

***Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga***  
***Episode II: The Star to the North***



**PART 4**

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic*  
*1:14pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Thank you and have a good day.”

As the camera turned off, Supreme Chancellor Drew took a deep break. He finished addressing the whole Republic about what happened with the stolen destroyer and the Lykan imposter who used Trent’s DNA. He also presented evidence of these facts from the data they had so far. He wanted to make sure that Trent was not viewed as a traitor by the people.

The only thing he did not tell the public was what he intended to do about the stolen destroyer, at least any definitive details. He told them that he will be talking with military advisors on how to retrieve the ship. At least he was being honest on that topic. He had contacted Grand Admiral Mikey to meet him concerning the actions needed to recover the vessel after the broadcast was completed and should be in the waiting area right now waiting to be called in.

However, a transmission from the main Senate chamber was coming in that he was not expecting. Drew took a deep breath, preparing for what they had to say as he answered the call.

A holographic screen appeared in front of him with the whole Senate chamber in front of him filled with all of the Senators. Drew began to wonder why they were contacting him.

“What can I do for you, Senators?” Drew asked.

*“We wanted to ask you a few questions regarding what you just broadcasted,”* Senator Chardanai asked. *“I have been requested to ask you these by my colleagues to reduce confusion. You only stated that Vice Admiral Trent was the one that was scanned but there were other people in that conference room with him aboard his battleship, wasn’t there?”*

“That is correct. However, we wanted to keep everyone else anonymous. Trent was only mentioned because the news caught his name being broadcasted. I and a few select members of the military are fully aware that the possibility exists that the Lykans could potentially or already have made clones of everyone else that was in that meeting weeks ago. I have informed the State ambassador to let his military know of the possibility based on our experience and to watch for a similar scenario like what Rear Admiral Nora’s fleet encountered. As for the rest of the people involved, I have sent the necessary info to either them or their superiors about the situation.”

*“Is there any chance that they could use this DNA to make clones that can infiltrate the government?”*

“Considering their method of insertion and the fact we now know what to look out for, the likelihood of them trying to insert another operative will be slim. If they attempt it again, we know how to respond to the situation.”

*“Then we have one question that a lot of us here have fears about.”*

“And what question would that be?”

*“We already know that the Lykans want to wipe out Humanity and would look for effective measures to do so. What prevents them from using the Human DNA they acquired from creating a biological weapon that is effective and lethal?”*

Drew’s face suddenly showed a shocked expression. He and his military advisors were focusing on ways to prevent the Kingdom from trying to infiltrate Republic forces and facilities again that the thought of using biological weapons was a distant thought to him. However, the senator had a very good point. With the Lykans in possession of Human DNA, they could easily create clones for use in experiments with biological weapons against Republic civilian sectors.

This wasn’t good. Drew had never thought about this potential use and now he had no idea how to respond to such a question.

*“I take your silence as a sign that you did not think about that possibility?”* Chardanai asked.

“I’ll be honest,” Drew said, “you have indeed caught me without an answer to such a question. You are correct that I did not consider that specific use of Human DNA. I will have to confer with the Secretary of Defense to see what we can do to further protect the citizens of the Republic from any possible biological warfare.”

*“I recommend you do so as soon as possible. Also, we had one more question concerning Vice Admiral Trent.”*

“What would that question be?”

*“What do you intend to do with him? From what I understand, if the Lykans have his DNA, there is no way he would be able to do his job if you had to revoke his access based on what you said in the news broadcast. So, what are you going to do with him?”*

“Grand Admiral Mikey and I are working on putting together a special unit that the Vice Admiral will be a part of. We are still working on the details of this unit. I will go over those details once we have them finalized. In the meantime, I am having the Vice Admiral return to Luminaire for some shore leave until the aforementioned details are worked out.”

*“Very well. We have one last question for you then. How do you intend to retrieve the destroyer and what happens if the Empire gets to it first?”*

Drew knew this was going to be asked.

“I have spoken with my military advisors about the destroyer earlier. We are having a fleet loaded up with twice as many Salire Purpura Crystals with an additional portion for the stolen destroyer. They will head into the system the destroyer jumped to, capture the imposter who at this point should still be trapped in a force field of the destroyer’s bridge, load it with the crystals, and hopefully jump out before the Empire responds to whatever actions the imposter has taken. If the Imperial forces are there, we try to explain to them what has happened. They have no love for the Lykans either after what happened to them over fifty years ago.”

*“I hope so, Chancellor. The last thing we need is another war to deal with.”*

After that, the transmission from the Senate chamber turned off. Drew raised an eyebrow.

“I guess they have no problems with the retrieval idea,” he said aloud.

He pressed a button on his terminal for the secretary.

“Is Grand Admiral Mikey still waiting?” Drew said.

*“He is,”* the secretary said. *“Should I send him in now?”*

“Yes, please.”

A few seconds after he said that, Mikey opened one of the doors and walked into the room.

“Supreme Chancellor,” Mikey said as he approached Drew’s desk and saluted.

“Thank you for coming,” Drew said as he gestured to one of the seats in front of his desk. “Have a seat please.”

“Yes, sir,” Mikey said as he lowered his arm and sat down in the seat.

“Sorry for the delay. The Senate decided to call me not too long after the broadcast and they had a few interesting questions for me.”

“I’m curious to know about what questions they were asking you. Anything to do with what we are about to talk about?”

“Some of them, yes. Others, not so much. There was even a question I had not thought to bring up at all because I did not think of this possibility.”

“Which was what?”

“The senators asked me what our defense would be if the Kingdom decided to use Trent’s DNA as well as the DNA of the others who were scanned to create a biological weapon to wipe out the civilian population of Republic planets.”

Mikey was wide-eyed when Drew said that.

“That was exactly my expression,” Drew continued. “I never took that possibility into consideration.”

“Considering how they view the Human as an infestation, if they could find the means to kill so many effectively, that would be one way to do it. This does not bode well if the citizens begin to think of that same scenario.”

“I know. I could not give a good answer to the Senate so we need to come up with something to make sure that the Lykans don’t use that method of attack against the citizens.”

“Understood, but so far the best solution is to push them back by expanding the DP Zone to where they won’t be able to jump directly past the zone. There are a few areas where they would be able to jump right through the zone.”

“That was the initial idea of the zone to begin with but those plans got thrown out when the Lykans attacked our forces sooner than expected. We already know the reason behind how that happened.”

“It would appear all of this seems to be centered around that visit from the Lykan ambassador a few weeks ago. Between them downloading our map and scanning our DNA to make clone operatives, we must look like the utter fools for being so trusting in our first contact with aliens.”

“We wanted to avoid a conflict with a new intelligent species. You can’t blame us for wanting to be courteous.”

“Being courteous was not the issue. We needed to be more cautious about it. When Blair was told it was a recording device, he should have questioned it further or had it submitted to a more detailed scan to find out its function. Two issues would not have happened if he had inquired further.”

“Maybe so and that is something I will have to take up with his superiors in that regards, but the fact of the matter is that we are in this situation now and we have to deal with it accordingly. If the Senate can approve the sustainable warp drive proposal, we might be able to use such a ship to infiltrate the Kingdom and attempt to remove any threats and/or experiments involving the Republic and its citizens.”

“That is a thought. Is such a ship the reason you wanted me to have Vice Admiral Trent pulled from the *Renaldo* and have him come here to Luminaire?”

“That is exactly right. I figured he would be perfect for the job along with Colonel Blair and Lieutenant Colonel Benja. They could get a small measure of vengeance for what the Lykans have done to them, especially Trent in that regards. If we can disrupt the Royal Navy’s operations, they would be unable to continue their war with us and the State.”

“It sounds like you have some added incentive to bring before the Senate.”

“That’s true but I will bring that up with them once we cover how we want to proceed. That brings me to the next thing I wanted to discuss with you. It has to do with the retrieval of that destroyer that was stolen...”

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*Office of Anchorwoman Laura, National Broadcasting System Building, City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen (“Light”) System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
1:50pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“I’m so relieved now.”

Laura had finally finished eating lunch after her appetite returned following the Supreme Chancellor’s address to the nation. It was like a huge weight was lifted off her shoulders now that she along with the rest of the nation will no longer think her husband was involved with the theft of the destroyer. She also called Amarria and left her a message, telling her the good news.

The Chief contacted her just afterwards and told her she could have the rest of the day off if she wanted to after lunch and Laura was contemplating the thought, but she knew she would be able to continue throughout the day. She had to redo her makeup which was not a big problem as she had some on hand in her office to fix it up. The Chief also stated if she stayed that she can address the nation concerning her husband during the evening news if she wished. Laura said she would think about it and let him know by four o'clock if she wished to do so or not. Right now she wanted to relax after having a rather stressful day so far.

Someone knocking at her door that was still closed did not help.

"Who is it?" Laura asked.

"It's Matt. Can I come in?"

Laura looked in the mirror at her face. Her makeup was still a bit of a mess. She turned and faced away from the door and got her makeup kit out to work on it.

"Come in," she said.

As Matt opened the door, he noticed she was facing a makeup mirror and working on her makeup.

"I must have come at a bad time," Matt said.

"It's fine," Laura said. "I just got done eating and I needed to fix up my makeup after my waterworks earlier. What's up?"

"I wanted to check up on you and see how you were doing. I had not seen you since the broadcast and I heard you were having lunch after the Supreme Chancellor's address to the nation. That's why I waited until now."

"I'm doing better now. A lot of questions were answered and I had a lot of concerns with how people such as our neighbors were going to view us after he was practically being branded as a traitor."

"I must apologize for that, but when breaking news occurs live and his name gets called out like that..."

"I know. We have to go based on the facts at the time the event had occurred. However, considering that people even in the military said he was the one issuing the orders, there wasn't much else to say otherwise. Now part of me wished that Christina didn't notice that destroyer going through Viridis to begin with."

"Whether she noticed it or not, what's done is done and now your husband has been cleared. I do have one question though."

"What's that?"

"If what they said is true and Trent's DNA is no longer in the military database, what does that do for his career in the military? Isn't his DNA required to do his job?"

"It is and he told me what happened concerning that. He had to be escorted to the brig because that was the one place he could go where the ship's computer, once his DNA was removed, would not put up a force field around him. They have since granted him access to his quarters and his Ready Room in order to pack his things as he has been recalled back to Luminaire. What they will have him do once he returns, neither of us knows for certain. He won't be back until tomorrow, though."

"Sounds like you should be happy about his return."

"Oh, believe me. I am very happy he is returning."

“But?”

“My only problem is the circumstances of which he is returning under.”

“I can see why you would be concerned in that regards. You heard the Supreme Chancellor, though. Trent was neither responsible for the theft nor was he a traitor. He is not at fault and the military knows he is a highly valued officer. I’m sure they have a way to reincorporate him back into the military in some form or fashion. Otherwise they wouldn’t have him come back here telling him they have something for him to do.”

“That is true.”

“By the way, I heard that the Chief was giving you permission to address the people concerning your husband. This must have been in response to several people who asked about you through our news site when we went to the first commercial break earlier today.”

Laura had finished touching up her makeup when Matt said that. She turned around and was very surprised by what he told her.

“People asked about me?” she asked. “I figured people would be hurtful and commented that I left the broadcast because I was ashamed that I married a traitor.”

“I’m not going to lie,” Matt said, “there were quite a few of those in the messages but there were also people who were sympathetic and wondered if you were okay after hearing such news. There were even those who thought you were strong to try and stay on the broadcast from the beginning knowing you already knew what was going on.”

“Dang it, Matt! I just touched up my makeup! Don’t make me cry again!”

“Sorry about that. I just wanted to let you know in case you were wondering what you were going to do. Thankfully the so-called ‘haters’ have been silenced for the most part after the Chancellor’s address earlier so there should not be issues if you wish to address the people.”

“I might just do that now that I know there are those who are concerned about me.”

“By the way, while the Chancellor didn’t say anything about it, did Trent hear anything about what the military will do about the stolen destroyer?”

“Trent heard that they were looking into sending a fleet to retrieve the destroyer and if the Imperial forces are there to open a dialogue to explain what happened. However, I don’t want this on the news until we have confirmation from the military or the government.”

“I know. I’m just curious if there will be anything further that would end up being reported by Brenda after she broke the news about the destroyer being stolen?”

“I know. She said she was bored out there in Serenus and look what happened. However, if we do establish contact with the Empire and they visit Serenus, you know she will be the first to report about it.”

“Do you think we should pull her from that location and have someone else there?”

“No, she did her job earlier and we cannot fault her for that. She didn’t report Trent’s name either, but rather it was announced over the speakers and by that destroyer’s crew. If anything, it is best for her to stay where she is for now.”

“Alright then. I need to get back to my office. I’m glad to see that you are doing better.”

“Thank you. I’ll see you later.”

“See you later,” Matt said as he turned towards the door and walked out.

Laura looked back at the mirror and took a deep breath. She had a statement to create.

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*Bridge, Cruiser-158, Docking Bay #7, Northern Republic Military Headquarters  
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus ("Serene") System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System  
1:57pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"Have we completed our supply operations yet?"

Captain Mandy was getting a bit antsy about the timeframe she was put under. Her ship and six destroyers were ordered to retrieve the stolen destroyer from the NR-A-Zero-Two System that was eleven Light-years away. Headquarters managed to access the destroyer's computer system remotely to check its status and position. According to the sensors on the ship, the imposter was contained in the force field as expected. What was not expected was that the imposter's life signs were gone, meaning he must have committed suicide when his mission was compromised. The logs indicated that the imposter had already sent a rather threatening message along with a dictionary of the English language further into Imperial territory.

Headquarters managed to access the external sensors of the destroyer and found that no Imperial ships had appeared in the system. It did detect an Imperial star gate based on its configuration and it detected activity from the gate, but there were still no ships in the system. Either they were hidden or the gate functions differently than other gates from other known nations. However, the fact that the Empire uses star gates of similar fashion much like the Republic, State, and Kingdom means that either they came to the same conclusions of using the crystals to make their gates or they had assistance in its development from someone else. Regardless, they needed to reach and retrieve that destroyer as soon as possible.

Every ship being sent to retrieve the stolen destroyer was loaded with a second set of crystals to make the trip to that star system and back to Republic space. Mandy's ship was given a destroyer-sized portion in addition to the two portions her cruiser had that was meant to supply the stolen destroyer for the ship to return. They needed to get underway by two o'clock and they only had a couple of minutes left.

"The last of the crystals are being loaded and secured right now," Commander Danielle said. "The docking bay doors are closing now. We can get underway in one minute."

"Very well," Mandy said as she activated the internal intercom. "All hands, prepare for immediate departure."

Mandy turned off the intercom.

"Communications, inform dock control to allow the fleet to depart."

"Yes, ma'am," the communications officer said.

"All of the docking ports are closed," Danielle said.

"Removing docking clamps," the helmsman said. "Engines are online."

"Docking control has acknowledged our departure," the communications officer said. "The rest of the fleet is now departing their respective docking bays."

"Helm," Mandy said, "take us out."

"Aye-aye, Captain," the helmsman said as he moved the ship forward.

The cruiser began to leave the bay it was docked in and entered the main docking bay area. The helmsman soon turned the ship to port or left towards the exit. The bay was large enough for the accompanying destroyers to leave alongside the cruiser at the same time. The ships soon left the atmospheric barrier into open space.

Mandy turned on the fleet intercom on her chair.

“Attention all ships,” she said. “Headquarters has identified that the stolen destroyer is located in the area near the second planet in the NR-A-Zero-Two. We are transmitting exact coordinates near the target to jump to. Once we arrive, we are going to put the stolen vessel in a tractor beam to hold it in place while this cruiser docks with the destroyer. We will investigate the ship, load it up with crystals, and have a skeleton crew assigned to pilot the stolen vessel back. If we run into Imperial forces, we will explain the situation to them. They were transmitted our dictionary in order to translate the threatening message the imposter sent to them so we should be able to communicate with them without difficulty. You are only to return fire if you are fired upon. Prepare to jump in fifteen seconds.”

Mandy turned off the fleet intercom.

“Helm, lay in a course for the coordinates we were provided and activate the Salire Purpura Crystals.”

“Aye-aye, Captain,” the helmsman said.

The cruiser and the rest of the fleet began to turn towards the star system they needed to jump to. Soon after, a wormhole began to form in front of each ship. Once the wormholes were stabilized, the ships entered into the wormholes. For a short moment, they went through a tunnel that looked like turbulent black clouds swirling around them much like a ship using a star gate. After a couple of seconds, they ended up in an unknown star system.

“Commander,” Mandy said, “scan the local area and verify our position.”

“Yes, Captain,” Danielle said. “Scanning the system now.”

As Danielle scanned the system, the main screen indicated a friendly IFF or “Identified Friend-or-Foe,” nearby. Information soon came in from the IFF that it was the destroyer they were sent to retrieve.

“Looks like we are in the right place,” Mandy said. “There is our stolen destroyer. Helm, take us in. Danielle, did the scans show anything?”

“Scans indicate an unusually large amount of gravimetric energy in the area but nothing conclusive.”

“Will this affect our ability to jump back?”

“No, ma’am. The levels are still below maximum levels to jump.”

“Alright then.”

Mandy activated the fleet intercom again.

“Destroyers Four-Six-Nine and Three-Eight-One, once you are in range, engage your tractor beams on the stolen destroyer. This cruiser will dock with the destroyer once the vessel is secure.”

As Mandy turned off the fleet intercom, the two destroyers she ordered accelerated to reach the stolen vessel. Once they were within range, they engaged their tractor beams on the ship. The rest of the fleet soon caught up to them.

“Helm,” Mandy said, “initiate docking procedures.”

“Aye-aye, Captain,” the helmsman said.

The cruiser soon slowed down and the cruiser’s port side came alongside the stolen destroyer’s starboard or right side. The helmsman deactivated the main engines and used maneuvering thrusters to align the docking ports of both vessels. Once they were aligned, the helmsman brought the cruiser within several meters before the ports extended out from both

ships and connected. The helmsman deactivated the thrusters once the computer confirmed the docking ports were locked in place.

“Docking complete, Captain,” the helmsman said.

“Good,” Mandy said as she got up. “I’m going on board with the resupply and inspection team. I want to check out this imposter myself, even if he is dead. Danielle, you have the bridge. Let me know if Imperial forces start to show up, though the destroyer would no doubt alert us while we are on board as well.”

“Understood, Captain,” Danielle said.

Mandy turned and headed for the elevator at the back of the bridge and pressed the call button. It arrived within seconds and the doors opened. She got in and the doors closed.

“Portside Docking Hatch Two,” Mandy said.

The elevator gave a confirmation tone and began to move. As it moved, Mandy realized there was a team she needed on that destroyer as well. She pressed the intercom button.

“Captain Mandy to Sickbay,” Mandy said. “Have a medical team including a coroner meet me on the bridge of the stolen destroyer.”

“*Understood, Captain,*” a female voice on the other end.

Mandy turned off the intercom as the elevator was reaching its destination. After a few seconds the elevator slowed to a halt and the doors opened. As Mandy stepped off the elevator and into the hallway, she saw the docking port to her right. Part of the crew who were operations officers and the skeleton crew who would operate the destroyer on its return trip were going into the destroyer.

“Hold it!” she said as she walked their way.

Everyone stopped and turned to face her.

“I don’t want anyone on the bridge until the medical team arrives along with the coroner to investigate the body of the imposter,” she said. “Until then, get this ship ready to move. We need to get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Yes, ma’am!” everyone said as they saluted and proceeded into the destroyer.

As the crew walked into the destroyer, Mandy heard steps behind her. She turned around to see the medical detail of five people including the coroner with their kits. As they got within a few meters of Mandy, they came to a stop and saluted.

“Medical detail, reporting in,” the coroner said.

“You were briefed about what you are here for?” Mandy asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said as he brought his arm down. “From what I understand, the imposter is no longer alive on the bridge but is still within the force field. The field is what is keeping any decomposition from spreading but we have face masks available should the body contain any surprises upon examination.”

“Did you bring a spare?”

“Yes, ma’am. We heard you wish to be there to examine the body.”

“Very well. Let us head to the bridge and begin the examination.”

Mandy turned towards the docking port of the destroyer with the medical team right behind her. Once they boarded the destroyer, they made their way towards the elevators which were a few meters away. Mandy pressed the call button and waited a few seconds before the elevator arrived, opening its doors. They got on the elevator.

“Bridge,” Mandy said.

The elevator gave a confirmation noise before the doors closed and began to move. After several seconds, the elevator began to slow down.

“Go ahead and put on your masks and gloves,” the coroner said.

Everyone put on their masks and rubber-like gloves. One of the medical assistants gave Mandy the spare mask and a pair of gloves. The elevator came to a stop just as they got their gear on. As the doors opened, they saw a deserted bridge, but just between the communications and the helm stations on the lower level was a column of light. Mandy and the medical team looked over the edge and saw the body of what looked like Vice Admiral Trent slumped on the ground within the barrier. It was a rather eerie sight to behold.

“Great Maker,” Mandy said. “He DOES look a lot like Vice Admiral Trent.”

Mandy walked down to the lower level of the bridge with the medical team behind her. Once they reached the force field, Mandy looked at the coroner.

“Are you ready to examine?” she asked.

“Go ahead,” he said.

“Computer, command override. Disable force field. Occupant in force field is deceased.”

“*Scanning detainee,*” the computer said. “*Confirmed. Detainee’s life signs show zero. Deactivating force field.*”

Once the computer said that, the force field deactivated, allowing the coroner to start examining the body. Mandy was uneasy at seeing the face of Trent lifeless knowing that he was alive elsewhere. The coroner was doing more visual observation of the body along with scans so that the body did not require cutting it open, a procedure that was no longer needed unless under certain extreme circumstances.

“It appears to be suicide by some form of poison,” the coroner said. “Very lethal, too. It appears to have taken effect within seconds of entering the blood stream.”

“So he took his own life rather than by taken prisoner,” Mandy said. “What a coward.”

“Don’t be so sure. My scans show something odd within the body as well, namely around the brain. There appears to be an artificial cerebellum with a subspace transmitter. The device appears to have scanned the entire brain and transmitted the deceased’s entire consciousness out of the body the moment the imposter died. In other words, our imposter has escaped mentally, no doubt back in his original body wherever that may be.”

“So the imposter was more of a Lykan infiltrator. No wonder he did not have second thoughts of what he was doing with stealing this destroyer or following the Lykan’s commands.”

A thought suddenly came to Mandy.

“Computer!” she yelled. “Bring up sensor logs of any subspace transmissions that have left the ship in the past two hours.”

“*Checking sensor logs.*”

“What are you thinking?” the coroner asked.

“If the imposter transmitted his consciousness through subspace, we might be able to track where it was going.”

“I see. You’re trying to find its origin.”

“And if we are lucky, it will lead us to the Lykan home planet if that is where it went.”

“But what if it bounced off of multiple relays?”

That comment alone just dashed Mandy's enthusiasm. The coroner had a point thought. Even Republic communications can go through the relays found on the star gates depending on the nature of the communications in question. However, she had to be hopeful that the transmission was directed straight to the source.

*"Subspace communication detected," the computer said. "Unable to determine destination of transmission due to gravimetric interference."*

Mandy groaned under her breath at the results.

"If it wasn't for that interference," she said. "I wonder why there is such interference, though. Computer, identify source of the interference."

*"Scanning..."*

"Captain," the coroner said, "I would like to see about taking the body back over to the cruiser to make sure there are no other surprises. So far there are no harmful chemicals, bacteria, or viruses, but I want to make absolutely sure."

"Sure, go ahead."

One of the aids activated a collapsible anti-gravity stretcher from one of their kits and began to load the body onto the stretcher. The computer suddenly chimed in.

*"Source of gravimetric interference found. Multiple sources detected. Putting them on the main screen."*

Mandy looked at a three-dimensional map that appeared on the main screen. Her jaw nearly dropped. According to the map, there were over two dozen sources of the interference. The worst part of it was the fact that those sources were surrounding the Republic fleet!

"Hold off on returning the body!" Mandy yelled at the medical team.

"What?" the coroner said. "Why?"

"Because," Mandy said as she pointed at the screen, "it would appear the Imperial fleet has already surrounded us."

"What are you talking about?"

"Those sources are artificial in origin. There is no way they would naturally be surrounding us like this."

"Wait, you're not telling me that those ships are cloaked and have been watching us this whole time?!"

"That is my thought. Cloaking devices may be extremely rare in the Republic but the gravimetric readings are consistent with their use. However, they may not realize that we can detect them this way. We thought they were natural interference but it appears they are artificial."

"If what you say is true, then we are not only surrounded but outnumbered."

"I find this behavior odd, though."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We detected gravimetric interference the moment we got into this system leading me to believe they have been here this entire time watching us. They may have wanted to see if we are indeed a threat or not. Either that or something the imposter said or did had their attention more than the threat itself."

"Then what do you propose we do?"

Mandy looked over at the body that was hovering on the stretcher.

“I wonder...,” Mandy said as she got out her communicator. “Captain Mandy to Danielle, please respond.”

*“Danielle here.”*

“Danielle, we apparently have company and they have already surrounded us.”

*“What do you mean?”*

“The gravimetric interferences we detected have two dozen sources and they are all around us right now. It would appear that the Imperial fleet has made use of cloaking devices which is why there is such interference to begin with.”

*“So they were here this entire time but have not engaged us. Are they observing us?”*

“Maybe they are, but I am about to call them out by hailing them.”

*“Are you sure you want to do that?”*

“We are in their territory and it would be rude not to introduce ourselves. Part of me wonders if they know we have detected them.”

*“Are you going to contact them from there?”*

“It would save me the trip of doing so from the cruiser. Besides, I think our imposter may have their interest.”

*“What makes you say that?”*

“The imposter’s consciousness was transmitted from the clone body towards Lykan territory and I think the Empire has taken notice of that transmission.”

*“So they may already know that the Lykans are involved. That might be why they have not yet attacked. I will alert the fleet just in case.”*

“Do it. I will go ahead and contact them using an open channel. Most likely they already have our language translated. Mandy, out.”

Mandy put her communicator back in her pocket. She walked over to the communications station and established an open channel. She took a deep breath as now it was her turn to open a dialogue with an unknown alien race for the first time.

“Attention, ships of the Camino Star Empire that have surrounded us. I am Captain Mandy of the Novus Initium Republic. We know you are there as the Republic has similar cloaking technology and the means to detect it. Right now, we are detecting twenty-five vessels that are using their cloaking devices. We know why you are here and we can explain what has transpired involving this destroyer that was stolen from one of our fleets and the person who sent your Empire that threatening message.”

Mandy did not have to wait long for a reaction. A few seconds after she had said her message, distortions appeared in the areas where the gravimetric sources were located. Ships started to appear within the disturbances and soon became solid. Mandy was quite surprised with what she had seen.

There were indeed twenty-five ships that consisted of sixteen destroyer-types, eight cruiser-types, and a single battleship-type. The hulls were somewhat organic looking in spots and were made or painted mostly silver with purple accents. One could have confused them to what looked like aquatic creatures which, based on limited contact with the Caminos, would fit perfectly with their amphibious nature. The ships’ construction made them look like they could take a pounding as their armor looked rather bulky. The report from the United Vitam State when the Kingdom forced engaged the Imperial ships long ago confirms their tough armor as well as

their possession of a nanomachine armor repairer system like the Republic's. The report from the United Vitam State also stated that the ships were armed with railguns and blasters that use the same ammo or charges but apply them differently based on which guns they were loaded into. They varied in their strengths and firing ranges much like the lenses the Republic uses.

However, the report showed the ships back then were different in their designs than the ones present now. No doubt the Empire developed a new line of ships after their first encounter with the Kingdom forces as these were considerably bulkier and well-armed than before. What concerned Mandy more than anything was both the numbers of the ships and the fact they brought a battleship along with them. The battleship was roughly the same size as the State's Golem-class battleship which in turn was smaller than the Republic's Paladin-class battleship. Unfortunately, Mandy wished a Paladin was here to even the odds in case things got bad.

Surprisingly, the IFF's of the Imperial ships started to come in and mark them on the main screen. The destroyers were known as the Taranis-class, the cruisers were called the Deimos-class, and the battleship was labeled as the Kronos-class. At least there were now names to these ships, even if they were translated. The IFF's were also marking them as "friendlies" meaning they do not wish to engage the Republic fleet, at least not yet.

The communications console indicated that the Kronos was hailing Mandy. She answered the call. A screen appeared in front of her with the image of a being that had cream-colored skin with sleek features and elongated arms, legs, and neck. Their beak-like face was also a surprise to see. For an amphibious bipedal race, Mandy figured they would look more green-toned or similar based on animals the Republic came across on other worlds. It just confirms that there are still wonders in the star cluster that Humans have yet to discover. The being was also dressed in a rather majestic-looking uniform.

*"Greetings, Captain Mandy,"* the Camino said in a deep masculine voice.

While Mandy could now tell that this was a male that speaking with, what shocked her was the fact that the Camino was not speaking through a translator! He was actually speaking English! The expression on Mandy's face was quite noticeable of which the Camino took notice and smiled a little.

*"I am Admiral Gringio of the Imperial battleship T'pori,"* he continued. *"I can understand the look on your face as you wonder how and why I am able to speak in your language natively, correct?"*

"You would be right," Mandy said trying to keep her composure now. "From what I can tell, you are not using a translator so how are you able to speak our language natively?"

*"My kind has advanced to the point that we are able to use cybernetics to improve our bodies and our minds for the harshness of space. I uploaded your language into my mind and I can understand and speak your language without issues."*

"I guess that saves time on having to use translation programs under the circumstances."

*"Now then,"* Gringio started to say with a stern look on his face, *"on to the business at hand. You are no doubt aware that a message was sent to our forces from the ship you are currently addressing us from. To be honest, we have been aware of your nation for quite a long time."*

"You have? How long have you known about us?"

*"We have been aware of your nation for several years. You may not realize this but your transmissions involving many of your public broadcasts do go past your borders, though not very far. We have a subspace repeater here in this system that receives those transmissions and sends them to our analysts and intelligence operatives for review. We have been keeping track of your events for quite a while to the point that we know about your current war with the Royal Lykan Kingdom and your alliance with the United Vitam State in their war."*

"Wait a minute. If you understood those broadcasts before today, you knew our language long before they were transmitted to you, correct?"

*"That is correct for the most part. Our linguistic department had an issue with some of the words in your broadcasts and tried to figure out their true meaning. Once your dictionary was transmitted, we were able to correctly translate what we could not understand."*

"So let me ask this: if you are aware of both the State's and the Republic's war against the Kingdom, how is it that your nation has not engaged them to push their forces back?"

*"Up to this point, the Lykans have not given us a reason to engage them in combat since they first fought our nation decades ago. It was our understanding that the so-called Slave Revolt after the Lykans' first defeat against our forces left them with neither the crews needed nor the means to build more ships that can be fully crewed."*

"You said 'up to this point' just now. That means something has changed in your way of thinking about the situation."

*"You have a keen mind to notice that. You are correct. Something recently has changed our thoughts on the situation. The first is the fact that the war your forces are dealing with against the Lykans. We had heard through your news reports of several Kingdom ships attacking both your borders and that of the State. Based on our projections, fleets the sizes of what you all are encountering should not have been possible without the need of another race to serve aboard their ships."*

"Normally, I would agree with you, but the Lykans have done the unthinkable to some of their slaves that could not flee from the Kingdom during the Slave Revolt."

*"I think I may already know what that would be but go ahead and fill me in just in case."*

"During your battle with the Lykans decades ago, they appear to have salvaged pieces of your technology at that time, namely the means to use cybernetics to interface living beings with ships. They took it a step further by making ships such as destroyers and cruisers fully automated with only one slave serving as a living computer core. That slave's memories are wiped and they are only inputted with what they need to operate a ship and follow orders. This allows them to build more ships without the need to worry about having a full crew on board. The only ships this method does not apply to are their battleships."

The Camino suddenly had a disgusted look on his face.

*"Are you saying they are using the technology they salvaged from us to turn innocent people into nothing more than living computer cores?!"*

"That's right. With millions of slaves at their disposal, they could field that many ships against our forces if they wanted to, resources aside, of course."

*"That's barbaric! This explains why they were suddenly able to field so many ships against your forces. This may also explain the transmission we noticed."*

"What transmission?"

*“Tell me, did you find a Lykan spy aboard that destroyer of yours?”*

*“Yes, we did in a way.”*

*“What do you mean?”*

“During our initial meeting with a Lykan ambassador, he had on him a device that we did not recognize. He stated that it was for recording the conversation for their records. However, the device was also able to access a map of our territory and it recorded the DNA of everyone in the room, including the vice admiral whose ship they were meeting on. The Lykans then proceeded to use the DNA of the vice admiral to create a clone who managed to infiltrate one of our ships in a recent battle. The clone then proceeded to steal this destroyer he infiltrated to bring it here in what we can only speculate to start a war between our nations. We had wondered how a clone would have been brainwashed or programmed to act against the people who was his own race, but then we discovered something once we got here to investigate.”

*“Let me guess, part of his brain had cybernetics that involved a subspace transmitter, am I right?”*

*“Yes, but how did you know?”*

*“It was based on our technology. Those with combat training and experience who control our ships in a similar manner also have their consciousness transmitted to a clone body. These officers are an investment for my government and their loss would cost a significant amount of time and money to train new officers for these same roles. We detected a subspace transmission from your ship and instead of heading to Camino, it headed into Kingdom territory. We noticed this while we were observing your stolen ship.”*

“So am I to assume that the reason all this time that your forces were observing this ship rather than attack or seize it was due to the fact you had known that this was not normal behavior for our kind?”

*“Yes. Despite your military force, your actions suggest more that you all are defensive of your current holdings and borders. You all do not have a need to expand except to create a buffer zone of what you all call your Defensive Perimeter Zone against the Kingdom.”*

“For whatever good that might have done. Our intent was to strengthen that zone over the next couple of months because we thought that it would take that long for the Kingdom to find our borders. We had no idea at the time they got the map and managed to arrive in the still developing zone within a couple of weeks.”

*“His Majesty also wanted us to be cautious as our first experience with an alien race was not very ‘pleasant’ as you can understand. We did not want to risk another such confrontation. That was the reason we created cloaking devices so that we can observe anyone who ventured into our space and observe their actions.”*

*“That is not a bad idea in all honesty.”*

*“I have to ask but why did the Lykan operative die on the ship? What did you all do?”*

“The operative used the vice admiral’s DNA to access and authorize the destroyer to get it here. In order to prevent the operative from doing any further damage, the vice admiral chose to have his DNA removed from our military databanks. This activated a force field around the Lykan operative once he stepped away from any of the consoles on the bridge. Knowing he could not do anything further, he apparently chose to ingest a deadly poison he had hidden on

himself. I'm assuming that once he did that, he transmitted his consciousness back to his original body, provided he has one."

*"He most likely does. If there is one thing that the Lykans despise from what we know, it is modifications to their bodies unless absolutely necessary. If the mind of a Lykan operative was indeed in that body, their original would be in a safe location."*

"That means that by now both the operative and his superiors will know the operation was a failure."

*"This also means that they will be bolstering their forces on their border with us now that we know what they have done with our technology. I will need to take this up with my superiors but they will need to see evidence to back this up. If it is alright with you, I would like for myself and one of my medical staff to examine the body alongside your medical staff to have evidence to present to my superiors."*

"The body is currently being moved to our cruiser that is docked with this destroyer. I will need to get authorization from my superiors to allow you to board. Also, we do not know if the air you breathe or any illnesses you may have are compatible with ours."

*"That is understandable. We will send you the necessary files shortly with them already translated."*

"Thank you. I will be contacting you shortly once I get word from my superiors."

With that, the transmission ended. Mandy turned to the medical team and the coroner who were almost stunned with her conversation with the Camino.

"Go ahead and take the body back to the cruiser," she said. "I need to inform the team and the crews about what is going on and to contact headquarters."

"Understood," the coroner said. "We'll put the body in stasis in the meantime. Let's go, people."

The medical team started walking towards the elevator with the body on the stretcher. Mandy got her communicator out once the elevator doors closed behind them.

"Captain Mandy to temporary bridge crew, you may report to the bridge and prepare the ship for departure but do not depart yet until we have received further orders."

She changed the recipient on the communicator to the cruiser's bridge.

"Mandy to Danielle, do you read me?"

*"This is Danielle. So what's the word about the Imperial ships?"*

"Wait till you hear this. You are in for a surprise."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Office of Grand Admiral Mikey, Novus Initium Navy Fleet Headquarters  
Planet Luminare Orbit, Lumen ("Light") System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic  
2:34pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

"Are you serious?!"

Grand Admiral Mikey was just about to fly out of his seat. Captain Mandy had contacted him just now for orders about the request for an Imperial officer and a doctor to board the cruiser to observe and document the autopsy of the imposter. She also brought him up-to-date with what had occurred so far while still in Imperial space. While the cloaking system and the cybernetics were not too surprising for the Grand Admiral, what Mandy told him next was surprising.

The Caminos breathed the same atmosphere and had the same diseases as Humans!

*"I am," Mandy said. "When they sent over their biological information, we discovered this as well."*

"First it was the races of the State, then the Lykans, and now the Caminos?" Mikey said. "This has gone beyond mere coincidence. There should not be this sort of similarities in all of our anatomies."

*"I concur and yet it is reality. The fact they use the crystals as well to create similar star gates like what we and the Kingdom, and to some extent the State, had created also lends to that similarity."*

Mikey rubbed his beard and pondered about the facts.

"I have a bad feeling about all of this," he said. "I can understand some similarities in mammalian races having similar diseases but there are reptilian and amphibious races with the same diseases such as us. The likelihood of that happening should be next to impossible."

*"Why does it sound like you are about to come up with some sort of conspiracy theory based on all of this?"*

"Can you give me an explanation as to why different races have the same diseases and breathe the same air content? None of us as far as we know have encountered each other until a few weeks ago at the earliest. So how is it that we are all affected by the same ailments? Someone or something had to have been involved with that happening. I can't think of any other possibility."

*"Well, for now, we need to focus on our next course of action."*

"Very well," Mikey said, sensing Mandy wanted to get off the conspiracy topic. "If there is no chance of contaminants or infections among the Caminos, as long as a security team is escorting them, they are free to observe and document the autopsy for their records to take back to their superiors. If they are convinced that this was indeed an operation by the Kingdom to have the Empire wage war against us, the Empire may take an active role in our war and put pressure against the Kingdom's forces."

*"Somehow, I think the Empire may go along and do that once they know the Kingdom reverse-engineered their technology and attempted to use it against them. They also made it clear that they found the use of the technology on the slaves to be deplorable. I doubt the Empire will stand idly by and watch any longer. However, I do have to ask one question."*

"And that would be?"

*"If this is our first official meeting, shouldn't we send ambassadors to meet them in a political sense?"*

"I'm going to get in touch with the Supreme Chancellor after this and he will make those arrangements but considering how the Empire was rather isolated and secretive this entire time, getting them to the table might be difficult. I think that is the reason why they needed to observe the autopsy: to give them a reason to come out of isolation."

*"Then let's hope that is the case. I will let them know that they can come over. I'll let you know about any further developments."*

"Thank you. Mikey, out."

As the transmission ended, Mikey leaned back in his chair. He figured that there would be contact with the Imperial forces, but the fact that they were observing the Republic this entire

time was still a bit of a shock. However, that might have been a good thing because they knew the act that the imposter did was outside the norm for those within the Republic. If the Empire can join the war against the Kingdom, they could help end the war quickly.

Mikey decided it was time to tell the Supreme Chancellor about what has transpired. He would need to get the ball rolling on the political side of things.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Shuttle Bay, Cruiser-242, Guardian-Class Cruiser  
Planet NR-A02-II Airspace, NR-A02 System, 11 Light-Years North of Serenus System  
2:43pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Why do I feel so nervous?”

Captain Mandy already sent a signal to Admiral Gringio that he and his head doctor were allowed on board, and that they will be escorted to Sickbay where the imposter’s body was being held. The Caminos’ shuttle was already on the way and they were making their way to the Republic cruiser’s shuttle bay located underneath the cruiser close to the engines. The shuttle would have to fly up into the bay and then move forward to land on the deck.

However, Mandy was nervous about meeting the Imperial Admiral. Commander Danielle was next to her on her right.

“I know why you are nervous,” Danielle said. “This the first time you and I have met any alien race.”

“That is correct,” Mandy said. “I have not met anyone from the State yet but that is because we were stationed all the way out here. Not only that, but this is our first physical encounter with someone from the Empire. I don’t want to ruin our first encounter with them.”

“Don’t worry. They are here to gather evidence concerning the Kingdom’s involvement with provoking the Empire to go to war with us. This isn’t an official diplomatic mission. That will come later and will be done with our ambassadors. Whether or not we are involved at that point, though, is yet to be seen.”

“Maybe so, but first impressions are always important.”

“On that, there is no denying. Just keep calm. At least they can speak our language natively. You don’t have to worry about any misunderstandings due to a bad translation.”

“That’s supposed to make me feel better?”

“It was supposed to, but I guess it didn’t, huh?”

“Good grief, Danielle.”

At that moment, the Imperial shuttle flew upwards into the bay. It looked like some sort of hard shell pod of an aquatic creature like the top portion of some of the ships they encountered surrounding them. The shuttle moved forward and extended what looked like six tentacles as landing gear. Once it descended and landed on the deck, the engines shut down and a ramp lowered from underneath the craft towards their direction.

Admiral Gringio first appeared moving down the ramp. The Camino was definitely tall! While the transmission did not make him look as tall, he looked to be anywhere from eight to nine feet tall. It was probably a good thing that the corridors were tall enough to accommodate their height. With him being that tall, his uniform looked far more imposing that it did during

their transmission. A second Camino appeared right behind the admiral. This one was a little shorter and wore a white robe and pants. This one held what looked like a kit in its right hand.

Both of the Caminos approached Mandy and Danielle. Once they were within a few meters, they stopped and bowed.

“Greetings,” Gringio said. “I am Admiral Gringio and this is my head doctor, Kencier. She will be observing the autopsy of the Kingdom operative you recovered.”

“Greetings,” Mandy said. “I am Captain Mandy. This is Commander Danielle, my second-in-command and my head tactical officer. We will be personally escorting you to Sickbay where the body is being held. Right this way please.”

Mandy turned and walked in front of the two Imperial officers while Danielle followed behind. They made their way into the corridor that was close to the elevator.

“We ask that you don’t wander off for your own safety,” Mandy said. “Otherwise, the computer will generate a force field to restrain you. It is the same system that imprisoned the operative once we removed his DNA from military database.”

“I see,” Gringio said. “We will stay close then.”

“We have disabled this feature within Sickbay so that you two will move more freely while you observe. Your doctor will be within the operation room while you accompany me to the observation room. My second-in-command will be going back up to the bridge to continue the command duties aboard the ship once we get there.”

“I understand. I’m glad you made such preparations.”

“We want to make sure that we are as open about this investigation as possible. We’ve also prepared a brief historical record of the Republic for you to look at afterwards.”

“We’ve done the same. We heard that your Republic did the same thing with the State and the Kingdom upon your first encounter with them. What surprises me is the fact that the Kingdom wants to try to enslave your kind after knowing how many there are of you and how big your nation is.”

“They don’t want to enslave us.”

“They don’t?”

“No. They want to exterminate us.”

“What?!” Gringio said as he stopped.

Everyone else stopped as well.

“They want to exterminate you all?” he asked. “That is not like them. What is it about your kind or the Republic that would want them to exterminate you all rather than enslave your kind?”

“Part of our history we have prepared for you will state this,” Mandy said, “but over three thousand years ago, our kind came to the star cluster accidentally.”

“What do you mean? Wait, are you saying you Humans are not from the star cluster?!”

“No, we are not. We discovered the same crystals you use in your interstellar gates which we call star gates on our ancient home planet’s moon after we had terraformed it. They got energized by accident and opened a wormhole that the entire moon went through, bringing us here to this star cluster. There was no way for us to get back afterwards. We don’t even know how far we travelled to this day.”

“So in essence, the Lykans view you all as either invaders or pestilence who are ‘defiling’ their ‘holy’ claims as you are not a part of what their god ordained to be theirs. Does that sound about right?”

“So you all are familiar with the Kingdom’s religious dogma, I see.”

“We’ve been doing reconnaissance on them for a long time without them knowing. They are not familiar with our cloaking technology so we have been able to sneak close enough to their ships to intercept their communications. It did not take much to figure out how they think and how important their religion is to them.”

“To them, it sounds like their war to exterminate us sounds more like a crusade than anything.”

“I may know your language but the word ‘crusade’ is not familiar to me.”

“It is essentially a holy war, one usually based or fueled by religion.”

“I see. It’s appropriate then for what the Lykans are waging against your Republic.”

“Maybe so, but we are not about to see them win this crusade against our people.”

“Of that, I will agree. Your ancestors may have not been from the cluster, but you all are here now and this star cluster is your home. My kind personally does not see your accidental immigration as an issue as long as it isn’t into our own territory.”

“That’s good to know. Hopefully if there is any other nation in the cluster, they won’t view us the same way as the Lykans. Now then, we need to get to Sickbay. They are waiting for us.”

Mandy pressed the elevator call button and within seconds one of the elevators appeared. They boarded the elevator with the doors closing up behind them.

“Sickbay,” Mandy said.

The elevator acknowledged the order and began moving. Mandy was feeling a bit relieved. She was concerned about the Empire’s position on the origins of Humans that accidentally migrated into the star cluster, but she now felt relieved that they did not share the same views as the Lykans. As the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened, Mandy led them out of the elevator and towards Sickbay. As they reached the doors, they opened to reveal a large room with medical beds lining an arched wall on their right. A large operation room was towards the back with a small room to the left that was the observation room. The operation room had a small room in between with two large glass doors on each side designed to decontaminate anything coming in or out of the room. They could see the coroner inside preparing to do the autopsy. Mandy approached the door and pressed the intercom button.

“Doctor,” she said, “our guests have arrived.”

The coroner looked and was shocked to see the two aliens but the shock quickly subsided. He pressed the intercom button on his side of the decontamination room.

“Greetings,” he said. “*One of the nurses on that side will instruct you on the decontamination process. We will be starting shortly.*”

One of the nurses overheard the coroner and came to instruct Kencier about the process while Mandy directed Gringio towards the observation room. Soon they will confirm their suspicions of the Lykans’ use of the reverse-engineered Imperial technology and what this means for the course of the war.

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