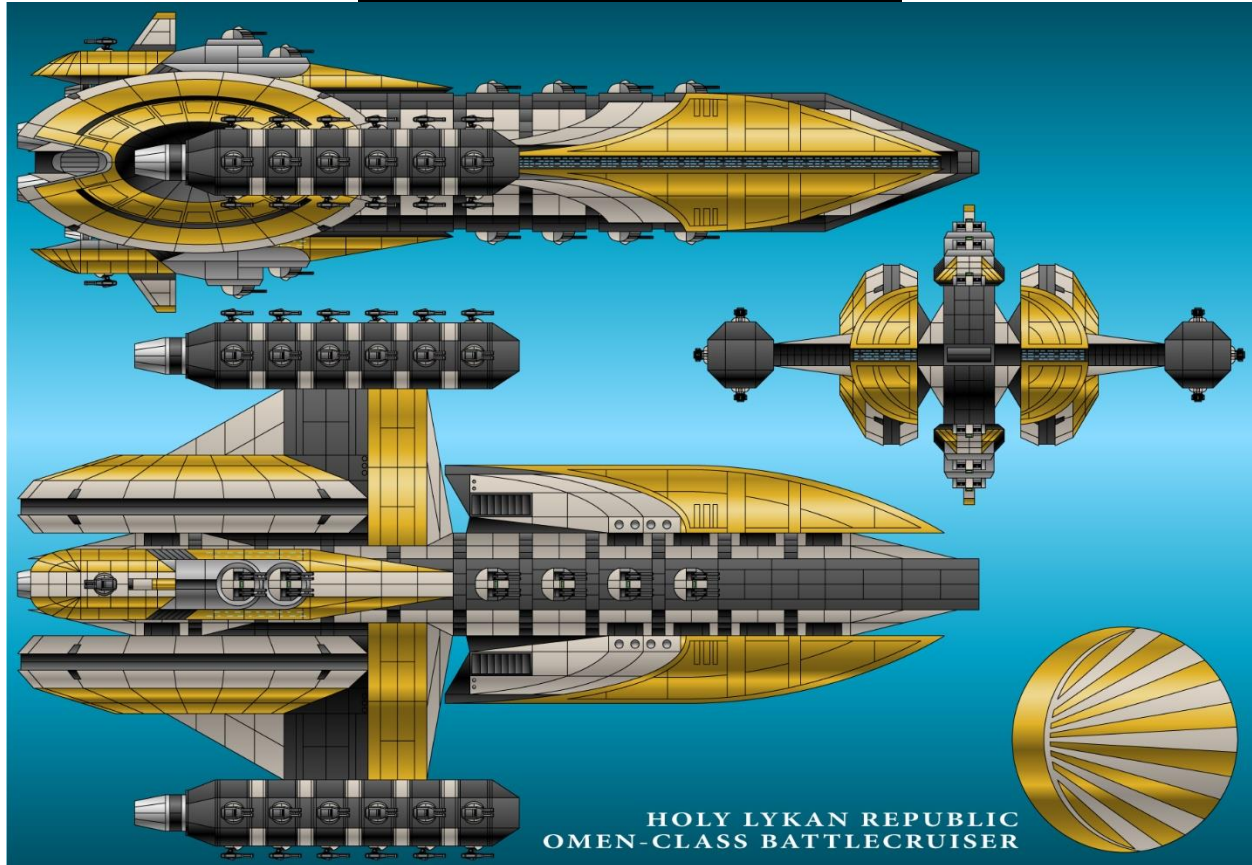


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode V: The Fox's State and Mandate



PART 2

Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
Lumen Star Gate, Dellino System, Holy Lykan Republic, Eastern Region
1:18pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.

“Welcome to the Holy Lykan Republic, Renaldo.”

The Eleventh fleet had waited for the transports to arrive at the star gate leading to the Dellino System as well as the fleet meant to relieve them before they could travel to Dellino. Those ships arrived a few minutes ago. The Eleventh Fleet assumed the mass-jump formation with some of the destroyers in position around each of the transports. The *Renaldo* was the first to go through the gate and was now being greeted by an HLR fleet that also served as a customs fleet on this end of the gate. The fleet consisted primarily of the new Punisher-class Destroyers with a lone Omen-class Battlecruiser leading them. This Omen was the one who hailed them.

“Lieutenant Commander Ro,” Trent said. “Put me through to that Omen.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said.

“Lieutenant Commander Ryan, take us out of the gate, please.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” Ryan said.

“I have Captain Grodico on the line, sir,” Ro said. “I’m putting him on screen.”

A holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen and an image of a Lykan male soon appeared. The uniforms they now wore had changed when they transitioned from the former Kingdom to the current Republic. The color tones for commanding officers matched the tones of the ships with beige as the base color with gold accents.

“Greetings, Vice Admiral Trent,” the Lykan said. *“I have been informed that you and your fleet are heading to the Yintaka System to deliver two planetary shield generators to the two worlds that are there, correct?”*

“That is correct, Captain Grodico,” Trent said. “However, we are in a bit of a hurry and need the shortest route to get there.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about the State being ‘interested’ in the Yintaka System. We are sending your communications officer the shortest route to take with the fewest jumps but it will still take about an hour to get there from here.”

“I understand. We will wait for the first group of ships to arrive so that we can transmit the route to them and so on. We will get going once that has occurred.”

“Understood. How will I know all of them are through?”

“The last group of four destroyers will be surrounding the second transport. They will be the last ones to come through.”

“I understand. I wish you luck and haste, Vice Admiral.”

As the transmission ended, Ro’s console indicated it was receiving the route details.

“I’ve got the course, sir,” Ro said. “I’m sending it to Ryan.”

“Sir,” Lieutenant Commander Chrystal said from the tactical station, “the star gate is activating. The first set of cruisers is coming through.”

“On screen,” Trent said.

The Lykan star gate appeared on the screen as it came to life. A wormhole quickly appeared at one end of the star gate and within seconds, four Guardian Cruisers appeared within the gate. The wormhole soon closed behind them.

“Ro,” Trent said, “send them the route and instruct them to wait for the next group to transmit the route to them before warping to the next star gate. Tell them to continue this until the last group is through.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said. “I’m transmitting the message and the route now, sir.”

“Are we to go straight to Yintaka without stopping from this point forward?” Captain Shannon asked.

“Correct,” Trent said. “We need only to give our fleet the route to take and a point to rendezvous at. They can proceed on their own from there.”

“Understood, sir.”

“Message has been received and confirmed, sir,” Ro said. “The cruisers are standing by for the next group to arrive.”

“Very well,” Trent said. “Ryan, warp us to the first gate and proceed to the Yintaka System.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” Ryan said. “Engaging the warp drive.”

The viewscreen switched back towards the front as the *Renaldo*’s bow pointed towards the direction of the first star gate that they needed to jump through. The *Renaldo* soon accelerated and was quickly surrounded by waves and fluctuations of the warp bubble around the ship as the star gate they came through quickly disappeared behind them.

Trent could only hope the State hasn’t already made their move in Yintaka yet.

* * * * *

Hallway to State Executive Council Room, State Assembly Hall, City of Freedom (translated)
New Vita Orbit, Capital System, Capital of United Vitam State
1:23pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.

“How much longer are they going to make us wait this time?”

Wade and Autumn, the NIR Ambassadors to the United Vitam State, waited outside the State’s Executive Council chamber. Autumn was sitting in one of the seats while Wade paced back and forth between the walls. They had just been in contact with Supreme Chancellor Drew about the possible situation that Ambassador Drino had implied. He had asked for Wade and Autumn to bring this up with the Executive Council to confirm and defuse the situation should they be planning to attack the Yintaka System.

However, Wade and Autumn have been waiting for over twenty minutes after the Council had convened with no word as to when they could enter. Every once in a while, Wade would find himself looking at the two security guards that flanked the doors. They were both male Zaurions, the bipedal lizards that were part of the State, and they were quite large and muscular. They were rather intimidating at first glance but now they were starting to get on his nerves as they would obviously not allow Wade or Autumn to enter without the Council’s permission.

The doors were also soundproof, so Wade and Autumn could not hear what they were discussing about. If they were taking about their plans involving the Yintaka System, neither of them would be able to listen in on the conversation. Wade wished he could bring in a listening device that he could plant somewhere. However, there were scanners in the door that would detect such things as well as weapons so there would be no way to bring one in.

The State has become ever more hostile with Wade and Autumn as tensions involving the NIR helping the HLR and the Mandate secure their borders with the State continuing to escalate. The two of them were beginning to wonder if it was even worth being there to represent the interests of the NIR as the State clearly did not care what their interests are. They heard that Ambassador Drino was intentionally late to the meetings between the ambassadors and the Supreme Chancellor back in Lumen which clearly shows the State lacking any interest in the affairs of others including their once close ally, the Camino Star Empire.

The guard on the left suddenly got a signal on a communicator that was on his hip. He looked down and checked his communicator’s screen. He looked back up and in Wade’s direction.

“The Council will see you know,” the guard said, his tone sounding annoyed than anything.

Wade did not take well to the tone that the guard gave but it was no different to everyone else in the same regards. Autumn got up from her seat and stood next to Wade. The doors slowly slid open. Wade and Autumn walked through once they were open enough for both to pass through together. The room was dark save for a light pointed directly into the center of the room. The ambient light was enough to see the base of the podiums that the five heads of each race would normally sit at the top of. Wade and Autumn had seen this before. It was a matter of intimidation that the Executive Council always did but that effect had long since worn off on the two ambassadors.

Once they reach the center of the room in the middle of the light, they stopped and looked up, expecting the lights to come on and show each of the heads of the Council. Five lights suddenly lit each of the seats of the Council and the two ambassadors expected the seats to be filled. However, much to their surprise, only one seat was filled while the others were vacant.

The seat that was filled was the seat second from the ambassadors' left. In that seat was Shiercon, a female Kittrane who were the bipedal feline race within the State. Wade and Autumn looked at each other before they looked in Shiercon's direction again.

"Councilor," Wade said, "where is the rest of the Executive Council?"

"They have already adjured for the time being," Shiercon said. "I volunteered to remain to speak with the two of you. I heard you had a matter to discuss with the Council?"

"I do, Councilor. I was informed by Supreme Chancellor Drew of Ambassador Drino's implication that the State was interested in the Yintaka System, a system currently under the control of the Holy Lykan Republic. This has led to some concern as to why the State would be interested in a Lykan-controlled system since the system is the only remaining location along your current border that lacks any planetary shield generators. The Supreme Chancellor had asked us to verify the State's intent with that system."

Shiercon took a deep breath.

"It would appear that Drino was not very subtle about our inquiry involving that system," Shiercon said as she shook her head.

"So, the State does have an interest in that system," Wade said. "Why does the State have an interest in Yintaka?"

"Ambassador Wade, even you should know by now why we would have an interest in that star system."

"I can think of a few reasons why you all would have an interest but for the sake of not beating around the topic and wasting our time, why don't you enlighten me on the specific reason why you would be interested in Yintaka."

"You and your Republic know what our intended purpose is when it comes to the Lykans as well as the so-called 'Mandate.' Do I really have to spell it out for you again?"

"So the State really does plan to attack the Yintaka System. Do you really intend to make this cold war hot now? You don't have any allies to back you up if things go badly for your forces."

"We have been at war with the Lykans for several decades without any help from anybody else. Do you think it matters to us if we don't have any allies?"

"Maybe it did not matter back then, but now there is more than just the Lykans to deal with if you choose to attack them. The Liberigi Mandate could easily come to their aid if they were asked. When you consider the fact that Yintaka borders their space as well, they wouldn't have far to travel to come to the defense of that system."

"We will deal with the Mandate if and when the time comes as we see fit. They are nothing more than brainwashed servants of the Lykans regardless of the so-called 'reformation' the Lykans have gone through. We will soon have them back among the fold as they should be so many years ago."

"You do realize that the NIR will not stand by while the State proceeds with the action the State is about to take, Councilor. It is already considered a tragedy by every known nation in the star cluster that this Council decided to remove any bit of culture from your nation. What is worse is the fact that you did so to make your people focus more on productivity in various industries in their tasks including the military related production. Do you really think that the Mandate wants to be a part of a nation that focuses more on increasing its military capabilities at the expense of your culture and the arts? How is the removal of culture from the State any different from the lack of each race's cultures during the enslavement under the Lykans?"

“I am not here to discuss how we run our nation, ambassador. If the NIR is so concerned with our interests in Yintaka, then it should not be involved with supplying that system or any other system controlled by the Lykans and the Mandate the planetary shield generators that your nation is creating for them to use! You and the other nations have hindered the State every chance you all could get in our quest to exact justice on the Lykans! We have been held back for long enough in exacting the justice our people rightfully deserve and neither the NIR nor the Empire will stand in our way of us doing so!”

“How do you call the act of genocide and extinction ‘justice’? You are about to destroy the peace that thousands if not millions of lives have died for to obtain, Councilor!”

“Those lives you speak of who have died to obtain peace were Human and Camino lives, ambassador. The lives of those from the State would have died in vain if we do not act towards achieving our goals. They died in the pursuit of ridding the star cluster of the Lykans, not to obtain peace with them much less coexisting with them!”

“Our nation along with the Empire helped the State to win the war! Are you about to tell me, tell them, that we should not have gotten involved in the first place if that is how you perceive our assistance in the war? Are you saying that those who gave their lives to stop the Lykans and their ambitions meant nothing to the one nation that needed our help the most?!”

Shiercon wasn't quite sure how to answer that question without sounding worse than it already was. Wade could tell that she knew how dire the State's situation was prior to the Republic and the Empire entering the war and that they needed allies badly. They would have lost to the Lykans' numerical advantage in the advent of their unmanned ships.

“Regarding those questions,” Shiercon said, “I may have stepped out of line about the fact that the Republic and the Empire did indeed come to our side to secure our future. We do acknowledge that fact and the consequences that would have happened had we not had your help. Nevertheless, while the war between the Lykans against your nation and the Empire may be over, ours must continue. Now, thanks to Drino, we have to concern ourselves with the strengthening of defenses from the Lykans as your Supreme Chancellor has no doubt warned them and possibly the Mandate of our intention to attack.”

“Councilor, I'm asking you to call this attack off on Yintaka. There is no reason to lose more State lives on a vendetta as your opponents are not the same as they were before! The Lykans have already let go of your people that were still enslaved and those they let go have willfully formed the Liberigi Mandate because they don't like what they see in the State! Do you really want to alienate the citizens of the Mandate from the State even more so? This attack your forces are about to commence will only serve to increase the divide between your nation and your brethren in the Mandate!”

“The Council has already decided to proceed forward with the attack before you were even allowed to come into this chamber. All of us in the Executive Council knew that you might attempt to delay us in ordering our forces to engage. That is why we had you wait outside until our overall meeting was concluded. I would suggest contacting your Supreme Chancellor and tell him to withdraw the fleet he has sent to Yintaka to supply the last shield generators to that star system. Drino told us that much about what your forces were doing. If you don't want your fleet to be caught in our attack and suffer any loss of Human life, then we urge you to make sure that they return to your Republic as soon as they possibly can. After that, you and your wife have been requested to leave the United Vitam State posthaste.”

“What? You are dismissing us?! Are you seriously asking for there to be no representation of the Novus Initium Republic in the State?!”

“We also decided that we no longer have any interest in hearing what your Republic has to say after all of the assistance they have given the Lykans and our Mandate brethren over these past six months. We are already calling Drino back as well. Once you all have returned to your space, we will be locking the jump gate that crosses between our nations. While your Republic had a hand in turning the tide of the First Interstellar War in our favor, it has done little since then to appease us with its own actions involving the Lykans. Now, I suggest you contact your government as soon as possible while there is still time for the Chancellor to recall your transports and the escort fleet.”

With that last decree of Shiercon’s, the lights that illuminated the top of the podiums turned off, leaving only the light in the center of the room. The doors behind them soon opened and the guards stood there to escort them out. Wade looked at the top of the podium where Shiercon was and turned to head out the door along with Autumn. As they walked out of the room and headed down the hallway, Wade was furious about the Council and its actions. However, they needed to contact Drew as soon as possible. He needed to know what was about to happen.

“What do you think the Supreme Chancellor will do once we report to him what has happened here?” Autumn asked.

“I don’t know in all honesty,” Wade said trying to cool down. “The State is going down a rather dark and dangerous path with their actions and they are practically trying to make an enemy out of everyone around them. I’m not sure how much of this the Supreme Chancellor is aware of based on his dealings with Ambassador Drino, but something needs to be done before the State crosses the point of no return in their relations with any of their neighbors. We don’t need another war to begin with the State being the hostile nation. However, they seem bent on starting a Second Interstellar War and Yintaka would be the starting point.”

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
1:49pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“I was really hoping that you were not able to confirm my suspicions.”

Drew felt rather disappointed and concerned. Ambassador Wade had just contacted him after he had met the State’s Executive Council, or rather one of the councilors. The summary of their meeting was that the State was indeed looking to attack the Yintaka System but offered a warning to the NIR to recall the fleet that was sent with the planetary shield generators unless they get in the crossfire. Apparently, Ambassador Drino reported that he saw the transports when he came back from his last visit to the State and the Executive Council wanted to act before they were delivered. Vice Admiral Trent and the Eleventh Fleet were already halfway to the Yintaka System. Drew was now facing a rather difficult choice in front of him, one he had hoped he wouldn’t have to be dealing with.

Does he recall the Eleventh Fleet or have them proceed as planned?

This was a hard decision to make. Drew had already talked with Forneido and Korveco about the possible attack on Yintaka and they were still in his office along with Orbinai about what their next course of action would be.

Wade was still on the line as he gave his report.

“I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, sir,” Wade said. “The State made its decision before we were even allowed in the Council chamber.”

“They knew that you would try to talk them out of it and prolong their attack,” Drew said. “I should not be surprised that they proceeded without hearing you out first.”

“There is more, sir. They also wanted me and Autumn to leave the State as they no longer want any representative from the NIR in their nation. In other words, we are being deported after this call is concluded. They had also recalled Drino back to the State as well.”

“In other words, I won’t be seeing him around after his last meeting with me.”

“Considering his constant tardiness, it may be for the better,” Orbinai said. “However, this blatant disregard for keeping the peace and wanting to continue their campaign of genocide against the Lykans needs to be dealt with quickly.”

“If I may ask, sir,” Wade said, “what are you going to do with the fleet that was sent to deliver the planetary shield generators?”

“That is what I am trying to decided,” Drew said. “I can either recall them to prevent them from getting involved in the upcoming assault or have them proceed with the delivery. Both of those choices have dire consequences.”

“If you recall the Eleventh Fleet,” Forneido said, “the planets would be unprotected from the State’s assault should our defense forces fail to stop them. However, you ensure that the NIR does not get involved with an old conflict that is being rekindled. I can respect that choice.”

“On the other hand,” Korveco said, “if the Eleventh Fleet continues with the delivery, the planets could be protected once the shield generators are deployed but your fleet risks getting in the crossfire. Even worse, the State may target the transports to prevent the generators from being deployed should they attack prior to the Eleventh Fleet arriving. It is a tough choice.”

“Wait a moment,” Wade said. “Did you two say the Eleventh Fleet was deployed?”

“Yes, we did,” Forneido said. “Wait a minute, you and I meet on the flagship of that fleet almost nine months ago! You know the flag officer in command then, right?”

“Yes, it was Vice Admiral Trent. If his fleet is the one delivering the generators, I suggest having him proceed with the delivery.”

“Why is that?” Drew asked.

“If I know him and his record correctly, he may be able to come up with a plan to make that delivery successfully without the State causing him problems. I’ll leave this to you, but I have to go and pack. I will see you all in the next day or so.”

“Safe travels, my friend,” Drew said before ending the transmission.

Drew looked at the other ambassadors.

“So,” Drew said, “you think I should have Vice Admiral Trent continue as planned?”

“I concur with Ambassador Wade,” Orbinai said. “Trent has always succeeded with whatever task he was given, a testament to both him and his crew on both the *Renaldo* and the *Templar*. If he can find a way to deliver those generators without any loss to his forces or civilian losses on the planets he is delivering to, then we can believe in him to accomplish this.”

“I agree with Orbinai,” Forneido said. “Trent is an admirable individual in several ways including combat. He can get those delivered. I can trust him to do that.”

“While I may not know the Vice Admiral personally like everyone else in the room,” Korveco said, “it sounds to me like he may be the right person for the job in this matter.”

“Very well,” Drew said. “I will send Trent a message letting him know what is about to take place and have him proceed. Forneido, are the Lykans sending reinforcements to Yintaka?”

“They are,” Forneido said. “I made it clear that the State had an interest in the system and may plan to attack it. They are sending some ships out there right now. Hopefully, they make it there in time.

“I understand. Korveco, what is the status of your forces?”

“They are standing by in the next system near the jump gate,” Korveco said. “If they are needed, they will be ready to deploy.”

“That’s good to hear. Orbinai, is there any hope of the Empire putting pressure on the State to back down from this assault they are planning? I don’t know if the Empire has any clout left in the State but your nation is the only one they are not upset with as far as I know.”

“I wish we did,” Orbinai said. “However, much like your ambassadors to the State, our ambassador was forced to leave as well. It would appear that the State wants to act on its own without the hindrance or ‘nagging’ of any other nation.”

“Then let me ask this question. It is possible for the Empire to send its closest fleet to the Yintaka System?”

All three ambassadors looked at Drew with surprised expressions on their faces.

“It might be possible with the approval of either the Mandate or the HLR depending on the route taken,” Orbinai said. “The only thing I would have to ask is why you want an Imperial fleet there?”

“We already know that the State doesn’t want to listen to any of us when it comes to words. Therefore, if the State doesn’t understand our position with words, then it may be best for them to understand by force. If they see fleets from the NIR, HLK, the Mandate, and the Empire in Yintaka, they may rethink their assault realizing they are fighting alone and outnumbered.”

“It is a gamble,” Korveco said. “The State has been fighting alone and outnumbered for the longest time but have managed to hold out. However, that is against one nation. Even if the Empire does send a fleet and it makes it on time, they may not think otherwise like you think.”

“We won’t know unless we try. If it gives the Eleventh Fleet time to activate the planetary shield generators and secure those last planets, the State just might call off their attack. We might be able to force them into a peace treaty with the HLK and the Mandate once they realize they could no longer harm any populated worlds on their borders.”

“Why not just lock the jump gate leading into the Yintaka System?” Orbinai asked. “Wouldn’t that stop them from attacking?”

“Unlike the HLK, the State no doubt has a large reserve of Salire Purpura crystals, or jump crystals as you all call them. Locking the gate won’t stop them if they are able to jump into the system on their own. It didn’t stop them when they jumped into the Lykan systems on the border near the end of the war when they killed all of those civilians.”

“I will see then if I can get my nation to send a fleet to Yintaka as you have requested. Depending on if they send the fleet and from where they are sending it from, I will work with either ambassador to insure our forces are not hindered in getting to Yintaka.”

“Thank you, ambassador. We will go ahead and adjourn for now. Please keep me updated if anything changes.”

Orbinai, Korveco, and Forneido got up from their seats, bowed, and headed for the door. Drew looked at his terminal as he needed to get the message to Trent about what to expect once he got to Yintaka. As the doors opened to let the ambassadors through, they stopped themselves. In the doorway was Ambassador Drino and he did not look happy at all. Drew stood up from his desk.

“Ambassador Drino,” Drew said. “I’m surprised to see you here considering I was told you were recalled back to the State.”

“I know this is an odd request coming from me in light of what is about to transpire,” Drino said, “but I am at this time formally requesting asylum.”

Everyone in the room was suddenly in shock, but Drew could tell that Drino was serious about this request.

“You want asylum?” Drew asked. “Considering the fact that you informed your government about the transports that they have decided to launch an attack on Yintaka, what reason could you give for me to grant you that request? For that matter, what reason can you give to make that request to begin with?!”

“I don’t want to go back to there!” Drino said almost to the point of tears. “They got rid of all culture in order for the citizens to focus on their tasks and their hatred for the Lykans! There is no art, no music, not even books outside of history, warfare, or job-specific titles! My trips to the State have been short only because I hate it there! It may be my duty to represent the State, but I like it here! The art, the culture, the flair of this city alone fills me with life!”

“You are giving good reasons why you want to stay here but I have yet to hear a reason why I should grant you asylum?”

“My government wanted to know about the transports with the planetary shield generators because they wanted to make sure that their attack would not be hindered. I knew this meant that they wanted to start up their war again with the Lykans but I also knew what the consequences would be if they proceeded. This was why I blatantly asked you about the system and the transports because if the NIR got there first, then those worlds would be protected and they wouldn’t proceed any further with their plans.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. During the war, you emphasized that your government would push forward in the eradication of the Lykans. Now it sounds like you want to do the opposite!”

“That was before we lost our culture to vengeance, before the Lykans reformed and released all of the remaining slaves! I had no idea how much they would change but when the Mandate was formed and why, I realized at that moment how much we alienated our own kind. Do you want to know the real reason why I was late to our meetings?”

“I’ve been wondering for a while.”

“It is because I am ashamed of what my nation has done. I am ashamed every time I have to come face-to-face with Korveco that serves as a constant reminder of why the rest of our brethren have not joined us. I have to put up a tough act just to make it through our meetings. I don’t want to see war again and especially if it is against our own people.”

Drew didn’t know whether to believe Drino or not but he saw Korveco walk up to him, putting his right hand on Drino’s left shoulder.

“I can see the honesty in you, my brother,” Korveco said. “It is good to see that at least one of our brethren from the State has seen the error of what they have done.”

“So you believe his words?” Drew asked.

“I do,” Korveco said as he turned his head to face Drew.

“I have to ask you one thing, Drino, before I consider granting your request.”

“Go ahead,” Drino said.

“Do you have any idea what the State is sending to Yintaka?”

“I do. In the six months since the war, the State has been looking into the construction of smaller attack vessels designed to get around the larger guns from battleships and cruisers.

Destroyers provide a smaller size and can track similar sized targets but the State wanted to go smaller and faster than those ships.”

“In other words, the State wanted to design frigates.”

“If that is your name for such vessels, then that would be yes. They haven’t come up with a name for them other than ‘fast assault craft’ but the State has managed to make lots of these vessels. They are small, less than a third of the size of one of our Raptor Destroyers, and almost twice the speed. They are equipped with two dual railguns, two light missile launchers, and five blasters. They were designed to attack a target like a swarm of insects and be hard to hit even with the guns on destroyers.”

“How many of these frigates are there?”

“Considering their small size and quick construction as well as small crew count, there are hundreds of them.”

“How is it that no one, not even my own ambassadors, have seen these ships?”

“They were built in select areas where there would be little to no outside eyes seeing them. The State knew that if those ships were discovered, the other powers in the cluster would develop similar ships to counter the frigates, including the Lykans.”

“It would take some doing to convince the Senate to commission a fourth class of ship after the war. I’m not sure about the other nations but even at that point, there is no way to counter such a force in mass in such a short amount of time.”

“We will have to look into that matter later,” Forneido said. “We have to contact our governments about these frigates and the potential danger they might cause.”

“I will designate these frigates’ class name as ‘Harpy’ since they don’t have a name,” Drew said. “I need to let Trent know about the situation and what he is getting into. This may make things difficult for all of us.”

“What about Drino’s asylum?” Korveco asked.

“Because he has provided us with potential information, I will grant his request. For now, he can return to his residence. We will work out the details later. Orbinai, do you think this information merits the Empire’s forces being mobilized?”

“They may have to,” Orbinai said. “If turrets are going to have a hard time tracking, then missile launchers may be the best solution in the meantime. Aside from the State, we are the only nation with missile launchers available.”

“Are you already forgetting the Sacrileges that are in our arsenal?” Forneido said. “We have quite a few of them but I will have to stress to my government to send a few more of them.”

“Whatever your nations can do to help,” Drew said. “Let’s hurry and make this all happen. We are against the clock on this one and the State knows the amount of time they have left until the NIR fleet arrives. We just have to keep them at bay until the generators are online.”

“What will you do with the State afterwards?” Drino asked.

The ambassadors and Drew looked at each other as they have not pondered that question before. Korveco suddenly cleared his throat to get everyone’s attention.

“I have an idea that might sound crazy,” Korveco said. “These are our fellow brethren that have lost their own way and their own identity to hatred and vengeance. They may have called us ‘misguided,’ but the State is far more ‘misguided’ than they tend to label us as. Therefore, I must first ask that you do not formally grant Drino asylum just yet.”

“What?!” Drino yelled. “Why?!”

“I, too, would like to know why you are asking me to revoke his request when I have granted it,” Drew asked.

“It is because I want Drino to go back to the State,” Korveco said. “However, he will not be traveling alone.”

“Now wait just a minute!” Drew said. “Tell me you are not about to suggest that you are traveling with Drino to the State, are you?! You have no idea how you will be treated there! You may be a fellow Vitam, but in your current attire, any citizen of the State will know instantly that you are from the Mandate and not from the State!”

“I do not wish to hide that fact among my fellow Vitams. I wish to go there to represent the Mandate and I will even talk to our Consulate about this to get their blessing on the matter. I want to speak with the Executive Council directly and try to convince them to no longer pursue their terrible goals involving the Lykans. I’m going so that I can find a solution and hopefully make peace between the State, the Mandate, and the Lykans.”

“I admire your bravery,” Forneido said. “It may be the best option we have right now. We know the Executive Council won’t listen to my fellow Lykans or the Humans now, but they may be more willing to listen to a fellow Vitam, regardless of where they come from.”

“My biggest concern, though,” Drew said, “is the safety and security for the two of you. Drino could be labeled a traitor for not wanting to go back to the State as well as Korveco for the actions of the Mandate to side with the Lykans over the State. Are you sure you want to go through with this?”

“With Korveco accompanying me,” Drino said, “I feel better knowing that I would not be alone in talking with the Executive Council to make them change their minds and their way of governing the State. I would suggest having your ambassadors wait to depart and tell them I’m bringing someone who they will need to take back with them once Korveco’s meeting concludes, provided he wishes to stay instead.”

“Very well,” Drew said. “I will allow this if the Mandate says so. Now, go and contact your governments, quickly. We need to hurry up and act before the State begins their attack.”

* * * * *

*Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
On Route to Yintaka System, 12 jumps from destination, Holy Lykan Republic, Eastern Region
1:57pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“I was hoping this wasn’t going to happen.”

Trent read over the message that he received from Supreme Chancellor Drew. When ships are traveling between star gates, a line of communication is hard to maintain. Therefore, it is usually easier to send and receive a text-based message that can be received while between jumps. The *Renaldo* received the current message prior to the last jump the *Renaldo* made.

Apparently, Wade and Autumn confirmed the State’s intent on attacking Yintaka and their timetable was moved forward once they confirmed that the NIR was delivering the planetary shield generators. However, after Drino requested asylum from Drew, he “spilled the beans,” as the old term goes, about the State’s newest class of vessel, a frigate-size vessel that Drew codenamed “Harpy.” While Drino did not have exact specifications of the frigates, he did say they were a third the size of their destroyers, and the ships were armed with two railguns, two missile launchers, and five blasters. On their own they were not too impressive but their size and numbers make up for it. They were going to be hard to hit at close range.

However, Trent was quick to surmise that there is a way to engage them before they become a problem. While they are a problem to track at close range, they can be shot down at

long range even with anti-battleship guns. As long as the frigates were approaching them, Trent's fleet would still have the advantage in firepower. However, there is no way to know if the State only intends to send in frigates or if any larger ships will be sent in.

There is only one last scenario to consider. There is a chance that the Harpies will bypass the defense forces entirely, ignoring them and making an attack run directly on the planets. If they suddenly arrive before his fleet does, there is little to no chance that there won't be civilian casualties before they arrive.

There is only one thing he needed to check on to see if it is even an option.

"Does anyone know the details about how planetary shield generators are deployed aside from the technicians that are on the transports?" Trent asked.

Everyone on the bridge turned towards Trent with puzzled expressions on their faces.

"I believe the engineering team would be the closest to knowing how those generators work," Captain Shannon said. "Why do you want to know?"

"I'm trying to see what options we have when it comes to their deployment. If there is a way to expedite their deployment on the two planets we are delivering them to, we can try to protect as many citizens as possible hopefully before the State attacks."

"Should I inquire among the engineering team for anyone who knows how they work?"

"I would rather not bother any of them if they are performing important duties to keep the ship running. I was curious if any of you knew since you all are already here."

"Considering what we are about to get into, how did you want to proceed with the delivery?"

"That is the tricky part. The State knows we are coming and thus could attack at any moment. I would rather not engage them under any circumstances because the last thing we need is to draw their attention. I have not asked this question until now but has the *Renaldo* or the fleet been given any additional equipment before I got on board?"

"Actually, yes," Chrystal said. "Much like the other fleets, we have in our possession a few warp field disruption generators. We are also in possession of some stasis field generators as well."

"What are stasis field generators? This is the first time I have heard of them?"

"It surprises me that you haven't heard of them. It was experimental at the end of the war, though, so I can understand why you might not have heard of them. They are generators that emit a heavy graviton field around its targets. This effectively slows the targets down to almost a third or less of their top speed."

"Then it is a good thing we have them. If the Harpies are as fast as we have been lead to believe, those generators when properly deployed can slow them down immensely."

Trent thought about this new information before continuing.

"How many of those generators do we have?" Trent asked.

"We have four of each," Chrystal said.

"Then here is the plan. We will be splitting the fleet into four groups. They will consist of two transport escort groups and two interceptor groups. We will give two of each generator to Cruiser Three-Five-Seven which will lead the second interceptor group while we lead the first interceptor group. We will head for the planet that has a smaller defense force. The purpose of the interceptor fleets is to stop the State frigates from warping directly to their target planets. We will position ourselves in their flight path to that end. We will then deploy the warp disruption field generators to bring them out of warp while the stasis field generators keep them from

escaping the field quickly. We will engage those ships with the intent to disable them should they start to clear the warp disruption field.”

“What about the other two fleets,” Shannon asked, “the ones that are escorting the transports?”

“Eight destroyers will escort each of the transports to the far side of their target planets. They will warp to a close proximity to the planet such as low orbit. There they will descend to the planet to deploy the planetary shield generators away from the fighting. Once the generators are online, the State will no longer have the firepower needed to attack either of the planets.”

“So, we are to act as a decoy or distraction in the meantime depending on how things are going between the State and the defense forces while the transports quickly set up the generators. That sounds a bit devious, sir.”

“Something I apparently picked up while I was on the *Templar*. Now then, relay the plan to the rest of the fleet so that they know how to proceed. Have the two pairs of generators ready to be deployed to Cruiser Three-Five-Seven. Once we reach the system, we will transport those to the cruiser and proceed with the plan from there.”

“What if the State is already there and attacking the planet? What do we do then?”

“We will do what we can to disable them as much as possible. However, we have not received word yet that they have begun their attack so I can only hope that whatever is causing their delay continues to do so until we arrive.”

“I hope so, too, though I am a bit concerned of why they are delaying their attack.”

“So am I, but we will know eventually. Ro, send a text message to the rest of the fleet with those plans.”

“Right away, sir,” Ro said.

“I read that Orbinai was trying to get an Imperial fleet there as well at the Chancellor’s request,” Shannon said. “Do you think they would be able to arrive in time?”

“The time it would take them to arrive at Yintaka from the closest Imperial-controlled system is an hour and a half,” Trent said. “While I would appreciate the support, I doubt they would arrive in time to make a difference whether by force or by intimidation alone. What I am trying to figure out is what the Mandate is going to do about the State?”

“What do you mean?”

“I read that Korveco was going with Drino to talk to the Executive Council on behalf of the Mandate Consulate about the way the State has been governing things within their borders, including their abolishment of culture and their continued hatred for the Lykans. I personally think that this is a bad idea on Korveco’s part. For Korveco to go straight to the State capital with only Drino acting as his escort puts him in a rather dangerous position. Drino’s authority within the State is not as good as it is outside the State. If the State arrests or detains Korveco and labels him as a ‘traitor’ for the acts of his fellow Mandate brethren, this could cause an even greater rift between the two nations to the point of open warfare.”

“Your area of expertise has usually been tactics and strategies, sir. Politics is a different story altogether. Who knows? Maybe Korveco has a plan of action already that we would not have thought of or considered.”

“I hope you are right. The last thing we need is for the State to make enemies of both the Lykans and the Mandate with us somehow stuck in the middle again. That aside, though, how many jumps are we now from the Yintaka System?”

“We are twelve jumps away, sir,” Ryan said.

“Understood. We will be there soon, then. Inform the crew and the fleet to go to Yellow Alert. We may be involved in combat soon.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said.

As soon as the order was given, yellow lines appeared on select areas of the walls and floors indicating the status of the alert. A short chime also rang out throughout the ship. Yellow alerts are generally an indication to be at combat readiness as combat might be evident but has not occurred yet. This allows for the crew to be ready at their combat stations when the time comes.

As the ship continued towards the next star gate it was about to jump through, Trent was beginning to wonder if the Yintaka System would be the place where a new war would begin or the place where the possibility of war would be diffused. He, his crew, and his fleet would find out soon enough.

* * * * *

*Office of Ambassador Orbinai, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
2:02pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“I can’t believe they are not sending a fleet!

Ambassador Orbinai got back to her office to send a message to her government to see about sending an Imperial task force as soon as possible to Yintaka to show solidarity against the attack on the Lykan system by the State. The response did not take too long to arrive. However, it was not the response she was looking for.

Apparently, the Emperor was quick to look over the request and decided that the Empire was not going to send a fleet even if it was meant to be a show of solidarity against the State’s actions. After all, the State cut its ties with the Empire after the war due to the Empire no longer wanting to continue the war with the Lykans. It also didn’t help matters when the State managed to figure out how to build their own hybrid weapons and ammo, though the Empire did the same with the State’s missile launchers and the missiles themselves.

The Empire has become more and more recluse, distancing itself from the other nations since the war. This denial of sending a fleet only shows how true that statement really was. How was Orbinai supposed to report this to the Supreme Chancellor? It wasn’t like she was going to be punished for trying or anything like that but she can only assume that the Chancellor would have serious doubts about relying on the Empire in the future for any sort of support.

Orbinai figured it was best to tell the Chancellor right away about these developments, though she really did not want to. She turned off the terminal screen and headed for the door. As the doors opened and she walked out of the office, she turned to her left to head for Drew’s office. However, she proceeded at a slow pace with her head pointing downward. A couple of Humans passed by and they looked like they could tell something was wrong but did not stop to ask. Orbinai was fine with that. The last thing she needed to do was stop to talk about the problem she was about to tell Drew about.

She entered the waiting room to Drew’s office. The secretary saw Orbinai and proceeded to address her.

“Ambassador Orbinai?” the secretary said. “Do you want me to inform the Supreme Chancellor you are here? He’s not in a meeting right now.”

“Yes, please,” Orbinai said. “I’ll wait right here.”

The Secretary pressed a button on the intercom.

“Supreme Chancellor?” she said. “Ambassador Orbinai is here to see you.”

“*Send her in,*” Drew said through the intercom.

The Secretary gestured towards the doors, indicating Orbinai could go in. Orbinai walked up to the doors and opened them, entering Drew’s office. The doors closed behind her.

“That was rather quick, Ambassador Orbinai,” Drew said. “What did the Empire say?”

“They told me an answer you may not want to hear,” Orbinai said. “Apparently, the issues between the State and its neighbors are effectively not the problems of the Empire. In other words, they are not sending a fleet because it does not benefit the Empire’s interest in such matters.”

“In all honestly, I’m not surprised by their answer.”

“You’re not?” Orbinai said as she was shocked. “You mean you knew how they were going to respond?”

“The way the Empire has handled itself as of late indicates to me that they were becoming more and more focused on themselves and their own interests than those of others. I was hoping that the Empire might change its way of thinking if they knew that a war may start again, but I knew in the back of my mind that it would not be so. It would seem as if I was correct in my assumptions based on their decision.”

“That fact that you somehow knew that the Empire was not going to send a fleet shows me how unreliable my nation has become as of late. I don’t know whether to feel ashamed, embarrassed, or both.”

“I know that you are not happy with the Empire and its decision at the moment but your Empire has its own values and policies that it must follow for the safety and security of its citizens. Human history thousands of years ago back on our home planet has shown that some nations have cut off ties to other nations not always out of spite but out of the safety and protection of its citizens when outside influence or problems tend to threaten their way of life. I tend to see the Empire’s actions as a very similar situation.”

“You are wiser than I would have thought. I had not thought about it in that manner until you put it that way.”

“The fact that the Empire has a representative here on Lumen indicates to me that the Empire still has some interests in the affairs of others. They just choose not to act for their own safety. I’m just happy to know they have not recalled you back, thus closing off that line of communication. When things go that far, then a breakdown in relations tends to follow and people tend to draw their own conclusions as to why one nation would choose to withdraw from any relationship with any other nation. At least we haven’t reached that point yet with the Empire.”

“The State on the other hand may be a different story. They did, after all, request for Drino to return without any indication that he would be replaced.”

“That is true. That is why Korveco is going with him, provided the Consulate approves of this decision.”

“Any word about that, yet?”

“Korveco said he would inform me of the Consulate’s decision shortly.”

“Do you have a plan should the State want to arrest Korveco?”

“Unfortunately, I do not. I can’t send a fleet into State territory without it being viewed as an act of war. The *Templar* and the *Cavalier* are still out exploring the Western and Southwestern

Regions and cannot be called back right now. I can only hope that Korveco knows what he is doing.”

“*Supreme Chancellor?*” the secretary said through Drew’s terminal. “*Ambassadors Drino and Korveco are here...oh, and Forneido just walked in as well.*”

Drew pressed the intercom button.

“Send them in,” Drew said.

The doors soon opened as the three ambassadors walked in. They all noticed Orbinai.

“Ambassador Orbinai,” Forneido said. “How did your request to the Empire go?”

Before Orbinai answered, Drew raised his hand to get their attention.

“The short answer is that the Empire is not sending a fleet,” Drew said. “I respect their decision after speaking with Orbinai. She did try to get them to send one, so we can at least appreciate the effort.”

Forneido, Drino, and Korveco looked at Orbinai who looked back at them. She gave a nod indicating she was in agreement with what Drew said. Not wanting to pursue the matter further, they refrained from asking about it further.

“So, ambassadors,” Drew said. “What do you three have to say?”

“My government has approved my trip to the State,” Korveco said. “Since the State has not tried to understand our position or our ideals when it comes to the Lykans, the Consulate has agreed to have me meet with the Executive Council directly. I will be traveling with Drino within the hour.”

“Are you both already packed?”

“My government limited what I could bring with me here,” Drino said. “Apparently as part of their abolishment of culture or entertainment, I could only bring clothes and materials needed for my task. I had to return most of my things back home on my last trip.”

“As for my things,” Korveco said, “I don’t have much myself save for clothes, mementos from my time here, and my holy texts. I will be taking the clothes and texts with me, but I will leave the mementos here. I will either return for them or you may have to send them to my home in case the State decides to arrest me as some sort of ‘traitor’ to their nation.”

“Don’t even joke about that,” Drew said. “I would rather that didn’t happen.”

“As would I, Supreme Chancellor, but I know that the possibility of such a thing happening exists regardless. Drino has gotten in touch with his government to let them know he is returning, though he asked for your ambassadors to remain until he arrives. I’m assuming you haven’t talked with them yet?”

“No, I was waiting to make sure you were going before I contacted them, but it would appear that it won’t be needed now.”

Drew stood up from his chair.

“Drino and Korveco,” Drew said. “I wish you both the best of luck with the Executive Council. I hope you both will help change their minds. I wish you safe journeys to both of you.”

The two ambassadors bowed.

“Thank you, Supreme Chancellor,” the two ambassadors said in unison.

They turned and headed out the door. As the door closed, Forneido looked at Drew as Drew sat back down in his seat.

“Ambassador Forneido,” Drew said, “have you heard anything yet about the attack by the State on the Yintaka System?”

“There has been no sign of any State ships in Yintaka at the moment,” Forneido said. “I have checked with my government just a moment ago concerning that matter and they have not heard anything yet.”

“The Eleventh Fleet will be there soon. Based on conversations that my ambassadors had with the Executive Council, I thought for sure that they would have appeared in the Yintaka System by now.”

“I thought so, too, but for some reason they have not.”

“Ambassador Wade did say that because of Drino, the Executive Council had to accelerate their timetable. I wonder if they were still trying to get their forces ready for their attack.”

“That is a possibility. Who knows how many of those Harpies as you call them are being gathered for their assault? Do you think they could be sending a lot of them just to attack Yintaka?”

“I don’t know. We are only going off of what Drino knows about the ships and right now, all we know is the general size and combat capabilities of those craft. We don’t know what they look like or how many of them there are for the State to deploy. However, considering the population count of both of the planets in question, I would say they would need a lot of firepower like what they brought during their last push into your territory near the end of the war. Whether or not the Harpies can bring that much firepower to the Yintaka System has yet to be determined.”

“Part of me wonders about contacting my government to see about development of a frigate to combat the Harpies in the near future. Whether our forces are successful in stopping the State’s forces or not, we need to be better prepared for combat against smaller targets.”

“I still have to bring this up with the Senate. Right now, they don’t know any of this is going on, only that they approved of the distribution of the shield generators. They know that this is the last delivery of the generators for the time being and that it is being made to a system on the border between the HLR and the State. I may have to wait to see how events unfold in Yintaka before I bring this matter before the Senate.”

“How long again has your nation maintained a three-ship-class policy?”

“It has been that way for hundreds of years since the end of the Expansion Era.”

“It sounds like it might be tough to convince them of expanding that number. I suggest starting up a draft of what you are going to tell them right away regardless of what happens in Yintaka.”

“That may help me get my mind off what is about to transpire. I will have Grand Admiral Mikey take charge of things in Yintaka with our forces while I focus on the proposal and report to the Senate. I have to bring him up to speed as well concerning the possible attack by the State and their use of frigates.”

Drew sighed.

“I can just tell this is whole matter going to go over well with the Senate, though,” Drew said sarcastically.

“Are you sure?” Forneido said, puzzled. “The impression you are giving sure doesn’t seem like they would enjoy what you would have to report to them.”

Drew looked at Forneido with his right eyebrow raised.

“You’re not familiar with the concept of sarcasm, are you?” Drew asked.

* * * * *

*Bridge, H.L.R.S. Vidoria, Harbinger-Class Battleship
Yintaka III Outer Lunar Orbit, Yintaka System, Holy Lykan Republic, Eastern Region
2:12pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“There is still no sign of the State’s forces yet?”

Rear Admiral Zindalo had his fleet on high alert as soon as he got the warning from his superiors about a potential attack by State forces close to an hour ago. This was based on the fact that Ambassador Drino hinted the State’s interest in the Yintaka System to the NIR Supreme Chancellor. He later got a report that the State confirmed their intent to attack Yintaka when the NIR ambassadors to the State confronted the Executive Council, or at least one member of the Council from what he heard, with the possible intent. Now Zindalo recently got a report stating that the State had developed a small combat ship that the Humans classified as a “frigate” that is fast and deadly in large numbers. The fact that their anti-destroyer autocannons are the only weapons capable of hitting them at close-range means that the defense forces are severely limited when fighting at that range. The only way to bring all their firepower to bear on them is by engaging the frigates in long-range combat.

Thankfully, up to six Sacrileges, the missile variant of the Omen Battlecruiser, were present in the system after being deployed by headquarters with three in his battle group and three in the other battle group protecting Yintaka IV. Missiles are fast and powerful, a fact Zindalo is all too aware of in past battles with the State during the First Interstellar War, and they can track their targets until their flight time expires. Zindalo was glad that such ships were built for the HLR and were a part of their forces, though he wished he had more here considering the possible number of frigates he would be combating. He wasn’t sure why the NIR Supreme Chancellor called them “Harpies” but that’s something he will have to look up later.

What Zindalo could not understand is why the Harpies had not shown up yet? The NIR fleet with the planetary shield generators would be in Yintaka any minute and the State should be aware of this fact based on what Drino had told them. If the State doesn’t attack Yintaka soon, the NIR fleet will arrive and deploy the planetary shield generators before the State can attack the populous. What was the State waiting on?

“Scan the system once more,” Zindalo ordered.

“I’ve started having the scanners run constantly, sir,” the tactical officer said. “I’ve had them do so after you asked so often to run them.”

“And there is still no sign of activity? There isn’t even a hint of a gravitational disturbance from the creation of an artificial wormhole?”

“There is not a single gravitational disturbance that is artificial anywhere within scanning range, sir. The only exception to this is the jump gates in the system leading into our territory or the Mandate’s. The jump gate into State-held territory is locked and has not shown any activity at all.”

“I see. I’m sorry to ask you so often.”

“I understand you are a bit tense, sir. We haven’t seen any combat in almost six months and you are either anxious or nervous about having to go into battle again.”

“I would say it is a little bit of both, actually. I still can’t believe the State wants to really start another war after so long. Their need for vengeance is starting to weigh far too heavily on their spirits that I wonder if they will ever see past it other than exterminating our kind.”

“Who knows, sir? What I am trying to figure out is if this whole thing was either a diversion or a false ploy?”

“Believe me, I have thought about the same thing. I would not put it past the State to somehow use the fear of attacking defenseless planets just to have our forces elsewhere as a diversion. However, the only reason why I wouldn’t think that is the case is due to one crucial element.”

“What would that element be, sir?”

“It is the fact that none of the systems aside from this one are defenseless. Every system along our border now has those shield generators on the habitable worlds. Therefore, unless the State has developed a means to go around or through the planetary shields, this is the only location where they can attack.”

“You don’t suppose they are actually waiting for the NIR fleet to arrive, do you?”

“Why do you think that?”

“That fleet is coming here with the generators that are needed to defend these planets. If the State wanted to make sure that both Yintaka III and IV remain defenseless, they would attack those transports directly and destroy them. This way, they can focus on their attack runs on the planets without dealing with a planetary shield being deployed.”

Zindalo thought about his tactical officer’s words for a moment. He was quick to realize that the officer’s point made sense.

“You bring up a good point,” Zindalo said. “There is only one problem with that possibility, though.”

“I would surmise that if the State did attack the transports that it would be considered a direct act of aggression towards NIR forces and that they would respond in kind, correct?”

“That is correct. I know that the State and the NIR are not on good terms right now due to the NIR assisting both us and the Mandate with strengthening our defenses. However, their main squabble is with our forces and in some aspects the Mandate. If the State makes an enemy out of the Humans, they would have no more allies that would help them.”

“They would be in the same predicament as we were when the former King was in power.”

Zindalo thought about those words for a moment. While the circumstances are not quite similar, there were some elements that were, such as a preexisting conflict and provoking another nation into combat. If the State pursued the course of action as to attack the Human forces, they would soon find themselves on a three-to-one conflict that would not be in the State’s favor. Surely they were aware of this fact and the consequences of provoking the Humans. They wouldn’t be that foolish in their pursuit of vengeance, would they?

“Hmm?” the communications officer said. “Sir, I’m getting word that one of our jump gates is activating. The gate controllers are reporting that the NIR fleet transporting the generators is starting to arrive. The *Renaldo*, a Paladin-class battleship and flagship of the NIR Eleventh Fleet, just arrived in the system.”

“Did you say the *Renaldo*?” Zindalo asked. “I wondered if that ship was leading the fleet or not when I heard the Eleventh Fleet was coming.”

“Are you familiar with that ship, sir?” the tactical officer asked.

“I’m familiar with the history involving that ship and the Human who commands the fleet. I’ll tell you more about both of them later, but it sounds like they are arriving a few ships at a time. The question I have is whether the transports are the last ones to arrive or not.”

“Sir,” the communications officer said, “we are being hailed by Vice Admiral Trent of the *Renaldo*.”

“Vice Admiral Trent?!” the tactical officer yelled. “Now I recognize the name of that ship! That was the ship where the first meeting between Lykans and Humans occurred! Trent was also responsible for attacking our ship production facilities with a stealth vessel that reduced our forces near the end of the war!”

“Looks like you know your history,” Zindalo said. “It was thanks to his efforts that we managed to reform ourselves. I do not hold a grudge against him for his past transgressions though because the end result has made us a better people. Do you have a problem with him?”

“I do not. I’m just surprised that he is here.”

“Very well. Communications, put him through.”

“Yes, sir,” the communications officer said.

A holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen. On it appeared a Human with some slight gray in his hair, obvious due to his age and some past stress as Lykans get gray in their fur for the same reasons. Zindalo never thought he would meet or talk with the man that helped reform the Lykans, though.

“I am Rear Admiral Zindalo of the battleship *Vidoria*, Yintaka Defense Force.”

“I am Vice Admiral Trent of the battleship Renaldo, NIR Eleventh Fleet. It is good to meet you. I’m checking to see if the State has begun its attack but from what we have scanned, it appears they have not done so yet.”

“Correct, sir. We are not sure why they are taking so long or if they are even coming. If I may ask, how far along are your transports from arriving?”

“They are still a good number of jumps back. They are the last two groups that will come through the gate. We expect them to arrive in ten minutes.”

“I understand, though personally I wish they were closer here than that far back considering the state of alert we are in.”

“Believe me, had I known the State was going to attack Yintaka in advance, I would have had them at the front of the group to arrive first before we got underway. The next group is coming through now. We will hold our position here at the gate until the entire fleet arrives. We have our own strategy of dealing with the State when they arrive so hopefully the rest of my fleet will get here soon.”

Alarms suddenly started going off on the bridge of the *Vidoria*. Zindalo looked at his tactical officer.

“Don’t tell me that the alarm is what I think it is for,” Zindalo said.

“It is,” the tactical officer said. “I’m reading a large gravitational disturbance off the port bow, distance: one hundred seventy-five kilometers!”

“Sir!” the communications officer yelled. “The defense force at Yintaka IV is detecting a similar gravitational disturbance near them! A wormhole is about to form!”

“Contact the Mandate forces on standby!” Zindalo said. “Let them know we will need immediate backup!”

“Yes, sir!”

Zindalo looked back at the screen with Trent on it.

“Vice Admiral Trent,” he said, “whatever it is you have planned, I hope you can implement it soon because something tells me we are about to have quite a fight on our hands with the lives of millions of Lykans at stake.”

* * * * *