

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



PART 9

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capitol City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capitol of Novus Initium Republic
6:32pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Armani Draco is permanently dead?!”

After talking with Federation President Shea about what her forces needed to subdue the Dominion dreadnoughts that were dormant at Federation border worlds, Chancellor Drew contacted Head Agent Aja through his terminal to see if she had established contact with the task force that was sent to Tenebris Prime. The moment Drew was connected to her, she gave Drew the shocking news. He didn’t know how to feel about Armani’s unexpected death.

“That is correct, Chancellor,” Aja said. “I was able to establish contact with the Templar only moments ago. According to Captain Tora, he was killed while in Ghost Team’s custody in transit back to the ship.”

Drew was taken back by what Aja told him. Why would Blair’s team kill a man while he was in their custody?

“That doesn’t make sense,” Drew said. “If they had him in custody, why would they kill him while in transit back to the *Templar*? Did Armani do anything to provoke such a response?”

“No. According to the helmet recordings we have reviewed, Ghost Two was being questioned by Ghost One as to why Ghost Eight was ordered to be silent about the outdated computer systems on Dominion dreadnoughts during and after the mission in Miranda.”

“Wait, are you telling me that Ghost Two’s team KNEW about the outdated computer systems and deliberately withheld that valuable piece of information?!”

“It seems that way, but that wasn’t the most surprising thing we had come across.”

“Would that be his motives?”

“Yes and no. It appears that Ghost Two’s intention was to kill Armani after he was no longer able to jump to a new clone body. However, his intent to kill Armani may not be under his own volition.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ghost Seven, one of the team’s radiation specialists, was next to Armani and checked on him when Ghost Two shot him. Ghost Seven’s scanner went off when it was pointed at Ghost Two. The setting was set to the same radiation used in mind manipulation.”

Drew’s eyes widened in shock.

“You cannot be serious. Are you telling me Ghost Two was somehow subjected to that radiation and that his actions are a result of that manipulation?!”

“The evidence points to that being the result. It also means two things. First, Ghost Two was subjected to it at some point prior to the encounter in the Miranda System. It would explain his gag orders for the rest of his team. The second is that this debunks our theory that whoever is responsible for the radiation is only targeting leaders of nations and factions to promote their plans are, whatever those may be.”

“That means that anyone anywhere can get affected if it promotes this unseen enemy’s plans, whatever or whoever they are. You do realize that we’re going to have to start deploying sensors designed to scan for this radiation on a planetary scale from this point forward, right?”

“I know, but this also means that ships and stations will have to be actively scanned as well. Whoever it is that is doing this knows how to move about the star cluster without being detected and can get to star systems without using star gates, such as the Lykans’ home planet before they were even in their industrial age. Once we receive the footage of the device, we may be able to find clues as to its origin and its makers.”

“And what do I tell the ambassadors, the Senate, and the public? How do I approach them without the man or the artifact responsible for the Dominion attack?”

“I know this was not the outcome any of us expected in dealing with the Dominion, and I also know that knowledge of the radiation that was used to manipulate key people’s minds is going to start a panic once that information is made public. However, you can only assure the public that steps are being taken to both prevent the radiation from affecting the public and that we will find those responsible for it.”

Drew let out a heavy sigh.

“Even if I could make such promises, the Senate is going to have my head on a platter for keeping the Dominion and the Federation secret, not to mention the deployment of the Seventh fleet in an aggressive act against the Dominion capitol without their authorization.”

“Then tell them I was responsible for your silence to them.”

Drew gave Aja a puzzled look.

“They won’t believe that for a moment. They will likely send a request to the Republic Bureau of Investigations to investigate both me and the RCIA’s actions. I can’t stop them if I am the target of that investigation, nor can you.”

Aja took a deep breath.

“Maybe we should have been more upfront with the Senate when the Federation and the Dominion were first found around a month ago, but we needed information to present to them before any action was to be taken.”

“Instead, the operation was compromised at both target locations and the Dominion took military action, forcing us to attack Tenebris Prime. This operation was a complete mess.”

“Add to it Armani’s death at the hands of one of our SAGATs and this operation was downright screwed up in the end. Armani’s capture would have been able to provide the answers and the validity of this operation. His death deprives us of both.”

Aja’s words suddenly brought a form of realization to Drew about Armani’s death.

“That may be why he was killed,” Drew said. “Whoever subjected Armani and Ghost Two to that radiation knew that Armani would possibly fail and wanted him silenced if caught.”

“What are you getting at?”

“Let’s think about the victims of this radiation in the order they were done. Based on the timeframe, Armani was the first to be affected by the radiation, resulting in a man who believes that a deity wants him to promote his research into using blood that he goes into self-imposed exile on himself and his followers to create a new nation illegally. This results in a nation that developed and grew without Republic supervision into a potential threat.”

“However, the separation of the Draco family under the direction of Armani’s son was not expected, I’m sure.”

“Correct. Armani’s son rebelled against his father’s ways and went elsewhere in exile with the rest of the Draco family, resulting in the creation of Draco Federation. This could not have been foreseen by the manipulators.”

“However, Armani resorted to cloning as he no longer had descendants in his Dominion. The device he was provided applied the radiation every time he jumped to a new clone.”

“It may be possible that these manipulators knew of Armani’s son not following in his footsteps, providing the device in advance. The results, however, is that the Dominion, in trying to expand their territories, came across the Federation and went to war shortly thereafter. So far, there have been no signs of the radiation within the Federation that we know of.”

“Almost two hundred years after the Dominion was created, King Kseriki the Third of the Royal Lykan Kingdom is affected by the radiation, resulting in a campaign of enslaving alien races in the Eastern Region for over four hundred years. Where Armani built his Dominion in a ‘holy’ crusade against the Republic, Kseriki used their religion as an excuse to enslave others.”

“Aside from Kseriki passing away and Armani consistently subjecting himself to the radiation, there is not another case of the radiation until the State Councilors are found to have that radiation, and it was the first case we came across. In that situation, the Councilors were trying to continue their war with the Lykans after we and the Empire ceased hostilities with the newly formed Holy Lykan Republic. However, their efforts were not as successful as the prior two cases in terms of their goals due to opposition from three nations in their campaign.”

“However, in all three cases, the intent was the same: to cause instability, unrest, and conflict throughout the star cluster.”

“That seems to be the idea. While the Federation and the Empire have not had any cases involving the radiation, they were still affected by conflicts with their neighbors who were.”

“That alone may make a strong case for explaining your actions to the Senate. I would suggest getting ready for that inquiry. I will send over the data and the feed on the device that Ghost Team recorded. What do you want me to do about Ghost Two?”

“We do have treatments for the radiation, don’t we?”

“We have the means to remove it, yes. However, we don’t know how much damage was done to his brain from exposure of this length. He will be the first living case of radiation in a Human that we’ll have to work with now that Armani is dead as is all of his clones.”

“Very well. Do what you can for him but keep him confined in the meantime. I’ll see if one of the Federation ships can jump the *Templar* close to Republic space.”

“See if they are willing to do the same for the Cavalier while you are at it. I think it would be best for both of those ships to arrive safely. Something tells me that the RBI will also be investigating this situation with the stealth ships, too.”

“I don’t doubt it. I’ll let you know what President Shea says shortly about jumping the ships here. Talk to you again soon, but I need to work on addressing the people soon. They will want answers much sooner than the Senate.”

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*Brig, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Templar, Planet Tenebris Prime Orbit
Tenebris System, Southwestern Region, Joint-Occupied Dominion Space
6:45pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“So, what did they say they wanted to do with him?”

Blair stood in front of Benja’s cell in the brig. A force field was generated in the cell’s doorway to keep Benja from escaping. Benja was stripped of his covert suit and gear, leaving only a black formfitting suit normally worn underneath. Blair had stared at Benja for several minutes since Benja was put in the brig for murdering Armani, their prisoner, while in transit. Benja was laying on the bed at the far end of the cell, his back towards Blair. Benja had not said a single word since he was detained.

Benja’s actions throughout the entire operation, from the moment the Dominion and Federation were found to the point he killed Armani, have costed the Republic and the Draco Federation dearly. Lives were lost among the Dominion and the Federation when the clear majority, namely among the clones of the Tribes, would have been spared if the Republic was aware of the outdated operating systems among the Dominion ships. It was Benja who did not want the Republic to have this information, and that resulted in not only the loss of life but the attack that occurred at Lumen and Sanctus.

While the Dominion is without working computers now, they no longer have a clear leader. While Armani is gone, the Chiefs that were loyal to him, whether through fear or faith, would not be able to rally their Tribes much less cooperate based on what he heard from Miya and her entourage. At this point in time, the Dominion can no longer function as they did before.

Blair heard that Tora managed to contact RCIA headquarters to report what had transpired involving Benja’s actions. She was waiting to hear back from them about what to do with Benja and the radiation that has been affecting him. She just walked into the brig from Blair’s left and he just asked her that question.

Tora stopped a few feet short of Blair and stared at him for a few seconds before turning to look at Benja in the cell.

“They are going to have the *Heaven’s Arrow* jump us just outside the Ruber System for now. We will be jumping to the *Cavalier’s* current location first so that both ships arrive at the same time. From there, we will head back to Lumen the ‘old fashion way’ where Benja can be treated for the radiation while we make our report.”

“Were there any losses on our side at Lumen or Sanctus?”

“Thankfully, no. The planetary shields held and the Dominion warships while automated were not able to penetrate our force’s defenses at both locations. It looks like the dreadnoughts were not able to land any successful strikes against our frigates and destroyers due to their size and speed. The fighters and bombers however were a bit trickier for our ships to engage since we did not have the time to develop effective countermeasures.”

“That will change going forward. So, what I heard was true about the automation of their dreadnoughts in our territory.”

“Yes. Armani knew that after the Aspergillus were terminated, the other Tribes would not have enough time to fill in the gap when it came to fully-train combat-ready soldiers, pilots, and military personnel. So, he had a system in place to control the ships remotely when needed. Unfortunately, those ships that were affected vented their atmosphere into space, killing the remaining crew. Also, he slaved the controls to his console in his private chamber. Once those signals were blocked, the dreadnoughts in Republic space as well as those that were attacking the Federation border were shut down. Our forces have already seized the dreadnoughts and reviewing their capabilities as well as any new technologies that we can utilize.”

“Does the Supreme Chancellor see us using those ships in our fleets?”

“I’m not sure, but I somehow doubt it. We may be recycling them into either more ships or towards a new design that can use those technologies. Head Agent Aja wasn’t sure either as to what we will use them for when I contacted her.”

“Either she didn’t know, or she didn’t want to tell you. I’ve known how the RCIA works since you and I first met, and secrecy has always been an essential part of that agency.”

“Touché, but she did tell be something I am concerned about, and you should be too.”

“Oh, and that is what?”

“She along with the Chancellor believe that the Senate will order the RBI to investigate this entire matter, including all of those involved.”

Blair let out a heavy sigh.

“Yeah,” he said, “I would be concerned about that as well. I guess that means any time off for my team is being suspended until after the investigation is concluded. Wait till I tell the rest of my team this news. Ugh.”

“I’m sorry to bring you such bad news, but this was to be expected when our plans started to fall apart thanks to Benja’s actions. If he hadn’t withheld that information about the outdated operating systems, things would not have gone the way that they did.”

“Will he be held responsible for his actions knowing that the radiation may have been the culprit of said actions?”

“As long as it is proven that he did not do it of his own volition, then no.”

Benja gave a short laugh from his cell. As the cell was not sound proof, Blair knew he could listen to the entire conversation between Tora and him.

“What’s so funny, Benja?” Tora asked in a stern voice.

Benja turned his head towards the two of them with a slight grin on his face.

“Even if the radiation is responsible for my actions,” Benja said, “I doubt I will be allowed to continue with the SAGATs. That’s not the funny part, however.”

“Then what is, Benja?” Blair asked.

“Have you two taken the time to understand *why* I resorted to such actions or what their purpose was?”

“Are you saying you know why you were forced to do what you did?”

Benja looked back up at the ceiling.

“First, you may want to ask when I was affected by the radiation.”

“We know it was before we reached the Miranda System, considering your orders while we were in that system.”

“True. I believe I was hit with the radiation while we were investigating one of the systems prior to Miranda. I can’t remember which star system we were in, but I could tell at one

point that something didn't feel right. I wasn't sure what it was, but it went away just as quickly as it appeared. At the time, I surmised that maybe I was feeling nauseous or suffering the effects of being cooped up on a ship for too long."

"You didn't get checked out by the ship's doctor?"

"Since it went away just as quickly as it appeared, I decided to wait until it showed up again, which it didn't from what I can recall. When we reached Miranda, something changed, and I felt like the orders I gave to my team were not my own. I recall what I ordered, but when I was alone with no one was around, I came to my senses and realized something was not right. Every time I thought about going to the doctor or telling someone what was happening, I stopped as if something forced me not to go forward with my actions."

"Did you suffer any headaches like the other cases?"

"No, and that was what troubled me."

"Wait," Tora said. "If you couldn't tell anyone about this before, why are you able to do so now even though the radiation is still present inside you?"

Blair looked at Tora with a puzzled expression on his face, but quickly realized that Tora had a valid point. Why is Benja able to tell them the events now? Blair looked back at Benja, curious to hear his response.

"I can only assume it is because the role I was forced to do has played out," Benja said. "Whoever these manipulators are, they wanted Armani dead for some reason."

"But that doesn't make any sense," Tora said. "They were communicating with him through the device he had to continue with his campaign after you were affected by the radiation. Why would they do both?"

"It must have been a contingency plan," Blair said.

Benja and Tora looked at Blair before he continued.

"If they wanted Armani to eventually attack the Republic, they needed a backup plan to silence him in case he failed. To that end, they wanted to make sure that conflict would occur by removing the means to dealing with the Dominion quickly, such as the outdated computer systems. They must have known that was a liability and wanted to make sure it wouldn't be used to stop the eventual conflict with the Dominion."

Benja sat upright in the bed, looking a bit content with what Blair said.

"I thought the same thing," Benja said. "It was the only thing that made sense. You picked up on it rather quickly."

"However," Blair said, "the fact that only you were affected by the radiation was risky. We could have easily switched who was being sent to investigate the wreckage in Miranda."

"If I'm right, I'm willing to bet I would have volunteered my team to investigate the Dominion wreckage if that were to occur."

"The part I still don't understand is why you didn't get a headache like the other cases," Tora said. "You knew what you were doing was conflictive, so why did you not get a headache like the other cases?"

"Because we would have known he was affected," Blair said. "Whoever is behind this knows we are on the lookout for such behavior from anyone who is being forced to do their work. Instead of getting a headache, they have managed to find a way to suppress the impulses that would alert others of their affliction. This makes their actions far more covert than before. Once their task is complete, it seems that the blockage of those impulses is gone, and they can talk about what happened to them. By that time, however, the deed is done before anyone realizes it and manages to stop it, such is the case with Armani's assassination."

“Whoever they are,” Tora said, “they have adapted their tactics to make it harder for anyone to detect visually when someone is affected by the radiation. Why in the cluster are they so focused on us fighting each other? What do they have to gain from doing all of this?”

“There could be a number of reasons: intelligence on our military capabilities, how we fight against a given enemy or force, testing our morals or our society. Who knows what the reason is, but this needs to end. We cannot have peace in the star cluster while those who are behind all of this are out there causing conflict. Benja, I don’t suppose you know who these manipulators are from the radiation in your head by chance, do you?”

“I wish it worked that way,” Benja said. “Unfortunately, I do not know who they are or where they are from. I doubt they would leave such information in the radiation they applied to my head.”

“Fair enough. I guess I was hoping for too much, but you are the only person who we have been able to talk to without getting a headache.”

“Hopefully,” Tora said, “once the radiation has been removed, you will still remember your actions for debriefing. Both the RCIA and headquarters will want answers for your actions. Just giving you fair warning as to what is to come.”

“Understood,” Benja said. “If we are jumping to the Ruber System after picking up the *Cavalier*, I won’t be waiting too long.”

“On that I can agree with,” Blair said. “It will be good just to get home. I’m kind of getting sick of being on this ship and being so secretive. If I knew I was going to be doing this kind of work, I would have joined the Space Navy or the RCIA directly.”

Tora didn’t say anything to retort Blair’s words, which surprised him. Blair looked over at Tora with a puzzled expression on his face.

“No witty comeback this time?” Blair asked.

“No,” Tora said. “You are being honest and quite frankly, I’m starting to get rather homesick as well. How do the Navy people handle such deployments?”

“That’s something you had better ask Trent about. I don’t know how he and his wife handle this in their married life.”

“I think I need to distance myself from both you and Trent for a while. You two have done enough work with the RCIA and me that you both need to get back to what you are good at without doing our dirty work.”

“On that I wholeheartedly agree.”

“We will be jumping soon. I need to get back to the bridge and prepare for the trip back. I’ll have the guards monitor Benja until we arrive at the capitol. I want to make sure there isn’t any more ‘programming’ hiding in his brain right now.”

“Understood. I need a few minutes.”

Tora nodded and turned to leave the brig. Blair looked back over at Benja in his cell. Benja laid back on the bed and let out a heavy sigh.

“I have to admit,” Benja said, “this isn’t the way I expected to be returning home.”

“At least it wasn’t in a body bag to recycle your remains,” Blair said. “It could have been far worse.”

“I know, but it is likely I will be spending time at a medical and radiological research center, having doctors and radiation experts run tests on me to see if there are any further clues as to who is responsible for this.”

“The list of suspects now is practically nonexistent, especially since that relic jumped away before we could contain it.”

“I know, and the only places remaining are the Northwest Region and the Southern Region, not to mention the unexplored systems that are in all but the Central and Eastern Regions of the star cluster. It could take years to find the culprits, especially when you consider how sparsely populated the Northwest Region is in terms of star systems and the gravitational barrier that cuts off access to the Southern Region.”

“Believe me, I know it will take a long time to find answers, but the key thing that all of the nations in the cluster need to keep in mind is to remain calm. All the nations can now take preventive measures to keep this from happening now that we know what we are looking for. If the leaders of the nations can keep the citizens calm, we can prevent this from happening again. When you think about it, both Republics as well as the State and the Federation will want to find the perpetrators for what they did to all of us. I think the Empire is the only one who may not be as driven to find those responsible as they haven’t been affected, at least to the best of our knowledge. Now, get some rest. Even though we will be jumping close to the Ruber System, it will still take time to get to the capitol from there. I need time to prepare my report when I am debriefed. Is there anyone you want me to get a hold of when we arrive?”

“Just my parents. I’m not in a relationship right now so they are the only people that need to know what is going on so that they don’t worry about me a lot.”

“Understood. I’ll see you again upon arrival at Luminaire.”

“Yes, sir,” Benja said as he closed his eyes.

Blair turned and walked towards the exit to the brig. Whoever it was that did this to Benja has messed with a long-time friend of Blair’s, and Blair was now determined to find out who was responsible, no matter how long it was going to take him.

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*Ready Room, R.N.S. Marshal, Paladin-Class Battleship, Planet Tenebris Prime Orbit
Tenebris System, Southwestern Region Joint-Occupied Dominion Space
7:02pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“There they go.”

Trent took a sip of water from the container he grabbed from the minifridge earlier as he looked over the reports that were coming in from ground forces that were sent to occupy the former Dominion capitol. He was also reviewing the readouts from his fleet and the Federation’s scan of Tenebris Prime. While there were defenses present on the planet, it was confirmed that they were deactivated thanks to the shutdown protocol that was sent out.

Trent still did not know what to think about the assassination of Armani at the hands of Benja or rather Ghost Two. Trent had known Benja for a while thanks to Blair, and Benja served with Trent during the initial contact with the former Royal Lykan Kingdom and the United Vitam State while Trent was in command of the *Renaldo*. Benja also served under Trent during their time on the *Templar* when the First Interstellar War had occurred. Benja’s actions were the result of being affected by the mind-altering radiation while he was on assignment to the *Cavalier* in the unexplored systems of the Southwest Region. It isn’t a matter of where and when it happened as Benja could answer that once he is debriefed, but it was more of a question as to *why* it happened. Why did the ones who were behind Armani’s manipulation want him dead suddenly when Armani was their pawn for more than six hundred years? Something caused a change to where Armani was no longer an asset, but a liability to their plans. What that change could possibly be was what made Trent begin to worry.

As Trent pondered this, he received a notification on sensors on his terminal that the Federation dreadnought *Heaven's Arrow* was creating a portal to jump both it and the *Templar* away from Tenebris Prime. Trent already knew the details that the two ships would jump to the *Cavalier's* location to retrieve that vessel before jumping again close to the Ruber System where the two stealth vessels would proceed to make the rest of the journey towards Luminaire on their own. It would take them some time to reach the capitol from that point, despite the use of the star gates from that point forward.

As the *Heaven's Arrow* and the *Templar* entered the portal and it closed behind them, Trent let out a heavy sigh. He knew he was stuck with another long-term assignment where he would be away from home for a while. He began to wonder how Laura was after the Dominion launched an attack on Luminaire and how she would take this news that he would be here for at least week, hopefully shorter. He needed to contact her to see if she was doing okay, but he had to wait until this whole matter with the Dominion and the Federation becomes public knowledge for the citizens of the Republic.

"Admiral Trent?" Captain Dani's voice suddenly came through the terminal.

Trent, while a bit surprised to hear the captain's voice, cleared his throat and composed himself before accepting the sudden audio call.

"Yes, Captain?" Trent asked.

"We have completed our scans of the planet. We have detected a single Human several miles outside of the capitol to the east among the forest areas. We took a scan and found that this Human is not a clone based on their unique DNA signature."

*"That must be Ebony Aspergillus, Tonya's daughter and last Chief of their Tribe. Inform one of our SAGAT squads to pursue and arrest her, but she is not to be harmed. That reminds me. Did Miya and the other former Chiefs that were with her on the *Templar* when the ship left?"*

*"Our last reports indicate that they did not depart the *Templar* when the transport had returned, so I can only assume that they are on the still onboard that ship."*

"Understood. My guess is they are going to Luminaire to present their case about the Dominion in person. I guess we will leave that for the politicians on that matter. When the SAGAT's arrest Ebony, have her transported to this ship. I wish to have a discussion with her and let her know what is going on."

"Yes, sir. What about the other Chiefs? The SAGAT's that were deployed are still trying to arrest them in their towers, but it is taking a while with no power."

"Have them brought here as well and put them all in separate cells. I don't want to take the chance that they might collaborate with each other in possibly escaping, difficult as that may be in our brig."

"Understood. I'll relay those orders to our troops."

"Have we received any further transmissions from headquarters or the RCIA?"

"No, sir. We may be under a communications blackout for the time being until the news breaks in the Republic about what has happened here."

"What about with the Federation government?"

"From what we can tell, the Federation fleet here is still in constant communication with their capitol or their headquarters. They are not under the same restrictions as we are with our headquarters. Why do you ask?"

"I want to see if I can get in contact with Amarria who is at the capitol and see if she has heard anything about the attack on Luminaire."

“Sir, I know you are worried about the attack on Luminare. We all are, but we cannot use or borrow a communications line for personal use. I understand you are concerned about your wife’s well-being, but if the attack was that severe, we would have been told or informed about it from the Templar when they were in communications with RCIA headquarters.”

“You are right,” Trent said as he let out a sigh. “If it were that severe, we would have been told about it. I won’t press the matter further, but if we do receive a communication from the Federation and it is from my daughter, I want it routed to me immediately.”

“Understood, sir. Let me contact the SAGATs with their orders and I will let you know when the Chiefs have been detained in the brig.”

“Very well. Carry on.”

The audio line cut off and Trent reclined in his chair. Maybe Dani was right, and he was worrying over nothing. Hopefully, once the news breaks in the Republic, he can contact Laura to make sure she was okay.

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*President’s Office, Federation Capitol Tower, City of Sanctus Draco
Planet Propitius Esto, Capitol of Draco Federation, Draconia System, Western Region
7:12pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Let Amarria in.”

President Shea had concluded her transmission with Admiral Tyler of the Dreadnought *Heaven’s Arrow* while the ship was recharging its portal drive. The dreadnought along with the Republic stealth vessel *Templar* jumped to rendezvous with the *Templar*’s sister ship, the *Cavalier*. They will soon jump near the Ruber System where the stealth vessels were stationed.

Shea was surprised to receive the report from Chancellor Drew that one of the Republic’s troops assassinated Armani while they were transporting him back to the *Templar*. In that same report, it was confirmed that the same trooper was affected by the mind-altering radiation as Armani. Considering that the past cases of infection by the radiation were on those in authority or power according to the records from the Republic, this new case where someone is not in such a position was both a shock and a cause for concern. If those responsible are now targeting anyone who would be able to cause misdirection and subterfuge in any of the nations of the star cluster, the threat of those who are doing all of this has increased even further. Drew mentioned to her the steps the Republic would be taking to keep such things from happening again, but the number of people that would have to be scanned on a regular basis in the Federation let alone the Republic and the other nations is ridiculous.

She wanted Amarria to come to her office after being told about Armani’s arrest, but she kept the info of his assassination and why it happened a secret. Shea did not know how Amarria was going to react to this information, namely that someone other than a person in authority was affected by the mind-altering radiation. She knew Amarria was going to have questions about the situation, but this whole scenario has presented more questions than Shea could answer.

The doors to Shea’s office soon opened, and Amarria came through them with a puzzled expression on her face. Amarria was only in her office not too long ago, so her expression being called back so soon was understandable. The doors soon closed behind Amarria as she made her way to Shea’s desk, stopping just in front of it.

“Miss President?” Amarria asked. “Has the operation at Tenebris Prime already completed in such a short time?”

“It has, Amarria,” Shea said before pointing to the seat just to Amarria’s right. “Please have a seat.”

Amarria sat down in the seat that Shea had pointed out.

“It seems that the operation was both a success and a failure,” Shea continued.

Amarria was now more puzzled than before.

“Could you elaborate on what happened?” Amarria asked.

“The Tenebris Dominion was quickly disabled because their operating systems were severely outdated. The Republic covert unit managed to shut down all Dominion systems with the proper shutdown code, rendering all Dominion computers both military and civilian inert. They won’t be able to reactivate them unless the Republic inputs the proper codes upon activation. The fact that their dreadnoughts were rendered so powerless because of this tactic frankly feels like an embarrassment on the Federation’s part because we could have stopped this long ago. However, I was also informed that there was an unexpected development in the operation, both on Tenebris Prime as well as when our fleets were discovered by the Republic’s covert forces in Miranda.”

“What you have told me thus far doesn’t make any sense. If the Dominion’s computers were using outdated operating systems, we should have known that from the start and would have proceeded differently than what we were initially planning when it came to infiltration missions in both Federation and Dominion space. How in the star cluster was such an oversight made that could have easily crippled the Dominion forces?”

“That is where the unexpected development I just mentioned about comes into play. Tell me, are you familiar with a member of the Republic’s Ghost Team with the callsign Ghost Two?”

“Yes, he was on the *Templar* when that ship was here. I also know that he was one that led a small squad of SAGATs who boarded the Dominion dreadnought wreck at Miranda.”

“He is also the one responsible for assassinating Armani after his capture while they were heading back to the *Templar* after they destroyed all of his clones.”

“He did WHAT?!”

Amarria was about ready to jump out of the seat as her hands were at the ends of the armrests of her chair to help push her up. However, she remained seated, allowing her impulse to subside as she hoped Shea had an answer to this development.

“Believe me,” Shea said, “I was just as surprised as you are about this. It appears that Ghost Two was subjected to the mind-altering radiation somehow long before your nation’s covert vessels discovered the battle at Miranda. He ordered a gag from his team about the condition of the outdated operating systems the Dominion was using which led to the series of events we have gone through. All of it was so that Ghost Two could assassinate Armani.”

“Why would those who use the radiation want Armani...?”

Before Amarria could finish her thought, she began to think through all the history she had read including Earth’s history to get an understanding of the motives for such a thing to occur. Before she could reach a conclusion, there was one question that needed to be answered.

“Did Armani have whatever was subjecting him to the same radiation?” Amarria asked.

“He did,” Shea said. “However, the device managed to jump away when Ghost One’s team attempted to retrieve it.”

“Wait, what do you mean it managed to ‘jump away?’ You’re not talking about a wormhole like what ships use when they use jump crystals, are you?”

“It’s exactly like that. It jumped deep within the Central Tower in a gravity well to parts unknown. Ghost One’s team was not equipped to track such a jump since the jump happened

unexpectedly. Thankfully, from what I hear, his team was able to record visual and scanner data of the artifact in Armani's possession before the jump. I'm sure that the Republic's Central Intelligence Agency will be going over the data when the *Templar* arrives at Luminaire in a little while. One of my dreadnoughts is jumping both the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* close to Ruber. They will travel back on their own power from there."

"I see. With that information, I can only think of two reasons why these manipulators would want Armani killed."

"And what do you base these two reasons on?"

"Similar events have happened in the past on Earth based on those records. In the case of Armani, this situation would be like those instances. The first reason is if Armani had become a liability instead of an asset. We know now that Armani had been manipulated, most likely from before the formation of the Dominion over six hundred years ago. These manipulators wanted to use him to create conflict in the star cluster between his Dominion and the Novus Initium Republic, the latter of whom rejected his research into the use of blood to enhance Humanity. While they were constantly directing his actions, whether directly or indirectly depending on how that device was set up, they seemed to want to continue the development of the Dominion. However, I believe that due to our actions of discovering the Dominion before the Dominion was ready to attack the Republic, these manipulators altered their plans. I'm not sure whether Armani was acting on their orders or not when he eventually terminated the Tigris Tribe for having the information on the Republic that would have undermined his rule, but that began a downward spiral that the manipulators could no longer control."

"Add to the fact that the Dominion did not create or enhance their core operating systems much in six hundred years and you have quite the failed experiment on their hands."

"However, this all depends on when Ghost Two was affected by the mind-altering radiation. Considering the information that you have mentioned about how he put a gag order on his own team when they were looking through the Dominion's database in Miranda, he was subjected to that radiation before we even knew about the Dominion or the Federation for that matter. If that is the only time he was subjected to it, then the order to kill Armani was also planted at that time, no doubt as a failsafe if Armani was to fail in his role."

"What about the second reason you mentioned earlier?"

Amarria let out a sigh.

"If this second reason turns out to be true," Amarria said, "then there may be more room for concern than we expected."

"Go on," Shea said, knowing that she was becoming concerned with Amarria's words.

"There is a chance that the manipulators have suddenly changed their minds about what they wanted Armani to do, whether based on the Republic's actions against the former Lykan Kingdom and the State's Councilors, or something else has drawn their attention that continuing to guide Armani's actions was no longer feasible. If they have chosen to stop manipulating people's actions because we were starting to come close to the truth of who was responsible for those actions, that is both good and bad news. The good news is that we won't be expecting anymore cases of this happening, hopefully permanently. The bad news is that the trail will run cold and we will no longer be able to bring those responsible to justice for their actions."

"In light of the fact that the Republic covert team has footage and scan data of the artifact that was used to manipulate Armani, I would say that their fear of discovery would be quite high now that we have some evidence of this manipulation."

"My concern is the other possibility for that second reason."

“You’re referring to the possibility that someone or something else has grabbed their attention more so that they need to focus on that rather than us and our conflicts, correct?”

“Yes. These manipulators have been around for a long time and their goals have been to start some form of conflict between two groups or nations. If there is something else they need to focus on, it must be enough for them to not want to deal with us to the point they don’t want any ‘loose ends’ as the term goes.”

“So, you’re saying that they would purposely have Armani killed because they could no longer afford to focus on us?”

“It is a high possibility, and one that would fit with Ghost Two being manipulated into killing Armani despite Armani being guided by the manipulators. Even though the footage, the scanner data, and Ghost Two will be going to the RCIA headquarters on Luminaire, any tests done may not determine who is responsible or where to find them. Right now, the highest probabilities of where they are located is either in the sparse Northwestern Region or the inaccessible Southern Region.”

“Then let me save you the trouble of trying to narrow it down. Whoever it is that is behind these manipulations is not in the Northwestern Region.”

Amarria looked at Shea with a stunned expression on her face. Shea realized that she let the proverbial cat out of the bag.

“How are you so certain about that?” Amarria asked, suspicious now of Shea’s words.

Shea took a deep breath and exhaled to steady her nerves, and to choose her next words carefully going forward. The information about what was discovered in the Northwestern Region was to be the Federation’s bargaining chip along with the portal drive for official recognition with the Republic. However, since the Republic has captured the Dominion’s dreadnoughts in their systems, this information was the only thing Shea had left to bargain with short of the fact that there are aliens who reside in the Federation.

Shea decided to leave it up to faith that the Federation will be recognized in the end by the Republic Senate.

“One of our ships began to explore the Northwestern Region just before your covert ship arrived here at the capitol,” Shea said. “We had only just implemented the portal drive around the time of the battle in Miranda as your forces had witnessed. Using that drive, one of our super-carriers jumped several Light-years deep into that region to look at possible colonization efforts if our war with the Dominion took a turn for the worse.”

“You were wanting to look for a possible refuge that they won’t expect you to be at,” Amarria said.

“Correct. While the supercarrier was scanning the system and the surrounding space, it detected something rather faint. It was a series of transmissions or rather broadcasts on open channels. It managed to trace the signals and they were coming from deep within the Northwestern Region. However, the transmissions were very weak and deteriorated that they could not make out any visuals. The audio was also garbled, but a few words were able to be understood.”

“Wait, ‘understood?’ You mean that the supercarrier was able to understand another foreign alien language somehow?”

“That is where it gets odd. It wasn’t another foreign alien language. The supercarrier picked up words in the English language.”

Amarria was suddenly in shock. She combed her memory to see if she remembered any other colony vessels aside from those that formed the Dominion and the Federation that were unaccounted for, but nothing came to mind.

“Is it possible that a colony ship from the Republic disappear without a trace?” Amarria said aloud. “Did the supercarrier investigate the transmissions any further?”

“It did not per my orders. We were at war with the Dominion and I did not want us to find ourselves in a possible war with another potential Human-based nation. We did set up jammers to prevent our transmissions and theirs from being received until the crisis was averted.”

“If the transmissions are that weak that they cannot cross a vast distance without them being deteriorated, this would explain why we haven’t detected them as well. There is a gravitational field like what prevents us from entering the Southern Region that also separates the Republic from the Northwestern Region. The only way for a ship from the Republic to enter that region is either through the Western Region or the Northern Region. That is why I am a bit surprised by the fact that you found a possible Human colony in that region.”

“If another nation managed to form at the same time we did, we could be looking at another possible conflict if either the Federation or the Republic were to try to bring them back into the fold.”

“I also doubt that the crews of both the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* are looking forward to such a trip, either. That region has the least number of star systems and the trips in between would be far longer than before, resulting in prolonged cabin fever symptoms.”

“Is stealth and secrecy the best way to go about trying to contact this possible Human colony? Remember how that went with us and the Dominion?”

“Valid point. I guess we will wait until the Republic is able to settle things with the former Dominion and your nation before we start to investigate that matter...wait a minute. You haven’t told Supreme Chancellor Drew any of this information, have you?”

“No. You are the first person besides me, the Federal Navy’s Admiralty, and the crew of the supercarrier that first discovered those transmissions. No one else besides them and now you are aware of this information. I do intend to bring this up with the Supreme Chancellor in due time once the current matter is resolved. Right now, I’m more concerned about official recognition from the Republic Senate once we are made known as well.”

Shea looked at the clock on her terminal before looking back at Amarria.

“The *Heaven’s Arrow* which is transporting the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* is about to jump close to the Ruber System,” Shea said. “I would suggest getting some dinner. As late as it is, I doubt the Republic Senate will be holding a session this late, but the Chancellor may be addressing the people of the Republic soon. I don’t think they will wait overnight for answers.”

“I concur. Since Drew knows who attacked the Republic, it is better for him to address it with the entire Republic rather than just the Senate. Speaking of which, what about the Dominion dreadnoughts that were attacking your border worlds?”

“They have been seized and our forces are making sure that they are disabled before we tow them to our shipyards. We intend to recycle them into more dreadnoughts and supercarriers to increase the number of ships in our fleet.”

“I’m surprised you don’t want to destroy them due to what the ships symbolically represent to the Federation.”

“I know that it would be a waste of materials to just destroy them. One of those massive dreadnoughts could be recycled into two of ours, cutting down the time to harvest resources to build brand new ones significantly. I’m quite sure that the Republic would be doing the same considering the laws that were passed by the Senate involving resource conservation and recycling of materials.”

“I see you read up on Republic laws that I provided for you.”

“Yes, I did. Many of those were interesting reads, but that is something we can go over another time. You go on ahead and I will let you know if the Chancellor will be addressing the Republic later tonight.”

“Very well,” Amarria said as she got up from her seat. “I will talk with you later.”

Amarria bowed towards Shea, then brought herself up as she headed for the exit. After Amarria opened the door and exited through, Shea took a deep breath. She knew it was very risky to reveal the fact that there were possible Humans in the Northwestern Region, but if there was any information on who and how Humans managed to make it to the Northwestern Region, Amarria would be the one to find it. She would have to go back to Luminaire to do some research, but that will be made possible once the Republic at large knows about the Federation.

Hopefully, things won't go downhill from this point forward.

* * * * *

*Office of Anchorman Matt, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capitol of Novus Initium Republic
7:19pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“Of all the days and times for something this big to happen...”

Anchorman Matt had been rushing around the office ever since the attack by unknown massive vessels first occurred more than two hours ago. Any broadcast at that time was terminated with alerts for people to seek shelter immediately. The attack lasted for almost fifteen minutes before the unknown assailants suddenly stopped attacking. Despite this, the gag order on the media was still in effect for more than two hours. There was now word that the Chancellor was going to make a State of the Republic address in almost ten minutes on all channels with normal broadcasting resuming afterwards.

While the gag order was in place, that did not mean that reporters were unable to flock to where the battles took place in both Lumen and Sanctus Systems. They were reporting and recording what they could for footage to be used on any special report after the Chancellor addressed the Republic. Matt had seen a lot of the footage that was captured by NBS reporters and camera drones. He knew that the footage would be compiled and edited for the time allotted, but the one thing he wished was that Laura was at work right now. Today was her day off and Matt heard she was busy with a personal matter. However, he knew what these aggressors were. They were the descendants of the accursed Tenebris cult that haunted his ancestors more than six hundred years ago. The colors of the ships were a giveaway. He knew Laura had brought them up for a reason some time ago, but he never expected they would launch an attack of this nature.

He began to wonder if Laura knew that the cultists were still alive somewhere outside of Republic space. For that matter, the way the Republic forces reacted towards the aggressors by attacking them instead of trying to open a dialogue with them means that someone knew of their existence ahead of time. Who and for how long did they know was something he wanted answers for. He could only hope that the Chancellor was going to answer those questions soon enough.

The Chief stated that Matt did not have to cover the news as the nightly news team was more than capable of covering the story, but Matt insisted on staying, looking over the reports and footage once he realized who the aggressors were. If Laura knew about them and was waiting to report on them, he wanted to see why she and the Chancellor were waiting to report this matter. He tried to call Laura, but the calls were going right to voicemail. He knew the shields were not penetrated by the attack, but this made her worry. He decided to text her instead.

I'm not sure what is going on, he typed, but the office is going crazy over here. I wanted to ask you about the ships that attacked both Lumen and Sanctus. Do these belong to the Tenebris cult that you and your daughter were researching? Did you know they still existed? Please respond. I tried to call but I was sent straight to voicemail.

Matt sent the message and set his phone down as he continued looking over the footage and the reporters' comments. According to their notes, the ships were devoid of any atmosphere, yet there were bodies on board of several Humans who died from being exposed to the vacuum. One reporter stated that it appeared that the ships were controlled remotely, with the transmissions coming from the direction of the Southwest Region. When the transmissions stopped, the enemy vessels ceased to function.

While Matt does not know what could have happened for those transmissions to have stopped, he was quick to realize that the direction from Lumen would be along the same direction as the former Tenebris colony over six hundred years ago, but outside Republic space. The cultists managed to escape and distance themselves further from the Republic by going further in the same direction away from Lumen. The evidence is becoming very clear that the cultists that attacked his family's planet so long ago were still active, though where they slithered off to for so long was something he hoped that the Supreme Chancellor might be able to explain.

As he continued to go over the footage to get any more information about the attackers, his phone buzzed, indicating that he received a message. He picked up his phone and it showed that the message was from Laura. He opened the message to read it.

Yes, I knew they still existed, she typed. I was brought in more than three weeks ago once there was confirmation of their existence in a system known as Miranda in the Southwestern Region. The stealth ship Cavalier found them four weeks ago. They are known as the Tenebris Dominion. They are made up of five of the six families that followed the cult created by Armani Draco six hundred and fifty years ago.

Matt took a deep breath. So, the Tenebris were still around and they even created their own nation somewhere in the Southwest Region. But one thing puzzled Matt. Why were only five of the six families a part of the Dominion? Matt decided to call Laura again to see if she will answer this time. Texting took too long to send and reply. This time, he was not sent straight to voicemail. After a couple of rings, Laura answered.

"Hello, Matt," Laura said, her voice filled with what sounded like sadness.

"Laura?" Matt asked. *"Are you okay? Have you been crying?"*

"I have been, yes. I will tell you about it later. I assume you are calling because you have more questions for me about the attackers, correct?"

"That's right. Any information you can provided will be crucial, even though the Supreme Chancellor is about to address the nation at 7:30pm."

"I see. It looks like I wasn't needed to make my report after all no thanks in part to the Dominion's surprise attack."

"That's what I wanted to ask you about. You said only five of the six families were a part of the Dominion. What happened to the sixth one?"

"While the other families followed the teachings of Armani Draco, Armani's son did not. When they fled from their colony world centuries ago just after Armani passed away, his son took their colony vessel and headed towards the Western Region instead."

"Wait, did they develop a sustainable warp drive for their ships centuries before our current stealth ships have them?"

"That is correct, but that is not the most shocking news that I heard."

“Do tell.”

“While the other five families formed the Dominion thinking that the Draco family was lost, the Draco family founded the Draco Federation in the Western Region. They even found three alien races centuries before the Republic found the Lykans and the United Vitam State.”

“They encountered aliens first?!”

“These same aliens are also citizens of the Federation. One of them even became president many years ago, though none have become president since then despite that president’s successful two terms.”

“How did we find out about the Federation?”

“The Dominion and Federation forces were fighting in the Miranda system when they were discovered by the Cavalier.”

“They are at war with each other? Why?”

“The Federation has rejected the teachings of the Tenebris cult and have formed a theocratic democracy. While the president is not the religious leader of the nation, religion is the cornerstone of their government and the president follows the guidance of their two popes who hold no real power in politics. Their religion is like the Great Maker faith. The alien races when discovered were not as advanced as the Draco family, so they were quick to accept the Draco family descendant’s technology and their religion, greatly improving their standard of living.”

“What about the Dominion? Who leads them?”

“I haven’t been given any update if an individual is leading them or not. I do know that the five families have resorted to cloning most of their population and calling themselves ‘Tribes’ with Chiefs in charge who descended from the original family members. They have also taken to ingesting enriched blood as their only food source.”

“They ingest blood?! That’s disgusting!”

“I concur. However, it does not appear that the Dominion have encountered any sentient alien races unlike the Federation. The violation of the Republic Charter by the Dominion is quite clear, but the Federation with aliens as citizens is more questionable about violating the Charter. While the Federation began as a Human-based nation, aliens are currently citizens that hold office and at one point was led by one of those aliens.”

“So, there is a chance that the Senate may recognize the Federation as a sovereign nation despite their shady past and the origins of its founding? I don’t agree with that.”

“Why don’t you agree with that?”

“They may not be a Human-only nation now, but let’s not forget that the Federation was founded on those that fled the Republic because of their heinous cult that Armani Draco created. Armani’s son could have easily had his whole family stay behind and face judgement for his late father’s action. Instead, he fled like a coward from the justice they so rightly deserved. To make matters worse, they also interfered with the development of three alien races rather than leave them alone for them to develop on their own. How do we know that the Draco Federation only added these aliens because they knew that it would allow them to be recognized by the Republic if they were ever found?”

Matt waited a moment to see if Laura would respond. After a few seconds of silence, Matt decided to continue.

“There will be members of the Senate who will look over all the records that led to the development of both the Dominion and the Federation. There will be those who will come up with the same conclusions as I have and deny the Federation official recognition as a sovereign nation, forcing them to become an extension of the Republic instead.”

“Do you think that will be fair to the alien races that call the Federation home?”

“Maybe, if they are lucky, the Humans of the Federation will be forced to hand over their nation’s government, assets, and territories to the aliens before the Humans are forced to return to the Republic. The Charter was created for a reason and this attack by the Tenebris Dominion emphasizes that exact reason why other Human nations should not exist!”

“Matt, I will say that you need to talk to the Chief and have someone else cover this story. Your impartialness is clearly not present as your past issues with the Tenebris cult for what they did to your ancestors is affecting your means to report this story.”

“I’m being biased? How do you think the Senate is going to feel once they learn that not only did the Dominion filled with religious fanatics existed this whole time, but the fact that the Federation exists as well, founded by the descendants of the man responsible for this whole fiasco to begin with?!”

“That is for the Senate to decide based on the will of the people. I’m sending a message to the Chief to take you off this coverage. I’m sending him a copy of this call so that he can hear why for himself. You need to go clear your head, Matt.”

“I need to go clear my head? If you knew about this whole thing, why are you not here to cover the story then? Where have you been this whole time that must have been more important than you covering this story?!”

“Matt, you do not want me to answer that question right now.”

“Oh, I want you to answer that question. We have worked together for many years covering multiple stories for both the midday and evening stories. This year is the first time you’ve hidden important details such as the Tenebris from me. What are you not telling me now after all these years of working together?”

“Fine. You want to know? I was busy moving into my new apartment located here in Downtown Luminous. The Chief knows about this already.”

Matt was puzzled by what Laura said.

“Wait, why are you moving into an apartment here in the downtown area? Don’t you and Trent have that lovely three-story house located in the mountains north of here?”

Laura was silent for a moment before he heard her take a deep breath.

“I’m moving because I’m filing for a divorce.”

Matt was suddenly in shock and was practically speechless. Here he was, arguing with Laura about the Dominion and the Federation along with her knowledge of both nations, and she had personal issues of this nature to deal with. Matt was beginning to feel like a jerk as he had no idea Laura was going through this matter.

“I’m...sorry. I had no idea you were going through such an ordeal. Why are you filing for a divorce after all this time?”

“That is a private matter. I will inform you about it at another time.”

“I have to ask since I know he has been deployed for a while, but is Trent aware you are filing for divorce?”

“Not yet. I left him a message at the house when he returns concerning the divorce. Who knows when he will read it, though.”

“I see. Does Amarria know as well?”

“No, she doesn’t. She is right now at the Federation capitol serving as a mediator between the Federation President and the Supreme Chancellor.”

“So, Amarria is at the Federation capitol and the Supreme Chancellor has been in communications with the Federation President? That may go a long way to smoothing out future

relations after all. I will go tell the Chief to have someone else cover the news story. Between the attack by the Dominion and knowing about your divorce, I may not be as impartial like you stated. My words were a bit harsher than I realized when it came to the Federation. Hopefully, you can work things out. I better let you go while I have the chance to talk to the Chief.”

“*Alright. I’ll talk to you later, Matt.*”

“Talk to you later.”

As the call disconnected, Matt took a deep breath before setting his phone down. Now he had to talk to the Chief, and that was one conversation he was not looking forward to.

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capitol City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capitol of Novus Initium Republic
7:25pm, October 26, 5434 A.D.*

“I am not looking forward to giving this announcement.”

Drew was nervous, and he had every reason to be. He had to tell a few trillion people in the Republic alone about what had transpired. He also had to divulge information about the Tenebris Dominion and the Draco Federation, information that had been kept secret from the Senate and the population in general. Secrets like these could easily have the Senate move to dismiss him from office, and that is what worried him the most.

There were times he often wondered if it would have been better to not have researched the Tenebris cult at all. However, he was quick to realize that if they didn’t know, then the surprise attack like the one two hours ago would have been worse. On the other hand, it did not help that several things went wrong with the operation that resulted in the Dominion attack.

The first was the fact that precautions were not properly taken to make sure that people such as Ghost Two would not find themselves subjected to the mind-altering radiation. Had that not happen to Ghost Two, the information that the Dominion operating systems were outdated on their ships would have been known upon their discovery and the Dominion would have been disabled from the very beginning. It is unknown if the Federation would have taken advantage of that situation, but it would have led to a more peaceful resolution than what had transpired today. The cover-up only helped to deteriorate the situation into open conflict with the Republic.

The second problem that arose was how the missions to infiltrate the Dominion and Federation capitols were handled by the *Cavalier* and the *Templar* respectively. Ghost One and Amarria’s cover of hiding in plain sight sounded like a good plan, but they somehow managed to get noticed when their actions in their research at the Federation’s Central Library attracted the attention of the Federation’s law enforcement. Amarria revealing that both she and Ghost One were from the Republic didn’t help much either. Drew could understand that lying to the police of the Federation would have been even worse, but the truth could have put them and the crew of the *Templar* at risk. However, President Shea has been very understanding and accommodating to allow Amarria to remain to fully research their culture and their records while bringing the Federation President up to speed with events in the Republic over the last six hundred years.

That development was nowhere near as volatile as what happened in the Dominion with the crew of the *Cavalier*. While the situation was under control from the beginning when Specter One and Brenda who went along with them accessed the Dominion’s Central Database, their exit triggered an alarm or alert that something was not done the way it was supposed to be, namely that only one set of doors should be opened at a time. By opening both sets of doors, they drew

the attention of the local security teams who went to investigate. This alerted the Chiefs and Armani, or at least one of his clones, that someone was there that wasn't supposed to be.

The situation became worse when the Tigris Tribe who operated the Central Database made it known that they had records of the Republic, a taboo in the Dominion to have such knowledge, who possibly infiltrated the Central Database. This information led to the deaths of the Tigris Tribe after Chief Miya of the Tigris suggested establishing a dialogue with the Republic and advocating for peace. To get away from having her mind wiped and at the cost of her grandmother who orchestrated it, the former Chiefs of the other Tribes helped her to escape along with the help of the Aspergillus Tribe. This resulted in the Aspergillus clones also being terminated by Armani, but only after Miya and her entourage managed to escape into Federation space where they were captured by the Federal Space Navy. They pleaded their case to both President Shea in person and Chancellor Drew remotely with a plan to capture Armani.

While the plan was going accordingly, Armani launched an attack on Republic space, revealing themselves to the Republic at large. The ships were remote controlled from the Dominion's capitol until they were jammed by the *Templar* and the Republic Seventh Fleet who was sent along with the Federation's main fleet to capture Armani. Despite the attack, things could be explained to the Republic and its allies about what has happened by hearing it directly from Armani once he was captured.

Ghost Two's assassination of Armani derailed that greatly.

Drew did not know how to explain Armani's assassination at the hands of Ghost Two due to the mind-altering radiation to the Senate or the public. The fact that the radiation is only known to the leadership of all known nations and not the public will make things worse. The only thing he could possibly say was that Ghost Two was under some form of mind control along with Armani and his actions. He did not need to go into too many details past that as telling everyone that it was the result of advance science would scare the public.

With only a minute remaining before he went "live," he steadied himself in his chair. He pressed a button on his desk and a camera drone deployed from the ceiling. It descended to his eye level and pointed the camera at him. While the camera became active, the drone indicated it was not broadcasting yet. Drew looked at his terminal as the drone fed its view onto the screen so that Drew could see its position. Drew also pulled up some holographic images behind his desk. One was from the battle over Lumen, another was of Federation ships, and the last image pulled up was an old picture of Armani Draco. He knew he was going to bring up all of these during the broadcast.

Drew took a deep breath to steady his nerves as he looked at the time on his terminal. As soon as the time hit "7:30PM," he activated the live feed from the camera. The broadcast would be displayed on all channels in the Republic, the first broadcast since the Dominion attack. Drew looked at the camera until he was signaled by the drone that he was now on camera after a prompt would appear on all feeds that he was about to make an announcement.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the Novus Initium Republic," Drew said. "As many of you have been made aware, the Lumen and Sanctus Systems were attacked by massive vessels belonging to a foreign power. I am here to tell you all tonight that this foreign power is known to both myself and the RCIA and was under investigation in secret for the past month. Tonight, we will report to you all who was responsible for this attack and their history in relation to the Republic. Please be advised that the following may not be suitable for children..."

* * * * *