

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



PART 3

*Bridge, R.N.S. Renaldo, Paladin-Class Battleship
Cesuser Star Gate, Yintaka System, Holy Lykan Republic Border, Eastern Region
2:16pm, March 14, 5434 A.D.*

“What is the status of the State forces?”

Trent had worked out possible scenarios in dealing with the State’s forces should they have already arrived in the Yintaka System or if they came after the Eleventh Fleet arrived. The odds of the State arriving while the Eleventh Fleet was still in transit or arriving in the Yintaka were very low, yet somehow the State’s forces started to jump into the star system just as Trent’s fleet was either arriving in the system or were still in transit.

So far, only the *Renaldo* and two sets of cruisers had arrived. The rest of the cruisers, all of the destroyers, and the two transports that were still in transit. The first of the two transports were still eight minutes away before it would even reach Yintaka.

Trent was trying to think how to handle the situation. The crews were already working on moving the two warp disruption generators and the two stasis field generators to Cruiser Three-Five-Seven which will lead the second group to Yintaka III. Since that planet has a Harbinger Battleship, the *Renaldo* would proceed to Yintaka IV to balance out the heavy firepower.

When the two wormholes first appeared near each planet, they were large enough for a battleship to go through. However, the Harpy Frigates that the State had created started to come

through several at a time. The *Vidoria*, the Harbinger at Yintaka III, had sent a picture to the *Renaldo* for Trent and his fleet to get their first look at the Harpies. The brief description that Drino had provided was a bit accurate. The ship looked like a smaller stubbier version of their Raptor Destroyers, with two dorsal wings near the back and a larger ventral wing underneath. It possessed the same weapons that Drino had mentioned with two dual railguns mounted above and below towards the bow. A pair of light missile launchers was mounted on top and close to the front. The five blasters were placed in different spots with two behind the missile launchers, one located above towards the back of the vessel, and one on each side of the ventral wing. A ship that size could fulfill roles for patrol and law enforcement purposes, a fact that Trent may want the NIR to consider at some point.

Right now, those ships are more of a threat to everyone in the system and the ships were coming through the wormholes at a rate of eight to twelve every few seconds! The Harpies were totaling over one hundred and twenty frigates at each planet and the numbers were continuing to rise! Trent was quick to realize why the State waited for two specific reasons. The first was that they had to gather that many ships from wherever they were jumping from and the second was that they wanted to make sure that they arrived when his fleet was still waiting for complete its trip. How they knew when the Eleventh Fleet would arrive is unknown unless they have managed to monitor communications somehow but regardless, the State was here now and only made the situation that much more difficult.

“The State forces are holding their position for the moment,” Chrystal said, answering Trent’s previous question. “They may be waiting for more of their forces to jump through the wormholes that are generated.”

“So what do we do now, Vice Admiral?” Shannon said, turning to face Trent. “The rest of the fleet isn’t here yet and we don’t know when the State will head for the planets.”

“Do we have an idea as to what the Mandate forces are doing?” Trent asked.

“They are jumping in from the Holule gate that leads to their territory,” Chrystal said. “However, they won’t have very many ships considering the size of their forces.”

“I know. We have no choice but to change our strategy, then. This ship and some of the cruisers will proceed to warp within close proximity to the State forces. Cruiser Three-Five-Seven will take the remaining cruisers to the third planet in the same position. I want to make sure that we are able to keep the Harpies from warping past the HLR forces long enough for our transports to arrive. The rest of the fleet will escort the transports when they arrive. Ro, relay those instructions to our forces and those on the way.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said.

“That’s a bit risky, sir,” Shannon said. “If we warp into close range of the State fleet, what would keep them from firing on us?”

“There isn’t anything that would prevent them, really. However, unless they want to make the NIR their enemy along with the HLR and the Mandate, it would be best for them NOT to fire on us. They are not in their own territory so they cannot claim self-defense when they are the ones who are invading another nation.”

“All ships have confirmed the message, sir,” Ro said.

“Good. Helm, set a course for the State fleet at Yintaka IV. Engage the warp drive.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” Ryan said.

As the ship turned towards its destination and began to accelerate to warp speed, Trent turned towards Chrystal.

“Chrystal, prepare to deploy the warp disruption field generator and the stasis field generator.”

“They are already prepared for deployment,” Chrystal said. “I figured they were about to be used.”

“Good assumption. Standby.”

The *Renaldo* and four cruisers entered warp heading for the State fleet located at Yintaka IV. The distance to the target destination appeared as astronomical units at first counting down. After it went within one AU, it changed to kilometers as the ships began to decelerate.

“Red alert!” Trent said. “Raise shields and bring weapons online!”

“Aye-aye, sir!” Chrystal said.

“Exiting warp in five seconds,” Ryan said.

Trent took a deep breath. He was gambling on the lives of those aboard the *Renaldo* and the cruisers here and those warping to Yintaka III that the State would not open fire on them. He could only hope that they were right.

The State forces quickly came into view as the wormhole that they were coming through suddenly disappeared. The screen was showing that there were now one hundred and sixty Harpy Frigates and Trent’s battle group was warping right on top of them. As the *Renaldo* came out of warp, Trent took in another deep breath.

“Deploy the generators!” he ordered.

“Deploying them now, sir!” Chrystal said.

From the forward portside hangar bay, a warp field disruption generator deployed and quickly activated. A bubble quickly appeared around the *Renaldo* and expanded till the entire State forces were enveloped. The stasis field generator deployed from the starboard front hangar bay. As it activated, a smaller visible bubble appeared around each of the frigates. These were gravitational fields that would force the State ships to go at much slower speeds, ideal in keeping them from quickly escaping the warp disruption field.

“Generators have been successfully deployed, sir,” Chrystal said. “The State forces are not going anywhere, at least not quickly.”

“Good,” Trent said. “Ro, open a channel to the State forces. I want to have a talk with their fleet commander.”

“Aye-aye, sir,” Ro said.

“Do you think they would jump into what they consider enemy territory just to talk?” Shannon asked.

“Maybe not, but it is best to make sure they understand what they are about to do and the consequences behind it,” Trent said. “Also, if it allows us to buy some time for the transports to get here, that’s even better.”

“Sir,” Ro said, “I have Captain Tumono on the line.”

“Put him through.”

A holographic screen appeared in front of the main screen with an image of what appeared to be a young Zaurion in a captain’s uniform. Trent was a bit surprised that someone this young was a captain of a ship unless he was exceptional for some reason. The young Zaurion though did not look too happy.

“Captain Tumono, I presume?” Trent said.

“Yes,” Tumono said. “*You must be Vice Admiral Trent. I have heard of your services during the First Interstellar War. I should not be at all surprised that you just pulled off this maneuver to prevent my attack force from reaching Yintaka IV.*”

“Captain, I am requesting that you and your forces leave this system immediately. While I may not have the authority or the jurisdiction to enforce this request, you have an HLR fleet in front of you and your ships are no longer fast and maneuverable. That means that your ships can be gunned down by even battleship-grade guns. Do you really wish to have come all this way just to become target practice?”

“Maybe not, but this is not your fight to get in the way of, Vice Admiral.”

“What ‘fight’ are you referring to, Captain? From what I hear, this attack force wasn’t meant to engage the local defense forces. It was meant to attack the civilians that are on both Yintaka III and IV directly so that the State could exterminate them, am I right?”

“I see that have not forgotten our goals involving the Lykans. I also get the feeling you somehow knew about these new ships of ours before you even arrived in the system.”

“On that, we did. I’m not sure what name you gave this class of ship but the Supreme Chancellor has labeled the class as the Harpy Frigate. The other nations have accepted this name as well.”

“It doesn’t matter to us what you call these attack craft, Vice Admiral. The fact is that we are here to proceed with the extermination of the Lykan infestation in this system and that is what we intend to do.”

“And how do you intend to do that? You are currently trapped in both a warp disruption field and a stasis field. I’m sure you can fly out but as I mentioned earlier, that HLR fleet will start to gun you down the moment you begin to fly anywhere but through a wormhole or star gate back into your own territory.”

“You are under the assumption that just because we haven’t been hostile to your forces yet that we just won’t attack the two generators in order to disable them.”

“If you attack the generators that we have deployed, it will be considered as open act of aggression towards our forces and we will be forced to return fire. Do you seriously wish to make an enemy of the NIR right now?”

“You and your nation have already been assisting murderers and slavers for months now! If that doesn’t already make us enemies, then I don’t know what will!”

“I’m trying to keep this matter from escalating into a possible war, Captain! There has to be a way outside the Lykans’ extermination that would appease the State and keep it from resorting to open warfare!”

“There isn’t, Vice Admiral! Because of the Lykans and the actions your nation has taken to assist them, our nation no longer has any sort of culture, only hatred for the ones who took it away from us to begin with! How would you feel if your government abolished culture and will only bring it back once the enemy who took it away from you in the first place is exterminated?”

“I would ask which ‘enemy’ you are referring to at that point.”

Tumono suddenly looked puzzled with Trent’s response.

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

“Why don’t we put things into perspective, Captain,” Trent said. “My nation was aware that your nation had no viable culture to speak of for a while. However, at the State’s request, we worked out an agreement to bring the culture of my Republic to the State to breathe new life into the State. Do you recall that fact?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Just like we were trying to breathe new life into the culture of the State, we also saw an opportunity to change the mindset of the Lykans when we found the flaw in their religion due to the actions of one of their past kings. We worked hard to help reform them and that also allowed

us to end the war when they realized their mistakes. We tried to reform both of your nations in ways to make them better than they were, to improve each nation and to help see past entrenched aggressions. We succeeded with the Lykans and they have completely reformed. However, it was the decision of the Executive Council to deport our citizens from the State and along with them the culture we tried to bring. So you tell me, Captain: is the enemy the Lykans who took it away the first time who has since changed their ways, or is it the Executive Council who forcibly took it away from everyone in their own nation a second time?"

Tumono looked rather perplexed at the question Trent presented to him. Trent asked it to buy them some time but he was curious what the thoughts of those not in government thought of what the Council was doing.

"Sir," Ro said, "there is a transmission coming from across the border in the next system within State territory."

"Is it for us or for their forces?" Trent asked.

"It is directed towards us, sir. It is...Admiral Bridneo?"

"Bridneo? The first Vitam we ever met? Put him through."

A second holographic screen appeared almost in front of the one of Captain Tumono. This time, Bridneo was on it and his uniform was decorated to that of an Admiral. When Trent last saw him, he was a Vice Admiral. He had obviously been promoted since then.

"Admiral Bridneo, now, is it?" Trent said. "It has been a long time."

"It has, Vice Admiral Trent," Bridneo said. *"I have been monitoring your communications with our forces. I understand the question you asked Captain Tumono and I know that the Executive Council deliberately removed culture from the State in response to the NIR assistance of the Lykans in their reformation. I can understand the Human need to help better those around them if it stops wars from continuing. If changing the State and the former Kingdom to have culture and a reformed knowledge of religion respectively helps to stop the war, I would be all for it."*

"If you understand that fact, then why is the Executive Council so headstrong to continue the war with the Lykans?"

"It is because the State cannot forget the history our ancestors had to endure nor can we forgive them for the genocide and desecration of our home planets with the drug that was used as some form of enforced slave control. We cannot forgive them of those transgressions against our people. We also know that you had a hand in the destruction of the stations that deployed the pseudo-antidote that kept them alive from the effects of the drug."

"I was told that I would not be held responsible for that due to the lack of information provided on that mission!"

"You were not at first but the Executive Council changed that decision after the war when the NIR assisted the Lykans' reformation over the objections of the State."

Trent did not like where this conversation was suddenly going. Trent suddenly has a stern look on his face.

"So what exactly does that mean when they changed their decision?" Trent asked.

Bridneo took a deep breath.

"Personally, I am glad I met you and convinced the NIR to join our war against the Kingdom over nine months ago. You helped to be instrumental in that regards and I have thought very highly of you since then and even now with your efforts during the war. I personally do not agree with what the Executive Council has decided but I, like others, must follow orders, including the orders that relate to you. The decision of the Executive Council regarding your

actions involving our original home planets is your termination for the contribution to genocide against our people, regardless of what ship you are serving aboard if at all.

“The Executive Council wants me terminated?!”

Trent thought this was some kind of cruel joke but was quick to realize that Bridneo was not joking about it at all! Trent had not anticipated this scenario where the State or in this case the Executive Council blames Trent for the death of their people on their original home planets while he served on the *Templar*! Worst of all, he flew his ship and four cruisers right near this State fleet that have been ordered to terminate him on sight!

Trent was about ready to order the generators to be deactivated so that they could warp out of the way but he quickly realized that if he did so, the Harpies would make their attack run on Yintaka IV not to mention looking like a coward in front of everyone present. Whether the circumstances were the same with the group at Yintaka III was unknown but Trent knew he had to think of something and fast!

“I’m sorry to be the one to inform you of this decision,” Bridneo said. *“At least you know about it from me and not from a random officer who does not respect you. Out of that respect, I am giving you a chance to make a decision between two choices.”*

“What would those two options be, Bridneo?” Trent asked, hoping one would be favorable in this matter.

“The first option would be for you to deactivate the generators you and your forces have deployed. You’re to withdraw your forces from this star system. The State forces will not pursue you if you withdraw but I would recommend not coming close to State forces again afterwards.”

In other words, Bridneo wanted Trent to abandon Yintaka and leave the HLR to fend off the State’s forces. This was not a good option at all, not to mention it would be against his orders.

“What would be the second option?” Trent asked.

“You can probably already guess what that option is but I will lay it out for you and your crew. If you choose to not drop the generators, the State forces will attack the generators and your ship directly in accordance with the termination order. We have been ordered though that if any of your ships come to your assistance, they along with the rest of your fleet would be labeled as accomplices and fired upon as well. Either way, those generators are coming down and our forces will be completing their mission.”

Neither option was favorable to Trent. Even if Trent wanted to leave the system and spare the lives of his crew and those of his fleet, he would never live with himself for abandoning his mission and leaving millions of Lykans at the mercy of the State. The HLR forces were heavily outnumbered even if the Mandate ships arrived.

Ro was trying to get Trent’s attention, but Trent did not want Bridneo to notice that he was distracted. With his arms and hands still on the arms of his chair, he tapped a message in the ancient Morse code for Ro to put her message “on screen.” A small text message appeared in front of and below the screen Bridneo was on.

“The transports have arrived. They’re proceeding to their destinations now,” it said.

Trent was feeling relieved to know the transports finally made it after stalling for some time but he couldn’t show it, at least not immediately. The transports still had to make it to both Yintaka III and IV and the State forces here will detect them warping in even if it is on the other side of the planet. There was also the time it would take to set them up. Time was a crucial factor in this matter and there were lives at stake on this matter.

“Sir?” Ro said out loud. “Rear Admiral Zindalo is contacting us from the HLR fleet at Yintaka III.”

“What does he want?” Trent asked. “I’m having a discussion with the State forces commander in charge of the operation.”

“He wants to know if he and his fleet can be of assistance involving the State’s invasion forces. What do I tell him?”

As Ro asked, she gave hand signals to Trent since he was looking her way this time. She was indicating that the transports are warping to their destinations now. Trent knew they would be arriving shortly and that the State fleet would be detecting them just as soon, alerting Bridneo who would realize that Trent had been stalling for time. Trent had to act fast.

“Tell him to standby,” Trent said.

“So, what are you going to tell him, Vice Admiral?” Bridneo asked. *“Are you going to run or are you going to be foolish enough to risk your ship and fleet against so many ships?”*

Trent could still see Captain Tumono’s image on the screen behind Bridneo’s. Tumono had turned away from a moment but even though the screen was muted to where he could hear the conversation but Trent and Bridneo could not, he could tell that they were detecting one of the transports warping in behind Yintaka IV based on Tumono’s facial expressions.

Trent had to say one last thing to Bridneo before he would get word of their arrival.

“Let me ask you this,” Trent said. “Why did you wait till now to start your attack? Why not sooner before my fleet arrived?”

“We had a lot of ships we had to gather to stage the operation,” Bridneo said. *“It was a bit rushed but we wanted to make sure your delivery of the planetary shield generators was not completed. We were going to intercept you first but you intercepted us instead.”*

“It didn’t dawn on you and your forces why we intercepted you first?”

Before Bridneo could answer, someone was getting his attention on his end. Bridneo looked away for a moment but soon the expression on his face had changed. By now, his forces were reporting seeing the transports warping to the far side of the planet along with their destroyer escort groups. If the coordinates were right on target, the ships would be on the edge of the atmosphere and should be making their planetary descent by now.

Bridneo looked back at Trent.

“You know, Bridneo,” Trent said before Bridneo could speak, “I will choose option number three: distracting you and your forces long enough for the transports to reach the planets, making sure your forces fail in their mission regardless of what happens to us.”

“Very clever, Trent,” Bridneo said under a growl. *“You bided your time to make sure those transports arrived but even I know it takes time to set those up. That is enough time for my forces to not only reach the planets but to destroy you and your fleet for your acts against the State. Farewell, Vice Admiral Trent.”*

The screens with both Tumono and Bridneo disappeared. This was no time for Trent to be happy that his forces succeeded in getting the transports to their destinations as the State’s forces were beginning to target lock the *Renaldo* and the cruisers.

“Activate the shield boosters on all ships!” Trent ordered. “All ships are to target the Harpies! Tell me those generators are within our shield perimeter, right?”

“They are,” Chrystal said, “but we just ticked off one hundred and sixty wasps wanting to get free and I don’t know how well we can hold off that much firepower from so many small ships!”

“Can our guns track them while they are slowed down?”

“Our anti-cruiser guns, yes. The cruisers will have a better chance to shoot them down with their smaller guns but we are still heavily outnumbered here.”

The Harpies started firing their weapons on the *Renaldo* only. Trent knew that they would target his ship since it was protecting both generators. Whether the *Renaldo* can handle this much firepower or not remains to be determined, it is a safe bet Cruiser Three-Five-Seven at Yintaka III won't last for long if they are facing the same number of ships.

“Open fire on the State ships!” Trent said. “Use multifrequency lenses in pulse mode!”

“I can't guarantee we can disable such small ships as you ordered earlier, sir,” Chrystal said. “Once their shields are gone, they may not be able to survive a direct hit.”

“I understand. Do what you can. Ro, inform Rear Admiral Zindalo to have his forces engage but check their fire due to the State's proximity to our ships!”

“Aye-aye, sir!” Ro said.

“By the way, where are the Mandate forces? They should have arrived by now.”

“I'll inquire with Zindalo about their status, but he says that HLR forces are moving into firing range now.”

Trent had forgotten how far the State's forces jumped into the star system from the HLR forces. It would take a few minutes for them to reach their optimal firing range. Considering the defense forces at Yintaka IV consisted of battlecruisers and destroyers, they needed to get closer to fire their long-range weapons. Hopefully, the Harbinger at Yintaka III could gun the State ships down with its heavy long-range guns before the Harpies overpowered Cruiser Three-Five-Seven's shields.

“Sir,” Ro said, “our destroyers are report that the transports are safely in the atmosphere and heading to their assigned drop-off points. They are asking if we require assistance.”

“Tell them to rendezvous with our forces to help combat the Harpies as soon as possible,” Trent said. “Chrystal, how are our shields holding?”

“Even with the shield boosters on, they are taking a lot of pounding,” Chrystal said. “We are at sixty-four percent and dropping. Ten Harpies have been either destroyed or disabled.”

“They must be shield booster equipped,” Shannon said. “They can take a lot of pounding for such a small ship.”

“Sir!” Chrystal said. “Six of the Harpies are heading for the edge of the warp disruption field!”

“Set those ships as our primary targets!” Trent said. “Do NOT let them leave the field!”

“Aye-aye, sir!”

White pulse lasers from the *Renaldo* and the four cruisers began firing at the Harpies that were trying to reach the edge of the warp disruption field. The concentrated laser fire proved too much for the frigates' shield boosters to handle as the ships started to explode once the shields were overwhelmed. The Harpies' defenses appeared to be solely their shields as the armor did not last as long at all. The six Harpies that tried to escape the field were dealt with swiftly.

However, this made the rest of the Harpies far more aggressive as they started to fire everything they had in their arsenal at the *Renaldo*. Projectile rounds and missiles started impacting on the State ships as the HLR fleet was now within their weapons' range. However, as both the shells and missiles from the HLR ships hit the Harpies, Trent noticed something he had not expected. The shells and rounds were giving off electromagnetic signatures!

“Sir?” Chrystal said. “Are you seeing the impacts from the HLR weapons?”

“I am,” Trent said, “but how? We didn't supply the HLR with EM warheads or the means to use rounds equipped with the same EM capability.”

“Let’s save that question for later, sir,” Shannon said. “We are still in a battle.”

“Valid point. What about our destroyers?”

“They are warping in now,” Ro said.

Sixteen Crusader destroyers warped in from around the side of the Yintaka IV to just outside the warp disruption field. This put them within range of using their laser cannons in pulse mode with their own multifrequency crystals. With lasers, projectiles, and missiles hitting the Harpies, their numbers started to decrease faster than before either by destruction or being disabled. The Harpies were still focusing on the *Renaldo* knowing that if they can bring the battleship’s shields down, they can destroy the generators directly in order to free themselves from the NIR’s “trap.”

“Sir!” Ro said. “Cruiser Three-Five-Seven is reporting that their shields are about to go offline!”

Trent knew that while the cruiser can still resort to using its armor repairer system as its next line of defense, the shields were the only thing protecting the generators. Trent activated his fleet communications system.

“*Renaldo* to Cruiser Three-Five-Seven,” Trent said. “Prepare to activate your armor repairer system and standby to lower your shields. Inform two of the closest cruisers to you to move into position for each of them to put their shields around a generator. They will take over protecting them. This will also split up the State’s firepower as they will have to choose which generator they want disabled first. Make sure you time it right so that there won’t be a chance the generators will get hit.”

“*Aye-aye, sir!*” a male voice responded.

Trent switched off the fleet communications system.

“What are the numbers of the Harpies that are attacking us?” Trent asked.

“Almost forty ships have either been destroyed or disabled,” Chrystal said. “We have three more trying to move out of the field but our destroyers are gunning them down quickly. The HLK forces are almost within autocannon range.”

“Once they are in range with those guns, they will either take out or disable the Harpies a bit more quickly. What about the Mandate fleet?”

“They are on standby, sir,” Ro said. “The Mandate fleet commander believes that this may not be the only force the State will deploy and wants to act as backup in case the State deploys or jumps more ships.”

“I understand,” Trent said. “It may be a smart call. They can respond and intercept a second wave of ships from their position faster than us depending on the circumstances.”

“Do you think the State has a second wave ready to jump after deploying this many Harpies?” Shannon asked.

“Bridneo is in command of a fleet much like when we first met him. If that fleet is at full strength like it was back then, then he just might send them, especially if they want to succeed with the Lykans’ extermination here in Yintaka.”

“Sir,” Ro said. “I have just received word that the transports have made it to their destinations on their respective planets. They are offloading the generators right now.”

“How long will it take for them to get those generators online?”

“Checking with them now.”

“The HLR fleet is now in autocannon range,” Chrystal said. “They are firing those weapons now.”

“That will help reduce their combat-capable numbers quickly,” Shannon said.

“The engineering teams report that it will take at least five minutes to connect the generators and power them up,” Ro said.

“Put a countdown timer up on the screen so that we can keep track,” Trent said.

“I’ve got it,” Shannon said as she pressed a few buttons on her chair.

A countdown timer appeared with five minutes on the clock. It started to count down.

“Sir,” Ro said, “Cruiser Three-Five-Seven has successfully transferred the generators to within the shields of two of the other cruisers.”

“Have the Harpies split their firepower now that they have to target two cruisers instead of one?” Trent asked.

“No, sir. They are focusing their fire on the cruiser with the warp disruption field generator.”

“I should have seen this coming. Chrystal, can a ship still go to warp when it is in a stasis field?”

“They can once they get up to speed,” Chrystal said, “but that will take more than three times the amount of time it would normally take to reach that speed.”

“Considering their size and low mass compared to other ships, it still won’t take them too long. Ro, tell them to continue to focus on destroying or disabling the remaining Harpies.”

“Yes, sir!” Ro said.

Trent looked at the countdown timer on the screen. They were coming up on four minutes remaining. Once the planetary shields were activated, the State’s forces would fail in their mission to attack Yintaka III and IV. The question now is whether they could hold them within the field long enough for those shields to go online.

“What in the world?” Chrystal said.

“What is it?” Shannon asked.

“I’m getting a reading coming from close to the other side of the planet from our position. These are gravitational anomalies!”

“I should have known Bridneo would not let this operation become a failure,” Trent said. “Is there a wormhole forming at Yintaka III as well?”

“The fleet reports a similar anomaly from almost behind that planet,” Ro said. “They are reporting that they have spotted State Raptor Destroyers and Chimera Cruisers coming out of the wormhole at that location.”

“I’m getting similar readings from the wormhole behind Yintaka IV, sir,” Chrystal said.

“Wait a moment. Sir, I’ve got a Golem Battleship on sensors!”

“You have an ID on that battleship?” Trent asked.

“Yes, sir. It is the *Ve’Nir*.”

“That’s Bridneo’s ship alright. I remember the name when we first made contact.”

“Sir,” Ro said, “Mandate ships are on an intercept course with the State reinforcements.”

“Will they have enough firepower to try and take on those ships including a battleship?”

“I’m detecting the Mandate ships’ warp signatures,” Chrystal said. “Wait a minute, that cannot be right!”

“What is it, Chrystal?”

“I’ve got thirteen ships heading to the State forces at Yintaka IV. I’m reading eight Retribution Destroyers and four Zealot Battlecruisers but there is an Absolution Battleship among them!”

“Did you say an Absolution?!”

Trent was surprised to hear that a Mandate battleship was here and for good reason. The Absolution was based on the same design as the Lykans' Harbinger, but much like the other Mandate ships, they were equipped with laser weapons provided by the NIR. The biggest problem the Mandate has though was the number of ships of each type they had at their disposal and the Absolution Battleships are the smallest in number between the three classes of ships they have with only twelve of them at their disposal. The fact that one of those ships was here was a huge surprise to everyone on the bridge and most likely both friend and foe alike.

However, the Mandate ships were outnumbered more than two-to-one against the State ships that had just arrived. Trent was hoping that the Mandate forces had a strategy against those numbers. The best they could do is hopefully distract them long enough for the planetary shield generators to go online. With over three minutes remaining on the countdown, the Mandate forces needed to be able to hold them off the State reinforcements somehow.

As the Mandate ships stopped in front of the State fleet, their laser turrets raised from their mounts and started pointing at the State vessels. Trent was surprised though that neither side immediately opened fire.

"What are they waiting for?" Trent asked.

"Considering the races on both sides are the same ones," Shannon said, "there could be some reluctance on both sides from firing on each other."

"I'm getting an open transmission from the Mandate ships on all channels, sir!" Ro said. "It is audio only for us."

"Put it through," Trent said.

The speakers on the bridge came to life as soon as Trent said that.

"This is Vice Admiral Vorfedio of the Mandate Battleship Coferin," a male voice said. *"Attention, State forces. You are violating Holy Lykan Republic space in an effort to do harm against civilians. You are ordered to return to State-controlled space immediately."*

Trent could tell that the name was that of a Vitam from his experience with them. However, he wondered if Vorfedio was aware that the State forces were already given that warning to withdraw. If he was, then why is he issuing the warning again?

"Vice Admiral Vorfedio," Bridneo said, *"why are you and your kind defending the lives of these murderers, thieves, and slavers? Do you not know or remember what the Lykans have done to our kind?"*

"I know what my former masters have done for me and they have been nothing but kind and rewarding while I was in service to them. Who is it that I am speaking with that sees the Lykans otherwise?"

"I am Admiral Bridneo of the State Battleship Ve'Nir. I don't know what sort of brainwashing or memory alterations the Lykans put you and the rest of the Mandate through to make you all think that they are 'nice' but the Lykans are nothing more than a plague on the star cluster!"

"I can assure you Bridneo that no one among my crew were brainwashed or had our memories altered. We were indeed treated well while we were slaves of the Lykans as well as our predecessors. I would not be surprised however if some of your ancestors were treated unfairly by other Lykans. No one is perfect, not even them, but it also means that not every Lykan is evil."

"Are you kidding?! They are ALL evil! They enslaved all of our races and not a single one of them voiced in opposition to the conquest of our worlds! Even if it was their King during the time that made a decree based on personal choice over what their religious texts said, they all ended up being in favor of it!"

“They were in favor of it because their King fed them a lie that it was decreed in those texts! Why would they oppose when their King said it was written as so?”

Trent looked at the time remaining on the clock. There were two minutes remaining before the estimated time of activation of the planetary shield generators. They were close now of achieving their goal.

“Sir?” Ro said. “I’m detecting some encrypted transmissions from the *Ve’Nir* towards the closest system in State-controlled space.”

“Can you quickly decipher the transmissions?” Trent asked.

“I’m trying to but it would take some time.”

Trent thought about why Bridneo’s ship was transmitting back to the State, namely the system that was one jump by star gate or jump drive away. Trent looked at the position of the *Ve’Nir* compared to the planet. It suddenly hit him why and what it was transmitting.

“Oh, crud!” Trent said. “Bridneo’s appearance was a diversion!”

“What do you mean?” Shannon asked.

“He jumped his fleet here for two reasons: to get reinforcements from our allies to deploy their remaining ships in reserved so that there would not be any more ships on hold! He would also transmit precise coordinates to his remaining fleet to where his remaining forces could jump just underneath the shield perimeter before it is activated! Even if the shield is active, their forces would be underneath it and can still attack the civilian population!”

“It looks like you are right, sir!” Chrystal said. “I’m detecting a gravitational disturbance near the upper atmosphere of Yintaka IV!”

“Sir!” Ro said. “The fleets at Yintaka III are reporting the same thing!”

Trent looked at the clock. There was a minute remaining. That was more than enough time for State frigates to get through before the shield would activate. They needed to act fast.

Trent pressed the fleet intercom button, setting it on an open channel for all allied ships intentionally.

“This is Vice Admiral Trent of the *Renaldo*! State forces in the system have provided coordinates to their allies to jump underneath the shield perimeter to attack civilian targets! ALL available destroyers are to intercept the incoming forces quickly before the planetary shields are raised! Do what you have to in order to prevent civilian casualties!”

Trent deactivated the fleet intercom button. As he looked at the main screen, his destroyers and those of the HLK turned towards Yintaka IV. While this would reduce the firepower being used against the Harpies that were still trying to escape the warp disruption field, the Harpies that were now starting to jump through the wormhole took priority over the ones that were stopped. As the NIR Crusader Destroyers and the HLK Punisher Destroyers started to do a short warp to the planet in order to intercept the Harpies that were starting to come through, Trent noticed the Mandate’s Retribution Destroyers were staying put within the fleet that the Absolution Battleship was leading. Trent was not surprised nor upset that they were not intercepting the Harpies that were coming out of the wormholes as they were staring down the State forces that Bridneo was leading. Bridneo’s fleet was still a threat and right now they were occupied in conversation, though Trent hoped that Vice Admiral Vorfedio was aware of why Bridneo came here and the second wave of Harpies that were invading because of Bridneo.

Trent continued to listen to their conversation while the countdown timer was running down the last minute.

“Do you really think killing the Lykans here would serve a purpose in the long run?” Vorfedio asked, still on an open channel. *“There are Lykans that are no doubt recently born that*

have no idea or knowledge of what they are being killed for? Can you really live with yourself knowing that innocent newborns are going to be killed for sins they have not committed because of a vendetta?"

"There are NO Lykans that are innocent in the eyes of the State," Bridneo said.

"Are those really your personal views or are they the views you have been fed to you by the Executive Council?"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't look like you are old enough to have been around during the Slave Revolts, now are you?"

"Well, no, I was born just after they happened."

"So you were never a slave to the Lykans for your entire life, have you?"

"No, I was born free of their slavery, but I heard what they did to my family before the Slave Revolt occurred."

The clock on the main screen had reached the zero mark. They could see the planetary shield start to activate over the planet. The wormhole quickly disappeared as the shield blocked whatever was creating it. The Harpies that had already gone through were starting to spread out to begin their attack runs but thankfully allied destroyers were also under the shield by the time it activated and attempted to pursue them.

"Sir," Ro said, "I have received word from Rear Admiral Zindalo to not be too concerned about civilian casualties. The civilians on both planets have already been evacuated to the shelters not too long ago."

"What?" Trent said, rather surprised. "When did they start the evacuation?"

"Apparently when they received word about the attack about an hour ago. The shelters should be protected from the State's attack."

"I wish I had known that from the start. That is some good news, at least. However, let our forces know to try to keep the collateral damage to a minimum. Let Vorfedio's ship know as well."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think they would make a run on the shield generator?" Shannon asked.

"That is a possibility," Trent said, "but they cannot use their warp in a gravity well or in an atmosphere. They would have to fly there under normal speed and that would take a while. Chrystal, if you spot any of the State frigates heading for the generators, inform me immediately. I will inform our forces to target those frigates first."

"Yes, sir," Chrystal said.

"Speaking of which, how many Harpies are left operational within the warp disruption field?"

"There are now thirty vessels remaining, sir."

Trent thought about the situation for a moment. Then he realized that it was suddenly silent on the speakers.

"Ro," Trent said, "is Vorfedio and Bridneo still transmitting?"

"They are," Ro said, "but you might want to see this."

Ro changed the monitor to zoom in on the *Ve'Nir* and the *Coferin* as well as their associated fleets. Trent noticed that their weapons were still pointed at each other though neither one was firing.

"What did we miss in the conversation while we were focusing on the new Harpies?" Trent asked.

“I’ve been recording the conversation,” Ro said. “I’ll rewind where we left off.”

“No, I was born free of their slavery,” Bridneo said, “but I heard what they did to my family before the Slave Revolt occurred.”

“So you’re telling me that your family drilled this hatred into you?” Vorfedio said.

“Does it matter how or why I have hatred towards the Lykans? I’ve been fighting them ever since I joined the military to protect those who fought for their freedom from those who would take it away again!”

“‘From those who would take it away again?’ Then why are you all not fighting against the Executive Council?”

“What sort of gibberish are you spouting now?”

“The Executive Council took away every bit of culture from the State that was being offered by the Humans in order for your nation to have some form of art and entertainment! The Executive Council took away your freedom to enjoy the arts and have some form of culture!”

“The Council did that because the Humans helped the Lykans!”

“The Humans helped the Lykans to change and reform their ways! You all have been told this multiple times! The Humans tried to help both the State and the former Kingdom better both nations in order to come to a resolution and to stop the war, to stop any further loss of life through conflict! You all are just too boneheaded to accept the fact that you cannot let go of an age-old hatred to better yourselves! Why can’t you all let go of the hatred you all have and learn to forgive? You can’t tell me that the Lykans are capable of doing something as simple as change the way they have been when the State is incapable or refuses to do the same?”

“You have no right to judge what the State can or cannot do compared to the Lykans!”

“What are you going to do, shoot us? Are you going to attack your own kind with the same hatred you have for the Lykans?! Are you ready to make us enemies as well?!”

“That is where the recording ends, sir,” Ro said.

“They have been sitting there with their weapons pointed at each other this entire time?” Trent asked. “I can understand Bridneo’s stance due to his history of combat with the Lykans but it sounds like he and the rest of the State needs to let go of their hatred but how do we convince them to do so?”

Trent thought about it for a moment. Then he realized that there might be a way when one considers WHO Bridneo was fighting all this time.

“Ro,” Trent said, “patch me in.”

“Are you sure that is wise?” Shannon asked. “You know how they feel about you considering the orders they were given.”

“I know but I may have a way to diffuse the situation.”

“Very well. Ro, do as he says.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Ro said. “I have you on an open channel on the same frequency.”

Trent took a deep breath to steady his nerves. What he is about to say may very well change how things go in this battle and afterwards.

“Admiral Bridneo,” Trent said. “You already know who this is, so let me get right to the point. What have you been fighting for most of your life?”

“What kind of stupid question is that?” Bridneo said. “I have been fighting to protect the freedom and security of the State from those who enslaved us!”

“Then why are you still fighting?”

“Huh? What do you mean why am I still fighting? The ones who enslaved are people are right here in this system!”

“I do not see the enemy you are speaking of. What is the name of their government?”

“What kind of ridiculous questioning is this?”

“One that deserves an answer, Bridneo.”

“It’s the Holy Lykan Republic, who else?”

“So you are saying the Holy Lykan Republic is the enemy?”

“Of course!”

“Why are they the enemy?”

“Are you seriously trying to drive my patience, Trent?!”

“Answer the question, Bridneo!”

“Fine, let’s play this game! They are the ones who enslaved our people, Trent! You know this!”

“The Holy Lykan Republic has only been around for six months, Bridneo. There are no slaves within their borders, so why are you fighting them?”

“What a minute. What are you getting at? They were not the Holy Lykan Republic when they enslaved our people!”

“What were they called, then?”

“They were known as the Royal Lykan Kingdom at the time.”

“So where is the Royal Lykan Kingdom now?”

“Well, they are...gone in a sense.”

“Then the nation you were fighting against is dead and gone. Congratulations, your war is over. Time to declare your victory though six months overdue.”

“Wait, what? What kind of nonsense are you saying?”

“Admiral Bridneo, your fight was against the tyranny of the King and the Royal Court of the Royal Lykan Republic, the Lykans whose bloodlines and rule span as far back as the King who made the decree to enslave the people who currently make up the State. Six months ago, the Lykans as a people took it upon themselves to oppose this same tyranny because of the current King’s actions. It took the collision and detonation of two stations for them to destroy the orbital city of High Charity to wipe out the King, the Royal Court, and the rest of the Royal Guard. I was there to witness that happen. The government the State vowed to fight to their last breath died that day Bridneo. The State, while not present, was a benefactor to the events that occurred that day. The ones responsible for creating and enforcing that law were no longer present. The government that has taken its place does not follow the same laws and decrees created by their former kings but follow those written in their holy texts to help base their new laws and government on. In other words, Bridneo, the nation you were fighting against is dead and gone. You are attacking people who no longer want to enslave or even threaten the State! You have gone from being the defender to the aggressor!”

Trent noticed that Bridneo was suddenly rather quiet.

“Bridneo, the fight you were fighting is no longer relevant. The Lykans of the Holy Lykan Republic are not the same people you harbor hatred towards. They regret what they have done and have been trying to make amends for their mistakes. They have changed their lifestyle and they have let go of the slaves. Those slaves, now the Mandate, saw something in the State they did not like. They saw the aggression the State had towards the Lykans even after the Kingdom fell and they didn’t like what they saw. They didn’t like that the Executive Council continues to promote hatred towards the Lykans as a people, and that they would go as far as to remove culture to force the State citizens to focus more on their hatred and be productive towards that end. The Executive Council has effectively ‘enslaved’ you and your people of the

State to fight a war you had already won six months ago! The question I would ask is why they want to continue to fight instead of making peace? You are seeing the ships that are either being destroyed or disabled near my ship right now, Bridneo. Those that are being destroyed involve lives that are being sacrificed for following orders by the Executive Council, orders that no longer have a foundation for being made to begin with, including the order to attack me and my forces! It almost seems like the Council wanted to find a reason to attack NIR forces. Is this what they wanted, to test the NIR's capabilities? There are a lot of State military personnel who will not be returning home today because they were following those orders. Were the lives lost here today worth it, Bridneo?"

The silence over the speakers continued that it was almost deafening. Trent soon realized that the Harpies that were attacking them had stopped firing on the *Renaldo*. None of the NIR or HLR ships were firing anymore either. It seemed like everyone was getting the message that there really was no need to fight. The question is whether Bridneo sees that as well. There was a good chance everyone stopped to hear Bridneo's response as well.

"No, it wasn't," Bridneo finally said somberly. *"You are right. The nation that I fought no longer exists as the entity it once was."*

Trent could see that the weapons on the *Ve'Nir* were moving into their "resting" positions, no longer pointing at the Mandate ships. Other State ships, including the Harpies, were doing the same thing, disengaging their target locks on allied ships including the *Renaldo*.

"The Lykans did make the effort to change them and their nation into becoming something better," Bridneo continued. *"They forcibly got rid of their corrupt and deranged leadership to make that change happen. I look at the ships they have now and I do not see the same enemy I have fought against for so long in the past. They have been trying to mend their ways and have even released all of their slaves. They even gave their former slave their own worlds to rule as they see fit, but they only did that because of how our brethren who were released viewed the State and how it was being governed negatively in their eyes."*

Trent quickly noticed that the Mandate ships were also moving their own weapons to their "resting" position along with the HLR ships.

"Make no mistake, Trent. While not all Lykans were bad while the Kingdom was around, as evident by those slaves who make up the Mandate today, there were several who did terrible things to our families. There is even the matter of them introducing the toxic drug on our original home planets for them to obey in their tasks. Yes, I know your involvement with the destruction of the pseudo-antidote stations was due to the lack of information provided and you should not be held accountable for what happened. I don't know why the Executive Council chose to change their decision other than to test our new ships against those of the NIR, but that decision just made the matter worse here in Yintaka than I could imagine. As for the Lykans themselves, I will be honest in that I don't know if I personally can ever forgive their transgressions against our people. Only time will tell if that will ever happen."

"Then what is your next move?"

"For now, the operation is considered a failure. The shields are up on both planets and I have received reports from the Harpies that recently arrived that the cities are deserted, leading me to believe that the civilians have already been evacuated to shelters. If the targets are out of reach, then there is nothing we can do about it. I am ordering all remaining ships to head to the star gate as we have used up the jump crystals to get here already, provided we are able to pass through the gate with the HLR's permission. However, I want to stay and discuss my surrender to the local fleet commander in exchange for letting my forces go free."

“You’re surrendering?”

“Admiral Bridneo, this is Rear Admiral Zindalo of the Royal Lykan Republic fleet broadcasting on an open channel. While you’re surrender would normally be accepted, there is no need for it.”

Trent was surprised at Zindalo’s words! Why was Zindalo saying there was no need for Bridneo’s surrender?

“I don’t understand,” Bridneo said. *“Why are you saying there is no need for it, Zindalo?”*

“It is because no Lykan lives have been lost. We understand how you and the rest of the State feels about my kind for a long time. However, you instead need to apologize to those who have lost their lives due to the orders they were following from the Executive Council. After that, we are going to have a chat with our leaders as to what needs to be done about the Executive Council and how they have been governing the State as of late. Something needs to change to achieve peace between us all so that we are not fighting each other all the time.”

“Actually,” Trent said, “there is already a couple of ambassadors that should be heading for the State capital of New Vita to discuss such a thing. In fact, since I must contact our Supreme Chancellor about the matter here and what has transpired, this will give me an ample opportunity to get them to discuss this same matter to the Executive Council directly.”

“I understand, Trent,” Bridneo said. *“Do what you must to help resolve this matter before things spiral any further out of control than they already have.”*

“Very well, Bridneo. I would like to invite you, Zindalo, and Vorfedio to join me on the *Renaldo*. I figured talking face-to-face with each other might help relieve some tensions.”

“Understood, Trent,” Bridneo said.

“I’ll be right over,” Vorfedio said.

“I’ll warp to your position shortly,” Zindalo said. *“However, what about the fields you have created to trap the first wave of Harpies?”*

“Valid point. Since this is an open channel to where my fleet can hear me, I want both the generators here and at our defense fleet at Yintaka III to deactivate and withdraw the generators. That is an order.”

Chrystal nodded, confirming the command. The warp disruption field and stasis field both faded away as the generators shut down. The generators were soon retracted back into the *Renaldo*’s forward bays. This meant that the Harpies they had trapped were now free but by this point they had no idea what to do next.

“Ro,” Trent said, “close the open channel.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro said as she pressed a few buttons.

The speakers deactivated on the bridge. Trent took a deep breath.

“I was beginning to wonder if that was going to work,” Trent said.

“You mean you took a gamble with a play on words, sir?” Shannon asked. “That was a very risky move.”

“It was needed to find a way to end the battle without destroying the entire State forces. That and there were Harpies within the atmospheres of both planets. That reminds me. Ro, make sure our destroyers return to space. Chrystal, make sure those new Harpies are also returning to space as well. They can get past the shield if they are leaving the planet.”

“Yes, sir,” Ro and Chrystal said in unison.

“I’m going to my Ready Room,” Trent said as he got up from his seat. “I’m going to contact the Supreme Chancellor and let him know what has happened. Let me know if anything changes, Shannon.”

“Yes, sir,” Shannon said.

Trent went up to the door and pressed the button to open it. The doors opened and he walked through. As soon as the doors closed, he let out a heavy sigh of relief. Considering it has been six months since he last saw combat, he had hoped he wouldn’t see it again for a much longer time frame. Trent went to the minifridge and grabbed a cold Crystallis soda before he headed behind his desk. He sat down in his chair, opened the bottle, and took a few sips. The drink was quite refreshing at this point. Part of him wished he could take a nap after all that happened but he knew that now was not the time for that.

Trent activated his terminal and established a secure line to the Supreme Chancellor. After a few seconds, it was not the Supreme Chancellor that answered but Grand Admiral Mikey instead. While this surprised Trent, he quickly assumed that the Chancellor either could not be reached or that he put Mikey in charge of this operation.

“Grand Admiral Mikey,” Trent said as he saluted. “I was trying to reach the Supreme Chancellor about the situation in Yintaka. Am I to assume he put you in charge of the operation and reports?”

“That is correct, Trent,” Mikey said. *“I may also want to remind you about the chain of command as well, though I can’t blame you for forgetting briefly considering the nature of your last assignment on the Templar.”*

“I’m sorry, sir. You are right. I did forget the chain of command.”

“It’s fine but do report, please. What happened in Yintaka? I heard about the possible attack by State forces.”

“That possibility became a reality, sir. One hundred and sixty Harpy Frigates jumped via jump drives to both Yintaka III and IV. The battleship of the HLR forces was located at Yintaka III so I ordered my battleship and four cruisers to Yintaka IV while the other four cruisers warped to Yintaka III. The destroyers and transports had not arrived at that time and were ordered to proceed to the delivery coordinates on each planet on their own.”

“I see. They jumped in while half your fleet was still in transit, but why did you split the cruisers up?”

“Cruiser Three-Five-Seven was provided with at least one warp field disruption generator and a stasis generator. Both my group and the other cruisers were to warp to close range of the Harpies to activate both generators to keep the frigates from immediately warping away and to prevent them from escaping the disruption field quickly. When I made initial contact with the fleet commander of the Harpies, I get hailed by Admiral Bridneo.”

“Bridneo? The Lykan you first meet in your first encounter?”

“Yes, sir. He was leading the State’s invasion of Yintaka. I tried to diffuse the situation and possible escalation of hostilities but he told me something I was not expected to hear that actually made the situation worse.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Apparently, the Executive Council saw fit to change their stance involving what I did to the stations over their home planets that had that pseudo-antidote. They decided to label me as the murderer of their people on those planets, even though those stations were taken out without any knowledge as to the nature of their function! In other words, I am apparently a ‘marked’ man to all State forces for termination including the ship and fleet I command if necessary!”

“Are you serious?! This is the first time I am hearing of this decision! Wait a moment. Don’t tell me those frigates opened fire on your ship, did they?”

“They did after Bridneo gave me the option to withdraw my forces from Yintaka without deploying the planetary shield generators. I had to refuse the offer because of the nature of my orders. Once I told him that, the frigates started to attack my ship, and when my fleet came to my defense, they started targeting them, though the only cruiser that was under fire was Cruiser Three-Five-Seven in the other fleet.”

“I cannot believe the State opened fire on NIR forces. Did we lose anyone?”

“Thankfully, no. The HLR forces assisted in destroying or disabling as many Harpies as they can. However, Bridneo’s battleship and more of his forces showed up after the transports had arrived and our destroyers engaged the Harpies we were holding. The Liberigi Mandate forces appeared including an Absolution Battleship.”

“One of their battleships was there? That is quite the surprise. They must have taken the State’s invasion of Yintaka very seriously if they managed to get one of their battleships there.”

“Vice Admiral Vorfedio who was leading the Mandate forces opened a dialogue to Bridneo on an open channel to try to convince Bridneo to withdraw his forces. That was when we discovered an encrypted message from Bridneo’s ship transmitting back into State-held territory. We assumed that he was sending coordinates to jump more of his forces, this time closer to the planet below where the shield would be active. Our assumption was correct and we had to send both NIR and HLR destroyers to intercept a second wave of Harpies. Thankfully, the planetary shield was activated soon after to prevent more from jumping through.”

“What about the ones that made it through? Did they attack the civilians on either planet?”

“Thankfully, they did not. When the Lykans were warned of the imminent attack on the star system, the civilians were evacuated to shelters for their protection so they were not in any danger. I got into the conversation between Vorfedio and Bridneo when talks had deteriorated. I managed to convince the State forces, especially Bridneo, that the enemy they have been fighting all this time, namely the former Royal Lykan Kingdom, is no longer around. The thought that the ruling party that promoted slavery was gone and replaced with one that no longer wished to enslave anyone appears to have set in on the minds of the State’s forces. They’ve finally realized that their war was over months ago.”

“That is good to hear but now we face a rather serious problem. While you may have convinced the forces in Yintaka of that reality, we still have the clear majority of their military, their civilians, and the Executive Council of the State that still think the war needs to continue. We need to convince them otherwise.”

“I know according to the Chancellor that Ambassador Drino was going back to the State and that Ambassador Korveco from the Mandate is going with him to speak on their behalf to change the Executive Council’s mind on the Lykans. You may want to inform them of what has transpired here before they get underway.”

“I will give them a copy of this transmission for them to be brought up to date.”

“Let me send you a copy of the transmission between myself and the other fleet commanders. Some of the dialogue that was said could be used when addressing the Executive Council. I’m sending it now, but I do have a rather big concern.”

“What would that be?”

“What would happen if the State’s military headquarters or the Executive Council find out what has happened here in Yintaka before the ambassadors arrive at New Vita?”

“What do you mean?”

“My concern is whether the State would look at launching more ships in an offensive against Yintaka. Do you think they would do so?”

“That is a good question. However, now that their operation is a failure and that the Lykan worlds located along the State and the HLR are now all secure, I’m not sure what more the State can do about it unless they are developing or have developed a countermeasure against the planetary shield generators. This may make them come down to a cold war for a while.”

“I would prefer if there wasn’t any type of ‘war’ between the State and the HLR. I’m beginning to wonder though what is running through the Executive Council’s heads right now for them to want to continue their conflict with the Lykans when the Lykans only want peace now.”

“Now that you bring it up, I’m beginning to wonder that as well. For the roles of protagonist and antagonist to be reversed between them is something I would not have expected. When I was told about the conversation between our ambassadors with the Council and how headstrong they were to continue their war, I felt like something was not right in their way of thinking. What was causing them to want to continue the fight so badly?”

“Part of me is wondering where this aggression continues to come from as well. The State should be enjoying this peacetime. They have earned their freedom and now have a nation they can call their own, safe from the enslavement policies of the former Lykan King. Part of me is wondering if the Council is being influenced by someone or something to continue the fight.”

“Influenced by whom would be the question I would be asking.”

“I wish I knew but there are just some aspects to this whole scenario that just does not make sense at all. The Executive Council’s actions towards their people and their continued insistence to make the Lykans extinct defies a sane mind. It seems like their actions are based purely on hatred for the Lykans and they want that hatred to spread among their citizens to give them the drive to continue their war. The question is why are they doing this? Do they not want peace at all?”

“I see what you are getting at. The Executive Council appears to be at the heart of the matter and that is what Drino and Korveco will go to find out once they get up to date. Go ahead and send the transmission you mentioned about earlier so that I can send it over to the Chancellor and the ambassadors to review. They’ll take over from there.”

“Understood, sir, I’m transmitting now. Please keep me informed if the situation changes.”

“I will.”

The transmission ended, and Trent submitted the recording from earlier between himself and the fleet commanders. Trent figured it was best not to report his invitation for those same commanders to his ship for the time being. Mikey would find out anyway if he reviewed the transmission prior to giving it to Drew.

However, the thought that someone or something influencing the Executive Council to fight started to bother Trent. If the Executive Council is not acting on their own innate intentions but rather an outside influence on the Council, who could it be and why? The thought of it was starting to make Trent get a headache. Maybe Shannon was right. Politics really was not his strong suit and it was best to leave it up to the ambassadors to find out the truth of the matter.

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