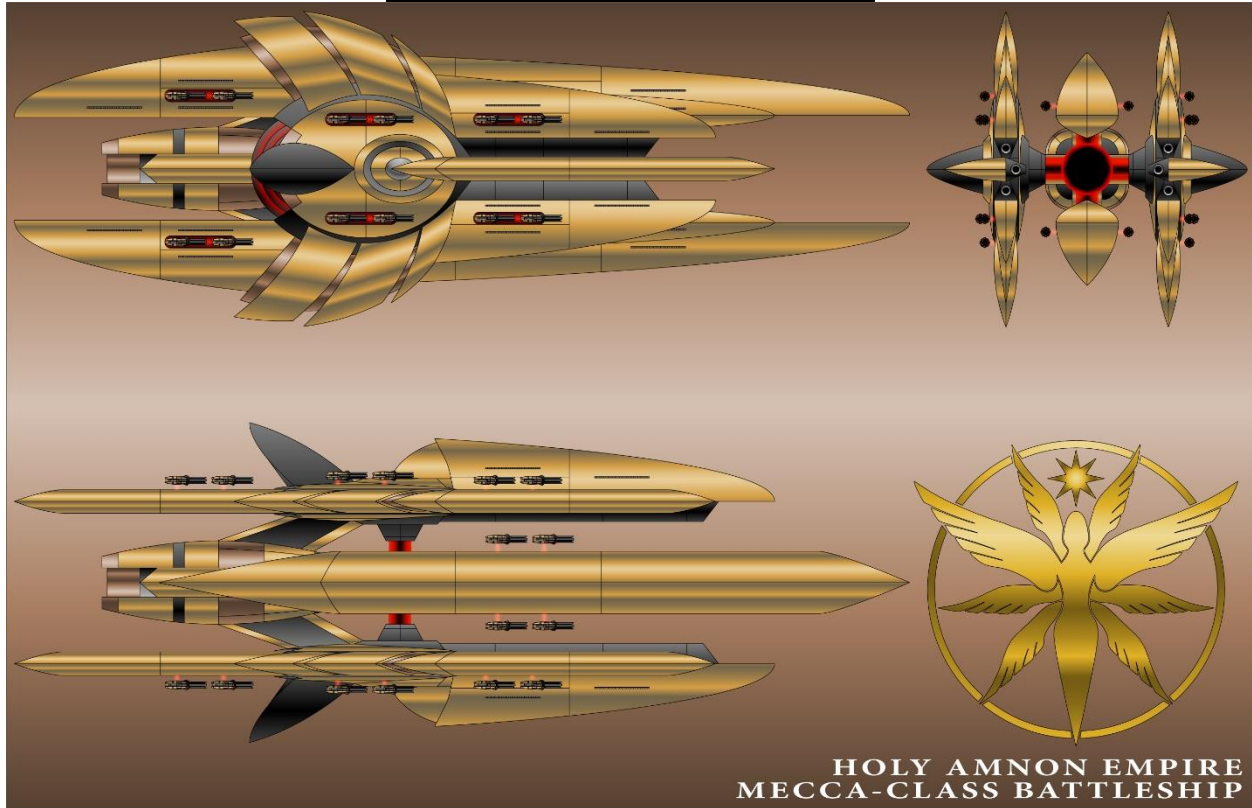


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VIII: What Was Left Behind



PART 7

Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminare, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
12:55pm, November 21, 5434 A.D.

“Why are you here, Mikey?”

After Drew left the summit room to get lunch and take it to his office to eat in private, he had not expected to see Grand Admiral Mikey waiting inside his office. He looked like he had already eaten his lunch, but he also looked like he had something on his mind to talk to Drew about. Drew knew he had to eat and get back to the summit room in over forty minutes. He could only hope that what Mikey has to say will not take too long.

“I wanted to talk to you about our options,” Mikey said as Drew walked over and around his desk.

“Is this about how to handle the Amnon Empire’s forces in the star cluster or are you including the Milky Way as well?” Drew asked.

“I know we want to get the Federation finalized as quickly as possible, but two days to do so, repaint the ships, and alter the Mammoths into Paramounts is next to impossible in such a short amount of time.”

Drew sighed as he sat down.

“I thought it might be as well,” Drew said. “We have to be united against the Amnon, but we need more than two days to do it.”

“I have a thought on that matter, and I was reminded by Bilartini that we have an item at our disposal to give us more time.”

“We do?”

“Do you not remember how we prevented the Yintaka Incident from getting worse?”

Drew thought about it for a moment before he realized what Mikey was referring to.

“The planetary shield generator,” Drew said. “If we can set one up at the last location of the field generator before the Amnon arrive, that will give us more time to get prepared. Do we know how long it can last against that kind of firepower?”

“It depends on the number of ships and their firepower,” Mikey said. “Our planetary shields once powered can be boosted for a long period of time, but we have never tested how long they can last before. I guess this will give us an idea if the Empire deploys a massive force to try and take it down. I would say that if left in full automation with the generators and reactors running, the shield can last a week before either the reactors start to run out or the shield generators start to burn out under continuous attacks. The local headquarters near the Southern Region can keep an eye on the field in the meantime since we will not be able to monitor the status of the shields with the gravitational fields active.”

“It will buy us time regardless. I doubt we can reclaim any of the field generator locations without a massive ground assault team and invasion fleet depending on how they are fortified. Do you think we can make those preparations in a week?”

“If we all can focus on our part to make the necessary preparations, yes. However, we need to begin soon if we hope to have the forces we need ready in time.”

“There is also the matter of what to do once we engage the Amnon Empire. We need an objective and a goal to reach. All-out war to free those oppressed by the Empire is not feasible. It would be like trying to conquer a nation the size of the Republic if not larger. That is not the kind of campaign anyone in the star cluster wants to wage.”

“Maybe not, but we cannot leave things the way they are in the Milky Way, either. There must be something we can do to change the status quo in that galaxy.”

Drew thought about Mikey’s words as he began to eat his cheesesteak he got for lunch. As he ate, he spoke between his bites to throw his thoughts out there and let Mikey know he was still thinking about the situation.

“I am going to speak my mind on this matter if that is alright with you,” Drew said.

“Go ahead,” Mikey said.

“First and foremost, I do not like the idea of rushing the formation of the Federation. There are too many details that need to be worked out and doing so while under duress is relatively bad. Things get overlooked that would have to be fixed later and that only shows a level of incompetence in our leadership if we let that happen.”

“That is understandable. I may not be in politics, but I do know that the Republic took time to develop into a nation to not repeat the mistakes of past nations.”

“I also want to point out that everyone in this star cluster was born and raised here. Those that preceded us died here as well. This has been the case for over three thousand years. We view the star cluster as our home. Yes, we kept the history of Earth in our historical texts. However, until recently, we had no idea what happened to the planet or those that remained behind. For that matter, we did not know there was a way to return to the galaxy of our ancestors.”

“All of that is true, yes.”

“But that is just it. The Milky Way was the home of our ancestors. It is not our home, nor has it been for over three thousand years. You remember those historical texts of people who left

their homes during the colonial period on Earth and the Expansion Era here, right? Those that were born and raised on the new territories, whether it be on a continent or on a planet, no longer view the 'old world' as it was called as their home. Instead, where they were born and raised was viewed as their new home."

"I think I see what you are saying. Both Earth and the Milky Way should not be thought of as our home anymore. Am I right?"

"Exactly right, Mikey. I feel no emotional or obligational attachment to Earth or the Milky Way. If I had the chance to visit knowing I could come back, I might take it. Otherwise, there is no reason for us to go back."

"What about your thoughts on the Amnon Empire and its practice of slavery?"

"I have given that some thought, too. I know the Amnon are responsible for destroying the New Unity Government in the Milky Way, and I do not condone how they went about doing so. However, they singlehandedly ended a civil war that went on for eight months where the New Unity Government failed to end it, much less stop it from even happening on their own. I think the New Unity Government here in the star cluster is far more successful than its Milky Way counterpart was."

"Are you saying that the New Unity Government deserved to fail?"

"It is one thing if war between nations occurred. That is caused by an aggressor who does not believe politics is the answer to achieve their goal, resorting to violence. A civil war, by comparison, is a failure by a government to deescalate the rising tensions and violence through diplomacy. The government had already failed months before the Amnon Empire acted using the method they did. It was not the most ideal outcome by our standards, but who knows how long that would have continued otherwise or how far it could have gone. The civil war could have wiped out all of Humanity and Animality in the process."

"I hate to say it, but you make a valid point. However, do remember that the Amnon Empire did kill millions of people when they acted."

"I am aware of that fact. However, while they killed millions, the millions that remained would survive versus the alternative such as extinction."

"And what about their slavery? What are your thoughts on that?"

"You already know that I do not condone the notion, but the Empire has been doing so for more than fourteen hundred years. At least we know that there is a clear-cut way for them to no longer be enslaved."

"You are talking about passing the test that Bilartini mentioned about?"

"I am. We know that eventually slavery will come to an end. Yes, they will be worshiping the Amnon Faith, but at least it is a way out of enforced servitude. That also means that they will have access to the best the Empire has to offer rather than the worst or be forced to rebuild their societies from the ground up taking another thousand years or more to accomplish."

"I guess so. Does this mean that all we are going to do is take out the intergalactic wormhole the Imperial forces are using to get here, then?"

"I thought about that. If we take that out, it means that all their forces that are currently in the star cluster will be stuck here. I do not want to make them feel like prisoners here far from home like our ancestors were unless they want to remain here. However, I want to at least give them the option of returning home."

"The question I have to ask that I would be concerned with is are there any protocols for them to follow to avoid capture, being taken prisoner, or even denouncing their Empire by remaining here? If we take them home somehow, what prevents Imperial forces from killing

them as traitors and failures for not defending the intergalactic gate they established? There are too many questions in that regards to consider for us to effectively plan out anything when we need more information about them.”

Drew took the last bite of his cheesesteak and washed it down with some water.

“Let me ask a question of you, Mikey,” Drew said.

“Go ahead,” Mikey said.

“How do you feel about the Amnon Empire using our ancestors’ transition into the star cluster as an ‘act of god’ and as a reason to promote their Faith to their citizens and their slaves both present and future?”

“Personally, I feel dirty and used. I feel like I am an example of a heinous act without even performing the act myself. It feels more like I am an accomplice if anything.”

“It is true. They have used Luna’s jump to the star cluster as an excuse for the longest time since modern technology cannot...”

Drew stopped his train of thought for a moment. A thought suddenly hit him in a way he had never expected before. Luna’s jump to the star cluster was the start of many things for Humanity and to some effect Animality. For those on Luna when it came to the star cluster, they found themselves in a new part of space, unable to return home. Many accepted that fate and started a new life in the cluster, eventually becoming the Novus Initium Republic. It was a bastion of freedom and equality for Humanity. For those back in the Milky Way, it was the start of a new level of hardship, forced to leave Earth because of Luna’s loss. They struggled living on Mars until they were able travel to other systems, eventually creating the interstellar nation of the New Unity Government of the Milky Way. They created what is known as Animality, and because of a Human scientist with delusions of grandeur, over a million of them came to the cluster living in the sparsest region of the star cluster. Ten groups of Animality fled the later established New Unity Government of the star cluster, most of which created their own nations and societies. Back in the Milky Way, a civil war broke out and was ended by the Amnon Empire who used near apocalyptic tactics to make themselves the dominant faction. They primarily used Luna’s disappearance as an “act of God” to make their point and made it where those in the cluster when later found as “convicts in a jail.”

The fact is that Luna was the start of it all. Maybe it was the key to usurping the Amnon’s beliefs and hold on their part of the Milky Way as well.

“Mikey,” Drew said after the revelation hit him, “can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” Mikey said.

“How big do you think we can make a portal?”

Mikey gave Drew a bizarre and puzzled look.

“I do not know,” Mikey said. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I had an epiphany,” Drew said. “I know how to undermine the Amnon Empire and its Faith at its very core. I will tell you at the meeting when it reconvenes. This is going to get a great deal of bizarre looks when I suggest it.”

* * * * *

*Federation Summit Meeting Room, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
1:35pm, November 21, 5434 A.D.*

“You want to portal Luna back to the Milky Way Galaxy?!”

Shea's shock was echoed by everyone else in the room. Drew had just proposed the most insane idea that no one in the room had ever heard of before. Even Bilartini who was called back was stunned by Drew's proposal. Drew sat in his seat, confident of his proposed solution to undermine the Amnon Empire.

"I am pretty sure I did not stutter, Shea," Drew said. "You all heard me correctly. Luna coming to the star cluster was the start of all of this. It seems only appropriate to return it to the Milky Way using a portal to do so. Its return would not be an 'act of God' as the Amnon have labeled its disappearance. Instead, it will be by our hands that we return it, namely to its original orbit around Earth which should also help return the planet to its previous state."

"I cannot say that the idea is a ridiculous one," Assefa said. "I see merit in the idea of sending Luna back if it slaps the Empire's faith in the face. There are only three variables that need to be considered: time, resources, and coordinates."

"Time is not going to be an issue. As Bilartini reminded us earlier, the Republic possesses planetary shield generators which we can utilize to slow down the Amnon Empire. Bilartini, is the last of the field generators on a planet or planetoid, and do you know its current location?"

"The answer is yes to both parts of your question," Bilartini said. "The power required to operate the gravitational field requires the use of a planet's geothermal energy. Therefore, the shutdown process takes a day to complete. Any faster than that and you risk the possibility of a catastrophic geothermal event and meltdown that can result in multiple eruptions across the entire planet."

"That is good news that it is on a planet and why it takes so long to power down. I spoke with my Grand Admiral and came up with a plan to buy us more time than two days. A team of technicians from the Republic will deploy to the planet that holds the last gravitational field generator. They will install a planetary shield generator system and reactors to power them. They will run autonomously and will be activated upon the team's departure from the planet. We estimate that it will last a week under either heavy bombardment or until the reactors run dry."

"If I may," Grand Admiral Mikey said as he approached the table from behind Drew. "We may be able to extend it to two weeks if we install a backup set of shield generators and reactors. We will have to rig them to self-destruct once they are out of power to prevent the technology from falling into Amnon hands."

"Two weeks will give us plenty of time to prepare what we need to fight them should they bring the field down," Glislar said. "This should also give you enough time to prepare what you need to transition Luna back to the Milky Way Galaxy. However, you would still need coordinates as to where Earth is. Not only that, but you need to calculate trajectory, velocity, and distance to make sure it is exactly where it needs to be. I also doubt you want to leave any technology on Luna that could give the Amnon an advantage whether against us or anyone in the Milky Way either."

"The plan to move Luna back to the Milky Way Galaxy is in multiple parts," Drew said. "We will set up a combined defense fleet near the edge of the Southern Region at our local headquarters in that area."

"Why there?" Dicarin asked.

"Because of Admiral Trent's retreat, the Imperial forces no doubt saw which star system his battleship jumped to based on his trajectory. That would lead them here to this system. We will have a decoy fleet on the other side of the field to put them in the right trajectory to make them go towards that system. We will be setting up interdiction model cruisers to knock them out of their Fold Drives by simulating gravitational fields like those of a planet. The defense fleet for

this little trap we are setting up will consist of vessels from battlecruisers down to frigates with a few Paramount Dreadnoughts mixed in to provide any needed heavy power against the larger Imperial ships.”

“Frigates to battlecruisers with only a few dreadnoughts?” Shea asked. “What about our battleships and remaining capital ships?”

“Another fleet consisting of available battleships and capital ships will be deployed to the star system the Amnon are calling ‘Access’ to engage Imperial vessels and their station. During the engagement, an assault team will deploy to take control of the gate, allowing a separate fleet of ships consisting of Enforcers to make their way through the gate. Once they are in the Milky Way, they will relay coordinates back through the gate to allow more of our forces to portal to their location. Once the infiltration team is clear, they will begin an assault on the gates to destroy them.”

“I assume our forces will be able to return to the star cluster once they are able to destroy the gates at both ends?” Veonis asked.

“They can, but the team in the Milky Way will have another task to accomplish. Half of them will find the planet Amnon and jump there directly.”

“At the heart of the Empire?! You know that their capital will be heavily defended from any attacks, right? Why do you want to send them to the heart of their Empire?”

“That group will open portals where our forces will be stationed. The idea is to provide a show of force, but not to attack. We are going to provide them an ultimatum and a ‘gift.’”

“What is the ultimatum and the ‘gift’ you are referring to?” Miya asked.

“The ultimatum is to leave our nation alone and never return. They are also to tell the truth to their entire Empire that society in this star cluster are not ‘convicts of God’ nor was Luna’s transition into the star cluster some ‘act of God.’ If they do so, they will never hear from us again.”

“Are you saying that we leave the Milky Way Galaxy alone and never return?” Shea asked. “Are you sure that is what you want us to do?”

“Does anyone in this room feel any particular ties to anyone or anything in the Milky Way Galaxy after more than three thousand years since we arrived here?”

Drew looked around the room after he said those words. Everyone looked at each other, wondering if the other person felt the need to go to the Milky Way Galaxy. Half of the people in the room looked like they were unsure while everyone else seemed like they could not come up with a valid reason. Drew sighed.

“If there was ever a reason for us to go back,” Drew said, “we will have the coordinates on file. However, I want to show that the people here are good of their word.”

“I take it, though, that the ‘gift’ you are referring to is Luna?” Assefa asked.

“It is, and that is what the other team will be doing. They will find Earth’s location, do the necessary calculations, and open the portal to connect near Luna to have it pass through. Since the moon’s orbital velocity is slow, we will be moving the portal across Luna and enter the Sol System faster. We will be installing mobile portal generators on Luna that will enlarge the portal made by the fleet in the Milky Way. As the portal moves across Luna, they will deploy and remain on this side of the portal so that no generators remain on the moon where the Empire can get them. We do not need the Empire to get their hands on that technology and allow them to come back. Once that is complete and the Empire agrees to leave us alone as well as stops ‘demonizing’ us in their religious texts, our forces will leave the Milky Way for good.”

“What about their forces that are trapped in the star cluster after we close the gate?”

“We will give them a choice, but only after we speak with Pope Empress Linda the First to see if they are even allowed back after failing to defend the gate. If she says they are allowed back without reprisal, we will portal them back once they understand that the fighting is over. If she says that they are in some fashion not allowed back, we can give them the choice of returning to face the consequences or they can stay in the star cluster with us as part of a new community.”

“You want to allow a military force of religious fanatics to become part of our new nation?” Glislar asked.

Drew looked over at Miya, Shea, and Veonis. All three of them looked at Glislar with rather angry expressions on their faces. Glislar soon noticed their expressions and realized he did not choose the best words at that moment.

“My apologies,” Glislar said. “I guess I did not choose my words carefully.”

“It is because we have examples of such nations among us that it only makes sense to invite any of the Amnon military personnel to join us if they are not allowed to return to the Milky Way Galaxy by the Pope Empress’ orders. We will see what happens in that regards. For now, what I have proposed seems to be the best course of action for the current situation.”

“I have no problems with this proposal,” Assefa said. “If we can finalize the creation of the Federation and consolidate our forces in preparation for our fight with the Amnon Empire in two weeks versus two days, we will be in better shape to do so.”

“I agree as well,” Dicarini said. “Once the Amnon Empire is dealt with, it will secure our future in the star cluster for generations to come. Even better, we will be able to coexist without fighting amongst ourselves once we are part of one nation.”

“We will also be able to explore the remainder of the star cluster including the Southern Region,” Shea said. “I have to ask this, however. Bilartini, do you have any objections to our exploring the Southern Region once the current crisis is averted?”

Everyone in the room looked at Bilartini, awaiting anxiously for his answer.

“My creators made their instructions clear to me,” Bilartini said. “If you all are able to deal with the Amnon Empire effectively, you are allowed to explore the once-isolated systems of the Southern Region including any of my creators’ technology.”

“Provided the Amnon Empire have not salvaged it for their own purposes,” Drew said. “If they learn how to make the crystals your creators had created, they will not need portal drives to return here. They can use the crystals to do so. We will not know if they managed to salvage this technology if we proceed directly to Access without pushing them back first.”

“They will not be able to operate the technology without knowing how it works. Only I possess that knowledge and I can teach you all once found.”

“Very well. All those in favor of this plan, raise your right hand.”

Drew raised his right hand, as did all the leaders of all the nations. It was unanimous.

“We are all in agreement, then,” Drew said as he and the other leaders put their arms down before he turned to Grand Admiral Mikey. “Grand Admiral, I need you to organize a detail in the next couple of hours to transport the planetary shield equipment to the location of the last gravitational field generator. I want those shield generators and reactors online by the end of the day if possible.”

“Yes, Chancellor,” Mikey said.

“Bilartini,” Drew said as he faced the artificial lifeform, “I need you to go with the Grand Admiral and the detachment we are sending. I want to make sure that the generators and reactors are set up that will not interfere with the operation of the gravitational field generator.”

“I understand, Supreme Chancellor,” Bilartini said.

“Meanwhile, the rest of us need to continue our work towards finalizing the formation of the Federation and prepare our forces for what is to come. We are only going to have two weeks to prepare, so let us make the most of it while we can. Before we do so, there is one more matter that needs to be addressed.”

“What is that?” Assefa said.

“The fact that we need to address the Amnon Empire to the rest of the star cluster. This is not going to sit well with the public regardless of the nation they are in.”

“I understand. It needs to be done because now this is everyone’s fight. Once we finalize the Federation Charter, we will all address the star cluster all at once.”

“Very well. Let us finalize this and begin the age of the United Systems of the Novus Initium Federation.”

“Before I go,” Mikey said, “I have one more request to make that I think will be needed.” Drew and everyone in the room looked at Mikey.

“What do you need?” Drew asked.

“Whoever I send to establish the planetary shields and reactors is going to need a quick getaway. Therefore, because of the nature of what I am requesting, I need the Council’s approval of its deployment.”

“Very well, Grand Admiral. What is it you need and elaborate why you need us to approve of it?”

* * * * *

*Waiting Room #3, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
1:54pm, November 21, 5434 A.D.*

“That is the Supreme Chancellor’s plan?!”

Trent and Shibuya waited in Waiting Room Three after Drew told them not to go too far in case they were needed. After they went and got some lunch and returned, they waited for almost thirty minutes before Mikey came in with Bilartini. During that time, Trent and Shibuya began to talk about themselves and their lives in their respective nations.

Much of Shibuya’s history revolved around her family’s military lives through her childhood into adulthood. Much of Shibuya’s military career was rather uneventful, but Trent was not surprised to hear about her family’s living situation. He was correct to assume that she had never been on a planet as she had stated that her family had always lived in space stations, but this was due to their deployment to different systems when needed. Unfortunately, she did not make many friends from the constant moving which also resulted in her never finding a boyfriend. The Republic tried to avoid such situations knowing that this sort of lifestyle would be detrimental to a child’s social development, but it was obvious that the Union did not have the same rules or guidelines on such matters. The best years of Shibuya’s youth was wasted on constantly moving locations followed by her military career not long after.

Trent was covering his upbringing when Mikey and Bilartini came in and told the two of them Drew’s plan on dealing with the Amnon Empire. Trent was in utter shock at what he was proposing, including sending Luna back to the Milky Way Galaxy.

“That is correct, Admiral,” Mikey said. “I also want to point out that the entire Council was in favor of the plan.”

“I am still trying to wrap my brain around this whole idea,” Trent said. “This also begs the question as to what you are going to have us do involving this plan.”

“As you heard, we will be sending battleships and capital ships to Access in less than two weeks provided the planetary shields at the last field generator hold out long enough. During that time, we will be working on preparing every ship we can spare for the fight ahead. Their colors will also change to reflect the new Federation once everything is finalized. However, we need to send a fleet to the location of the field generator to set up the planetary shields and reactors.”

“Why do I get the feeling it is going to be me on this mission?”

“Right now, you are the only one who has been to the Southern Region and Bilartini here knows you and your ship. It would take too long to bring another flag officer up to speed on these matters and we need this done by the end of the day.”

“You are certain we can get two weeks out of the shields with both the primary and the backup shield generators?”

“Honestly, I do not know. We have never tested them under these conditions before, but based on the specifications, they will either drain the reactors in a week or the generators will burn out from a constant bombardment depending on the Imperial fleet’s size and strength. Your fleet will not be going alone on this mission, though.”

“It is not?” Trent said with a puzzled expression on his face.

“If an enemy fleet arrives, we need your fleet to get out of there as fast as possible. We are trying to maintain the element of surprise in terms of our ship capabilities and compositions. The less the enemy knows about that information, the more of an advantage we will have in the upcoming battles. To that end, I have requested the use of an Enforcer Battleship.”

“An Enforcer? How did you manage that?”

“I asked the Council prior to coming here after they voted on the plan when I realized it would be necessary. They approved of its use so that we are not diminishing any of our other fleets in the process.”

“I have read up on the Enforcer Battleships,” Shibuya said. “If I am not mistaken, they are part of a joint fleet effort designed to protect the area in the Southwest Region you called the Nature Restoration Zone.”

“That is correct, Shibuya,” Mikey said. “Because those ships operate independently of each other, they are not assigned a support fleet of any sort. Therefore, I had requested them specifically for this mission to help you out.”

“I see,” Trent said. “Very well. I assume you are already having the equipment being sent to my fleet as we speak?”

“Yes, with the orders of deployment and the mission parameters. I also gave them an abridged version as to what is happening and why this mission must be carried out.”

“Why do I get the feeling you have just blown a great number of minds with all that information all at once?”

“I do not get what you mean,” Bilartini said. “Are people going to die from a combustion of their brains?”

“It is a metaphor, Bilartini,” Trent said. “I was referencing the fact that it was a lot of information to suddenly be provided all at once and some of the crew may not understand what is happening immediately because of it.”

“Regardless, you all need to get going,” Mikey said. “The sooner it gets done, the more time we will have to prepare for what is ahead.”

“Grand Admiral?” Shibuya asked. “Am I going along as well?”

“Well, Assefa did not say otherwise and you were assigned to observe events that occur in the Southern Region. At this point, you can continue to observe. However, I will remind you of the talk we had earlier about what has been going on between you two. Please act professional and do not get the crew talking about your possible interest in each other. Understood?”

“Yes, sir,” Trent and Shibuya said in unison.

“Good,” Mikey said. “Now, get going. I await your mission’s success.”

Trent and Shibuya saluted before they turned and walked out of the room. Bilartini looked at Mikey, bowed, and proceeded to follow them. Mikey let out an audible sigh.

“I hope they do not run into trouble out there,” he said as he rubbed the top of his head.

* * * * *

*Bridge, R.N.S. Marshal, Paladin II Battleship (refit), Novus Initium Navy Fleet Headquarters
Planet Luminaire Orbit, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
2:45pm, November 21, 5434 A.D.*

“I wish you gave us and the fleet more advance notice than this.”

Trent could not help but sympathize with Captain Dani’s frustration. Being told on short notice that the *Marshal* was going to be redeployed along with the deployment of the entire Seventh Fleet this time would be frustrating enough after how their last mission went earlier that morning. Finding out that they were going back to the Southern Region knowing now what attacked them and what the mission entails would be maddening to anyone with a sane mind. However, this was an important mission that fits into Drew’s plans on giving the rest of the star cluster a chance to prepare for combat with the Amnon Empire as a unified force.

Trent also noticed that any plans after this mission were omitted from the mission parameters. At first Trent thought Drew did not want to make matters worse by telling the Seventh Fleet about the plan to move Luna back to the Milky Way Galaxy. However, Trent was quick to realize that this was done intentionally in case there was any possibility of capture. Hopefully, that will not happen, but the objective is to secure the gravitational field generator and leave, not to fight at all. If being told on short notice was bad enough, being told to flee instead of defending yourself was only more stressful.

It did not take her long to address her issues with Trent as he, Shibuya, and Bilartini entered the bridge. She was going station to station to make sure that everything was ready for deployment and that all the equipment was on their assigned vessels.

“My apologies,” Trent said as he addressed Captain Dani who stopped at the Tactical station. “It was short notice for me as well.”

“I understand that our mission will give the star cluster two weeks instead of two days to prepare to fight against those Imperial ships,” Dani said. “While we may not have received any damage from those Imperial cruisers that engaged us, we do not know if there are already Imperial forces in the area when we arrive.”

“That is why they want us to deploy quickly,” Trent said as he approached his seat and sat down. “If their Fold Drive is as fast as our readings indicated, they can get to the last generator in a matter of hours.”

“We may have more time than that,” Bilartini said as he walked up on Trent’s left side. “Remember, it still takes one day for a generator to power down. The system you found me in was only discovered a few hours ago. Once the generator is down, the remaining generator’s power signature will be detectable to their scanners. If we reach there before the current

generator is taken offline, we will have the advantage of surprise in our favor while you set up the planetary shield generators and the reactors. Do remember that they must be made to self-destruct to prevent the Empire from obtaining such technology.”

“We know, Bilartini. Captain Dani, were the mission parameters clear that an Enforcer Battleship was accompanying us to hasten our arrival and retreat?”

“The ship was mentioned,” Captain Dani said as she headed back to her seat to sit down. “It does not say which ship that was, though.”

“I do not think it matters that much at this point. Is the fleet ready for departure?”

“We will be in ten minutes. The last of the supplies are being loaded right now on some of the ships.”

“Very well. Bilartini, could you provide our helmsman with the coordinates needed to get to where the last field generator is?”

“I will do so,” Bilartini said as he walked over to the Helm station.

Captain Dani turned to face Trent in her seat.

“Do we know if this mission will be uneventful unlike the last one?” she asked.

“I do not have an answer for that,” Trent said. “Hopefully, the Imperial forces are not sending out scouting patrols to look for the last field generator while waiting for the one they just found to deactivate.”

Bilartini walked back over to Trent from the Helm station to Trent’s left side again.

“I have provided your helmsman with the necessary coordinates,” Bilartini said.

“Good,” Trent said. “While we are waiting to depart, do we know what kind of planet we are expecting to see this field generator on?”

“Yes. Since the field generators require geothermal energy to remain powered, the planets my creators install them on are volcanic in nature.”

Trent looked at Bilartini with wide eyes.

“Volcanic planets?” Trent asked. “That is going to delay us some. We will have to tell the teams to wear EVA suits.”

“I am on it,” Dani said as she got up and walked over to the communications station.

She could have given the order from her chair, but Trent figured she needed to walk to get rid of the building frustration she was feeling right now. Trent took a deep breath.

“Satisfy my curiosity for a moment, Bilartini,” Trent said. “Did your creators give you any information on the Amnon Empire’s ships other than their technology?”

“The Empire’s cruisers were the vessels most commonly encountered by my creators,” Bilartini said. “My creators know there are three types of vessels total, but very rarely seen the other two to have a complete profile that I could be uploaded with.”

“I wondered about that. It sounds like their cruisers are their primary ships-of-the-line for their forces while the other two serves as command vessels, heavy weapons platforms, or both.”

“It sounds like having the information would be crucial for your future plans.”

“There is an old Human saying: knowledge is power. Knowing what an enemy’s forces are capable of gives us an advantage in how to fight them and win.”

“From my understanding, it can also signify other situations, such as having information that you could use against others in non-combat situations as well.”

“It does, but I am using it as a reference in this matter involving the lack of knowledge of some of the Imperial ships.”

“While I do not possess any diagrams or specifications of those ships, I can say with certainty that my creators feared the largest of the Imperial ships.”

“Why is that?”

“Their largest ships have the firepower to devastate the entire surface of a planet with ease with more of the turrets you have encountered than on the cruisers. How many it has, or its size is unknown to me. My creators either fled when it appeared or were killed while trying to get information on it.”

“To me, that sounds more like a dreadnought and it is possibly the size of one like those in the Draco Federation or the former Dominion. If that is the case, then the ship class in between the cruiser and the dreadnought must be a battleship-type. I am trying to understand why they needed such large vessels.”

Shibuya came up on Trent’s right side.

“The Union had a nickname for such vessels,” she said. “They were called ‘terror ships.’ Such massive vessels of mass destruction are generally made by those who are in search of terrorizing their populations and/or their enemies into submission.”

Trent looked at Shibuya with his right eyebrow raised.

“You realize that aside from the Union, every nation has battleships or larger, right?” Trent asked.

“I am aware,” Shibuya said. “I am also quite aware that the former nations of the Lykan Kingdom and Tenebris Dominion once used such vessels to instill terror in their domains. I know that the Draco Federation, the United Vitam State, and the Camino Star Empire developed their versions of such vessels in response to those threats. However, I want to know why the Republic developed them when you all had no one to use them against?”

“Because the Republic is not stupid. We wanted to make sure that we could protect ourselves should we encounter anyone in the cluster that could threaten our way of life. We had to be prepared for as many scenarios as possible. If the scenario called for a heavy weapons platform, we would be prepared for it.”

“I see. I guess it was better to be prepared than not be. If we were not...”

Shibuya stopped herself suddenly. Trent wondered why she stopped talking.

“Is there a problem?” Trent asked.

Shibuya turned and leaned close to Trent’s right ear.

“I forgot that your crew does not know the rest of the Chancellor’s plans,” she whispered. “Let us just say that it is good that you all have those vessels for later plans and leave it at that.”

“Very well,” Trent said as he looked forward again.

“Admiral,” Dani said as she walked back to her chair from the Communications station, “the equipment is on board and the technicians are currently getting into their EVA suits in preparation for the mission. We are ready for deployment.”

“Understood,” Trent said as he activated the fleet communications system on his chair. “This is Fleet Command to the Seventh Fleet. We will now be departing from dock for our assigned mission. The *Marshal* will exit first. Follow the orders of dock control and we will form up for portal entry. Be advised as you saw in the mission parameters, an Enforcer Battleship will be joining us in this mission in case we run into any hostiles. The orders to flee stand. We are not to engage the hostiles to prevent them from getting an understanding of our tactical capabilities unless I authorize it. We will see you outside. Fleet command, out.”

As Trent turned off the fleet communications button on his chair, Bilartini looked over at Trent with a puzzled expression on his face.

“I am not used to seeing such preparations and attention to detail for leaving one of your space stations,” Bilartini. “It seems...inefficient in a way.”

“Considering you stated your creators never used vessels before, I can see why you would say that,” Trent said. “Our ships have to be guided out by an overseer to avoid colliding with one another. It does take a while for an entire fleet to deploy but there are fleets patrolling all the time so that they are ready to defend a system when needed.”

“I see. I was concerned about your tactical readiness and the fact that we are in a hurry to get to the location of the last field generator. I apologize for my impatience.”

Trent did not want to look at Bilartini, but he was surprised by a machine that would have emotions at all. He expressed a form of happiness when they first met, and he heard that Bilartini expressed shock over Drew’s plan to return Luna to the Milky Way Galaxy. Bilartini’s creators were advanced enough to instill emotions of sorts into their creation, but was it to blend in better with Humanity or find common ground and ease when speaking to Humanity? With the Amnon Empire making them extinct, there would be no way to know for sure.

As Trent continued to watch the screen, the *Marshal* departed from the bay it was docked moving to starboard till it was clear. The ship then moved forward towards the main access path that would lead out of the station. It turned to starboard once it reached the main access way towards the barrier field and proceeded out of the station. Once it cleared the airspace, the ship turned to starboard once more to face in the direction of the star system they were jumping to.

Ahead of them, they saw a single Enforcer Battleship, its blue and black glossy paintjob reflecting local light and making it noticeable. This was the first time Trent had seen an Enforcer. The vessels were larger than the Paladin Battleships even after their refits. The fact that the ships were a combination of designs from the battleships of the Novus Initium Republic, the Lykans, the Caminos, and the State along with the weapons systems was odd, but yet they worked to make the Enforcer a ship not to be messed with. The Portal Drive was also installed on the vessel allowing some representation of the Dominion and the Federation along with the blasters being switched for particle cannons. It was truly a vessel that would represent the new Federation being established by the existing nations.

As they approached, the Enforcer’s IFF signal identified the vessel as the *Grimsson*. The Enforcers have not been assigned a prefix yet, but that would likely change once the Federation Charter was ratified.

“Sir,” Sierra said from the Communications station, “we are receiving a transmission from the *Grimsson*. I have Rear Admiral Lewis on the line.”

“Put him through,” Trent said.

A small holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen. A male Human of African descent appeared on the screen wearing the blue with black accent uniform of those assigned to the Oversight Committee of the Nature Restoration Zone. With the NRZ that was originally the former Dominion becoming a state in the new Federation, the NRZ’s Oversight Committee’s authority would be under Miya’s authority rather than the other way around. Trent was surprised to see that an Enforcer assigned to the Oversight Committee was here but at this point it did not matter where it was originally assigned to.

“Admiral Trent,” Lewis said. “I have heard stories about you and your exploits over the past couple of years. I figured you would be involved with this one as well.”

“Maybe I am a glutton for punishment, Rear Admiral Lewis,” Trent said. “I assume you were brought up to speed with the nature of our mission?”

“I am, though I must say, I was not expecting to go to the Southern Region today. However, if this Amnon Empire I was briefed about is going to be as much trouble as I have been told, you need all the help you can get.”

“Just remember, Rear Admiral. We have explicit orders not to engage the Imperial vessels if any to avoid them knowing our tactical abilities.”

“I am aware of the orders, sir. Let us hope we do not have a reason to fight our way out of there. How long until the rest of your fleet undocks?”

“It will take them eight minutes to deploy from headquarters and rendezvous with us. I will have my Helmsman transmit the coordinates to you where we are going. Our destination is a volcanic planet that holds the last gravitational field generator. It uses the geothermal energy to power the field.”

Lewis looked over in the direction of Bilartini.

“I assume that the being to your left is the one responsible for providing us with the coordinates of our destination and the information on the Amnon Empire?”

“This being is Bilartini,” Trent said, gesturing with his left hand to indicate he was referring to the being to his left. “He is the one that provided us the information in question.”

“I have my reservations about the matter, but they are my own and not that of the crew. I hope that we are not making a mistake by trusting this being with our lives.”

Trent could understand Lewis’ feelings on the matter. Trent has his own reservations about trusting the information that Bilartini has provided. However, he has yet to find a reason not to trust the artificial lifeform to his left and can only hope he never provides one.

Lewis looked to Trent’s right towards Shibuya and was a little taken back by her. Trent was not sure if it was her appearance or the fact that someone from another nation was on board the *Marshal*.

“I have to ask,” Lewis said, *“but who or what is that to your right?”*

“This is Rear Admiral Shibuya from the New Unity Government,” Trent said. “She is an observer on this mission. As to what she is, she is a Skunk. If you do not know what that is, I suggest looking up ancient Earth animals sometime.”

“Very well. Send me a signal once we are ready to portal to our destination. I await the coordinates. Grimsson, out.”

The screen with Lewis on it disappeared. Trent took a deep breath.

“Charming fellow, huh?” Shibuya said sarcastically. “From his tone, he sounds like he was not prepared for this sort of mission either.”

“Seems that way,” Trent said “Everyone is tense when we have a possible crisis on our hands with such short notice. Not many people like such surprises after the Dominion attacked the Republic without even a notice.”

“I see. I guess anyone would be tense and on edge after such an ordeal.”

“Regardless, his mannerisms could use some work. Helm, I want you to transmit the coordinates for our destination to Communications to relay to the *Grimsson*.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Diana said from the Helm station.

Trent leaned back in his chair, trying to relax. Shibuya looked at Trent.

“Is it alright if I take a seat in one of the observational chairs in the back of the bridge?” Shibuya asked.

“Go ahead,” Trent said as he looked at her. “It is going to take several minutes for the rest of the fleet to arrive.”

“Thank you.”

Shibuya turned and headed for one of the observational seats towards the back of the bridge. Trent looked over at Bilartini to his left.

“Could you also take a seat back there for now, Bilartini?” Trent asked.

“I do not require the need to sit,” Bilartini said.

“I understand that much, but it would be better per protocol for non-military personnel to remain in the observational seats unless they have permission to move freely on the bridge. Until we reach our destination, I am requesting for you to remain seated in the observational seats.”

“As you wish. This is your vessel.”

Bilartini turned and walked towards the back of the bridge. Trent felt a bit more at ease with the two of them at the back of the bridge versus being next to his seat. It meant that he could focus on the task at hand and think about how this mission will go once they make the jump without having the two of them looking over him where he can see them.

“Communications,” Trent said, “send a message to the fleet. Have odd number vessels form up with us while even number vessels form up with the *Grimsson*.”

“Yes, Admiral,” Sierra said.

Captain Dani turned to face Trent.

“I should have asked this earlier,” Dani said, “but what happens if the Amnon Empire is already at our target destination? It would still take ten minutes for both the *Marshal* and the *Grimsson* to recharge their Portal Drives.”

“That is not very likely,” Bilartini said from his seat behind Trent. “The Empire has to shut the field generators down one at a time. Until they shut down the one in the star system I was in, they do not have a reason to be investigating the next location until then.”

“That is provided that they do not switch tactics,” Trent said without facing Bilartini. “They shut them down one at a time because they did not feel the need to rush their operations. However, they now know that the people who reside in the cluster can breach the barrier easily, much less the fact that we have established interstellar travel. Knowing those facts now, they will most likely want to find the last field generator before we are able to mobilize our forces for their invasion. The moment the second-to-last generator is offline, they will want to begin the shutdown sequence of the last generator almost immediately.”

Bilartini was silent for a couple of seconds. Trent figured he was computing or analyzing Trent’s words.

“I understand,” Bilartini finally said. “I did not account for the variable of a change in their tactics or their operations upon knowing of your existence and your interstellar capabilities. If I had, I would have advised that we left sooner. Even after they would have found the field generator where you found me, it would still take them some time to reach the last generator’s location.”

“Then we need to leave soon,” Trent said. “Tactical, has all of our ships arrived?”

“The last vessels are forming up on both ships now,” Khara said. “We are ready to depart for the last field generator’s location.”

“Good. Communications, I want you to send the signal the *Grimsson*. Tell them we are using the Portal Drive now.”

“Yes, sir,” Sierra said.

“Helmsman, proceed with Portal Drive activation.”

“Activating the Portal Drive now, Admiral,” Diana said.

A portal soon appeared in front of the *Marshal* with a second one on the left side of the screen as the *Grimsson* activated its own Portal Drive. The smaller vessels of the Seventh Fleet from cruisers down to frigates began to navigate their way into the portals before the battleships once the portals were large enough for multiple vessels to pass through. After the last set of ships of the fleet passed through, the *Marshal* began to advance toward its portal while the *Grimsson*

approached its own. Once both vessels were through their respective portals, their portals closed behind them. From the viewpoint on the main screen, there were fewer stars ahead of them much like the star system they were in earlier this morning. This time, however, Trent noticed a planet in the lower right of the screen. More than half of its surface was covered in dark gray or black terrain. The rest was covered in active volcanos, pools of magma, and lava rivers feeding into lakes into eventual oceans of lava. The planet was far from being a habitable world by Human and Animal standards.

Despite the fleet not even in orbit over the planet yet, a massive construct could be seen on the surface along the planet's equator. It was moving on a massive rail, going in the opposite direction of the planet's rotation. The top of the construct was glowing as it continued to face or point in the same direction.

"That down there is the gravitational field generator," Bilartini said. "That is what you are here to protect with the planetary shield generators."

"Hard to miss something that size," Trent said before activating his fleet communications system. "This is fleet command. Deploy the fleet and begin the operation to deploy the planetary shield generators. I expect the setup and construction to be finished and operational within the hour. Fleet command, out."

Trent turned off the fleet communications system as he looked at the screen. The Seventh Fleet began to deploy and disperse around the volcanic planet. Once the ships reached their target areas, they began to deploy equipment and shuttles down to the surface.

"Now we have to sit and wait for them to get finished setting everything up," Trent said. "Science and Tactical, launch sensor probes towards the edges of the star system. I want more of a warning this time if any Imperial vessels approach our position."

"Yes, sir," Glenn and Khara said.

Now that the operation was underway, Trent wondered if it was a good time now to talk to Shibuya about a couple of matters, whether personal or business. It would help pass the time until the operation was completed.

"Captain," Trent said as he got up from his seat, "keep an eye on the operation. If a development occurs or if any Imperial vessels are detected, let me know."

Captain Dani turned to look in Trent's direction.

"Yes, sir," Dani said. "Are you heading for the Ready Room?"

"I am. Shibuya, would you please accompany me? I wanted to talk to you about a couple of matters and since you do not have anything to do right now, it will help pass the time."

"Very well," Shibuya said as she got up from her seat. "What about Bilartini?"

Trent was hoping Shibuya would not bring him up if they began to talk about personal matters, but it appeared Bilartini was uninterested.

"I would like to observe the operation," Bilartini said. "I have not seen the deployment of such a system before."

"Very well," Trent said. "Shibuya, please come with me to my Ready Room."

"Yes, Admiral," Shibuya said.

Trent started walking towards the Ready Room doors with Shibuya following behind him. They entered the Ready Room, but Trent walked over to the couch to his right rather than his desk. He sat down at the far end.

"Please have a seat," he said as he gestured to the spot on the couch for her to sit.

Shibuya sat down and was facing him. Trent knew she had something to say but could not say it in front of others.

“So,” Trent said, “I wanted to go over something you had brought up first. You were talking about the battleships and capital ships of other nations earlier, but you appeared to be concerned about how it would reflect about the rest of Drew’s plans from the sounds of it. Can you please elaborate or was I reading too much into it?”

“I thought about what I said earlier about the use of battleships and capital ships as ‘terror weapons,’” Shibuya said. “However, because of the fact that we have such vessels, we can combat the Amnon Empire effectively against their larger vessels.”

“I see. If you had brought that up in front of the crew even though they were not fully aware of the plan, you were concerned how that would affect them.”

“While I think it is a good plan, I am concerned about how this all is going.”

“Care to elaborate?”

“The first problem I have is the loss of life for a ship like the size of the *Marshal* here. There are thousands of people aboard this vessel and if one of them is destroyed, that many people will die.”

“No one knows that more than those who have been at war. Every nation knows what it feels like to lose so many lives.”

“The Union has never been at war before, so I am rather scared of the prospect of war after all this time and the loss of life that comes with it.”

“Consider yourselves lucky. Up until more than two years ago, the Republic has never had to deal with a war either. It was forced on us when we tried to be diplomatic with the Lykans when we first met them.”

“That brings up another valid point. We are preparing for a war with an enemy who we have yet to try and contact or establish diplomatic ties to.”

“Considering what we have been told about them, the Amnon Empire does not seem to have much interest in establishing any diplomatic ties to any nation that does not follow its established faith.”

“That is the problem. How do we really know the Empire is like that? Remember, we only found and retrieved our other guest earlier this morning. He told us all about the Amnon Empire and their actions towards his masters from their point of view. He may have told us how we are viewed by them, but no one has stopped to factcheck any of his story yet, have they? We are trusting him far too much that we appear to accept his ‘truth’ at face value.”

“You think he would have been programmed to lie about the Amnon Empire and its history as some sort of ploy?”

“He may not even be aware he was lying if he were programmed as such. For all we know, his creators are the aggressors this whole time. Do not forget all the cases in the use of the MAR that has occurred and affected all of us so far. Who is to say his creators had not done the same thing to those in the Empire to make them more aggressive?”

“That is both a possibility and a valid point, but you do remember that the Imperial cruisers fired on us when we retrieved him without so much as a warning, right? They did not even try to hail us first to know who we are.”

“True, but considering we announced his name which is also the name of his species on an open channel, they could easily think that we are allies to his people and would open fire on anyone with ties to them. For all we know, this could be a massive misunderstanding.”

“Do you have anything that this feeling is based off of?”

“I just feel that if a nation that is truly devout to their religion were the dominant power in an area of space, they would not resort to slavery without a good reason.”

“You want to tell that to the races of the State? I know you read up on the history of the old Royal Lykan Kingdom and how they viewed slavery as ‘just’ in their religion.”

“I know about their predicament, but I also know that it was forced by another party through the use of the MAR.”

“I know it was, but the species of the State could easily argue that the citizens and the military of the Lykans could have rejected the order and found a better path that did not result in the use of slavery. For all we know, the Amnon’s use of slavery, if it exists, may be for purposes that are not malicious at all. I’m not trying to justify its existence as slavery is an affront to the ideals and the principles of the Republic, but as you stated before, we may not have all of the facts that we need to get a solid picture of the Empire and its culture.”

Shibuya sighed and tried to find another counterargument, but she looked like she was getting nowhere with her dilemma.

“Look,” Trent continued, “I understand where you are coming from. If there is a peaceful diplomatic way to resolve this matter, I would want to investigate it as well. For that matter, I would welcome the opportunity if it were presented. However, we are soldiers and we also have our orders from the Council.”

“I know we are, and I know we do,” Shibuya said as she sighed once again. “I just wish that we knew for a fact that everything our guest has said was true.”

“I wish there were a way, too, because now you are making me have doubts about the mission. Tell you what I can do. Once this mission is complete, I will speak with both the Grand Admiral and the Chancellor about finding a diplomatic solution to this matter. If they agree to it, we will come back out here and try to establish a dialogue and get a better understanding of the Amnon Empire. You can even accompany me to see how things go. Is that alright with you?”

“What if they do not agree?”

“Then we proceed as planned, but if a diplomatic means presents itself, I will try to take the opportunity when presented.

“Alright. I understand.”

Trent could tell that Shibuya was on the verge of tears. The thought of war really was worrying her, and he did not blame her for being scared. War had scared him too at the beginning of the First Interstellar War. Trent decided to do the one thing he could think of to help settle her down. He moved closer to her, put his arms around her, and gave her a hug. He could tell by her fur being slightly on end that this was quite sudden, and it shocked her for only a second or two. Shibuya put her arms around him, and he heard her beginning to cry. It reminded him of when he had to tell his ex-wife the same thing when the First Interstellar War began, but he was not able to console her as he was still in the Tranquillus System at the time.

After a minute or two, Shibuya let up on the crying and withdrew from Trent up to within a couple of feet. Trent had his hands on her waist while she had her hands on his shoulders. They were staring into each other’s eyes. From that angle, if it was not for the fur and her small snout, she could have passed for Human with all those Human-specific facial traits.

Shibuya’s eyes were a little red from crying when she sighed.

“Screw orders,” she said as she suddenly came forward, kissing Trent on the lips.

Trent was surprised by her kiss that he did not brace himself when she came towards him suddenly. He fell back on the couch with her lips still locked on his and her arms around his neck. The surprise quickly passed as Trent closed his eyes and put his arms around her waist.

Shibuya was right. Screw the orders.

* * * * *

Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
3:22pm, November 21, 5434 A.D.

“It is finally done.”

Drew had returned to his office after the summit meeting had concluded. The Federation Charter was now ratified and will come into effect in one week’s time. This was to allow the Council members to return to their nations and inform their citizens of the upcoming changes to both the political and military structure. Drew needed to write his address to the Republic at large and have it ready by later tonight for the evening news. He also had to address the nation about the Amnon Empire and Bilartini’s creators. It would take a while to get all of that typed up and ready in less than two and a half hours.

When it came to the military personnel and their deployment, unless on a special assignment, the ships would remain under the state their original jurisdiction would entail. In other words, the Camino ships will remain in their state, the Lykans on theirs, and so forth. They will all go through a change in their prefix designation. The prefix that will be before their names will be N.I.F.S., short for Novus Initium Federation Ship. They will also be using a different yet interesting style of paintjob going from yellow to dark gray from the front to the back of the vessels. They will also use either dark gray or white accents depending on a state’s preference.

The only vessels that will be deployed to every state will be the Paramount Dreadnoughts and the Enforcer Battleships. The Dreadnoughts will become the flagships of select fleets as they are converted from their original Mammoth Dreadnought configuration to their Paramount versions. The Draco Federation was by far the most resistant of the notion considering their history with those vessels, but they could not deny the tactical capabilities of the redesigned Paramounts and Shea eventually accepted them. Because the remaining Mammoth Dreadnoughts are in what will become the Tenebris State, it was decided that any that are not needed would be broken down and recycled into new vessels either as Enforcers as originally planned, any vessels already found in other states for the Tenebris State to use as their own, or their own original designs. Miya would be left to decide those ships’ fates as forty percent of their clone population was killed by Armani Draco’s fanaticism, especially their militant *Aspergillus* clones. This would require them to either train more of their clones as combatants or investigate more automated vessels of sorts.

The Republic and Draco States will help the Union State in expanding to other star systems in the Northwest Region using Portal Drive versions of star gates to significantly reduce travel times between star systems. This would help with their population issues in terms of their numbers and allow more to live on planets than on space stations. There would still be interest among the Union State’s population in moving to other states like the Liberigi State to expand their populations, but interstate migrations are still topics that need to be addressed.

Drew leaned back in his chair to relax for a moment while he figured out how he wanted to word his address to the Republic. As he was thinking about his address, his terminal went off showing a call from his secretary.

“Supreme Chancellor?” the secretary said through his terminal. *“There is a gentleman here who wishes to see you.”*

Drew pressed the respond button on his terminal.

“I am in the middle of working on my address to the Republic,” Drew said. “Kindly ask the gentleman to come back tomorrow as I am busy right now.”

“Sir, he says it has to do with recent activity in the Southern Region.”

Drew was suddenly puzzled. He began to wonder who this individual was that was here to see him and wanted to talk about activity in the Southern Region? Only the Federation Council, their escorts, and Admiral Trent’s fleet knew about the activity and missions to the Southern Region. Not even Drew’s secretary was aware of the missions to the Southern Region, who no doubt would be confused by this point.

“Send him in,” Drew said.

A few seconds later, a male Caucasian Human with blonde hair who looked to be in either his late thirties to early forties entered through the doors. His outfit consisted of long and rather ornate robes that were bronze in color with gold colored accents. He looked like he was a religious figure of sorts rather than the usual politicians or military officers Drew normally gets. When the man got closer to Drew’s desk, Drew noticed that the visitor had a pendant on his necklace. It was a figure that looked like it was Human but lacked a face and the base had no legs. It had eight wings, a star over its head, and had a circle that most of it was embedded in. The figure resembled that of a faceless angel.

The visitor stopped short of Drew’s desk.

“My apologies for coming unannounced, Supreme Chancellor Drew,” the visitor said. “I am aware that you are a busy man running this fine nation of yours.”

“You will excuse me if I want to get to the point of your visit,” Drew said. “First and foremost, to whom am I speaking with? You know my name, but I do not know your name.”

“Of course. How inconsiderably rude of me. My name is Nathan, and I have been appointed to speak you on behalf of the Holy Amnon Empire. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“The Amnon Empire?!” Drew said as he stood up. “How did you get here with the barrier still up?!”

“So, you have heard of us. That saves me some time. I am here on behalf of my Pope Empress to speak with you directly. There are things we need to discuss before the situation gets worse for either of our nations.”

* * * * *