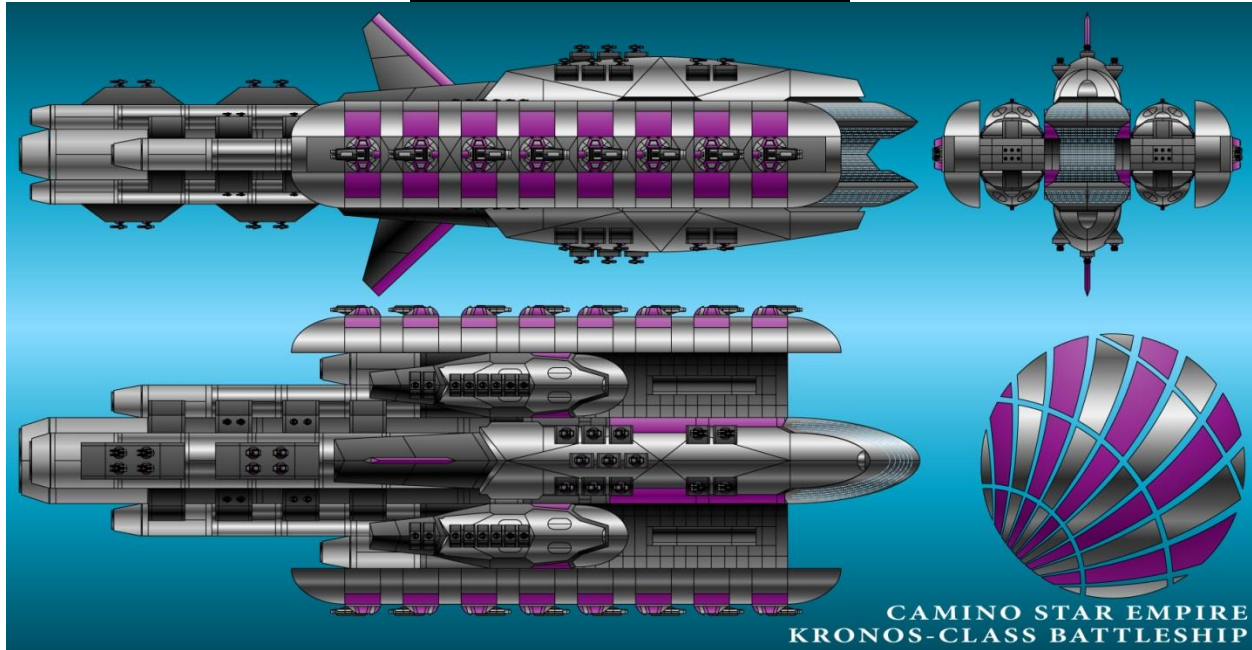


Warring Factions: The Novus Initium Saga
Episode II: The Star to the North



PART 5

Sickbay, Cruiser-242, Guardian-Class Cruiser
Planet NR-A02-II Airspace, NR-A02 System, 11 Light-Years North of Serenus System
3:31pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.

“That’s all we needed to know.”

Kencier along with the coroner came out of the operation room the autopsy was being done in. Mandy and Gringio came out of the observation room after watching the autopsy, though both agreed that they may have lost their appetite after witnessing it.

“So,” Gringio said trying to regain his composure, “is what we have determined that is in that body confirmed in the autopsy?”

“It is,” Kencier said. “There was indeed a subspace transceiver as well as cybernetic components that are very similar to our own. I would say that the Kingdom did an elaborate job of being able to reverse-engineer and replicate our technology. Some of the components look to be made of different materials, no doubt due to the lack of the required materials that are normally found within the Empire, but the components seemed to do the job they were intended to do.”

“Am I to assume,” Mandy said, “that this means that the Kingdom is using your technology for their purposes after all?”

“It would seem that way,” Gringio said. “We will need to get this information to the Emperor as soon as possible. Can you compile records of what your forces have encountered involving the scans of the Kingdom ships using the so-called ‘living cores’ in their ships? These atrocities need to be dealt with but it will be up to the Emperor to make that judgement call.”

“I will make sure you have a copy of our records before you leave. Is there a way to contact your nation after today, though? I know my government will want to initiate political relations after today as a show of good faith, not to mention that if your nation chooses to take action against the Kingdom that we could help coordinate our forces along with the State’s.”

“It is probably best not to put too much faith in the possibility of us joining the war much less coordinating our forces until the Emperor has made his decision. On a personal note, I really hope he does. The Lykans have been an issue for a very long time. The Slave Revolt weakened them and they had their focus on the State for a long time. The fact that they now have the means to field more ships with a crew of one using our technology makes them extremely dangerous to everyone in the star cluster. I also know that it would only be a matter of time before they would set their sights on our Empire again. However, the fact they were trying to start a war between us and your Republic shows they wanted our forces to be weakened before they would attempt to invade. However, this failed plan of the Kingdom’s along with the evidence we have gathered so far may be enough for the Emperor to take action against the Kingdom.”

“We can only hope. Let me get that information for you.”

Mandy walked over to the communications panel found on one of the adjacent walls and activated the intercom to the bridge.

“Mandy to Danielle,” she said. “Do we have information about the scans that were taken of the Kingdom ships involving their ‘living cores’ including schematics?”

“Yes, Captain,” Danielle said.

“I want you to transmit that information to Admiral Gringio’s ship. They have the evidence from the autopsy and had requested for that information as well.”

“Understood. We will compile the information and transmit it to his ship immediately.”

“Thank you. Mandy, out.”

Mandy turned off the intercom and walked back over to the Caminos.

“That information should be transmitted to your ship by the time you depart,” Mandy said.

“Thank you,” Gringio said. “When I get back to our ship, I will transmit back to you a brief history of our nation so that you all have a better understanding of our people. We have been following your historical channels for quite a while, so we know a lot about your history short of the fact of your species transition into the star cluster.”

“That would certainly give us a better understanding of your people and their culture.”

“Once my people get this information including our Emperor, we will contact you about our decision about taking action against the Kingdom. It could take up to a few days at most before our Emperor makes his decision.”

“I understand. I will let my government know what has happened here once we leave this space.”

“I take it the destroyer that was stolen from you is ready to leave already?”

“We loaded the ship with the necessary crystals for it to jump back into our own territory. This will make quite an interesting report for me to file, though.”

“I’m sure it will. From my understanding, the thought that your Republic has managed to encounter three alien nations within a month’s time for the first time in your species’ history would be an important and historical event indeed.”

“That brings up an interesting question, though. Has the Empire come across any other nations or species besides the Kingdom and the Republic? I figured it would be best for us to know in case we end up coming across anyone else in this star cluster.”

“At this point, we have not. We haven’t detected transmissions from any other nation or race in the star cluster. However, I personally doubt that means there are no other races or nations that are present in the cluster. If there are, they could be using a different form of communications we have not detected yet or they are not yet as technologically developed.”

“So in other words, all of us have to be constantly vigilant of other such nations if we go exploring the star cluster,” Mandy sighed after saying that. “I just hope that if there are, they are not like the Kingdom.”

“That makes two of us. There are only so many stars in the cluster and we all have to get along to survive. Before we depart, I do have one question I wanted to ask though I know no one from your species may know the answer based on personal experience.”

“Now you have me wondering about the question, but go ahead and ask it.”

“Do you know if the galaxy your species came from is larger than this star cluster?”

“That is an intriguing question. You are right that no one in my species has had any personal experience from being in the galaxy that our ancestors came from. However, what I can tell you is that it was a spiral-type galaxy over one hundred and twenty thousand Light-years across with countless stars. It was called the Milky Way Galaxy.”

Gringio and Kencier were both in shock at the sheer size of the Milky Way.

“Did your species ever explore that galaxy?” Kencier asked.

“Only from our own home planet called Earth,” Mandy said. “My kind had not done any manned missions past the outer planets of our ancestor’s solar system by the time Earth’s moon transitioned into this star cluster.”

“I remember you saying earlier that an entire moon went through a wormhole. That is still something that is hard to comprehend but from what I can tell there is physical evidence of this happening, correct?”

“The moon known as Luna is in a stable orbit just beyond the outermost planet in the Lumen system, the capital of the Republic. It has been made into a historical monument to preserve the ruins that are still there despite the fact the place was stripped of essential materials when it got to the cluster. There were thousands of us back then and the new home planet of Luminaire was more than sufficient for our needs for two thousand years. It was at that point when we started to expand into the star cluster.”

“If my math serves me right, that means that currently the Republic is the oldest spacefaring nation out of us all. Your nation was exploring star systems while the rest of us had not even gone into space yet!”

“When did your nation start going to other star systems?”

“Just over a thousand years ago, but you all have been in space only slightly longer.”

“Then you are correct. We have been exploring other systems for a little longer than your Empire has. Believe me when I say that there are those of us who wondered what has become of our ancestors who still lived on Earth and what they are doing right now. The loss of the moon would have had certain effects on the planet, there is no question about that. However, despite what scientists have tried in the past, we were never able to open a wormhole that would take us

back to our galaxy. After some time, those scientists gave up and we as a species resigned to live our lives in the star cluster. If anything, it did give us a new start free from any ties to our ancestral planet and the nations that resided there. We learned from our mistakes and created a society that has managed to live in peace for over three thousand years.”

“And yet you have had a military since your kind has been in this star cluster.”

“Humans are not fools. We knew there was a possibility of conflict and security within the Republic from those who wish to do harm both internally and externally. That was one part of our past that we could not let go but we managed to use it in the most efficient way possible.”

“It was probably a good thing that you have a military considering who you all managed to encounter. Regardless though, we need to get going so that we report these findings to our Emperor.”

“Very well. I’ll call a security team to escort you both back to your shuttle. I will head back to the bridge so that we can leave your territory as soon as you are back aboard your ship.”

“As you wish.”

Mandy went back to the intercom panel.

“Security team,” she said, “report to Sickbay for escort duty.”

She turned off the panel and turned back towards the two Caminos.

“I will wait till they arrive to escort you two back before I head to the bridge,” Mandy said. “Did you have anything further to ask?”

“Not that I can think of. I will say that your species is definitely a rather intriguing one. Your Republic has an enormous population, highly advanced technology, a massive cultural output, highly diverse, and a highly stable government for over three millennia. We heard rumors that there were members of the United Vitam State, namely among their younger generations, that have expressed interest in the Republic’s culture. We can already see why that is considering their lack of culture outside a militaristic one.”

“Your Empire is a bit better informed than I realized. I heard the same rumors but I don’t know the details or whether this is official or not.”

“That is understandable. I don’t have anything further then.”

At that point, the doors to sickbay opened and in walked four security officers with laser rifles in their hands. They came to attention in a two-by-two formation.

“Security detail, reporting as ordered,” the officer closest to Mandy said.

“Please escort our two guests back to their shuttle,” Mandy said.

“Yes, ma’am.”

The four officers turned towards the center of their formation looking at the person next to them and took a step back creating an opening for the Caminos to walk between.

“It was good to talk to you both,” Mandy said. “I hope this is not the last time we meet like this.”

“If fate allows,” Gringio said, “We may see each other again. Farewell, Captain.”

The Caminos bowed. Mandy did so in response. The Caminos soon walked into the formation of the security detail. They quickly turned towards the door and began walking out of Sickbay. As soon as they left through the door and the door closed, Mandy let out a huge sigh.

“Man, that was a bit nerve-racking,” Mandy said.

“How so?” the coroner asked.

“I was afraid that I was going to say the wrong thing at any moment. I somehow doubt that the first encounter that Vice Admiral Trent went through with the Kingdom and the State was no less stressful.”

“Probably not, but then again when are first impressions not stressful?”

“At any rate, I need to get back up to the bridge and get ready to depart this system back into Republic space. We still have all of the evidence that was collected from the autopsy, right?”

“Don’t worry. I made sure everything was accounted for. They only recorded and copied the data we had.”

“I just wanted to make sure. I will see you later.”

“Hopefully not as a client of mine.”

“Very funny. Talk about dead humor.”

“One needs to have some form of humor in my line of work.”

“Granted. See you later.”

Mandy walked out of Sickbay and proceeded to head to the closest elevator. As she hit the call button, she let out another sigh. The stress of the situation was finally leaving her but she knew there was a lot of work to do once she got back.

The elevator soon arrived and she stepped in once the doors opened. Thankfully there was no one in the elevator.

“Bridge,” she said.

The elevator gave an acknowledging chirp before getting underway. Mandy leaned against the wall, still contemplating everything that has transpired today. It was a lot to take in and process between a cloned infiltrator managing to hijack a ship to running into another alien race. Thankfully the public within the Republic were already aware of the Empire existing near the border but she doubted that they would have expected to contact the Empire today of all days.

To her, the star cluster was starting to feel a little crowded.

* * * * *

*Observation Room #3, Main Docking Bay Juncture, Northern Republic Military Headquarters
Planet Serenus VI Orbit, Serenus (“Serenus”) System, 34 Jumps North of Lumen System
3:49pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“Why are you still here?”

Marina came back to the third Observation Room after writing her article for her company involving the theft of the destroyer. She was looking for Brenda afterwards and was told by some of the station staff that she was still in the Observation Room. When Marina arrived, she saw Brenda sitting in one of the seats looking out the window into the main docking bay juncture that pointed out into space. The star the destroyer fled to could be seen through the atmospheric barrier.

Brenda turned to look at Marina.

“I was just pondering a few things, that’s all,” Brenda said.

“Like what?” Marina asked.

Brenda looked back towards the window.

“The first major news story I’ve had since I got here and it had to be about the theft of a destroyer by a clone of Vice Admiral Trent. Not the kind of story I wanted to report in all honesty. I ended up putting a bad light on Trent and I could tell Laura was not happy about it.”

“It is our job to report the facts as we are presented. The fact his name was overheard during your report did not help things. However, I don’t think she blames you for what happened. She knows what it means to report the news even if we ourselves don’t like the content of the report.”

“Maybe. I just hope I don’t get stuck out here permanently for doing so.”

Brenda paused for a moment and looked at the same star again that the destroyer and the fleet sent to retrieve it jumped to.

“The fleet that went after the destroyer has been gone for a while, hasn’t it?” Brenda asked. “Do you think they encountered any trouble?”

“I hope not. The only trouble aside from the clone would be the Imperial fleet and we don’t need to be at war with them when we already have the Kingdom to deal with.”

Proximity alarms started going off around the station at that moment. Brenda and Marina looked out the window towards the docking bay exit to see several wormholes suddenly appear from the direction of the same star the fleet jumped to. Brenda and Marina quickly realized who it was that created the wormholes as the Republic fleet that was sent was coming through the wormholes including the destroyer that was stolen.

“Looks like they made it back in one piece,” Brenda said. “Do you think I should report this?”

“Not just yet,” Marina said. “How about we wait this time and see if they wanted to release a statement first. For now, use the camera drones to record their arrival for later.”

Brenda activated the camera drones and started recording. The two of them continued to watch as the ships entered the main docking bay, docking into individual bays that were available. Brenda stood up as the last ship finally docked, shutting down the camera drones.

“I’ll go ahead and let the office know the ships are back and I’ll ask them what they want me to do,” Brenda said. “I figured it would be best to see how they want me to proceed.”

“That’s probably the best idea for now,” Marina said. “Any ideas of what you want to do for dinner later tonight?”

“Let me see what the office wants me to do first and then I’ll get back to you on that. It’s already been a long day and it just seems to be getting longer.”

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
3:57pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“So contact was made after all.”

Supreme Chancellor Drew sat behind his desk looking over the preliminary report that Captain Mandy had filed with her immediate superiors. This report made it to Grand Admiral Mikey who just presented it personally to the Chancellor. State Ambassador Drino was also present to hear the report.

“Yes, Chancellor,” Mikey said. “Apparently the Imperial forces were already there where the stolen destroyer was located but they were cloaked. Captain Mandy’s fleet began to get the stolen vessel ready to get underway and to remove the deceased clone body from the bridge when they noticed the gravitational anomalies around them were artificial in nature. Captain Mandy called them out and they indeed appeared.”

“So they were there already but were observing our actions even though there appeared to be a threat issued against them?”

“It would appear that the Empire has been observing the Republic through the broadcasts we have sent out for quite a long time. They knew of our contact with the Kingdom and the State as well as our position involving the Empire from news reports. The threat from the cloned infiltrator according to the Caminos seemed highly irregular to be issued from one of our ships. Therefore, they went to investigate rather than engage the destroyer.”

“So your nation was able to make contact with the Empire,” Drino said. “I’m beginning to wonder, though. Why did they fail to answer any of our transmissions?”

“Based on what Mandy could determine,” Mikey said, “the Empire considered the conflict between the Kingdom and the State to have nothing to do with the Empire itself. The Empire did not wish to enter any conflict that was not in its best interest. The only reason the Empire was willing to speak to the Republic was due to the fact they detected a transmission similar to their own using cybernetics that were reverse-engineered from implants they had created. When they realized the subspace transmission was heading into Kingdom space, they sent a fleet to investigate. Now that they know the Kingdom is using their technology in such a fashion that even includes turning slaves into living cores, they may get involved after all.”

“So we ask for their assistance and they ignore us, but when they find out their technology was being used to make living computer cores, THAT’S when they get involved?!”

“Our own history shows that nations in the past on our ancient home planet usually fought to either gain resources or defend their existing territory but there have been occasions where it was not in the best interest of a nation to get involved and remain neutral in an existing conflict. Only once a nation’s interests or territory is attacked is when that nation no longer remains neutral. This has happened on more than one occasion but has not been the case for more than three thousand years. I can see the Empire working under the same mentality in that regards. Only if the Empire had something to gain would they have assisted the State but from their standpoint there was nothing to gain from going to war with the Kingdom.”

“I guess that would make sense,” Drino said sounding a little defeated. “I was hoping that since they had no love for the Kingdom they could assist us against a mutual enemy. I guess we should be thankful that they are even considering joining the fight now.”

“Until we have confirmation,” Drew said, “we must not get excited over that possibility just yet. Once we get the official word from that nation’s Emperor or ruling party of their entry into the war, then we can work out the details from there. Depending on the timeframe, we could be looking at a day or two minimum before we hear from them.”

“So what do we tell the public?” Mikey asked.

“The truth so far, but we will make it clear that we will be waiting to hear from the Empire about their position on the war. From there, we will work things out.”

“I guess I should tell my government the same thing, correct?” Drino asked.

“That would be wise,” Drew said. “I know some if not all of the members of your government will not be thrilled it took the Empire this long to act but tell them what we told you and hopefully it will make sense to them as well.”

“One can only hope. I will head back to my office and contact my government as soon as possible. Let me know if you hear from the Empire again.”

“We will,” Drew said as Drino got up from his seat and proceeded out of the Chancellor’s office.

Drew looked over at Mikey.

“So how are things going with Trent?” Drew asked.

“He is done packing his quarters,” Mikey said. “He just needs to get his personal belongings from his Ready Room and then wait for the shuttle to pick him up tomorrow. He’ll be able to sleep in his quarters one last time before he has to depart.”

“I still have to talk to him about the sustainable warp drive project and his role in it.”

“*Supreme Chancellor?*” Drew’s secretary said through the intercom. “*I have Agent Tora from the RCIA out here to see you, sir. She says it is involving Vice Admiral Trent.*”

Drew looked over at Mikey as they exchanged puzzled looks.

“Did you contact her about him?” Mikey asked.

“I was about to ask you the same thing,” Drew said. “What do you suppose she wants with Trent?”

“Considering the track record of his involvement on two occasions that had to do with the RCIA, namely with Agent Tora, she probably wants to talk about his future as well. However, considering how he allowed that reporter on his ship during our first contact with the State and the Kingdom which greatly upset her, I’m sure she might have other ideas in mind.”

“I can only guess,” Drew said before he pressed the button to respond to the secretary. “Send her in.”

The doors soon opened and Tora walked in dressed in a business casual suit with a skirt. Even after three thousand years, these sorts of attire for businesses remain the same, though the quality and design has made changes over the years. She walked in with a slight grin on her face. Both Drew and Mikey knew this would not be good for either of them.

“Greetings, gentlemen,” Tora said. “I heard through the grapevine that you have ordered Vice Admiral Trent back to Luminaire in order to find him something to do since the Lykans have his DNA.”

“That’s right,” Mikey said, not looking too thrilled. “We are still working out the details of how to assign him to other areas involving the military that will make it difficult for the Lykans to try infiltrating again.”

“I see. Well then, the RCIA might have use for him after all under the circumstances.”

“What do you mean by that?” Drew asked.

“When I heard that both him and Colonel Blair’s DNA was in the hands of the Lykans, I figured that they would not be allowed to access sensitive military information with their DNA if that has been compromised.”

“Let’s not forget,” Mikey said, “YOUR DNA was also scanned and compromised.”

“They only have the DNA but there is one thing they do not have that a clone won’t have either.”

“And what would that be?”

“Every agent in the RCIA has a microchip in their body. I won’t say where for the sake of secrecy but both a DNA scan as well as the microchip needs to be read to access a secure RCIA facility. If the Lykans make a clone and try to use it to access an RCIA facility, they would be denied twice. The third time would result in a heavy stun of the target.”

“So the RCIA uses a ‘two-step’ authentication system,” Drew said. “That would make things difficult for the Lykans to duplicate.”

“Exactly. That means that our intelligence department is protected from intruders and infiltrators.”

“Then maybe I should ask this question,” Drew said with a serious look on his face. “What is it you want from Trent and Blair?”

Tora’s expression also turned serious.

“Do you remember how you wanted to fund a project to create a sustainable warp drive system to bypass the use of star gates especially in Lykan territory?”

“Yes, I did present that to the Senate but I did not know that meeting was made public already.”

“It wasn’t. We had a couple of agents there since that is part of our duty to oversee such meetings. We know that you had brought this particular topic to the Senate’s attention and we would also like to see it approved and funded. A ship designed for deep infiltration and reconnaissance would fit our mandate perfectly along with a special operations unit.”

“I see where you are going with this,” Mikey said. “You want Trent and Blair to be involved with the project as well if it gets approved.”

“It would appear that we all had the same idea. Wonderful! If the ship is built, Trent can be put in command thanks to his expertise. Any special operations and infiltration teams can be commanded by Blair thanks to his experience being in the SAGATs. It would save us time and effort in finding experienced combat personnel for the command positions.”

“There is one thing you need to keep in mind, Agent Tora,” Drew said.

“What would that be, Supreme Chancellor?”

“Because it is a CIVILIAN agency that is asking for the procurement of MILITARY equipment and personnel for what would sound like a joint operation, both Trent and Blair will have the option to decline your request if they so choose.”

“Oh, of course, Chancellor! I’m not saying that they didn’t have the choice. However, I have a feeling that they may accept our offer.”

“What makes you so sure of that?”

“That is because we have an agent within the fleet that was sent to recover the stolen destroyer. He has managed to recover sensor readings including the transmission of the Lykan infiltrator’s consciousness back into Kingdom space. We have the coordinates.”

“You snuck one of your operatives on board?!” Mikey said as he was fuming. “Who gave you the authority to do that?!”

“Head Agent Aja. When we heard that the infiltrator had transmitted his consciousness, the agent went to work to know where it had gone. Aja also knew that the chance to meet the Imperial Navy was high and made sure to record everything that occurred while they were there. What is the point of intelligence gathering if one of our agents is not present?”

“I’m beginning to see why Trent and Blair don’t like working with you or the RCIA in general. Having unauthorized civilians on board while on an operation would be grounds for arrest.”

“And yet,” Drew said, “there is something overlooked with what you just said, Grand Admiral.”

“Something I overlooked?” Mikey asked.

“You just said ‘unauthorized civilians’ a moment ago, right?”

“Yes, I did... WAIT A MOMENT! How in the world was this agent able to bypass the security?! The computer would have put up a force field around them the moment they got on board!”

“We made sure to input the operative’s DNA into the military databanks to prevent that from happening,” Tora said with a smile. “It was not that difficult for us to do since we are privileged to that information.”

“Since when?”

“Since the idea of the use of DNA to access military equipment became a reality a very long time ago. To make sure that the information was not compromised by those with malicious intent or below certain ranks without approval, the Supreme Chancellor at the time gave the authority to monitor and secure the information to the RCIA. We have retained that authority since then. When the removal of Trent’s DNA from the database occurred, we took notice of who did it and why based on the reports involving the stolen destroyer and where the real Trent was. We knew this removal was not malicious so we did not stop it from happening. When we heard that the fleet in Serenus was being deployed to recover the destroyer, we needed to make sure about the clone that was used and any records of his actions. That was why he was part of the medical team sent aboard as he already had medical training and expertise. For that matter, he was the coroner.”

Drew and Mikey looked at each other. They didn’t know what to think of the situation nor did they know whether to inform Mandy that the coroner aboard her ship was an RCIA operative. Drew turned back towards Tora.

“Let me ask this, then,” Drew said. “You said you got the coordinates to where the infiltrator’s consciousness was transmitted to. Can you determine if these coordinates could be the Lykan home system?”

“While the transmission was deep into Kingdom space,” Tora said, “it was not on the edge of the cluster. It is close to the edge, though, so there is a possibility that the capital of the Kingdom is nearby that system. If a ship is created to be able to infiltrate their space, we can monitor the transmissions from that system which could lead us to their capital.”

Drew pondered this thought. If ever there was incentive for the Senate to approve the funding of the sustainable warp drive, this would be it. Drew looked at Tora again.

“I will bring this up with the Senate when we meet again,” he said. “At that time, should it be approved, THEN you can approach Trent and Blair involving the project. If in the off chance it does not get approved, then we will think of another strategy and what to do with those two as well as the others who DNA was also scanned. Is that clear?”

“Crystal,” Tora said.

“Good. Is there any other business you wish to discuss?”

“Not at this time. I will take my leave, then, Supreme Chancellor.”

Tora bowed, turned around, and walked out the doors of Drew’s office. Drew and Mikey looked at each other again.

“I’m beginning to see why Trent and Blair don’t like working with her or the RCIA,” Mikey said. “She along with that agency can be quite manipulative.”

“I wholeheartedly concur,” Drew said.

* * * * *

*Office of Advisor Forneido, Lykan Royal Palace, City of High Charity (translated)
Lykana Orbit, Heronia System, Capital of Royal Lykan Kingdom
4:46pm, June 3, 5433 A.D.*

“HOW COULD YOU ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN?!”

Forneido was on his feet, hands slapped against his desk as he looked at the holographic screen in front of him. The Lykan operative whose consciousness was transferred to the clone body of Trent was on the screen with an expression of slight disappointment. The failure of the infiltrator’s mission to put the Empire against the Republic made Forneido surge with rage. The infiltrator was still in the middle of his report when Forneido made his outburst.

“Certain factors were not taken into account about this mission, my lord. Apparently the real Trent managed to get contacted while I was within Imperial territory and managed to have his DNA removed from their database. I was not aware that such a security measure was in place.”

“And you’re telling me there was no way to circumvent that security system?!”

“The force field was deployed the moment I walked away from one console towards another. The field had little room for me to move and the floor had no visible grooves where I stood. I was effectively trapped with no means of escape. At least not physically, anyway.”

“The problem I have now is that not only did you not destroy the body you were possessing to ensure there was no evidence, but there is a chance the transmission of your consciousness was tracked if they scanned the frequency of the transmission!”

“With all due respect, my lord, the location of the facility is located deep within our territory and would require a large number of crystals to jump all the way here while circumventing our jump gate system. Based on what I can tell, the Republic is not willing to waste the crystals and the State does not have the ships available at the moment for such an endeavor.”

“And what of the Empire? Can you say for certain that they won’t get involved?”

“The Imperial fleet never appeared while I was in their space. It would appear that they are either cowards or they did not see my threat as significant.”

“We cannot move forward with our plans based on conjecture! We will have to accelerate our plans further. Since the State and the Republic will no doubt be looking out for more infiltrators, we will have to proceed with Project Beta.”

“Project Beta? That could take a while to complete considering the scale of the project.”

“The timeframe of the project is none of your concern! If anything, YOU are the reason we have to go forward with the project! I suggest you let this failure sink in as you will not have access to your funds nor get paid for a whole month!”

“But my lord...!”

Forneido cut off the transmission. He quickly went in and applied a block to the infiltrator’s account, freezing his assets and finances. The advisor’s punishments were generally quick and effective. He sat down in his seat and tried to assess what has happened after all of this. He activated the communications system again, this time contacting the Kingdom’s Research and Development branch.

Project Beta needed to get underway and quickly.

* * * * *

*Private Residence of Laura and Trent, Tacoma Suburb District, North of Luminous
Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
8:16am, June 5, 5433 A.D. (Two Days Later)*

“I miss these kinds of mornings.”

Trent stood in the kitchen of his home looking out towards downtown Luminous. He had gotten up a little while ago. It was the latest he had ever slept in a very long time. It was also the first time in a long time he was able to see a sunrise. Normally he would report to work before the sun would come up over the horizon.

He had arrived on Luminaire mid-afternoon yesterday via the private shuttle that was reserved for him from Tranquillus. When he arrived, he reported directly to the Supreme Chancellor and the Grand Admiral as he would no doubt be detained by force fields if he went to the orbiting military headquarters. They told him what had occurred after the fleet made it into Imperial space two days ago. Since then, a few interesting things have occurred.

First and foremost, his wife was excited to see him after a long while. Trent wanted to relax once he got home and sure enough she was willing to oblige him by having the automated cooking system create his favorite meal and watching a movie. They cuddled until it was time to go to bed. That was last night.

Yesterday morning before his arrival at Luminaire and his meeting with the Supreme Chancellor, the Republic received a communication from the Empire. Their Emperor had reached the conclusion after being presented with both pieces of evidence that the Kingdom “stole” their technology and reverse-engineered it to serve their goals, and that a Kingdom operative tried to push the Empire into war with the Republic. As of nine o’clock yesterday morning, the Emperor dissolved the cease-fire agreement it had with the Kingdom and launched a surprise attack on the unsuspecting Kingdom fleet on the border. The Empire is already looking at sending an ambassador to Luminaire to begin diplomatic talks with the Republic followed by a military representative to coordinate their attacks with the Republic and the State’s militaries.

In light of this turn of events, the Senate decided to approve of the cultural export into the State as well as the sustainable warp drive system. All the parties involved agreed that with the coordinates that were recovered from the Kingdom infiltrator’s cybernetic transmitter, they now have an idea of a general direction where the Lykan home world might be. A ship with the sustainable warp drive as well as a cloaking device and ECM/ECCM abilities would be best suited to make surgical strikes against Kingdom assets to hinder their war efforts. Knowledge of the drive is only known by the Chancellor, the Senate, and select members the military along

with the heads of the State at the moment. The project would take a few weeks at best to develop. Hopefully with the Empire's help the Kingdom can be kept in check during that time.

While Trent was told that he can have the next few days off to relax, he was told to come to a meeting at the Chancellor's office in the next few hours. Trent already told Laura about this and she was fine with it as she had to go into work today as well. She was currently getting in the shower while Trent came down to the kitchen to have breakfast prepared for her. He looked back out at the skyline in the distance and began to ponder a few things in light of what had happened over the past month involving meeting alien races and Humanity's past as well as its future. As he stood there looking out the window, there were times he wondered if Earth looked like this in the morning. There were pictures and historical references but those were never the same as being there. The thought was a bit fleeting, though. Earth was a distant memory to Humans in the Novus Initium star cluster, only brought up in history and cemented in fact with the presence of Luna in the outer orbit of the Lumen System.

Trent then looked around the house or at least the floor he was on. Laura tried to keep things tidy while he was gone and so far she had done a good job. Part of him wondered if she took care of his car while he was gone to. He would soon find out since he had to drive towards the Chancellor's office in a little while. While his car had the same automatic driving feature as Laura's, he generally preferred to drive manually. However, he figured it would be best to let the car drive once he was on his way there.

It then hit him that there were programs he had recorded while he was gone. He went over to the viewscreen and activated it, scrolling through the recorded programs. The shows that both he and his wife liked along with Amarria were some reality shows and Japanese animation, also known as anime for short. While there were various races that came to the cluster that were on Luna, many were of Japanese as well as Korean descent who were eventually self-taught among others into drawing animated programs. That tradition continued for over three thousand years. Indeed, while the people of the Republic viewed themselves as one race, different ethnic identities were still present on various places on this planet as well as other planets. There was one planet whose terrain was like that of ancient China and Japan on Earth that was colonized by those descendants not too long after Humanity was able to go to other star systems. The planet was called Rosea in the Flors System located one jump "east" of Lumen. Trent has been there a few times and it is a beautiful world that rivals Luminaire. Much of the animation that has aired was made in the studios located in the capital city of Fujitsu as well as New Seoul.

Trent was about to watch one of the programs when his phone started to ring. He picked it up and looked at the Caller ID that was on it. To his surprise, the ID showed that it was Sheryl who was calling him. He answered the phone.

"Hello, Sheryl," Trent said. "To what do I owe the pleasure of this call?"

"Hey, Trent. I heard you were back on Luminaire after the fiasco that the clone put you through."

"I am. I had to go through a few things with some of the financial institutions and other agencies to ensure that I was not the clone that stole that destroyer, including the phone company and my email service. I got it all straightened out, thankfully. It was not as difficult as I thought since they announced the crime was done by a clone."

“I figured as such. I was calling to check up on you and Laura. I’m actually on Luminaire right now for some business and I have some time this evening to kill before my flight leaves tomorrow. Are you two interested in joining me for dinner?”

“Laura still has her evening report to do tonight but she should be free afterwards. I have a meeting with the Supreme Chancellor at eleven this morning but I will be free afterwards as well. Let me check with her and make sure she doesn’t have any plans afterwards and I will let you know.”

“Alright then. Send me a message when you talk with her. I will be busy at that time and I will see it afterwards.”

“Very well, then. Actually, if you want, why don’t you meet at our home?”

“At your residence?”

“Yes. I don’t think you have ever been here before. It would also be quieter and you don’t have to worry about the possibility of fans bothering you while we are eating.”

“That does sound nice. Could you send me your address along with Laura’s answer?”

“Not a problem. I’ll also see if Amarria is available as well to join us.”

“Actually, I have one other question as I’m thinking about it.”

“Go ahead?”

“Have you heard yet as what it is you will be doing since your DNA was removed from the military database?”

“Not yet. I can only assume that my meeting with the Supreme Chancellor later today may have something to do with that. I was told that I had a few days leave which leads me to believe that at the end of that leave they will have me at work again. Hopefully I will know where by then. What business do you have on Luminaire if I may ask? Looking at doing a concert somewhere on the planet?”

“I’m not sure, actually. My agent is going with me to the Luminous Convention Center Management Office as he wanted to see about doing some sort of event. He hasn’t specified what kind of event it is that we are discussing with that office though.”

“I see. Well, like I said, I will send you a message once I speak with Laura and Amarria about the dinner plans.”

“Alright. Sounds good! I will talk to you later.”

“Talk to you later. Bye-bye.”

“Bye-bye.”

Trent hung up the phone and set it down on the coffee table.

“What was that about dinner plans?” a female voice suddenly said behind Trent.

Trent nearly jumped as he turned around to see Laura dressed and ready for work.

“Good grief!” Trent said as he tried to relax. “You scared me. Rarely would someone sneak up on me like that.”

“Sorry about that,” Laura said, “but who was that and what was that about dinner plans?”

“It was Sheryl. She is on Luminaire right now for a meeting at the Luminous Convention Center Management Office later today and wondered about joining us for dinner afterwards. I told her that I did not know what your plans were after your evening broadcast or Amarria’s plans after she gets off work, so I would let her know afterwards. I also invited her to our home for dinner as it would be more private than a public restaurant where there may be fans.”

“I see. As far as I’m aware of, I have no plans after the evening broadcast. However, considering she is coming over for dinner, I will need to get home as fast as possible through evening traffic. That could take a little while for me to get home. You may also want to check with Amarria about tonight. Did she have a specific time when she wanted to have dinner?”

“She didn’t but we are to let her know when she needed to be here by.”

“Let me think. You’ll be home right after your meeting with the Chancellor, right?”

“I may end up checking out a couple of places afterwards since it has been a while since I’ve walked through the downtown area, but I should be back well before the evening rush hour. If you want, I can get dinner started before you, Amarria if she comes, and Sheryl arrive.”

“Sounds good. I would say that unless traffic is really horrible which usually it is not that I should be home no later than fifteen minutes after seven. You can let her know that she can arrive here fifteen minutes after that.”

“Got it. By the way, your breakfast is ready. It is in the warming unit to keep it warm.”

“Thank you, sweetie.”

Laura came around and gave Trent a kiss on the lips. Thankfully her lipstick does not come off on items or people unless the remover is applied. This allowed women to eat meals and kiss people without it rubbing off.

“I’m going to go ahead and get ready to go,” Trent said. “You’re not leaving for another hour or so, right?”

“That’s right. I will be here when you are done. Depending on how long your meeting is, did you want to join me and Amarria for lunch after the noon day broadcast?”

“I’ll let you know if I am available. Hopefully, this meeting won’t take too long. By the way, have you been given my car a good run at least once a week while I was gone?”

“Yes! I enjoy driving it!”

That answer made Trent laugh a little bit. He then went upstairs to get a shower. At least he could wear something that was not a uniform for this meeting.

* * * * *

*Office of the Supreme Chancellor, Republic Parliament Building, Capital City of Luminous Planet Luminaire, Lumen System, Capital of Novus Initium Republic
11:07am, June 5, 5433 A.D.*

“Are you kidding me, sir?!”

Trent sat in one of the chairs in front of the Supreme Chancellor, though he was about ready to jump out of it. Next to him to his left sat Agent Tora with a smile on her face. Grand Admiral Mikey sat on one of the couches behind them, not looking very pleased about the situation being explained either.

Supreme Chancellor Drew leaned back in his chair with a slightly unhappy look on his face as well. He had just told Trent why he was called and why Tora was here.

“I’m not,” Drew said. “Agent Tora came into this office two days ago once she had heard about the clone infiltrator and how we captured him or at least his corpse. She also heard about the proposals we had put on the table with the Senate involving the sustainable warp drive. She had made a proposition for both you and Blair’s assistance in the matter of commanding a deep infiltration vessel with that technology due to both of your experiences. I told her that she could

ask for your assistance if the proposal was approved. It was approved before you arrived, as I stated in our debriefing yesterday.”

“So why is Colonel Blair not here for this meeting?” Trent asked.

“He is in transit right now to this system. I found it best to ask you both individually rather than at the same time.”

Trent looked at Tora.

“Then maybe I should ask you this question, Agent Tora,” Trent said. “What is in it for me to help you with this assignment? What incentive is there for me in accepting this assignment?”

“We have the coordinates of where the infiltrator’s consciousness went after he committed suicide. It may be close to the Kingdom’s capital. Not only will this give you the opportunity to take out their means to try and infiltrate the Republic again, but also give us a good idea where their capital is located.”

“That is your incentive?”

“Well considering that right now your DNA is no longer in the military databanks until there is verification of no more possible infiltrations by the Kingdom, you are basically without a job until that point.”

“I have a lot of vacation time saved up for a while.”

“This war with the Kingdom, unless we go on a full offensive, will last longer than the time you have saved up for vacation. Granted, this leave you are on now was approved by the military due to special circumstances, but how would taxpayers view an officer being paid to sit on his butt and lounge about in the middle of a war?”

Trent began to feel like he was being blackmailed into taking up Tora’s offer at this point. She, despite her attitude about it, had a valid point. His leave would only last for so long and if the military could not put him somewhere due to his military access issue, they would no doubt put him on the reserve list and would not get paid near as much. There was always the recruiting office and he would be able to stay on the planet hopefully but there are many who may not want to enlist due to the war. Trent’s options were starting to look very limited indeed.

“If I agree to this,” Trent said, “what would my position even be?”

“Once we add your DNA and retinal information to our system,” Tora said, “you would be listed as a Vice Admiral ‘on loan’ to the RCIA for military expertise on our projects along with Blair. You will be paid by the military to avoid suspicion but in reality, you will be commanding the vessel that will go into development involving the sustainable warp drive. The ship will also incorporate ECM/ECCM and a cloaking device. We expect that once the drive system has been developed, the ship will be designed around that drive as well as those other pieces of technology. We expect that this will take about a month or so to complete.”

“I’m familiar with the proposed capabilities of the vessel, but what will I be doing during the time of development?”

“You will report to our office daily during the design and implementation process. The RCIA is known to develop covert machines and craft but we need expertise in developing a covert warship and you are available to help us in that endeavor. Blair can help us to train in infiltration for boarding and ground tactics. We will be giving you daily hours to help in the initial design concept so you can go home to your wife. We do expect you to remain silent about

the project itself. You can tell you wife though that you are helping out in the research and development part of the military that is classified. Funny thing is it would not be too far from the truth when you think about it.”

“So once again, I’m forced to be secretive to my wife about my activities. This tune is starting to get real old, you know.”

“Maybe so, but you and Blair are not the only people who have to be secretive about it, and I’m not referring to the Grand Admiral or the Supreme Chancellor in the room right now.”

Trent, Mikey, and Drew all looked at Tora with curious expressions on their faces.

“I was aware of you asking Trent and Blair to join the project,” Drew said, “but I was not told you were recruiting someone else in the military.”

“That is because this person is not in the military,” Tora said. “We approached this person separately.”

“Then you are talking about a civilian?” Mikey asked. “Who in the world did you ask to join the project that does not involve the military?”

“Funny you should ask that. One of my agents is meeting with her right now at the Luminous Convention Center Management Offices.”

Trent stood up from his chair the moment he heard that location. He thought he was hearing things at first but Tora looked at Trent and smiled as if she knew who he was thinking of.

“You can NOT be serious?!” Trent yelled.

“I had a feeling you knew who I was referring to,” Tora said. “Yes, I am referring to HER.”

“Trent,” Drew said, “who is Tora talking about?”

“She is referring to the pop idol Sheryl!” Trent said.

Both Drew and Mikey stood up in shock from their seats when they heard that name. Both stared at Tora.

“Tora, why are you recruiting Sheryl for this project?!” Drew asked. “What possible use do you have for her?!”

“Her expertise in the field of art and culture would give us a better understanding of the Lykans for starters,” Tora said. “She also has to make up for what she did with our last operation.”

“What are you talking about?” Trent asked. “How was she involved?”

“If you recall, during our operation in Tranquillus a few weeks ago, you allowed a reporter on board your ship because they requested to cover the ‘training’ happening at the time. This reporter got her information from your wife. Your wife though was informed by Sheryl after she along with others had a meeting with the governor of Voluptas after your fleet was spotted. Thanks to Sheryl, the operation was exposed to the Republic prematurely involving our first contact with aliens. It seemed only fitting to have her take responsibility for her actions.”

“Responsibility for her actions?!” Trent said in disgust. “From what I heard, she only informed my wife of seeing my fleet! That may have led to that reporter coming aboard my ship but you are making it sound like it is solely her fault and that you are punishing her for it!”

“That may be how you take it, Trent, but the fact is that we need more information on the Lykans than just military and political infrastructure. We need to know what inspires them culturally to do what they do and how it stemmed to what we are seeing today. If we can use

their culture against them, the better off the Republic will be in this war. What better way to accomplish this than with someone who works in the entertainment field?"

"And what happens should she decline the position? She is not in the military and her actions, while resulting in a situation you were not happy with, were indirect as she would not have known the situation or the outcome."

"Fair enough. However, I doubt she will decline the offer."

"And what makes you so sure she won't, short of either blackmailing her or making it difficult for her to get work?"

"Despite the fact that she is popular, the reality is that she needed a break from the spotlight. She doesn't show it but we can tell that she is worn down from all of the performances and activities that she is doing. While she would like to take a vacation, many of her appointments are booked in advance. If she works with us, she can have some time to relax and recoup while we handle the performances that she had scheduled. There may be fans that are unhappy with that happening but we can make up a story that she needs time off for medical reasons and is unable to perform."

"You want to lie to the public?"

"I would rather not tell them the truth due to the nature of the mission. She will have time off by herself before the mission begins to actually recoup and put her affairs in order to deter suspicion from fans. If she does choose to decline the mission, than we will seek another person in the entertainment industry to assist us. We would not do anything further to her."

Trent looked over at Drew, then back at Mikey. Trent hoped they were thinking the same thing as him in the fact that the RCIA was taking things a little too far with this operation. Trent knew though what needed to be done. All three of them sat back down in their seats.

"As far as the proposal involving my assistance with this infiltration operation," he said, "I will do so, but on one condition."

"And what condition would that be?" Tora asked with an eyebrow raised.

"Once this operation is completed, it will be fully disclosed to the public."

"I cannot agree to that request!"

"I hate to say it, Trent," Drew said, "but I have to agree as well. The mission cannot be disclosed."

Trent looked at Drew with a surprised expression on his face.

"I'm surprised at that response," Trent said. "Is there a reason why the mission cannot be disclosed after it is completed?"

"It is due to the nature of the sustainable warp drive," Drew said. "This drive is meant solely for use by the military and select agencies. As a deterrent from criminals trying to steal such ships in order to escape law enforcement or other nations attempting to circumvent our current border security, the knowledge of this drive system is to remain classified for the foreseeable future. Disclosing the mission would jeopardize that and it took a lot for me to have the Senate approve the drive system to see it undone. Only the heads of the State know about it outside the Republic but are leaving the infiltration of Kingdom space to us. They have the same concerns we do."

"I see. So that is why this mission is so secretive. Here I thought this was all cooped up by the RCIA in its entirety."

“Believe me when I say that I hate to keep things from the public in general but under these circumstances, we have to do so to keep the peace.”

“So,” Tora said, “now that we understand the situation behind the mission and the fact that we cannot honor a condition due to that same nature, what is your answer, Trent?”

Trent was not too happy about being shot down on the condition he had but understood why it had to be shot down. If what Tora said was true and the ship can locate the Kingdom home planet to the point that they can bring the Kingdom to surrender on their home turf, it would bring the war to a quicker end.

It was either that or he would have to sit behind a recruiter’s desk for the rest of the war.

“Alright,” Trent said. “I understand the nature of the project and the secrecy behind it. It would give me something to do than sit behind a desk at a recruiting office. I’ll do it, but once this is done, you and I part ways, Tora. Any mission after this from you I will turn down. Do I make myself clear?”

“I can live with that,” Tora said. “This little ‘relationship’ of ours has been a rather big strain on both of us after so long. I must point out though that I am only a liaison for the Head Agent. She sees this as an opportunity to bring about a swift end to this war and hopefully the Lykan threat.”

“Let us hope it leads to that.”

“Now that we have that out of the way,” Drew said, “we have another matter at hand.”

“And what would that be, Supreme Chancellor?” Trent asked.

“Trying to convince Blair to agree to the proposal as well.”

Trent nearly laughed.

“Yeah,” Trent said, “that would be an interesting conversation.”

“But in all seriousness, there is indeed another matter that needs to be addressed.

Whatever actions or consequences came from that clone infiltrator’s failure has caused an escalation in combat from Kingdom forces along the DP Zone. The State and the Empire are also reporting an increase in enemy engagements along their borders. The State and the Empire are sending a military liaison to start coordinating our efforts to begin striking Kingdom assets when found. We are still working on moving more ships from less strategic locations to the DP Zone as well as putting together an assault fleet.”

“So the Republic will be going on the offensive soon.”

“Correct. However, that is why we are hoping this project that you will be on will keep our losses to a minimum by forcing the Kingdom to surrender or keep them from waging any further hostilities. If we can figure out how they are controlling the ships that are using their slaves as living computer cores, this would make our work a lot easier.”

“So let me see if I got the mission perimeters right for this project. One of the objectives behind this project is to destroy the cloning facilities to prevent any further possibility of infiltration.”

“There is also a possibility that they could be developing biological weapons using that DNA as the basis behind their experiments. That is also included in the mission parameters.”

“Understood. Also among those objectives is to locate and disable the remote control systems being used to control the slave ships. There is also the objective to locate the Lykan home planet and find a way to force them to surrender. Does that cover everything?”

“Everything we can think of at this time. The ship will have to be designed to work independently for prolonged periods of time without resupply.”

“Such is the nature of special ops like this. That part alone will make for a rather difficult design process.”

“I understand but you do have to keep all of these things in mind while designing the vessel. I hope you also understand that if the ship is discovered that the Republic will deny your existence officially.”

“The problem with that notion is that if we ARE captured, it would not be difficult for the Lykans to know WHERE we came from much less care of the Republic’s deniability.”

“Fair enough, but if the ship’s mission is compromised and is unable to escape Kingdom space, the ship will have to be destroyed to prevent some of the technology and data from getting into Kingdom hands. Are you prepared for that?”

Trent knew that was possibly going to be brought up. The nature of the mission required secrecy and if they were discovered, they could not leave anything for the Lykans to recover when it comes to data or hardware.

“I am,” Trent finally said. “I understand the risks of this assignment and the consequences if we fail.”

“Very well,” Drew said. “You still have a few days off. We will give you the details about where to go soon.”

“What should I tell my wife once the ship is ready to deploy?”

“The truth,” Tora said.

Trent looked at Tora with a surprised look on his face.

“Are you serious?” Trent asked.

“This time, I am. Because of the nature of the mission, we cannot run the risk of her contacting you. You can tell her the truth about what you are doing, but she is not to, under any circumstances, report this on the news. If she so much as brings it up on the news, we will immediately put a media blackout in effect and have her removed from the station under house arrest. I want you to make that clear to her. If any of the other nations whether friend or foe knows about the sustainable warp drive, this will make border security an issue if they begin their own development of the same technology. We know the Empire has been monitoring our news feeds and this is one thing they don’t need to know.”

“I understand. I will let her know when I talk to her shortly. We were going to have lunch together after this meeting, though dinner will be interesting.”

“Why is that?” Tora asked.

“Let’s just say that one of our guest this evening will have more in common to talk about than we expected.”

* * * * *

To be continued...
END OF EPISODE II