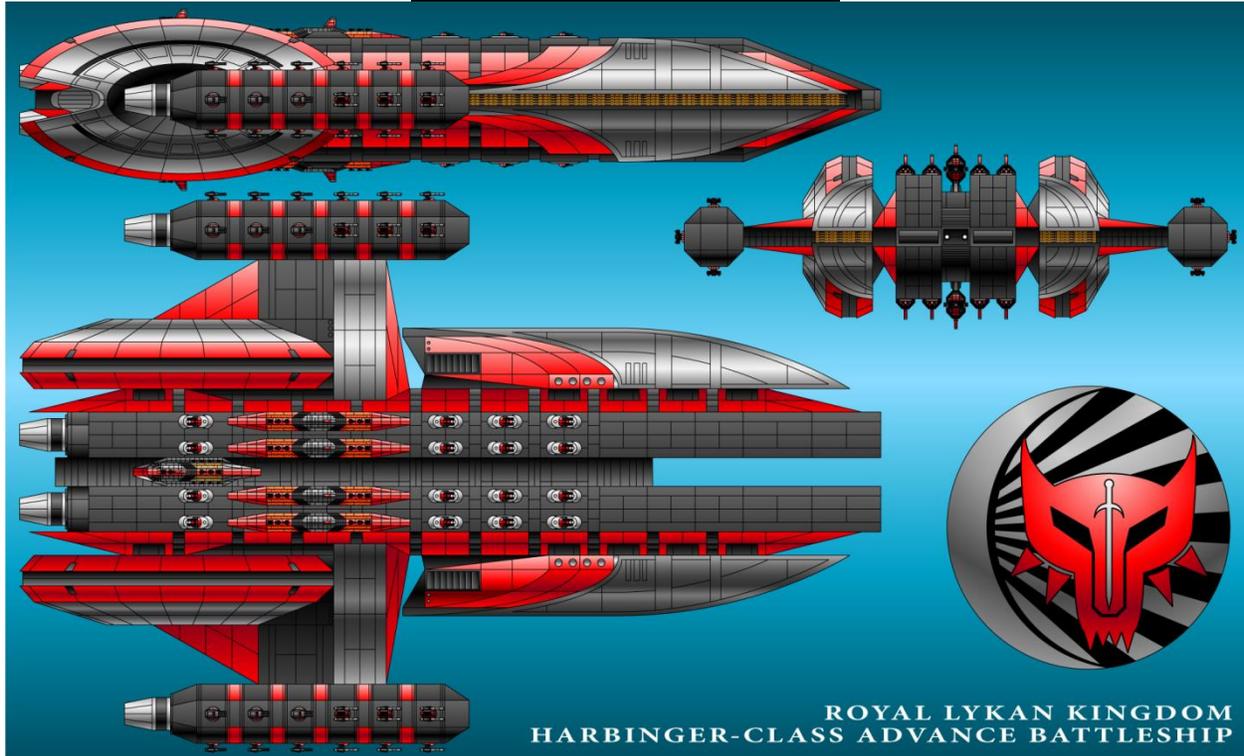


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode IV: The Star of the Wolf



PART 2

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
8:57am, September 5, 5433 A.D. (The Next Day)*

“I need everyone by the front door in two minutes!”

Trent stood by the front door as he waited for his bridge officers to finish getting ready. He was in casual clothes much like how he was when he and his bridge crew first arrived at his home a few days ago. Next to him was his luggage which did not contain much in terms of outfits as his uniforms were on the *Templar* and are cleaned on a regular basis. Their ride is supposed to arrive at nine o’clock and everyone had to be by the front door before then so that they could get on their way quickly, especially considering the morning traffic.

Laura had already gotten cleaned up and dressed to see them off. She sat near the window that faced out front near Trent to keep an eye out for their ride to arrive. She wanted at least to see them off before she had to leave for work.

“How long do you think you will be gone for this time?” Laura asked while looking out the window.

Trent looked over at her.

“Depending on the travel time to the Heronia System and the implementation of our plan, I would say between one to two weeks,” Trent said. “Hopefully this will help end the war and I can go back to my normal life after that.”

“I hope so, too. I didn’t tell you this but our news station internet page has links to the

Republic's Killed-In-Action and Missing-In-Action list. I don't know why but every once in a while, I look for your name on that list. I'm usually happy when I don't see it on there."

"Part of me wonders if you would or not, considering the nature of our mission."

"Yeah, that's true. At least there is one thing you might be famous for."

"What would that be?"

"You would be the first non-Lykan to ever enter the 'forbidden' Heronia System," Laura said with a slight laugh.

"I think the word you are looking for in that case is 'infamous.' The Lykans would definitely not consider our entrance into their system an accomplishment."

Footsteps were soon being heard coming up the steps from downstairs as well as down the hallway upstairs. Soon after, Tora and Natalie appeared out of the doorway from downstairs and Trent could see Sheryl, Rei, Haley, and Usatame coming down the stairs from above. Everyone was pulling their luggage behind them.

"Any sign of our ride?" Tora said.

"Not yet," Laura said. "They should be here any minute."

"Miss Laura," Tora said as she and the rest of the bridge crew bowed her way, "we appreciate your hospitality and accepting us into your home for these past few days."

Laura turned and noticed they had all bowed. She was quite surprised by this gesture.

"You're welcome," Laura said. "I just hope that you make it back from this mission in one piece. You all take care of my husband."

Everyone straightened themselves.

"We will," Tora said.

Laura turned back towards the window as a black van suddenly pulled up in front of the house.

"Looks like your ride is here," Laura said as she got up. "Take care of yourselves."

Laura then went and hugged each one of the bridge officers which surprised them at first but were quick to accept and hug her back. She then got to Trent.

"You be safe out there, dear," Laura said.

"I will," Trent said.

They kissed each other on the lips for a few seconds. Trent then grabbed his luggage and opened the door.

"We'll see you later," Trent said as he walked out.

The bridge officers followed right behind him as Laura looked out the doorway. The van's right sliding door opened as well as the back as Trent and the bridge officers put their luggage into the back of the van. They soon got into the van and closed the van's sliding door. As soon as the door was closed, Trent could see Laura stepping back and closing the front door.

He knew she was upset but this is something they have had to cope with for a long time.

The van soon got underway. Trent could see that the driver was a male Caucasian in an all-black suit wearing shades. No doubt this was an RCIA agent who was sent by Head Agent Aja. As such, they generally don't speak unless they have something to say. What Trent didn't realize was that in the passenger seat next to the driver was Tora. Trent looked puzzled wondering when she got in that seat.

"So," the driver said, apparently addressing Tora, "were you able to come up with a method to defeat the Lykans?"

"Yes," Tora said. "We are going to force them to re-evaluate their religion by broadcasting a presentation through their public and military communications systems. We have

the presentation ready and Trent has informed the SAGATs who are on board that we need to commandeer one of the Lykan communication hubs to broadcast.”

Trent quickly realized that this RCIA agent was sent to do more than drive them to their destination.

“Do you think it will work?” the driver asked.

“The Lykans cannot ignore their own religious texts and showing them that their own leaders have manipulated those texts which have led to their ‘fall from grace with their deity’ will demoralize them. This will allow us to force them to surrender under the pretense that this is their divine punishment for ignoring the true meaning of their holy texts.”

“Sounds like a plan. I will inform Head Agent Aja of your plan after I drop you off at the spaceport. She sent me to get an update due to the sensitive nature of the assignment.”

“Did she happen to have any updates on the Lykans both in and out of Dellino?” Trent decided to ask.

The driver looked at Trent in the rearview mirror through his shades before looking back forward.

“Go ahead and answer him,” Tora said. “He IS the commanding officer of the *Templar*, after all.”

“I know who he is, Agent Tora,” the driver said. “To answer your question, Vice Admiral, the Lykans and their slaves that are in the Dellino System are still isolated from the rest of the Kingdom. No occupational forces have landed yet but Republic forces are attempting to communicate with them to let them know they will not be harmed if they don’t take any aggressive acts. So far, they are cooperating. As far as the Kingdom outside the system, while the jammers are effective, the RCIA has sent out transmission interceptors past the jammers to gather any further information on the status of the Kingdom. What we have intercepted has been rather perplexing.”

“What do you mean by that?” Trent asked.

“The Kingdom, or rather its citizens, is in a state of near chaos. Something has happened in the Kingdom since their forces had retreated from the frontlines. From the way it sounds, the citizens are protesting their King. We have yet to determine the cause of this protest.”

“If the Kingdom is in this condition,” Tora said, “this might make our plan a bit harder to implement. They would be too focused with their protests to listen to our message.”

“Then it sounds like we need to find out why they are protesting and see if there is a way to use it to our advantage,” Trent said.

“How do we find that out?”

“We head to Heronia and access any news archive we can find at the communications hub we selected. Then we will have a better understanding and try to adapt the plan to what the protest is all about. I only hope we get to Heronia before the protests get quelled.”

“Has their military done anything to stop the protests?” Tora asked the driver.

“Not as far as we can tell,” he said. “It seems as though whatever the protest is about, the military and law enforcement agencies seem to allow the protestors to continue as long as there is no property destruction. The only group that seems to be stopping any protests under their jurisdiction appears to be the Royal Guard, and that group has resorted to using force to enforce the King’s order and rule.”

“This is starting to sound more and more like a revolution,” Trent said. “We can definitely use that to our advantage.”

“What do you mean?” Tora asked.

“You remember the conversation yesterday involving ‘getting rid of the Kingdom,’ right? Not only did we determine to use their religion to change them, but imagine changing their entire government and having them overthrow their King? What if we managed to convert them into a democracy instead?”

“Then we would be upholding Drino’s wish of ‘getting rid of the Kingdom!’ I see where you are going with this and I like this.”

“But wouldn’t there be deaths involved if we try to promote that?” Haley asked.

“That will depend on the Lykans,” Trent said. “I’m hoping based on their religion that they will protest peacefully and remove the King from power. On the other hand, it will also depend on the actions the King takes.”

“Regardless of what the Lykans will do based on our actions,” Tora said, “we need to get back to the *Templar* as soon as possible. The sooner we can get underway and implement the plan, the sooner we can end this war.”

Tora had a point. Knowing that their actions would soon see an end to the war filled Trent with some excitement and anticipation. Trent still wondered why the Lykans were protesting their King, but something told him they would find out soon enough.

* * * * *

*Control Room #3, Military Research and Development Station
Heronia VII Orbit, Heronia System, Capital System of Royal Lykan Kingdom
11:13am, September 5, 5433 A.D.*

“They are here, sir.”

For almost a day, Forneido had been looking over the preparations for the launch of the *Harbinger*, ranging from supplies and ammo to personnel and crew members. So far everything was going smoothly. However, finding fellow Lykans who are in the military or have served that were still in the Heronia System was rather difficult. The Royal Guard had taken measures to blockade the Heronia System to prevent anyone going in and out in the wake of the public protests that have been occurring throughout the Kingdom. Thankfully he along with Verno and Granio were able to find enough personnel to crew the ship just above the minimal crew count needed for the ship to run. Practically all the personnel they had found were among those that protested whether verbal or silent in some form or fashion.

Among the crew members that managed to make it, Forneido needed those that have had experience working at the bridge stations. Thankfully, they found some who can among the group. Verno and Granio came to let Forneido know the bridge crew had assembled.

“Good,” Forneido said, turning away from the console he was monitoring. “Bring them in.”

Verno and Granio bowed before Verno turned back towards the door, opening it.

“Come in, please,” he said as he held the door open.

Five Lykan males walked in single file into the room and lined up shoulder-to-shoulder facing Forneido. All of them had various amounts of grey in their fur due to their age, but all of them still remember how to stand at attention after all this time.

“Greetings to you all,” Forneido said. “Thank you all for coming this way. I’m sorry for calling you all to help with the operation of this ship after you all have long since retired from the military.”

“Sir,” the Lykan second from the right said, “may I speak freely?”

“Of course, and your name, please?”

“Antario, sir. I am the former tactical officer of the battleship *Dranicor*.”

“I’ve heard of that ship and her loyal service before she was retired. What do you wish to say, Antario?”

“Sir, we all came here after hearing what our King has done and wish to see change in our leadership, but we are also aware of some of the mistakes you have made in this current war. I have to ask this but do you seek to overthrow the King and rule the Kingdom yourself?”

“The answer I have for that question is ‘no.’ For me to overthrow the King only to take his place would make this whole thing a farce. No, we need to do something involving the current regime and how things are being run because somewhere along the way, we have been forsaken by our god by our own acts. I just wish I knew what they were. However, for a King to lead like the one we have now who does not care for the livelihood and safety of his subjects is something I cannot ignore.”

“You realize that if the King is dethroned, a new one would be picked from the Royal Court. We might be in the same situation all over again.”

“Then it sounds like they ALL need to be removed from power.”

“You are talking about overthrowing an entire government! Have you completely lost your mind?”

“Would you rather that we have someone in charge who does not care about their fellow Lykans? Did you know the King has ordered the Royal Guard to stop all protests within their jurisdiction by force?”

“What did you say?” Antario said with a shocked expression on his face.

This expression was shared among the rest of the Lykans there, except Verno and Granio who knew of this fact. Forneido pulled up a news feed at one of the other consoles to show the five aged Lykans. It showed the headline “Royal Guard stops insurgents in the Kingdom in Ciscio” with footage of the ships commencing orbital bombardment of one of the cities on the planet. The old Lykans looked on in horror.

“This footage is being released as a warning to all Lykan protestors,” Forneido said. “What they don’t show is a Lykan Royal Navy Fleet warping in to stop the Royal Guard from bombarding civilians. That fleet was destroyed by the Royal Guard without suffering any losses.”

“Are you serious?” Antario said. “How do you know this?”

“I have contacts within the fleet stationed there. They told me they were going to stop the Royal Guard or die trying to protect the civilians. The last transmission I got was their ship about to be destroyed but that they were going to die with honor in the service of protecting the people, not the crown. Would you like to hear it?”

Antario looked at the rest of the old Lykans. They needed to know if what Forneido was telling them was real.

“Please play it,” Antario said.

“Very well,” Forneido said as he brought up the recording.

The speakers in the room flared to life with the sounds of explosions and impacts. A male Lykan’s voice came on among all the sounds.

“Forneido, I send this last transmission to you. We have failed to stop the Royal Guard from destroying the city of Vangirdi but we will at least die knowing that we tried to protect and value the citizens of our Kingdom over the misguided deeds of the crown. I hope they show our actions this day to the Kingdom to show how our King is willing to destroy our own citizens who are peacefully protesting him and his actions. I guess he DOES value his position and authority

over the well-being of his citizens. If you are planning to act against him, I suggest you do so soon. From what I have heard, our enemies have not moved one system further from where our forces abandoned their frontline positions, so for the moment our citizens close to the frontlines are still safe but we don't know for how much longer."

A loud explosion was heard in the transmission.

"Our main reactor is about to go critical. I guess I will be joining my wife and kids who were killed in that bombardment in the hereafter. Forneido, I leave the rest to..."

Another huge explosion interrupted the transmission, followed by a lot of static for a few seconds. Silence followed once the transmission ended. Forneido stopped the playback and looked at the five aged Lykans who were now shocked after hearing the entire transmission.

Antario was almost speechless.

"The King would go to THOSE lengths?" he finally said. "The protests have been peaceful! There was no need to use force of any kind, much less the destruction of an ENTIRE city!"

"Apparently," Forneido said, "ANY opposition to his rule, even if it was peaceful, is considered a 'crime' against his authority. It appears he considers the offense punishable by death."

Antario and soon the other aged Lykans were visibly angered by these actions. They were quick to temper those feelings and show some restraint.

"There is no question in our minds now what must be done," Antario said. "The King and the Royal Court must be dealt with. Who will govern and lead after they are removed from power, we as a people will decide afterwards. We have been informed of what you wish to do and how to get there, but are you sure we can trust the Republic for assistance? I've heard of what your actions have been towards them. They may not look favorably towards you because of said actions."

"I will work that out with them," Forneido said. "If it means I must turn myself in for war crimes to get their assistance, then so be it as long as the King and the Royal Court can no longer rule. Now, the *Harbinger* will be departing shortly. My aides Verno and Granio will show you the way to the ship and your assigned stations."

The aged Lykans came to attention and bowed. They then turned towards the door with Verno leading them out. Granio closed the door behind them. Forneido turned and looked at the *Harbinger* outside the control room window. He can only hope that the Republic is willing to assist them. He knew he would not be asking the same of the State and the Lykan's history with the Empire was also rather problematic. The Kingdom has made a lot of mistakes involving their "neighbors" but Forneido needs all the help he can get, even if it meant that the results in the end may mark him as a traitor to the Kingdom in the history books.

Of course, that all depends on who is writing those books.

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Luna II Drydock #2 on Moon's Dark Side
Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:55am, September 5, 5433 A.D.*

"It feels a bit weird now being back here after so many days away."

Trent stood next to his command chair, his right hand on the top of the headrest. The other bridge officers had already gone to their assigned stations and were bringing everything

online. The *Templar* was not allowed to dock due to the nature of the vessel. It was decided to have the ship resupplied and fixed at the drydock found on the dark side of Luna Two, one of Luminaire's two moons and named in honor of the original Luna that orbits the outermost edge of the system.

Here, there was seclusion from the usual traffic from trade, logistic, passenger, and military vessels. Historically, this location was used as the testing areas for new ships and technology but those have been a bit far and few. However, the drydock is still maintained and used in periodic updates to ships when the docks at the military headquarters station were full due to a mass update of sorts. All the docks are also fully enclosed to allow for a breathable atmosphere so that workers don't need space suits when external repairs and maintenance is required. This allowed for repairs on the *Templar* to be done in "secret," though now the term is relative with most of the military forces in the system now aware of the ship. However, this also allowed for the *Templar* to use the newly controlled star gate that goes directly to the Dellino System without alerting patrolling forces. It does save on a lot of travel time now that there was a direct route available.

Trent's comment was visually acknowledged by all his bridge officers by their body language. He figured that they all were happy with the time off they had, most of them feeling like they were back to being civilians again. However, he knew that they would be back to their normal lives hopefully by the end of the week at the earliest if everything goes according to plan. He needed to remind them of that.

"Everyone," he said as he sat down in the command chair, "Can I have your attention, please?"

All the bridge officers turned around to face Trent, curious as to what he was going to say.

"Let us hope that this is the last time we have to board this vessel after this mission. I for one am ready to get back to my original post and I'm sure most of you want to get back to your regular lives regardless of the profession you worked before being assigned to this vessel. If everything goes according to plan, this war will be over in a week's time and we will return to those lives. If we stay focused at the task at hand, we can make that a reality. I'll even throw a party for our achievements at my place, though no one else will know why but that doesn't matter. So, let's get this mission started."

"Yes, sir!" they said with slight smiles on their faces.

As they turned around, Trent looked at the main screen. Though the screen only showed the drydock doors, he was not focusing on those doors. He was thinking about the return to his normal life and how close it was. He had to snap out of it, though. Now was not a good time to be daydreaming.

"All stations, report," Trent said.

"Engines and navigation are online," Rei said.

"Weapons and defensive systems are online," Natalie said.

"Communication lines are active," Sheryl said.

"Drones are online and standing by" Haley said.

"All crew, SAGATs, and supplies have been accounted for, sir," Usatame said.

"Connection with RCIA database has now been separated," Tora said. "We are ready to go, sir."

"Sheryl," Trent said, "request permission to depart from drydock."

"Aye-aye, sir," Sheryl said.

Sheryl pressed a few buttons and waited for a response. Her console soon gave a beep indicating a response.

“They are informing us that the airspace around the drydocks is clear,” Sheryl said. “No one aside from the air traffic controller will see our ship leave. They are opening the drydock doors right now.”

“Understood,” Trent said.

As if on cue, the door in front of the ship started to slide apart vertically. The air had already been removed from the bay so there was no decompression needed as open space started to reveal itself beyond the doors. After a few seconds, the doors were fully opened.

“Drydock reports docking clamps and walkways have been retracted,” Sheryl said.

“Helm, take us out,” Trent said.

“Aye-aye,” Rei said. “Main engines are at one-quarter speed, heading out of drydock.”

The hum of the engines could be heard through the ship as the *Templar* started making its way forward out of drydock. As the ship began to emerge out of drydock, more stars from around the star cluster came into view. For Trent, this view never gets old. At least it felt like the star cluster was made of a lot more stars than when they were on the edge of the cluster in Dellino.

“We have cleared drydock,” Rei said. “Shall I proceed to the Dellino Gate?”

“You may proceed,” Trent said.

“Roger. Aligning us to the Dellino Gate.”

The bow of the ship began to point upwards at an angle, almost going vertical. The main screen soon indicated that the mobile star gate the Lykans had constructed when they tried a direct assault on the capital a few days ago was directly ahead of them. This is the gate that connected to the Dellino System at the outermost edge of the Eastern Region and the star cluster.

The *Templar* was soon pointing right at it.

“Activating warp drive,” Rei said.

The ship soon accelerated towards the gate with Luna Two and Luminaire quickly disappearing behind them. The ship was soon surrounded by waves and fluctuations of the warp bubble around the *Templar*. After twenty seconds or so, the waves and fluctuations began to disappear as the ship started to slow down upon approaching the gate. The gate itself soon came into view as the red and silver outline of the angular yet boxy looking gate was in range. Part of the First Fleet was still orbiting the structure, patrolling it in case someone wanted to go through who was not authorized. Thankfully by now, the First Fleet is among the fleets in the Lumen System that was aware of the *Templar* and the fleet had standing orders to not interfere with any mission or deployment of the stealth vessel unless necessary.

The *Templar* came out of warp in front of the opening of the star gate. Rei soon turned the bow towards the opening. When the Republic fleet seized control of the gate in the Dellino System, they released the controls of the gate in the Lumen System to the First Fleet detachment patrolling it. The Republic has been looking at converting the gate to a manned gate but the process is still ongoing and it was decided to wait until the situation with the Kingdom had been stabilized before proceeding with the modifications.

“We are receiving a message from the First Fleet detachment,” Sheryl said. “They are saying we can proceed through the star gate to the Dellino System.”

“Understood,” Trent said. “Helm, take us in.”

“Yes, sir,” Rei said as she steered the *Templar* into the star gate.

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Bridge, R.K.S. Harbinger, Lykan Advance Prototype Battleship

*Military Research and Development Station Airspace, Heronia VII Orbit, Heronia System
11:57am, September 5, 5433 A.D.*

“All systems are online.”

With the *Harbinger* fully supplied and crewed, Forneido did not waste any time launching the vessel after all the system checks were completed. The ship left the Military Research and Development Station only a few minutes ago, leaving Verno and Granio in charge of making sure the station was moved the moment the *Harbinger* jumped away. It is unknown if the Royal Guard could detect the *Harbinger* now at such a distance from the Ciscio jump gate, but they will detect the wormhole the *Harbinger* was about to create. They must be gone by the time the Royal Guard arrived at their current position.

Forneido sat in the command seat of the *Harbinger*. None of the aged Lykans that signed up to serve as the bridge crew have ever commanded before and Forneido seemed the best candidate to command the battleship. He did know what it was capable of, after all. Antario was at the tactical station while the other four sat at the remaining stations: Helm, Communications, Operations, and Engineering. The Helm and Operations were in front for Forneido while Communications and Engineering were behind him. Tactical was to Forneido's left.

The primary concern that Forneido had was whether the connection hub in the Dellino System was still online or not. He had not checked at all since yesterday to see if it still was or not. If the Republic had shut down the hub, then this plan of his would vaporize in a heartbeat.

There was only one way to make sure after the Operations officer made his statement.

“Alright, everyone,” Forneido said. “You know that what we are about to use has not been tested yet. However, if this works, then we can proceed with getting help from the Republic to remove our King and the Royal Court from power.”

“And if it does not work?” Antario asked.

“Then our remains may be spread between here and Dellino or worse we are stuck in this system and the Royal Guard will be on us quickly. I'd rather think positive about it for now.”

“Well, no time like the present for a miracle to happen.”

“Communications, have Verno and Granio establish a link with the hub in Dellino. Let's make sure that the Republic hasn't disabled it since yesterday.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer said as he pressed a few buttons.

“Helm, be prepared to use the ‘Reeler’ Jump System once we have confirmation of a signal from Dellino.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” the helmsman said.

“Sir,” the communications officer said, “they have a connection with the Dellino hub! It's still online!”

“What about the jamming?” Antario said.

“The connection doesn't use standard communication lines but rather an experimental laser transmission that goes through a miniature wormhole too small to be detected,” Forneido said. “The ‘Reeler’ system uses something similar but we would generate the beam which would connect to the Dellino hub and cause the creation of a wormhole between us and the hub allowing us to traverse or jump past the normal limit.”

“You're saying this can get us to Dellino in a single jump but can we jump back?”

“Yes, but the hub here needs to be moved to a safe location before the Royal Guard finds it. Verno and Granio will see to that part of the operation. Once we have been able to secure

some help from the Republic, we will use the same means to return but will generate a wormhole large enough for us and the Republic fleet to follow through.”

“Hopefully you are convincing enough to make that possible.”

“You and me both. The fate of our nation, or rather the fate of our people, rides on this. Helm, connect to the Dellino hub and activate the ‘Reeler’ jump system.”

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

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*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1
Lumen Star Gate, Dellino System, Republic/State/Empire Occupied Space, Eastern Region
12:01pm, September 5, 5433 A.D.*

“Welcome back to the Dellino System, Templar.”

The *Templar* had just come out of the star gate that linked the Dellino System to the Lumen System. It was odd to see the lack of stars in front of the ship again but at least this confirmed their location. The detachment of the First Fleet under Admiral Trista had already returned to the Lumen System, replaced by the Sixteenth Fleet. This fleet was the same size as Trent’s old fleet, the Eleventh Fleet, consisting of one Paladin Battleship, eight Guardian Cruisers, and thirty-two Crusader Destroyers totaling forty-one ships. This was a larger fleet than the First Fleet detachment that was sent here in the chaos of the Lykan invasion sent a few days ago. The Seventeenth Fleet which has the same number of vessels was also here in Dellino, but was spread throughout the star system to investigate any Lykan facilities and population centers as well as maintain the communications jamming that was in effect. There were also smaller fleets of State and Imperial forces consisting of their new refit models in Dellino as well that are patrolling the star gates that lead to Lykan-held systems and keeping the gates offline to prevent enemy forces from entering the star system.

Having the greeting from the flagship of the Sixteenth Fleet was surprising but at the same time rather comforting as the crew knew they were no longer on their own all the way out here.

“Sheryl,” Trent said, “tell them ‘thank you’ and that we are proceeding with our assigned mission.”

“Understood, sir,” Sheryl said.

“Helm, lock in the coordinates for the Heronia System and prepare to warp.”

“Understood, sir,” Rei said.

Alarms suddenly went off throughout the ship.

“What in the world is going on?” Trent asked.

“Sir!” Natalie yelled. “Sensors have detected a wormhole forming near a Lykan facility in orbit of Dellino III! It’s big enough for a ship to go through!”

“It can’t be. I thought the Lykans had no Salire Purpura crystals left!”

“Ships of the Seventeenth Fleet are moving to that location right now.”

Trent thought for a moment about the situation.

“Helm, change course,” he said. “Take us there as well.”

“Sir?” Rei said as she and the rest of the crew turned to face Trent.

“That is not mission, sir,” Tora said. “Let the Seventeenth Fleet handle this.”

“Are you saying that even an RCIA agent isn’t curious to know how the Lykans are jumping when they are supposed to be out of crystals or why they are jumping towards that facility?”

“I...suppose we can investigate. I am curious how it was possible for them to jump.”

“Alright, helm. Take us to those coordinates.”

“Yes, sir,” Rei said as she and everyone else turned back towards their stations.

The front of the *Templar* turned towards the direction of Dellino III and the location of the wormhole being formed. Once it faced that direction, the *Templar* soon entered warp and flew towards its destination. Thoughts were running through Trent’s mind trying to contemplate how or rather why were the Lykans trying to enter the Dellino System now? Why was that station at Dellino III their target? Trent along with everyone on the bridge would soon find the answers to those questions.

After several seconds, the *Templar* began to slow down as it was coming out of warp. Ahead of them was Dellino III to the right, an orbital installation in front of them, and a wormhole to their left that was now fully formed. Most of the Seventeenth Fleet had already arrived with no doubt more on the way. Just as the *Templar* came to a stop near the installation, a ship came through the wormhole.

It was a huge vessel! It had the colors of the Lykan Royal Navy and looked to have elements of their Thrasher Battleships, but it had several new components and parts the likes of which no one had ever seen before. These included the rounded sections found along the sides that looked somewhat like parts of Republic ships but were aesthetically not, and the vertical saucers in the back were also rather new and odd. This ship size-wise looked to be the same length as a Republic Paladin Battleship. Considering the flagship of the Seventeenth Fleet was a Paladin that was already here to compare its size against, it was indeed the same length. It had far more weapons compared to a Thrasher and it is unknown how strong this ship’s defenses were.

Trent quickly realized two things when he saw that ship: the direction it came from and the direction those guns were pointing. The former based on the direction the ship came from was from the direction of the Heronia System! How was the ship able to jump this far when even a Republic ship could not make that trip in one jump? The second was that the guns were pointing upward. None of them were pointing at any of the ships near it.

As the wormhole closed behind the unknown vessel, Sheryl turned towards Trent.

“Sir,” she said, “the flagship of the Seventeenth Fleet is calling for all ships to target the unknown vessel.”

“Inform them not to target the vessel,” Trent said. “Do it quickly.”

Sheryl was puzzled by Trent’s request as everyone on the bridge turned to face Trent.

“You heard the order, Sheryl,” Trent said.

“Yes, sir,” Sheryl said as she turned back around.

“Why don’t you want them to fire?” Tora asked. “What do you see?”

“Look at that ship’s guns,” Trent said. “None of them are facing any of our ships. The ship came through the wormhole like that instead of having its guns pointing forward, ready to aim. Whoever is commanding that vessel is not here to fight. Sheryl, relay that as well to the Seventeenth Fleet.”

“Yes, sir,” Sheryl said.

“There is also something else,” Trent said. “That ship jumped from Heronia. I’m curious to know how it did that in one jump. It may have something to do with this structure it jumped

to. Usatame, inform Colonel Blair to gear his SAGATs to investigate the structure. I want them to find out what is so special about this orbital facility.”

“Yes, sir,” Usatame said.

“Sir,” Sheryl said, “the Lykan vessel is hailing us and the rest of the fleet. It is audio only.”

“Put it through,” Trent said.

The speakers on the bridge soon came to life as the incoming transmission came through.

“*Attention, Republic,*” a male Lykan’s voice said.

The voice sounded very familiar to Trent, but there was only one time he would have heard such a voice. Could it be who he thought it was?

“*My name is Forneido, former Head Advisor to the King of the Royal Lykan Kingdom.*”

It WAS him! Trent was quickly angered by the Lykan who was responsible for scanning his DNA on their first encounter, created a clone based on that DNA who infiltrated the Republic causing him to temporarily be relieved from the military, and used that same DNA to no doubt create that virus the Lykans attempted to use a few days ago! While the facility that housed all of that has since been destroyed, it was Forneido who not only got the scan data to begin with, but also got a copy of the map of the Republic and declared war on the Republic in the name of their King.

Now here he was, in a brand new Lykan ship, and he had the audacity to come here against an entire Republic fleet!

But wait, did he just say he was the “former Head Advisor?” What happened to him and does it have something to do with him being here? Trent continued to listen to the transmission.

“*I am here with this new battleship not to fight you, but request for your assistance in a matter of utmost urgency that is happening in the Kingdom.*”

“He came here to ask US for help?” Trent said. “He is either desperate or something is seriously going on in the Kingdom we don’t know about.”

“I wonder if it has something to do with those transmissions I told you about yesterday,” Tora said. “Remember how I stated that the Kingdom was in chaos and that its citizens are protesting against their King?”

“You did, but the question now is this: are we to assist the King or the people?”

“*I see a vessel among your fleet here that I do not recognize,*” Forneido continued. “*You must be the vessel that has given our Kingdom a lot of problems as of late. I wish to speak with your commanding officer and, if possible, a representative of your government unless you can speak on their behalf.*”

“It sounds like he is calling us out,” Tora said.

“No,” Trent said, “just me in this case. Sheryl, send a message to the Seventeenth Fleet that we will respond to Forneido’s request. Then send a message back to the Supreme Chancellor and inform him of what is going on. We will need an ambassador from the Republic unless he thinks I can speak on his behalf.”

“Where exactly do you want this meeting to take place?” Tora asked. “I hope you are not thinking aboard this ship.”

“Do you have another suggestion?”

Tora remained silent as she was thinking of another place to hold such a meeting but could not think of one that is secure. She shook her head indicating she could think of a place.

“Alright then,” Trent said. “Sheryl, send those messages. Send a general message to Forneido letting him know we are contacting our government on how to proceed. Send it text only. He may not know it is me specifically aboard this vessel.”

“Understood,” Sheryl said.

“I do have one concern,” Tora said. “I’m aware of what Forneido did to you last time you spoke with him face-to-face. If you were selected to represent the Republic and its interests, can you say for certain that you would remain objective in that setting?”

“When you think about it,” Trent said, “this gives us the perfect opportunity.”

“For what, exactly?”

“It gives us the chance to see how he would react to the video that you had prepared.”

Tora was puzzled at first, but was quick to realize what Trent was getting at. They needed a Lykan to test the video’s powerful message to make sure it worked as intended and Forneido would fit the bill.

“I see what you are getting at, sir,” Tora said. “I will prepare you a mobile version to take with you and present to Forneido.”

“Good. Now let’s just hope Drino and Orbinai don’t come here as well. I will need to plan this out accordingly otherwise.”

“What do we do in the meantime?”

“Have we found out why the Kingdom citizens are protesting against the King? You mentioned it yesterday as well but I wondered if there was any update as to why?”

“Let me check on that,” Tora said as she looked through the database on her console, hoping it was updated with that information.

After a minute or so, she turned back towards Trent.

“It appears there is something new in the database,” she said. “According to news reports from within the Kingdom, the protests were happening due to the King willfully having the military fall back from the frontlines without even trying to evacuate the civilians first in those star systems.”

“The King abandoned them?!” Trent said. “What leader would do such a thing? Granted, if the Republic moved forward from their current positions, we at least would treat them without malice as far as I know. I can’t say the same for the State though and who knows what the Empire would do.”

“Apparently Forneido was responsible for presenting this to the public but it appears he did this in response to being removed from his position due to his failures. The fallback order was also in response to this.”

“So that explains the ‘former’ part of his introduction. Anything further?”

“I’m checking on that. Give me a moment.”

“I have a response from the Supreme Chancellor, sir,” Sheryl said. “He says that while he may not be happy that we did not proceed on our mission as planned, he is willing to indulge Forneido’s request. He says that Forneido will be allowed on board the *Templar* but obviously with measures in place for him to not repeat what he did last time. He also said that due to the timeframe, you will serve as a representative to the Republic for this meeting.”

“That’s good to know,” Trent said.

“He is, however, sending Ambassadors Drino and Orbinai to represent their governments’ interests as well.”

“Oh, no,” Trent said as he sighed. “I was hoping that he would not send those two for a couple of reasons. We all know that one of those is to keep our ploy of converting the Lykans to a more peaceful race based on their own religion.”

“So, what is the second reason?” Natalie asked.

“A Lykan and a Vitam in the same room was one experience that was stressful enough as it is when I first met them, but can you imagine how it would be now after everything that has happened? I would feel more like a referee than an ambassador. How long will it take until they get here?”

“He said they should be here in less than thirty minutes,” Sheryl said.

“Alright. Sheryl, inform Forneido that we will meet with him on this ship. Also inform him to leave any devices he has on his own ship. He should understand why but just in case have a scanning crew ready in the shuttle bay. Make sure the remaining SAGATs have closed off access to other areas of the ship so that the only path he can take is between the bay and the conference room. I will go down there to get things ready.”

Trent got up from the command chair and began heading towards the elevator.

“Hold on, sir,” Tora said as a small device ejected from her station console.

She grabbed it, got up from her station, and walked over to Trent, handing him the device.

“This is a mobile version of the presentation we talked about,” Tora said. “Make sure the ambassadors don’t know you have that on you or Drino will know what we are planning. Who knows how thin the ice is in our relationship with the State but if they find out we are about to put the Lykans through a religious renaissance instead of the State having their way in their extermination, this could sabotage any chance for peace with both the Lykans and the State.”

“I understand the risk involved,” Trent said as he took the device. “I’ll try what I can to make sure that Forneido sees this without Drino and Orbinai finding out. I know Drino’s take with the Lykans but I still don’t know Orbinai’s thoughts are on the topic.”

“Let’s hope she has not been influenced since yesterday, though I highly doubt it.”

“Alright. Natalie, you have the bridge.”

“Yes, sir,” Natalie said.

Trent headed for the elevator. Now was the time to see how well this gamble would pay off.

* * * * *

*Shuttle Bay #1, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Republic Stealth Warship #1
Dellino III Orbit, Dellino System, Republic/State/Empire Occupied Space, Eastern Region
12:01pm, September 5, 5433 A.D.*

“This ship was definitely made by the Republic.”

Forneido stepped off of his shuttle after it was guided into the *Templar’s* starboard-side shuttle bay located in one of the two “pods” the extended from the ship’s midsection. He wore civilian clothing and had no robes at all. He left all his devices on the *Harbinger*. He knew why he was asked to leave them after what he did a few months ago on the Republic Battleship *Renaldo*. He wanted allies in his attempt to get rid of the King and the Royal Court, not to make enemies hate him more. The only other Lykan was the pilot and he was instructed by Forneido to remain on the shuttle until his return.

Provided of course that he DOES return.

Before his shuttle landed in the starboard bay, he was informed that another shuttle arrived from the direction of the Lumen jump gate that landed on the vessel's port side. Hopefully they were Republic ambassadors with whom they would discuss the situation. The last thing he needed was representatives from the State and the Empire here. All that would do is add additional tensions during this meeting.

Forneido looked around the bay at the number of drone units as well as a couple of transports in the bay. They matched the aesthetic look of the vessel meaning they no doubt had the same capabilities as the ship when it came to stealth. Before Forneido could look around any further, two SAGATs were approaching him from the direction of one of the exits from the bay. They stopped several meters away and gestured for him to follow them without saying a word. Forneido knew they were his escorts through the ship. As he approached them, the one on his left motioned for him to stop just short of them. The one on the right had a scanner on him. Forneido was not upset that they would not trust him after what he had done before. He allowed the SAGAT on the right to scan him thoroughly. Once the SAGAT was done with his scans and was convinced that Forneido had no devices on him, he packed the scanner in his belt.

"This way, please," the SAGAT said as he led.

Forneido followed behind him with the other SAGAT behind Forneido. As they exited the bay and proceeded down the hall, Forneido realized that the design of this ship, while similar in some respects when he was on the *Renaldo*, was rather different. It was aesthetically more militaristic and confined by comparison. He also noticed that there were no windows at all on the ship. He was also quick to notice that all adjacent hallways were blocked off by force fields to prevent him from wandering off elsewhere. Again, Forneido was not surprised by the measures taken by the Humans. No doubt the same thing would have been done had the roles been reversed.

They came to an elevator whose doors remained open. Once the three were inside the elevator, the doors closed and the elevator began to move sideways on its own. It was obvious that his elevator was programmed to take them to their destination once they were inside, not allowing anyone else to use it until Forneido's "visit" had concluded. It did not take long for them to reach where they were going as the elevator slowed down and eventually stopped. The doors slid open to a short hallway and a set of double doors flanked by additional SAGATs.

The two that escorted Forneido stepped out and flanked the elevator doors.

"They are waiting for you inside," the one on the right said.

"What do you mean by 'they'?" Forneido asked. "Who all is inside?"

The SAGAT did not reply, only motioning him to enter the doors. While Forneido suddenly seemed reluctant to do so, he knew he needed to go through the doors. He walked off the elevator and approached the doors. He stopped in front of them as the SAGAT that flanked the left pressed a button on the door frame. The doors slid open, revealing a conference room similar in design the one found on the *Renaldo*.

What he did not expect to see were the three people inside that were seated, namely the Human at the far end, the Vitam on the left, and for the first time with his own eyes a Camino on the right. However, the Human is who he recognized as he entered the room and the doors closed behind him.

"Vice Admiral Trent," Forneido said. "I'm surprised that the Republic would send you for such a meeting."

"Forneido," Trent said, "I'm the commanding officer aboard this ship and appointed Ambassador for the Republic."

“I see. That would make a lot of sense about the determination you had to reach Dellino and take out the cloning facilities, the DNA database, and the virus that was produced. I assume you were put in charge of this vessel due to the DNA authentication requirements your military has which yours could not be used after our infiltration a couple of months ago.

“The same one used to try to bring my Empire into a war with the Republic,” Orbinai said.

“I don’t think I’ve had the pleasure of an introduction from you, madam,” Forneido said.

“Then I will give you one. I am Ambassador Orbinai of the Camino Star Empire. Across from me is State Ambassador Drino.”

“Yes, I noticed the Vitam when I entered. I also noticed the anger in his eyes which I have seen many times before.”

“Those times had better be from my enslaved brethren,” Drino said. “If those times were when you and your kind converted them into computer cores for your ships, you may not leave here unharmed.”

“Ambassador Drino,” Trent said. “Refrain from using threats and act like an ambassador of your people in this room.”

“Do NOT dictate to me about my role here, Trent!” Drino said. “This is already uncomfortably closer than I want to be to any Lykan without trying to kill them.”

“Forneido, please have a seat. We have quite a few things to discuss.”

“I don’t doubt that at all,” Forneido said as he approached his seat.

Trent could see Drino’s fur going on end as Forneido sat down, now closer to him than Drino was comfortable with.

“So,” Forneido said, “where do you want to begin?”

“Let us start by what brought you here to Dellino,” Trent said. “We will ask about the means later.”

“Of course. Tell me, how familiar are you and your allies with the state of affairs in the Kingdom right now?”

“I have been told it has been a bit chaotic recently. The citizens are protesting their King’s most recent orders. Care to elaborate on those orders and how they came to be?”

“Let me confirm something first. If I understand the scenario perfectly, your ship and your actions were what led to these events. Your ship for the past couple of months has managed to travel within the Kingdom undetected and without the need of a jump gate. Using that advantage, you have managed to destroy or hamper the Kingdom’s ship-building capabilities to the point that I began to reassign existing forces to the frontlines to maintain our current borders. Is that correct?”

“It is, yes.”

Forneido sighed at the answer, which confirmed his suspicions before he continued.

“After the failure of Project Alpha which was to use a Human clone to force the Empire into war with the Republic, I resorted to Project Beta which would see to the creation of a virus that would affect Human DNA to dissolve on contact. The method of transport was existing ships through a mobile jump gate with the Republic capital as the target. The idea was to not only remove your government and the largest portion of Humans from the cluster but to force your military fleets from the frontlines. With the strongest and most advance military force away, the Kingdom would renew its push against the State and the Empire to restore our borders before the Republic got involved again.”

“I take it that the existence of the Republic’s three largest fleets along with the existence of the warp disruption fields was not part of the plan, was it?”

“Nor was your ship’s involvement in the taking of the gate on this end, the destruction of the facility where both projects came from, or the capture of this star system and the battleship assigned to Project Beta. Combined with the depletion of our forces faster than can be replaced and the fact that your ship destroyed the stations over the five original home worlds of the races that make up the State ended up compounding the failures when the King found out about what has happened over the past couple of months. He sentenced me and my family out of our positions and into poverty. When I found out that he ordered our fleet away from the frontlines without evacuating civilians, I decided to make a fool of him and broadcast our conversation to the entire Kingdom for the citizens to realize the foolish actions the King was making.”

“So, what you are saying is that in a fit of vengeance for your own actions, you managed to turn an entire nation against your King for the actions he took in response to your failures, is that it?”

“Well, when you put it that way, it does make it sound like it was a bad thing.”

“Maybe it was and maybe it wasn’t, but the fact is that you started this mess so why are you not seeing this whole thing through on your own? Why come all the way here?”

“There are a few reasons behind that. First of all, because your forces have seized our jump crystal mining operations and that almost all of the remaining crystals we had was used to jump a jump gate all the way to Lumen, the only places which have crystals at all is the *Harbinger* and the hubs both here and in Heronia.”

“I take it the *Harbinger* is the name of the ship you brought with you and the hub is the structure you jumped to, correct?”

“Yes, it is. It was a new method of jumping from place to place like a jump gate. By having a hub and a ship coordinate a jump point, or rather the creation of a wormhole with the same entry and exit points, you can create a longer distance jump while at the same time retaining the crystals on board if they are properly shielded from the effects of the jump. This was the first successful jump we made with it and it was our first try. Because of how few crystals we have, to jump to any other system would have wasted the ones on board so the only place I could jump the ship was here. There was no way I was going to engage so many Royal Guard ships on one end of a jump gate only to jump into another fleet of them. The *Harbinger* is a tough ship but not THAT tough.”

“Speaking of the *Harbinger*,” Orbinai said, “I noticed when I was looking over the ship’s design based on visual scans that the ship, while retaining parts that remind me of your Thrasher battleship, has new parts that remind me more of both Imperial and Republic vessels. Tell me this, Forneido. What other new technology is incorporated in the *Harbinger* that might make me think it was possibly ‘salvaged’ from Imperial ships from our first war with your kind?”

“Wait,” Drino said, “are you saying they might have reverse-engineered more than the Empire’s cybernetic technology?”

“I see that the Imperial ambassador has eyes for details,” Forneido said. “You are correct, Ambassador Orbinai. Our researchers went back to the Imperial ships that we managed to salvage to look for a specific piece of technology. You may have already guessed what that technology was.”

“It was our nanocell armor repair technology, wasn’t it?” Orbinai said.

“That system is similar in function to the Republic’s armor repairer system, isn’t it?” Trent asked.

“Very similar. If Lykan scientists have managed to reverse-engineer the technology, then that would mean the *Harbinger* is able to repair its armor from damage.”

Drino was in shock from hearing all of this.

“Are you telling me that the *Harbinger* is a new line of battleship with not only increased firepower but now advance defenses?” Drino asked.

“That is correct,” Forneido said. “The armor is also twice as thick as the Thrasher battleships’ yet still retains the dual-shield system. It is as the Humans call it a ‘tough nut to crack,’ wouldn’t you say?”

“If that ship is even allowed to be mass-produced, it would make our battles that much tougher! We must destroy it here and now to prevent that from happening!”

“Oh, please. You’re telling me that we should allow the State to field ships with the new shield boosting technology provided by the Republic to increase their defenses but not allowed to do the same with armor repairing technology salvaged by Imperial ships? Hardly seems fair, doesn’t it?”

“Salvaged?” Drino said before Orbinai responded to Forneido’s comment. “More like the technology was stolen if you ask me, much like the cybernetic technology!”

“Ambassador Drino,” Orbinai said, “I can speak for the Empire in that matter and while I am upset at this development, the fact is that the Empire did leave the wreckage behind at first. We did send a salvage team afterwards to retrieve the wreckage only to find there was none. We didn’t send them in immediately due to what I believe was called a ‘hot zone.’ We didn’t want to risk the loss of anymore lives at the time. This was our mistake of which the Kingdom took advantage of at the time.”

“Then what is the Empire going to do about it?” Drino asked.

“At this point, there isn’t anything we can do.”

“What do you mean there isn’t anything you can do?!”

“Like I said, it was our fault for leaving the wreckage of those ships behind. We only have ourselves to blame for the Lykans reverse-engineering our technology.”

“Then why is the Empire involved in this war?!”

“We are in this war because the Lykans tried to use us to their advantage in their existing war against the State and the Republic. We don’t like being toyed around with and we want to make the Lykans pay the price for their mistake in that regards. We are not in it for the resources or territory that they have. Our goal is to see that their own nation suffers merely on the reduction of resources and territory they held prior to our involvement. So far, our objectives are being fulfilled. This has nothing to do now with the ‘theft’ of our technology when we practically gave it to them.”

“So it doesn’t matter to you that the Lykans are now in possession of technology that would allow them to stay on the battlefield longer?! The Thrashers were already a problem trying to destroy before without hitting their engine arrays. The *Harbinger* is even more so and they fixed those weaknesses, too!”

“If I may stop you right there for a moment, Ambassador Drino,” Forneido said. “Right now, the only people in the Kingdom that are aware of the *Harbinger* are myself, my crew, and those at the hub in the Heronia System. No one else, not even the King, is aware of the ship’s existence or its capabilities. They are not even aware of the hub there either and thanks to my aides there the hub has by now been moved to another location in that system in order to avoid the Royal Guard.”

“So you are on the run with a ship even the King does not know about?” Trent asked.

“Yes, but I came here especially after what the King has done to stop the protests which I might add have been peaceful ones.”

“What do you mean? What action has he taken?”

“He has ordered that any city where the largest protests are occurring to be bombarded from orbit by the Royal Guard, killing everyone in the city.”

Everyone’s eyes, even Drino’s were suddenly wide from that information.

“Has this actually been done?” Trent asked. “Has the Royal Guard actually fulfilled this order even once?”

“Yes, they have,” Forneido said. “They bombarded the city of Vangirdi in the Ciscio System, destroying the city and killing of the civilian population there.”

“Is there proof of this?”

“My ship has the recording from the fleet that intercepted the Royal Guard to stop them from bombarding it. The fleet ultimately failed as the Royal Guard knows the weakness of every ship in the fleet while theirs is fortified. Am I able to request that my ship transmit the recording here for you to listen to?”

“Allow me,” Trent said as he pressed a button on the table in front of him.

“Communications, contact the *Harbinger* and inform them that Forneido wants the recording from the Vangirdi bombardment transmitted to us to listen to.”

“*Understood, sir,*” Sheryl said.

“Do we really need to listen to this?” Drino said. “What would that accomplish?”

“Credibility that the King is using force against his own people,” Trent said. “Would the State do so against your civilian populous if they were peacefully protesting for any reason?”

Drino looked a bit hesitant on answering the question.

“We haven’t had any protests since the formation of the State for me to answer that question,” Drino said. “I don’t even know the laws should something like that even happen. I personally would not condone it, though. However, if Lykans want to kill each other off, I don’t have a problem with that.”

“Ambassador Drino,” Trent said, “I can understand your history with the Lykans and I know it is hard for you two to see eye-to-eye with each other, but if the Lykans citizens are asking for outside help to overthrow an oppressive King, you’re saying you would not assist them in that task?”

Drino looked like he didn’t want to answer that question.

“*Sir?*” Sheryl said. “*We have the recording. I’ll play it through the speakers in that room.*”

“Hold off for a moment,” Trent said. “Ambassador Drino, I would like you to leave the room for a little while.”

“What?” Drino asked, surprised. “Why do you want me to leave?”

“There is something I want to discuss with Forneido in private and your comments lately have not been productive to this conversation. Ambassador Orbinai, would you please accompany him for a little while?”

“Certainly,” Orbinai said as she got up. “Ambassador Drino, please accompany me.”

Drino looked at Trent, then Forneido, then Trent again with an angry look on his face. As he got up, he took one last look at Trent.

“I hope you make the right decision for all of us,” he said before walking towards the back door.

Orbinai soon followed behind Drino. After they left the room and the doors closed behind them, Trent looked over at Forneido with a stern expression on his face.

“The room is soundproof,” Trent said. “I wanted them out of the room for you and I to talk about a topic that would no doubt make those two feel uncomfortable.”

“Personally,” Forneido said, “having the Vitam out of the room would make me feel more productive about this meeting. I doubt I would have gotten anywhere with him regardless of what I would say. So, what is it you wanted to ask me without those two around?”

“I hope you don’t mind me asking but how is your connection to your kind’s faith?”

Forneido was surprised for a Human to ask him such a question. He never would have expected that topic to be brought up.

“That is a surprising question to ask,” Forneido said. “However, as of late, I have questioned every part of it.”

“I take it that you are questioning it due to what has happened as of late to you and nation, for the, and I’m sorry to put it this way, ‘failings’ that you all have been going through. Am I right?”

“You are correct. Things are not making sense and I’m not the only one. If our god has decreed for us to bring unbelievers to his alter, then why are we suffering like this? Where did we go wrong?”

“You may find this odd, but one of my officers during the course of our mission the past couple of months has gathered as much of your race’s religious texts as possible to get a better understanding of the Lykan culture.”

“Really?” Forneido said, surprised that a non-Lykan would take an interest in their faith.

“She compared your texts with your history and found out a few things that may explain where you as a race, a culture, and a nation went wrong once you all went forth among the stars.”

“What do you mean?”

“What if I told you that your texts were either misinterpreted or was made to suit the needs of the elite among your culture?”

“I would like to see where she found such a thing among the texts and history. Do you have proof?”

Trent got up and reached into his pocket. He pulled out the portable storage device that Tora had given him. A large monitor was to Trent’s right as he went over to the monitor. Once he plugged the removable storage into the monitor, it turned on and loaded the presentation that was stored. It paused on the first frame of the presentation where the text was in the Lykan language.

Forneido read the text and was surprised to see the title. To him, it read “The Misinterpretation of the Lykan Faith: What it was supposed to be and how royalty twisted it.”

“You all made a complete presentation involving the topic?” Forneido asked.

“We did,” Trent said. “Our intent was to show this to the entire Kingdom after commandeering a major communications system in Heronia, but we want your take on it first. What you are about to see is how we viewed your religion from an outside perspective not influenced by bias or the way your government wants to interpret it. Do you think you can view this with an open mind if I show this to you?”

Forneido looked at the screen and was genuinely curious to see what a Human’s perspective was on their religion.

“If it provides me with renewed faith in my religion and something to believe in again, then I am up to watching this presentation,” Forneido said. “Please begin the presentation.”

* * * * *