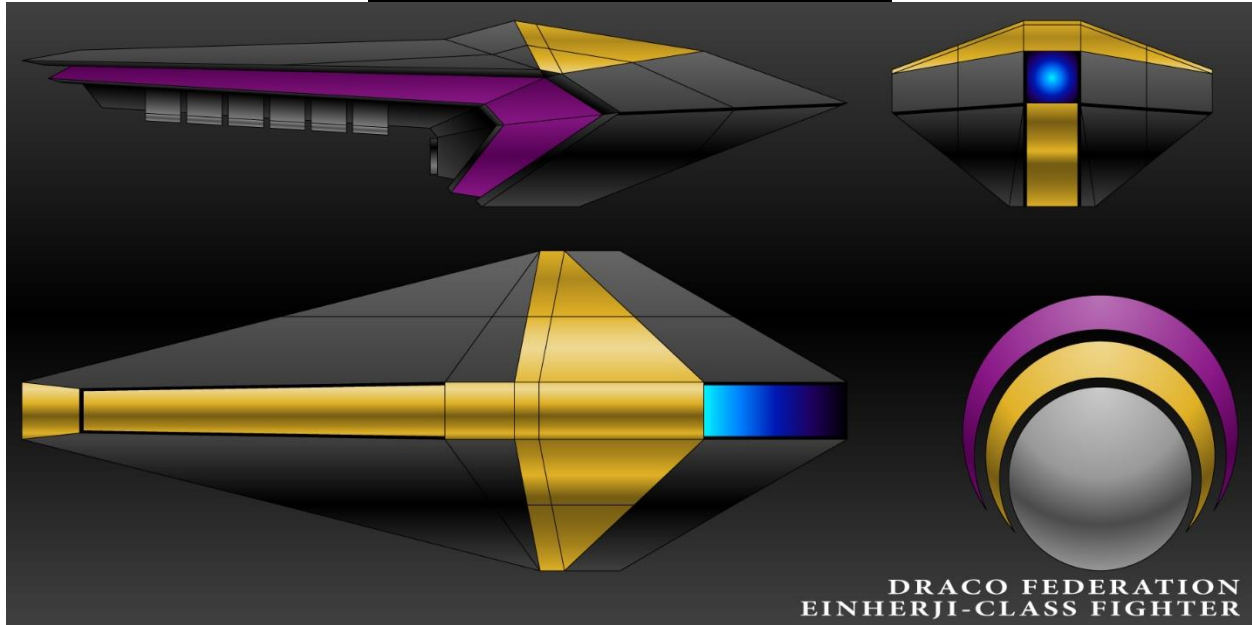


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode VII: The Tiger and the Dragon



PART 1

*Family Living Room, Tigris Tribe Head Family Residence, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
1:21pm, October 25, 5434 A.D. (One week later)*

“Why did I ever bring up the Republic?”

Miya returned to the head family residence building of the Tigris Tribe, the tribe she was Chief over. After she entered, giving some of her garb to her servants to take and clean, she headed straight for the couch in the family living room. The room was incredibly large, bigger than most of the clone dormitories found around the city. It was painted in black with red accents as was customary for those who live and serve the Dominion. The lights were already on but the room still seemed dim because of the colors. Tapestry and drapes lined the room, hung from the ceiling and lining the walls, though there were no windows to speak of for them to cover. Rarely does Miya managed to look outside at the city, but generally there was no reason for her to do so.

Chairs, cabinets, and bookshelves lined against the walls filled with some natural landscape paintings and pictures as well as tablets full of information including history before and during the Dominion. These tablets were not linked to the central historical archives unless the Tigris allow them to do so. This way, no one can access those records unless the Tigris deem it necessary. In the center of the room, an octagonal indentation half the size of the room was four feet down with steps at the diagonal sections leading down. A rail lines the sides that do not have steps. In front of those rails in that recessed area were red couches that could seat up to four people if needed. The couches faced towards a cylindrical table that houses a holographic display system in the middle. Right now, the display was turned off since no one was in the room at the moment. When Miya walked into the room, the display came on automatically and a holographic sphere appeared displaying information involving records from various sources ranging from blood distribution to work output from those in the Tigris Tribe.

At that moment, Miya could care less about the information that was being displayed on the screen. She walked slowly and tiredly towards the closest of the couches, went down the steps, and planted herself face first on the couch. She exhaled heavily as she tried to relax. However, her grandmother walked into the room shortly after from the door on the opposite side of the room and saw Miya on the couch. Miya didn't look her way, too tired to look up or notice that she entered the room.

Miya's grandmother came and sat on the couch on the opposite side of the display. She turned off the display to see Miya clearly.

"Tough day at the Council meeting?" her grandmother asked.

Miya turned her head in surprise to see her grandmother across from her. She immediately sat up on the couch and sat upright out of respect.

"Hello, grandmother," Miya said. "I didn't hear you come in."

"Apparently," her grandmother said. "I've not seen you this tired in a while."

"I know. These meetings have been getting worse over the past week since I brought up about the possible intrusion by Republic operatives. I'm regretting ever bringing up the fact that we have historical records of the Republic in the first place."

"I don't doubt it. We even had investigators here to try to retrieve those records. I managed to convince them otherwise."

"You did? How?"

"It's best if you did not know. I'll tell you one day."

Miya began to shudder as to what her grandmother could have said to the investigators.

"So," her grandmother continued, "why have the meetings been making you tired? Surely the reveal about the possible Republic intrusion can't be the only reason."

"You may be surprised. The other Chiefs want to strike the Republic in fear of what they may be capable of, especially if the Republic has the means to intrude into our space undetected. Even worse, they also have the means to come down to the planet undetected. We have yet to even consider cloaking technology as we have never had a reason for it, let alone detect it."

"What about His Majesty Pope Armani? What are his thoughts on the matter?"

"That is where it gets weird. When I first brought it up, he was obviously not happy about us having records of the Republic in the first place. Since then, however, he has not shown up to any of the Council meetings. His aides have stated that he is busy in meditation over what to do about the Republic. He is only seen during the evening services that are broadcasted across the Dominion. Has he ever been absent to Council meetings when you were Chief, grandmother?"

"He has done so only when he needed to, but never for as long as you are telling me. This is serious if he has been absent for that time. I can understand his thoughts about possible war with the Republic while we are still at war with the Federation. However, being absent during this time makes me wonder if it is out of necessity or possible fear."

"Fear? Why would His Majesty Pope Armani be afraid of the Republic?"

"Probably for the same reason he was not happy that we kept our archive of the Dominion's true history."

Miya looked at her grandmother with a puzzled expression on her face.

"What do you mean our 'true history'?" Miya asked. "Is there something about our past that His Majesty Pope Armani does not want us to know?"

"Did you ever wonder why or how the Dominion was founded to begin with?" her grandmother asked. "Why do we exist outside of the Novus Initium Republic in the first place?"

Before Miya could answer, her grandmother got up and walked up the stairs towards the bookshelf to Miya's right. Her grandmother skimmed over the tablets until she found the one she was looking for and pulled it off of the shelf. She returned to the recessed area but walked over to the couch Miya was sitting at. She sat down to Miya's right and activated the tablet's screen. The title on the screen read "The Tenebris Exile: The Origins of the Dominion."

"What is this?" Miya asked, puzzled. "I along with the current Chiefs of the Tribes were taught that the Dominion was founded when our ancestors, after finding enlightenment in the holiness of our blood, left the sinful and corrupted land of our origins to follow our divine faith. Of course, now I know that 'land' is in fact the Republic."

Her grandmother gave a slight laugh.

"My dear," her grandmother said. "That was what you were taught because it was the 'truth' that His Majesty Pope Armani wanted you to believe. Reality isn't as subtle or as pious as you and everyone else were led to believe."

Miya's grandmother swiped left on the screen to the next page.

"The Republic in reality back then wasn't as 'demonic' as Armani makes it out to be," her grandmother said. "Back then, it was going through what was called the Expansion Era. It is unknown if that era is still ongoing after all this time, but it was during that time that the original Armani Draco lived over six hundred and fifty years ago."

"Was he a religious figure back then?" Miya asked.

Miya's grandmother gave a slight laugh.

"No, he wasn't," she said. "He was far from that way of life. Originally, he was a medical scientist researching in hematology or the field of blood. He had several theories of using blood including the means to help prolong lifespans and immunity from all known forms of diseases."

"He was a scientist first? What led him to become the founder of the Tenebris faith?"

"That's the part even our historians from back then have yet to understand. Armani attempted to find financial support for his research but no established company in the medical field wanted to fund a project that would be considered illegal under Republic law. There were reports that he had gone into some form of depression before he and his family moved to a new colony world as far from the central Republic government as they could be at the time. Once they arrived, Armani, being the first person to set foot on the planet, called the world Tenebris."

"Wait, then our planet of Tenebris Prime isn't the first planet to bear that name?"

"No, it wasn't. After he along with the rest of the Draco family settled on the planet, his attitude changed. He began his research far from the Republic government knowing they were struggling to maintain control of the colonies, but soon after he believed that his work was the divine work of our god that we know now. No one even now knows why someone who wasn't a religious man suddenly became one unless he saw something during his research that made him start thinking that way. Not even records from his family that we have during that time explain his sudden change in attitude. He soon convinced members of other families to join him in his research-turned-religion."

"Are you talking about our ancestors along with those from the other Tribes?"

"Yes. Apparently, this research became a cult in the eyes of outsiders, and the Republic couldn't send anyone because they did not have all the details or they were not made aware of our ancestors' actions. However, Armani's ambitions grew more severe to the point that his followers started to kidnap people from surrounding areas and colonies."

"They kidnapped people?! Why would they go that far?"

“Our records don’t say specifically why they resorted to kidnapping others, but it was believed that those they were kidnapping were being ‘liberated’ from their ‘constrained religious beliefs.’ I’m willing to bet the real reasons may be more gruesome than what our ancestors recorded. They either made it sound like some religious intervention of those individuals or they were told not to record the truth of their kidnappings at that time.”

“If that is the case, how do you know that they were kidnapped?”

“I based it on the events that unfolded at that time stating that there were non-family volunteers who submitted themselves for sacrifice. I’m old enough to know that people are not like that unless they wanted to commit suicide through religious means, something that I have found did not exist in any of the Republic’s established religions during that time. The following events also give me reason to believe they were kidnapped.”

“What events?”

“Despite how just and pious our version of historical events unfolded, the reality was that our ancestors knew they were killing people they took. They drained them of their blood and cremated their bodies to get rid of the evidence. Someone on one of the colony planets where people were being kidnapped got wise about our ancestors’ actions and managed to get evidence of their transgressions. When the Republic government was informed of what was taking place on Tenebris, they would send a fleet to either arrest our ancestors for their crimes or destroy them if those who were kidnapped could not be retrieved.”

“How did our ancestors managed to know about the Republic fleet being deployed against them? How did they manage to get away?”

“You can thank the Aspergillus’ ancestors for your first question. Members of their families were in the Republic military and managed to warn their families on Tenebris about the military sending a fleet to arrest or destroy them. Our ancestors quickly loaded up the old colony ships which had new drive systems installed for sustained warp travel and waited for the Republic ships to arrive. When the fleet arrived, those same family members who were on the Republic ships managed to provide false readings around the planet. This allowed our ancestors to sneak away undetected while the Republic fleet began on orbital barrage of the colony once they ‘detected’ only our ancestors on the planet below. In other words, to weed out the cult, the Republic fleet needed to make sure that the DNA of any of those kidnapped were not found alive below. I don’t know if any of those who were kidnapped or not were still alive at the time, but the last thing our ancestors saw was the fleet firing on the planet before they warped away.”

“What about the Aspergillus members on the Republic ships? Did they ever join up with the rest of our ancestors?”

“They couldn’t even if they wanted to. The enhanced warp drive on our ancestors’ ships was new and was not available to Republic ships. There was no way for them to catch up once we left, and who knows what happened to them afterwards.”

“So our ancestors went into self-imposed exile, and we are the descendants of criminals and murders in the eyes of the Republic if they know we still exist.”

Miya embraced herself and began to feel shivers down her spine.

“How do I comprehend this information?” Miya said. “Our whole way of life is based on some sadistic cult’s practices. I feel sick to my stomach! I wish I never knew this information! How can I enter that Council chamber knowing now that our way of life was following the delusions of the original Armani Draco?!”

“Well, that depends on your definition of ‘original,’” her grandmother said. “Don’t you know that the Armani Draco you know IS the same person as back then?”

Miya looked at her with a puzzled expression.

“What are you talking about?” Miya asked. “There is no way that the Armani Draco that I have seen in the Council meetings is the same one from over six hundred and fifty years ago!”

“Physically, you would be correct,” her grandmother said. “Mentally, however, is another story. Who you are seeing is a clone body, but the consciousness of the original Draco is transferred from one clone body to the next when that body is close to death.”

“How is that even possible?”

“I’m not sure when the technology was developed or how it works, but I do know that it is more than possible. All of his mannerisms and attitudes along with his memories are there because I noticed this transition between different clone bodies after my initial appointment as Chief ended. His face and body were hidden under his robes and hood, but his voice sounded younger than before. He does this transition around the time the Chiefs are replaced with the next generation. When your mother passed away unexpectedly, I had to continue to fulfill the position until you were of age to become Chief. I know His Majesty Pope was not thrilled as it meant I would see through how he has stayed ‘alive’ all this time. That was when I began to question how much of our history and customs were a lie from the beginning and began my research. That is how I know our true origins, and I am beginning to wonder if the possible Republic intrusion is making Armani fearful of a possible Republic invasion if they’re gathering information.”

“There is one piece of history I still don’t understand, though.”

“What is that?”

“As everyone else knows, once we first established contact with the Draco Federation, we learned that Armani’s son was the head of the family and directed them to a different planet in the Western Region than the rest of the cult. If that is true, where was Armani Draco and why is he here instead of in the Federation? Why was his son the head of the family at the time?”

Her grandmother looked puzzled, as if she didn’t know the answer.

“That is a good question,” her grandmother said. “I’ve never bothered to look that up or research that matter. Let me look into that.”

Miya’s grandmother looked through the texts between the timeframe of when the Tenebris began to kidnap people and when they fled the planet. After a few minutes, she had a puzzled expression on her face.

“This cannot be right,” she said.

“What is it?” Miya asked.

“According to this, Armani died a week before they had to evacuate the planet.”

“He died?” Miya asked, stunned. “How is that possible when you told me that the man in the Council meetings is mentally the original?”

“That is what I’m trying to find out, but I can’t find anything to explain how that is possible if his consciousness is in...”

Her grandmother stopped for a moment as a thought came to her.

“I wonder,” her grandmother said. “It may be possible that the technology existed to transfer his consciousness at the time. It doesn’t say if his body was afflicted by natural causes or if he was in an accident, but if his consciousness was transferred or stored at the time of his death, our ancestors may have held on to his mind until we got to Tenebris Prime to transfer it to a clone body. Unfortunately, there is nothing to support this at all in our history. Most likely, the information was struck from the record if there was a record at all about it to begin with.”

“Even if that was the case,” Miya said, “it still doesn’t explain why he or at least his mind wasn’t with the Draco family when they separated from the rest of our ancestors.”

“Well, we know that his son did not adhere to the same religious principles that Armani had put forth at the time. There is a chance that when he was about to die that he wanted his mind or clone body to be transported on one of the other families’ colony vessels instead of his own family’s vessel. Of course, this is all speculation, but it does fit the facts.”

“If that is the case, then I can understand why he wants to conquer the Federation. They are the descendants or followers of his son who betrayed his ideals. However, knowing what I know now about our actual history, I’m beginning to wonder who is truly in the wrong in our current war, much less how the Republic must see us.”

“When you take into account that the Federation is unaware of the location of our capital as we are of theirs and that the Republic was able to find us, there is a good chance that they are also aware of the Federation and where its capital is located.”

“But, how would they have found our capitals?”

“I’m not sure, but if the Republic manages to establish contact with the Federation, there is a good chance that we could lose this war if the Republic joins it. This is made worse for us when one considers the Republic Charter.”

“The Republic Charter? What’s that?”

“Surprisingly, it was one of the concerns of our ancestors when establishing the Dominion. The Charter clearly states that no other Human-made nation shall exist outside or separated from the Republic. It was designed to keep Humans from waging war in the star cluster over different ideologies in how a government is run.”

“That would mean that the Dominion is an upfront to that Charter. If the Republic knows about us, then their intrusion into the Central Database may be a form of recon to get a better understanding of our culture. However, wouldn’t the Federation also be affected by the Charter?”

“It would, but the Federation’s circumstances are different. For starters, while they are the Tribe that separated from our religion, they have formed a version of the Great Maker faith and created a government based on it. Also, the Federation is not solely run by Humans. They have three alien races among them and thus give them leverage to no longer be subject to the Charter. However, that will be up to the Republic Senate, their governing body, to interpret whether the Charter’s stipulation applies or not. We don’t even know if the Republic is solely made of Humans now or if they have discovered other alien races like the Federation did.”

“Then what should we do? We don’t know the Republic’s military capabilities after all this time and we are still at war with the Federation. We need to address this calmly, but if Armani doesn’t appear to state his thoughts on the matter, we may never get a resolution.”

“Then let me ask this question. You are Chief of the Tigris Tribe. You have a great responsibility to guide the actions of our Tribe in the Dominion. What is it you think we as a Tribe should do to resolve this matter?”

Miya looked ahead of her as she thought about her grandmother’s question. Her grandmother was right that Miya has the sovereign head of the Tigris Tribe. Her decisions and actions would affect her Tribe. She began to think what would be best for the survival of the Tribe if not the Dominion. War would not be the best option as they were already at war with the Federation and there was no information as to the combat capabilities of the Republic much less the size and scope of the nation and its population. If the Republic established contact with aliens races, were they now among Humans in the Republic or are they separate nations both friends and foes?

The only thing that was certain to Miya was that the Republic knows about the Dominion and war with the Republic needed to be avoided, but at what cost? The war with the Federation was now a stalemate as the Federation began to roll out vessels capable of combating the

Dominion's dreadnoughts on near equal footing. If the Republic has established similar combat capabilities or managed to create similar combat vessels with the knowledge from both the Dominion and Federation's militaries somehow, neither nation would possibly survive if the Republic deemed both nations as violating the Charter.

Fighting is not the answer, and Miya knew that. They needed to focus on their own nation and the war with the Federation was where they needed to start when it comes to finding a peaceful resolution before trying to deal the Republic.

"Grandmother," Miya said, "I need to start drafting a proposal to the Council. I believe we need to end this war with the Federation in a peaceful manner before we begin to focus on how to handle the Republic. I know that the Council and His Majesty Pope all wanted to retrieve those who are descendants to the Draco family when we first established contact with the Draco Federation, but this war is draining essential resources and manpower. I know this is not going to be a favorable course of action to take, but we have bigger concerns to think about before the Republic decides to make their own move."

Miya's grandmother was surprised at first before she smiled at Miya.

"Now that is how you take charge," her grandmother said. "You have the right idea of putting our people first than the war we are currently in with the Federation. I agree with your decision. I will help you draft up the proposal tonight so that we can have it ready by tomorrow to present to the Council."

"My only concern is if they all decided to agree with me, but Armani is not there again to ratify the proposal," Miya said. "Worse yet, if he is there and decides peace with the Federation isn't an option, instead continuing the war and possibly wages war on the Republic."

"I know you have concerns about the matter, but you need to be strong in your resolve to help our Tribe and our Dominion survive. I understand your fears about the Chiefs and Armani rejecting the possible proposal, but there is a chance that they would understand your stance in trying to protect our Tribe and the rest of the Dominion from the possible threat of the Republic and approve of it. As long as you are resolute in your beliefs that the best thing for the Dominion is to end the war with the Federation peacefully and work towards diplomatic negotiations with the Republic, I would have a hard time believing that anyone would want to see our nation that has functioned and prospered outside of the Republic for over six hundred years be led to ruin against the militaries of two nations, one of which we know nothing about their capabilities."

"All the more reason we as a nation need to stop our current conflict. I know that possible recognition as an independent nation from the Republic would be difficult, but considering the size of the Dominion, it's not as if they can come in and wipe us out in an instant. At least, I hope they don't have that capability."

Miya took a deep breath.

"Let me rest for a little bit, first," Miya said. "I'm still worn out after that meeting and the history that you just provided me. I need to do this proposal with a clear and rested head if I'm going to present it to the Council tomorrow."

"Oh course, dear," her grandmother said. "Go ahead and take a nap for a couple of hours. I'll wake you up and we can get to work on it."

"Thank you, grandmother," Miya said as she got up from the couch. "I will see you in a couple of hours."

"Rest well, dear."

Miya bowed towards her grandmother, then turned to her left up the nearest stairs. She headed for a pair of doors on that side of the room that would lead to her quarters, pressing a

button that scanned her fingerprint on the right side of the doors. As the doors slid opened and Miya walked into her room, her grandmother shut off the screen on the tablet that had the Dominion's true history. Once the doors closed, her grandmother let out a heavy sigh.

"I hope I am doing the right thing," she said softly.

* * * * *

*Dominion Intelligence Room, Central Tower below ground level, Capital City of Plena Tenebris
Planet Tenebris Prime, Tenebris System, Southwestern Region
2:02pm, October 25, 5434 A.D.*

"Do we have any more useful information regarding the Republic, yet?"

Armani Draco had visited the Dominion Intelligence Room on a regular basis every day for the past week. When the possibility of an infiltration of the Central Database by Republic operatives came up thanks to Tigris Chief Miya, Armani set plans in motion for an invasion into the Republic capital system of Lumen. Armani had anticipated this day for centuries, regardless of jumping into a new clone when the time came. He knew that his cult would be hunted by the Republic, but he never thought it would have taken this long for their forces to find the Dominion capital.

He knew over six hundred years ago that he would eventually crush the heart of the Republic for their archaic laws that stomped his dreams for greatness. His research would have issued in a new age of Humanity where people would live healthier, longer lives without the need for cybernetics. He would have gone down in history as the greatest scientists who ever lived as the man who would eventually pave the way for extending people's lives, maybe even immortality. However, the Republic Senate saw his research as "inhumane" citing that Human experimentation was "against the law of both the government and nature." They were in a star cluster that Humanity never originated from in the first place, so "nature" would no longer matter! Humans are "guests" in this star cluster and they needed to adapt to live in their new home including using genetics to do so. They were fortunate that the planet Luminaire, the capital world of the Republic, did not require much to adapt to the environment. For that matter, very few planets that were settled by the Republic at the time including the original Tenebris colony needed terraforming. Even Tenebris Prime did not need any terraforming to be habitable. This was the first time he really thought about it but right now, that was not his focus at this time.

The fact is that his research could have benefitted billions if not trillions by now, but his dreams and aspirations were dashed because of the shortsightedness of Republic law. He had to take action into his own hands, and create his own colony using his research as a base going so far to convert it into a religion. He couldn't remember when it occurred after all this time, but he remembered having a dream one night that a red angel appeared and told him that his work was the correct path to take towards divinity. He was not a religious man before, but this dream was so real and so vivid that it was more than a dream to him. He was chosen by their god, and put all of his time and effort into his newfound faith.

His son, however, did not follow his divine vision. He was a disappointment to Armani to the point his son questioned every action Armani had taken towards the growth of the Tenebris faith. If it wasn't for Armani's failing health from the stress of running a new religion and coordinating the seizing of potential "assets" towards the forwarding of his divine research, this war with the "Draco Federation" which he refuses to acknowledge that nation to this day would not be happening right now. The Tenebris would be one singular nation, unhindered by any war

with their fleet at full strength to defend itself against a Republic invasion. Instead, he had to resort to the use of experimental technology that was developed by a few loyal members of his family to transfer his consciousness into a computer storage unit for transport on the Aspergillus colony vessel, the most loyal of the families.

Of course, members of the Aspergillus family were more than happy to “dispose” of those same Draco family members once their research data was retrieved to transfer his consciousness to a fresh clone body later, another taboo in the eyes of the Republic who disapproves of clones. Besides, they needed the remains of bodies to find after the Republic destroyed the colony.

The descendants of his son may think that they are being “reclaimed” by the Dominion to be a part of their following again, but the reality is that every member of the so-called “Federation” are nothing but misguided traitors who are not worthy of being part of the Dominion. Those they have captured thus far have been transported to be part of the blood farms to spend the rest of their days providing sustenance for the Dominion population. Removing them from the life support systems that maintain them is a death sentence, a fitting fate for those traitors. No amount of negotiation will ever see those traitors returned to the Federation and Armani won’t stop the war until every traitor is providing blood for the Dominion as punishment.

Armani was not afraid of the Republic finding out about the blood farms. Those were a part of Dominion life and its sustainability. If anything, he felt more hatred towards the Republic for their actions but he was no fool. He knew that the Republic would have continued to develop and grow over the past six centuries including their military capabilities. This was evident in the fact that the Republic possessed stealth technology that even Dominion scanners could not detect. He needed information on the Republic for a possible invasion of Lumen to remind the Republic of the one Human they betrayed.

To that end, he ordered the deployment of listening posts and satellites developed by the Lupus Tribe just beyond the jammers on the outer edge of Dominion space. They were pointed right at the Lumen system for any information coming from that system. If there were any subspace transmissions still being broadcasted, the listening posts would pick them up.

That was five days ago and Armani has learned quite a few things about the current state of the Republic from the multitude of channels available that they have accessed. The Republic has grown to the point that it takes up the entire Central Region of the star cluster, more than double the size at the point when the Tenebris were exiled. The Republic is now home to a few trillion Humans, but only in the past year or two did they encounter independent alien nations in the Northern, Eastern, and Southeastern Regions of the star cluster along with the names of their nations: the Camino Star Empire, the Holy Lykan Republic as it is called now, and the United Vitam State respectively. He was also aware of the war these nations had with the then-Royal Lykan Kingdom, the first war that the Republic had ever fought. Of course, he balked at the news reports stating that was the first war Humans have been involved in since living in the star cluster knowing that the Dominion and the Federation have been at war longer than that.

There were only two problems with the recordings they had been listening to. While they state that the Republic still uses star gates to travel between star systems as do the other alien nations, there was no information on the military capabilities of any of the nations. This was a big problem as it would appear that these alien nations may be allied with the Republic after their war, though the Empire seems to be reclusive again according to their history.

The second problem with the recordings is that there was no mention of the Tenebris Dominion or the Draco Federation at all. Either the information is currently being kept from Republic citizens or the Republic itself has not received the information yet from their infiltrators. If the latter is true, it would mean that the ship used to infiltrate the Dominion capital is still on route to wherever it was deployed from. Without more info about the ship that infiltrated them and how they traveled to the capital, Armani could not begin to guess the route it took in order to trap and ensnare it to prevent that information from reaching Republic hands.

Armani chose members of the Lupus Tribe to listen and record the transmissions from the Republic as they knew best how to operate the devices. The recordings however were not to be stored in the Central Database. Armani no longer trusted the Tigris Tribe who withheld information that was deemed forbidden from him. Because of that, the Chiefs were now quarreling over their next course of action in the Council chamber. His biggest concern is how much of their “true” history did the Tigris possess. He sent investigators to confiscate the information from the Tigris Tribe’s residence, but apparently they were driven away by Carol, Tigris Chief Miya’s grandmother. He’s known her to be rather cunning, but he never knew she could be so conniving. He didn’t know whether to fear her or be proud of her.

However, if the information the Tigris has explains how the Dominion first started and not the version that everyone else was told or taught, this could prove problematic for him, especially if Chief Miya knows that information and presents that in a Council meeting. Thankfully, one of the investigators managed to secretly plant an observation device into the room where the information was held before they were driven off. So far, there was nothing to report out of the ordinary from the device, but he has not checked in today concerning the Tigris Tribe’s residence. His primary concern right now was any new information from the Republic pertaining to either their “discovery” of the Dominion or the Republic’s military capabilities.

LTC-A-C16516842 was the current head of the operation. With the exception of those born naturally from the descendants of the original heads of each Tribe, everyone else in the Dominion are clones born in clones facilities located all over the nation. As such, each clone is given a designation rather than a name. The first three letters indicate the Tribe they were genetically tied to, in this case the “Lupus Tribe Clone.” The next letter indicates the facility they were cloned from, with “A” being the main facility on Tenebris Prime and going as far up as “X” going outward to the edges of Dominion space. The letter in front of the number represents the “batch” of DNA used to create the clone based on an individual from the foundation of the Dominion. The number was obviously the number of the individual clone. When calling out a clone by their designation, their last three numbers are generally called, but when a few of them are working as a group for a specific task, they’re titled starting from “Alpha” as the one in charge, then Beta, Charlie, and so on based on skill or age. For that reason, LTC-A-C16516842 was labeled as “Alpha” in charge of acquiring information from the Republic.

“There is nothing new to report, Your Highness Pope,” Alpha said as he turned from his station and faced Armani. “The Republic’s news channels have made no reference or report concerning us or the Draco Federation.”

“There is still no information about their military capabilities?” Armani asked.

“No, sir. There is a chance that their current capabilities are public knowledge and those news stations may have no reason to reinforce said knowledge. If they were currently at war with any of those alien nations, we would have a better chance of seeing their vessels in action.”

“We missed that chance over a year ago. You’re not able to intercept any military transmissions, yet?”

“The Republic military frequencies are using encryptions that we have not deciphered yet. They’ve had centuries to advance their military communications to better their deployments and transmit orders without the general public knowing their movements.”

“You haven’t been monitoring their heinous culture at all, correct?”

“We’ve purged all but the news stations and military transmissions from the feeds we have intercepted. Those will no longer be a problem. I’ve been told that Gamma’s mind wipe of the unholy content from that occurrence was successful and he will be reporting back tomorrow after his checkup.”

Armani knew that there was a chance that the Republic’s toxic culture of “freedom and liberty” would be detrimental to the Dominion’s way of life he established. Control and absolute obedience of the clone population had to be maintained for the Dominion to remain under his authority. While the head Tribal families have more freedoms than the clones, they were taught that their freedom was a privilege that can be taken away if they ever intended to overthrow Armani. He took “special measures” to make sure that does not happen, measures those families do not know.

“Very well,” Armani said. “Is there anything further to report?”

“There is,” Alpha said. “Delta has been monitoring the Tigris Tribe’s Head Residence as you requested and there has been a development that needs to be brought to your attention.”

“Very well. Show me.”

Alpha turned towards his right and looked two seats down from his station at the man at that station.

“Delta,” Alpha said, “bring the tablet with the Tigris Tribe footage.”

Delta looked over at Alpha and saw Armani.

“Yes, Alpha,” Delta said.

Delta turned back to his station, pressed a few buttons, and a tablet with a large screen popped out near the display. Delta grabbed the tablet, pulling it out of its holder, and turned on the screen to get to the requested footage. Delta got up and walked to Alpha and Armani, presenting the tablet. Armani grabbed the tablet and pressed “play” on the screen with the volume up to listen to the recording.

“Let’s see what Carol and Chief Miya’s plans are involving the Republic,” Armani said.

* * * * *

Grand Library, City of Sanctus Draco, Capital of Draco Federation

Planet Propitius Esto, Draconia System, Western Region

2:46pm, October 25, 5434 A.D.

“I’m not getting anywhere with this.”

Amarria was starting to get frustrated with the “dead-ends” she kept hitting. For the past week, she had been researching everything she could find that could shed some light as to who the leader of the Tenebris Dominion was. Unfortunately, she kept hitting a point where she wasn’t able to research any further due to lack of information or returning to the point she started. Despite her best efforts, she wasn’t making any progress despite every possible clue or lead in the information. The Dominion REALLY did not want the Federation to know who the head of state was for reasons only known to the Dominion leadership and the Tribal Chiefs.

Amarria could not count how many hours she had spent in front of the terminal in the Grand Library that was reserved for her to use. She also had to be escorted and watched by local

police officers to make sure she was not disturbed as her presence as a Republic citizen is still unknown to the rest of the Federation population. This also meant that she could not socialize or confide with anyone to release the amount of frustration that she had been building in her research. It was moments like this that she wished she was back in Luminous to see her mother for lunch so that she could talk about work.

Because she was confined to the government building and the Grand Library until the Federation made an official announcement concerning the Republic, she had to eat meals either in her quarters or in the government building's cafeteria. She can't really complain about either location as both were well decorated and quite aesthetically pleasing to the eyes with purple and gold accents and highly artistic yet religious paintings on the walls. She did not know if the average citizen's accommodations are similar in style or not, though.

While she has been in the capital, she took notice that prayer and worship is done on a daily basis throughout the Federation, which was mandatory to everyone unless they were in combat after she inquired about it. Since Amarria was an outsider to the Federation, she is considered exempt from having to abide by that law. While Amarria wanted to sit in on a service, the fact that she has never attended one before become quite apparent to anyone around her. Amarria has asked about whether the services were broadcasted and President Shea granted her access to watch them in her quarters for "research" purposes. The similarities with the Great Maker faith were very apparent with the services, with the only differences being the mention of the High Bishops instead of the Grand Pope as well as blessing for the Federation instead of the Republic. They also ask for forgiveness quite often in their services, but Amarria had surmised that they want to be forgiven for their ancestors' actions when they were still part of the Tenebris. She continued to watch their services each day since then for any other differences and to make it easier for her to understand their culture more when compared to the Republic.

However, those services she watched did not ease her troubled mind in trying to find the Dominion's leadership. She had searched every possible lead she could find in the Dominion's records they provided to the Federation, but each one was exhausted. She leaned back in her chair and sighed, rubbing her eyes from staring at the screen for too long. The officer that escorted Amarria looked her way briefly before he continued to look around to make sure no one disturbed her.

Amarria was tired and wondered what she was going to do now. She stayed behind to find out more about the Dominion's leadership along with the Federation's history and culture. While the latter she was able to accomplish, she felt defeated in the former, the first time for her where the lack of history caused her not to find the answer she needed.

She paused on that thought for a moment. While the Draco family separated from the rest of the families that make up the Tenebris cult, the other families-turned-tribes appeared to follow the same followings and structure of the cult prior to their exile. If that were the case, then none of the five tribes would follow someone who was a member of one of those tribes, unless that person was anonymous or their real identity is not known somehow. The only family that unified them was the Draco and all of them were in the Federation...

Amarria's thoughts suddenly stopped when a possibility came to mind, one that she didn't consider until that train of thought hit that stop. Is it possible that not ALL of the Draco family went with Armani's son when they split from the rest of the Tenebris? Considering that the Draco family went along with the cult that Armani Draco first established centuries ago, the fact his son did not follow his father's teachings shows that there was a rift in the family when it came to their sadistic religion. The possibility exists that not everyone agreed with the son's

decision and didn't board the Draco family ship. The question is who did not board the Draco family ship centuries ago, boarding the other families' ships instead?

Amarria leaned towards the terminal to bring up the Draco family history around that timeframe to see if there were any records of those Draco missing from their ship's manifest. After a minute or so, she was able to find the manifest for their colony ship at the time of their exile. She looked through the names of the people totaling just over fifty in number, comparing it to the list of Draco family members last registered as active at their colony before they left their colony. Armani Draco died just before the evacuation so not seeing his name on either list came as no surprise. When Amarria put the lists next to each other, it showed a discrepancy with three names of Draco family members who were not on the Draco colony ship during their exodus.

Amarria quickly researched the names and professions the three people were into. All three were men in their forties and all three of them were studying human brain functions as well as cybernetics. Amarria pondered this for a moment, wondering why these three in particular were missing from the Draco colony ship during their evacuation. Amarria tried to look into what happened to them during the evacuation, but there was no information to be found among the Draco Federation's records.

The problem facing Amarria is the fact that she looked over the history that the Dominion provided the Federation multiple times and none of it possessed a manifest of the families on the other Tenebris ships during that time. Either there was no need to provide one or they knew that if the Federation researched their manifest that those names would show up indicating there were members of the Draco family in the Dominion. Amarria could not wrap her head around why those three would go with the rest of the Tenebris families than the Draco other than they still followed Armani's teachings, but the fact that they studied the human brain as well as cybernetics still puzzled her. She began to think why or how their profession would benefit the rest of the Tenebris, but the only thing she could think of is the use of cybernetic implants to control their clone population. However, the Federation has never recovered anyone from the Dominion, living or dead, so there is no evidence if their contribution to the Dominion was used.

With the possibility that non-Federation members of the Draco family are living within the Dominion, the possibility also exists that one of their descendants may be the unknown leader of the Dominion. If that is the case, this would explain the hostile nature of the Dominion towards the Federation. If that is the case, then the question remains as to why the Dominion would hide the fact that their leader is a descendant of the Draco family?

This is all still speculation, but her theory fits the facts with what happened to those three Draco members from over six centuries ago and who those five Tribes would listen to outside of their Tribes. If this was true, then President Shea needed to know what Amarria found.

Amarria downloaded her findings to her tablet. Once the download completed, she logged out of the terminal, got up from her seat with tablet in hand, and approached her police escort. Her escort heard her getting up and turned to face her, his arms behind his back.

"There has been a development in my findings," Amarria whispered. "I need to see President Shea immediately."

The officer nodded in agreement, turned and started heading for the doors to the back of the library with Amarria following behind him. Amarria could only hope that she was not wrong about her findings.

* * * * *

*Brenda's Quarters, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier, In Transit to Ruber System
Tenebris Dominion Space, Southwestern Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
4:14pm, October 25, 5434 A.D.*

“Why is there so little information relating to their history here?!”

Brenda continued to work on her initial report during the return trip from the *Cavalier's* infiltration mission on Tenebris Prime. She began to sort through the information a couple of days after they began their return trip in order to collect herself after finding out that everyone in the Dominion consumes blood for sustenance. She had a difficult time having any appetite when she tried to eat anything in the ship's galley after finding out that fact, but that feeling started to go away after a couple of days. Once she got better, she began to review the information that she and Lakia retrieved from the Dominion's central database to begin her report.

However, while records exist that relate to the distribution of blood, the main focus of Brenda's report was the Dominion's history. That was where her frustration started to begin. The information on the Dominion's history was small in size, and some of it did not quite coincide with what the Republic had prior to the Tenebris going into their self-imposed exile from the Republic. A good portion of the historical information that was extracted appeared to be rather embellished, almost like it was part of some holy text.

According to the text, Armani Draco was designated as a “prophet” and “saint” who lived on a world that was part of a nation full of “sin” and “deviancy.” He received a vision one night from an angel in red stating that he was destined to bring the truth of the one “true god” to the nation. To that end, the angel told him the truth lies in their blood, which has been tainted for centuries, and for him to make their blood pure again with his knowledge.

After receiving this message, Armani set out to use his knowledge to “purify” the blood of Humankind starting with his family and the members of five families that followed his message. These six families were the founding families of the Tenebris. Their names were already known to Brenda as well as their roles so she skipped over that part as those roles were written to sound more “regal” or “holy” than they needed to be from her perspective.

The texts stated that the ruling body of that nation, which Brenda knew was the Republic Senate but was not stated by name, found their “righteous” religion an affront to the “sinful” laws of the nation. As that nation sent their military to destroy the Tenebris, Armani sacrificed his body to allow the six families to escape into space. His knowledge and “soul” were saved, though what the texts mean by that is unknown, and the Tenebris traveled out of that nation without the military knowing. Their exodus from their world lasted for two months before they reached a world far from that “sinful” nation where they would start anew and be free to worship their “true” religion. The Draco family were lost in the exodus, their fate unknown. An asterisk was next to this part of the text, referencing later pages. This was no doubt referencing when the Draco Federation was discovered, but she read that later on.

Because they were so few in number, they resorted to creating members of their families born artificially from their collective knowledge. It was obvious that this was the start of the Tenebris cloning their population, but it was not stated as such. The families of the Tenebris grew into the five known Tribes, where the True Descendants of the original families would serve as the leaders and administrators of the new Tenebris Dominion, governed by the heads of the Tribes under the guidance of the messenger of the “red god.” Brenda was careful in her report not to capitalize it since, unlike the other religions of the Republic, it was not a recognized

religion by the Republic Senate. It was also not stated who this “messenger” was or what position they held in relation to the Dominion leadership. Whether this was done intentionally to protect this “messenger’s” identity from the Dominion population or from the Federation once they were found is unknown. Those that were clones would serve the roles they were born into for the betterment and sustainability of the Dominion based on the Tribes they came from. Everyone is required to attend daily services whether in person or remotely at the same time. Most likely this “messenger” is the one that also performs their religious services.

After the creation of their society, their history from that point forward only highlighted key moments in their history. These moments included but were not limited to the founding of their first colony outside of Tenebris Prime, the creation of the Portal Drive, and first contact with the Draco Federation along with their war between their nations. Other key moments included the introduction of new Chiefs up to current for each Tribe along with past Chiefs’ deaths that were ceremonial in fashion. However, they were no longer Chiefs long before their deaths as either their child or grandchild were in that position of power.

At that point, Brenda noticed a couple of odd trends concerning the Chiefs she could not understand. The first trend she noticed is that they only serve as Chief for an average of twenty years. All five Chiefs begin and end their tenure at the same time. The day after, their daughters take over their positions unless they are unable to do so such as an illness or death. Why their tenure was only twenty years was unknown. The other trend she noticed was that the Chiefs were always women, never men. Unless an occupation is specific to a gender for privacy reasons, positions and occupations within the Republic can be held by anyone, including the position of Supreme Chancellor. The concept that a position can only be held by one gender when it doesn’t have to be is an outdated concept done away with over three millennia ago with the founding of the Republic. Whoever it was that decided that only women can be Chiefs obviously had an outdated way of thinking concerning the Tribes’ leadership. There is no mention of any boys being born by the Chiefs. Based on what she read, the only males within the head family of each Tribe are separated from the rest and either serve as governors in other star systems answerable to the Chiefs, or they are suitors or mates to produce an heir to the position of Chief. How only girls would be conceived at the moment of conception caused Brenda to ponder that information. Unless some medical or genetic procedure took place between impregnation up to the early stages of pregnancy, there was an equal chance of having a male or female.

Unfortunately, this is all merely speculation on her part based on the facts.

The one part of their history she was trying to find is what happened to any of the Federation citizens that would have been taken by the Dominion when they conquer some of their worlds. The only information relating to those Draco was the Dominion’s “crusade to cleanse their wayward brethren of the Draco Tribe of their transgressions.” This part was neither insightful nor informative. Without more information to their whereabouts, there was no way Brenda could include that in her report without using the original wording which doesn’t help anyone to know what they did with captured Federations citizens. There was also no information as to what they did with any of the alien citizens on those captured worlds, either.

It took some time for Brenda to put all of these facts together and start coming up with her report. Because of the amount of “religious embellishment” that was present in the Dominion’s history, she had to go through and reword a lot of the information in order to sound more professional, as if it was written by an outsider of the Dominion, not a cult fanatic. That was the reason for the multitude of quotations she had to put in during her initial report. This alone took her some time to write as she had to be careful with her wording. However, the one

part of her report she wasn't sure how to word carefully was the use of blood as sustenance for an entire population. This topic was going to be very sensitive to the people who would eventually view her report, namely the entire population of the Republic. She debated on whether to be brutally honest or try to word it in a way to not disgust everyone with the upsetting details. In the end, she needed to be honest about the details because it was disgusting to her that other Humans would resort to something as barbaric as ingesting another Human's blood just for sustenance. She heard the name of an ancient mythological creature from old Earth tales that was once Human or looked like one and ingested the blood of Humans for sustenance. That creature was called a vampire. To her, that is what the Dominion was: a nation full of vampires.

Brenda's frustration with the lack of the Dominion's more complete history did not help make the report any easier on her to write. No matter how she looked at it, the report was small in size because of the lack of information even after she added the information about their ingesting of blood. She tried to extend it further by rewording more of the report but she could only do so much before she either embellished it herself or be on the verge of making stuff up, both of which she needed to avoid.

She took a break from writing the report, one of many breaks, to rest her brain. Part of the reason she needed to see about working on the report more was how long it was going to take to get back to the Ruber System in Republic space. There was one more week before they arrive and the *Cavalier* is currently stopped right now to allow its warp drive to recharge. If she finished her report, if there was nothing more for her to do with it, then she would find herself being bored with nothing to do to pass the time short of watching movies and videos she already watched, exercise in the workout room, or train with the SAGATs on the ship which there was no need for her to do now. She reclined in her chair and looked away from the terminal screen for a moment to clear her head.

A few seconds later, her door chime went off. She looked over at the door with a puzzled expression on her face.

"Who is it?" Brenda asked.

"It's Lakia," her voice said through the terminal next to the door. "*Can I come in?*"

Brenda leaned forward and turned her chair towards the door.

"Come in," she said.

The door opened and Lakia stood there in her one-piece workout attire, possibly for running. Considering she was already sweating, it looked like she either finished her run or she was taking a break from it. Brenda looked at her with a puzzled expression as Lakia walked in and the door closed behind her.

"How is your report going?" Lakia asked.

"Troubling," Brenda said. "Did you ever look at the copy of the history when we retrieved it?"

"No, I didn't. I was told to leave that for you to work on. What's troubling you about their history?"

"A lot of their history is missing information including the name of the Republic and who their leader is or their position. Most of their history is also highly embellished in religious lingo that it is hard to tell fact versus very overzealous fiction. I tried what I could to convert the information to actual fact from the view of an outsider, but it has taken a while and my head hurts after all that time spent trying to reword most of it."

"How close are you to finishing it?"

"Technically, I already have finished it."

“You’ve finished it? Then why are you acting like there is still more to do?”

“Because we still have one week left to go before we get back to the station in Ruber. If I’m finished now, I won’t have anything to do for the next week to pass the time short of maybe working out, but I can’t do that for an entire day for the next week. I will be worn out.”

“There is nothing more you can do to the report?”

“I wish there was, but I was on the verge of embellishing it and I did not need to be doing that as that would be sacrificing my journalistic integrity by that point.”

“True, that is something you want to avoid doing to your report. Anything of note you found of interest?”

“Some but maybe I should let you look over the report. I need fresh eyes to proofread this for me and it may be informative to you as well.”

“I will look at it in a little while. I was just taking a break from my run around the ship.”

“I figured that was why you were in that attire and sweating. How do you keep yourself occupied during such long deployments?”

“Aside from training and exercising? I usually have a few large books on hand to read during my downtime.”

“What do you normally like to read?”

“I tend to read books from around the Twentieth to Twenty-First Century, namely science fiction novels.”

“Twentieth to Twenty-First Century? Wait, wasn’t that during the ‘Earth Space Age’ before Luna was even terraformed?”

“That’s right. During that time, science fiction was a huge thing with writers and artists depicting possible futures that Humanity could take. A lot of those stories from back then can be rather awe-inspiring.”

“But in this day and age, doesn’t science fact overwrite science fiction?”

“Maybe, but could you imagine how different things would have been if for example Luna was never terraformed? What would happen if Humankind never found the Salire Purpura Crystals after terraforming Luna? The realm of possibilities were so numerous that one couldn’t count them all, and new possibilities were being created by new authors when they had their own vision to write. Unfortunately, authors nowadays don’t have such imaginations to create any good science fiction. There are some that have come up with encounters with aliens as a basis for an intriguing story, but now that Humanity as a whole has encountered aliens, even that realm of science fiction is giving way to science fact.”

“You know that was eventually going to happen whether we like it or not.”

“I know, but I guess I like how some people like to romanticize on the possibilities.”

“You sound a bit like Amarria from what I heard.”

“Amarria? You mean that woman in the meeting back at RCIA headquarters?”

“Yes, she is Admiral Trent and Laura’s daughter. I heard she feels the same way when she reads the history of the Republic, namely the Expansion Era when colonists were venturing into the unknown. I wonder how she feels now after that team reached the Federation’s capital.”

“You can ask her in one week’s time when we get back to Ruber. If you want, I can lend you a couple of those books to your terminal. It will help pass the time for the next week.”

“If it will help pass the time, I will take you up on that offer as long as you read my report to help proofread it. By the way, when will this ship get underway again? I haven’t heard the engines power up to go to warp in several hours.”

“Now that you mention it, you’re right. It should only take a few hours for them to

recharge. I wonder why they're delaying getting them online and underway again."

"Should we go check?"

Lakia pondered Brenda's question for about a few seconds before she came to a conclusion.

"Let me complete my run first," Lakia said. "If they are not up and running by the time I complete my run, I will go to the bridge to check and let you know what is going on."

"Alright, then. Please give me some good books that will take a while to read, too, since we have a long trip back."

"I will and I'll get back with you in a little bit. See you."

After waiving at Brenda, Lakia turned and pressed a button on the terminal next to the door, opening it. Once she walked out and the door closed behind her, Brenda turned back to her terminal to look it over, making sure it was saved before she closed the file. She leaned back in her chair.

"Romanticizing about future possibilities, huh?" she said quietly out loud. "That must have been nice back then."

* * * * *

*Bridge, Covert-Ops Stealth Warship Cavalier, In Transit to Ruber System
Tenebris Dominion Space, Southwestern Region, 60 Light-Years from Ruber System
4:18pm, October 25, 5434 A.D.*

"Have you confirmed what the object is?"

Captain Luke like the rest of the crew had to wait patiently for a few hours for the warp drive to recharge, the same routine like what they had to do on their way to Tenebris Prime. They did not end up in the Oberth System like they were when they traveled to Tenebris Prime. Instead, they were in the Grissom System on the border of Dominion space before one travels into the unknown regions of space going towards Republic space. Transmission jammers were located just outside the system to prevent communications going to and from the Dominion. The preliminary report based on the information retrieved from the Dominion's archives confirms that the jammers are to prevent outside influence from the Republic while at the same time preventing the Republic from detecting Dominion transmissions.

However, while the jammers appear on passive sensors at this distance, something new appeared just beyond them that didn't look like a jammer at all. Since the warp drive was still recharging, Luke requested for Yuki, his science officer, to try and scan the new object with as little active scans as possible. Yuki, however, advised against doing so as those scans could still be traced. An alternative, she suggested, would be to send a shuttle that was warp capable to the new object to get visual scans and transmissions from that object. Luke followed her suggestion and launched a shuttle with an investigative team to examine the object. After two hours, the shuttle returned to the *Cavalier* to submit their report.

The one leading the team, a man who Luke only knows as "Shadow One," came to the bridge to give Luke his report. Shadow One was still in his full body armor suit, his face covered by his helmet. Luke knew that the Shadow team were dedicated RCIA agents whose identities remain secret from the rest of the crew. Only other RCIA agents know their identities, meaning Luke doesn't even know what they look like underneath those helmets. Agents like them usually keep to themselves, so Luke has not personally spoke to them and even less seen them.

"Yes, *Captain Luke*," Shadow One said, his voice synthesized and modified deeply

through the helmet to mask his true voice. *“The object that was discovered past the Dominion jammers appears to be a subspace receiver designed to collect transmissions from beyond Dominion space.”*

“So, it is some sort of listening post the Dominion has deployed,” Luke said.

“Considering we didn’t detect it on the way to the Dominion capital, I can only assume that it was deployed within the past two weeks since our first pass through.”

As Luke pondered this news, a thought came to his mind as to WHY it would have been deployed recently within that time.

“Shadow One,” Luke continued, “exactly WHERE was the listening post pointing towards?”

“It was pointing towards the direction of the Lumen System,” Shadow One said.

Luke let out a heavy sigh. He knew what that meant.

“Then my fears are confirmed,” he said. “The Dominion knows we infiltrated their capital to retrieve their information.”

“If that is the case,” Yuki said, “why only deploy a listening post? Wouldn’t they have deployed a fleet directly into the Lumen System in retaliation?”

“The Dominion has exiled itself for more than six hundred years, only coming into contact with the Draco Federation years ago. Based on the information we acquired from their archives, the Dominion has kept any knowledge on the Republic away from the population. This means that they have no new information on the Republic since their exile. If they launched their fleet without updating their knowledge on the size and scope of the Republic and its military, they risk jumping into the middle of several fleets as well as find themselves within range of the orbital defense platforms. They need updated knowledge on the Republic but I wonder if they are listening for something else...”

“Like what?”

“There is a chance they are listening for any reports involving the Dominion and/or the Federation. Unlike military channels, public channels such as news stations are not encrypted. If news were to break about either nation being exposed, the Dominion would learn about it and possibly take action. This puts us in a difficult situation.”

“So, if we report our findings to the Republic about the Dominion, it would mean that the Dominion would attack once they know that they have been exposed to the star cluster at large. Even if we only expose the Draco Federation, there is a chance that the Dominion would also attack knowing their conflict would be brought up as well. This is not good news.”

“The question I have is how they figured out it was us that infiltrated their archives? According to Specter One’s report, the infiltration into their records should not have been detected. Only when they tried to exit the building did alarms go off because of their method of vacating the premises, opening both the external doors and internal doors at the same time. That should not have been enough to raise suspicion.”

“Maybe not,” Shadow One said. *“However, if the procedure for exiting the building has never been deviated even once by their clones, they would have conducted an investigation to see if their archives were accessed by unseen infiltrators. If they were able to detect the infiltration using a method that the computer system Brenda was using could not conceal, they would have proof at that point that they had infiltrators accessing their archives. If the Federation has never used optical camouflage before, it wouldn’t take the Dominion leadership long to figure out who was behind that infiltration and subsequent data access.”*

“In other words, Lakia and Brenda’s stunt in their withdrawal from the archives exposed

us whether we intended to or not,” Luke said. “Is there anything we can do to keep the listening post from detecting transmissions from the Republic without alerting them of sabotage?”

“Even if we alter or modify the listening post here, there is no guarantee that this is the only one pointing towards Lumen outside of their jammers without further exploration and investigation. If they see that one post is not reporting the same information as the rest of them, they will have further proof of espionage and will have a legitimate claim for retaliation.”

“So, how do we deal with them?” Yuki asked. “We were sent to get information that would be reviewed by the Supreme Chancellor and the RCIA which would later be brought to the Senate and to the public in general. If all we did was get the information but it won’t be reported, what was the point of bringing along a reporter in our case or the librarian on the *Templar*? How do we tell them their reports may never be presented to the public in fear of a Dominion attack against the Republic?”

“I get what you are saying, Yuki,” Luke said. “However, that is not our call to make under these circumstances. It will be up to Head Agent Aja and Supreme Chancellor Drew to make their choice once we tell them about the Dominion listening posts. As for Brenda, we won’t tell her about this situation until we reach Luminaire to give our report. Her report may still be valuable when it comes to information about the Dominion.”

“So, in other words, we tell her nothing about what is going on. What about the Specter Team? Do we tell them about this or do we keep quiet with them as well?”

“Let me put it to you this way: no one outside of the bridge and the Shadow Team is to know about that listening post. Those that are part of the debriefing at the RCIA headquarters will find out about that listening post at that point. Does everyone present understand that?”

“Yes, sir,” everyone on the bridge said, except Shadow One who only nodded.

“The warp drive should be charged by now,” Shadow One said. *“It is best for us to get underway before the crew begins to ask why we haven’t activated the warp drive yet. I will take my leave.”*

Shadow One headed for the elevator. Luke turned towards the helmsman.

“Activate the warp drive,” Luke said. “Let’s continue on to the Ruber System and get out of Dominion space.”

“Yes, sir,” the helmsman said. “Activating the warp drive.”

Luke leaned back in his chair as the ship began to accelerate. Nearby planets started to quickly disappear behind them as the space around the ship was surrounded by blue colored fluctuations and streaks from the warp bubble. He began to wonder what the RCIA and the Chancellor will do once they arrive at the capital and how they were going to handle the situation with the Dominion listening posts. He understood Yuki’s frustrations as he felt the same. However, he could not convey those feeling in front of the bridge crew.

He was upset, however, that Brenda and Specter One fouled up their mission and their data gathering was possibly discovered. He wanted to find a way to punish them for their failure and for putting the mission as well as the Republic at risk, but there was a week’s worth of travel between the Grissom and Ruber Systems ahead of them. Any sort of disciplinary action taken aboard his ship would only last that long and both of them are only following his orders while on his ship. With one being a civilian and the other a SAGAT, neither of them were under his jurisdiction to apply any disciplinary action unless it affects the ship. This will have to be the Head Agent and Supreme Chancellor’s call when it comes to their actions.

Of course, that’s only IF they wanted to punish them...

* * * * *