

## Tech System 711

### Chapter 711 The Fifth Imperial Council Meeting II

As Aron settled into his seat, the sound of applause filled the council chamber. The ministers and councilors rose to their feet in unison, clapping enthusiastically in recognition of the emperor's speech.

Gaia, maintaining her usual composed demeanor, raised her hand, motioning for silence. Gradually, the applause quieted, and the chamber returned to its calm, formal atmosphere.

{Thank you, everyone,} Gaia said, her voice gentle but commanding. {Now, we'll begin with the first item on the agenda. The Imperial Health Agency. Councilor Ross, the floor is yours.}

A podium was elevated in front of Councilor Nathan Ross, who then rose from his seat to present his agency's progress report. "Having successfully established a solution for maintaining the health of our citizens, our agency has transitioned its focus. We are now concentrating on researching the distinctions between humans and Proximians, aiming to leverage these differences to enhance the well-being of all races within the empire."

He got straight to the point without any pleasantries, as Gaia had made it clear during the first council meeting that the emperor preferred directness and efficiency. Councilor Ross, being the first to experience this directive, adhered to the practice from the very beginning.

"This research has the potential to unlock a deeper understanding of interspecies health and adaptability, ensuring that the health standards we've set extend to every individual in the empire, regardless of origin."

Our research in these areas has yielded significant advancements, with several minor but positive outcomes already achieved. However, we anticipate that it will take a few more years to realize major results. We are proceeding cautiously to ensure that any beneficial findings are implemented safely, with no harm coming to our citizens as a result of our research."

"Additionally, we have made substantial progress on the project initiated at the beginning of the empire, which involves the collaboration with other agencies to gather DNA samples of all remaining Earth flora and fauna. We have successfully reintroduced over 73 percent of the previously extinct species and increased the populations of species that were on the brink of extinction. We anticipate completing this project by the end of the first decade of the empire."

He paused briefly to catch his breath and transition to the next topic of his report.

"We have also been collaborating with our Proximian counterparts to introduce genetically modified species designed to thrive in the environment of Proxima Centauri B. This initiative aims to create a self-sustaining ecosystem on the planet and prevent damage to its developing environment. The implementation of this project is progressing well, but as the effects take time to manifest, we are currently

distributing these species across various locations and closely monitoring their interactions with the environment.”

His report on the work they were doing in proxima continued for about twenty minutes before he wrapped it up, saying, “As always, all information has been made available in the Akashic Record for those interested in the details of our work so far and the plans for the work we’ll be doing in the future. That’s all from my agency, thank you, everyone, for your time.”

He sat back down in his chair and the podium in front of him melted back into the table.

{Next in line is Councilor Bauer of the Imperial Environmental Agency. Please deliver your report, councilor,} Gaia shortly moved on after a small round of applause for Councilor Nathan's report.

Councilor Greg Bauer rose and immediately dove into his report, wasting no time on meaningless pleasantries that served no purpose but to waste time and lower efficiency.

“The Imperial Environmental Agency’s efforts to reverse the damage from global warming since the industrial revolutions have been progressing positively, with only a few minor issues arising. We have successfully removed over 95 percent of harmful greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and nearly achieved the same level of cleanup for the oceans. Although we have met our target, the process was delayed by two years due to increased greenhouse gas emissions during the construction of fortress cities and the destruction and reconstruction of earlier urban areas.”

“Thanks to the monopolization of material production by Hephaestus Industries and Manufacturing, which operates predominantly in outer space, and the implementation of carbon-neutral fuels across various industries on Earth, I’m pleased to report that we have successfully met our goal. We are now producing fewer greenhouse gases than we can absorb with our atmospheric absorbers and the natural vegetation on the planet.”

Councilor Bauer continued for about ten more minutes, detailing the progress made in reversing the environmental damage inflicted on Earth since the Industrial Revolution. His report primarily focused on Earth’s recovery efforts, given that the majority of their work remained on the home planet.

The Imperial Environmental Agency’s involvement with Proxima Centauri B was relatively minor at this stage, as the atmosphere there had not yet suffered significant damage. A majority of their role on Proxima Centauri B mainly involved collaborating with the Health Agency to monitor the introduction of new species and their impact on the planet’s ecosystem.

“That’s all from my agency. Thank you for your attention.” He said once he was done delivering his report before returning to take his seat in order to allow for the next person to start delivering their report.

Gaia efficiently called upon the next counselor without delay, ensuring the meeting proceeded smoothly.

One by one, the agency heads rose to deliver their reports, each providing updates on their respective projects. The session continued without breaks or significant pauses, a testament to the gravity of the occasion and the presence of the emperor.

Aron's expression remained impassive, his attention unwavering throughout the lengthy council session.

The same could be said for his younger brother, Henry, who, despite his usual tendencies toward laziness, displayed a notable shift in demeanor. Understanding the gravity of the situation, he set aside his typical reluctance and remained resolute throughout the meeting. His genetic enhancements, coupled with the meeting being in a VR environment, enabled him to maintain a high level of concentration from the start of the session.

### Chapter 712 The Fifth Imperial Council Meeting III

The reporting proceeded swiftly, with many agencies delivering concise updates. As most of these agencies operated on a day-to-day basis, they had few long-term projects to discuss. Some had already achieved their major objectives, allowing them to keep their reports brief. In under five minutes, many agency heads summarized their current progress before yielding the floor to the next speaker, maintaining the meeting's steady pace.

There was no shame in delivering brief reports, as it was far more detrimental to drag out presentations with unnecessary details. The agencies with fewer ongoing projects understood that efficiency was key, especially in the presence of the emperor.

Everyone in the room was acutely aware that attempting to prolong a report without substance would not only fail to impress but could lead to swift repercussions.

The emperor's keen insight into such matters meant that any attempt to waste time would likely result in immediate replacement.

After about six hours of continuous reporting, Gaia finally called for a break, allowing everyone to refresh and return in top condition for the upcoming reports. Only the juggernaut agencies remained: the Imperial Treasury Agency, Imperial Justice Agency, Imperial Works Agency, Imperial Police Agency, and a few others. Along with them, the ministers of exterior, interior, and war were still to deliver their updates.

The Tourist, head of the Imperial Intelligence Agency—Nyx's most trusted subordinate, as trustful as an AI can be—was present as usual but, true to form, would not be delivering a report.

After an hour-long break, the meeting resumed, starting with the head of the Imperial Treasury Agency. The atmosphere in the chamber shifted slightly, as the reports from the larger agencies were expected to be carrying a powerful punch, reflecting their critical role in maintaining the empire's core functions.

The head of the Imperial Treasury Agency wasted no time as he rose to deliver his report, diving straight into the core of the matter. "The fiscal budget for the next year has been drafted and is pending final approval from His Imperial Majesty. As always, the detailed breakdown will be available in the Akashic Record after this meeting, but I'll provide a concise overview now.

"Our projected total expenditure for the upcoming year stands at eighty trillion Earth New Dollars. Of that, fifty trillion is allocated to public defense. As per tradition, the imperial family will bear seventy percent of this burden, a commitment they've consistently upheld."

As the head of the Imperial Treasury Agency announced the figures, there was a collective intake of breath from the audience watching across the empire. While it was no surprise that the budget had always been in the trillions since the empire's founding, the sheer scale of the military expenditure always drew attention.

It was well understood that the imperial family, specifically the emperor, personally covered seventy percent of this vast defense budget. In exchange for shouldering such a massive portion, the imperial family held complete control over the military. This arrangement left no room for dissent, as the public only contributed a small fraction of the defense budget, essentially paying for their own protection—a system that had been enshrined in the constitution from the empire's inception.

The staggering amount the emperor had already invested—over a hundred trillion of his personal wealth—into the military was mind-boggling to many, even if the people had grown accustomed to the empire's massive budgets. However, the shock was somewhat tempered when they were informed that this vast sum wasn't simply handed over to the military but instead funneled into research, development, and production carried out by the emperor's personal companies. The resulting advanced technology and equipment were then transferred to the military, ensuring the empire had the best tools available, especially after the incorporation of the Proximians, which had doubled the military's needs.

Yet, this was not a one-sided arrangement that only benefited the empire. The imperial family was rewarded for their financial contributions with the right to claim ownership of up to forty percent of any star system or resources the empire discovered. This ownership gave them control over a significant portion of the empire's future wealth, a balance that allowed them to recoup their investments when the time came for expansion. However, since the empire had yet to begin its expansion into new star systems, the emperor's massive expenditures remained an initial investment in what was hoped to be an incredibly lucrative future.

When people first learned of the emperor's right to claim up to forty percent of future star systems and resources, there was a wave of dissatisfaction. Many questioned why the imperial family should own such a significant portion of something that hadn't even been discovered yet. However, the discontent quickly dissipated once they considered the alternative.

They realized they had two choices: either let the emperor fund the military and expansion efforts, in exchange for future ownership rights over resources no one yet possessed, or face the burden of funding it themselves through increased taxes. Faced with the prospect of higher taxes, the decision became clear. Complaining about something they didn't own, which was years away from being relevant, seemed counterproductive when the alternative meant immediate financial strain on the citizens. Thus, the majority accepted the arrangement, preferring to leave the financial burden on the emperor rather than their own pockets.

He continued, "Due to our spending remaining consistent despite the ongoing economic growth, we anticipate entering our third year of budgetary surplus. As in previous years, this surplus will be deposited into the imperial treasury."

These funds will be reserved for use in emergencies or when the empire requires an immediate increase in expenditure.”

One of the significant advantages of having government expenses overseen by an AI with access to an entire quantum supercluster is the elimination of unnecessary expenditures. The AI system resolved many of the inefficiencies that plagued large institutions in the past. As a result, the empire is enjoying its third consecutive year of budgetary surplus while having already cleared all the debt incurred during the empire's foundation.

This efficiency is further supported by the elimination of the outdated practice where agencies were compelled to spend their entire budget to avoid potential reductions in the following year. Such practices often led to wasteful spending. With the new system, agencies are able to use their funds more effectively, contributing to the empire’s overall fiscal health.

“While there have been numerous requests to lower taxes due to the ongoing surplus, we are not inclined to do so. Our current tax rates are already the lowest they have been in human history. Just as we did not increase taxes during periods of budgetary deficit, we believe in maintaining a stable tax rate during times of surplus as well.”

He continued for the next fifteen minutes, summarizing the budget allocations for various agencies and outlining their plans to ensure the economy continues its upward trajectory. After concluding his summary, he took his seat, signaling that it was time for the next agency to present their report.

{Next agency on the docket is the Imperial Blessings Agency. Councilor Ross, the floor is yours,} Gaia announced.

#### Chapter 713 The Fifth Imperial Council Meeting IV

Councilor Ross's report followed the usual pattern but highlighted a notable development: the percentage of awakened individuals among humans had increased from the initial two percent to ten percent. This was a significant rise, reflecting the raising in the age of people who were awakening due to the continual increase of mana density in the planet's atmosphere.

In contrast, all Proximians had been awakeners from the outset, so their numbers remained constant.

Ross also addressed the decline in unsanctioned vigilantism. The numbers had consistently dropped as the empire took a firm stance against such activities. The government had made examples of those who attempted to engage in vigilante actions, reinforcing the rule of law and ensuring that such behavior was deterred effectively.

Councilor Ross then shifted to discussing the advancements made in the study and application of mana. He expressed his gratitude to the Empress and the tree folks, acknowledging their critical contributions to the research and discovery of new mana applications. Their insights and collaboration had been instrumental in the progress they achieved.

With that, Ross concluded his report, taking his seat as the fifteen-minute presentation came to an end.

As the reports from the remaining agencies concluded, attention turned to John, who was to deliver the final report. His was the most anticipated presentation, as it concerned the impending arrival of the Visitors—an event that had long been the focus of the empire's preparations and discussions.

John, clad in his distinguished military uniform, stood up, commanding attention with his presence. His uniform, more ornate than the usual suits worn by other council members, symbolized the gravity of his position and the information he was about to share. As the final report of the council meeting, his address was expected to carry significant weight.

The major ministries—the Ministry of Interior, Exterior, and War—typically did not present reports at every council meeting. Their updates were generally infrequent, with the Ministry of Exterior only reporting when new discoveries were made, such as the findings of the exploration fleet's findings in the previous year.

John's authoritative voice cut through the silence, commanding the attention of everyone present. “Thank you,” he began, his tone reflecting the gravitas of his position. “As this is my first time reporting at a council meeting, my report will be comprehensive, covering our activities since the foundation of the empire before detailing our preparations for the approaching Visitors.”

He continued, “Currently, the imperial military boasts a force of five hundred twenty-five million active personnel. All have completed their training, are fully equipped, and are ready for deployment in any situation that might demand imperial military intervention.”

John paused briefly, giving the audience a moment to process the significant number and its implications.

The revelation of a half-billion-strong military force was awe-inspiring and intimidating. The sheer scale of this number dwarfed the populations of most pre-empire countries, highlighting the colossal investment of resources into the military.

Of the trillions spent, a significant portion—around a quarter—was allocated to salaries and amenities for the troops. The empire ensured that military personnel were well-cared for, providing them with housing, free public transportation, and other benefits. This generous treatment was justified by their crucial role as the first line of defense against any potential threats to humanity and the empire. Their well-being and readiness were seen as essential to maintaining the security and stability of the empire.

John continued, his voice steady and commanding, “With the integration of the Proximians into our ranks, we’ve exceeded our initial projections for military expansion, achieving our decade-long target within just five years. This accomplishment not only fulfills the emperor's promise but surpasses it by more than double.

Regarding our armament capabilities, we are well-positioned to confront civilizations ranging from 0.15 to 0.75 on the Kardashev scale with confidence. This enables us to effectively engage and potentially overcome any civilization of this scale in a direct conflict. Additionally, we are equipped to sustain a prolonged engagement with civilizations rated between 1.0 and 1.5 on the Kardashev scale, which aligns with the expected level of the incoming visitors.

In terms of defensive strategies, we have the capacity to withstand an assault from a level 2 civilization, allowing us to buy critical time to develop targeted technological advancements to counter such forces.

For security purposes, the two star systems currently under our control have sufficient defensive forces to act as a buffer against any unforeseen threats from beyond our current understanding.

It is important to note that these assessments are based on simulations and theoretical models. The results reflect the minimum outcomes from these simulations, considering the limitations of our current knowledge. The actual effectiveness may vary depending on the technological capabilities of any adversaries we might encounter.” Once again he paused to allow the transition to be more smooth.

John then continued, seamlessly transitioning to the next point, “In preparation for the impending arrival of the visitors, we have conducted millions of simulations to devise potential methods for establishing communication with them. A small fleet of stealth ships has already been dispatched to the anticipated location of their arrival. These ships are tasked with initiating contact, in collaboration with the Ministry of Exterior, and gathering additional intelligence should the situation take a turn for the worse.

Furthermore, we have a fully equipped fleet on standby, ready to deploy should the worst-case scenario occur, such as an attack on our envoys. While this may seem like an extreme measure, the Ministry of War's role is to ensure that we are prepared for every possible outcome, including those beyond our immediate control.

We are confident that we are prepared for any scenario within the realm of our current projections and have also accounted for contingencies involving forces potentially exceeding our initial estimates of their capabilities. With these measures in place, we stand ready to address any challenges that may arise.

John concluded, “That is all I can disclose for now. We must also maintain a level of ambiguity in our information, as there is a risk that the visitors could potentially tap into our communications. Given that we have yet to gather substantial intelligence about them, it's prudent to keep certain details confidential. Thank you.”

John took a final breath and nodded towards the council, signaling the end of his report. He then resumed his seat, the podium retracting back into its original form as the chamber remained in a tense but focused silence.

Gaia promptly took over, guiding the council meeting towards its conclusion. She reviewed the key points discussed and asked if there were any questions or comments from the attendees before officially closing the meeting.

## Chapter 714 Arrival

In the silent darkness of space, if one focused on a specific point with utmost precision, they might notice the faintest distortion in the light—a subtle bending, almost imperceptible to the naked eye. It resembled the phenomenon of gravitational lensing, where light curves around a massive object. Yet, this was no ordinary lensing effect. Only the most sensitive instruments, positioned in close proximity, could detect the anomaly within the vast emptiness of the void.

But that subtle light distortion would go unnoticed by most, as something far more conspicuous dominated the scene. A ship, large and unmistakable, coasted through space, its presence impossible to miss. It made no effort to conceal itself, traveling at sub-light speed in the same direction as the mysterious blobs that bent light around them. Its open, steady approach seemed to signal a lack of

ill intent, as if the ship's very demeanor was an attempt to assure any observers that it posed no immediate threat.

"Okay, let's start gearing up for our meeting," said Baraka as he rose from his chair in the ship's canteen, his voice steady but commanding. Without hesitation, he headed toward the assigned armory.

"Yes, sir," his team members replied in unison, quickly abandoning their meals. They followed Baraka into the armory, a room not far from where they had been sitting. Inside, the crew began suiting up in their power armor, the rhythmic sounds of gear locking into place filling the room. Despite being hours away from their destination, the team prepared with practiced precision, understanding the need to be ready long before the moment arrived.

With all the power armor and suiting equipment aligned neatly on the right side of the armory room, the team finished suiting up and moved to the left wall, which had opened to reveal an array of weapons. Each weapon was carefully placed in racks marked with their corresponding owners and specialties.

"Why are we still using these?" one soldier asked, grabbing his weapon from the rack, his tone slightly incredulous. "I'm pretty sure we have new weapons a few generations ahead of these."

Baraka, the team leader, finished securing his own weapon and glanced over. "In case things go south and they manage to get their hands on our weapons, we want them thinking this is the best we've got," he explained calmly. "Let them underestimate us. It works to our advantage. Besides, these are more than enough to handle any carbon-based lifeforms."

After he said that he put on his headgear, and it seamlessly integrated with the rest of his suit, creating a fully self-contained environment. The faint hum of the suit's systems activating filled the room as the rest of the team followed suit, preparing for whatever awaited them.

"Based on the countermeasures they put in our ship, giving us the latest weapons should be the least of their worries," the soldier muttered, recalling the debriefing about the extensive precautions taken. The leadership had been so cautious that even he found it bordering on paranoia. The ship they were on had technology at least fifty generations behind, and the engines were designed to prevent faster-than-light travel. They didn't even want the possibility of advanced tech falling into the wrong hands.

On top of that, the crew was exclusively human, a deliberate move to conceal the existence of new species—something that might provoke conflict just by being revealed.

"They're just hoping for the best and preparing for the worst," Baraka replied, his tone steady. "They know Murphy's Law is always lurking around the corner. That's why they're not leaving anything to chance."

The team finished securing their weapons and putting on their headgear. As Baraka gave the order, "Okay, let's move out and meet our communication team. We're in operation mode now," the atmosphere shifted instantly.

The playful banter evaporated, replaced by a sharp focus. It was as if a switch had been flipped—an ingrained response from their rigorous training, signaling that it was time to get serious.



The moment he said that the atmosphere in the room changed as all of their playfulness disappeared immediately as those words were like a trigger something ingrained in them during training for when they are in operations.

In disciplined silence, they moved out of the armory and headed to their assigned stations. Baraka led a small team directly to where the members of the Ministry of Exterior were located, ensuring everything was in order for the final checks before they headed to the Captain's room with them.

The mission was about to enter its critical phase, and there was no room for error.

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A few hours later.

As the ship drew closer to the object that had been steadily approaching their star system for the last half-decade, they reached the distance where they could use their visual equipment for a thorough inspection.

Without hesitation, the ship's captain initiated the activation of the visual observation systems as soon as they entered range. As the machinery came online the screens in the control room flickered to life, as they started to display their gathered real-time data and images, which would be the first time they visually saw it as in the past they could only clearly monitor and observe it through mana observers only due to distance.

“Now that is a different way to make ships,” the captain remarked, studying the images that were being updated for everyone aboard.

The ship's crew watched intently, absorbing every detail. The object before them was unlike anything they had seen: an enormous, oval-shaped vessel with an exterior covered in what appeared to be a rugged, stone-like surface. The texture resembled a pockmarked moon, suggesting it was designed to shield against space debris and impacts.

The surface was dotted with evenly spaced massive holes, from which fluctuating flames of varying intensities emitted. These seemed to be the vessel's engines, active despite being at rest and are currently in the vacuum of space.

They, the observers speculated whether the engines were in use to maintain position or to shield the engines themselves from potential impacts as they didn't have the protection the ships surface had, but these were just theories.

The captain focused on the mission at hand, “Bring us to a full stop,” he ordered.

The crew swiftly carried out the command, initiating the final deceleration process. The ship eased to a complete stop, the vibrations from the engines subsiding as they steadied themselves.

Taking a deep breath, the captain prepared for the next step, “Start sending the communication signals,” he instructed, bracing for the response that would follow.

Chapter 715 How to Comunicate with Alliens 101

Earth, CUBE.

In the expansive room atop the highest floor of the CUBE, Aron, Rina, Henry, his parents, her parents—his father recently released from prison a few months ago—the heads of the three

ministries, Sarah, Felix, the head of all agencies collaborating with ARES on first contact, were gathered.

Unlike their usual VR instances, everyone was physically present this time.

The same with Nova, Nyx, Gaia, and Athena who were attending in their nanomachine bodies, seated around the massive table with the others.

Despite their strong confidence in the security of the quantum network, they weren't willing to take the risk of being trapped in VR. The possibility of being imprisoned in a virtual space and used as leverage for an unfair agreement was not zero, especially when their lives, and not a random citizen's, were on the line. Such a decision, if made under duress, would be far harder to resist when they themselves were the targets.

As a result, Aron decided that all interactions related to the Visitors would be conducted face-to-face. The quantum network would serve only as a communication and monitoring tool. This approach was mirrored across the empire: everyone in VR was forcefully logged out, with access to VR suspended. Only AR and other non-VR functions were permitted. This precaution was implemented after a thorough explanation was given about the potential risks and the necessity of ensuring their security.

In front of them was a massive screen displaying various views and data from the ship. This was the only advanced piece of technology aboard, though its outer exterior still emitted some radio signals to maintain a facade. The room was filled with a tense mix of anxiety and excitement, as this was the moment they were initiating their first actual contact.

As they watched in silence, the audio of the command given by the ship's commander came through: "Start sending the communication signals."

This marked the point of no return, causing everyone in the room to take a deep breath. The next developments would determine their approach and interaction with the Visitors.

Amidst the ball of anxiety and silence in the room, Henry turned to his brother and asked, "Brother, how do we communicate with species that we don't even know how they look, how they talk, or what their language is?" Despite his whisper, almost everyone in the room heard the question due to their heightened senses.

"Good question," Aron replied, his eyes leaving the screen as he addressed his brother. "What needs to happen for two conflicting sides to reach an agreement?" he asked, using this approach to guide Henry's response.

"A common enemy risking both sides' bottom line?" Henry answered, unsure where Aron was going with the question but continuing with the flow knowing there was a reason behind it.

"Good, a common enemy," Aron said, "which means they now have something in common that brings them together. And here we are, using something common to both sides, something we both have regardless of the circumstances."

Before he could elaborate further, Henry asked, “What is it?” sensing that this was the next piece of the puzzle needed to reach Aron’s answer, as his brother often responded to such queries in his explanations.

“What is the most abundant element in the universe?” Aron asked, his smile unwavering.

Henry thought for a moment before responding, “There’s mana, but since our understanding of it is still limited, I’d say dark matter by mass and hydrogen by the number of atoms.”

“Exactly,” Aron said. “All of those are correct. However, we need something that doesn’t require special equipment to discover or interact with. That’s why we chose hydrogen, which makes up about ninety percent of all the atoms in the universe.”

“So how are we going to use that to communicate?” Henry asked, looking at Aron with curiosity.

“Watch closely,” Aron replied, extending his hand over the table. The nanomachines embedded in the table immediately activated, projecting a hologram to assist with his explanation.

“We’re utilizing the hyperfine transition of neutral hydrogen,” Aron began, as the hologram displayed a visual representation of the process. “This occurs when the electron in a hydrogen atom flips its spin relative to the proton. This flip causes a small release of energy, emitting a photon with a wavelength of 21 centimeters and a frequency of 1,420 megahertz.”

As Aron spoke, the hologram illustrated the transition and its associated wavelength, making it easier to grasp.

“This gives us three things,” Aron continued. “The first is the understanding of binary, which is fundamental. It’s something that any technologically advanced species should be able to comprehend. We’ll use the 21-centimeter wavelength as a representation of ‘1’ and the absence of this wavelength as ‘0’.

Once this binary system is established, we can determine a reference time and distance—0.7 nanoseconds which is equal to one full oscillation of the transition for time and 21 centimeters wavelength for distance.”

Henry watched intently, absorbing the information as the hologram showed how these principles fit together.

“With these three elements—time, distance, and binary systems—set as our standards, we can introduce mathematical concepts, a universal language that transcends species and civilizations to form a common ground that can bridge gaps in understanding, regardless of the differences in appearance or spoken languages which will eventually lead to establishing a common language,” Aron concluded.

“But won’t that take a long time?” Henry asked, having processed Aron’s explanation.

“If it were a direct exchange between species, yes, it would be quite time-consuming,” Aron acknowledged. “However, we’ll have our AI and their AI handle the initial communication. They can form a basic language between themselves, which we can then use as a bridge for communication with us. This process will be faster, provided they’re not hostile and don’t immediately launch an attack.”

Aron’s gaze shifted back to the massive screen, which displayed their ship sending out the same signal at regular intervals. The repetition was intentional, accounting for the time it would take for the Visitors to detect, capture, and begin interpreting the signal. This time frame could range from a few minutes to several days, depending on the sophistication of the Visitors’ technology.

Amidst the explanation, Felix, Sarah, Rina’s and Aron’s parents listened attentively. They had joined the meeting at Aron’s invitation and had not been briefed on the details beforehand. Despite their unfamiliarity with the specifics, they found the explanation fascinating and easy to understand even for those who were not very knowledgeable in the field of communicating with aliens.

“Now, how are you going to respond?” Aron asked in a low voice, tapping on the table as he refocused on the data streaming across the screen.

## Chapter 716 Speculation Amidst Silence

Outer space.

In the ship’s control room, an air of tense silence prevailed as they awaited a response from the other side.

Half an hour passed without a reply. Then an hour, three hours, and finally five hours went by with no indication of contact from the Visitors.

“Is it possible that our assumption about their understanding of binary was flawed, or are they simply ignoring us?” the captain wondered aloud, his concern growing with each minute of silence.

“Should we consider shifting to another means of communication?” the vice captain inquired, glancing at the captain as the waiting game continued.

The empire, known for its meticulous planning and preparation, always ensured they had multiple backup plans when dealing with significant situations like first contact with extraterrestrial civilizations. In this case, they had more than just one method of communication, anticipating the possibility that their initial approach might not be effective.

“Not yet. We will continue monitoring for three days, and if there’s no response by then, we’ll move to the next step,” the captain said before refocusing on the data collected by the ship’s sensors.

As he reviewed the information, he paid particular attention to one detail: the active engines, specifically those facing their side. These engines emitted a small amount of mana, indicating that they were either partially or fully powered by mana.

Additionally, since visual monitoring began, none of the engines had been turned off. Instead, their intensities had fluctuated, which negated the initial assumption that the engines were there to protect against potential hazards. The current location was relatively clear of asteroids and debris, making this explanation unlikely.

“But why are they maintaining exact coordinates?” he wondered aloud, hoping that the question might trigger a response from the control room or the ship’s AI if one was available.

The ship seemed to be using its engines to maintain exact coordinates relative to the galaxy’s rotation, with a deviation of only a few meters. Given the ship’s massive diameter of a thousand kilometers, this level of precision was unusual and implied a highly controlled positional maintenance. Such meticulous accuracy seemed unnecessary unless there was a specific reason for it.

The ship’s AI responded, outlining several potential reasons for the activity: {There could be a few explanations for this behavior. They might be gathering coordinates and calibrating their sensitive equipment, mapping the area, or their species might have specific requirements for remaining still. These are the possibilities we can infer at this moment, and additional reasons might become apparent as we continue to monitor them.}

The captain, seeking clarity, inquired, "Mapping for what purpose? What are they gathering coordinates for?"

{If our theories about space travel are correct, then the coordinate collection could be related to hyperspace lane mapping or navigation, which requires extremely precise data. However, this is based on our current research on hyperspace, which has not yet yielded conclusive results, that is one of the many reasons they might need accurate coordinates,} the AI responded,

The captain, considering the implications, said, "If what you're suggesting is true, allowing them to continue could be problematic for us. It might explain their delay in responding to us." He paused, deep in thought, then continued, "But this is all based on our limited understanding. We can't use this as a justification for taking action against them, as it might be a misunderstanding and could lead to unnecessary conflict." He made sure to voice his reasoning clearly, so everyone in the room understood his perspective and was not swayed by purely negative assumptions.

“But we can’t remain too passive. Move 20 light-seconds closer and observe their reaction,” the captain ordered, directing the ship to make the maneuver in an attempt to provoke a response from the object.

The control room members promptly responded to the captain’s order, and the engines roared to life, propelling the ship steadily closer to the object.

As the ship crossed the five-second light-distance mark without any response from the other side, the captain muttered, “Come on, do something,” in a low voice, audible only to himself and the AI.

The silence persisted as the ship closed the ten-light-second distance, further suggesting that the object might be buying time.

However, when they reached a distance of fifteen light seconds, the stillness was broken. The other side finally responded by repeating the same message they had been broadcasting.

“Stop,” the captain commanded as soon as the AI reported that the other side had responded.

{They sent two similar responses: one through the same means we did and another via mana. They might be testing our development in mana or assessing our ability to detect the difference. It also seems like they used this time to prepare equipment for sending the conventional response.} The AI provided this analysis as the ship came to a full stop.

Why do you think that is?” the captain inquired.

{The conventional response is about 22 centimeters thick, which could indicate calibration issues, that they’re using the signal for the first time, or that they’re testing our ability to detect differences. The mana transmission was sent after the initial response, possibly as a backup or another test.}

“We don’t have time for this speculation,” the captain said firmly. “Stick to the protocol and use this opportunity to develop a basic communication language with them. Respond using conventional means—we don’t need to play their game or follow their rules.”

{Understood. I’ll get to work on that. It will take a few hours, depending on how quickly their AI responds.} The AI acknowledged and began the task.

Thus, the rapid exchange of communication between the two sides began, with the only limitation being the speed at which signals could travel. Both AIs appeared to be sufficiently fast, meaning the primary constraint was the signal transmission speed rather than any lag in processing on either side.

“I hope you’re not just buying time,” the captain muttered as he reviewed the exchanged information being used to establish communication between the two sides.

#### Chapter 717 Watching from a Distance

The back-and-forth between the two AIs continued as they worked to establish a common foundation for communication.

Although this could have been an ideal moment to probe each other, neither side attempted to do so, recognizing that the limitations of the communication medium made such efforts futile.

To ensure the communication foundation would allow for the exchange of information with full context and minimize misunderstandings, the process would take several hours or even days. The outcome depended on how quickly each side could comprehend the other’s approach. For now, it had become a game of patience, where haste could easily lead to complications.

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While those aboard the ship waited for progress in communication, the rest of the solar system remained in a state of high alert.

Military bases across the system were operating at their highest situational readiness, a level they had never activated before. All forces, including those previously off duty, had been called back into active service three months ago when the vessel was in its final approach.

As for the returning personnel, they underwent intensive retraining, preparing for any potential threats before being assigned their stations.

Within the mission control room on Mars, the team was engaged in a different kind of task. They were using their powerful supercomputers to analyze and calculate potential reasons behind every action being recorded by their sensor array. These sensors had been stealthily deployed long before the Vessel arrived in the vicinity.

The array included two types of sensors: some disguised as ordinary asteroids, fabricated with atomic printers so convincingly that they appeared completely natural, even to those who had placed them there. The other type were active stealth sensors, maintaining a constant cloak of invisibility while transmitting valuable data back to the mission control team.

“We are detecting a mana pulse extending from the Vessel in all directions,” Awwab, the technician responsible for monitoring mana surveillance, announced. The holographic mockup of the solar system reflected this, showing the pulse spreading at light speed, bathing everything it touched in mana. For anyone with mana sensors, the pulse illuminated objects, making them visible and revealing the Vessel's intention to highlight any hidden entities or cloaked objects in the vicinity.

As the pulse swept through space, everyone in the room held their breath, anxiously watching the screens. The stealth fleet and concealed sensors were in the path of the pulse. Tension filled the air, as they feared their stealth technology might be compromised. But when the pulse passed the locations where their assets were expected to be, without any highlight or detection, the room collectively exhaled in relief. Their stealth tech had, for the moment, proven capable of withstanding the mana scan.

The pulse continued its expansion, reaching a distance of about ten light minutes before fading as it met the ambient mana levels in the surrounding void. The AI immediately noted the distance and, using the intensity of the initial pulse and the range it covered, began developing an algorithm. This would allow any future ships detecting a similar pulse to predict its reach and calculate how far it would travel before dispersing into ambient space, giving them an edge in potential encounters.

“Why now?” Jacob, the mission commander, muttered under his breath as he tapped his fingers rhythmically on the table. Positioned on one of the furthest ends of the oval table that had the hologram projection of the star system and its surroundings from the screen, he seemed deep in thought.

Years of intense training and countless simulated encounters had drilled a fundamental lesson into his subconscious: no action from the other side is random. Everything has a purpose, even if it's not immediately clear. Overlooking such details could spell the difference between success and failure, or even survival and defeat.

His eyes narrowed as he tried to piece together the motivation behind the mana pulse. Was it a probing tactic? A sign of impatience? Or perhaps an attempt to confirm suspicions about something hidden in the void?

However, when no further unusual activity occurred from the other side within the next ten minutes, Jacob decided to leave the matter to the AI for the time being. Yet, twenty-seven minutes after the first pulse, a second one emerged—this time, twice as powerful as the first. It provided the perfect

test for the newly developed algorithm, which had predicted the pulse's saturation point. As anticipated, the pulse extended precisely to the predicted twenty-light-minute radius before dispersing, confirming the accuracy of the AI's calculations.

"Anyone care to explain what they're doing?" Jacob's voice rang out across the room, sharp with the tension that had been building.

"I suspect they're either mapping the area or scanning for hidden objects—or both," Awwab, the mana specialist, responded. "Both tasks can be done simultaneously. They might also be searching for things that are invisible to the naked eye but detectable through mana, whether those things are related to us or native to the area."

Jacob sighed, rubbing his temples with his fingers. "I enjoy a good mystery, but not when it could end in war."

The fatigue was setting in, and it was clear the constant pressure to maintain focus was wearing him down. Had it not been for the enhancements to his body, he knew he might have already collapsed from exhaustion.

"We're operating with limited information," his assistant said, handing him an energy drink. "Any mistakes we make will only become clear after we've gathered enough intel."

Jacob took the bottle, nodding in silent agreement. He knew there was no leaving this room until communication was firmly established with the other side.

But their wait didn't last too long. By the second day, as they had grown accustomed to the sporadic mana pulses, the AIs across the board reported to their respective teams: {The framework for communication has been established. We can now begin exchanging messages from both sides.}

Everyone in the monitoring rooms and on the ship let out a mild sigh of relief as they moved to the next phase.

The ship's captain immediately began initiating the communication process, having already been provided with the necessary notes and protocols for this crucial step.

## Chapter 718 Probing and Conversation I

"So, how is it going to work? Are there things I need to keep in mind during our conversation?" the ship's captain asked the AI, concerned that the script might need revision. The captain wanted to ensure that there were no limitations or special considerations for communication, given the AI's understanding of the other side's system and any potential nuances that could affect the exchange.

{You don't need to worry about that. During your communication period, I'll serve as the translator, ensuring that all contexts and reasons for your statements are conveyed clearly so that they understand your intentions with minimal loss in translation. The same will apply in reverse. However, please note that at the moment, we're limited to sound transmission. We can't transmit



large amounts of data through our current means, which allows us to communicate in real time without delay,} the AI clarified, adding a slight pause to distinguish between the two topics.

“Okay, good. Send a request to start the communication; we are ready on our side,” he said, clearing his throat to ensure his voice was clear for the upcoming conversation.

{You can start; they are ready,} the ship’s AI responded shortly.

“Greetings, I am Niwildan Nideha, acting representative of the Terran Empire attempting to initiate contact. Please confirm receiving and understanding what I am saying,” he said, beginning the direct conversation between the two sides.

They waited in silence for a response, unsure if the translation language they had developed was functioning correctly or if it was merely a hallucination between the two AIs.

“Greetings, Niwildan Nideha. I am Xalthar Zynara, Sage of the Astral Conclave. We have received and understood your transmission, although it was challenging as we had to downgrade our systems to accommodate your attempts at communication. How about your side, can you understand me?” came the response, relayed by the AI to preserve the tone and context as accurately as possible.

Upon hearing the response and noting the tone, Niwildan raised an eyebrow. He wondered whether the AI had detected a hint of arrogance in their tone and had emulated it, or if it was simply the way the other side spoke. He thought to himself, 'Everything would have been easier if we had their brain data.' Being one of the few privy to this knowledge, he knew it would have made the process much smoother.

“Yes, we can hear and understand you too. However, before asking any further questions, I would like to inquire about the reason for your presence in this sector,” Niwildan said, deciding to move the conversation forward.

“We came here to investigate mana pulses from this sector that attracted our attention. We thought it might be an interesting phenomenon that could increase our understanding of mana,” Xalthar responded.

“Do you still perceive the mana pulses at this moment, and where were they coming from?” Niwildan asked. Although he was aware of what the pulses were, having been briefed beforehand, he needed to confirm that they were indeed discussing the same phenomenon, or at least to ensure they were talking about something relevant.

“The pulses are no longer present, as they ceased during our journey. From our observations, they originated from the star system you are based in. Since it appears that you may not be well-versed in mana, we request permission to investigate the phenomenon in exchange for sharing our knowledge about mana,” Xalthar replied, his tone still carrying a hint of arrogance. Niwildan noted that the AI’s translation had

accurately captured the tone, confirming that the arrogance was part of Xalthar's communication style rather than a quirk of the translation.

Upon hearing their request, Niwildan was taken aback by their directness. Their offer to share knowledge about mana, while assuming that the Terran Empire had no such knowledge and was merely technologically oriented, was both surprising and revealing. This assumption could either benefit or complicate the relationship between the two sides, depending on how their understanding and relationship between technology and mana.

“Unfortunately, since we cannot infer what you are referring to and both sides still lack sufficient information between each other to formulate trust, we cannot grant you access to our star system at this time. Instead, how about we exchange information with each other and upgrade our means of communication from this basic setup to one that allows for a more extensive and detailed exchange?” Niwildan proposed, steering the conversation in a direction that maintained control from his side while addressing his own needs and keeping their demands in check.

There was a moment of tense silence following Niwildan’s response and suggestion, causing everyone in the control room to hold their breath as they waited for the other side’s reply.

After five minutes, the response came, “Sure, we will accommodate your request. Please send the technology you want us to upgrade to, and we will proceed with the communication enhancements.” This time, the speaker’s tone was noticeably more humble and welcoming compared to Xalthar’s earlier arrogance.

“How long will it take to transmit all of the schematics and instructions for the equipment and code?” Niwildan asked the AI in a casual tone, maintaining his composure thanks to his extensive experience with similar situations.

{Since we are sending the tech for both microwave and millimeter-wave communication through the hydrogen line, it will take at least a few days, considering signal retention and loss,} the AI responded.

Niwildan nodded, acknowledging the information before saying “Understood. We will begin preparing the necessary files for transmission immediately. Please ensure that your systems are ready to receive the data and provide confirmation once the upgrade is complete.”

He paused for a moment, then added, “In the meantime, we will be getting closer to accelerating the speed of transferring communication” attempting to probe for the possibility of arranging a face-to-face meeting or gaining more visual information.

However before even doing anything into implementing what he said a response came swiftly, “Please maintain your current distance. Any attempts to close the distance will be considered a hostile measure, and we will react accordingly.” The tone was firm and serious, making it clear that they were not open to negotiation on this matter.

‘This is exactly what I needed to know,’ Niwildan thought to himself, knowing that their preferred distance provided insights into their defensive capabilities, including

the potential strike range of their weapons. Armed with this information, he responded, confirming that he would adhere to their distance request and instructed the AI to begin the transfer of information.

## Chapter 719 Probing and Conversation II

For the next few days, there was no direct communication between the two sides. They were either exchanging technical manuals and codes for building the necessary communication technology or receiving them.

Once the transfer was complete, a response came from the other side, stating that they would have the device ready in three hours before going silent again. This response alone hinted at their ability to rapidly produce such technology, suggesting they had advanced fabrication capabilities—likely akin to 3D printing, at least for small-scale devices compared to their massive ship.

Regarding the use of "hours" in the conversation, it wasn't literal Earth time; instead, it was based on the standardized measurement system established during their initial communication.

What followed was a return to silence and waiting—a situation every imperial soldier trained for space warfare was familiar with. Much of their training involved long stretches of travel between points, while actual combat tended to be brief, often resolved within a few hours or days. Since either they held the upper hand, or the opposing side did, resulting in quick outcomes.

As such three hours later, right on time, a small two-meter door opened on the colossal ship. The door was so minuscule compared to the ship's vast size that it almost went unnoticed, if not for the visual monitoring equipment that quickly highlighted and zoomed in on the scene. From the door, a small antenna emerged before it quietly closed behind, leaving the antenna exposed.

After a brief pause, the antenna began to adjust, slowly aligning itself to face the much smaller ship stationed at a distance. Once it was properly oriented, it started transmitting radio waves as a test, aiming to confirm if the communication system was functioning as expected.

Once confirmation was received that the transmission was successful, the next phase was promptly set in motion. Both sides initiated video communication, eager to see and understand the appearance and nature of each species from the other side.

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"Greetings," Xalthar said, his voice smooth and resonant. He appeared as a tall, slender humanoid with iridescent skin, large expressive eyes, and elongated limbs. His streamlined head was adorned with human-like ears, and his subtle mouth barely moved. Golden lines, reminiscent of circuits, adorned his visible skin, which were echoed by the intricate designs of his robes. His demeanor exuded a mix of curiosity and haughty confidence, a subtle reminder of the arrogance often seen in humans.

"Greetings," Niwildan responded, matching Xalthar's composed posture from his own chair. "It's good to finally put a face to the voice." His tone was courteous, yet firm, reflecting his own sense of importance and the diplomatic gravity of the moment.

However, Niwildan's surprise was evident as he took in the sight of Xalthar and the others behind him. It was clear that not only was Xalthar humanoid resembling humans, but so were the others in the background, each displaying distinct features indicating different species.

Xalthar, noticing the reaction, raised his chin slightly, interpreting the surprise as a sign of awe toward his exalted presence. To Niwildan, it seemed like Xalthar assumed that his elevated demeanor was having the intended effect, reinforcing his perception of their own superiority.

There was a brief pause between the two sides before Niwildan, not interested in engaging in what seemed like a power struggle, spoke up. "How about we start by exchanging information about who we are and where we come from?"

"Sure," Xalthar agreed. "Although it might seem like we're giving up more, it's better to do this first. We can have a more detailed discussion once we understand each other's backgrounds and positions." Before Niwildan could reply, the video call was abruptly terminated.

Seeing what had transpired, no one in the control room felt angered by the action. During their training, they had been taught that the behaviors of new species should never be viewed through the lens of their own culture until a full understanding was reached. What might seem offensive from a human perspective could very well be a gesture of deep respect in another culture. Therefore, they remained composed and continued with their duties as expected of them.

Moments later, the other side began transmitting a large volume of information through the antenna. In response, the control room sent back basic information about humans. While it might seem unwise to divulge details about themselves, the amount of information they were receiving in return made it worthwhile. Despite being fundamental, this exchange was crucial for bridging the knowledge gap, as they currently lacked any information about the other side.

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{Based on the mana intensity detected from that antenna, I can say with high certainty that it is either their primary source of power or they are a mana-based civilization,} Nova reported to Aron. They were the only ones in the room now, as the others had returned to their work and would continue being updated on the situation in their responsive room and would only regroup if a significant development required a meeting.

As Nova spoke, Aron sat in silence, tapping the table—a habitual gesture indicating he was deep in thought or piecing together information.

Noticing Aron's silence, Nova stopped speaking, understanding that any comments she made would be heard by him, but he would only respond if it was an emergency.

After observing Aron cease his tapping, Nova asked, {What's on your mind?}

"Through the video call, we saw seven different species behind Xalthar, and they were all humanoid. The species we discovered through the exploration fleet were also humanoid. This makes me wonder if all species that advance to interstellar capabilities are required to be in a humanoid form, or at least those in this galaxy or this specific sector of the galaxy," Aron said outlining what he had been thinking.

{At least with the information we have, that's the only conclusion we can draw,} Nova responded after some thought. {If your assumption is correct, then there must be some interference related to Laifu or her fundamental laws that skews such outcomes.}

"Should the information we receive include details about species in their so-called Astral Conclave, it might help answer our question or partially prove or disprove our assumption," Aron said, aligning with her line of thought. For now, he would wait for the completion of the information transfer from both sides so he could review it and determine whether his theory was correct or not.

## Chapter 720 "F\*ck"

After five hours, the data transfer from the other side was completed. The transfer of information about humans only required about two hours, but it was intentionally extended by including filler and other white noise to conclude simultaneously with the other side's transfer. This delay was a deliberate strategy to ensure that the other side wouldn't cut off their data transfer once they realized that all of their information had been received.

This approach also explained why both sides sent data in a format that could only be fully read once the entire transfer was complete. This was to prevent either side from analyzing the information in real time and drawing conclusions about the other's capabilities before the full data had been exchanged.

Everyone with access to the information began sifting through it at their maximum speed, which was determined by the AI's processing capabilities. This race to analyze the data quickly aimed to provide an edge over the other side.

Once Nova had finished processing the terabytes of information and filtering out the garbage and filler data, she activated Aron's implants to their maximum capacity. The implants accelerated his time perception to stretch a single second into a minute and forty seconds. She then materialized a hologram in front of him, displaying only the most crucial pieces of information. The remaining data would be reviewed later, when they had more time.

Nova chose not to assimilate the information directly into Aron's system, as doing so could render him out of commission for an extended period. In the current situation, where he needed to be reachable at all times, it was crucial to avoid any risk of him being unavailable.

Aron, understanding Nova's approach, focused on reading the hologram to bring himself up to date.

The same process was occurring for every one actively participating in the mission. Depending on their level of implants or headgear, time acceleration ranged from twenty times to sixty times the normal speed. Aron was an exception, handling the fastest currently possible time perception acceleration due to his advanced implants together with his brain being able to handle it, albeit with some slight pain, nothing he couldn't handle.

Xalthar was from a race called the Elara, known for their specialization in magical advancements. The Elara were among the top ten powers within the Astral Conclave, a governing body that acted as both the rule-maker and enforcer, holding all the species within it together. The Astral Conclave functioned like a united nation but wielded significantly more power.

The information sent did not disclose their exact rank within the top ten powers of the Astral Conclave, which indirectly suggested that they were positioned toward the lower end of this ranking, given that they only emphasized their inclusion in the top ten.

The minimum requirement to join the Astral Conclave is to control at least one entire star system. The more star systems a species controls, the higher their position within the Conclave. Consequently, the Conclave includes a range of entities: some are kings of their species, while others are representatives of business chambers that manage one or multiple star systems and many others.

However, meeting the entry requirement of controlling at least one star system was only the beginning. Another crucial requirement was the ability to defend that star system against potential invasions. Alternatively, a species could secure entry by obtaining the backing of an existing Conclave member. To gain such support, a species needed to offer something valuable enough to attract an ally but not so enticing that it risked their star system being forcibly taken over and absorbed into the ally's domain.

A third option for joining the Astral Conclave was to become a branch species of an existing member. However, this route meant that the species would be under the control of the parent race, effectively surrendering their autonomy. Most species avoided this option, as it would result in a loss of freedom and independence, making it a last resort primarily used to prevent species from being eliminated or enslaved.

For the branch species option to work though, the species seeking entry had to be accepted by an existing member of the Conclave. However, many species were reluctant to take on the responsibility of protecting and managing a branch species when they could simply enslave them with no such obligations. Consequently, this option was rarely chosen, with offers to become a branch species usually only accepted if the species had something particularly valuable or of sentimental importance to the potential host.

The Astral Conclave only recognized and protected entities that were formally registered under their system. Depending on the category, these entities would have specific rights. Anything not registered and owned within the Conclave was considered open for claim, whether it was a star system or its inhabitants. This created an incentive for many species to prevent others from joining the Conclave, as joining would mean that their species and star systems would be registered and come under the protection of the Conclave, thereby formalizing ownership and protection.

The most common method for registering with the Astral Conclave involved declaring ownership of at least one planet. This declaration effectively extended control to everything within that planetary system, granting the declaring species ownership and rights over all associated assets. Typically, this registration was managed by a government, allowing them to maintain their governance and control over their territory without the fear of sudden loss of autonomy or being reduced to a subordinate status.

Slavery of conquered species was a widespread and openly practiced business within the Astral Conclave. Although it was not officially sanctioned by the Conclave, every member was involved in some capacity. The lack of action to ban this practice stemmed from the fact that all Conclave members benefited from it, and as long as their own species were not at risk of becoming enslaved, there was little incentive to challenge the status quo.

As a result of the registry system and the lucrative slave trade, many species had individuals seeking to strike it rich by exploring new star systems. These explorers hoped to discover valuable materials or species that they could sell information about to one of the top ten powers for a substantial reward.

The reason they didn't attempt to claim ownership themselves was that the process of declaring ownership did not guarantee permanent control. Any species could counter-declare ownership, leading to a conflict to settle the claim. This type of conflict was essentially a war declaration, as the fight would involve everything related to the disputed star system and its assets.

"Fuck," Aron exclaimed internally as he read through that section.