

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



PART 7

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
5:15pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“What do you mean they suddenly stopped attacking?”

Drew received another call from Fleet Admiral Mikey not too long after he had talked to him over ten minutes ago. This time, however, Mikey gave Drew the oddest update to the current conflict that was transpiring in the Republic. The update was as much of an enigma as it was shocking. For whatever the reason unbeknownst to them, the Tenebris Dominion’s dreadnoughts at both the planet Luminaire and at High Sanctus had suddenly ceased their attacks on those

planets and their defenses. Drew was puzzled as he sat in his seat, not quite sure how to take this news since he could not understand the reason why they would suddenly stop their attacks while in star systems controlled by what Armani would consider their enemies.

"We are just as puzzled by this development as you are, sir," Mikey said through Drew's terminal. *"When we noticed that they had stopped engaging our forces and our defenses, we ceased our attack as well. Since we know that their ships are under some form of automated control, we didn't want to risk a self-defense protocol suddenly becoming active if we continued to engage their ships, resulting in continued fighting. We also noticed that according to our sensors just before they stopped their attack, long-range communications that were being transmitted from the Southwest Region to the dreadnoughts had suddenly ceased. Once that happened, the dreadnoughts stopped their attack."*

"Communications to the dreadnoughts had ceased?" Drew asked. "The task force that was sent to the Tenebris capital must be jamming enemy communications there, but if that is the case, then I wonder why the dreadnoughts stopped their assault? Surely, they were programmed to operate without continuous commands being supplied from their headquarters, right?"

"I have a hunch, but I don't believe the computers on board their dreadnoughts are capable or even programmed to perform independent actions without commands being given to the dreadnoughts' computers. If you remember in the initial briefing at RCIA headquarters weeks ago, these ships were crewed by a few thousand people. If there were any level of automation involved in their normal day-to-day operation, there would be no need for so many personnel to be on board. I'm willing to go so far as to say that their computers lack a dedicated artificial intelligence that is capable of making such decisions independently without being given orders unlike the Federation's drones."

"That means that once the communications are cutoff, the current operations of the enemy dreadnoughts returned to normal requiring a crew. This may be our best chance to try and commandeer their vessels for us to study and research the technology on board including the portal drive! Can you quickly deploy teams to the enemy ships in both systems as well as setup a jamming field to prevent any reestablished Dominion communications from getting through?"

"The latter can be done within a minute, but the former will take more than ten minutes to deploy, not to mention brief them on what is going on and what to expect once they are on board. The problem we face is that only a few ships at both locations have lost shields. Those can be boarded easily, and we can hack their systems from there. The problem are the ships whose shields are still up. We will have to find a way to bring them down, but if my hunch earlier is correct, the self-defense protocol that I thought they might have may not be present if there is not an AI on board to fight back. We will see what we can do and report back once we have made progress. However, are we not expecting the Lykans to arrive in High Sanctus shortly?"

"Oh, that's right! I need to get in touch with them immediately to make sure they don't come in with guns blazing. Proceed with the capture of the dreadnoughts while I contact Forneido and let him know what is going on."

"Yes, sir."

As soon as the communication from Mikey was no longer on Drew's terminal, Drew rushed to get in contact with Forneido. Within seconds, Forneido was on the terminal screen with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Supreme Chancellor Drew?" Forneido asked. *"Is something wrong or has something happened involving the enemy invasion?"*

"The latter of the two, actually. I need you to tell your forces to hold position for now."

“Hold their position? Why?”

“The enemy ships have stopped attacking. We noticed that long-range communications being transmitted to the dreadnoughts have ceased. When that happened, the enemy vessels stopped their attacks. I mentioned to you minutes ago that the ships were being operated autonomously, but now we can confirm that this is done remotely rather than independently. Those ships are currently holding their position and no longer engaging our forces. We will be having teams boarding the enemy ships whose shields are down to seize control. If they can gain control of the remaining dreadnoughts while continuing to prevent communications from being established from the enemy headquarters, we can disable them and possibly repurpose them.”

Forneido raised his left eyebrow.

“These events that have transpired today are already questionable at best about this enemy that consists of Humans you have told me. Now you’re telling me want to control their behemoths for your own use? I hope you can forgive me for saying this, but I’m scared of this power you wish to yield even though I don’t know the full scope of what these ships can do.”

“Don’t be scared, Ambassador. I intend to repurpose them for a different role, one that is shared between all friendly nations of the star cluster. Once these cultists are dealt with, I will be calling for a meeting of the Senate to deal with their violation of the Republic Charter before I put forth a proposal to all the nations to consider. It actually falls in line with what your Prime Minister proposed some time ago.”

“It does? Wait, are you talking about the international peacekeeping force he proposed? I thought the proposal wouldn’t pass in the Senate?”

“In light of recent events, the Senate may be more willing to accept such a proposal, especially if there is not as much cost involved in creating new vessels for that purpose if we recycle the dreadnoughts in our space instead.”

“I see. An intriguing if not a resource conservative cost-effective idea. However, if you are looking at recycling them into something else, plans and blueprints are going to need to be drafted to make use of the materials. That could take a while.”

“I am far ahead of you there. The design blueprints are already made and need only one component to complete: the unique drive the dreadnoughts possess.”

Forneido raised his left eyebrow again.

“Exactly how LONG have you known about these cultists?”

“All in due time, Ambassador. Now, if you would please tell your forces to hold position, we can bring this matter to a swift close and proceed forward with future matters.”

“Very well, but I hope you are prepared to explain in front of the whole known star cluster what these cultists are all about after this.”

“Oh, believe me, I have been prepared for a while. We will speak again soon.”

Forneido bowed in acknowledgement of Drew’s statement before he disconnected the call. Drew leaned back in his chair and took a deep breath. Things could have gone far worse than he expected once the Dominion invaded, but the fact that this oversight by Armani where jamming was such an effective tool made Drew wonder how come he did not consider the use of electronic warfare in fights?

Drew then remembered the one crucial fact that answered that question easily. While Armani was a self-proclaimed Pope of his cult, he was once a doctor, not a military tactician. Drew knew this oversight was going to cost Armani more than he would know.

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*Troop Bay, Covert Dropship, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar Port Hangar Bay
Planet Tenebris Prime Orbit, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:15pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Control reports enemy fleet is engaged, and we are clear to deploy, Ghost One.”

Blair, or rather “Ghost One” for the remainder of this mission, took a deep breath. The plan sounded simple, but he knew that wasn’t going to be the case under these circumstances. The Federation Main Fleet along with the Republic Seventh Fleet were to engage the local Dominion forces in Tenebris Prime’s orbit. While the Dominion’s dreadnoughts are larger and heavily armed, there were several factors working against those behemoths. The first was the Republic fleets electronic warfare capabilities such as jamming communications, stasis fields to slow the massive vessels down from closing range, and electronic countermeasures to keep them from targeting allied vessels. The second is the fact that the Dominion was not aware that their capital system’s location is known and thus were not prepared for a surprise attack of this nature. The jamming of their communications will prevent other Dominion ships from being called in to reinforce their numbers.

The last factor they were hoping would be working against the dreadnoughts is that the remaining crew on board those ships would not know how to operate them in a combat setting after the Aspergillus Tribe’s clones were wiped out by Armani. However, after hearing that Dominion dreadnoughts were attacking Luminaire, High Sanctus, and the Federation border worlds, this factor would no longer apply. While the question as to how they were trained to operate the ships in combat in a short manner of time is still in the air, the goal remains unchanged.

Thankfully, the *Templar’s* cloak was not affected by the portal as the ship went through, and thus the ship was not spotted upon entering the system along with the Republic Seventh Fleet and the Federation Dreadnought that transported them. The *Templar* focused its own jamming fields targeted at the capital per Tonya, the former Aspergillus Tribe Chief. Based on reports, there are no communications getting through from the Dominion capital either coming or going from the city. Now it was Blair and his team’s turn to take action.

Once the dropship reaches the central compound, Blair’s team will infiltrate the Central Tower, and locate the way into Armani’s private area. Once they are inside, Blair and the odd numbers of his team will locate Armani while the even numbers led by Benja who is “Ghost Two” will locate Armani’s clones if Armani can somehow jump to a new clone at will. Tigris Chief Miya and the former Chiefs will accompany Blair’s team as Blair knew that they, namely Miya, may have some choice words for Armani when they see him.

Now that they were given the “green light” to proceed, it was time to put their plan into motion. Blair activated the communication system in his helmet.

“Confirmed, pilot,” Blair said. “Take us out and head to the target point.”

“Yes, sir,” the pilot said through Blair’s helmet.

As the dropship lifted off the hangar bay deck and moved forward out of the bay, Blair looked at the whole team including the Dominion “guests.” Everyone was wearing a helmet now and their faces were hidden. However, he knew that they all heard the pilot through their helmets and that they were beginning the mission. Despite their faces being hidden, their ID’s or their names in the case of the women from the Dominion were displayed over their heads to identify each one when needed. The Dominion women were also the only people on the team that were not supplied with weapons. Blair still had some trust issues with them being around. He knew

that they had their own agenda for going so far as to practically “invite” the Federation and the Republic into their “home” only to get back at Armani for what he had done to them. The last thing he needed them to have was a weapon in case they wanted to use it on Armani when the orders were to capture him. He also wanted to make sure that they were not armed if they wanted to use the weapons against Blair’s team, if their intentions or plans were to backstab or betray them. He had his doubts, but the time to voice those doubts has passed and the mission was already in motion.

When Blair first started his mission to infiltrate the Federation capital, he would never have guessed that he would find himself infiltrating the Dominion capital as well before he would even return to Republic space. He wondered if the rest of his team felt the same way as he does, jumping into another mission before returning to Ruber. He knows that the old term “cabin fever” must be setting in after being on board the *Templar* for more than three weeks, but he doubted that they would want to have ended it by going on a mission like this. He would have to find a way to make it up to them all afterwards, provided they are not forced to endure another long arduous mission afterwards. Maybe what they needed right now was a “pick-me-up” as the term goes.

“Listen up, Ghost Team,” Blair said.

Everyone was looking his way, including Miya and her group.

“After this mission is over, I will see to it that you all get some leave for a long while to recoup. I know you all have friends and family worrying about you all after all this time and staying on a ship for as long as we have is something you all would have preferred not to do again. We will leave the fallout of this mission in the hands of the politicians and pray that they don’t start another war after this. We need some time for ourselves and if this mission goes well, we will achieve just that. Are all of you ready to complete this mission and go home?”

“Yes, sir!” the members of Ghost Team said in unison through Blair’s helmet.

Blair could tell that Miya and her group did not say anything. In his mind, why would they since they are returning home right now, traitors in the eyes of the current leadership? He quickly wondered if they were scared right now to return home, knowing the consequences of their actions will either result in their death if Armani somehow prevails or the death of their nation once Armani is captured and the Republic doesn’t recognize the Tenebris Dominion’s sovereignty. He doubted the Republic would let the attack on Luminaire and High Sanctus by Dominion forces slide. The Republic will find some method to make the Dominion pay for those attacks even if Armani was the one responsible for them. Blair also knew that the remaining Chiefs that still sided with Armani would also have to be dealt with along with their clones who looks to know how to fight in combat now.

As the dropship descended into the upper atmosphere, Blair wondered how the battle being fought nearby was going. Hopefully, Admiral Trent had not gotten in over his head.

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*Bridge, R.N.S. Marshal, Paladin-Class Battleship, Flagship of the Republic Seventh Fleet
Planet Tenebris Prime Orbit, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:19pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Is this some kind of joke?”

As the battle between his fleet and the Federation’s Main Fleet against the local Dominion dreadnoughts continued, Trent started to notice something was amiss in the combat

capabilities of the dreadnoughts compared to what was reported at the battles over Luminaire and High Sanctus. Even with his forces providing electronic warfare in the form of ECM's, graviton stasis fields, and warp disruptors in case the enemy ships had that drive, the way the enemy dreadnoughts were fighting lead Trent to start reevaluating the Dominion's combat capabilities.

Captain Dani turned in her chair enough to look in Trent's direction.

"Is something wrong, sir?" she asked.

"Based on the reports from headquarters," Trent said, "the dreadnoughts that were attacking Luminaire and High Sanctus were fully combat capable and were even launching fighters to engage our forces."

"That is correct, sir."

"How is it then that I don't see that happening in front of us right now?"

Dani had a puzzled expression on her face before she turned to look at the main screen with the tactical map displayed. She soon realized what Trent had noticed. She turned back towards Trent.

"You're right," she said. "They haven't launched any fighters at all, and they don't appear to be utilizing their ships' full capabilities. Well, at least the ships we are not jamming with ECM's anyway."

"This doesn't make any sense. Even if we jam the dreadnoughts, the fighters would be too numerous to jam once they were deployed. Granted, they would be affected by the stasis fields and become slow moving targets, but they would still launch them regardless like they did back home. What is going on here?"

"Is it possible that the Dominion fully crewed the dreadnoughts that are attacking the Republic and the Federation border worlds? If they only fully crewed those ships, they would not have any reason to fully crew these here. They may have thought that there would be no retaliation from either our forces or the Federation's."

"That is a possibility, but even if that were the case, I still don't see how they managed to train so many people in such a short time."

Trent thought over the matter for a moment before a thought popped into his head.

"Could it be?" he said out loud with a shocked expression on his face.

"What is it?" Dani asked.

Trent turned to Sierra at the communications station.

"Sierra," Trent said, "before we started jamming the enemy fleet, were there any transmissions from the capital towards either the Republic or the Federation border?"

Sierra turned slightly towards Trent with a puzzled expression.

"I would have to look at the logs," Sierra said, "but is there something I am looking for specifically?"

"It's a hunch, but I want you to look for any transmissions that were commands such as those used for a computer or some form of remote control."

"Give me a moment to look," Sierra said as she turned back to her station.

Dani looked at Trent with a puzzled expression again.

"Are you saying that the ships that are attacking the Republic and the Federation worlds are being controlled or operated remotely, Admiral?" Dani asked.

"It's the only explanation I can think of as to why there is a difference in combat capabilities between those ships and the ones here," Trent said. "If they are remote commands such as to a computer, this brings up another question I am afraid to find out the answer to. I just hope that I am wrong about this, or Armani's sins just increased."

Sierra looked over the logs at her station for a few seconds before she retrieved the requested information. After she reviewed the information, she turned back to Trent.

“Admiral,” she said, “I have confirmation that there were transmissions directed towards Lumen, Sanctus, and the Federation border worlds. The transmissions indicate the use of a ‘slave’ system of commands.”

“I was afraid of that,” Trent said.

“What is a ‘slave’ system?” Dani asked.

“It’s a system where the ‘master’ computer gives instructions and commands to other computers, or ‘slave’ computers,” Trent said. “In other words, it is like a remote-control system, but the master computer needs to remain in constant communication with the slave computers in order to operate accordingly. Once we jammed communications here, the master computer lost control of the slave computers of the dreadnoughts.”

“How would anyone on board those ships be allowed to perform their duties when the computers are controlling everything?”

Trent waited a moment before looking at Dani a serious expression on his face.

“They wouldn’t,” Trent said. “Anyone on board would be a hindrance to the operation of such a system. There is a chance that either the crew are no longer on board, they are locked out of the system and are only along for the ‘ride,’ or the worst case scenario where they were terminated the moment the system was activated. If the first or last scenario is in play, the dreadnoughts would be on standby or cease to function. If they are still on board, they will either gain control or remain locked out until the dreadnoughts are either captured or destroyed by allied forces.”

“Regardless, it means that their invasion in those systems have been halted by our efforts. That’s some good news, right?”

“It does, but we still have our own mission to finish. The *Templar* needs to maintain the jamming on the Dominion capital to prevent such a system being activated on the ships in this system. The last thing we need is for this battle to suddenly turn against us. Sierra, please inform the *Templar* and the *Heaven’s Arrow* of this news. They need to know what we’ve found.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Sierra said as she turned back to her station.

“I still feel sorry for the Chancellor right now,” Dani said. “He’s going to have to explain about the Dominion and the Federation much sooner than he expected after this.”

“I don’t envy his position,” Trent said. “He has to explain everything to the public a week sooner than he wanted to. Same goes for my wife who was selected to report the matter. I just hope nothing major has happened there before we jammed communications.”

As Trent looked at the main view screen, he noticed of one of the nearby dreadnoughts took a direct hit to its portside midsection from a Federation particle beam. The missile silos at the point of impact began to detonate in a chain reaction ripping the dreadnought in half after several seconds. So far, neither his fleet nor the Federation fleet has lost any ships thanks to the electronic warfare systems being used against the Dominion fleet, but they still have several enemy dreadnoughts closing in on their position. Thankfully, none of them were withdrawing from jamming range yet, but Trent knew that if the Dominion’s defenses were to dwindle, any of the dreadnoughts could create a portal and withdraw to call reinforcements. There was still no means for Republic forces to stop them from using their portal drives. If the covert ops team cannot secure Armani before that occurs, this operation was going to get far more complicated if not difficult, and that is the last thing he wanted to happen.

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*Western Courtyard, Central Ruling Complex, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:25pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“So, where do we proceed from here?”

As soon as the cloaked transport carrying Blair’s team was close to the ground within the perimeter wall of the Dominion capital’s Central Ruling Complex, the bay door in the back opened for his team to depart. Activating their suits’ cloaking devices before disembarking from the transport, they set up a perimeter with their guns drawn near the bay door until the last members of the team, namely Miya and the former Chiefs, jumped off. Once Miya’s group was off the transport, the transport closed the bay door and flew upward away from the ground. While the silhouettes of everyone and the transport were visible on their heads-up displays in their visors, the transport’s engine noise can only be hidden so much before someone in the Central Complex would take notice.

As Blair looked around, someone hearing the engine noise would not be as much of a problem as he initially thought. Much to Blair’s disgust, it didn’t take him long to notice the dead Aspergillus clones at one of the entrances and along the perimeter wall. While he could not see the faces of his team much less Miya’s group, he knew that they would find the sight of so many dead bodies with their heads and brains fried very unappealing. He did not know if they would spot any dead Tigris clones or not outside of the Central Database, but he knew that going through that way into the Central Tower was ill-advised after what happened involving the team the *Cavalier* sent and their actions leading to current events. Miya also advised against it, but Blair believed that she did not want to see all of the dead Tigris clones that were inside that building at the moment.

As he continued to look around, he realized that the dead Aspergillus clones were the only ones around. If they were the only group handling security for the Central Complex, it meant that the complex was virtually undefended. However, Blair was not about to risk lowering his guard in case one of the other Tribes took up the mantle of guard duty, whether they wanted to or not.

“Let’s proceed to the Aspergillus Tribe Head Family Residence Tower,” Tonya said through Blair’s helmet speakers. *“My code should still work and there may not be as many of my Tribe inside after what has happened.”*

“Why not go through the Tigris Tribe’s Tower?” Blair asked. “Wouldn’t it be the same situation there?”

“It is, but it would raise alarms for anyone to go through that tower considering the Tigris were the first to be executed including members of the head family. Going through the Aspergillus Tower would make it seem like members of my family were trying to find survivors if any alarms were to go off. I also know my way around the tower and where to avoid any trouble before we reach the Central Tower.”

“Very well. Lead the way. The sooner we are able to get to Armani, the sooner this whole fiasco he started will be over.”

“Follow me.”

Blair turned towards the silhouette that displayed Tonya’s name over it. She led the group towards the tower to the right of the Central Database. Blair could see that there was a double door on the side of the tower facing away from the Central Tower. Two Aspergillus guards were dead on the ground on each side of the door. Tonya made her way to the control panel located on

the left side of the double doors, trying to avoid stepping on the dead guard who was laying down at the base of the panel. Misty and Sandra began moving towards the guard and looked like they were trying to move him.

“Do not touch or move him,” Blair said.

Misty and Sandra stopped and looked towards Blair. Before they could say anything, Blair raised his left hand to stop them from possibly arguing with him.

“Bear in mind that we cannot be seen,” he continued. “If you move him, anyone or any surveillance equipment will notice a dead body suddenly moving. They will know something is not right and set off alarms. They already know that infiltrators with optical camouflage have infiltrated their capital once before, so it won’t take them long to come to the same conclusion.”

Misty and Sandra backed away from the body.

“You make a valid point,” Misty said. “I wonder, though. How long have you been doing covert missions such as this?”

“Longer than what I ever wanted to do it is all I will say on the matter. When this is over, I will no longer need to be on any further covert missions. I personally want to start a family after this. I need some level of a normal life outside of these missions.”

Miya came up alongside Blair’s left side, putting her right hand on Blair’s left shoulder. He turned to look at her, even though all he could see was a silhouette.

“Once Armani is no longer in charge,” Miya said, “we’ll see to it that you and everyone else in the cluster can find that level of normalcy.”

“Easier said than done,” Blair said, “but I appreciate the gesture.”

Miya nodded in agreement before retracting her hand from Blair’s shoulder. He looked back in Tonya’s direction as she looked like she was trying to open the door.

“How are you doing on the lock?” Blair asked.

Tonya looked in Blair’s direction.

“You may not believe this,” Tonya said with surprise in her tone, “but the door is unlocked! Security has been deactivated on this door!”

Blair was confused, almost taken back by what Tonya said.

“It’s been deactivated?” he said. “Do you have any idea why?”

“No, I don’t. Security is always active to prevent any unauthorized clones from entering. These towers were meant strictly for use by those of natural birth except for selected guards in the Central Tower.”

Blair pointed his gun towards the doors and walked in front of them. The rest of his team did the same, moving to his sides. Miya and the rest of her group stood by Tonya away from the doors.

“This could be a trap,” he said. “If those doors open, they could alert whoever is inside that someone is here. However, we have no choice. All units, prepare to fire if anyone is waiting on the other side.”

Blair looked at Tonya.

“Open them,” he said.

Tonya nodded in acknowledgement before pressing the button to open the doors. As they began to slide open, Blair and the rest of Ghost Squad brought their guns up to firing position, taking aim at anything that might be waiting for them. Once the doors were open fully, Blair and the rest of his team were relieved to find no one was waiting for them behind the doors.

“Alright,” he said. “Everyone inside. Tonya, once you close the door behind us, I need you to lead the way. We’ll follow close behind.”

“What happens if we run into anyone I know and trust?” Tonya asked.

“Do you think anyone in your family is still alive if Armani ordered their execution?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. I want to hope that they are still alive.”

“I understand, but our mission cannot be compromised. The sooner we get Armani, the sooner anyone who remains among both the Tigris and Aspergillus Tribes will be safe.”

“Very well. Get inside and I will lead the way, but we need to hurry before someone among the other Tribes notices this door is open.”

Blair and the rest of his team proceeded inside followed by Miya and her group. Tonya was the last one in and she closed the doors from a panel inside the doorway. As the doors closed, she moved ahead of the group down the hallway.

“Follow me, but quickly,” she said. “Security may be down, but that doesn’t mean our activity wasn’t monitored somehow.”

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*Dominion Intelligence Room, Central Tower below ground level, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:29pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“I see our guests have arrived.”

Alpha sat at his station, watching all of the monitors that displayed all of the entrances and exits from the Central and Tribal Towers. One of the monitors indicated movement and Alpha looked at the screen that was getting his attention. This was the main entrance into the Aspergillus Head Family Tower from the outside into the western courtyard. The doors opened and remained opened for less than two minutes before they closed. He could see slight impressions in the carpet indicating footsteps of several people. There looked to be more than a dozen pairs of footprint impressions before they disappeared off the screen. There could be anywhere from twelve to sixteen people inside using some form of optical camouflage to avoid detection. It was hard to say since he wasn’t able to get a solid count before they were gone.

One thing was clear, though. The reports of infiltrators in the Central Database over a week ago were true, and most likely it was the Republic who had this technology. All he had to do now was guide these “guests” to where they needed to go to get to Armani.

“Epsilon,” Alpha said, “are we able to provide any form of visual guidance from the main Aspergillus Tribe Residence entrance towards the entrance to Armani’s Inner Sanctuary?”

Epsilon turned around, surprised at Alpha’s request.

“Alpha,” Epsilon said, “even if I could provide such guidance, I have no idea where the entrance to Armani’s Inner Sanctuary is located.”

“Wait, you don’t know where it is?”

“No, sir. I thought you knew?”

“I don’t know where it is myself. Does anyone here know?”

Alpha looked around at his team as everyone looked at him, shaking their heads “no.” He did not anticipate the fact that everyone on his team didn’t know where the entrance to the Inner Sanctuary was located.

“No one here has ever seen him enter or leave his Sanctuary except to come here?” Alpha asked, puzzled.

“Aside from the Tribal Council Chamber and the hallways,” Epsilon said, “we have never seen the entrance to the Inner Sanctuary. We don’t even know where it is in the Central Tower.”

“This isn’t good. If the Republic has sent covert operatives to capture or arrest him, they have no idea where to go to find him. Don’t we have the blueprints or the schematics to the Central Tower?”

“Only the areas that are accessible to the head families of the Tribes and among those that are permitted in the Central Tower such as the guards when they were still alive. The whole area below the Tribal Council Chamber and above this room is a complete void in the schematics. There are no visible entrances in or out aside from the elevator behind us or the central podium in the Tribal Council Chamber.”

“While there is an exit to this room, the elevator is only accessible to Armani and we would know when he would come in and out of here. The central podium is out of the question for entry and exit to his sanctuary as well. There has to be another way for him to leave or he would not have been able to kill Miss Carol by his own hands.”

Alpha just realized that his own words might help to solve the dilemma he was finding himself in.

“Are there any video feeds from the hallways that lead to and from the Tigris Head Family Residence?” Alpha asked.

“Yes, there are,” Beta said. “Do you want us to go over the feed?”

“Yes, and hurry! Find the footage of Armani heading to the Tigris Tower and run that backwards until we find where he came from.”

Beta turned back to his console and began pulling up the footage from earlier in the day. It did not take long for Beta to find the footage of Armani heading down the hallway leading into Tigris Tower.

“I found the footage,” Beta said. “I’ll put it up on the main monitor and begin going backwards.”

The footage on the main screen changed to show the same footage Beta was looking at. While paused, it showed Armani without his normal robes on. It was odd to see him without his holy attire, instead dressed in all black casual-like clothing. His face, however, showed it was clearly him. As Beta played the footage in reverse, he changed cameras to the ones he had passed while he was heading to the Tigris Tower. After a few camera changes, Beta stopped rewinding the footage. The last shot was facing in the direction Armani was going, his head popping up from the bottom of the screen.

Alpha was puzzled why Beta stopped right on that particular camera and time frame.

“Why did you stop, Beta?” Alpha asked.

“I don’t know why but that is the only footage in that part of the hallway,” Beta said. “There are no cameras showing where he was coming from further back than this.”

“There are none? What is further back from this point?”

Beta pulled up the schematics from that section of the Central Tower on that floor. He then put it up on the main screen.

“According to this,” Beta said, “there is a foyer located in this section of the central tower between the Aspergillus and Tigris Towers. However, while the area shows it is recessed inward into the wall by six meters, this foyer does not seem to show any visible function. In fact, this seems to be the only foyer located in the entire Central Tower.”

“That must be the location of the entry into the Inner Sanctuary,” Alpha said, “but I don’t see a door in the schematic.”

“It may be possible that it is hidden where no one can find it. Either the wall can move in some direction or it is a hologram camouflaging the entrance.”

“Either way, this location holds the greatest possibility of an entry into the Inner Sanctuary. Is there any way to access the controls for the entryway from here?”

“Not that I can see. Considering that the schematics for the Central Tower doesn’t even show the entryway to begin with, I doubt that we would have access to it anyway. It would defeat the purpose of a private sanctuary away from everyone else where only one person at least would be permitted to access it.”

“True, however, he was able to get back in without any problems, either. There has to be a trick to it. Regardless, can you set some guidance lights from the entryway to the Aspergillus Tower to this foyer?”

“I can, but if the Republic did send covert operatives using optical camouflage, what makes you think they are going to follow those guidance lights? If I were them, I would take this as some sort of trick or a trap.”

“I know. You’re right. However, even if they have a guide, they won’t know where to look unless they know what they are looking for. So, why not give them a hint to its possible whereabouts?”

“Alright, sir. I’ll activate some holographic guidance lights starting from the Aspergillus Tower entryway on that floor to that foyer.”

“Good. All we can do now is hope that they will find their way in and get to Armani. This madness of his needs to end.”

* * * * *

*Aspergillus Tower Entrance Corridor, Central Tower, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:35pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“What is this?”

As Blair’s team was exiting the Aspergillus Tower while following Tonya, they were surprised to suddenly see what looked like floating lights near the walls on both sides of them, realizing quickly that they were looking at holograms. They were moving like a flowing pulse ahead of them, indicating that they were to head in the direction they were going.

Blair looked over at Tonya, though he could not tell if she was puzzled by these lights or not with the helmet on.

“Tonya,” Blair said, “what are these lights for?”

Tonya’s silhouette on his helmet’s display looked over at Blair.

“These are guide beacons,” Tonya said through Blair’s helmet. “If someone is lost, they use these to find their way. However, I haven’t seen these used in years.”

“It also means that someone knows we are here, most likely when we entered the Aspergillus tower. The question now is why they are wanting to guide us somewhere? Are they guiding us to a trap or are they helping us to find Armani for some reason?”

“There is only one way to find out,” Miya said behind Blair. “We know that Dominion sensors cannot see through the optical cloak your Republic uses. This team currently has the advantage in that our observers don’t know our exact position for the moment.”

“Yes, they do,” Benja said. “Look down. The carpet is showing recessions where are feet are. If they have ‘eyes’ on this hallway and others, they know exactly where we are right now.”

Blair looked down to see that Benja was correct. The carpet was thick enough that their foot placement was clearly seen to the naked eye or the casual observer. This meant their position

and their mission were already compromised to some extent, but by whom? It couldn't be Armani as he would want them killed immediately rather than lead them on like this. Regardless of who it was, they couldn't stay in that hallway forever as they were short on time.

"Whoever it was that set these guides up wants us to go to where they are heading," Blair said. "All they can tell is how many of us there are, not what we are packing such as weapons and gear. So, let's see where these lights lead and go from there."

Blair moved on ahead of the team as the rest followed behind. After several meters, they came across a "T" junction, but the guide lights were flowing to their left. As they reached the end of the hallway, Blair stopped and looked around the left corner. There was no one in the hallway and the guide lights continued down the corridor as it curved to the right.

Blair turned and looked at Tonya.

"What's down that way?" he asked, gesturing with his hand towards the left corridor.

"There is a foyer and the entrance to the Tigris Tower down that way," Tonya said.

"A foyer? We're roughly five floors from the ground. Why is there a foyer on this floor?"

"I...I really don't know. I've never bothered to think about it before. I would only assume that since this corridor links the five Tribes' Towers together, it would be a meeting place outside the Tribal Council Chamber. However, it was never used as such."

Blair looked back around the corner in the direction the guide lights were directing them again. There was only one explanation for why that foyer was there.

"That must be the location to the entrance to Armani's Inner Sanctuary," he said.

"Someone is guiding us there. For what reason, I cannot say, but there is a chance someone has a clear enough conscious to realize that what Armani has been doing is morally wrong."

"There is only one group I can think of that would be allowed to do this," Sandra said.

"It must be the Intelligence Team made up of clones from my Tribe, the Lupus Tribe. They have a facility in the lower levels of the Central Tower as well as access to surveillance systems to monitor where we are. They would have an 'Alpha' in charge of the team. He must be the one allowing this to happen. Anyone else in the team would have been stopped."

"Could this 'Alpha' be responsible for the lack of security when we first entered the Aspergillus Tower?"

"It's very likely. My only concern is that Armani has a direct means of entry into their room, which would have provided him another means of leaving his Inner Sanctuary. However, Armani would have been spotted exiting from the lower levels to get to this level to reach the Tigris Tower when he murdered Miya's grandmother, Carol."

"While it may be risky, let us see if this 'Alpha' is as trustworthy to our cause as you hope he is. Let's proceed to the foyer."

Blair proceeded down the left corridor, following the guide lights at a jogging pace with the rest of the team followed behind him. As they made their way down the corridor, they soon reached the foyer with the guiding lights turning towards it. When Blair reached it and looked around, several plants were lined up along the side walls. There was no furniture, but there was also no visible door. Of course, if the door to the Inner Sanctuary was visible, then there would be no need to hide its location and every one of the Chiefs would have been aware of its location a long time ago.

"Ghost Five and Six," Blair said, "scan the walls. Get close to the far wall as well. Find anything that looks like a mechanism or circuitry that indicates there is some door or moving wall located here."

"Yes, sir!" Ghost Five and Six said in unison.

Their silhouettes past by Blair as they approached the far wall first. He could see that they had pulled out scanning equipment with Ghost Five checking the left side of the wall while Ghost Six checked the right side. After a moment, Ghost Six turned to Blair.

"I think I got something, Ghost One," he said.

"What did you find, Ghost Six?"

"I'm detecting a power conduit running from this side of the wall towards the right wall. There may be a hidden access panel on the right wall. I'm following the conduit now."

Ghost Six moved towards the right wall, tracking the conduit he was detecting. When he got to the closest plant to him, he looked at Blair again.

"I'm detecting a control panel behind this plant, sir. It's behind a cover, but for me to get to it, I have to move both the plant and the cover which will be visually noticeable."

"It doesn't matter at this point. Whoever is leading us already knows we are here, so we might as well not disappoint them."

"Understood, sir," Ghost Six said as he began to move the plant's branches and leaves out of the way.

When he was able to reach the panel, he pressed a button on the bottom of the cover. The cover slid up revealing what appeared to be some sort of scanner. Ghost Six scanned the console.

"Clever," he said. *"This control panel is a combination of a DNA scanner, hand reader, and cardiovascular mapper. It is only meant to be opened by the hand of one person, and we all know who that is by this point."*

"So, it requires Armani's hand biometrics for access. No one could get inside his Inner Sanctuary except for him. Ghost Eight, is there a way to bypass that kind of security?"

"Let me take a look," Ghost Eight said as she approached Ghost Six's position.

Once she reached the console, Ghost Six moved out of the way as Ghost Eight attached a device on the scanner. Within seconds, Blair can hear her scoff over his helmet's speakers.

"I thought this was going to be an advanced elaborate security system," Ghost Eight said. *"Why are you all still using such antiquated technology and operating systems? I can open this lock within seconds easily!"*

"Antiquated?" Sandra said. *"My Tribe has been keeping our operating systems up-to-date for centuries!"*

"Then they must be patches and fixes only. I recognize this version of the system from my History of Technology class. It hasn't been in use in the Republic for more than six hundred years. How does a society who developed a portal drive manage to run it on a centuries-old operating system?"

Before anyone could respond to Ghost Eight's question, the far wall began to slide upwards, revealing a black wall and a door right behind it.

"See?" Ghost Eight said as she detached her device off the scanner. *"Easily hackable. If one of your ships was ever boarded by Republic operatives, its computer core could easily be taken over and the crew's access locked out."*

Blair looked over at Sandra's silhouette who had her head down by that point. Blair couldn't tell if she was embarrassed, upset, or dumbfounded about how outdated their systems were compared to the Republic's. It also surprised him that there was no reference about the operating systems on the Dominion ships after the investigation in the Miranda System and the Central Archive when teams accessed those systems weeks ago. Blair, however, doesn't usually focus on the versions of operating systems as he usually leaves that to the experts.

He had been worried about the combat capabilities of the Dominion's dreadnoughts ever since they were discovered in the Miranda System more than a month ago. If what Ghost Eight is saying is true about their systems being outdated and they were able to hack right into their computer cores to take over the ships, the threat of the dreadnoughts would be alleviated if not completely removed in an instant without firing a shot. If they had more time to analyze the information, the attack on Lumen and Sanctus would have gone completely different.

Blair was then quick to realize that this information could be used to stop every dreadnought in both the Dominion and in systems they were currently attacking!

"Ghost Eight! How easy is it for you to generate a shutdown command along with rewriting access codes for both the systems in this building and on a dreadnought?"

"Are you kidding?" Ghost Eight said. *"I have programs already installed in my suit's terminal to accomplish that if necessary. All I have to do is transmit the codes into their computers and wait for their systems to shut down once the new access codes overwrite the existing ones. Wait a moment, are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?"*

"I am. Go find an access terminal and make it happen. I want the computer systems of the Dominion shut down and access only given to us. That includes the communications systems to prevent the need to jam their transmissions. Then inform the *Templar* to drop the jamming and transmit the same protocol with one added bonus. I want the dreadnoughts to automatically transmit the same shutdown protocol throughout the entire Dominion fleet, including the ships that are invading."

"You want to turn the protocol into a worm! Brilliant, sir! I'm on it! I saw a terminal back the way we came. I'll get started there! Be back in a couple of minutes."

Ghost Eight ran out of the foyer and proceeded back down the corridor towards the Aspergillus Tower corridor. A terminal was located across from said corridor and Ghost Eight attached the same device she used before to the terminal. As she began to work on her task, Blair could hear Sandra sighing through his helmet's speakers.

"Even after more than six hundred years, we never stood a chance against the Republic, did we?" Sandra said. *"Even with the military might of our dreadnoughts and the Aspergillus Tribe's combat capabilities, we would be defenseless against this form of electronic warfare. My Tribe never conceived of updating the operating systems of our computers except through patches and fixes, but obviously those are not enough to combat what your Republic has developed in all that time."*

"From a hardware standpoint, the portal drive is still an innovative piece of technology along with the solar reactors your ships are using as an energy source for your weapons. However, your Dominion stagnated from a software standpoint. I'm not sure why that is unless your Tribe had very few software developers and programmers, but regardless, this is a huge glaring oversight that not even Armani would have foreseen. I will say that it will make his capture that much easier, though."

"How so?" Miya asked.

"If we can shut down his systems, this may include his means to jump to a fresh clone body to escape capture. With that offline, we would be able to capture him, both physically and mentally, with no methods of escape for him to slip away from our grasp. He would finally face the justice he has escaped all this time."

"Then I have to ask, but what happens if he is not aware of this fact and he tries to take his own life in order to jump to a fresh clone body? Does that mean that he would permanently die by his own hands?"

Blair looked over at Miya's silhouette, not sure what expression was on her face when she asked that question. He knew, however, that she did not have any loyalty or sympathy for him after what he had done to her family.

"Yes," Blair said. "He would die, permanently."

"Sir?" Ghost Eight said, still at the terminal she was hacking. *"I sent an encrypted message to the Templar, but they are saying that they cannot drop the jamming just yet."*

"Why not?" Blair asked as he looked towards Ghost Eight's direction.

"While I was working to shut down the system, I started with the communications system first. However, the Templar is still detecting transmissions from the Central Tower."

"Well, great," Blair said, sounding aggravated. "That means that the system Armani is using is separate from the rest of the Dominion's systems."

"That must mean that every time he did one of his services, he transmitted them from his Inner Sanctuary directly to the population without bogging down other Dominion transmissions, if not override them when needed," Sandra said. *"We need to shut down his systems as well before your forces can shut down our ships."*

Blair looked over at Sandra. Whatever her feelings were for their system being severely "outdated" according to Ghost Eight, she must have snapped out of it when she realized that the fighting would only stop once Armani was no longer in control. Maybe having an outdated system was a blessing rather than a curse in this matter.

Blair turned back towards Ghost Eight.

"Tell the *Templar* that we will work on disabling Armani's systems that are separate from the rest of the Dominion's shortly. For now, proceed to disable the remainder of the tower's systems and functions."

"What about those who directed us here?" Misty asked. *"We did get help from them as to where to find the entrance to Armani's Inner Sanctuary, after all."*

Blair looked at Misty.

"Whoever it was that directed us this way will be blinded from this point forward, but I am thankful that they got us this far. We can take it the rest of the way from here."

He turned back towards Ghost Eight.

"Proceed with my orders, then see what you can do about Armani's communications from the terminal by the door when you are done."

"Understood, sir," Ghost Eight said. *"Shutting everything down now."*

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*Dominion Intelligence Room, Central Tower below ground level, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:42pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

"What do you mean you lost control?"

Alpha had continued to monitor where this "invisible" covert ops team was located based on their footprints that were made in the thick carpet and what they were doing until they reached the foyer where there were no cameras present. There was no way to monitor what that team was doing after that point no thanks to Armani making sure there were no cameras present to show where the entrance to his Inner Sanctuary was located in the foyer. Alpha had waited patiently for something to happen that would be visible to them if possible on the monitors, even if it was small and insignificant.

Beta suddenly stating he lost control of all surveillance equipment was not what Alpha had in mind when he was waiting for “something” to happen.

“I can’t tell what is going on,” Beta said. “Several of our systems are shutting down almost all at the same time. I’m trying to investigate the cause...dang it!”

“What is it?” Alpha asked.

Beta turned around to face Alpha while pointing at the screen behind him, which was now black.

“My terminal has been shut down,” Beta said.

“Mine’s shut down, too,” Delta said. “From the looks of things, it appears everyone else’s terminal is going down, as well.”

“Did someone hack into our system?” Alpha asked.

“There is no way for us to tell now,” Beta said. “I can’t turn it back on to investigate.”

Alpha let out a heavy sigh. If the intruders were that capable of hacking into their systems and shutting those down like this, then they really are from the Republic. The Federation was never capable of this level of computer infiltration. How they were able to hack their systems had left some questions Alpha wished he could answer, but if they were down, there was no way to keep track of the infiltration team’s movements. All he could hope at this point was that these invaders found a way into Armani’s Inner Sanctuary before his team’s systems were shut down.

All he could do now was wait and see the results of his and their actions.

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*Inner Sanctuary Entrance Foyer, Central Tower, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
5:44pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Their systems are shut down, Ghost One.”

Ghost Eight disconnected her device from the terminal she was using to hack into the Dominion’s systems after she had shut them down. As Ghost Eight made her way back to the rest of the rest of the team, the lights in the hallway started to shut off in sections throughout the hallway. Everyone including Ghost Eight looked around as the hallway was starting to become pitch black as there were no windows present in the hallway.

“I guess I shut down more systems than I expect to,” Ghost Eight said.

“Prepare to activate your night vision systems in your helmets once all of the lights are off,” Blair said.

As the last lights turned off, Blair’s night vision in his helmet activated as shades of green filled his view. The other members of his team showed up as dark green silhouettes with a thin light green outline around them. When Ghost Eight returned to the team, Blair looked at her.

“Do you think you can do the same thing to Armani’s systems?” Blair asked. “Minus the loss of power in the lights and possible doors, of course?”

“I can,” Ghost Eight said. *“Hopefully that terminal is connected to other systems such as Armani’s communications system. Otherwise, we will need to find the central computer inside for me to shut it down.”*

“Understood. Get to it.”

Ghost Eight moved back over to the terminal in the wall behind the plant again, using the same device she used a moment ago to reconnect with those systems. After a few moments, Ghost Eight turned to Blair.

"We are in luck," Ghost Eight said. "The communications system is linked into the same computer as this terminal. I'm attempting the shutdown protocol."

"Before you do," Blair said, "see if you can get a layout of the Inner Sanctuary. We need to know where to go to apprehend Armani."

"Yes, sir. I'm looking for it now."

"Aside from this door," Miya said, "we know that Armani can escape through the Tribal Council Chamber if he is very careful. Considering it is a platform he is raised up on, we need to make sure he cannot escape that way."

"There is a third option," Ghost Eight said. "I'm looking over the outline and there is an elevator that descends below the Inner Sanctuary. It leads to the Dominion Intelligence Room."

"Is the elevator connected to the main system's power or is it connected to Armani's?" Blair asked.

"It's connected to the main system which I shut down. He won't be escaping that way, though the same elevator services the interior and is powered by the Inner Sanctuary's power systems for that purpose. The Tribal Council Chamber is the same story. This entryway is connected to his system and is his only way in or out."

"Then we have him cornered. Transfer the layout to our HUD's, then shut down his systems except for lights, doors, and lifts if needed so that we can get to him."

"Yes, sir."

Blair's heads-up display in his helmet began to display the layout of the Inner Sanctuary. The layout composed of three floors. The bottom floor was the largest of the three and it showed a layout of eight large capsules or pods connected to a large central computer in the middle of the room. The pods were facing away from the center of the room.

The middle floor was what the main entrance connected to. It was a cylindrical hallway layout with what appeared to be a study on the left and a storage room of some type to the right. The middle of the room contains the central computer and the far end has the elevator that services all three floors and the Dominion Intelligence Room.

The top floor was the smallest floor. A room in the center of the floor and based on the furnishings was obviously Armani's bedroom. The small cylindrical hallway around the bedroom had the main elevator across the hall from the bedroom door and the lift to the central platform of the Tribal Council Chamber on the opposite end of the hall.

Internal sensors inside the sanctuary show there were lifesigns in two locations. All eight of the pods shows humanoids at different "age" levels inside, though four of them appear to be connected to hoses. The last lifesign was in the bedroom. Based on those readings, Blair was quick to know what he was looking at.

"Armani is in his bedroom on the top floor of the sanctuary," Blair said. "It appears his clones are in the bottom floor, but why are four of them connected to hoses?"

"I know what those are," Sandra said. "Those hoses are designed to both supply those clones with nutrients and extract blood for sustenance for others, or rather in this case, for Armani alone."

"So that is how he sustains himself without ever leaving the Inner Sanctuary," Tonya said. "I wondered if he had his own supply, but I wasn't expecting for him to use his own clones for that purpose."

"Then the other four pods must contain clones for him to use," Blair said. "Ghost Eight, are those pods connected to the mind transfer system that Armani uses?"

"Looks like it," Ghost Eight said. *"He won't be able to transfer to a new clone if I shut down the power."*

Blair thought about the plan at this point. Part of him was concerned that Armani may attempt to jump to a new clone and in the process kill himself before or during apprehension. A thought came to mind, one that would be crazy but it would be easy to capture him just the same.

"I want you to keep the transfer system and one clone active," Blair said.

"Why?" Ghost Eight asked.

"If he kills himself, his mind will transfer to a fresh clone. If he is being subjected to the mind altering radiation once he emerges, we can find the source of the radiation and find out who or what is responsible. If we can stop the radiation before it takes a hold of him, then Armani will come to his senses, provided his current actions are not his own ideas rather than the byproduct of the mind manipulation."

"Very well, sir. I'll keep one of them active. I guess it doesn't matter the age, does it?"

"Just as long as the brain is developed enough for his entire mind to transfer."

"Understood."

"You will remain here to keep those systems in check. Ghost Nine and Ten will guard you and the main entrance. Ghost Three, Five, and Seven will go with me to secure the target. Ghost Two, Four, Six, Eleven, and Twelve will secure the clone room."

"What about my group?" Miya asked.

Blair looked at Miya's silhouette.

"I will have you come with me when we confront Armani," Blair said. "The rest of you will wait here. There isn't a lot of room in there if you join us."

"What about the study and the storage room?" Tonya asked. *"We don't know what is in those rooms. He might be hiding something dangerous in either one."*

Blair thought about it for a moment. Tonya just made a rather valid point and he needed his team to cover the locations Armani was going to be in and their way out. The study and the storage rooms were not priority locations and Tonya bringing up those locations was starting to make him curious as to what Armani was storing in those rooms.

"Ghost Eight, are you able to scan the interiors of either the study or the storage room?"

"I'm checking," Ghost Eight said. *"The study has sensors inside and I'm not detecting anything out of the ordinary in there. However, the storage room doesn't have any, so I can't detect what's inside."*

"Very well. Tonya, you and your group can check out the storage room and see if Armani is holding anything of significance while the rest of my team secures him. Is there something you are looking for specifically?"

"Not specifically," Tonya said. *"However, if Armani has something in his possession that is causing him to be manipulated, there is a possibility it is also in the storage room."*

"You make a valid point. Very well. Ghost Eight, unlock the storage room for access. Tonya, you and the other former Chiefs can check out the room, but be careful. If there is something in there that can manipulate minds, we don't know if the suits will protect you from the radiation it is using to alter a person's mind. If you find anything, contact Ghost Two. He can spare one or two people if needed from the clone room, but whatever you do, do not pick it up. Ghost Six and Seven have equipment to handle anything that emits radiation. As Ghost Seven will be with my team should such a device be present in Armani's bedroom, Ghost Two will send Ghost Six to assist you if he is needed should such a device be located in the storage room instead of with Armani."

“Excuse me, Ghost One,” the British male voice of Ghost Six said. “If it is alright with you, I will accompany the former Chiefs. I can run a quick radiological scan of the room to see if there is any radiation inside. If there is none detected, I will report to Ghost Two’s team to check the clone room.”

“Very well. If you don’t find anything, then the former Chiefs will return to the entryway and wait for us to bring Armani out. The storage room and study can be searched afterwards. Is that fine with you, Tonya?”

“Understood, Ghost One,” Tonya said. “I guess we can see what Armani has been hiding at a later time.”

Tonya’s comment started to make Blair a little suspicious, as if she had an ulterior motive for wanting to see what was in the storage room. However, time was running out and he would have to deal with her curiosity at a later time.

“Alright, you have your assignments, so get to them,” Blair said. “We’ve taken up too much time already and the fleet needs those dreadnoughts shut down immediately.”

“Yes, sir!” Ghost Team said.

Blair ran inside with the rest of the team following behind him except Ghost Eight, Nine, and Ten. After he entered the Inner Sanctuary, he proceeded to the right of the cylindrical hallway ahead.

“This is Ghost Eight. I’ve just shutdown Armani’s systems except for the lights, doors, and the elevator. I detected that he was using the computer system in his bedroom when I shut down the system, so he knows we are here now.”

“Roger that,” Blair said. “You heard her, team. Armani knows we are here now and may be preparing to defend himself or jump to another body to escape. Ghost Eight, lock the elevator so that he cannot use it just in case but have it called to our floor. Ghost Two’s team will descend to the clone room first to secure that possible escape route for Armani.”

“Understood. The elevator is ready.”

Blair and his team passed the large metal doors to the storage room to the right. Blair’s HUD showed that Ghost Six and the four former Chiefs stopped in front of the door. The sound of the doors opening began to fill the hallway even as Blair approached the elevator doors.

In the next few minutes, Armani’s reign over this part of the star cluster was going to end. He just hopes that whatever Tonya is looking for in the storage room isn’t going to jeopardize the mission.

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