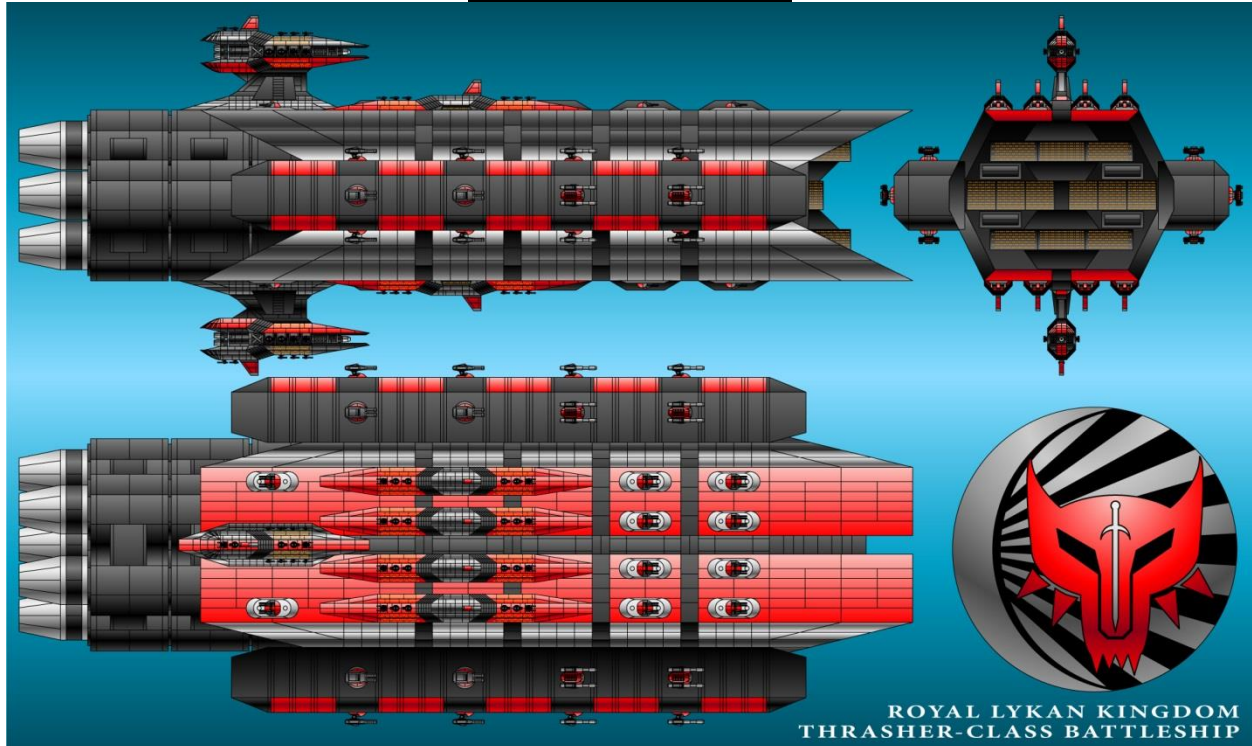


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode I: Alone Yet Not



PART 5

*Conference Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
8:33pm, May 11, 5433 A.D.*

“I’M GOING TO RIP YOUR HEAD OFF!!”

United Vitam State Vice Admiral Bridneo jumped up from his seat. The news that his people, along with the other slave races that were left behind in Royal Lykan Kingdom, were being turned into central biological computer cores for the ships of the Lykan fleet sent him into a fury. He wanted to rip apart Kingdom Representative Forneido who sat across the table. It did not matter to him that the Lykan was bigger or that he was on board a Republic ship as a guest, he wanted to get at the Lykan and make him responsible for what the Kingdom has done.

A pair of force fields soon appeared separating all three parties from each other.

“Get a hold of yourself, Vice Admiral!” Trent said. “I can empathize with how you feel about this situation but losing control is not going to help you or your kind right now.”

Bridneo took a few deep breathes to try to calm down, but being told this news did not help his mentality. As he tried to calm down, he looked over at Tora.

“Is there a way to save them from those ships?” Bridneo asked.

“According to our scans,” Tora said, “there are three problems with removing them.”

“And they are?”

“The first is that there are no other thoughts aside from ship functions running through their minds. It is as if their mind has been wiped and reprogrammed to only run ship functions. They will be unable to function independently if separated from the ship. The second problem is that they are also hooked up to a life support system. Removing them from that system would also kill them instantly. Then there is the third and final problem where rescue would be nothing short of impossible. The ship’s systems are rigged to self-destruct the moment the ‘core’ is unplugged from the ship. The moment you unplug them, the ship will explode.”

Bridneo looked over at Forneido, trying to keep his feelings in check.

“How dare you do this to our kind, you egotistical Lykan piece of trash!” Bridneo said.

“We did what was needed to keep the peace and for those disobedient slaves to no longer be unruly,” Forneido said. “You only have yourselves to blame for leaving your masters and your rightful place as our servants.”

“That’s enough, Representative,” Wade said before turning to Bridneo. “Vice Admiral, please calm down. Frustration will only lead to rash actions.”

It was taking all of Bridneo’s effort to calm himself down. He looked over at Tora.

“Thank you for providing this information,” he said. “At least we know what they are doing to them. I will try to remain calm.”

Trent looked over at Tora and the ambassadors before they all looked at Forneido who was none too pleased about having this information about the “living computers” brought to light.

“Representative Forneido,” Wade said, “in light of this information, we are going to present this to our government. We would suggest that you wait here with the Vice Admiral. We will keep the force fields active for the safety of both of you. We will also soundproof the rooms so that further ‘pleasantries’ won’t be exchanged to raise tensions even further.”

Forneido only nodded in agreement as did Bridneo. The force field separating the Republic group from Bridneo went down as they all got up and walked past him. While Tora and the ambassadors walked towards the door, Trent stopped and put his hand on Bridneo’s left shoulder as he still was trying to calm down.

“Are you going to be alright?” Trent asked. “Do you need anything?”

“I’m fine for the moment,” Bridneo said straightening his posture. “I’ll be more composed by the time you all come back. Hopefully you all will bring me some good news.”

“We’ll see what happens,” Trent said as he removed his hand.

He headed for the door. The force field reactivated so that there were two of them separating the two representatives. As the door closed behind Trent, Tora and the ambassadors turned to him.

“We need to head to your Ready Room,” Tora said. “It is the best place for us to report to the Supreme Chancellor.”

“Agreed,” Trent said. “Something tells me though that we may need that reporter on board to report what has happened here once we talk to the Chancellor.”

“I figured that might be the case,” Tora said. “I’ve recalled the drone so that the Lykans don’t find it. I don’t think the Lykans have cloaking capabilities but I would rather they not snatch up the drone and reverse engineer it to use that technology.”

“That is the least of our problems,” Trent said as he directed them to the elevator. “The Vice Admiral was right about how the Lykans would react to our history and Forneido would not hear us out at all.”

“It would not have mattered much,” Wade said as he pressed the elevator call button. “The best case scenario involving the Kingdom was signing a non-aggression agreement with them. This is by far the worst case scenario and it was even more so with the news of what the Kingdom is doing to their slaves.”

The elevator arrived and the doors opened. The four of them walked in.

“Bridge,” Trent said.

The elevator gave an acknowledgement chirp before closing the doors and began moving.

“It couldn’t be helped,” Trent said. “You have a nation that promotes slavery, uses them currently as biological computers, and follows a deity that promotes them to conquer the star cluster in the name of their god. Add on to it that we are an affront to their beliefs not originating from the cluster itself and you have a recipe for disaster no matter how you look at it.”

“Did we handle that situation the best we could, though?” Autumn asked. “I feel as though our emotions got the better of us in there.”

“They did a little bit,” Trent said. “Our own morals were in conflict with what we were dealing with in there. I thought we could work things out peacefully with the Kingdom but I think their own actions they have taken in their war against the State prove otherwise.”

“Speaking about the State,” Tora said. “What are our thoughts about them?”

“That is difficult to answer,” Trent said. “Personally, I think they need some help from the Republic. Politically, I cannot answer for. Helping them only confirms that we are entering their war.”

“In case you missed it, Forneido already declared war on the Republic on behalf of his government.”

“True. It would seem that the Kingdom wants to be at war with everyone. You all heard Forneido. They also want to renew their conflict with the Empire. Their mindset is that they are the rightful heirs of the entire star cluster and as such they will want to conquer every race in the cluster to that end.”

“Then there was no hope for peace from the start,” Autumn said. “I wonder if their defeat against the Empire was very profound, then.”

“What do you mean?” Trent said as the elevator began to slow down.

“They believe they were chosen by their god to conquer the entire star cluster but they were stopped by the Empire. If you were to think what your actions were guided by a deity and you still lost, wouldn’t that cause some concern?”

The elevator stopped and the doors opened to the bridge. As they stepped out, Trent turned to all of them.

“We’ll discuss this further in the Ready Room,” Trent said.

As they walked towards Trent’s Ready Room, Shannon turned to face them from her seat.

“How did it go in there?” Shannon asked.

“Not as good as we had hoped,” Trent said. “I’ll fill you in on what happened in a little bit but we need to talk with the Supreme Chancellor and hopefully the Senate if they are still in session.”

“Understood.”

Trent pressed the door open button to his Ready Room and the doors opened up. The four of them walked in as Trent headed around to his seat. Wade and Autumn took a seat on the couch while Tora sat in one of the seats in front of Trent’s desk.

“I doubt the Senate will be in session as late as it is,” Tora said. “Hopefully the Supreme Chancellor will be in his office.”

Trent looked at the time.

“I somehow doubt he will be in his office unless he really is waiting on our progress,” Trent said. “I’ll send him a message and see if he response to us calling him or vice versa.”

Trent began typing the message, asking for the Supreme Chancellor to contact them as soon as possible as the meeting did not go very well. Trent sent the message and waited for a response. About two minutes later, Trent was getting a call on his terminal from the Supreme Chancellor. Trent answered it and a video of Drew appeared. It looked like Drew was at home already.

“Okay, Vice Admiral,” Drew said, “what in the cluster happened?”

“The worst case scenario, sir,” Trent said. “We tried to plead our case with the Lykan Representative, but they appear to be set in their ways based on their religion to see us as nothing more than an ‘infestation’ to the point that not only is he declaring war, he called it an ‘extermination’ of our species.”

“I was hoping that you all would have done a better job at defusing the situation.”

“There was more to it than that,” Tora said.

Trent turned the terminal around for Drew to see Tora.

“What do you mean?” Drew said.

“I used a cloaked drone and had it scan one of their destroyers in detail. The ships are for the most part automated but they are using their slaves as living computer cores. They have them connected by cybernetic implants and the only types of thoughts we registered are ship functions only. We detected nothing of individuality or free will, not even a memory being accessed.”

“Are you serious?! Why are they going so far?”

“The Slave Revolt may have something to do with it. The Lykan Representative told us prior to us finding out this information that the Kingdom was going to remove the slaves’ religions once and for all. Converting them to living computer cores who only think about ship functions and accepts commands would fall in line with that decree.”

“That’s not right no matter how you spin it. What did the Vitam representative think?”

“How do you think he took it? We had to activate the force fields in the conference room just to keep them separated from each other!”

“So the State is furious with the Kingdom and the Kingdom is for lack a better term declaring war on us. I really was hoping for better news. What is the position of the State towards us?”

“The State has no issues with us at all. I’m not sure if they wanted an ally or not in their war but if the Kingdom is declaring war on us at the same time as fighting the State, it may be better to join or forces for mutual defense.”

“Possibly so. For right now, I will order our forces to bolster the defense of the systems along our Eastern border and I will call for an emergency session of the Senate for tomorrow

morning. Vice Admiral Trent, you may dismiss the Lykan representative and send them on their way but inform the Kingdom fleet to leave Republic space. If they refuse, inform them that if they do not that you will open fire if they ignore your second warning. Considering the State fleet is still in the system, they will be outnumbered and will be forced to retreat. Inform the State Vice Admiral that we will be in contact with his government soon but that there will be a proposal on the table to become allies when our Senate meets in the morning. Also inform him that his forces need to strengthen their defenses since the Kingdom is trying to spread their defense fleet thin. Do so after the Lykan Representative leaves.”

“Understood,” Trent said.

“Also, Vice Admiral Trent, I want you to keep the Eleventh Fleet there for now. If things go well, we could be looking at establishing a star gate in that system to link to one of the State’s systems as well as a meeting point for any ambassadors. Right now, the Lykans are aware of our presence in the Tranquillus System but they may not know about the other systems along our eastern border. Lykan forces may focus their attacks there first before they attempt to move west towards our other systems along the border. We may be looking at creating a defensive zone past our borders to prevent them from entering populated systems.”

“So, for the first time since the Expansion Era,” Trent said, “Republic forces will be moving eastward but only to establish a defensive perimeter. Am I correct on how I heard that?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“Hopefully the public won’t give us problems in that regards but that is a better solution than trying to evacuate the populations in all of those systems.”

“I hope they won’t give me any issues with that either. I’m assuming the conversation is recorded?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then please forward me the conversation before I make it known to the public. People will want to know how things are going when the news goes on-the-air at ten and they may want an update.”

“The reporter on board will notice the ships and fleets leaving before then and will want a statement,” Tora said.

“Then you can provide it to her. Let her know that I am reviewing the conversation and that we will give her facts to report before ten. I will also contact the members of the Senate and let them know what has transpired before we call our session in the morning to discuss our next steps.”

“Yes, sir,” Tora said.

“Understood,” Trent said.

“What should we do, sir?” Wade asked.

“Wade and Autumn, we will be hiring a Trans-Republic Shuttle service to bring you two back to Luminaire along with Tora in the morning. It will be safer for you three to be back on Luminaire than being on the possible front lines.”

“You want me back, too?” Tora asked.

“Head Agent Aja wanted me to tell you to return once your mission was completed for debriefing. I’m guessing that the RCIA will need to figure out how to handle intelligence gathering involving the Kingdom and the State and will want to know what you know so far.”

“Understood, Supreme Chancellor.”

“You all have your orders. Let me know if the problem with the Lykans gets worse after you dismiss the representative.”

The transmission ended at that point. Trent looked at Tora and then at Wade and Autumn.

“So,” Trent said, “ready to tell the Lykan to hit the star ways?”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Tora said. “I would suggest you let Captain Shannon know what is going on before we proceed.”

“You’re right,” Trent said as he turned the terminal back around and hit the call button.

“Captain Shannon, please report to my Ready Room.”

Shannon entered the Ready Room a five seconds later.

“Yes, sir?” Shannon asked after the doors closed behind her.

“Please have a seat,” Trent said, directing Shannon to the other open seat in front of his desk.

Shannon sat down, looking a bit puzzled.

“Something tells me that things did not go so well in there based on what you said earlier,” Shannon said.

“And you would be right,” Trent said. “The Lykan representative reacted the way the Vitams said he would once he read our history. Now they view us as a pestilence to the cluster that needs to be exterminated even though we have been in the cluster for over three thousand years. In summary, they are declaring nothing short of war on us.”

“Does their fleet know of this declaration?”

“Not yet but that will change once the representative leaves the ship. I will be heading back down to the conference room but I want you to put the ship and the rest of the fleet on yellow alert. Also have shields and weapons powered and on standby. We will be ordering the Lykan fleet to leave the system but if they don’t, things will start to get ugly and we may have to force them to leave.”

“What about the State and the Vice Admiral from that nation?”

“The State is currently not showing any hostilities towards us, especially in light of the fact that we uncovered something the Lykans have been doing to their slaves that remained in the Kingdom.”

“What are you talking about?”

“We found out through covert means that the Lykans, to remove any influence of their slaves’ religions, have chosen to convert some or all their slaves into living computer cores for their ships. They cannot be removed or rescued, otherwise the ship will instantly self-destruct. Their minds have been wiped to only have ship functions run through their heads.”

Shannon was in shock.

“Are you serious?!” Shannon said. “How could they do such a thing?! Was the State representative furious upon getting this news?”

“We had to put up force fields to separate them both. Most likely they will remain up to keep them separated until they leave the ship. We need to let Vice Admiral Bridneo know that his forces will need to go back to the State to strengthen their defenses as their defensive lines are spread pretty thin.”

“If the Lykan has declared war, how has the Chancellor and the Senate responded?”

“The Senate members will be informed by the Chancellor tonight and they will have a meeting in the morning. The Chancellor is also deploying additional forces to the eastern border and will be expanding past that point to form a defense perimeter against Kingdom forces.”

“We are expanding past our borders? That will be interesting considering how long it has been since the Expansion Era.”

“I know.”

“What about our fleet?”

“We will be stationed here for now until we have established relations with the State. The Chancellor wants to look at the creation of a star gate that will link to a system in the State and we may be asked to provide defense during its construction.”

“I see. What about our three guests here?”

“They are leaving in the morning. A private shuttle will be taking them back to Luminaire from here.”

“Alright. I shall get things ready and put the ship to yellow alert. Anything else?”

“Only pray that they don’t start firing here. Let’s get to it.”

Trent got up as did everyone else. Shannon walked out onto the bridge while everyone else followed. Shannon went back to her seat while Trent and the others walked back to the elevator. The elevator doors opened as soon as Tora pressed the call button. They walked in and the doors closed behind them.

“Conference room entry two,” Trent said.

The elevator got on its way. After a few seconds, an alarming chime sounded and some of the lights in the elevator went yellow.

“Looks like she called for it,” Tora said. “Are these lights all over the ship including the conference room?”

“Yes, why?” Trent asked.

“I ask because not only will the representatives know something is up, but so will that reporter. She may say something to her network.”

“If all she reports is a yellow alert without the facts, it is not much to report without knowing the reasons why. All she will have is speculations.”

“So she won’t report about the ship being at yellow alert without knowing why. That’s good at least. She will however ask about what is going on when the fleets start to leave.”

“I will let her know what is going on after the fleets have left. No doubt the camera drones outside will be recording when those fleets leave.”

“I think the big question now is how do we tell them to leave?” Wade asked. “This will especially be problematic when it comes to the Lykan.”

“Let me take care of that,” Trent said. “I have a lot more composure in such things and it is my ship after all. I’ll do the same for the Vitam as well but we will see about having the Lykan leave first as well as his fleet.”

“You think you can handle that?” Tora asked amusingly.

“Easily.”

“We’ll see.”

The elevator soon came to a stop and the doors opened to the conference from the side they exited from earlier. As they approached the door and it opened, they could see that Bridneo

was having a bit of a conversation with Benja about the SAGATs while Forneido across the table through two force fields looked like he was praying. Both of the aliens noticed the group's entry into the room when light from the hall entered in. Both of the force fields went down as the group approached their original seats. Trent was about to ask what the Vitam was talking to Benja about but that will have to wait till later or Blair would address it.

As they sat down, Trent looked at Bridneo before looking at Forneido to see if they were paying attention.

"Gentlemen," Trent said, "we have reported what has been discussed here in this conference room with our Supreme Chancellor. Forneido, in response to your statement of wanting the Republic's 'extermination,' you are to hereby leave this ship and your fleet is to leave our space immediately."

Forneido stood up from his seat and looked at Trent with disgust.

"It is one thing for you to have me leave your ship," Forneido said, "but what authority do you have to order a fleet of the Royal Navy from space that you and your kind infest?"

Trent stood up at that point. While Trent was nowhere near as tall as the Lykan, he did not look any less imposing.

"Let me put it to you this way. If that fleet does NOT leave our space, we have been ordered to open fire on them after the second warning and last I looked, they are outnumbered two-to-one against our fleet and the State, and I'm pretty sure the State fleet is very much looking forward for some retribution for what your kind has done to theirs."

The Lykan realized the truth in Trent's words.

"Very well," Forneido said reluctantly. "However, let it be known that you and your kind will not stand against us and our god's decree for us to rule over this star cluster. Remember this moment, Vice Admiral Trent. This is the moment where you, your children, and all the generations afterwards will wish your Republic willingly accepted serving the Lykans and our god."

Trent looked at Blair who was near the door closest to Forneido.

"Colonel Blair," Trent said, "show this...representative...back to his shuttle and get him off my ship."

Blair walked up next to Forneido.

"Yes, sir," Blair said as he directed Forneido to the door.

Forneido looked at Blair, then back at Trent and the rest of the people in the room. He defiantly moved his snout upward before turning and heading towards the door with Blair following behind him. As Forneido went through the door and passed the two SAGATs closest to it, they turned and walked right behind the representative and Blair before the door closed. The SAGATs outside the door must have been monitoring the situation inside the conference room and, as part of their training in terms of security, if a hostile person is to leave the ship they are to follow along behind the hostile and the person escorting them until they get back to their vessel. This is to ensure that the hostile party cannot re-enter the ship.

Trent turned to Bridneo who was partially happy to see the Lykan gone but at the same time concerned over what was found out.

"Vice Admiral Bridneo," Trent said, "I am to inform you by order of the Supreme Chancellor that we will be in contact with your government within the next day or two. Our

Senate who houses the representatives of all of the worlds of the Republic will meet to discuss the situation with the Lykans. However, a proposal is on the table that you might like.”

“A proposal?” Bridneo asked, a little surprised and hoping it was good news.

“The Supreme Chancellor has been sympathetic to your nation and its cause, especially in light of the knowledge of what the Kingdom has done to your people and others of the State. With that in mind, he will be proposing to the Senate an alliance with the State including the creation of a star gate from here to State territory and mutual defense.”

“A star gate? Oh, right. That’s what you call your jump gates. Wait, are you serious about an alliance?!”

“I am,” Trent said, seeing a spark of hope return to Bridneo’s eyes. “I want to point out though that the Republic is only looking at taking a defensive stance against the Kingdom for now. We have no intention to invade their space.”

“That’s fine by me. If the Lykans are making enemies out of everyone in the cluster, they won’t have allies of their own and eventually will run into issues with a prolonged conflict.”

“That brings up another point that needs to be addressed by yourself and your fleet. The Lykans, based on their movements, have intentionally been spreading your defense forces thin.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let me ask this: why are both of your fleets here?”

“It’s because the Lykans are trying to outflank our forces.”

“No, they are not. They are forcing your fleets to stretch their defense lines thin. How far away are you from your original defense lines?”

“Well, we’re...oh no...”

“We figured this out earlier. They are spreading your lines thin. If they are using your kind only as computer cores and their automated production facilities are working at full capacity, they could have easily rebuilt their entire force and then some. If their nation is indeed at full strength or greater than prior to the Slave Revolt and your forces are stretched then...”

Bridneo stood up quickly at the realization of Trent’s words.

“I need to get back to my ship right now!” he said.

“You will be escorted back to your shuttle but your launch will need to be delayed until the Lykan fleet leaves. If you launch while they are here and they know they are in hostile space, your shuttle will be an open target as you make your way back. I will be heading back to the bridge to make sure they leave. Once you reach your shuttle, you are free to contact your fleet and let them know they may be engaged by the Lykan fleet in our space if they refuse to leave.”

“I understand. I will also pass along your message to begin negotiations with your Senate once we receive word they agree to an alliance. I will provide your ambassadors here with their contact information to give to your government. Thank you all. For the first time ever, I feel some relief knowing we will no longer be alone in this fight.”

“I bid you safe journey, Vice Admiral,” Trent said before turning towards the door. Forneido went through a couple of minutes ago.

Trent left the conference room and headed towards the elevator. He waited a couple of minutes after pressing the call button before the elevator arrived. He stepped in once the doors opened and closed right behind him.

“Bridge,” Trent said.

As the elevator gave an acknowledgement chirp and proceeded to move, Trent pressed the intercom button.

“Trent to Shannon,” he said. “What is the status of the Lykan shuttle and their fleet?”

“The shuttle has just departed,” Shannon said. *“We detected a transmission from the shuttle to their fleet just a second ago but the fleet has not done anything different yet. We have our weapons charged and shields are on standby.”*

“Vice Admiral Bridneo will be contacting his fleet once he reaches his shuttle but his shuttle will not launch until the Lykan fleet has left, provided it does leave. We told him to ready his fleet for combat in case they refuse to leave.”

“So if things get dicey, we will not be the only ones fighting them off. That’s good to know. Should we charge the primary cannon?”

“No, leave it offline and covered by the protective plates. I don’t want the Lykans to know we have that weapon unless absolutely needed.”

“Understood. Are you on your way to the bridge?”

The elevator stopped and the doors opened to the bridge.

“Just arrived,” Trent said as he walked off of the elevator.

Shannon turned around and saw him.

“Talk about making an entrance,” she said.

Trent walked over to his seat and sat down.

“Is the Lykan shuttle heading for their fleet or is it flying away from this airspace?” he asked.

“It’s currently flying towards the fleet. Considering the shuttle may not have enough Salire Purpura crystals to make a jump from here, it may be relying on the fleet to get back to Lykan space.”

“If the representative is an advisor to their king, the fleet may not risk his life in battle. Be prepared though in case I am proven wrong.”

“Vice Admiral?” Ro said from the communications station. “There is a transmission from the State shuttle to the State fleet.”

“Good,” Trent said. “Bridneo made it back to his shuttle promptly. Chrystal, keep an eye on the Lykan fleet. Let me know if something looks out of place.”

“Are we issuing the Lykan fleet a warning to leave the system?” Shannon asked.

“Most likely the representative has already conveyed that message for us. We will wait a moment and see if they leave. If not, then we will issue a warning for them to leave.”

“Understood.”

Trent looked at the shuttle on the screen as it started to approach the battleship in the middle of the Lykan fleet.

“I’ve got a reading,” Chrystal said. “The battleship’s shields are down.”

“Copy that,” Shannon said.

The shuttle went around to the front of the battleship where its hangar bays are located. The bay on the battleship’s starboard side opened as the shuttle began to approach the bay. As soon as the shuttle was inside the bay, the doors closed.

“The shields are back up,” Chrystal said.

“Let’s see if they begin to retreat,” Trent said.

After a few seconds, the battleship began to move out of formation and started to point its bow away from the other ships. However, the battleship was the ONLY ship moving. The cruisers and frigates did not move at all.

“Sir...?” Shannon said.

“I see it,” Trent said. “Tactical, get ready to deploy shields and weapons.”

Trent flipped the switch on his chair activating his communications to the rest of the fleet.

“This is fleet command,” Trent said. “The Lykan fleet is considered hostile and has been ordered to leave Republic space immediately. The battleship is the only ship leaving right now. All ships are to have shields and weapons on standby if the cruisers and destroyers are being left behind to attack.”

Trent flipped the switch off.

“Communications,” Trent said, “inform the battleship that if the cruisers and destroyers do not remove themselves from this system as well, we will open fire on them.”

“Sending message now, sir,” Ro said.

As Trent continued to watch, even though the message was sent and no doubt translated, the cruisers and destroyers had not moved at all. Trent was now certain that those ships were going to attack once the Lykan battleship was clear of danger.

Trent flipped the fleet communications switch once again.

“Fleet command to all ships,” Trent said, “deploy gun turrets and begin targeting Lykan destroyers and cruisers. Hold your fire till I either give the order or you are fired upon.”

Trent flipped the switch off again. Despite being deep within the ship, the sound of the turrets moving from being flush with the rest of the “blisters” to being exposed to space was still audible. The guns themselves are a sight to see and if the Lykans were seeing the Republic fleet’s true firepower being exposed for the first time, Trent was hoping they would recall the cruisers and destroyers knowing they were outnumbered and outgunned.

The show of force fell on deaf ears and blind eyes as the battleship continued to pull away.

“Sir,” Chrystal said, “I’m getting gravimetric readings from in front of the battleship. They are opening a wormhole.”

“They are so hard-headed!” Trent said as he flipped the fleet command switch again. “Attention all ships: raise shields and prepare to engage!”

An artificial wormhole soon appeared in front of the battleship, which quickly flew into it. As the wormhole closed behind the battleship, the cruisers and destroyers soon turned their bows to the Republic fleet.

“Sir!” Chrystal said. “The Lykan fleet is targeting us and the fleet!”

“Hold your fire,” Trent said. “Let them fire fir...”

Before Trent could finish his sentence, the Lykan fleet began firing with their artillery cannons at the Republic fleet. The shells started impacting the shields causing the ship to shudder slightly from the impacts.

Trent flipped the switch on his chair.

“Fleet command to all ships!” he said. “Set all lenses to x-ray types and return fire! Destroyers, set primary target for the forward most destroyers! Cruisers, set primary target to the closest cruiser!”

Trent flipped the switch off.

“Tactical, set anti-cruiser guns to target the closest cruiser as well. Set the big guns to any other cruiser we can hit.”

“Aye-aye, sir!” Chrystal said.

While non-visible spectrums would normally be not visible to the naked eye, the laser weapons on board when fired use a specialized beam of light that makes them visible in order to make sure the weapons hit their marks. In the case of the x-ray lenses, the visible light came out green. This option was good to do more damage than the standard lenses while reducing the total range by a quarter, a range the Lykan ships were within while the guns were in beam laser mode. Hundreds of green streams of light fired from all of the available turrets on the Republic ships as they hit their mark. While the Lykan ships were firing at every ship within range of their guns, the Republic fleet began coordinating their fire on each destroyer and cruiser that was the closest to them. This tactic allows for the greatest amount of firepower to be brought to bear on a single target in order to eliminate that target quickly, thus reducing an enemy fleet’s numbers and incoming firepower. This was quickly proven as the first destroyer and cruiser were quickly eliminated, their shields gone and their hulls melted to slag before their reactors exploded.

The *Renaldo*’s anti-battleship guns however were powerful enough to waste a cruiser in a few shots. Regardless of how powerful a cruiser’s shields were, being hit a few times by up to eight large caliber dual beam laser cannons is enough for any shields and armor to succumb to that much punishment.

As the first few ships were destroyed, Trent noticed missiles coming from starboard on the view screen.

“Sir,” Chrystal said, “the State has launched missiles against the Kingdom ships. They appear to be targeting ships to our starboard.”

That was when Trent realized something. The Kingdom ships were firing ONLY at the Republic ships. They were ignoring the State ships entirely.

“Tactical,” Trent said, “whatever you do, don’t utilize the shield boosters or armor repairers unless I order you to do so. Communications, send that to the rest of the fleet.”

“What?” Chrystal said as she was shocked. “Why do you not want to use them?”

“Why don’t you want to utilize those systems, sir?” Shannon asked, equally puzzled.

“They are testing our capabilities,” Trent said. “They are only firing at our ships. They are completely ignoring the State ships even as they are being destroyed. I don’t want them to know that we are capable of boosting our shield strength or repairing our armor. I want them to underestimate our defensive capabilities.”

“I see,” Shannon said. “It’s the same with the main cannon. You want them to underestimate our capabilities.”

“You never show an enemy your hand until they force it. Tactical, how are we doing so far?”

“The enemy ships are firing almost one-on-one with our ships so our shields are dropping at a slow rate as well as the rest of the fleet. As long as they are not concentrating their fire on one of our ships, we should be able to hold out for a while longer before our shields collapse.”

“What about their forces? How many have been destroyed?”

“We have destroyed seven destroyers and four cruisers but their defenses are tough.”

“How so?”

“We noticed that the enemy ships appear to deploy a primary shield followed by a secondary shield so it is taking a moment to get through them but the moment their shields are gone, their armor is incredibly thin and it doesn’t take much to punch through.”

“And what about the Vitam fleet?”

“The Vitam fleet has destroyed three destroyers and working on the closest cruiser to their fleet. They’ve sustained no damage as the Kingdom fleet focused on us rather than them.”

“From what I hear, the Vitam fleet can trade blow-for-blow with the Lykan fleet but only if they are in the same numbers. The Vitam fleet needs to get out of here as fast as possible thought to reinforce their defenses as well as resupply.”

“The only problem with that is their flag officer is still on board,” Shannon said. “There is no way we can clear him to depart while we are under fire.”

“Sir,” Chrystal said, “I’m getting new readings. I’ve got multiple target locks from every Lykan ship! The enemy fleet is concentrating their fire on us!”

“Forget what I said about not using the shield boosters! Activate them now!”

“Shield boosters activated. It’s good timing because our shields were starting to deplete faster than before. Beam output has dropped by thirty percent though.”

“Cease firing from the anti-cruiser guns and redirect power to the big guns. Let’s try to take out as many cruisers with those as we can.”

“Aye-aye, sir.”

As Trent watched, the Lykan ships were indeed focusing their artillery cannons at the *Renaldo*. The Lykans must have been wanting to know how much punishment a Republic battleship could take. However, despite the strength of the shields even with the boosters active the shields were slowly draining with the combined firepower of the Lykan ships on them. However, now that the Lykan fleet was focusing its fire on the *Renaldo*, this allowed for the rest of the Republic and State fleets to focus their fire on the remaining Kingdom destroyers and cruisers to help relieve some of the firepower on the battleship.

As the Lykan destroyers and cruisers were being destroyed one after the other by the combined firepower of the Republic and State fleets, the shield boosters on the *Renaldo* started to level out the damage from the impacts on the shields and soon started to replenish faster than they were being damaged. Soon only two Lykan cruisers and four destroyers remained.

“They are outnumbered and outgunned,” Shannon said. “Why are they not retreating?”

“It is because of their programming,” Trent said. “They were no doubt ordered to remain and test our abilities. When their numbers started to reduce, they were probably ordered to take out our ship. In the end, they were effectively on a suicide mission to gather data. No doubt they have been transmitting their combat data this entire time. Because we were forced to use the shield boosters, they now know we can strengthen our shield systems. Thankfully they did not get down to our armor for us to show the armor repairer system as well.”

As the last ship which was a cruiser exploded quickly from the combined beam laser and missile fire, Trent surveyed the wreckage before him. The Lykans were willing to sacrifice ships for data, but these ships had slaves who were no longer themselves on board. Trent was not sure if Bridneo had informed his fleet yet of this development or not but either way, this made Trent sick in the stomach to know what had transpired here.

“Damage report?” Shannon asked.

“There is no damage to the ship,” Chrystal said. “The fleet reports to damage to the armor though some of the destroyers’ shields were less than twenty percent remaining. If the combat had prolonged any further, they would have either used their shield boosters or the shields would have been gone and they would have to rely on their armor.”

Chrystal looks at her scanners again before something else got her attention.

“Hold on,” she said. “I have some wreckage nearby just outside the shields. Checking...”

She pressed a few buttons before the results came in.

“Oh,” she said. “I have spotted the wreckage of at least two camera drones from NBS News. They must have been caught in the crossfire.”

“Then they got a first-hand view of being shot,” Trent said. “Wait, do we know if they were still recording?”

“I can’t tell.”

“Sir,” Ro said, “I have a request from Vice Admiral Bridneo to leave and rejoin his fleet.”

“Permission granted,” Trent said.

“Also, I am getting a message from the Supreme Chancellor. Apparently the camera drones not only recorded, they aired what just happened here to the whole Republic!”

“Oh, no,” Trent said as he rested his forehead in the palm of his left hand in disbelief. “This isn’t going to be good.”

* * * * *

*Main Senate Chamber, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
9:10am, May 12, 5433 A.D. (Next Day)*

“What were you thinking?!”

Drew was not looking forward to what the Senators had to say the following morning with a few of them already screaming at him. Even though he contacted the Senators last night and put the proposal on the table about an alliance with the State, they wanted to do this with as much discretion as possible. They also wanted time to explain to the public about what the situation with the Kingdom and the upcoming war.

The live video footage of the Kingdom fleet exchanging fire with Republic and State ships painted a rather vivid picture to the public of what they were getting involved in.

The situation could really not be helped as no one remembered about those drones at the time the fleets opened fire on each other and that oversight was something that had to be answered for. No one can say who is truly at fault for the situation being the way it was, either. It was already abundantly clear that the Kingdom did not want an alliance with any race in the cluster due to their religious decree. However, now it is up to the government to somehow assure the public’s protection from the Lykans while there is already action being taken during the night to ready a defensive perimeter, they now need to give the public peace of mind.

First things first, though. Drew needed to settle the Senators down. This task alone was going to take a while.

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*Ready Room, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
Planet Tranquillus VIII Orbit, Tranquillus System
9:48am, May 12, 5433 A.D.*

“Sorry to have worried you both.”

Trent sat at his desk as he was looking at his terminal. He had both Laura and Sheryl on the screen as they were a bit worried. They both had seen the footage of the battle that had taken place last night and tried to contact him. However, there was a lot of cleanup to do after the fiasco that had occurred. He sent a message late last night to them as well as to his daughter Amarria to let them know he was okay and that he would talk with them the following morning. They got the message thankfully, though he still needed to talk to Amarria who was at work.

Trent could tell that Laura was still at home but was ready to leave for work while Sheryl was also at her home.

“I could not believe what I had seen,” Laura said. *“I was hoping things were not going to come down to war but last night everyone realized what we got ourselves involved in.”*

“It could not be helped,” Trent said. “The Lykans have it embedded in them that they are the sole rulers of the star cluster appointed by their deity. When a race with that kind of resolve interacts with others, the only result will be conflict. I have not heard of a single race that they have made peace with.”

“What about the Camino Star Empire?” Sheryl asked. *“The Lykans are not fighting them right now.”*

“The Lykans made it clear that they intend to conquer the Empire at some point. Now that they have the forces needed for waging war on multiple fronts, they may renew their conflict with them very soon.”

“Do you think the Republic could form an alliance with both the State and the Empire? If we are all fighting the same enemy this may give us the opportunity to wear out the Kingdom war machine faster than they can renew it.”

“An alliance with the State is the easy part but that is due to several factors, one of which is communication. This is something that the Senate is seriously thinking about. Right now we don’t know how to contact the Empire nor do so in their language. The other problem is that while we know the Kingdom wants to eventually renew their conflict with the Empire, they currently have not done so. The Empire may not want to initiate combat unless provoked. This is why the Senate is hesitant on contacting them because we don’t want to bring someone into a war if we can avoid it.”

“I’ve heard that the Senate is still working out the details involving the State,” Laura said. *“However, the State leadership has agreed to the creation of a star gate that will link Tranquillus to one of their systems to allow for international travel and later trade. All of the other details will follow shortly and be provided to the public.”*

“I heard some of those details as well. That is why my fleet is still here. It will take some time to construct the gate on both ends and calibrate them since the technology is a bit different, though the concept is the same.”

“How long are we talking?”

“If the components are all made at the same time and transported all at once, I would say two months tops on our end. The one within the State though I do not know. I heard however that their construction capabilities are about on par with the Republic’s.”

“*So it will be a while when I see you again?*” Laura said in a disappointed tone.

“Maybe. I heard that they will be sending another fleet to help bolster the defenses here but I don’t know which fleet or who they are sending.”

“*That reminds me,*” Sheryl said, “*I heard somewhere that the Kingdom intentionally spread the State’s forces thin along their original defensive lines. Did that State fleet you came across managed to get back and strengthen their defenses?*”

“Yes. Once that fleet returned to their territory, they bolstered their defensive lines. I’m not sure what the fleet composition is like in the State but if the Kingdom resorted to stretching out the State’s defenses, I can only assume the State has a good size fleet, powerful ships like what we saw, or both.”

“*There is something I don’t get though,*” Laura said. “*If the Kingdom and the State have been at a stalemate for so long, how it is none of our ships were destroyed? I was assuming the Kingdom had a lot of firepower.*”

“They do and from what I was told, they normally focus their firepower on a single target unless they are in close combat which they were not. My guess is they wanted to test our defenses first on each ship to know how they handle against their firepower before they decided to focus their fire on my ship. If they had focused on any other ship first such as a destroyer, we would have suffered losses before their fleet was destroyed. Even a destroyer’s shield boosters and armor repairer systems could only compensate for so much firepower against it.”

“*I doubt they will spread their firepower again from a distance. The next engagement they go into with us, we will no doubt see losses next time.*”

“I know, and I am not looking forward to seeing those reports.”

* * * * *

State Executive Council Room, State Assembly Hall, City of Freedom (translated)
New Vita Orbit, Capital System, Capital of United Vitam State
10:15am, May 12, 5433 A.D.

“Thank you, Vice Admiral Bridneo. Continue the good work.”

The five representatives of each of the five races that form the State sat on a raised arced table. Access to their seats was only available from the back of the room. Anyone who would be addressing what formed the Executive Council from the floor in front of the desk would always have to look up. This was to be a bit more symbolic for those that address the council directly, considering that most lawmaking and representation is done by the Representatives Parliament. Usually the issues addressed to the Executive Council involve finalizing of laws and military action so rarely do individuals address them unless it is something that only their branch handles or they are involved with directly. From the Council’s left, there was Migatun, a male Zaurion who were the large bipedal lizards. To his right was Shiercon, a female Kittrane who were the bipedal felines. Continuing to their right was Miclud, a male Vitam; Shiarmor, a male Esmu who were the bipedal equestrians or horses; and lastly there was Cuborah, a female Arjaf of the snake-like race that have two arms. Each one of them was elected by their race to represent their

kind on the Executive Council much like those on the Representatives Parliament. These races have come to coexist long before the Slave Revolt which allowed them to work together for their freedom.

They received the report from Vice Admiral Bridneo whose fleet came back to the forward defensive line along with other fleets that had spread out just in time for the Lykans to send a massive invasion force against them. While the defense line held, there were significant losses on both sides, though it was clear the loss of life was more severe among State forces considering the near automation techniques of the Lykan forces. Prior to the invasion forces appearing, the Council had also received a report from Bridneo about the Novus Orsa Republic and their willingness to form an alliance. This was great news for the Executive Council and both they as well as the Representatives Parliament were coming up with the initial drafts for an alliance and international trade to present to the Republic Supreme Chancellor and their Senate including a mutual defense agreement against the Lykans. This was a breath of fresh air for the Executive Council who feared that they were the only nation fighting against the Lykans since they had no means to contact the Empire for support.

The one thing the Council was still not happy about was what the Lykans were doing with their people who were still enslaved within the Kingdom and turning them into nothing more than living computer cores. Word about this was already spreading among the State citizens who were both outraged and depressed as their war may no longer matter if their kind can no longer be saved, if everyone or only some of them were being converted into living computer cores either inside ships or are awaiting implantation into a ship's system. However, this horror now puts fear into the citizens that if they cannot stop the Kingdom's assaults and the Lykans eventually succeed in capturing any population of the State, those citizens would go through the same process and be made into living computer cores with no chance of rescue afterwards.

However, the Council did bring hope to the citizens by informing them about the Republic and the fact that the Lykans had declared war on them as well. Knowing now that the Lykans will divert their attention between the State and the Republic, the citizens started feeling a bit more relieved while at the same time curious about the Republic and its culture. The Council had made it clear to the citizens that they will inform them of any information about the Republic that is made available.

"It was good that our forces managed to come back in time to defend our borders," Shiarmor said. "If they hadn't noticed what the Kingdom was doing to our defensive lines on time, the Lykans would have successfully invaded our space."

"However," Cuborah said, "their shipbuilding capabilities are now at full strength no thanks to what they are doing to our brethren. We had built up our navy on the premise that the Lykans would no longer be able to fight at the same level of strength they had prior to the Slave Revolt. Now that we know that they not only have regained their previous fighting strength but possibly exceeded it, we need to think of a more effective strategy in light of our recent losses."

"On the other hand," Migatun said, "with their attention on the Republic now, we might be able to hold our own for a while."

"The only problem with that logic," Shiercon said, "is the fact that they don't know the borders of the Republic with the exception of the Tranquillus System. It could be a while before the Kingdom probes and finds the rest of their border in order to efficiently attack them."

Otherwise, if the Kingdom only focuses on the Tranquillus System, the Republic can focus their defense there and keep the Kingdom at bay for a very long time.”

“Council,” Miclud said, “while I understand your concerns about the war effort, I would rather not take advantage of an ally in thinking that the Kingdom will focus more on them than on us. We have a powerful friend with us for the first time since we formed the State and we need to improve our relationship with them rather than take advantage of them. The Kingdom no doubt will continue its attacks against our forces now that our navy knows to fight harder in order to protect our peoples from becoming computer components. The Kingdom’s stance on the Republic, however, is that they are a pestilence and they are to be terminated instead. Both of our nations are in danger against an enemy force that wants to conquer the entire star cluster in the name of a false deity. I am aware that the stance of the Republic is defense only for the time being, but I can only hope that both our forces can go on the offensive and put an end to the Kingdom once and for all.”

“What about our attempt in contacting the Camino Star Empire?” Migatun asked. “Have we made any progress?”

“No,” Shiercon said. “They have isolated themselves to the point that they do not want any contact with any other race. Even the Republic understands this and does not want to contact them unless absolutely needed. I wish we had their support as well. All three of our nations would be able to overpower the Kingdom’s forces in a joint operation.”

“We can only hope that they can change their mind in the future,” Miclud said. “Now, onto the next matter of business with the Republic...”

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Royal Throne Room, Lykan Royal Palace, City of High Charity (translated)
Lykana Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom
10:46am, May 12, 5433 A.D.

“I am glad you made it back in one piece, Advisor Forneido.”

King Ankorio IV sat on his throne one story up from the ground floor. This was designed to be symbolic and opposing for anyone who came to address his Highness. The throne was completely molded in gold that came from several worlds, a symbolic representation of authority across the worlds of the Kingdom. The three-story tall room was heavily decorated with the walls painted representing the moments of triumph in the history of the Kingdom as well as depictions of servants who were ordained as saints to their faith. Long silver and red colored banners hung from the ceiling to break up the flow and to give it a more majestic feel. Several windows lined the edges between the wall and the arched ceilings.

The king himself was quite aged at over eighty years of age and all of his hair was gray and white. Most Lykans live to be over one hundred and sixty years old. However, his hair was still highly groomed to show that while he was old, he would not be unsightly. His crown was large and made of jewels that were also acquired from several worlds the Lykans had “claimed” to again be symbolic of who rules them all. This outfit was made of at least three layers of robes that were red and silver with gold stitching to accent the attire. This only shows his head while standing with his arms and legs covered but allows for them to be visible when he is sitting.

Several security guards stand watch over him and the entire room along the walls and entrance ways whenever he is in the room.

Usually the room is only used to address the Royal Court as well as dignified guests but sometimes the King's advisors fit into that category. Right now, not only was Advisor Forneido present at the base of the throne bowing on one knee but so was the rest of the Royal Court to hear about the Republic.

"Your Majesty," Forneido said. "Our divine cluster has been invaded by a pestilence. The race that is dominant in the Republic is known as Humans and their kind did not come from the cluster. Instead they came here on a moon of their home planet in another galaxy through a jump portal using the same jump crystals we use. They say it is an accident and most likely it was. However, they gave up on trying to return to their galaxy and instead spread like a disease through the core of our beloved cluster for over three thousand years!"

The whole Royal Court was in a bit of a murmur amongst them as the King showed little emotional change.

"Do we know how many there are and how big this Republic is?" the King asked.

"There are over five trillion of them in the star cluster spread across hundreds of worlds," Forneido said.

Everyone in the room was stunned upon hearing those numbers. There were more Humans than there were Lykans by a huge margin. The King was not very thrilled upon hearing this news.

"Do we know which systems they inhabit?" the king asked.

"While we are only aware at first of the one system that they call Tranquillus, I was able to secretly copy a map of their territory from their database while they were not watching, among other things."

As Forneido said that, he pulled out a device from behind the couple layers of robes he wore.

"I'm not sure if they noticed the download or not," he continued, "but I will have our military strategists look at the information on determine our best plan of attack against these pests."

"You said 'other things' earlier. What else did you get?"

"I also got the genetic code of both the Vice Admiral of the former slaves as well as the Vice Admiral who commanded the battleship of these pests."

"What do you intend to do with their genetic codes?"

"With your permission, Your Majesty, our scientists have been working on the means of infiltration among the former slaves and have developed the technology of cloning along with cybernetics. With this technology, we will be able to create infiltrators who are loyal only to the Lykans who can go in and cause disruption within our enemies' forces or their government."

"I see. Do you already have a course of action to take using these clones at your disposal?"

"The plan is simple though it will take some time to create a suitable clone to infiltrate each nation. However, there is one key player we need to work on before we commit a major offensive against either the former slaves or the pestilence."

"You are talking about the Camino Star Empire, am I correct?"

“Yes, Your Highness.”

“And what do you propose we do about them. We have a cease-fire with the Empire and while it is our goal to eventually conquer their territory, we cannot fight a three-front war against the State, the Republic, and the Empire.”

“I have already thought of a plan on my way back here that will make things easier for the Kingdom to achieve victory over our enemies.”

“I see. Hopefully it is a plan that will succeed compared to our forces failing to invade the State. The Republic knew what we were planning based on our forces’ deployment and alerted the State to this fact. Thus, we failed to conquer the State. We need to remove these Humans as quickly as possible as I foresee their involvement in our war with the State as highly problematic if we are to have any chance of success in retrieving our former slaves.”

“I understand, Your Highness. I will proceed immediately with my plan. You will not be disappointed.”

“Very well, Advisor Forneido. You may proceed.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.”

Forneido got up and headed for the exit right behind him. He grinned as he formulated and finalized his plan in his head. To him, the Republic may be a pestilence but they have also presented an opportunity.

That opportunity was to wipe the Camino Star Empire away along with the Kingdom’s embarrassing defeat by their hands from their history. The Republic will help the Kingdom achieve that goal, whether they want to or not.

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To be continued...
END OF EPISODE I