

Tech System 681

Chapter 681 The Meeting (01)

“I know that you like for the official meetings to immediately get to the point, so let’s go with that today,” Birch said as they took a seat in one of the many rooms in the palace. The room was well-prepared, with amenities such as water and a few snacks already set on the table.

Aron, Rina, Ayaka, and Lee sat on one side, while Rayyan, Birch, Oak, Crabapple, Mangrove, and Cypress sat on the other, facing each other.

“I would like that too,” Aron said calmly, answering with confidence. He didn't appear at all like someone attending his first official meeting with peers who could be considered equals in terms of leadership. If Rayyan's government were counted as a separate empire, it would rival his own, at least in terms of population count, which exceeded that of Aron’s empire.

“In the past, I have acted as the representative for both the Proximians and my fellow tree folk. Today, everyone here will speak and represent themselves before we decide on the best course of action for our children.

Rayyan is here to represent our children’s interests and ask questions pertinent to them. Her input will be crucial in our decision-making process. The rest of us will consider her input when we reach the decision-making stage. That’s our course of action. If you have one for your side, we would like to hear it before we begin our conversation,” Birch said and started waiting for Aron's response.

“From our side, my wife and I will be the official representatives. Ayaka and Lee are here as advisors throughout the meeting. That’s all,” Aron responded. “If there is nothing more to add from your side, we can start the conversation.”

With that, Aron left the floor open for the other side to ask the first questions since they were here to discuss them.

“Should we join the empire as citizens, what will our treatment be, and what leadership structure will be implemented upon us?” Rayyan asked, taking the initiative to pose the opening question of the meeting.

“If you were to join the empire as citizens, you would receive the same treatment as any other citizen of the empire. This includes all the rights and privileges that come with citizenship.

Even if you choose to remain allies rather than becoming full citizens, you will still be treated with respect and fairness, though there would be some restrictions, such as requiring visas to enter imperial territories and more.

I can provide records to confirm this, and we have already amended our constitution to include your group. The formal ratification of this amendment will be completed after this meeting.

Regarding governance, there will be no changes to the current system. During your training, you were introduced to the same governance model that the empire employs. Rayyan, you would be responsible for representing the Proxima star system under imperial rule, following the same governance style that will apply to other regions acquired by the empire in the future.

The solar system, being the empire's capital, is directly controlled by the imperial family, which is why it does not have a representative like other star systems.”

Aron paused for a moment after addressing the initial queries related to Rayyan's question before continuing.

"I would also like to add that within our governance structure, all leadership positions, regardless of their level, have defined limits on their power.

The Emperor holds the highest authority within the empire, but even this role is bound by the rule of law. The Emperor can remove individuals from power, but only if there is substantial evidence and a valid reason for doing so.

Similarly, just as a thousand of our empire's citizens have the power to challenge and dethrone me should I act inappropriately, a randomly selected thousand of your people will have the same power to hold their leaders accountable, including me."

Aron spoke plainly, ensuring that all aspects of the governance were clear. He wanted to avoid any misleading impressions and prevent future misunderstandings that could lead to conflicts or discontent.

Rayyan remained silent throughout Aron's detailed responses, occasionally nodding in acknowledgment. Although she was familiar with most of the information from previous readings, hearing it directly from the leader of the empire provided a different level of clarity and assurance. At that moment, she was satisfied with the answers she had received.

“What is the goal of the empire?” Cypress, the creator of the fae or fairies and the only winged species among them, asked.

“At the start, the creation of the empire was an unintended consequence of a world war between myself and the rest of the world, which I won overwhelmingly. The cause of that conflict was our discovery of a potential visitor, whom we initially and are still considering to be hostile until proven otherwise.

We recommended the formation of a unified force to confront this potential threat, and that remains our primary focus, including your possible role as allies or citizens.

Our investments are centered on preparing for this threat, but if we manage to overcome it, our goals will shift based on the situation at that time,” Aron explained calmly, summarizing the foundation and current objectives of the empire.

“Mmm,” Cypress nodded, indicating her satisfaction with the answer she received.

“For me, I'm curious about your so-called magic and the way you harness what you call mana. From the information I've gathered through your people's conversations, it seems that you only discovered it a few months after the formation of the empire.

How have you reached such an advanced understanding of it so quickly, and how did you discover the different methods to harness and materialize its effects in the real world?" Crabapple, the creator of the dwarves, asked, his voice carrying a hint of the dwarves' natural inclination toward creativity and invention.

"That is because we, or rather I, knew about mana long before people began experiencing what we call the awakening or blessing," Aron answered calmly.

His response, however, sparked a contrasting reaction from everyone on the opposite side of the table, including Ayaka and Lee, whose expressions shifted to one of surprise and intrigue.

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Seeing the room still in silence, indicating their curiosity for more details, Aron decided to elaborate.

"I received what you call a blessing a few years before the formation of the empire," he began. "This gave me the opportunity to delve into the study of mana well before it became widely known. Coupled with my company's advancements in quantum computing and VR, I had access to time acceleration and advanced simulation capabilities.

These technologies allowed me to effectively spend centuries, alongside my AI assistant, developing and refining the system from the ground up. We went through countless trials and errors, and I personally experienced many failures, including several catastrophic ones, before mastering the basics and discovering how to harness mana for various effects."

Aron's explanation was a blend of truth and strategic omission. He carefully avoided mentioning that he had acquired foundational knowledge from the system and that his wife's and his citizens' awakening was the reason he bought it in the first place, since he couldn't use magic in that way and could only harness mana through runes that he had already bought previously.

Although Rayyan and the tree folks were surprised by the explanation, it couldn't compare to the shock Ayaka and Lee felt. They had always believed that the foundational knowledge of mana was the result of collective efforts by many knowledgeable individuals who analyzed awakeners and used simulations to discover the basics and teach others.

But now they were learning that all the foundational work had been done by the Emperor alone, over centuries spent by himself. This revelation greatly increased their respect for the Emperor, which was already immense to begin with.

"Does that mean you discovered the means to use mana of all different affinities?" Crabapple asked, his curiosity yet to be satiated.

"Not all of them," Aron responded. "My experiments focused on finding the basic means of harnessing mana and creating foundational formulas for its use. These foundations allow others to develop more complex formulas as they make new discoveries about mana. Most awakeners manifest with specific affinities and are

more efficient in using magic related to those affinities. While they can use magic from other affinities, it comes with significant penalties, such as increased mana consumption and complexity in understanding. This specialization means that they can further research within their specific affinities, and with the number of awakeners, there are more chances for advancements.”

“Then how come we feel no specific mana affinities from both of you despite both of you releasing what can be said to be an aura of awakeners? Although there are some of our children who release an aura similar to yours, yours feel fainter, almost on the verge of disappearing, something we would have missed had we not focused our senses on you two.” Mangrove asked taking over from his fellow tree folk.

“That is because we have no specific affinities,” Rina responded dropping the bombshell.

“Although rare, there are a few who have no affinity to specific mana, which makes it easier for us to learn any specific affinity of mana or maybe even all of them, if you can handle learning all of them.

As for why you almost didn't feel it from us, it is because we are actively suppressing it.” She explained, as this was specifically her field, and what they were answering was either public or mostly only mildly classified information.

‘You can do that?’ Lee thought to himself when he heard the empress talking about them physically suppressing their awakener aura that could only be felt by other awakeners. ‘So that’s why I couldn’t feel that they were awakeners,’ he finally realized, feeling relieved that his long-standing question about why he hadn’t sensed their awakener status was now answered.

“I know you have more questions related to that, but I would suggest we postpone them until after this meeting, as the purpose of this meeting is about your children and not really about our discovery of mana,” Aron said, noticing their continued curiosity despite the lengthy explanation.

“That’s true, sorry for getting distracted by that. It’s one of the things we are most curious about, having spent millennia with access to mana but seeing our discoveries take an entirely different path from yours,” Birch apologized, explaining their obsession with the topic.

“I’m happy to have a lengthy discussion about this after the meeting and the following bureaucracies, as we are also curious about your side of the discoveries. We are here for as long as our tasks require, so you don’t have to worry about us leaving ahead of time,” Aron responded, indicating they could now return to the primary discussions that brought them together today.

"We will take you up on that offer. Now, taking over our children would mean you are also responsible for their protection. On what level are you confident in protecting them?" Birch asked, swiftly returning to the main topic, this time speaking not as a representative, but as the creator of the elves.

“At present, we are in the process of building a formidable military to ensure the safety of our empire. Should your children join us, they will be integrated into this military, especially considering we have a potential visitor on the way. We are confident that within a few years, our military will be powerful enough to ensure both our safety,” Aron replied calmly.

He then pointed to Lee, who now wore a look of surprise from the unexpected shoutout from the emperor. “Also, if we’re talking about the obligation to protect them, aren’t we also considered another parent?” Aron continued with a hint of humor, “After all, the empire aided in their upbringing just as much as he also aided in their creation.”

A few people in the room chuckled at his attempt to lighten the mood, while others remained silent, their expressions serious.

“So it means that you can’t protect them at this moment?” Oak asked, his voice cutting through the lighthearted atmosphere Aron had just created, instantly bringing the discussion back to a more serious tone.

“I don’t think you can take that from my previous answer. Although I mentioned that we are in the process of building our military, it doesn’t mean we are defenseless. The level of threats you’re concerned about is not beyond the capacity of our current defenses, provided we have early detection. Our military will be prepared well before any significant threat arrives,” Aron responded in a tone matching Oak’s seriousness.

"I don't think so," someone said, but before anyone could even care who said it,
BOO.M.

Chapter 683 "....."

While the meeting was taking place, the security forces of both sides were carefully monitoring the palace. Although the possibility of an incident was almost nil, they needed to be ready for anything.

By the slimmest chance that something did happen, their leaders would need to be rescued immediately. This philosophy underpinned the current small contingents responsible for keeping an eye on the palace, while the rest of the security forces focused outward.

However, the peaceful monitoring only lasted for so long. In a fraction of a second, two massive roots emerged from opposite sides of the palace wall. They spread rapidly, intertwining and clashing against the walls of the palace, enveloping it as if it were a cocoon.

“ ”

There was a silence from those near the vicinity of the palace, but their surprise was more about the symbolic of what had happened. The sudden cocoon of roots meant that the emperor, his wife, and the leadership of the Proximians were now confined within the cocoon.

BOOOOOOOOOM.

It was only three seconds later that they heard the explosion, which immediately brought everyone back to their senses.

Four seconds after the explosion.

“Show me what the sensors are seeing,” Josh, the head of the Aegis team assigned to protect the emperor on the ground, asked calmly, his eyes fixed on the now fully cocooned palace.

Although he was asking questions, his mouth wasn’t moving, and neither were his eyes blinking at all. Everything around him seemed either at a full stop in the air or moving in slow motion, depending on their relative speed before the shockwave. Time seemed to have paused for him, his focus solely on the cocooned palace, his mind processing the sudden turn of events with an eerie calmness.

That was not a result of fear-induced adrenaline or any innate abilities, but rather a deliberate acceleration of his perception of time, causing everything to appear frozen or moving sluggishly..

It was a technology developed in Lab City, an offshoot of the VR and AR advancements made a few years ago. In its current form, the tech was a few hundred iterations beyond its initial discovery, though it still had its limitations. Not everyone could handle the acceleration of time perception while simultaneously experiencing the real world, where the amount of information couldn’t be controlled as it could in a VR simulation.

So, at the moment, he was conversing directly with the security AI through his thoughts, needing to assess the situation on the ground. He would have to send a report to the fleet admiral after he determined how they could assist.

That was because currently, he was in control of the situation, and the fleet would act as his and his team's support, as he was the one responsible for the direct security of the emperor.

{Our scanners are being blocked by a massive amount of mana within the cocoon roots,} the AI relayed directly to his mind.

Upon hearing that the sensors were being blocked, Josh didn’t linger on the negative news and immediately shifted focus.

“Replay the recording of the event,” he commanded, eager to view the incident clearly since his accelerated perception had compressed it into mere seconds.

The footage was augmented and replayed before him.

His expression remained unchanged, as the time acceleration tech only affected his perception, not his physical appearance. As a result of that, his face stayed as it was moments before the tech activated, not reflecting the intensity of the scene he was observing.

The footage revealed two massive roots emerging from either side of the palace, rapidly expanding and converging to envelop the structure. As the roots encased the palace, it reacted within the same time frame, sealing all openings to prevent any intrusion from the roots.

“What else do you see?” he asked the AI, knowing that not utilizing its full capabilities would be unwise and could leave him unprepared for future inquiries.

{Although the roots appear identical to the naked eye, there is a noticeable color variation between them, suggesting that they may come from two different tree folks} reported the AI, highlighting the subtle differences in color between the roots.

“Alright, send this information to fleet control and request a few attack ships to breach that cocoon,” he instructed, promptly deactivating the perception acceleration.

“Everyone to the ship! We need to breach that cocoon and rescue the imperial family!” Josh commanded, swiftly organizing the security team on the ground.

For them, only seven seconds had elapsed since the shockwave hit, making his analysis and response time just two seconds.

Without hesitation, the security members rushed toward the ship, which was already hovering and approaching them to pick them up.

The operation to rescue the imperial family was now officially underway, as Josh and his team were heading to the cocoon.

Meanwhile, other groups were still in the process of assessing and reacting to the unfolding crisis.

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In just ten seconds after the cocoon’s appearance, the fleet responded swiftly. Landers and attack ships were dispatched one after another, descending from orbit to support the Aegis forces on the ground. The fleet’s readiness was a result of their vigilance during the meeting eve when they were almost sure that nothing was going to happen, ensuring they were prepared for any emergent threats.

The Proximian security forces were equally swift in their response. Responding within a few more additional seconds, they had formulated an action plan. Given that their ships were already stationed on the planet, they were poised to arrive at the scene ahead of the reinforcements coming from space.

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The unfolding crisis quickly captivated viewers both on Proxima and on earth. Within thirty seconds of the incident, the live stream's audience swelled to half a billion.

As the situation continued to develop, the number of viewers surged by millions each second. Reactions varied widely: some watched with bated breath and concern, others with a sense of schadenfreude, while many tuned in purely for the spectacle, eager to see if the emperor's fate would be sealed in real time.

“What is the meaning of this?” Aron demanded, his voice cutting through the tension as he looked directly at the tree folk delegation. Instinctively, he had cast a protective shield around his group the moment he sensed the massive surge of mana. This swift action had caught everyone else on his side off guard, just as the palace began to shake and emit an ominous creaking sound.

"Nothing personal, we're just making a logical choice," Oak responded through his massive humanoid form, looking at Aron as if he weren't one of the two who had just tried to crush them.

“Aron narrowed his eyes. "A logical choice? By attacking us during a diplomatic meeting? What do you plan to do after killing us? I'm sure you know that killing me won't mean the empire will fall. They will not stop seeking revenge against you. Our current military is more than capable of that," Aron responded in the same calm manner, making the other humans in the room get goosebumps at his composure.

“Do you think I'm worried about your little military at all? Why worry about something that we can already deal with through our people? Also, what makes you think that we were trying to kill you?” Mangrove, the creator of the dark elves, responded, with him being the other person whose roots are currently covering half the palace.

“What do you mean by that?” Rina asked, her voice sharp and direct.

“Why go to all this trouble if there was nothing to gain from you worth all the upcoming trouble?” Oak responded, his humanoid body forming a creepy smile.

Mangrove continued from where Oak left off, “The ability to hide the amount of power you have indicates that you have enough power to warrant that, but also enough power to achieve the hiding to the point that we almost missed it. Although we planned this ahead of time, your response pushed us the final mile in giving us the confidence that your bodies can handle our full consciousness without us facing any limitations in our previous abilities.

If it succeeds, we will have every bit of our powers and an empire under our control. And if you die, we can just create a body the same way we recreated Lee's and put one of our people in it. What is there to worry about?” Mangrove revealed their entire plan.

This acted as both a display of their confidence and a taunt, demonstrating their belief in the inevitability of their success even after revealing their plan. The arrogance in their voices made it clear they were not concerned about anyone stopping them.

Aron ignored the two who had already revealed themselves as the perpetrators behind the current situation and turned to the others who had remained silent. "What about you four? Are you on the same side as them?" he asked, wanting to understand if they were complicit or merely bystanders.

Rayyan looked utterly shocked, unable to respond. From the start, she had been certain that no matter the outcome of the meeting, it would end with them on friendly terms with the empire that

had practically raised them. Now, all of that seemed to have been thrown out the window by the actions of two of the elders, one of whom was the creator of her specific race. This left her powerless to oppose him, rendering her silent not by choice, but by sheer inability to respond.

Birch responded shortly, having processed the situation rapidly. “This is news to me. Just because we are on the same planet doesn’t mean we can read each other’s minds. It seems like they planned this on their own.”

Cypress added, “I agree with her. I have no intention of disrupting the current situation; I’m quite content with how things are. As some of your human philosophers suggest, I’m trying to enjoy the moment before it’s gone. It seems they’re the ones intent on making it disappear.” She turned to the Giant and Dark Elf tree folks, her gaze conveying a sense of disappointment that would have been more expressive had she had a fully expressive face.

“It seems like they’ve inherited some of Lee’s less desirable traits when shaping their new personalities, based on his experiences,” Crabapple said, his tone reflecting his critical thinking and curiosity. “Though I’m not entirely sure what specific traits they’ve inherited, their planning seems to be rooted in those aspects.”

As they were talking, small tremors began to ripple through the palace, indicating that those outside were trying to breach the cocoon. However, the calmness on the preparators’ faces indicated that they were not worried about the breach at all.

Upon receiving the responses from everyone, Aron fell silent for a moment, looking down at the table. This caused everyone on his side to feel their hearts sink, interpreting his silence as a sign of seeing no way out. This reaction was particularly striking to Rina, who had always believed that Aron was the strongest person she would ever know.

But the silence was short-lived. Aron’s expression shifted to a smile, giving him an unsettling appearance as if he had snapped from despair. This almost caused everyone on his side to have a heart attack if not for his cryptic words that followed: “So that is what it was talking about.” His statement left everyone in the room puzzled and curious about what he meant.

[DING!!!!!!]

[URGENT SYSTEM QUEST!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!]

Objective: Deal with the situation without killing the preparators and put them under your control.

Reward for Fully Completing the Task: +2 of the system's awakening requirements.

Reward for Partially Completing the Task: 500 billion SP

Punishment for Failure: -

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This was the system notification that appeared the moment Aron shook hands with the giant's creator at the palace's door, which left him puzzled about what the system required from him.

Although the notification listed no punishments for failing, the rewards were enticing. Completing the task fully would grant him two of the five system awakening requirements, leaving only three remaining. This was crucial, as the system had hinted at a significant reward for fully awakening it.

Throughout the meeting, Aron had been trying to discern the actual mission and whether it would involve confronting those on the opposite side of the table. He had focused on answering their questions to buy time for figuring out the mission. With the revelation of the preparators' true intentions, it seemed the need for further investigation had diminished.

"I hope you don't regret this," Aron said with a serious tone before finally releasing the suppression he had been placing on himself. The gravity of his words was clear, and with the justification to act now fully realized, any sympathy he might have had was set aside.

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Everyone in the room immediately felt a surge of pressure ripple through the air, making the atmosphere heavy. The sudden change took everyone by surprise, even the two perpetrators behind the current situation, as the pressure was more than expected.

Before anyone could react, two shields materialized around Oak and Mangrove, confining them along with anything nearby within the oval barriers. In an instant, the interiors of the shields combusted into flames, incinerating everything inside within seconds before the fire stopped and the shield deactivated.

As the shields deactivated, fine ashes fell to the ground where Oak and Mangrove's humanoid forms had once been.

"....."

"....."

"....."

The room plunged into a deeper silence as everyone tried to comprehend what had just occurred. Even Rina, his wife, was stunned, her mind racing to process the rapid and dramatic turn of events. The swift and decisive nature of Aron's actions left everyone in a state of shock, their brains struggling to catch up with the reality of what had just transpired.

Not even five seconds had passed between Aron's words, "I hope you don't regret this," and the two tree folks' bodies being enveloped by a shield, then instantly incinerated and reduced to fine ashes where they had been.

The remaining three tree folks were astonished, not because they didn't notice it happening, but because it occurred so rapidly that their perception lagged by a few seconds. Even after they perceived it, they couldn't comprehend the mana disturbances aimed at the two, as it was something entirely new to them.

Rayyan remained frozen, just as she had been before. Ayaka and Lee were still catching up, their minds struggling to process the rapid turn of events.

Rina, meanwhile, was dumbfounded by Aron's display of power. Although she always knew he was powerful, she had never witnessed him win a practice fight since he always trained under severely unfavorable conditions, constantly getting bested by the AI. This display shattered her previous understanding of his capabilities.

“I hope you aren’t planning on joining them now,” Aron said, looking at Birch as he rose from his chair, causing it to slide backward.

He wasn’t worried that he had just killed them, as he knew that their humanoid forms were merely extensions of their main bodies. What he had done was akin to cutting someone’s hair—a minor inconvenience rather than a fatal blow. However, it wasn’t for nothing; by removing them from the room, he ensured they couldn’t launch any immediate attacks against him, buying crucial time to manage the situation.

“Rather than that, we would like to help you deal with them,” Birch said, indicating her willingness to act against the troublemakers. Aron’s display of power had impressed her and shown that he was even more formidable than they had estimated.

“Have you ever fought amongst yourselves?” Aron asked, following Birch’s statement.

“Not since we reached our current size,” Crabapple responded.

Aron thought about it for a fraction of a second before immediately saying, “Although I would like your help in dealing with them, that will do more harm than good. What I want you to do is focus on minimizing the amount of damage they inflict on the planet and protecting the proximians. I will deal with them.” He spoke confidently, recalling that while his system didn’t specify that he had to complete the mission alone, he wanted to ensure there was no reason for receiving a lower-grade reward.

But not only that, he was also using this moment to send a clear warning to the remaining tree folks, demonstrating that he could deal with such threats personally without relying on his military. This display of power was meant to deter any similar actions in the future and ensure that his authority remained unchallenged once the current crisis was resolved.

“Are you sure about that? Although we previously couldn’t use mana as a means of attacking because we didn’t know about its capability for that, you can now be sure that we know everything you taught all of our children about mana and can use it the same way as them,” Cypress asked, explaining her question and emphasizing their newfound capabilities.

“If I need help, I will ask for it, but for now, I need you to focus on the safety of both the planet and the citizens. If you need to reach me, you can contact me through this,” Aron said, dropping four buttons from his sleeves onto the table. Without waiting for a response, he flew upward, breaking the sound barrier a second later. Birch was quick enough to respond, opening the palace’s roots where Aron was about to pass through. However, the same couldn’t be said for the two roots still attempting to cocoon the palace. He didn’t care how hard they were or looked, breaking through them with force.

A resounding BOOOOOOOOOM echoed as he pierced through them.

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BOOOOOOOOOM.

The ships that were amidst their attack immediately came to a halt. The sensors pinged the presence of the Emperor, automatically stopping the ships from continuing their assault to avoid harming him or anyone else still inside the cocoon in case a shot went through the opening he had created.

The opening he had pried immediately began to heal, just as it had when they previously attacked with small-yield weapons. They had been cautious not to use anything too powerful, to avoid harming those inside they were trying to save.

“The fuck,” a soldier involuntarily muttered. Although it was impossible to believe what he was seeing, his visor was directly highlighting the floating man, zooming in on him with a golden name hovering above him, clearly labeling him as the emperor.

The surprise was shared by everyone except a few Aegis members monitoring from space. It was the first time the emperor did something that undeniably proved he was an awakener as everything in the past only hinted at it based on his reaction to the situations he found himself in.

This revelation wasn’t just witnessed by those present but also by more than five billion people from both Proxima and Earth who were now watching through the live stream.

As for the emperor, he hovered for a moment, receiving an update on the situation. He couldn't receive this information while in the palace because Nova had deduced that his discussion at that time was more critical than the current report.

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{That’s all,} Nova said as she finished updating Aron on the situation. It had taken only a few seconds for her to do so since she delivered just the bullet points, and Aron filled in the gaps himself.

“Thanks, keep updating me on any changes,” Aron said before looking down at the cocoon, which now appeared as intact as it had been from the beginning. It had fully healed and was no longer under attack from the ships, giving it a moment of respite.

He waited to see if the cocoon would react or shift its focus toward him, but even after a few moments, nothing happened.

{I think they're still maintaining it to imprison her and are planning to deal with you first before returning to handle her,} Nova hypothesized to Aron.

“I would have done the same if I were the one attacking us,” Aron agreed. He understood their strategy: imprisoning Rina would force him to fight while constantly worrying about her safety. This divided focus would make it easier for them to overwhelm him, allowing them to defeat him more quickly and with minimal damage before returning to deal with Rina, who, although hypothesised to be slightly weaker, might still pose a threat if he turned out to be more powerful.

“Then let’s mess with their plan,” Aron said, extending his hand toward the cocoon below. Shortly after, runic sentences appeared and activated, immediately forming a skin-tight shield around the cocoon. But he didn't stop there. With his extended hand, he shifted his focus from the outer shield to the runes that were still projecting active shields around Rina, Ayaka, and Lee, taking control of them as well.

The runes immediately had a few of their letters change. All three runic words projecting three different shields moved and joined, merging into a single rune. The new combined shield began growing while still in its passive mode, allowing anything to enter and leave freely as it expanded. It extended through Birch's palace until it reached the outer side of the palace walls.

Once there, the shield entered active mode, activated fully, enveloping the cocoon from the inside as well.

“Snap!” Aron snapped his fingers.

Before even a second could pass, BOOOOOOOOOM.

An explosion erupted inside the shields, visible to anyone watching. The blast ignited everything within the two shields, overwhelming them faster than they could regenerate.

The explosion continued for about three seconds before subsiding, revealing the aftermath inside the shields. Nothing but ashes remained, falling through the half-dome of the inner shield to the floor, unveiling the palace once again.

Aron then deactivated the outer shield while simultaneously shrinking the lower shield in passive mode, reducing its size until it fit the room.

Once it was contained, he reactivated the shield and cast a flying rune on it, detaching the room from the palace and lifting it into the air.

Birch responded by spreading the roots from the roof of the palace while at the same time having the palace return back into her roots as the room rose until it reached his eye level.

She then absorbed all the roots within the room back into her body, leaving only the clear shield remaining.

“While your real bodies are dealing with my request, I want your copies to stay clear of the mess and act as communication intermediaries. I have some questions I’m curious about,” Aron said, directing his gaze at the tree folks.

He then turned to Rayyan, who was in the midst of regaining her composure.

“I need you to grant me temporary control of the government. Your current situation isn’t ideal for managing this crisis,” Aron said. Rayyan, understanding the gravity of the situation and acknowledging the impact of the recent events on her ability to lead, agreed.

She handed over control, knowing it was an emergency and that she could communicate with Aron through the button he left, now turned into an earpiece. This way, she could monitor his actions and reclaim control if necessary.

Aron then turned to Lee, pointing at Ayaka. “I need you to protect her while she heals anyone on the verge of death. Once they’re stabilized, they should be placed in a stasis pod for further treatment.” Lee nodded immediately, understanding the urgency of the task.

Turning to his wife, he added, “I need you to assist me if they try to attack other locations.”

With that, Aron deactivated the shield, ready to address the next phase of their plan.

As the shield deactivated, everyone inside immediately cast flying magic on themselves to stay airborne, except for Ayaka, who struggled with any magic other than life magic.

Despite her ability to heal herself, no one wanted to risk unnecessary harm. Nova, quick to act, ordered a nearby ship—Aron's personal vessel—to deploy its tractor beam, catching Ayaka before she could fall.

The tractor beam also latched onto the three tree folks and Rayyan, pulling them into the ship alongside Ayaka. The tree folks would use the ship as a base for communication, while Ayaka was to be provided with a newly created suit from the ship's atomic printer, ensuring her survival for the demanding tasks ahead.

Having completed his preparations, Aron turned towards his ship.

“Nova, connect me with all available government personnel who can assist with the situation,” he instructed.

{You are connected} Nova replied, linking Aron to the fleet he had brought, the exploration fleet’s military forces, the Proximian temporary government’s military, the Proximian police, the Proximian fire department, and all Proximians who had opted for magic training. Despite being awakeners, not all had chosen to learn magic, preferring to focus on their individual interests.

The live stream, now with eight billion viewers, was also set to broadcast his communications.

“I won’t beat around the bush. I need everyone to work together to resolve this situation swiftly and minimize damage,” Aron began, addressing all the targetted personnel, as usual, keeping to his word of not beating around the bush from the start.

Chapter 687 FAFO 3

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“I won’t beat around the bush. I need everyone to work together to resolve this situation swiftly and minimize damage,” Aron began, addressing all the targeted personnel, as usual, keeping to his word of not beating around the bush from the start.

“For starters, let’s review what led us to this point when everything seemed cordial just moments ago,” Aron began rhetorically. Before anyone could respond, a video played, showing the two tree folks revealing their plans to kill and take over shortly before Aron had taken decisive action against them.

This revelation sent shivers down the spines of everyone watching, regardless of their power scale. None could match his speed and decisiveness, which was both awe-inspiring and intimidating.

“I understand that this video might seem abrupt and lacking context, but I won’t waste time elaborating on it right now. The full recording of the meeting will be released once we’ve dealt with the current situation,” Aron said, preemptively addressing any potential complaints from the Proximian side. He wasn’t concerned about his own side, as everyone present, barring the livestream viewers who couldn’t do anything anyway, were government employees.

“Now, for the Proximians, I understand that the sight of their actions might be daunting due to your respect for them or fear of their power. Let me assure you, I won’t be utilizing either your forces or mine to deal with them directly. Instead, I will handle it personally. What I need from you is to coordinate with the remaining three of your creators who are aligned with me to minimize the damage and ensure your safety. I don’t want their plans to cost you any more than necessary,” Aron said, addressing any fear or potential rebellion from the Proximians by clarifying his intentions and emphasizing their safety.

“You will receive...” Aron began, but he was interrupted by a sudden pause as he turned his head towards a distant point where the viewers could see nothing. “I was wondering why they weren’t revealing themselves,” he added, speaking in a lowered voice that was still audible to everyone.

“I don’t have much time, so I’ll be brief,” Aron said, concluding his address. “Every government institution capable of assisting will receive detailed instructions on their tasks. I expect you to follow them precisely. I need to attend to other matters now.”

As he finished speaking, thousands of small dots became visible, converging from almost every direction towards his location.

The ships in the area swiftly picked up everyone on the ground, rising into space and positioning themselves at a safe distance from the unfolding situation. Only Aron and Rina remained on the planet.

Due to the change of the situation, Lee was being transported to the ship, tasked with protecting Ayaka, who would be delivered to her designated location by the vessel she was in.

“I’ll see you soon,” Rina said, her magic cycle manifesting near her stomach. With a trail of sonic booms, she took off into the distance. She was heading out to fulfill his request, ensuring that any locations attacked while Aron was occupied would have someone to handle the situation.

Aron let a small smile slip as he waved at Rina’s departing figure. The smile quickly faded as he turned his attention back to his approaching guests.

“How many are they?” Aron asked, slightly surprised. While he anticipated that they might split their consciousness into multiple humanoid forms, he had expected no more than a hundred or, at most, a thousand each. Seeing over two thousand approaching him was far beyond his expectations. (there are two enemies)

{Currently, there are five thousand of them. But I don't think they're bringing everything they have from the start if they believe they can handle you with just this force. There are likely more where that came from,} Nova informed him, reminding him to stay focused.

“I know, I know. Communicate with the remaining tree folks and gather as much information as you can about how I can handle them, keeping the system's requirements in mind,” Aron instructed, with the last part relayed mentally. Aware that he was being watched live by nearly the entire empire, he decided to use this opportunity to demonstrate his full capabilities, sending a warning to those who previously only saw his military and thought that only that art about him was powerful.

As he spoke, his shoes, socks, coat, waistcoat, and tie began to liquefy and flow toward his right hand. The nanomachines converged, forming a single-edged sword with a cyberpunk aesthetic, perfectly designed for cutting through wood.

“You’re making things harder for yourselves. Do you really think there’s a scenario where you come out as the winners?” about a hundred of the five thousand hovering soldiers spoke in unison.

“I should be the one asking you about the version of the information you’ve collected from both your people and mine. Did you ever see yourself winning?” Aron asked, engaging in the conversation. He saw no harm in speaking, as the longer it went on, the more benefits he gained. This delay worked in his favor since the other side had all the time to prepare.

While Aron was speaking, Nova tagged the hundred humanoids who spoke in unison. She pinged them with a single color, marking them as controlled by one of the two tree folks.

“You seem to have forgotten that there is a six-month buffer between us and your so-called formidable military that is still in construction, and currently, you’ve only brought about a million with you. One of us should be enough to deal with you,” another group of humanoids spoke in unison. “That’s why I’m wondering why those three betrayed us.”

As they spoke, Nova quickly tagged this new group with the same color as the first batch, noting the speaking patterns and recognizing some from the previous group.

“HAHAHAHAHA!” Aron couldn’t help but laugh at the statement and the naivety of the two tree folks.

His laughter seemed to irritate them. They immediately activated their magic cycles and launched a coordinated attack.

BOOOOOOOOOOM

Chapter 688 FAFO 4

Aron stood unmoving as his shield effortlessly tanked the barrage of attacks—fireballs, wind slashes, earth spears, magic missiles, and lightning bolts—all basic but potent spells.

Despite the shield's ease in absorbing the hits, the surrounding landscape bore the brunt of the onslaught, with the damage inflicted on his surroundings telling a very different story.

The fireballs, each the size of a bowling ball, detonated against the shield, leaving behind craters several meters wide, some with glassy reflections at their centers from the intense heat. And that was just the beginning—other attacks gouged the ground, leaving deep fissures and scorched earth, revealing the true power behind the seemingly basic spells.

"Each of them should be at the level of the strongest known awakeners," Aron mused, assessing the power of their attacks as the first barrage subsided. He hadn't just tanked the attacks for the sake of it; he was using this initial round to gauge how much mana each strike drained from his reserves, allowing him to determine the strength of each humanoid's assault accurately.

"Time to get to work," Aron said, shrinking the shield until it was skintight and then immediately springing into action.

He vanished in an instant, and by the time the sonic boom of his movements echoed through the air, seventeen of the nearest humanoids had already collapsed to the ground. Some of their bodies were engulfed in flames, others frozen solid, but all shared a common fate: each had been sliced into at least seven pieces.

As the remaining humanoids quickly spread out, they continued their barrage of attacks, each one more desperate than the last.

"Futile attempts," a few of the humanoids taunted, their voices carrying a forced calmness. "No matter what you do, you won't be able to take down all of us. We brought more than enough to overwhelm you, and anything you've destroyed can be replaced."

Despite their confident words, the tree folk controlling them were beginning to feel the weight of doubt. Though the situation still appeared to be in their favor, and they remained convinced of their eventual victory, they were now forced to consider the possibility of losing more than they had originally anticipated. Their calm façade was cracking, revealing the underlying tension as they watched Aron slice through their forces with unnerving precision.

What gave them pause was seeing Aron effortlessly slice through the first seventeen humanoids, despite the fact that they were shielded at maximum strength. It was as if those powerful shields were nothing more than paper to him. Even more troubling was the realization that their humanoids couldn't keep up with Aron's speed.

This forced the tree folks to take action, using their main consciousness to guide the humanoids' attacks.

Yet, even with their intervention, the humanoids still had limitations, and despite their increase in awareness compared to previously, Aron was quick enough to evade and counter every strike, proving that their efforts were still not enough to stop him.

What stunned them was that Aron was relying on magic for his incredible speed, while he used his sword and raw physical strength for the attacks.

They could tell that he wasn't using magic for the cuts themselves because the mana fluctuations in his surroundings only spiked when he ignited the pieces to prevent the humanoids from healing. This clear distinction highlighted just how formidable his physical prowess was in addition to his magical capabilities.

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"Any chance of figuring out how his magic system works?" Mangrove's main consciousness asked Oak after failing to decipher it on his own.

"I think he's created a system unique to himself," Oak replied. This realization had also intrigued him. The magic system Aron was using was entirely different from anything their children or even the imperial personnel employed.

This unfamiliarity meant they could only react to Aron's actions after they occurred, making it difficult for their humanoids in the meeting to anticipate or counter his moves. The unpredictability of Aron's system rendered their attempts to respond effectively nearly impossible.

"It doesn't matter anyway; we can study his system after we deal with him," Oak said. "I only need about ten minutes to be ready to start the next plan. What about you?"

"About the same amount of time," Mangrove replied, his senses still focused on Aron, who was tirelessly engaging their humanoids. "It seems he believes he can handle us alone—what a fool. But why haven't the other three made a move?"

"Perhaps they've chosen to stay neutral, waiting to join whichever side emerges victorious," Oak speculated, returning to his task.

"Cowards," Mangrove said.

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"Nova, any update on the information gathering?" Aron asked while slicing through his four hundredth humanoid.

{They are still answering some questions. Do you want me to wait until they finish all of them, or provide you with the information as it comes in?} Nova replied.

"Give me what you have so far, and continue to update me with new information as it comes in. I don't have time to waste; they might be planning something more. This can't be even half of what they're capable of."

{Here's what we've gathered so far: The so-called Timeless Meadow is where they gather mana, meaning their actual consciousnesses are spread far apart from each other.

Their bodies are structured with layers of roots, categorized into outer roots, inner roots, and core roots. The strength and number of humanoids they can create depend on which root is used.

The more powerful the root, the fewer humanoids they can create at once, as there's a limit to how many times they can split their consciousness.

The outer roots are the weakest, and the humanoids you're fighting are from this layer.

Additionally, they can use magic through their actual bodies, which would be stronger than what the current humanoids are using. We don't yet understand why they're not using their actual bodies to deal with you.....}

Upon hearing the last part of her explanation, Aron paused and said, "Ask if the humanoids need to be controlled by the main consciousness or if they can act independently," as he grabbed a humanoid and used it as a shield against an incoming lightning bolt.

{She said that the humanoids can act independently. But, they can also shift their focus to directly control the humanoids with their main consciousness.}

"They must be planning something," Aron said as he processed the information.

"Find out where the core roots of the two are located," he instructed, preparing his sword.

As he held the sword with both hands and swung it in a horizontal, circular motion, he declared, "Severance."

Before the humanoids could react or question his unusual movements, all those at his altitude were sliced in half.

Chapter 689 FAFO 5

As thousands of humanoids fell, Aron remained in place and continued his assault. Without pausing, he swung his sword again, targeting those at varying distances from him. No matter where they were, each swing resulted in the humanoids being sliced in half. Within thirty seconds, all the humanoids had been severed and were plummeting to the ground. Although they weren't dead yet, they lay on the ground, struggling to regenerate.

Only then did Aron lower his hands, small beads of sweat trickling down his forehead. The exertion of his effort had clearly taken a slight toll on him.

He achieved this by applying a shield rune to his sword and adjusting it to be as thin as possible while extending its length. This transformation turned the shield into a long, versatile blade that he could control with precision.

Aron's deep understanding of runes, gained from his basic and intermediate runes bought from the system, allowed him to modify and adapt them to his needs.

Thanks to the practice done by his clones, he could use this capability swiftly, even amidst the intense battle.

He descended until he was just a few meters above the heavily damaged ground and extended his hand toward the thousands of regenerating humanoids, including those he had already defeated. A shield enveloped them all before he ignited them once more, reducing them to ashes.

{Although there are roots underground, the majority of their core roots are under the ocean about 500 km from here,} Nova relayed, along with an augmented map for him to follow.

Without acknowledging the message, Aron shot off in the direction of the nearest sea at full speed. As he flew, he activated stealth, vanishing from both the live stream and sensors, continuing his journey without any observers.

He reached the ocean in 20 seconds but continued for another 10 seconds, covering a distance of approximately 510 kilometers at Mach 50.

Hovering above the ocean, he quickly conjured a new shield in the form of a 50-meter-wide cylinder. He began extending its height downward into the ocean, and it continued to grow until it reached the ocean floor, exposing the roots beneath. Without hesitation, he leaped into the cylinder, flying into the ocean's depths.

As he descended, Aron was acutely aware of the ticking clock. Despite his stealth spell rendering him undetectable, his actions weren't entirely invisible. Just as a cupboard's movement could be seen even if it was silent, his activities could still be noticed despite his invisibility.

Upon reaching the ocean floor, Aron wasted no time and began to cut through the roots. However, before he could complete his swing, a whipping sound was heard, followed by a sonic boom and a series of loud bangs. The area cleared, revealing Aron, now swordless, zigzagging upwards while being struck repeatedly by a powerful whip, clearly feeling the brunt of a devastating attack.

"Damn, that was close," Aron muttered, coughing as he deactivated the cylinder shield and ascended from the ocean.

"Looks like you lost your little weapon," a voice echoed, taunting him as he hovered about a kilometer above the water, scanning for any approaching roots.

Focusing on his heightened senses, Aron detected a different kind of pressure from another humanoid. Shortly after, it emerged from the ocean, revealing itself to be holding the sword Aron had dropped during the attack.

"You seem to have grown arrogant, thinking you could handle our core roots directly after dealing with the humanoids made from our outer roots," the humanoid taunted. As he spoke, his hand expanded to envelop the sword, then compressed with immense force, shattering the weapon into fragments. He then casually tossed the broken pieces back into the ocean, all the while locking eyes with Aron, gauging his reaction.

Aron frowned slightly, his expression hardening as he replied, "Are you finally ready to face me seriously now?"

"You seem to believe you can still handle me," the humanoid said, pausing dramatically before adding, "Then let me show you the difference between us."

As he finished speaking, a colossal magic cycle activated, spanning several kilometers. The massive shield materialized instantly, encircling Aron and leaving him no room to escape.

“You seem to feel invincible with your capabilities, but let’s see how you fare without mana,” the humanoid declared as it began to absorb the surrounding mana.

Aron immediately attacked the shield with everything he had, desperately trying to break free. His efforts were relentless, but the shield held firm.

“Yes, struggle, struggle like the insignificant insect you are,” the humanoid taunted while not even attempting to interfere. “You should be grateful, honored even, to have your body deemed worthy of housing our consciousness. And yet, you dare to fight against us?”

As the humanoid spoke, the mana within the shield continued dwindling, and they dwindled to dangerously low levels, making his attempts to escape even more futile.

As the mana continued to be absorbed, Aron’s attacks grew weaker until the runes outside of his shield deactivated, unable to sustain their function without the necessary mana in its surroundings.

With his options dwindling, Aron descended slowly to the floor of the shield, finally taking a seat, his expression a mix of determination and resignation.

“It seems you were wise to replenish the mana within your shield before everything was absorbed,” the humanoid continued, its voice dripping with arrogance. “But now, I can either wait for the mana to deplete from your shield or attack it, forcing it to use up what little energy remains.” he paused for a moment, relishing the look of despair on Aron’s face before he said, “Yet, I am merciful. I promise a painless end if you deactivate the shield.”

Aron, visibly devastated, covered his face with his hands, his posture conveying deep disappointment and frustration at the situation.

Or at least, that was the appearance from the humanoid's perspective. However, for Nova, who was closely monitoring Aron through the nanomachines embedded in his clothes, the truth was different. She saw a brief, fleeting smile on his face—one that lasted only a nanosecond before disappearing, unnoticed by everyone else.

Chapter 690 FAFO 6

While the humanoid was waiting for Aron to sink deeper into despair, Rina was also facing her own set of challenges.

After leaving Aron, Rina had headed to the opposite side of the planet. Now, she hovered a few kilometers above the surface, receiving constant updates from Nova about the situation from the information being summarized by her, but gathered from every sensor on and outside the planet.

She was on high alert, prepared for anything. Her clothes had already transformed into armor, opting for defense instead of a weapon like Aron, as she didn’t possess his level of durability.

{You have an approaching guest,} Nova warned as soon as she detected a humanoid closing in on Rina's position.

Rina didn't flinch as the humanoid approached, hostility evident in its movements. Her stillness wasn't born of arrogance or ignorance of what Aron was facing; it was rooted in confidence in the situation.

Seeing her lack of reaction, the humanoid dropped its hostility momentarily and said, "It seems you're already aware of what's happening to your husband and have decided to make things easier for us. A wise choice. For that, I'll make it painless for you." Without waiting for a response, the humanoid surged forward at high speed, its right hand expanding like a blooming flower as it aimed directly for her head.

Just meters away from Rina, the humanoid suddenly froze as a sharp ****zzzzzt**** filled the air. Before it could react, it was ensnared by mana ropes crackling with lightning, sending powerful shocks through its body and momentarily paralyzing its movements. That brief pause was all Rina needed.

A fire whip materialized from thin air, lashing around the humanoid and attempting to sear through its body. However, the humanoid's form, crafted from a core root, displayed remarkable resilience. The flames licked at its flesh, but rapid regeneration allowed it to resist being consumed.

Yet, the relentless assault continued. Rina's attacks came from every direction, trying to overpower the humanoid's regenerative capabilities through sheer force. But despite the onslaught, the humanoid managed to hold on, its regenerative abilities keeping it intact against the barrage.

"Your attempts are quite futile, and I'm going to make you regret even thinking of it," the humanoid snarled, though the anger in its voice was betrayed by the fact that it was still tightly bound by Rina's mana ropes.

Rina remained silent, unfazed by the threats. She knew the limits of her mana ropes—how much energy they could handle before breaking. But she could also tell that the humanoid was nearing the rope's breaking point, its bravado merely a tactic to buy time.

The silence between them might have suggested that Rina was waiting for the humanoid's next move, but she wasn't one to make such a foolish mistake. Just as she was about to act, the humanoid shattered the mana ropes, lunging at her with deadly intent, planning to kill her and claim her body for reconstruction, just as they had done to Lee.

BAM!!! The sound echoed sharply as the humanoid's punch was abruptly halted, coming to a stop mere meters from Rina. The force behind the attack was palpable, but something had stopped it cold, leaving the humanoid stunned and confused.

The humanoid looked around in surprise, perplexed by the invisible force stopping its punch. It couldn't sense anything unusual in its surroundings, but it needed to confirm that its punch hadn't simply been halted by air molecules in the air due to his fast punching speed.

BAM!!! BAM!!! BAM!!! BAM!!! BAM!!! BAM!!! BAM!!!

The humanoid continued throwing punches in different directions, only to encounter the same frustrating results. Each time, its fist either met an unseen barrier or, in some cases, passed through

only to be blocked as it tried to move forward. The invisible walls surrounded it, confining its movements and leaving it bewildered by the unexpected resistance.

"Doing the same thing and expecting different results is the definition of insanity," Rina finally spoke, her voice calm and collected as she addressed the humanoid for the first time since their confrontation began just seconds ago.

"What did you just do?" the humanoid demanded, its voice laced with anger. Although it didn't expect an answer, it couldn't help but replay the events in its mind, searching for clues.

The humanoid recalled that each of her attacks had appeared out of nowhere, with no visible magic circles or even the strange magic system used by the currently imprisoned little emperor. It began piecing things together.

"Stealth," the humanoid muttered, deducing that it was the most likely explanation for what had happened. "But there would need to be two different magic circles—one to hide the other from being seen or sensed. But I don't think my senses are dull enough to miss something like that."

The humanoid's frustration grew as it continued to puzzle over how Rina had managed to conceal her attacks and movements so effectively, leaving it unsure of its next move.

Rina felt a deep sense of satisfaction as her years of hard work and rigorous training began to pay off. Her deep understanding of mana, combined with the extensive knowledge she had assimilated from Aron and countless hours spent in simulations, had allowed her to refine her magic system.

She had now mastered the ability to merge multiple magic cycle properties into a single cycle, activating them as one cycle.

Currently, she could combine up to five different cycles into one cycle and the humanoid was experiencing the result of this advanced technique.

The spell in question was an intricate amalgamation of five magic cycles: a shield cycle, a stealth cycle, an absorption cycle, an energy conversion cycle, and a mana cycle.

This complex combination together with the attacks that delayed the humanoid at the start had been prepared before the humanoid's arrival and rendered nearly invincible, thanks to their stealth properties.

The shield cycle generated two layers of invisible shields. When one was struck, the absorption properties took in the impact, which was then transferred to the energy conversion properties before the shield reached its maximum tolerance and breaks, the absorbed force was then converted into mana, albeit with significant inefficiency.

This mana was then utilized by the mana cycle to maintain the magic's integrity, supplemented by ambient mana from the surroundings.

Her most notable achievement was the conversion mana cycle, a concept she had personally developed by studying Aron's runic conversion techniques. With the help of Aron's magic training partners and the ability to see things in deeper details within the universal simulations.

She had spent at least twenty years in VR to create this cycle and although still rudimentary and inefficient, it represented a significant leap forward in her magical capabilities.

Rina had hoped to further refine this cycle with the assistance of the tree folks, but their betrayal had complicated her plans.