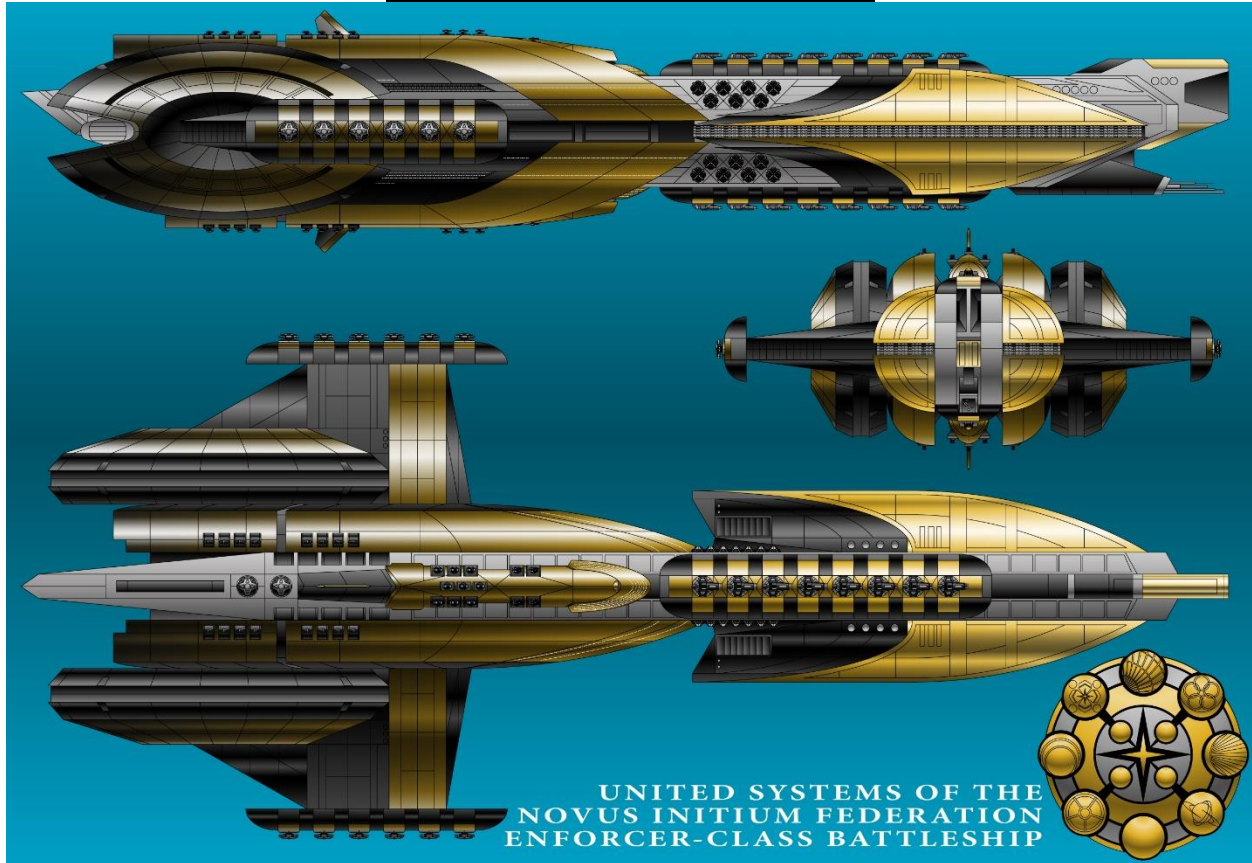


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VIII: What Was Left Behind



PART 10-SAGA EPILOGUE

*Officer Training Classroom #3, Federation Naval Academy, Suburb City of Futuræ
38 Miles East of Luminous, Planet Luminare, Lumen System, Capital of the Republic State
3:00pm, December 12, 5441 A.D. (7 Years Later)*

“That is all for class today.”

As the last bell for the day at the Federation Naval Academy rang to end the afternoon classes, Trent looked out at the class that was leaving for the day. Even after a few years, it was hard to get used to seeing a mix of Humans and Animals in the same room.

More than seven years had passed since “Reunion Day” had occurred. After more than five weeks of trying to restore the star gate network and civilian communications to every state of the Federation that relied on them, the United Systems of the Novus Initium Federation and the Holy Amnon Empire finally held a summit to begin formal relations. The name of the event was proposed by the Empire to put a positive spin on the swap the aliens who were native to the star cluster had pulled, saying that it was a “reunion” of the two parts of Humanity and Animality that resided in two different locations. The aliens were given a new and far more appropriate name than what was provided: Saccularius, which is ancient Latin for “thief” or “swindler.” It was a name that was far more appropriate to call them by due to their actions of deceit and manipulation to steal the Milky Way Galaxy from Humanity and Animality.

It took a while for the Amnon Empire to resume any amount of “normal” in their case. While they had all their planets transported to the star cluster, the psychological effect of seeing a lack of stars made them feel alone and scared. They felt like God had abandoned them in a dark pit for something they have done wrong. The Pope Empress Linda the First did everything in her power to try to convince her people that this was the work of those that stole the Milky Way from them, but some still felt like it was some form of “divine punishment,” resulting in weeks of grieving from many of the citizens. While no formal relations had begun between the Federation and the Amnon Empire, Trent had been requested thanks to Admiral Negrete to speak on behalf of the Federation, to show that they were not alone in the cluster. In Trent’s own words and using a term that would eventually lead to the name of the event, he stated that the children of Earth were finally “reunited” again after more than three thousand years. His speech helped the citizens of the Empire know that they were not alone and that they had brethren that can help them with their new lives in the star cluster. Trent was never one for such speeches, but in a way, he felt like this was his way to atone for his own failure from preventing this from happening.

While his speech occurred when the Federation was still recovering from the loss of the crystals, Trent knew that once everything was back to normal, he was going to retire from active service. He wanted to remain with the military, so he decided to do the next best thing. There was already word that the Federation was looking at making a naval academy in the new suburb of Futuræ east of Luminous. He offered to be an instructor at the academy, and instead was given the position of head administrator because of his rank. He would still teach classes because of his experience in different fields, but he restricted those for officer trainees only. It meant that he could go home every day after the last class is dismissed for the day. Cadets and officer trainees stayed at the academy, but he did not have to since he lived locally and because of his position.

Because he was leaving the *Marshal*, his crew threw him a farewell party, despite the fact he said he was not going anywhere for a while. Trent made it clear to his bridge officers that he meant what he said at that time. However, his failure and his rage for the android that attacked him had blinded him of their true objective and left him with mental scars that would not simply go away. His failed marriage with his ex-wife was another indicator that he needed to step down and take better control of his life, especially since he wanted to pursue his relationship with Shibuya. He did drop a surprise on Captain Dani by promoting her to Rear Admiral, a promotion that was already approved by the Admiralty after Trent informed them of what he wanted to do going forward. He wanted the crew to continue to follow someone they trust, and Dani was the perfect choice for the role. Trent would leave it up to her to decide who will be her new commanding officer, provided the Admiralty do not pull the same stunt they did with Shannon after he promoted her by dropping a new commanding officer on her from another ship.

However, he would no longer be driving home alone.

After all the trainees in his class left, Shibuya walked into the class with her briefcase and purse wearing her Federation uniform like Trent was wearing. He could see that she had already cleaned up after her physical training class earlier in the day. Trent smiled as she entered the classroom. She was quick to return the smile.

“How was your class today?” Shibuya said. “Found any prospective officers that need to be fast tracked, yet?”

“Not with this semester so far,” Trent said, sounding slightly disappointed. “Their finals are next week and so far, their scores are looking quite good. I do have a couple of smart trainees but there are a couple that are lagging. I may have to offer the option of extra classes to assist them. They have the smarts, but I think their confidence in their performance may be lacking.”

“Do not tell me you are hosting it during the winter break again.”

“No, not this time. I brought it up with another instructor who has been teaching those same trainees and he offered to help this time if needed.”

“That is good. I do not need another winter break that you are going to be working through again.”

Shibuya came up to Trent, used her left hand to push Trent’s face towards her, and give him a kiss on the lips. Trent was not going to complain to his beautiful wife about kissing in the classroom after the class let out.

Prior to Reunion Day, Shibuya was busy getting her affairs in order with the Union and its military. She wanted to see about moving to the Republic and securing a job in the Republic so that she could be close to Trent. After the events on Reunion Day, however, the Republic was in a state of emergency along with the other nations after their star gates had gone down. She did receive a message from Trent about what happened and that he was still thinking about her. He also told her what was going on and that he was going to be busy for a good number of weeks to help get the Republic back to normal along with the other nations. She sent a message back, saying she will be waiting when he was done.

Not long after the star gates were restored, the new Federation’s Council elected to open academies at the capitals of each of the new states. When the time came to apply for the positions at each academy, Shibuya applied as a physical fitness instructor at the academy in Futuræ after hearing Trent was going to be both an instructor and administrator there. Her application was approved, and she moved to Luminaire and into his house. After three months of dating, Trent proposed to Shibuya and she said “yes.” They got married at a military wedding four months later, being the first couple of different species to marry outside the Union.

It did not take long for Shibuya to get pregnant, but what Trent and Shibuya were not expecting were to have twin girls! They named them Nadia and Natsuki, both names meaning “hope.” When the girls were born, they looked Human but with a few exceptions. The obvious exceptions at first glance were the ears and tail each one had that looked like that of a Skunk. Later when they started to grow hair on their heads and tails, the familiar black with white stripes began to appear. Later checkups showed that the girls were perfectly healthy, though fertility could not be evaluated until they hit puberty. The one thing Trent was concerned with is if they have a Skunk’s scent glands as well, knowing that if they were teased, it was not going to go well for those doing the teasing.

During a checkup when they reached five-years-old last year, the doctor performed a scan on them at the parents’ request. It was confirmed that both girls had the scent glands, though whether the girls were aware of their arsenal or not remained to be seen.

While they were growing up, Amarria volunteered during the day to look after her little half-sisters until they were old enough to go to daycare. Once in daycare, Amarria after she got off work from the Central Library would pick them up to take them home and watch over them until Trent and Shibuya got home from work. Amarria has grown quite fond of her half-sisters over the years and from what they could tell, it looked like they were fond of her, too, though Amarria would be old enough to be their mother amusingly.

As they kissed, Trent’s phone went off. Trent had to break off the kiss, much to both he and Shibuya’s displeasure and pulled his phone out of his pocket. The caller identification showed that it was Amarria who was calling. It was odd of her to call right now unless something had happened, but he answered it to see if there was a problem.

“Trent, speaking,” he said.

The first response Trent heard was coughing and gagging. It was loud enough through the earpiece that even Shibuya heard it and gave a perplexed look on her face. Trent put it on speaker for the two of them to hear.

"Dad?" Amarria finally said between the coughing and gagging.

"Amarria?" Trent said. "Is everything okay?"

"Does it sound like everything is okay?!"

"Calm down and tell me what is going on?"

"I was about to give the girls a bath when they decided to run around the house naked. I chased after them and eventually they went outside where they had a nasty surprise for me. Can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead," Trent said, starting to become concerned about the "surprise" Nadia and Natsuki had for Amarria.

"Did you know the girls had Skunk scent glands?"

"Yes, I...oh, no."

"Yeah, those two little pranksters are aware of their arsenal. I followed them outside into the back yard, but they were on all fours, tails up and fur fanned out with their butts towards me. They had the most devilish grins on their faces. I had completely forgotten what you told me about Skunks for a moment and approached them, not knowing what they had planned. That was when I got a double dose of their spray."

"How bad did you get it?" Shibuya asked.

"I will give you this, they knew how to aim those deep red nozzles. They both hit me in the face right in the eyes, nose, and mouth."

Shibuya closed her eyes and shook her head in disbelief.

"Let me guess," Shibuya said, "in that same order, you were temporarily blind, gagging, and vomiting?"

"Precisely. The girls thought it was funny at first as I heard them laugh, but my reaction after getting hit and the rancid smell made them realize that it was not funny at all what they did to me."

"I am wondering how they found out about their arsenal," Trent said. "We will deal with that later. Shibuya, what does she need to get that stuff off her?"

"I will tell her, but we will do it on the way home," Shibuya said as she took Trent's phone and held it close as they walked out of the classroom. "Amarria, whatever you do, do not go inside the house. That smell lingers for a long time even after it is removed, and it is going to spread throughout our neighborhood, but we do not need it inside. Where are the girls right now and what are they doing?"

"They are still outside with me, but I can tell they are upset at what they did. They did apologize but I will leave that up to you as to what to do with them when you get here. They are both still naked and it is going to get cold in a few hours. I am on all fours just in case I have to hurl again from that rancid spray."

"Put me on speaker, please. I want them to hear me."

Trent and Shibuya walked outside the building towards the parking lot. Trent's car was parked out front close to the entrance thanks to reserved parking.

"You are on speaker now," Amarria said.

Once they were in the car and Trent started up the vehicle, the call was channeled through the car audio for both Trent and Shibuya to hear. Trent began to pull out of the parking lot to head home.

“Girls?” Shibuya asked. “Can you hear me?”

“Yes,” both girls said, the sound of sadness and crying in their voices.

“We will discuss your actions later. Right now, I need you two to go inside, get dressed, and head into mommy’s bathroom. There is a bottle beneath the sink called ‘Musk Remover.’ I want you to get it, a full roll of paper towels from the kitchen, and a trash bag. Bring it to Amarria as fast as you can, understand?”

“Yes, mommy,” the girls said in near unison.

Trent and Shibuya heard feet moving through the grass and a door opening nearby over the phone.

“Amarria?” Shibuya asked.

“*They are inside and heading upstairs from what I can hear,*” Amarria said.

“Good. This stuff was specially formulated to remove Skunk spray, but it will take a few applications to get the residue off. Unfortunately, the smell will remain for a few days.”

“*Ugh. I cannot go home or to work smelling like this.*”

“It is still early in the afternoon. I can go with you if you want to your place to get a few things. My car is a convertible, so we can drive with the top down. We can leave once I arrive. If you can call into work and explain what happened, I can verify your story.”

“*I will tell them to go look up Skunks in the library and they will get a good idea why.*”

“I am so sorry my girls did that to you.”

“*They are sorry, too. At least I know now to watch out for their business end.*”

“I hope you never have to look at that part of them again, except when giving them a bath. Of course, that is provided you still want to watch them before we get home when we work after this?”

“*They are still my half-sisters, and while I am upset with them right now, I still love them. I will still keep watch over them while you two are at work.*”

Trent and Shibuya could hear Amarria coughing.

“*This stuff smells so bad.*”

Trent and Shibuya tried not to laugh at Amarria’s discomfort. They soon heard the back door open and two pairs of footsteps again.

“*The girls are back with the stuff and the paper towels,*” Amarria said. “*Their faces scrunched up when they came near me. I guess they do not like their own perfume.*”

“Am I still on speaker?” Shibuya asked.

“Yes.”

“Girls, that smell came from you. What you used is not meant for fun like what you did just now. It is a deterrent to keep people from harming you, like pepper spray that local law enforcement uses. We will talk about your punishment later, but if you help Amarria with getting rid of the mess you made and cleaning her up, I will leave it up to her to decide since she was your victim. Does that sound fair to you all?”

“Yes, mommy,” the girls said.

“*I find that a fair condition,*” Amarria said.

“Alright. I hate to say this, but you will need to take off your shirt, Amarria. I am fairly sure it got hit as well and it will take a lot just to get the smell out, much less the stain.”

“*I understand. The girls and I will take care of what we can before you arrive, but knowing them, I feel confident that they will clean up as much as they can.*”

“Make sure you make use of the water hose as well to wash the stuff off between applications. It is the closest thing to a bath you can get outside. We will be home shortly.”

“Alright, we will see you soon.”

Amarria hung up and Shibuya let out a heavy sigh.

“I had hoped that Amarria would never have to go through that with the girls,” Shibuya said. “It took her so long to get used to my presence, and she loves her half-sisters.”

“Amarria will be fine,” Trent said. “I am still concerned with how the girls learned about their arsenal, but there is a chance they were curious about their skunk origins and researched it. The content access from the Central Library is free, after all.”

“That is true. I will say this to you though. You better hope our girls are able to clean her up really well.”

“I know. You told me the description of the smell when I was in sickbay on the *Marshal* seven years ago. I had hoped I would never smell that firsthand, but it looks like I do not have a choice now, huh?”

“I guess not. Do you have any idea what kind of punishment Amarria may have in store with the girls?”

“If you are worried it will be physical, I would not worry. I do not think she wants to be harsh in punishing them. We could tell that the girls were not being malicious in their intent. They thought it would be fun and amusing to spray her, but I guess they did not know how bad that idea was or that it was no longer funny anymore. They will learn from this.”

“Yeah, but if she is staying with us for a while, we may have to open up some windows for a while.”

“During winter? It is going to get cold during the night.”

“It will be better than the smell lingering inside the house for a while.”

“Fine. We will see what we can do when we get home.”

As the two of them continued down the highway towards home, Trent remembered again when Shibuya described the smell to both him and Captain Dani in Sickbay after the Saccularius android attacked him. He also remembered what else had occurred since then, reflecting on more of the past seven years involving the Federation and the Empire.

After the Federation was formed, Drew continued to serve as Supreme Chancellor of the Republic State for the remainder of his term. The last Trent had heard, he was invited to the Amnon Empire to serve as ambassador for the Federation for the following four years to help improve relations between the nations. Thanks to his efforts in his new role, he brokered a deal for ships from both nations to be exchanged to provide both variety and understanding of the changes and developments both nations had gone through. Eventually, those ships were made a part of the nations they were sent to and serve as unique reminders that while they as the descendants of Earth are still separated by national lines, they are here in this cluster together.

On the topic of Earth, while it took longer to make the necessary preparations primarily due to adjusting for the transition of those star systems to the star cluster, Luna was finally returned to its original orbit over Earth five years ago. It took a while for the effects of Luna’s return to take hold and the planet’s daily rotation returned to normal. Many had their concerns about how this will affect the wildlife that had grown there after they had adjusted to shortened days, but it was decided to leave the planet alone for now until Humanity and Animality felt the need to repopulate the planet again.

After Luna was returned to Earth, the Federation saw an interesting influx of visitors from the Empire. They were not migrating, but they were interested to see and hear about the various religions that were based on and evolved from old Earth religions. Some visited the capital of the Draco, Union, and Lykan states, but most of them visited High Sanctus, the home

of all the religions in the Republic State. Many would call it a pilgrimage for those that came. Thankfully, no one caused any trouble and Trent did not expect there to be any. They were all genuinely curious about those religions and their developments. The same was said for those that went to visit the Amnon Empire to understand its religion as well and how it came to be after the original New Unity Government fell in the Milky Way. Everyone in the star cluster in some form or another had fought wars based on religion, but they did not want to repeat those mistakes over such differences again.

To correct what had happened to those Humans and Animals that were affected by continued exposure to the MAR in the Milky Way that the Empire tried to help and fix, the Federation offered its expertise in the fields of genetics from specialists in the Tenebris State and cybernetics from the Camino State. The Empire's efforts did show improvement of their "slaves'" mental capacities, but they were still far from being developed enough compared to current Humans and Animals. Cybernetics including an implanted cybernetic "brain" which replaced and linked parts of the brain for increased processing helped those from teenagers to adults up to forty years of age, the limit that brains will be able to adjust to those changes. Children would later get those cybernetics as well once their brains started to develop upon puberty. Genetics were used to help future babies be more developed upon birth, thus not requiring cybernetics. Several were born from volunteering parents, and their mental development was on par with Humans and Animals from the Empire and the Federation. While they are still being monitored, every child born this way is healthy and active, showing the same level of intelligence as those their same age from other nations.

While driving down the highway that was a loop around the city of Luminous, Trent took a quick glance towards the downtown area and noticed the newest skyscraper built not too far from the Republic Parliament Building. The new building would serve as the administration of the Federation as well as where the Federation Council will meet. The ambassador of the Empire would also join in on those meetings in case there was some matter that needed to be brought up with the Federation or a state specifically.

Trent had heard from Amarria that Laura is doing quite well. Laura got remarried about two years ago. From what he had heard, she was more focused on her career at the news station for a long while before she started dating again. Amarria still visits with her mother and her new stepfather, though it is usually with her mom for lunch before she goes to pick up Nadia and Natsuki from daycare. Laura has never met the twins, but Amarria has stated that Laura had no interest in meeting the children of her ex-husband. It was not in a malicious or vengeful tone according to Amarria. Laura did not say specifically, but Amarria said she could tell that Laura was feeling a little depressed. While Trent knows why Laura cannot have another child, it made Trent wonder if Laura wished she could have another child with her new husband. There was no way Laura was going to come out and say that to Amarria knowing that word would eventually reach Trent. All Trent could hope for is that she is happy with her life with her new husband.

Trent soon got off at the exit closest to their home and made their way through a few back streets until they reached the residential street and gate that would take them up the mountainside towards their neighborhood. After they passed through the gate and made their way through the streets towards home, they soon reached their house and pulled into the driveway, opening the garage door. As soon as the vehicle was in the garage and Trent turned off the car, they opened the doors to the car to get out.

As soon as the car doors were opened, the two of them got a whiff of the putrid Skunk spray smell in the air.

“Great Maker!” Trent said as he covered his nose. “That smells worse than what you described to me before!”

“I told you it was potent,” Shibuya said as she covered her nose as well. “Imagine how bad it is if it sticks to you in its concentrated form.”

“I would rather not, especially after how Amarria reacted on the phone. If that smell is in the air, our neighbors are going to start complaining soon if they have not done so already. Let us see how the clean-up is going.”

Trent came around the car and headed for the door inside, but not before he closed the garage door first. He wanted to keep as much of the putrid smell out of the house as possible. Once the garage door was closed, Trent and Shibuya quickly got in the house as fast as possible and shut the door. Their effort was in vain as the faint trace of the smell was already in the house. Trent tried to breathe as little as possible of the foul odor.

“I forgot that the girls came in to get the stuff needed to clean Amarria,” Shibuya said. “The smell must have come in at that time.”

“That would explain it,” Trent said as he headed to the stairway heading down near the front living room. “Let us head downstairs through the media room. We can close the door at the top of the stairway to keep as much of the smell out if it gets in.”

“So, do you still love our two little stinkers?” Shibuya said jokingly as she followed behind Trent towards the stairs.

“Not funny, Shibuya,” Trent said as he made his way down the stairs.

Shibuya closed the door behind her as they made their way down to the media room. The closer they got, the more it smelled. Once they reached the media room, they could see outside the large windows near the door out into the backyard. Amarria was on her knees with her shirt off including her bra, but her back was turned towards the windows and she looked like she was using her arms to cover herself. Trent and Shibuya could see the girls with her and can identify them based on hair length. Nadia who had short hair was wiping Amarria’s face with a paper towel, her other hand holding a can of the musk remover. There was a trash bag next to her that was already half full. The paper towels were smeared with yellow or gold-colored substance that was on Amarria’s face, which must have been the Skunk spray. Natsuki who had the long hair was holding the water hose to wash Amarria’s face between applications of the musk remover. Both girls were looking concerned as they were cleaning Amarria’s face. Trent could only assume that they were hoping their spray would come off easily, but they were quickly finding out that their spray does not come off easily as they had hoped.

Trent opened the door and the full force of the potent putrid aroma hit his nose as it was more concentrated than before. Trent almost gagged when he smelled it. The girls noticed him and Shibuya, and immediately were scared. Amarria only turned her head, trying to avoid turning around completely considering the level of undress she was in.

“Dad?” Amarria asked.

“It is me and Shibuya,” Trent said. “I will not come out since you are topless. How are things going?”

“Daddy?” Nadia said. “It is not coming off easily.”

The girls looked like they were on the verge of tears again. Shibuya came out the door and approached Amarria, going around to her front.

“Let me see,” Shibuya said as she squatted down and looked at Amarria’s face. “It is coming off, but the spray is sticky, girls. I do not need to go into the science of it right now, but you are doing a good job thus far.”

“We are so sorry,” Natsuki said, crying. “We were playing around and thought it would be a good joke. We did not know this was going to happen. Honest.”

“Girls,” Trent said, squatting from the door. “Listen to me. I only want to know one thing. I promise I will not get mad at you no matter the answer, but how did you know that you could spray like you did? I know your mom did not teach you this, at least not yet.”

Nadia and Natsuki looked at each other, still crying, before Nadia looked at Trent.

“One of the boys in our daycare said we had a fun ability,” Nadia said. “He said that we have the means to spray someone from our butts. He also said it would be a great joke to play on our parents or sister.”

Trent took a deep breath. How did a child from the daycare know this fact about Skunks at their age? The girls saw that he was getting upset and were starting to worry. Trent quickly noticed that his expression was being misinterpreted by them.

“Do not worry, girls,” Trent said. “You were misled, and I cannot blame you for that. As you can see, it is not a joke and I know Amarria did not find it funny. Do you know which boy it was that told you this?”

“Yes,” Natsuki said.

“Good. Tomorrow, I will take you two up to the daycare and I want you to point him out to me. I will talk with the people at the daycare and have them contact his parents for them to handle his actions. Are you two going to be okay with that?”

“But then we will be called tattletales,” Nadia said. “No one will want to be friends with us if we tattle on him.”

“His actions and false information caused us to deal with this situation. Amarria has to miss work for a while and cannot go home due to the smell.”

“If that is the case,” Amarria said, “I can watch over them for the next few days. Besides, I think their punishment may keep them away from the daycare for a while.”

“Oh?” Trent asked. “You already have a suitable punishment in mind?”

Nadia and Natsuki looked to be worried, but Amarria looked to have a slight grin on her face from what Trent could see from his angle.

“Shibuya,” Amarria said, “could you step back for a moment so that I can talk to the girls for a moment?”

Shibuya was a bit puzzled by the request but got up on her feet.

“Okay?” Shibuya said as she backed up a few feet.

“Girls,” Amarria said as she looked between the twins. “Set the stuff down and come to me, please.”

Nadia and Natsuki put down the items in their hands and approached Amarria, fearing what their punishment was going to be. They stopped a couple of feet from her, either out of fear, the smell, or both.

“Come closer,” Amarria said.

The girls were a little reluctant but stepped closer. They were now more afraid and crying more than ever. Amarria took a deep breath, though the aroma made it clear she was reluctant to breathe in any more of the stench.

“Take a big whiff, girls,” Amarria said.

The twins did so, and immediately looked disgusted. They stayed put, though.

“That does not smell good, does it?” Amarria asked. “As your parents have told you, you possess a potent weapon, but it should only be used to defend yourselves if you are threatened. It is not a joke or to have fun with, and you can get in serious trouble using it. You understand?”

Both girls shook their head in agreement with what Amarria said.

“Good. Do you promise never to use it again unless you are being threatened by someone who wishes to harm you?”

“We promise,” the twins said in unison.

“Good, but you are not off the hook yet. I have decided on your punishment, and I know you are not going to like it.”

Trent could tell that there was a hint of a laugh in Amarria’s voice and began to wonder what she had planned. The girls looked like they were scared, and their tails’ fur was fanned out from their fear.

“As your punishment for spraying me...” Amarria started to say.

Amarria suddenly reached out to the girls, grabbing them around the waist and pulling them close to her. She planted their faces against hers and began rubbing the remaining Skunk spray that was on her face onto theirs!

“...You get to share the stink you made with me!” Amarria finished, laughing.

“EEWWWW!!!” the twins said, trying to pull themselves away from Amarria to avoid getting their own Skunk spray on their faces.

Shibuya was in shock but started to laugh at the punishment Amarria had in mind. Trent, however, was starting to get upset at what Amarria was doing.

“Amarria!” Trent said as he stood back up. “The girls have not had their baths yet! We cannot have them come upstairs to their room with that on them!”

“I guess they should have cleaned me off better like their mom said, huh?” Amarria said, still laughing and rubbing her face onto the twins’ faces.

Trent did not realize that this was what Amarria would have in mind over the phone. She must have thought about their punishment and waited to see how well they would clean her up before delivering it. Trent did not know whether to be impressed with her cleverness or be upset that this was the punishment she had in mind.

After a moment, she let go of the twins who quickly backed away in disgust of their new facial application courtesy of Amarria. They tried to get the spray residue off of their faces, but it began to smear on their hands and they started to feel sick, knowing rubbing it anywhere else will just make it worse for them.

“Well,” Amarria said, “I think they learned their lesson how bad it is to spray someone. I guess they can sleep in the media room with me and we can share in the stink together!”

Shibuya was trying to hold back her laugh but was doing a poor job doing so. Trent began to feel sorry for the twins, knowing that was a punishment worse than anything he could think of. Trent cleared his throat, though breathing in any more of the foul putrid stench was starting to make him gag.

“Shibuya,” Trent said, “can you help out here for the sake of privacy? I will go ahead and get the media room ready for a sleepover, if not quarantine.”

“Of course,” Shibuya said, still laughing. “Let me go and get changed really quick. We are going to need to set up a large bath to get this spray off them.”

“I will get the inflatable pool and some warm to hot water to fill it with. Do we have enough musk remover for something like this?”

“We have other chemicals that will do the job just as good. I will grab them while you get the pool. You may want to change too.”

“Of course, but I have this feeling that this stench is going to permeate our uniforms for a while. We are going to need to wash their clothes as well.”

“I will handle that. For now, let us get what we need so that we can begin ‘Operation Clean Up the Stinkers!’”

Trent laughed out loud at Shibuya calling this by an operation name, though when he breathed in, the large amount of stench he inhaled almost made him gag again.

“I would have gone with ‘Operation Stink Bombed,’” he said, “but I am not about to argue code names right now. Let us get the stuff and get this done. I have had enough of the stench to last me a while.”

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*Private Residence of Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of the Republic State
6:02pm, December 12, 5441 A.D.*

“I just delivered their dinners.”

Trent came back to the kitchen, taking off the face mask he wore when he went down to the media room where all three of his daughters were. They were having some fun watching some movies that were children-friendly and bonding. The twins were feeling better, though the smell was still getting to them. Shibuya gave them as good of a bath as possible and it did work well to remove the twins’ Skunk spray, but the smell according to her will linger for a few days before it can completely dissipate. They will have to bath with the same stuff they used to get the spray off for the next few days to accomplish this.

Trent set up an atmospheric barrier at the door to the stairs that lead to the media room to prevent the smell from spreading throughout the house. The wind will dispel the smell that was outside away, but having the smell contained inside the house only made it worse by making it concentrated in one room. They would have to open the windows during the day for a few days.

Shibuya, who was between the kitchen island and the stove, laughed a little after Trent removed the mask and placed it on the island. He took a deep breath as the air was getting better upstairs thanks to the numerous lit scented candles and air fresheners releasing their fragrance.

“How are they down there?” Shibuya asked.

“Their stinking selves are doing just fine suffering together,” Trent said. “I got the name of the boy that told the twins about their sprays. When I go to the daycare tomorrow, I am going to have a talk with the employees there and see if they can get me in touch with that boy’s parents about what happened.”

“The boy is going to probably lie about it to his parents.”

“Most likely, but considering the girls said there were witnesses and I have a specific name, it will be hard for him to do so. He had to know about their sprays, so any search history at home will make it easy to find if he knew or not.”

“I know it took a while to get them cleaned up that we still have not gone over to Amarria’s place to get her a change of clothes for the next few days. Do you want to head over there after rush hour clears up?”

“We might as well. We can leave in the next twenty minutes since we will not be fighting traffic going towards downtown. I can send her a message, but I know we will need the key.”

“She hangs her keys by the garage. We can grab them and go.”

“That is good to know. I thought for a moment that I would have to put the mask back on to go retrieve them from her. Great Maker, I had no idea the smell of a Skunk’s spray was that bad or putrid.”

“Does that warning I gave you about spraying you seven years ago make more sense now?” Shibuya said with a smile.

Trent looked back with a straight face.

“If I had known the effects it would cause,” Trent said, “I would have taken your threat more seriously.”

Shibuya laughed a little.

“You mean to say you did not?” Shibuya asked.

“I figured that you and I would never have to come to that point. I took a gamble with you, and I won.”

Trent winked at Shibuya who only shook her head in disbelief while laughing slightly.

“You may not have had the best of luck during that time when it came to missions,” Shibuya said, “but you did with me, for better or for worse.”

“After the unholy terror our two daughters unleashed on Amarria this afternoon, I hope that is the worst of it.”

Shibuya laughed again.

“As you said,” Shibuya said, “I think they learned their lesson from this experience.”

“Did you ever go through the same thing when you were a child?” Trent asked.

“Well, my parents had us go out to an airtight chamber for me to learn to use my spray against trash that was to be incinerated. My spray smelled far worse than the trash, so it was not hard to miss that smell.”

“Have you ever used it afterwards?”

“As I mentioned, my family lived in space stations. If any of us ever sprayed inside a station, it would be very hard to go unnoticed.”

“That does not exactly answer the question.”

“Okay. I did once against a bully, a male Wolf, when I was nine. He had no idea what a Skunk could do, and I let loose on him after he threatened me.”

“I guess he learned his lesson after one spray, huh?”

“It...was not just one time.”

Trent widened his eyes after hearing those words from Shibuya.

“No,” Trent said. “Tell me you did not fire more than once at him.”

“He went down after I scored a direct hit in his eyes which blinded him,” Shibuya said. “He was screaming in pain from the sting in his eyes and the smell, but I was so infuriated with him that I did not stop there. I wanted him to remember to never mess with me again. While he was on the ground trying to rub his eyes, I stood over him and delivered another shot right into his nose at close-range. As he grabbed his nose in pain, I delivered a third shot directly into his mouth. He was blind, gagging, and vomiting while his nose, throat, and lungs were on fire.”

“Great Maker! You were brutal!”

“Yeah, but his screams after my first shot got the attention of station security. By the time they got there, I had just finished my third shot. It took an EVA team to get into that area to retrieve him. Even though I was gone, I was already identified, and my parents were contacted. I got in a lot of trouble for that. One shot was self-defense, but three shots would be considered assault with a lethal weapon. He was in a coma and on a ventilator after he passed out from lack of oxygen. Because I was a minor, I did not face charges as such. Instead, the judge had ordered that I have my glands removed.”

“Wait, are you saying they are gone?”

“No, my parents requested to be reassigned to another post as an alternative.”

“They did that for you?”

“A Skunk’s scent glands are what make a Skunk who they are. However, the Union justice system does not see it that way. If we were civilians, I would not have my glands. However, if moving to another location is a suitable alternative because of my parents being in the military, then it usually goes in favor of the military’s decision. However, my parents were not about to let me off the hook for my actions. I was punished by a severe whooping and I was grounded for two months.”

“What about the Wolf that bullied you?”

“I never heard from him again, but I can tell you now that I doubt he will ever mess with a Skunk again.”

“I am sure he would not. Compared to what you went through as a child, we were very lenient with our daughters.”

“Our daughters learned their mistake quickly. I did not. That was why I was far more compassionate with what they went through. Granted, Amarria probably wished it did not happen at all since she did not deserve it but having her decide their punishment seems to have brought them even closer together than ever before. Your daughter Amarria is a very kind person and a loving half-sister to the twins. I hope in time she will come to accept me more.”

“I think she already does. She just has not said it yet.”

“You think so?”

“I know we have been married for almost six years, but I think during that time, she has come to view you as a loving mother to both her and the twins. Of course, I am only assuming her feelings based on how much she has opened towards you and the twins. One day, she will tell you herself how she feels. She is still torn between you and her real mother just like how she is between me and my ex-wife’s new husband. That is not an easy thing to live with.”

“I guess not. I understand, though. At least she is not pushing me and the twins away.”

“I still remember when Amarria saw the twins for the first time. She was shocked by their Skunk-like features, but she knew she was related to them by blood. She always wanted to have siblings, but after my ex-wife had Amarria, she did not want another one again.”

“So, is that why she is taking to the twins so readily?”

“I would say so. I am glad that she is not pushing them away despite being sprayed by them. I sincerely believe she loves them too much to ever do that to them. I can only hope that she will love you as much as her real mother. I am sure she will eventually speak to you about it, but that will be on her own time. Now, we better grab a bite before we head over to her place.”

“Already made,” Shibuya said before she turned around behind her.

She grabbed two plates off the opposite counter and turned back around. She had cooked up a few corndogs for each of them, the same meal Trent took down to the girls. She came around to the kitchen table. Two glasses of water were already there as she set the plates down.

“Sorry if this was not what you were expecting tonight,” Shibuya said. “However, I was not expecting to rush home and clean off Skunk spray off Amarria.”

“It is not a problem,” Trent said as he and Shibuya sat at the table. “We can eat these quickly enough and be out the door on time. Let me send a message to Amarria to let her know what we are doing and if she needs anything else from her house really quick.”

Trent took out his phone and quickly typed up a message to Amarria about their plans. He then sent it and set it on the table. This was not how he expected the rest of his day to go, but it could have been worse. He could have been sprayed instead. Trent almost gagged at the thought.

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*Private Residence of Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of the Republic State
7:34am, December 17, 5441 A.D. (5 Days Later)*

“The smell is finally gone.”

Trent came down to the media room to check up on his daughters who were still asleep. Every day for the past five days, they opened the door outside from the media room to let the smell disperse into the open air. They had to shower three times a day to get as much of the spray as they could off them. Thanks to their continuing efforts, the smell was finally gone.

Trent was as quiet as he could be as he came down the stairs, knowing that they could wake up any moment. It was Trent and Shibuya’s day off and Shibuya was upstairs making breakfast for everyone. As Trent approached the sofa bed they were sleeping on, they were under the covers with Amarria in the middle on her back, and the twins on each side. Nadia was pressed against Amarria’s right side with her right arm over Amarria’s chest. Natsuki, however, was sprawled out on her back on Amarria’s left side with her mouth open and drooling a little. The morning light from outside was starting to flood the room.

Trent took out his phone and took a quick photo, making sure the flash was off. After taking the memorable photo and putting the phone back in his pocket, he sat down on the right side of the bed. The shift of the bed from his weight caused all three to groan a little. They slowly woke up, rubbing the sleep from their eyes before they noticed Trent sitting on the bed. They also quickly noticed that he was not wearing a mask this time.

“Rise and shine, sleepy heads,” Trent said with a smile. “Breakfast will be ready soon, and the smell is gone. Your quarantine is over. You can come up now.”

Natsuki, the closest to him, got up and practically pounced on Trent.

“Morning, daddy!” she said.

Nadia was starting to get jealous as she got out of bed on the left side and came around to Trent’s right side, hugging him.

“Good morning, daddy!” Nadia said.

Amarria sat up on the bed.

“I bet you missed that when I was younger,” Amarria said with a smile.

“I do,” Trent said, “but you all seem to have gotten closer with this experience.”

Natsuki backed away slightly from Trent for a moment.

“Amarria has taught us a lot of things,” Natsuki said. “She told us more about our ancestors, both Human and Skunk.”

Trent raised his right eyebrow as he looked at Amarria.

“Oh, did she?” Trent asked before looking back at Natsuki.

“She did,” Natsuki continued. “We now know why Skunks were feared by predators and what our spray was meant to do. We promise that we will never spray for fun or out of...uh...”

“Malicious,” Amarria whispered.

“Right, out of malicious intent.”

“I hope you know what that word means,” Trent said, “but I think you may have a better appreciation for what you possess. I wanted to wait until the smell was gone, but I talked with that boy’s parents. He is apparently some sort of prankster with the other children, playing tricks on them. When he looked up what you were, he thought it would be funny if you sprayed your parents. Instead, you sprayed Amarria. The parents did apologize and pulled their son from the daycare. I already told the daycare what happened, and they will keep a better eye on you and the

other children. I already told them that you have learned your lesson with us and that you will not spray anyone unless you are being threatened or you are really scared of someone. Do you understand, girls?"

"Yes, daddy," the twins said in unison.

Nadia suddenly pulled away from Trent. Trent looked to his right and down at her.

"Does that mean that Amarria is going home today?" Nadia asked with a look of worry on her face.

"That is a good question," Trent said as he looked over at Amarria.

Amarria gave Trent a look like she was suddenly forced to answer Nadia's question. Amarria looked at Natsuki and Nadia who were showing a look of concern on their faces as they looked back at her.

"Sisters," Amarria said, "I have to go home and take care of some business that I had to put off because of what happened."

Natsuki let go of Trent and pounced on Amarria, hugging Amarria around the neck and putting her head on Amarria's left shoulder. Amarria, while shocked, smiled and put her arms around Natsuki.

"I do not want you to go," Natsuki said.

Nadia let go of Trent as well and went around the bed to give Amarria a hug from her right side. Amarria moved her right arm off Natsuki and around Nadia.

"Please do not go," Nadia said, her face muffled.

"Sisters," Amarria said while on the verge of tears. "You see me almost every day. It is not like I am going away forever, you know."

Trent was now the one fighting the tears.

"Girls," Trent said, "Amarria has a job just like mommy and daddy do. Now, mommy and daddy will be off the next few weeks because of the holiday season. If you want, we can take you to where Amarria works so you can see for yourselves."

The twins turned to look at Trent, their eyes glowing with hope. They turned to look at Amarria again.

"We can visit you at work?" Nadia asked.

Amarria smiled.

"You can," Amarria said, "but I told you earlier about the most important rule of the Central Library, right?"

"It is a quiet place to read," Natsuki said.

"That is right," Amarria said. "When you do come to visit, dad will let me know, but you must whisper in there. I can show you the vast number of books and tablets that hold the history of the Republic State. We even have a children's area for people like me to read books to good little boys and girls."

"You started reading to children?" Trent asked, puzzled. "Since when did you start doing that kind of activity?"

Amarria looked at Trent with a smirk on her face.

"I started learning to do that when I found out I had younger sisters," Trent said.

Trent shrugged.

"I should have figured," he said. "Now girls, breakfast will be ready soon. Go ahead and head for the table. Amarria and I will be up there soon."

"Okay, daddy," the twins said as they let go of Amarria, got off the bed, and headed for the stairs.

“The three of you bonded far more than I could have imagined,” Trent said as he looked at the stairs before looking back at Amarria. “They are in love with you.”

“And I, them,” Amarria said. “I never would have imagined that our sisterly love would have developed like this.”

“Before we go upstairs, there is something I wanted to ask you. It is a serious question.”

Amarria sat up in the bed.

“Go ahead,” Amarria said.

“I have been wondering if you love your stepmother,” Trent said.

Amarria took a deep breath.

“That is a hard question to answer,” Amarria said.

“Because of your real mother?” Trent asked.

“Yes. Mom is mom. I cannot view someone taking her place or the love I have for her.”

“I figured as much.”

“Please do not misunderstand. Shibuya is a wonderful person and she has made you the happiest I have seen you be in a long while. She gave birth to my first and only sisters, regardless that they are only my half-sisters. I love those two little stinkers.”

“I understand. I did not mean to put you on the spot like that. I was hoping that there was some love for Shibuya from you that was about the same as your sisters, but I should know that Shibuya cannot replace your real mother. I am willing to bet that the same can be said for her new husband.”

“He is okay, but you would be correct. I do not view him as my father any more than I view Shibuya as my mother. However, I often wonder if mom misses or regrets not having more children somehow.”

“I was hoping your mother would have told you this, but after your birth, she had her ‘system’ removed.”

“What do you mean...oh. Wait a minute. Are you saying she cannot have any more children at all?”

“Your birth was a hard one for her, and she did not want to go through that again.”

“I see. I did not know.”

“You did not tell her that I have twin girls, did you?”

“I did at one point during lunch one day, and she acknowledged it, but she suddenly looked very depressed. I guess that explains why.”

“Speaking of which, you are not getting any younger.”

“Oh, come on, dad! Not this again!”

Trent laughed.

“I know,” Trent said. “You will meet the right person for you when you do. Come on. Shibuya must be serving breakfast right now and we do not want to let it get cold.”

“Alright,” Amarria said as she brought her feet around to the right side of the bed.

“When do you think you will be heading back?” Trent asked.

“I need to get cleaned up and I will help straighten up things before I leave, so I will say around noon or so. I figured the girls will want to spend time with me before I leave.”

“Probably, so. Alright, let us head upstairs. I am sure they are waiting on us.”

Both Trent and Amarria got off the bed and headed for the stairs. Trent was hoping for too much that Amarria would start to love Shibuya like Laura, but she was right.

Shibuya could not replace Laura as her real mother, and Trent needed to remember that.

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*Private Residence of Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of the Republic State
11:30am, December 25, 5441 A.D. (8 Days Later)*

“Lunch will be ready in thirty minutes!”

Shibuya’s voice rang from the kitchen as Trent was cleaning up the living room floor. It was covered in wrapping paper from all the gifts the twins received from their parents on Holy Day of Giving. The holiday was under a different name more than three thousand years ago and signified the birth of a savior to a holy land more than five thousand years ago. This also began the current calendar that was in use. The day remained holy, but the name had changed since that holy land was on Earth which was until recently a distant inaccessible world.

While one would consider Nadia and Natsuki’s actions almost two weeks ago “naughty,” they have long since learned their lessons and were given their gifts that they enjoyed with glee. However, not all the gifts under the tree were for the twins. There were gifts for Amarria who was arriving shortly. Amarria was spending the morning with Laura and her husband. Trent found out a couple of days ago that Laura and her husband were looking at adopting a couple of children. That made Trent feel a bit relieved after the talk he had with Amarria over a week ago. Amarria would have more siblings and, while not related by blood, she will no doubt come to love them as much as she has loved Nadia and Natsuki.

During the past week, Trent decided to get in touch with multiple people who have had a profound or significant impact in his life during the rough few years that involved the First Interstellar War through Reunion Day. The first of those people was retired Colonel Blair. He and his wife just had their second child, another daughter. His wife works in the fashion industry in Voluptas while he oversees one of the security agencies meant to protect people like her. Trent heard that he runs the agency almost like his SAGATs, which made Trent begin to wonder if these security guards are armed and disciplined like them. The holiday in the Voluptas System is by far the most commercialized location in the Republic State, but considering the entertainment orientation of the system, it comes as no surprise to Trent that it has developed in such a way.

Blair did tell Trent that Benja, formerly Ghost Two seven years ago, was released from the hospital not long after Reunion Day occurred. According to reports, anyone who had the MAR, past or present, suddenly had no signs of it anymore. This confirmed that the MAR would no longer plague the star cluster for generations to come. Benja has since continued to serve with the SAGATs and is currently at the rank of Brigadier General. The SAGATs themselves, seen as an elite fighting force within the Federation, has expanded their scope to operate in all the States, increasing the force’s size and diversity with all the species of Animality joining it.

Dani and Shannon, both now at the rank of Vice Admiral, still command their respective fleets. Dani has since married her girlfriend who, thanks to genetic development, are expecting their first child together. While the Republic State had such methods for a while, the Tenebris State had the technology down to an art. Doctors and genetic engineers from the Tenebris State are now found in all states and have made their expertise available to all who can afford the operation. Trent is looking forward to hearing about the birth of their child.

Shannon also married a couple of years after Reunion Day to an information technology expert she was introduced to during rotations by one of her friends. She and her husband now have a four-year-old boy. She took her son to the *Renaldo* to introduce him to the bridge officers, who were quick to show him what they do. Trent doubted that the boy would remember his visit as young as he was, but Trent thought it was cute that the officers took to him so well.

Tora and Head Agent Aja stepped down from the Republic Central Intelligence Agency not long after Reunion Day. Many of the operations that have occurred in private, such as the actions of the stealth vessels during the First Interstellar War along with the discovery of the Tenebris Dominion and the Draco Federation were brought into the open. While Trent was not charged for the actions while in command of the *Templar* during the First Interstellar War, keeping the missions classified and without the approval of the Republic Senate had forced the two agents to retire before they would be brought up on charges. Trent had not heard from the two of them since then, but considering that secrecy was their expertise, he doubted he will ever hear about them or from them again.

Many of those who were involved in those missions with both the *Templar* and the *Cavalier* were not brought up on charges such as “accessories to espionage.” Because of the missions no longer being classified, they were free to talk about their experiences and the actions with the press. It was quite the scandal when it came to their stories being brought up on the news that many citizens and senators wanted Tora and Aja to stand trial for their involvement with those missions. However, after so many years, the two of them have never been found which again was no shock to Trent. Everyone who was involved returned to their normal lives, though having their stories on the news meant their lives would be anything but normal.

Of course, it was worse for those already in the limelight of society in the entertainment industry. Sheryl, who Trent helped when some obsessed fans tried to kidnap her and other idols years ago and who was aboard the *Templar* during the First Interstellar War, got even more popular in her pop idol career when she told her story. Trent had not spoken to her in a long time since she was always busy. Fortunately, he managed to call her during some long-deserved downtime a few days ago. Much to his surprise, she was about to get married to a man she met on vacation some time ago. They hit it off well and have stayed in communication with each other before they went on dates. They had to do so discretely from the public eye, which was difficult to do. After she broke the story on her involvement with the *Templar* during the First Interstellar War, that made it harder for her to hide from the limelight. It was thanks to that story that her now fiancé knew who Trent was when he called to see how she was doing.

Everyone he had talked to was surprised to hear who or rather what Trent was married to, but also about his twin girls. Trent introduced his family to everyone he contacted, and they were happy to hear about his new family, though any that he had not kept up in a while were surprised about his divorce from Laura. Shibuya and his daughters were introduced to so many people remotely who either have influenced Trent’s life or he influenced their lives.

As Trent cleaned up the floor of the wrapping paper that was used, he could hear the girls upstairs playing with their new toys. He had missed that sound after Amarria grew up. It was almost nostalgic in a sense. He soon noticed the sounds stopped, followed by the sound of footsteps coming down the hall and down the stairs. He looked up and saw Natsuki coming down the stairs, though not with any of her new toys in hand. She came all the way down the stairs and up to Trent, hugging his left leg. Trent looked down at this adorable display of affection but wondered why since both girls thanked Trent for their gifts earlier.

“Hey there, Natsuki,” Trent said, rubbing the top of her head between her ears. “Is everything okay? You did not break one of your toys already, did you?”

Natsuki looked up at Trent. She was not crying so she did not do something bad like breaking a toy already. He was puzzled more now why she came down to give him a hug.

“Daddy?” she asked, her eyes beginning to fill with worry. “Does Amarria have a different mommy that us?”

Trent was suddenly in shock that this question came out of nowhere. The twins could easily see that Amarria did not possess the same Skunk traits as they did, but they have been growing up around her for years that they never thought anything about it before. Well, at least until now, it seems. Trent knew he would be having this conversation, but today was an odd day for Natsuki to pick to ask that question.

Trent noticed a head peeking over the stair railing halfway down, and saw Nadia looking over with eyes filled with curiosity. They must have challenged each other as to who would ask that question and Natsuki lost from the looks of it.

Trent looked back down at Natsuki.

“Where did you hear that?” Trent asked.

“We came back to check on you and Amarria and we heard you talking on the day when we were allowed to leave the media room,” Natsuki said.

Trent did not even hear them coming down the steps that day, but it was obvious now that they overheard the conversation Trent had with Amarria about Shibuya. Trent looked up at Nadia and gestured for her to come down.

“Please take a seat on the couch for a moment, you two,” Trent said.

Natsuki let go of Trent and headed to the right side of the couch. Nadia came down the stairs and sat on the left. Trent took a seat on the edge of the steel coffee table to talk to them.

“Are we in trouble for asking?” Nadia asked.

“No, you are not,” Trent said. “I was just hoping that it would be a few years before I had this conversation with the two of you.”

Trent took a deep breath.

“Amarria is what is you would consider your half-sister,” Trent said. “I am the father of all three of you, but Amarria is the daughter of my first wife named Laura.”

“What happened to her mom?” Natsuki asked.

“She is still alive if that is what you are asking. Her mom and I began to drift apart with each other because I was away in the military for long periods of time while Laura was here. Eventually, Laura wanted to go through a process called a divorce.”

“What is a divorce? Nadia asked.

“It is the opposite of a marriage. It is a procedure or an act to end a marriage. Laura left this house with her stuff while I was away on a mission. I came back and found out what she did. Amarria took it the hardest because now her parents are no longer together. If the divorce did not happen, I would not have met your mother and you two would not be here now.”

“So, we are related because you are our daddy?” Natsuki asked.

“Of course, you are, girls.”

“Is Amarria sad about the divorce?” Nadia asked. “Why does she not love mommy?”

Trent’s eyes widen. They heard more than he expected and now they dropped a huge bombshell of a question. Trent took a deep breath.

“It is not that she does not love her,” Trent said. “It is hard for Amarria to love your mother as much if not more that her actual mother. Look at it from her point of view. You love your mommy, right?”

Both girls nodded in agreement.

“Imagine if your mommy were to go away and another were to take her place. Would you feel the same way with your new mommy?”

They shook their heads in disagreement, but soon realized what Trent was getting at.

“Oh,” the twins said in unison.

“You see what I am getting at, then,” Trent said. “It is never easy for someone when such things like a divorce occurs, but while she may not love your mommy as much as her own mommy, she still does have some love for her. After all, your mommy is the reason your two are here and we all know Amarria loves you very much. Do not ever forget that, okay?”

The girls nodded in agreement and came up to Trent, giving him a hug. A few seconds later, the doorbell rang. The girls backed away from Trent for a moment and looked at the door. Trent looked that way as well. He knew who it was, but the girls were oblivious who it could be. Trent got up and headed for the door, looking through the peephole to make sure. He smiled when he saw Amarria holding presents in her hands as the boxes almost covered her face.

Trent looked back at the twins.

“When I open this door,” Trent said, “remain seated. Their hands are full, okay?”

The girls nodded in agreement. Trent turned and unlocked the door, opening it.

“Hello, Amarria,” Trent said. “Let me help you with those.”

Trent grabbed the gifts in her left hand. She moved her free hand over to support the remaining gifts in the right hand as she walked in.

“Amarria!” the twins said, but they stayed in place.

“Hi, girls,” Amarria said as she walked in, placing the gifts by the tree.

The moment Amarria no longer had the gifts in her hands, the twins rushed at her and tackled her, being careful that she was not going to hit anything going down. Amarria was in shock as the twins gave her hugs after she went down.

“Whoa, girls!” Amarria said as she tried to recover from the tackle. “What was that for?”

“We love you, sister!” the twins said. “Please do not ever be sad!”

Amarria, puzzled, looked over at Trent who had yet to close the front door or set the gifts down. Trent shook his head.

“They heard us talk when you all were able to leave quarantine,” Trent said. “They asked about your mom and I told them about your feelings for her and their mom.”

Amarria’s was shocked, and she almost started to cry. She looked at each of the twins who were still hugging her.

“You know about that, and you still love me, you little stinkers?” Amarria asked.

The looked up at her, their eyes filled with tears.

“We are still related,” Nadia said. “We are your sisters!”

“And we still love you,” Natsuki said. “We know you love us, too, sis!”

Amarria nearly broke down crying and gave the twins a big hug.

“I will always love you, sisters,” Amarria said with tears in her eyes and a smile.

Trent began to cry seeing the love between sisters happening in front of him. He noticed to his left that Shibuya was by the stairway, seeing what was happening and was crying as well. Trent wondered how long she was there and if she heard what Trent told the twins a moment ago, but at that moment, she was more focused on the love the sisters had for each other.

Trent shook his head. The greatest gift he has received thus far is seeing the love of his family members for each other, and he would not have asked for anything more perfect than this in the entire Novus Initium star cluster.

* * * * *

The End

END OF EPISODE VII

(Note from the writer below)

From the writer:

Greetings, reader. Thank you for reading the last chapter of the Novus Initium Saga. When I started this saga based on a dream I had about the moon being like Earth and sucked through a wormhole (yeah, that was a weird dream to have), I had a different idea how I wanted this story to end. However, things changed as I progressed the story and so did my personal relationship at the time that I wrote them. This resulted in the change of my own character's relationship by the seventh story.

Many changes occurred during the writing of this saga. Among them was the link the other nations had to each other as descendants of Animality. I originally wanted them to be separate species, but as I progressed, I wanted to show that there was a commonality between them and Humans in the process. I also wanted the Bilartini who I had called the Forerunners at the time I came up with them to be the antagonists studying Humanity and later Animality like test subjects. This changed as there was no easy explanation to this motive if they were either going to go extinct or overrun the rest of the star cluster.

When I came to the eighth story, I wanted to see about Humans and Animals in the star cluster being able to return to the Milky Way. However, while halfway through, I realized that I had done something similar in a previous set of stories (that had since been deleted) and would be a predictable outcome for the reader. Instead, I chose to do the opposite and have the systems of the Milky Way that make up the Amnon Empire, another change as I wanted them to be antagonists by this point, be brought to the star cluster instead. It was a twist that I knew no one would have expected and I felt like it works. Humanity and Animality are reunited and, while not in the Milky Way, the star cluster is theirs to explore, to discover, and to grow.

Many of the names used in these stories are names of people I know. There were a few changes to those names that some who have read my stories may have noticed, but this was due to the change in my relationship or friendship with those people in real life. After having a second set of stories that have gone through similar changes, I feel that my next saga will no longer use people I know, instead using original character names. This is one of the reasons I do not sell my stories, instead making them available for free for the enjoyment of all who want to read them. Many of the designs used were also inspired from a few sources, which would also present a problem if I made my stories for sale.

There have been moments when I wrote these that I felt that they were not going the way I was hoping, or real-life problems made writing them less than enjoyable. However, I am glad that I was able to push those times and be able to complete these stories for those who continued to read them out of curiosity, enjoyment, intrigue, or whatever reason they had. While this may be the final chapter of the Novus Initium Saga, this is far from being the last story that I write. Another saga is already in the works at the time of this note and after a brief rest, I will begin work on said saga. I will be making changes to my website to separate the sagas as well. Please look forward to what will be a remake of a saga that I wrote more than ten years ago, but done with new designs, new characters, new storytelling, and a new direction that I wish to take them.

*My next saga is **WARRING FACTIONS: ALTERNATE TIMELINE REMAKE**. Look forward to reading them soon!*

*-Trent B., aka TechnoKoop
July 11, 2020*