message to the Grand Admiral. I'm ready for your message to the State forces, but how do you want it sent?"

"I want it sent by text. Here is the message: 'This is Admiral Stephens of the Republic Second Fleet. I understand your position when it comes to the Lykans, but I have orders to proceed into the Ciscio from my superiors. We will be making our way to the Ciscio gate. If you do not move your ships by the time we reach your position, we will ploy right through you. This is not up for debate.' Send that message."

"Sir," the helmsman said, "am I to assume we are playing an old yet very large game of 'chicken' with the State's forces?"

"You guessed correctly," Stephens said.

The Admiral then pressed the fleet communications button on his seat.

"This is Admiral Stephens to the fleet. All ships are to raise shields and activate shield boosters. We are to head straight for the Ciscio gate at top speed. We are going through that blockade but do not fire on the State ships unless they fire on you first. Prepare to move in five seconds starting now."

Stephens turned off the fleet communications system.

"Main engines are ready," the helmsman said.

"Shields are online and shield boosters active," the tactical officer said.

"Helm," Stephens said, "full speed ahead."

"Aye-aye, sir," the helmsman said as he activated the main engines.

Every ship in the Second Fleet started moving towards the gate and the blockade. The State ships were just over fifteen kilometers away and were closing fast as the Republic ships were closing the gap. As the Republic ships were within ten kilometers, the communications station was going off.

“Sir,” the communications officer said. “The State ships are demanding that we cease our approach or they will open fire.”

“Ignore their message,” Stephens said. “They are bluffing. They are outnumbered, outgunned, and outclassed in size. Either they move or we move them.”

As the Republic ships were within five kilometers of the State fleet, collision alarms started going off indicating imminent impact with the State ships. The State ships soon began moving out of the way of the Republic ships to avoid impact.

Stephens smiled as they began to pass by the State ships. The State was the ‘chicken’ in this contest.

“Sir!” the tactical officer yelled. “I’m reading targeting sensors from the State ships! They are targeting the ECM destroyers!”

“They’re what?!” Stephens said.

How did the State know those ships were important?! They must have noticed the different equipment mounted on the ships and figured they were vital to the Second Fleet’s mission!

Stephens pressed the fleet communications button again.

“This is fleet command. The State ships are targeting the ECM destroyers. Target the State ships’ weapons and engines, but do NOT fire unless they fire upon those ships first. Only disable the ships if they fire, but do not destroy them.”

Just as Stephens finished saying that, the State ships opened fire with their railguns, blasters, and missile launchers at one of the ECM destroyers. Stephens knew that even with shield boosters and armor repairer systems that the destroyer cannot handle that much firepower for long.

The rest of the Second Fleet opened fire on the State ships with their turrets in pulse laser mode, hitting the nearest ship they could fire upon. Due to the close range, the ships used their multifrequency crystals designed for short range and high energy damage potential. White laser beams filled the space between the Republic ships and the State vessels. The State continued to focus on the ECM destroyers regardless.

“Communications,” Stephens said, “get the Seventeenth Fleet here, pronto. We don’t have time for this fiasco.”

“On it, sir!” the communications officer said.

Stephens pressed the fleet communications button once more.

“Attention, all available ships! Any ship that can get between the State ships’ line of fire and the ECM destroyers, do so now! ECM destroyers, make all available speed to the gate! The Seventeenth Fleet is on its way to cover us! Everyone else, continue to the gate!”

Several of the Guardian Cruisers got in the line of fire of most of the State ships, easing the incoming damage on the ECM destroyers and not a moment too soon. The ECM destroyer the State fleet was initially targeting almost had no shields left.

Some of the State destroyers and one of their cruisers showed signs that their shields were starting to be overwhelmed by the large number of laser beams hitting the shields, even with their own shield boosters active. The State ships can handle some incoming fire with those, but not against six-to-one odds like this.

Soon the entire Seventeen Fleet arrived nearby and bore witness to the fiasco that was happening.

“Sir,” the communications officer said, “the Seventeen Fleet is requesting a situation report.”

“Tell them that when we arrived at the Ciscio gate, the State had put up a blockade to prevent us from going through. We were forcing our way through without firing but as soon as they moved out of the way, they opened fire on the ECM destroyers. We are returning fire to disable the ships. Once they are disabled, contact headquarters for further instructions.”

“Sending the message now, sir.”

“We will be entering the gate in ten seconds, sir,” the helmsman said.

“I have a response from the Seventeenth Fleet, sir,” the communications officer said.

“They will engage the State ships so that our fleet can get through the gate. They are engaging them now. We are also getting a signal from the Ciscio gate control. They are saying that the gate is active and ready to send us to Ciscio.”

“Good,” Stephens said.

Stephens pressed the fleet communications button one last time.

“Attention, Second Fleet! Assume fleet gate transport formation! Continue to fire on the State ships until you enter the gate! ECM destroyers, you will be the second group to jump! The rest of the Second Fleet will cover you until you jump while the Seventeenth Fleet distracts the State ships!”

Stephens turned off the fleet communications system as the *Bannon* entered the gate.

“Communications,” Stephens said, “send a report and footage to headquarters before we jump. I want them to know what has happened here.”

“Yes, sir. Sending message now.”

As soon as the communications officer sent the message, the subspace bubble soon surrounded the *Bannon* once it was within the gate. A wormhole soon opened at the other end.

This is the beginning of the end for the Kingdom, but it may also be the end of the Republic’s alliance with the State.

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*Bridge, R.K.S. Harbinger, Lykan Advance Prototype Battleship
Dellino III Orbit, Dellino System, Republic/State/Empire Occupied Space, Eastern Region
11:41am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“I was not expecting that to happen.”

While Forneido and his crew waited for the research station in Heronia to reach its destination in order for the *Harbinger* to jump, they had been following the series of events based on their sensors and communications at the Ciscio jump gate. Everyone was shocked that the State had opened fire on the Republic ships, namely the ECM destroyers that were designed to assist against the Royal Guard fleet in the Ciscio System. The fact that the State fleet targeted those ships specifically meant that they knew what those ships were for. Either that or they could identify they were of some importance as those ships are not normally deployed.

The Republic Seventeenth Fleet was soon dispatched to assist with the situation there, but Forneido was puzzled about something. The Imperial forces were the ones who were supposed to be guarding that gate, not the State. Where were the Imperial forces and why did they move from the Ciscio gate?

Forneido wanted to try and contact them on an open channel but an incoming transmission interrupted that thought.

“Sir,” the communications officer said, “the research station is stating that they are in position and that the hub is now active.”

“Alright, then,” Forneido said. “I hate the thought of leaving this system with the way things are going but we have an objective to complete. Helm, active the ‘Reeler’ jump system. Let’s get back home and get to work.”

“Understood, sir,” the helmsman said. “Activating system now.”

A purple colored beam shot from the front of the *Harbinger*. A wormhole soon formed in front of the battleship as it connected to the one formed by the hub in Heronia. The wormhole was soon large enough for the *Harbinger* to go through.

“Take us in,” Forneido said.

The *Harbinger* approached the wormhole and soon flew through. Within seconds the battleship appeared on the other end and in front of the research facility. Forneido could see edge of a gas giant planet on the screen behind the facility. He recognized the planet as Heronia XI, the outermost planet in the system and close to the Ciscio gate in the system.

“Sir,” the communications officer said, “Verno is on the line for you.”

“Put him through,” Forneido said.

The screen changed from the external view to an image of the Verno, once again in the control room of the station.

“Welcome back to Heronia,” Verno said. *“This is the closest we could get to the Ciscio gate without drawing attention.”*

“Good work,” Forneido said. “This location is sufficient. You may want to move the station once more, but we will contact you to let you know if it is required. Right now, we need to contact the *Templar* and have them meet us at the gate.”

“Understood, sir. I wish you luck.”

“I would say it would be better to pray for our success. Before we go, I am transmitting a presentation that we were given. I want you and everyone on the station to watch it, and then find a major communications hub to transmit it to the entire Kingdom once the King has been dealt with. I want the Kingdom to know why we are doing what we are doing today.”

“I understand. We are ready to receive.”

“Communications, transmit the presentation now.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer said. “I’m sending it now. I’m also getting a message from the *Templar*. They are heading to the gate to have their troops covertly infiltrate the gate before we arrive. They suggest waiting five minutes before we make our way there.”

“Understood,” Forneido said. “Tell them we will proceed in five minutes per their request. Verno, I trust you and Granio to make sure this presentation is seen everywhere throughout the Kingdom. I will let you know when to transmit.”

“I understand. I’ll make sure that every Lykan sees it.”

“Also, while we wait, I want to make you aware of the situation that occurred in Dellino just before we arrived. You’ll want to hear this.”

“What is it?”

“Let’s just say that the State has pulled off the stupidest move I have ever seen.”

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:43am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“You want to tell me what in the world you and your forces were thinking?!”

Drew was furious. He had received a report and a video recording from the Second Fleet showing that the State forces in the Dellino System not only formed a blockade at the Ciscio star gate, but also fired on the Republic fleet when they attempted to plow through without being fired upon! The fact that the State focused on the ECM destroyers was something else that surprised Drew. How did they know to focus on those ships?

Drew called Ambassadors Drino and Orbinai into his office initially to distract them while the operation was commencing but once this footage came in from Grand Admiral Mikey who initially received it, Drew had to confront Drino with this evidence.

“You and Vice Admiral Trent were both warned about helping the Lykans, Chancellor,” Drino said. “We of the State make good on our warnings.”

“How did you know this was even happening?!” Drew asked.

“I was at our briefing at Trent’s home,” Drino said. “I knew that the Ciscio System was the only means in or out of Heronia through the jump gates. Also, after the jammers were taken offline in Dellino, it wasn’t hard to determine what your next move was.”

“Orbinai, what happened to your forces that were supposed to be guarding the gate?”

“My apologies, Chancellor,” Orbinai said. “Drino made a compelling argument that if the Empire willing turned a blind eye to the actions of the Republic that it would make the Empire an accomplice involving actions that would be detrimental to the war effort.”

“But wouldn’t these actions achieve the Empire’s goals?”

“They would. That is why our best course of action was to not get involved at all in the matter. The Imperial forces are gathered at Dellino IV awaiting orders to return here and head back to Imperial space. The Emperor is not about to get our forces involved in a skirmish between the State and the Republic. However, I am rather displeased with the actions the State had taken involving this matter. I personally think that if the Republic can bring about an end to the war by reforming the Lykans, I would be all for it. There does not need to be any more loss of life.”

“Oh, yes, there is,” Drino said. “The complete and total extinction of the Lykans for all of their crimes against our people is all that we require to end our war with them.”

“You are letting your rage and sense of revenge cloud your judgement, Drino,” Drew said. “No race or species has the right to make another extinct.”

“I concur with the Chancellor after what your forces have done, Drino,” Orbinai said. “Attacking the Republic Second Fleet when your forces were outnumbered six-to-one was foolish.”

“Your forces’ weapons and engines were disabled in the firefight,” Drew said. “Thankfully, the ECM destroyers were able to get through the gate without any serious damage incurred by the State ships. However, the fact that your forces were ordered to engage those ships leads me to believe that the State is willing to turn on its own allies in such a situation despite said allies working towards achieving an end to the war!”

“How would...” Drino started to say.

“I’m not finished, yet!” Drew interrupted. “We came into this war because the Kingdom threatened our own existence in this star cluster. We joined forces with the State because we had

a common enemy. We gave you advancements in technologies you all did not have in order to give your forces as much of an advantage as they could get against the Lykans. We even sought to give your nation a sense of culture after your people had gone so long without one due to the Lykans! We have done what we can to accommodate you and better your nation and your forces, but this attack on our forces would put all of that in vain because the State is too headstrong to see past their own sense of revenge to know how damaging such actions would be! Now, we are willing to tow those ships into docks so that your crews can repair their engines, and ONLY their engines, in order to get back to the State, but this video I received from the battleship *Bannon* is going to be transmitted to your Executive Council as well as the Republic Senate and the Emperor for them to review. We will decide how to proceed with these actions that your fleet has taken against ours afterwards. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," Drino said, "but let me make one thing clear."

"Right now, Drino, I don't want to hear another word out of you until after our current operation is complete. If your forces are not willing to help or contribute the end of this war the way that we are proceeding to do so, then it is best to sit back and let us finish what we have set out to do. Now, if you have nothing else to contribute that is productive to that goal, I suggest you leave my office for now until the operation is over. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly, Chancellor, but this discussion is FAR from over."

Drino got up from his seat and headed out of the room, his face showing evident signs of being displeased with Drew and his actions. Drew at this point didn't care what Drino felt towards Drew, this level of behavior whether from Drino or the State was unacceptable.

"This sort of behavior makes me regret ever suggesting a joint operation in Dellino to begin with," Drew said.

"There was no way for you to know this sort of thing was going to happen," Orbinai said. "The State did not make its intentions well known when your people joined the war. You were trying to promote a feeling of cooperation for what your perceived as a common goal. I guess all of our goals did not align as we all once thought."

"Rather what you and I thought. I think Drino was very much aware of the State's goals and probably thought we would go along with the Lykans' extinction. This is going to cause a lot of problems in our dealings with the State in the future."

"What about Republic citizens in the State as well as your ambassadors?"

"I have already sent word for all Republic citizens to move back to Republic territory as soon as possible due to the strained relationships between the State and the Republic. As for the ambassadors, I want them to remain there for now until I feel their representation of the Republic no longer matters in the State."

"I just hope it doesn't break down that much. Once the State ignores the Republic, there may not be anyway to contain their forces from trying to fight against the Kingdom."

"In other words, we may have to find a way to help the Lykans better defend themselves, especially since we will most likely request for them to no longer use cloned brains in unmanned ships. I might have an idea, but to make sure you claim deniability, I'll have to ask you to leave as well."

"I understand. I will leave you to your plans. Hopefully, the Republic will make the Lykans a better people in the end."

"We don't have any other option at this point after the war, but thank you for understanding at least."

Orbinai stood up, bowed, and proceeded out of the room. As soon as she left his office, Drew pressed a button on his desk for his secretary.

“Get me Grand Admiral Mikey, please.”

“Yes, sir,” the secretary said.

It was time to put the Republic’s brightest military engineers to the test.

* * * * *

*Bridge, R.N.S. Bannon, Paladin-Class Battleship
Dellino Gate Airspace, Ciscio System, Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region
11:48am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“All ships have made it through the gate, sir.”

The tactical officer’s confirmation that the entirety of the Republic Second Fleet arriving in Ciscio safely made Stephens feel a bit better. He was still not happy with what occurred in the Dellino System before they arrived involving the State’s forces putting up a blockade and opening fire on the ECM destroyers as they tried to force their way through. That matter will be up to the politicians of both nations to work out for the time being. For now, he needed to focus on the task at hand.

“Tactical,” he said, “do we know where the Royal Navy is located?”

“I’m detecting two fleets in the system,” the tactical officer said. “One of them is near the Heronia gate which is no doubt the Royal Guard. The other is in orbit over Ciscio VI. I’m detecting far more ships there.”

“That must be them. Communications, get me the Fleet Admiral of the Royal Navy. Make sure that the transmission is focused towards that fleet, although I’m pretty sure the Royal Navy has picked us up on their sensors by now.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer said.

The communications officer transmitted a general hail in the direction of Ciscio VI. After a few seconds, the station indicated it was getting a response.

“I have Fleet Admiral Corindio of the Royal Navy on the line,” the communications officer said.

“Put him through,” Stephens said.

A holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen with an image of an aged Lykan male based on the amount of grey that was in his hair. His uniform was highly decorated, befitting one who has years of loyal serve to the Royal Navy.

“*I am Fleet Admiral Corindio of the Lykan Royal Navy,*” the Lykan said. “*To whom am I addressing?*”

“I am Admiral Stephens of the Republic Second Fleet here at the request of former Head Advisor Forneido to my government.”

“*You are rather late, Admiral.*”

“My apologies. The State found out about this joint operation and proceeded to set up a blockade at the gate in Dellino. They proceeded to fire on my forces when we attempted to push through.”

Corindio was suddenly shocked.

“*Your State allies fired on you? I’m rather surprised about that.*”

“The State is very adamant that they don’t want anyone to help their enemies. They seem highly motivated to make your kind extinct no matter what government you serve.”

“I should not be surprised by their mentality but attacking your forces would not doubt be a costly mistake. For now, though, we should focus on the task at hand. I was informed that you came with destroyers designed to jam communications and ECMs capable of disrupting the Royal Guard’s targeting computers, is that correct?”

“Yes, and we have them here intact. The State was focusing their attack on them but they managed to jump here without any serious damage. They are ready to go. They will focus their jamming and ECMs in the direction of the Royal Guard when we arrive so that your own systems are not affected, so long as the Royal Guard doesn’t resort to close range combat.”

“Understood. We will try to keep our distance from them when we engage. Forneido has shown us the presentation and we are looking forward to starting over after this day following the path we were supposed to take. I guess you can say it has helped motivate me and the rest of the Royal Navy.”

“That is good to hear. We will proceed to the Heronia gate. We should arrive before your forces do which will allow us to set up the jamming and ECMs This way you won’t get hit with a massive barrage by the time you arrive.”

“Very well. We will see you there.”

The holographic screen disappeared. Stephens took a deep breath. It was time for combat. He pressed the fleet communications button on his chair.

“Attention, all ships. We are now at Red Alert. Activate shields and shield boosters with armor repairers on standby. Be prepared to change your frequency crystals based on range the moment we arrive at our destination. Set course for the Heronia gate, distance: twenty kilometers from gate. ECM destroyers, prepare for directed jamming and ECM use. Go to warp in ten seconds.”

Stephens turned off the fleet communication system as the Red Alert klaxon sounded throughout the ship.

“Helm,” he said. “Prepare to warp.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” the helmsman said. “Course is set for the Heronia gate, distance: twenty kilometers from gate.”

“Activate warp drive. Today, we will end this war.”

* * * * *

*Throne Room, Lykan Royal Palace, City of High Charity (translated)
Lykana Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom
11:52am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“Did you say there are Republic forces in Ciscio?!”

King Ronimier could not believe what he was hearing from the Royal Guard fleet commander in Ciscio. The fleet commander had detected a Republic fleet coming through the Dellino gate only a moment ago. Based on the size and the reports from the assault on Lumen from almost a week ago, the fleet that arrived was the Republic’s Second Fleet.

“Yes, Your Highness,” the fleet commander said. “They are warping here right now and so is the Royal Navy. We detected a transmission between the two fleets. It would appear that they are working with each other and may be joining forces against us.”

“Then it would appear that Forneido has made allies of the Republic and convinced them and the Royal Fleet to act against their rightful ruler, but how? What form of persuasion did

Forneido used to allow both forces to work together? There is something missing in this whole equation.”

“Sir, the Republic fleet has just warped in. We are about to...”

The transmission was suddenly cut off as the screen was filled with nothing but static. Ronimier was puzzled by the sudden cut off in the transmission.

“Commander?” he said. “Respond now, commander!”

There was only static on the screen. The King pressed a button on his throne.

“Someone check on the transmission equipment,” he ordered. “I don’t want a loss of communications during this crucial time!”

“We are checking the equipment now, sir;” a male Lyman said over the speakers in the room. *“However, it would appear that the transmission was cut off at the source.”*

“Then try to get them back on the line! Get me the Royal Guard fleet commander at the Ciscio gate! Let’s see if they can get in touch with them.”

“Yes, Your Highness. Attempting to contact them now.”

The King leaned back in his throne. Something happened with the communications with the Royal Guard. It then hit him that the same thing had happened in Dellino when the Republic fleet attacked. The Republic was capable of jamming transmissions and most likely did so against the Royal Guard.

The King also remembered part of the report that Jyinuuro had sent a few days ago. The Republic was also capable of keeping Kingdom ships from locking onto their targets! If the Republic fleet had ships capable of doing both, there is a chance that the Royal Guard’s overwhelming firepower would be hindered! If that were to happen...

The King soon realized that it has been several seconds after he requested contact with the Royal Guard stationed at the Ciscio gate in this system.

“Why haven’t we established contact with Royal Guard at the Ciscio gate yet?!” the King yelled.

“We have been trying, Your Highness. We know our communication systems are working as we have maintained contact with the Royal Guard located here and in other parts of the system, but we haven’t been able to do so with the Royal Guard at the gate at all.”

“It can’t be. There is no way those vermin should be here already! Have the sensors picked up any ships or foreign vessels in the system?!”

“We are checking on that now.”

The King was about to go livid. He was hoping there were no non-Lykans, especially those detestable Humans, in the Heronia System. The Lykans had kept any non-Lykans out of their “pure” system and he was not about to have that change today!

“Sir, there is a problem!”

“Don’t tell me there are foreign ships in the system,” the King said with a growl.

“I wish we could tell you, but the ENTIRE sensor system is down in Heronia! We cannot track anything in the system outside High Charity’s sensor range!”

“Are you telling me it has been SABOTAGED?!” the King yelled as he stood up from his throne. “We DO have intruders in the system! Call every available Royal Guard ship to High Charity! Activate the city’s shields and weapons systems! We will NOT allow these vermin to have their way any longer!”

The King was more livid now than before. There were “vermin” in their system and we wanted them exterminated, now more than ever.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1
Ciscio Gate Airspace, Heronia System, Capital of the Royal Lykan Kingdom, Eastern Region
11:54am, September 7, 5433 A.D.*

“Did we catch them by surprise or what?”

Trent had not been this excited in combat for a while. The *Templar* had reached the Ciscio gate under cloak before the *Harbinger* in order to secretly deploy Blair and Benja’s teams to infiltrate the gate’s control center. Once they were deployed the *Templar* decloaked and activated a jamming field as well as ECM to prevent the Royal Guard from locking onto the stealth vessel. While the Royal Guard ships could resort to using optical tracking, it looked like the ships’ crews had never been trained to do so, instead relying on their computer systems to track their targets. This gave not only the *Templar* an advantage against the Royal Guard ships but the *Harbinger* as well when it warped it.

To top it off, the *Templar*’s primary heavy railgun was removed as the damage was deemed worse than anticipated. In its place was a mobile warp field disruption generator, meaning that the Royal Guard ships could not escape by warp to warn the remaining Royal Guard ships in the system. The field was so large that the *Harbinger* came out of warp twenty kilometers from their target but the ship’s weapons range was still far enough to begin firing at the Royal Guard ships with its anti-battleship guns.

Realizing the usefulness of laser weapons against shields versus railguns, and due to the fact that the *Templar* was going on a more combat oriented mission than covert, the railgun turrets were replaced with laser weapons. The *Templar* was literally blazing white multifrequency crystal focused energy in pulse beam mode against the Royal Guard fleet. While those laser beams would make seeing where they come from a lot easier for the enemy fleet to follow, they still could not track or fire with the ECMs active.

Forneido was also correct that half of the battleships were present at the gate, making a total of thirty-eight ships instead of the full seventy-six like what was present in Ciscio right now. This was even less in number than the fleet of ships that were waiting to invade Lumen almost a week ago, meaning the *Templar* had an easier time keeping that many ships from locking onto their targets. The Royal Guard fleet had another huge disadvantage in this fight. They were trained to take out their own ships to prevent insurgents from acting against their King. However, despite the origins of the *Harbinger*, the ship was still brand new capable of staying on the battlefield for much longer than the Thrashers the Royal Guard was using. The *Templar* was also unknown to the Royal Guard. Even if the Royal Guard could target either or both of the opposing ships, they wouldn’t know where to hit to be the most effective.

However, while the *Templar* and the *Harbinger* had the advantage in this fight, they were still two ships trying to take out thirty-eight and thus this would take a while to bring their numbers down. Trent was starting to become concerned that the Royal Guard ships would start moving in different directions to get out of the warp disruption field and the jamming field as well. While the *Templar* can move both fields wherever it goes, it can’t follow all of the ships.

As their third Royal Guard ship they had been firing upon succumbed to the combined firepower of both the *Templar* and the *Harbinger*, Trent’s concerns were starting to outweigh his excitement.

“This is starting to take longer than I anticipated to take this many battleships out,” Trent said.

“I somehow doubt even if we had the heavy railgun that we could take them out any faster,” Natalie said. “I’m willing to bet that Forneido may also start becoming concerned. I’m not sure if even the *Harbinger* has enough ammo to use against these many ships.”

“That’s part of the reason we need the Royal Navy and the Second Fleet to finish their fight with the Royal Guard in the Ciscio System. We need them here to finish this fleet off.”

“What if the *Harbinger* came into close range and made use of its other guns including the autocannons?”

“If they did that, they would be susceptible to the jamming and ECMs once they got in range. Forneido knows this and that is why the *Harbinger* is resorting to long-range attacks. If we disabled either one of those systems, the Royal Guard will either call for backup or we would be subjected to their combined firepower. Neither of those is a good option right now.”

“I understand, but if those ships were to move out of the warp disruption field, they could run and get reinforcements.”

Trent looked at the Royal Guard fleet. After the most recent ship was destroyed, he noticed there were some sort of light signals coming from one of the ships. Most likely this was the flagship and it was using those light signals to send messages to the other ships. This was the one area of communications interruption that the *Templar* could not stop.

However, the ship itself could be stopped.

“Target the ship that is sending those light signals!” Trent said. “That ship might be the flagship of the fleet!”

“Sir!” the communications officer said. “The *Harbinger* is saying we need to move. It said those light signals it saw were orders for some ships to ram us!”

Trent looked at the Royal Guard fleet. He quickly noticed that three of the closest ships to their position were changing course and started heading for the *Templar*.

“I need suggestions!” Trent said. “There is no way to take out three battleships at once with our existing firepower and even if we move, they would change course to still ram us!”

“I’m thinking but nothing is coming to mind!” Natalie said.

“What about hacking their computers?” Sheryl asked.

“Not while we are jamming them,” Tora said. “I’ve just tried that with no success.”

“I might have an idea,” Haley said. “Sheryl, asked the *Harbinger* for the required light signals for ‘stand down from previous order’ and ‘all ships, stand down.’ Hurry!”

“I’m on it!” Sheryl said.

“What’s your plan, Haley?” Trent asked.

“The drones we have can still cloak but they are also equipped with search lights,” Haley said. “I’m going to fly them close to the lights the flagship uses and send out light signals for those orders. Since the drones will be cloaked but flashing those lights, the other ships will think the signals were genuine!”

“That’s brilliant but you need to hurry! Those battleships are starting to pick up speed!”

“The *Harbinger* has given us the light signal patterns!” Sheryl said. “I’m sending them to you, Haley!”

“I got them,” Haley said. “I’m programming the drones with the signals now. Now launching the drones to where they need to go.”

While the drones could launch discretely from the *Templar* without enemy ships seeing them due to their size, it is usually hard to keep track of them with the naked eye, especially once they are cloaked.

“What happens if the other ships signal back?” Trent asked. “If the flagship sees that we are sending signals, it may try something else.”

“I may have a solution to that,” Tora said. “If a drone is that close to it, I can hack into the flagship from that close range. I can shut it down from here. We have the knowledge of how to do so after our capture of the Lykan battleship in Dellino. The commands should be the same.”

“Can you make it where it can send a shutdown signal to the entire fleet once we remove the jamming?”

“That can be easily done.”

“The drones are in position,” Haley said. “Ready to send the light messages.”

“Hacking system on standby,” Tora said.

“Sheryl,” Trent said, “tell the *Harbinger* to hold their fire. We have a surprise for them.”

“Sending now,” Sheryl said.

The three Royal Guard ships were now within eight kilometers of the *Templar*.

“Send the signals, Haley!” Trent said.

Trent could see patterned flashes of light from the direction of the flagship. A few second later, the three battleships that were approaching slowed down as they were coming to a halt.

“Tora, you’re up! Hurry before they try to confirm those orders.”

“Already on it!” Tora said as she tapped away on her console. “The hack is in place! Lower the jamming field!”

“Turning off the jamming field now!” Natalie said.

As the jamming field went down, Tora’s console indicated that her hacking was successfully being deployed throughout the Royal Guard ships.

“I’m detecting that their shields and engines are going offline, sir,” Natalie said. “Looks like the hacking worked. The ships are practically dead in space.”

“Good work, Tora and Haley,” Trent said. “How long do you think it would take for them to bring their systems back online?”

“I made sure that they needed an encrypted key to unlock their systems even if they rebooted them,” Tora said. “Unless they are good at hacking themselves, it will take them a long while to bring those ships back online.”

“Sir,” Sheryl said, “we are getting a transmission from the *Harbinger*.”

“Put them through,” Trent said.

A holographic screen appeared with Forneido on it. He obviously looked puzzled.

“Trent,” he said, “*what did you do to the Royal Guard?*”

“We managed to hack their systems and shut them down,” Trent said. “It was the best solution in dealing with these many battleships.”

“I see. With their shields down, it will make it that much easier to destroy them.”

“What about showing them the presentation we showed you? Do you think that would change them to join our side rather than fight against us to protect a misguided King?”

“Their loyalty to protect the King has been instilled in them that trying to persuade them otherwise isn’t an option. Remember, they DID destroy a city of civilians on the King’s order without hesitation. It is best to finish them off before they become a threat again. If you want, you could consider this their punishment for killing unarmed civilians.”

“You make a valid point. Very well, I will consider this act as their punishment for those actions. Tora, do you have the means to initiate the self-destruct on the Royal Guard ships?”

“I’ve had my finger ready to initiate that command for a while now,” Tora said smiling.

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