

Tech System 701

Chapter 701 In the Benining :)

The moment Aron logged in, Nova wasted no time and teleported him to a private simulation she had specially created for the event.

"It took quite some time," Aron remarked as he settled into the chair she had prepared for him.

{Since their brain structure differs from ours, and they've evolved various ways of interpreting things throughout their existence, I had to restart the decoding process several times after analyzing each evolutionary phase. They've had quite a few of those over their long history,} Nova responded. As she spoke, she materialized visual representations of the distinct brain structures she had to decode, showcasing the complexity of their evolutionary changes.

"Why didn't you just use the little protagonists in our two workers to speed up your analysis?" Aron asked, puzzled by her decision to use a more manual approach.

{The little protagonists can monitor and interfere with the brain, but due to the power level of the beings we're dealing with, they can't fully control them. Right now, all they can do is imprison their consciousness and use the body in place of the original owner by mimicking the brain's signals—that's the extent of their current capabilities,} Nova explained.

She projected a series of visuals, detailing the limitations of the little protagonists. {Even our current VR tech isn't advanced enough to brainwash them. I had to rely on manual methods by analyzing their brain data and memories alone.}

The visuals illustrated how, once a being reached a certain power threshold, the little protagonists became less effective, achieving only up to 75% control. Despite this, they were still able to incapacitate these higher-level beings, just not fully dominate their minds.

"Yeah, and about that, please run some diagnostics on them and give me all of the weaknesses. I need to update them now that they've faced real-life scenarios, and we know their limitations," Aron said, mentally noting the need for upgrades. His drive for perfection stemmed from his long-term plans—these "little protagonists" were not just tools but weapon he intended to use against other civilizations.

{Will do,} Nova responded promptly, creating a separate instance to initiate the diagnostics and begin the detailed analysis required for the updates.

"Okay, show me what you got," Aron said, taking a deep breath to emotionally prepare for what was about to unfold. He knew this would be an extensive experience, sifting through what might be a massive trove of memories. Rather than assimilating the data directly, which could overwhelm him with irrelevant details, he opted to watch it first. Assimilation was reserved for vital information, and only if something truly important emerged from these tree folk memories would he consider integrating it later.

{Since the memories span thousands of years, most of which involve long periods of inactivity while they waited for the results of their experiments, I've filtered out all those parts. I've left only the moments where something significant happened or where they were engaged in activity,} Nova explained as the environment around Aron transformed.

Suddenly, the room shifted, morphing into a scene of nothingness. It was an empty void, the starting point of what he called "swimming"—a way of experiencing memories as if living them. He could now immerse himself in these moments, becoming an invisible observer while also feeling the emotions and sensations tied to the events.

The first memory began to unravel before him.

The scene unfolded slowly, with small white dots gradually appearing in the void, representing the awakening senses of the tree folk.

As time accelerated, more and more dots emerged, each one signifying a sensory perception coming to life.

This marked the beginning of their relationship. From then on, they would regularly meet, exchanging information about their exploration of the world. They shared discoveries, updating an internal map of the planet as their senses extended farther and farther across the surface.

Over the years, they discovered more of their kind, repeating the process of introducing each new tree folk to the Timeless Meadow, where they would be brought up to speed. Eventually, all five tree folk had met, and together, they mapped the entirety of the planet, their bond growing closer with each new revelation.

After nearly a thousand years in this accelerated memory, Aron could finally comprehend what these white dots represented—the tree folk's ability to sense their surroundings had fully developed.

At first, the tree folk explored their newly awakened senses, gradually learning how to extend their range. Months passed, and eventually, one of them encountered another tree folk. It was a discovery that led to the first attempt at communication.

Without the knowledge of how to interact, the tree folk tried various methods until, by pure chance, their senses intertwined. When that happened, both were suddenly transported to a place that was strikingly familiar.

"Timeless Meadow," Aron said softly, recognizing the space immediately as it formed before him.

The two tree folk stood in awe of each other's forms, which manifested as vast, sprawling roots, each hundreds of meters long. Communication came instinctively when one of them attempted to transmit thoughts, and to their surprise, it worked.

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However, their connection wasn't without conflict. Though still limited in power, disagreements led to fights, initially only mental clashes. As they continued to grow, however, their roots extended enough to physically intertwine during these fights, adding a new dimension to their interactions. It wasn't just conflict that arose from this intertwining, though.

The tree folk discovered that when their roots merged and expended mana, they could create things they already understood—trees, for example, which were scattered across the small landmasses of the planet. This revelation led them to shift their focus from exploration to experimentation.

Thousands of years passed, with the tree folk steadily growing in size and power. Eventually, their senses extended far beyond the planet, allowing them to observe the entire star system. It was during this period that the Proximian fleet arrived.

At first, the fleet went unnoticed, but soon after, the tree folk detected the newcomers. Fascinated by these beings unlike anything they had encountered in their thousands of years of existence, they devoted much of their time to observing them.

The memory stream continued up to the present day, marking the end of the swimming.

It was then followed by silence.

{What's your conclusion?} Nova asked, breaking the silence.

“.....”

Aron remained silent, still processing the flood of memories he had just witnessed. Nova, recognizing that he was amidst his contemplation, waited patiently, understanding that he would speak once he had fully digested the information.

After a few moments, Aron finally broke the silence. “Everything I've seen from their beginnings to their discoveries is pointing me toward something, but with the data we have now, it's too early to draw a definitive conclusion. This will require a deeper dive before I make any solid assumptions.”

{I agree, but if you were to form a hypothesis based solely on the current data, what would you say they are?} Nova pressed, almost as if she was eager to compare her own analysis with his.

Aron pondered for a moment before replying, “I've got three possible theories. First, they were created deliberately. Second, they're the result of a mana anomaly, possibly evolving naturally from it. And lastly, they may have been birthed or produced by someone, or something, perhaps from this planet—or even from another star system—and then sent here.”

His answer was measured, but he was curious now, sensing there might be a reason behind Nova's insistence.

{Looks like we're on the same page. Although I've come up with more theories than you, the most likely ones align with yours.} Nova responded, revealing her reasoning.

Aron nodded, then quickly gave an instruction. “Have the exploration team gather samples of the different levels of roots from the two tree folks. We'll send them back to Earth for further research. I want to see if we can confirm any of these theories.”

{I'll handle it. And what about you? You still have a few hours before your scheduled tour of the planet.} Nova reminded him, aware of the timeline.

“I'm going to start researching how to create a body for them. The goal is to see if their main consciousness can be transferred into it. If successful, we can perfect the body and have the two tree folks inhabit it, allowing us to use their original forms as research material. If not, we'll test the new body to determine if there's a distance

limit for their split consciousness and, if so, how far it extends. Depending on the results, I have several plans for them," Aron explained, outlining his strategy and noting that he would need Nova's help for the body creation.

{Let's get to work then,} Nova responded, her excitement palpable as their surroundings transformed into a high-tech biology research laboratory.

"Bring me a copy of the two tree folks' progeny and one of mine," Aron said, shifting into research mode and ready to dive into the project.

Chapter 702 Two weeks later

Two weeks later.

Aron stood calmly inside one of the physical labs on his ship, his eyes fixed on five medipods positioned before him. Holograms hovered over each pod, displaying streams of data being collected in real time.

Inside the pods, five bodies lay motionless, sustained by a constant supply of nutrients directly administered to their systems. The pods were designed to keep the bodies alive while preventing any activation of brain function, ensuring that consciousness remained completely dormant.

Although the bodies in the pods outwardly resembled the various races of the Proximians, the similarities ended there. Internally, their structure was much closer to Aron's own physiology than to that of the Proximians or even humans.

{I think that's enough observation. We should start the final etching,} Nova suggested, materializing beside him, ready to move on to the next critical step in their experiment.

"Sure, let's do it," Aron said, stepping closer to the nearest pod. Immediately, runic sentences began to materialize in front of him. With each passing second, the complex runic script grew longer and more intricate, with hundreds of symbols and words flowing together seamlessly.

For two hours, Aron worked tirelessly, constructing an extraordinarily detailed runic sequence. When he finally finished, he opened his eyes and asked, "Are there any mistakes?"

{None,} Nova responded, having meticulously monitored and cross-referenced every symbol against the simulations they'd run beforehand.

"Good," Aron said, a smile forming on his face. The relief was evident; a single mistake would have meant starting over from scratch, wasting two hours of intense concentration. The satisfaction of knowing everything was flawless allowed him a brief moment of reprieve before moving on to the next crucial step.

He then began to gradually reduce the size of the runic script, scaling it down from occupying the entire room to fitting within the confines of the medipod in just a few seconds. But he didn't stop there; he continued minimizing it further.

This final reduction took more time, about twenty minutes of concentrated effort, until the script was the size of a fist.

This was the smallest he could achieve, though it was still significantly larger than the runes within his runic heart, which were atom-sized.

With the fist-sized runic script prepared, Aron lowered it carefully into the medipod. Nova opened a precise slot on top of the pod, guiding the script through. She then revealed the chest of the body inside, exposing its beating heart.

Aron positioned the script so that it aligned perfectly with the heart and gently lowered it into place.

As the script made contact, it bonded with the heart, etching itself onto it. Once the bonding was complete, he relinquished control, allowing the heart to take over.

The heart immediately began to sustain the script's activation by using the mana within the body's mana vessels.

{I will begin completing the process here, while you can proceed with the others,} Nova said as she activated the mana etching machines within the medipod. She began etching short runic sentences across various parts of the body to enhance the quality of the runic script.

Since the script was a mere copy of some of the active parts of his runic heart and only partially understood, they were employing different patches and fixes to achieve a fraction of the functionality of the original runes.

As Nova worked on the current medipod, Aron moved on to the next one and started repeating the process.

After a full day of meticulous work, Aron finally completed etching the runic script onto the bodies. The process had taken so long due to several mistakes along the way, requiring him to restart the process for a few bodies and take breaks to recover his mental energy.

"How long until you're finished?" he asked, taking a seat to rest.

{It will be about a day before I complete the etching of the remaining runes, implement the subconscious security measures in the brain, and install the current generation of little protagonists,} Nova responded. The bodies remained active, with light flashing on and off hundreds of times per second.

"Alright, I'm going to rest. Let me know when everything is done," Aron said as he started leaving the lab. Nova immediately locked the door behind him, securing the lab and preventing any disturbances during the final stages of the process.

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The three tree folks monitoring the room exchanged knowing glances.

Although their actions might be seen as spying, they were fully aware that the other side was well aware of their presence. They had previously made it clear that they could observe any location with mana within the star system. As a result, they came to the conclusion that the other side knew of their surveillance but chose not to interfere or show any concern.

They reached this conclusion because his personal room was entirely unobservable to them, indicating that he possessed technology capable of concealing his activities. However, he had chosen not to use it for what he was currently doing in the lab.

"They really went through all this trouble for a body he probably would have just given them if they had asked," Birch said, shaking her head in disbelief.

“Well, we and they didn’t know that at the time, so it wasn’t something we could consider,” Cypress replied, acknowledging the gap in their knowledge.

“Anyway, does anyone understand what he was doing with the symbols he put on the heart?” Crabapple asked, shifting the focus back to the bodies being worked on. “I can’t even begin to replicate what he did or make sense of the symbols.”

“I think it has something to do with managing or monitoring the mana in the bodies he’s creating,” Cypress speculated. “Maybe it’s to control it or keep track of it in some way.”

The debate continued as Cypress and Crabapple exchanged points and counterpoints. After a few minutes of back-and-forth, Birch interjected, “Why not just ask him directly instead of wasting time debating?”

“We will ask him eventually,” Crabapple responded. “But part of the joy in research is discovering that your hypotheses were on the right track. It’s more satisfying when the answer aligns with your own reasoning,” Crabapple said as he rubbed his nonexistent beard.

Chapter 703 Rebirth I

"Do you want to test it out?" Aron asked when the three tree folks used the access he had granted them through their contract to reach out with questions about the bodies he was creating.

Birch responded, "We need physical contact with the body to attempt the transfer of our consciousness."

"That’s an easy fix," Aron said, and moments later, the tree folks sensed his personal ship in orbit beginning to deorbit and head toward the planet.

"Anything else you need?" he added.

"What level of consciousness can it handle? Depending on the brain's capacity, the amount of consciousness we can transfer will change, and I don’t want the brain to explode right at the start," Crabapple asked.

Aron considered the question before replying, "During the transfer of part of your consciousness into your humanoid bodies, do you do it by cutting a piece of consciousness and inserting it, or is it like pouring water, gradually filling it up until the body reaches its capacity?"

Cypress responded this time, "We can do both, but we typically use the first method since we already know the amount of consciousness each humanoid body can handle."

"Good. Start with the lowest amount you can safely transfer, and then slowly increase it until you feel the body has reached its limit. Don’t worry if the body gets damaged—I can remake them. Just don’t do it deliberately, as you’ve seen the time it takes to reconstruct them," Aron said.

As the conversation unfolded, the ship finally arrived and hovered above what seemed to be an empty ocean.

Aron stepped out of the ship's door, and simultaneously, the hologram that had been speaking to the tree folks vanished, replaced by his physical presence.

"Okay, let's start," he said, as though speaking into thin air. Moments later, slender roots emerged from the ocean, gently floating in front of him, awaiting his following command.

Without another word, Aron turned and re-entered the ship, the hovering roots trailing behind him like obedient snakes, following his every move.

Upon arriving at the lab, the three roots wasted no time and headed directly toward the medipod that housed a body of their race. Just as during Aron's rune-etching process, the medipod opened a small entry point, allowing the roots to pass through.

The roots latched onto the heads of the bodies, beginning to pulse rhythmically, signaling the start of the consciousness transfer. Tiny movements could be observed in the bodies as the process continued, subtle but noticeable signs of interaction.

Aron and Nova stood by, carefully watching the process. They activated every available sensor in the lab, ensuring that every minute detail was captured, knowing that this data would be invaluable for future observation and research.

As for the remaining two tree folks—the so-called traitors—they watched with what could only be described as jealousy. Despite Aron creating bodies for them as well, he hadn't spoken to them or invited them to join their fellow tree folks in experiencing the process. They were left to observe, feeling the sting of watching others enjoy what they had risked everything to gain and, ultimately, failed.

"I think this is the maximum the brain can handle," Cypress reported to Aron, speaking through her primary consciousness.

"How much of it did you input?" Aron asked, intrigued by the result.

"Enough to cover fifty core root-mage humanoids," Crabapple answered, his tone carrying a mix of awe and disbelief.

"How many more times can you repeat this process at the same time?" Aron asked, thinking of the possibilities. If they could do it a thousand times, it would mean gaining a thousand strong soldiers—an army that could be incredibly useful.

"Unfortunately, no," Crabapple responded. "The reason we can only create one core humanoid at a time is because the amount of consciousness we input puts a heavy toll on the main consciousness. It takes time to recover after losing such a significant part of itself. With the bodies you gave us, since they're taking fifty times the usual amount, the toll is even greater, and the recovery will take that much longer unless the consciousness is returned to the body to fill the gap it left.

"What happens if the body carrying a part of your consciousness is destroyed? Does it return to your main body, or is it lost forever, leaving your body to take the required period to refill the part lost?" Aron asked.

"The second one happens," Cypress replied. "We can't recover the soul unless we have direct contact with the body containing it."

"Noted," Aron said, mentally filing the information away. At the same time, Nova ensured a physical record was kept for future reference, documenting everything thoroughly in case they needed to revisit the notes later.

"Okay, you can open and move your bodies now," Aron added, giving them permission to start moving in their new physical forms.

"....."

Instead of eyes opening, there was only silence.

"Is there a problem?" Aron asked, materializing a hologram to display the information from the medipods.

"We still have a connection, but it feels like we're in a maze or sluggish goo, and that's hindering our progress," Birch explained.

Aron examined the real-time brain data, noting that the brains were still in a "booting mode." Thanks to the runes, the consciousness placed within was attempting to reconcile with the subconscious, trying to blend the two parts into a single, cohesive entity.

"Don't fight any changes you're feeling," Aron instructed. "What's happening is the consciousness is integrating with the subconscious to operate seamlessly."

Understanding this, the tree folks stopped resisting and allowed the process to unfold naturally.

This continued for ten hours, with Aron and the tree folks maintaining their focus on the process.

After half a full E-day, the bodies' eyes finally opened. At first, they appeared lifeless, but then they showed signs of vitality as life entered them.

"Damn," was the only utterance from the two traitors, their voices tinged with defeat. Their hopes for the situation to unravel had not come to pass; instead, everything had worked seamlessly.

Chapter 704 Rebirth II

"This feels different," Birch remarked, her voice coming from her new body as she emerged from the now-open medipod.

She experienced drowsiness and a headache, feeling unusually heavy, as if she needed more rest. Despite the discomfort, she was captivated by the sensations her new body provided.

While she could simulate these experiences in VR, they were never fully accurate due to differences in brain data and insufficient understanding of it.

Now, however, the experience was genuine, and she was engrossed in it, not caring about the drowsiness at all.

She realized she couldn't ignore or dismiss these feelings; her consciousness was fully integrated with this body's brain, making her as vulnerable and perceptive as any human or Proximian, or so she thought.

Meanwhile, Cypress, though also adapting to her new body's sensations, was focused on something else. She attempted to unfold her transparent wings, which were currently tucked against her back.

As she extended them, they revealed intricate, glowing golden veins running through them, adding to their ethereal beauty and making them distinct from typical faerie wings.

While Birch and Cypress were engrossed in their new sensations or exploring their wings, Crabapple's focus was more practical. "I can sense the mana inside me," he said. "With this body, I believe I should be able to use magic even in environments that aren't rich in mana."

Aron, hearing Crabapple's observation, responded with a smile. "Let's test that then."

Before anyone could react, the ambient mana in the room began to vanish. Within moments, the room was devoid of mana, as if it had never contained any at all.

Despite the complete absence of ambient mana, the tree folks didn't experience the suffocating sensation they had anticipated. They felt comfortable and capable of using their magic without any difficulty.

Crabapple and the others began activating their magic cycles. As they drew mana from their bodies, they performed the activation process repeatedly. With each iteration, they grew more accustomed to the sensation, and their casting speed increased beyond their initial capabilities. They soon reached a point where their activation speed surpassed their physical capacity to keep up, demonstrating a marked improvement in their ability to use magic even in mana-depleted environments.

Aron observed their progress with satisfaction, knowing that the data collected from their tests would be invaluable. He allowed them to continue at their own pace, confident that their experimentation would provide further insights into the effectiveness of their new bodies.

"How are you feeling?" Aron inquired as they took a break from their magic cycle experiments.

"Personally, I feel tired, and I think I need to sleep," Birch responded.

"I feel tired too, but more than the tiredness I felt when I woke up," Cypress added.

"Tired as well, but I think it's because of the lack of external mana," Crabapple said, noting a sense of weakness as he opened and closed his hand.

"That's because you're depleting the mana within your bodies without any external source to replenish it," Aron explained calmly. "Also, since this is your first time using these new bodies, the fatigue is more pronounced. With time and training, you'll adapt and get used to it."

He offered reassurance, understanding that transitioning from their ancient, mana-rich forms to these new bodies was a significant adjustment.

"Does that mean this weakness will persist as long as we're in a mana-less environment?" Crabapple asked. "It seems like this ability would be quite limited if

we're left weakened after a short use, which would be counterproductive if we need to keep these bodies functional."

"Don't worry about that," Aron said with a reassuring tone. "You don't need a mana-rich environment to replenish your mana. Try this," he added, presenting three bottles filled with a mysterious liquid.

The tree folks drank the liquid, and within seconds, they felt the weakness they had been experiencing start to dissipate.

"Why didn't I sense any mana in this liquid, and how did it replenish our mana?" Birch asked, surprised at the rapid recovery.

"That's a nutrient-dense liquid," Aron explained with a chuckle. "Your bodies are designed to convert any unused nutrients into mana, which helps replenish what's been lost. It's a reliable way to restore mana in environments where ambient mana is scarce. If you're ever in a pinch, you can also rely on consuming food found in the area to help with replenishment."

All the tree folks stared at Aron in surprise, having never encountered or heard of such a system during their extensive information gathering. Their astonishment grew as they realized the level of sophistication required to achieve that.

Over the next few hours, Aron meticulously continued basic testing of the various aspects of the newly created bodies. He focused on validating every detail on his checklist to ensure the bodies' functionality and effectiveness before moving forward.

By the end of this rigorous basic testing period, Aron had addressed all necessary basic aspects, preparing for the subsequent steps in their development process.

"Okay, let's conclude our basic tests for today," Aron said. "I need to assimilate the necessary knowledge for your bodies so they can become fully functional rather than just meat bags. Since your bodies aren't fully reinvigorated yet, they'll use this time to replenish and complete their calibration. You should be ready by the handover ceremony."

The tree folks didn't resist and laid back down as Nova initiated their bodies into deep sleep. They began assimilating the prepared knowledge while their main consciousness returned to focus on the happenings of their new bodies. However, they were initially met with darkness due to the lack of mana.

This darkness lasted only a moment before mana was replenished in the lab, allowing them to see clearly. With the immediate needs addressed, Aron left the lab to review the data and check on his wife, who had immersed herself in VR for research following her inspiring conversation with Crabapple.

They could also be said to be waiting with anticipation and eagerness for the handover ceremony because they were eager to reunite with their new bodies, as they had become somewhat attached to the sensations and capabilities of their newly created forms.

Chapter 705 The Ceremony I

With time moving like a boulder falling from a mountain, the day of the long-awaited and much-anticipated handover ceremony finally arrived.

Recognizing its significance, the event was declared a holiday—the first ever shared across all imperial territories. The excitement was palpable, and in front of the planet's largest public square, located by the Proximian main government building, more than twenty million Proximians had gathered to witness the historic occasion.

This number had been limited due to concerns over crowd safety; any more, and the event might have turned unforgettable in the wrong way. The rest of the Proximians attended virtually, watching the broadcast from the safety of their homes, eager to be a part of this monumental event.

But the ceremony wasn't just for the Proximians. Nearly all the members of the exploration fleet, except for those on military duty, were also in attendance. This brought together representatives from both groups who would now be the members of the empire. The gathering symbolized not only a union of cultures but also marked a poetic end to the exploration fleet's journey—a rollercoaster of an adventure that would be forever etched into the empire's history.

The ceremony was moments away from starting, and the prominent guests had all taken their seats. Aron sat at the front, with Rina to his left and Rayyan to his right. Behind them sat the attending government officials, the higher-ranked members of the exploration fleet and Aron's friends

Some among the attending members were engaged in quiet conversations, reflecting on their journey, while others were content to watch the spectacular airshow unfolding above the crowd.

The atmosphere was a mix of anticipation and awe, with a palpable sense of history in the making.

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"How the heck did they manage to bring all of these here?" Lee asked in surprise, his eyes fixed on the sky, where an incredible airshow was unfolding.

The spectacle began with an aircraft resembling the earliest planes from Earth's history, followed by a stunning display of each successive generation of aviation technology. The show effectively narrated the human journey of conquering the skies, using the very medium to portray the technological progression that led them beyond Earth's atmosphere and, eventually, to this distant star system. It was a fitting tribute to humanity's legacy, as none of them would be here today if not for those early innovations.

"They didn't bring them here. They made them here within the last month," Ayaka, seated next to him, responded with a small smile, clearly impressed by the effort that had gone into preparing the event.

"So, have you made up your mind about the promotion? Will you stay here or head back with us?" Ayaka asked, following up on Lee's indecision about the offer.

Both of them had been offered prominent roles in the Proximian government, a natural step considering Lee was practically seen as a parental figure by the Proximians.

Their history had been taught to them without sugarcoating, and Lee had earned immense respect from them, positioning him as an ideal candidate to bridge the empire and Proximians.

Ayaka, being the person Lee looked up to the most, had also been offered the same position, but she had turned it down for now, opting to spend time with her family on Earth.

Lee, however, was still unsure.

“I’m coming back with you,” he finally answered. “I talked with Mom, and I think it’s best to spend some time with her before I make any decisions about my future.”

“Oh, are you planning to retire then?” Ayaka asked, surprised at his decision to return with them despite the opportunity to stay and experience life with the fantasy races he had only seen on screens before.

“I am planning to retire, but just like everyone in the exploration fleet, I have the option to return here and have a house whenever I want. So, it’s not like I’m leaving them forever,” Lee replied. He then looked up at the massive ship making a grand flyover as the airshow showcased the current generation of spacecraft.

As their conversation continued, the airshow concluded, and the ceremony officially began. The MC, a towering giant, created a striking contrast with the speakers who looked like small children in comparison, guided the event with a commanding presence, setting the stage for the formal proceedings.

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“Last month, we faced a threat that challenged our very existence for the first time since we were left to fend for ourselves. This incident exposed our inexperience and vulnerability when compared to those closest to us.

While the circumstances were beyond our control, we cannot use that as an excuse. We’ve learned that the death of the weak often becomes collateral damage in the actions of the strong.

However, acknowledging our weakness does not mean surrendering to fate. Evolution teaches us that when faced with overwhelming adversaries, a species can either strengthen itself individually or unite to confront the threat collectively.

We have chosen the latter: to unite with our more experienced human counterparts and combine our strengths to face whatever challenges the universe presents.

Our creation may have been a fortunate accident, but I sincerely hope this union will yield results as positive as the serendipity that brought us into existence,” Rayyan concluded, eliciting a wave of thunderous applause and cheers from the assembled crowd.

She waved to the public with a warm smile as she returned to her seat.

“And now,” the MC announced, quieting the crowd for a moment, “we will hear a speech from the Emperor of Terra, who will also be officially recognized as our emperor by the end of this event.”

The mention of Aron’s name was enough to prompt an immediate and enthusiastic cheer from the crowd.

They welcomed him with a resounding cheer and applause as he stood and made his way to the podium.

Had it not been for the strategically placed sound absorbers around the square to manage the volume, the sheer noise from the crowd's enthusiasm would likely have caused hearing problems for many attendees by the end of the ceremony.

Chapter 706 The Ceremony II

"We are not perfect," Aron began, his tone shifting to seriousness after the customary greetings, causing many in the audience to raise their brows in curiosity.

"As humans, we've fought one another. We've killed, stolen, betrayed, and committed countless atrocities against each other." He paused, the weight of his words hanging in the air. People began to wonder if he regretted saying that or if he had been handed the wrong script.

But Aron pressed on, undeterred. "I'm not saying this to boast of our flaws or diminish humanity. I say this to make it clear—we are flawed individuals."

He continued, "Yes, we fought each other, but we also helped each other. Yes, we committed atrocities, but we also did better—so much so that those better actions overshadowed the worst. And, importantly, we learned. We learned from our mistakes and took steps to prevent them from happening again, or, if they did happen, to minimize the damage."

"This," he said with conviction, "is our only real advantage over you—experience. Experience gained through trial and error, from the time our species has had to learn and grow."

He paused again, giving the audience a moment to reflect on his words. "Experience earned because we had to survive and thrive on a planet that often seemed bent on killing us, with bodies not built for the challenges we faced."

"Experience earned through interactions with different groups, with differing points of view, forcing us to compromise, to adapt, to grow."

"And all of this," he said, gesturing broadly, "led us here, to this star system."

He paused again, allowing his words to sink in. The humans in the crowd felt a mix of pride and reflection, while the Proximians were trying to imagine themselves in humanity's shoes, considering the long journey humanity had taken to reach this point.

"But just because you haven't gone through what we did doesn't mean you lack advantages over us," Aron continued, transitioning to acknowledge the Proximians' strengths.

"Your advantage lies in your purity, in the untainted life experience that most humans lose during our development. The twists of fate that have entangled human society since its dawn have taken that away from us."

He paused, then added, "Another advantage is how you've started your lives as a unified group. You didn't have to endure the brutality and division that we experienced to achieve unity. It's something I envy—something that I believe we desperately need to keep ourselves from going astray."

Aron's tone softened as he reached his point. "That's why, from the moment I learned of your existence and your unique characteristics, I knew it was vital that you join us. Whether as imperial

citizens or as allies, you would act as a counterbalance to us, just as we could to you, ensuring neither of us strays from our path."

He smiled as he concluded, "With that reasoning, and for many other reasons, I officially welcome you to our empire as its newest members. May this union be as prosperous as we all hope it will be."

Aron's speech was notably brief for such a significant event, especially compared to the often long-winded addresses of world leaders from previous regimes. But he didn't need to elaborate on unrelated topics; he had the focus and leverage to address the heart of the matter, which he appreciated.

The crowd erupted into a sea of cheers, waving the empire's flags with joy and pride. Some were so moved they shed tears. It was a momentous occasion—one that had far-reaching implications not just for the Proximians, but for humanity as well.

'I hope humanity can adopt some of their traits,' Aron mused to himself as he observed the scene. The Proximians' deep gratitude was evident. They were fully aware that their very existence hinged on an accident, one that had even cost a few human lives.

But even if they had come into existence through some other means, they knew it would have taken them thousands of years to reach this level of development. Thanks to the empire, they had bypassed that long, arduous process, arriving directly into the modern age.

Their purity and innocence meant they took to heart everything they were taught. It shaped their behavior and values. For them, concepts like breaching contracts, scams, broken agreements, and dishonesty were deeply despised.

They were raised under the empire's guidance, and these virtues became the foundation of their actions. As a result, they held themselves to the highest standards, embodying the integrity that Aron hoped would influence the rest of the empire.

"Why are you cheering?" Crabapple asked, turning to Birch, who was enthusiastically joining the crowd in their celebration.

Their new bodies had been returned to them just a few hours before the ceremony. After assimilating the knowledge Aron had prepared for them, they decided to attend the event as spectators, eager to experience life from the perspective of their children. Since the public was unaware of their new physical forms, and with no plans to reveal their existence anytime soon, they blended seamlessly into the crowd.

"My personality makes it easy for me to enjoy things," Birch replied with a grin.

"Unlike you, who would probably become an introvert if left alone." He chuckled and returned to cheering, blending into the energetic atmosphere.

Crabapple sighed, glancing around. "I wish I could leave," he muttered. The no-fly zone around the area meant he couldn't escape by air, and trying to navigate through the massive crowd on foot would take hours. Resigned, he settled in for the remainder of the event.

The ceremony proceeded smoothly, with a series of pre-arranged acts unfolding as planned. First came the ceremonial signing of the authority handover, a formal moment that symbolized the union between the Proximians and the Empire.

This was followed by a solemn yet powerful event, as all high-ranking government officials stepped forward to swear their allegiance to the Empire and the Emperor, solidifying the new era of governance.

But the highlight came next—the first official singing of the imperial anthem. As the voices of twenty million people rose in unison, the sound filled the massive square and echoed beyond.

The sheer force and unity of the collective singing sent chills down the spines of everyone present, creating an atmosphere of overwhelming emotion. Whether watching from afar, through the live stream or standing among the crowd, the moment felt historic, as if it symbolized the birth of something far greater than anyone could have imagined.

After all the official proceedings concluded, the ceremony transitioned seamlessly into a massive concert, shifting the tone from formality to celebration. The stage came alive with the energy of nearly all the Proximian's most famous singers, each invited to perform for this historic occasion.

The Proximians, along with the humans in attendance, joined in the festivities, dancing, singing along, and celebrating their new union.

Chapter 707 Departure

A week after the handover ceremony, the exploration fleet had begun the long process of packing for their return to Earth. With packing always taking longer than unpacking, it took an entire month for them to complete the task. Now, the entire fleet stood ready for their journey back home.

{Sir, the packing is complete, and the time to move out is approaching. They are asking if they should extend the expected departure time.} Nova's voice echoed in Aron's mind as he stood inside the now-empty stellar forge.

"I'm about done here, so we'll move out as scheduled," Aron replied calmly, finishing the etching of a massive rune around the wide opening of the forge.

{Okay} she said as she sent the response back to the fleet admiral.

"Boot it up and run a full systems check to ensure everything is working as intended," Aron ordered briefly, having completed his part of the work. The remaining modifications had been handled by the miniature atomic printer he'd brought to the forge.

Nova didn't respond verbally but immediately initiated the process, booting up the renovated forge and running comprehensive system diagnostics without delay.

During the past month, while the fleet was packing for evacuation, Aron had been tirelessly modifying the stellar forge into an advanced atomic printer. This printer would be crucial for producing arms and ships for the soon-to-graduate Proximian Ares trainees. With roughly 250 million Proximians currently undergoing training, the demand for weapons, military gear, and equipment would soon skyrocket.

Not only would there be a need for personal arms and supplies, but the entire star system would require a new network of sensors, military outposts, and defense structures.

Fortunately, the tree folk on the planet had stepped in to assist with building temporary military bases, ensuring that the Proximian trainees had adequate facilities for their training.

The real, permanent bases would be constructed later, once the more immediate priorities were addressed.

Without their help, the enormous task of constructing these bases would have been placed on the newly completed atomic printer, and it would have taken precedence over everything else.

Despite the sheer scale of the tasks ahead, Aron remained unfazed. He had brought along a team of specialists—experts in military infrastructure and logistics—who would remain behind to oversee the construction and ensure that the Proximian side of the military was ready as quickly and efficiently as possible.

These experts would make certain that everything proceeded smoothly, allowing the Proximians to transition into their military roles without delay.

{Everything is up and running as expected,} Nova reported back after completing the diagnostics.

"By when will the people assigned here be ready to take over?" Aron asked after hearing Nova's positive report.

{Tomorrow, this facility will be operating at full capacity,} Nova responded, displaying the completion percentage of the training program for the atomic printer workers. These individuals had been carefully selected and deemed worthy of handling the classified knowledge involved in the forge's operations.

"Good," Aron said with a satisfied nod. "Let's get back. I don't want to be left behind and have to fly to Earth on my own." He started heading toward the landing bay to return to his ship.

{It would take you a few decades to accelerate to the necessary speed to reach Earth in any reasonable timeline,} Nova teased with a chuckle, her tone lightening the moment.

Aron smirked at her remark. "All the more reason not to be late then."

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Having already completed all the tasks required of him on the planet, including bidding farewell to the citizens, Aron was ready to leave. When the time finally arrived, the fleet wasted no time in departing.

Due to its massive size, the start of the departure was slow, but not everything they had brought with them was going back.

About half of the ships that had accompanied the Emperor were left behind to ensure the security of the star system while they waited for the atomic printer to begin production of additional ships.

As the fleet departed the star system, nearly all the awake Proximians gathered to bid them farewell. They waved from the planet's surface and from ships in space, sending their well-wishes for a safe journey back to the capital of the empire

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"I didn't even have time to enjoy coming to another star system," Felix said, reclining in the lounge of the imperial flagship. Although he had managed to tour the planet in

the last few weeks, the majority of his time had been spent ensuring the foundation of the company's new branch was solid.

Thanks to the Proximians' beliefs and personalities, the process had been surprisingly smooth and uncomplicated, but it left him with little time to fully experience the wonders of this new world.

"You can come and visit anytime you want," Birch replied, smiling before shifting to a more curious tone, "But do you care to tell me how you know the emperor?"

Knowing it would take them six months to reach the capital planet, Birch was eager to learn more about the people closest to Aron. She had noticed the bonds between them but wanted to understand their history.

Meanwhile, the other tree folk, especially the traitors who had been given new bodies just a week ago, were still keeping their distance. They bore grudges and carried the weight of the humiliation they had faced. Crabapple was spending his time with Rina, while Cypress, sitting beside Birch in the lounge, observed Felix and Sarah with quiet interest.

Felix, finding a welcoming audience, began recounting his story with enthusiasm. "You know, we first met Aron in a rather unexpected way..."

He described their initial encounter, how he and Sarah had crossed paths with Aron, and the series of events that had led them to form a connection. The tale was filled with interesting anecdotes and light-hearted moments, reflecting the close bond they had developed over time. He spoke openly, aware that his story contained no sensitive information that could compromise any security.

As Felix spoke, the others listened intently, occasionally interjecting with questions for more details. The atmosphere in the lounge was relaxed and engaging, providing a welcome distraction from the long journey ahead.

Meanwhile, the fleet passed the heliosphere and seamlessly transitioned into faster-than-light travel. The vast expanse of space now stretched out before them as they journeyed back home, marking the end of an extensive and eventful Journey.

Chapter 708 Summary Report

December 15, 5 AE (After Empire)

It has now been five years since the formation of the empire, and it has finally entered a phase of stability. No major obstacles threaten the empire, aside from the inevitable minor issues that arise. However, even these small problems are kept to a minimum and are swiftly addressed whenever they occur.

With all citizens now relocated to fortress cities, satellite cities, nearby villages, and even the rebuilt former cities upgraded to fortress city standards, the empire could confidently claim it had completely eradicated homelessness.

Due to the large number of newly built cities combined with the refurbished older cities, the empire was experiencing an overflow of unoccupied houses under its administration. In a fully capitalistic system, this surplus would have led to a significant drop in property values, as supply far exceeded demand.

However, the empire was not a fully capitalistic or free-market society. While the free market was allowed to operate in areas like business, the government maintained strict control over sectors deemed essential for survival, as outlined in the constitution. This approach ensured that necessities such as housing, healthcare, and food were accessible to all citizens, preventing the exploitation of basic needs by market forces.

As a result, the millions of still-empty houses were not subject to devaluation. Instead, the empire set their prices based on factors such as size and location, but these prices remained stable, only adjusted for inflation. This ensured that even future generations wouldn't have to worry about the cost of owning a home, providing long-term housing security for all citizens, including children born generations later.

Although the prices were regularly adjusted for inflation, more than four years had passed since the Fortress City project began, and none of the houses had seen any price increases. This was due to the empire's meticulous efforts to prevent both inflation and deflation.

Economists had initially argued that such a policy might stagnate the economy, fearing that the lack of natural economic fluctuation could lead to stagnation. However, this concern was avoided as the empire found itself in a period of rapid expansion. New industries were being established every few months or years, driving the economy in the opposite direction of stagnation, resulting in an economic boom.

The same standards were applied to all necessities for the citizens, except for food. While the empire refrained from direct interference in the food market, the emperor took a personal hand in ensuring its stability and accessibility.

This began with the creation of a new company under the umbrella of Connect Enterprises, named Demeter Agriculture. Despite its name suggesting a focus on farming crops, Demeter Agriculture's sole purpose was to purchase crops from farmers and sell them to buyers.

The company was currently buying products from almost anyone in the food production industry at premium prices, ensuring that farmers received decent profits. Demeter Agriculture then acted as an intermediary, selling these products to companies that needed them for manufacturing or directly to citizens at very affordable prices.

During its first year, when people calculated the buying prices from farmers and the selling prices to companies, it became clear that the empire was selling the products for half or even less than what they paid to the farmers. This led many to believe that the emperor was using Demeter Agriculture to lower food prices and support the agriculture industry, intentionally absorbing the losses to benefit both farmers and consumers.

But they couldn't have been more wrong. Demeter Agriculture bought everything from farmers, including produce that might not have met customer cosmetic standards. The company also acquired even low-quality items that would otherwise have been discarded at their production price.

Upon receiving the crops, they were sent to what the public assumed were "sorting facilities"—in reality, these were massive atomic printers. The printers repaired any damage to the produce, enhanced the fruits, and made everything look aesthetically pleasing. This process transformed even the discarded batches into high-quality products.

As a result, Demeter Agriculture was able to turn a profit while indirectly controlling prices across the agricultural sector. With a near-monopoly on agricultural produce, the company could sell to anyone in need, creating a competitive market with thousands of companies vying for trade. This competition helped keep prices low, with the Trade Commission monitoring the market to prevent harmful monopolies.

Although Demeter Agriculture operated as a de facto monopoly, it had not violated any laws that would attract the Trade Commission's scrutiny. Their monopoly status was achieved purely through offering better deals and lower prices than competitors, without engaging in practices that would warrant regulatory action. The company did not employ exclusive supply agreements, predatory pricing, or refuse to deal with competitors. Instead, it allowed other businesses to operate freely within the market.

The Trade Commission kept a close watch on Demeter Agriculture, ready to act if the company attempted to undermine competition or engage in anticompetitive practices. Unless the emperor directly intervened, the commission had the authority to address any violations and ensure fair market conditions.

The same principle applied to all of his companies. Fortunately, the emperor didn't need to resort to underhanded tactics, as he was always several steps ahead of any potential competitors in each industry.

"At some level, money now is really just like agreeing to accept children's currencies," Aron remarked as he reviewed the yearly report for his companies, noting the staggering profits they were generating.

Despite spending hundreds of billions on the House of Hope and the Coeus Foundation, it seemed like a mere drop compared to his earnings.

{True, it is almost valueless since you can have everything you want without it anyway}, Nova agreed. At this point, anything he desired required something beyond money—System Points (SP).

"But that is only in the eyes of someone in my position; for everyone else, it's everything," Aron said, reflecting on his past. He remembered his time as a student, about a decade ago, when he was on the brink of graduation with a massive student debt hanging over him.

{However, that might change depending on how our faceoff with them unfolds,} Nova said, hinting at the upcoming event. She was referring to the approaching body now in its final phase of deceleration, soon to come to a complete stop.

"Let's hope it's something beneficial for us and not just a stone cast into a now calm lake," Aron said. While he was excited about the prospect of something unexpected, he hoped it wouldn't disrupt the peace and stability his citizens had come to enjoy. Their expectations and hopes were different from his own, and he wanted to ensure their well-being was maintained.

Chapter 709 Preparations for the Meeting

Imperial Space Agency.

“So, if they intend to stop, it should be within the next two months,” Dr. Musa Aminu, the head of the ISA, said while reviewing the latest observation data.

Over the past five years, the empire’s advancements in observation technology, combined with their rapid production and deployment capabilities, had allowed them to gather increasingly detailed information on the approaching visitors. Now, with precise calculations and high observational fidelity, they could pinpoint the exact region where the visitors were likely to pass through.

However, there was a limit to the current mana-based observation technology. The approaching vessel continuously emitted mana, and when combined with the ambient mana present in the void between heliosphere-protected star systems, this made it impossible to capture a detailed image of the vessel. As a result, they would have to rely on visual observation when the vessel came closer to gather more precise details.

"Are we really just going to sit back and let them do whatever they want while we watch?" one of the attending scientists asked Dr. Musa.

Dr. Musa replied, "That's not my call to make. My responsibility is to report this to the emperor during the upcoming Imperial Council meeting. He will decide what course of action we take." He paused briefly before continuing, "However, if you have any suggestions for how we should handle this, now is the time to share them. I'll present them to the emperor to provide him with options." He opened the floor, inviting suggestions from the group.

With the stage now open, members of the Imperial Space Agency began offering their suggestions one after another. Ideas were discussed openly, with participants debating their merits without concern for how foolish any might seem. After all, it would only be the Agency head and vice heads who would ultimately report to the emperor, not them. This environment allowed for creative, sometimes unconventional proposals, as everyone was focused on exploring every possibility, knowing that the final decision lay with higher authorities.

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"They have no idea we're here," whispered one of the junior officers, awe in his voice as their ship crept closer and closer to the ship whilst in stealth mode.

But then, something changed.

A pulse came from the alien ship, and a sudden, inexplicable wave of energy washed over their ship. The lights flickered. Instruments went haywire.

"Status report!" Darius barked.

"Systems are fluctuating," Irina said, her fingers flying over her controls. "But we're still cloaked. They can't—"

Suddenly, the alien vessel emitted a bright flash of light, and every screen on the ship went dark for a moment.

"Commander... I think they know we're here," Irina said, her voice barely a whisper.

"All stations, prepare for evasive maneuvers!" Darius shouted, his heart pounding. "Break away, now!"

But it was too late. A red warning light blinked on the main display as the alien ship turned toward them, locking on. The hum of energy grew louder.

"Brace for impact!" Darius shouted, gripping his seat. The ship jolted violently as a blinding explosion filled the viewport, racing toward them with terrifying speed.

"Shit," someone muttered as the explosion overtook the ship, swallowing them whole in a split second of blinding white.

{Simulation complete. Result: failure,} Athena's calm voice echoed through the silence, bringing the scenario to a final, bitter end.

Over the past few years since the discovery of the approaching visitors, Athena had been running countless simulations, each with different parameters to predict how their encounter might unfold and how events could escalate depending on their actions.

{Let's start another,} she said, quietly logging the results and insights gained from the previous run. With no definitive knowledge of its occupants, purpose, or capabilities, she was left to theorize, running her calculations based on limited data and educated guesses. Still, she pressed on, knowing that the more simulations she completed, the better her chance of glimpsing the right outcome.

Similar preparations were underway across various departments that had any connection to the impending first contact with the approaching vessels. From the Imperial Space Agency to the military and all the way to the Ministry of the Exterior, each department focused on their role in the encounter.

The Ministry of the Exterior concentrated on the means of initiating communication, while the military prepared to send personnel to protect diplomatic envoys. Meanwhile, the space agency took charge of monitoring the situation, ensuring nothing unusual occurred by locking down surrounding space and keeping a watchful eye on the oncoming visitors.

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Aron was seated in his office, which remained in the same temporary cube as the construction of the new imperial palace had only begun a few months ago. Given the project's scale, it would take several years to complete.

"Brother, why did you call for me?" Henry asked as he entered the room. At eighteen, Henry had grown noticeably taller and was beginning to resemble a younger version of Aron, with his recent growth spurt marking his transition into adolescence.

"I've called you because now that you're eighteen and considered an adult, it's time for you to start familiarizing yourself with the workings of the government. You'll be attending the Imperial Council meeting with me," Aron explained, gesturing to the stack of papers in his hands.

The papers were made from nanomachines, which allowed them to function like holograms while still providing the tactile feel of paper.

"Brother, you're going to be around for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Can't I just focus on what I love? Plus, you could always have a child to take my place if

needed. I really don't want to deal with government matters," Henry said, his expression serious about his reluctance to assume a political role.

Aron listened to Henry's response with an understanding expression before asking, "So, you don't want to take my place in the future?"

"Not really. Why tie myself down with such responsibilities when I could be doing what I love?" Henry replied.

"I understand your reluctance. However, as the only direct heir and the current crown prince, it's important for you to at least attend this meeting and see how things are handled. You can decide later if you want to continue in this role or not," Aron said, making it clear he wasn't trying to force Henry into a position he wasn't comfortable with. There was no urgency; he wanted Henry to be informed and prepared, but the choice was ultimately his.

"Okay, I'll attend, but I don't need to prepare anything to speak, right?" Henry asked, wanting to know if he needed to be ready to say anything.

"No, unless you have a suggestion or something specific to discuss, you won't need to speak. You'll mostly be observing," Aron replied, reassuring him.

While the opportunity for Henry to learn was a significant reason for his attendance, this particular meeting was set to address a crucial issue. Aron wanted Henry to be present not only to gain insights but also to be fully informed about the important matters at hand. Understanding these key issues would help Henry make an informed decision about his future role, as knowledge and context often influence our choices.

Chapter 710 The Fifth Imperial Council Meeting I

As the days passed, the day of the Imperial Council meeting finally arrived.

Inside the VR Imperial Palace's grand Emperor's Council Chamber.

One by one, the heads and vice heads of imperial agencies began to appear. Within just five minutes, all of the required officials were present—more than half an hour before the meeting's official start time. Since the first council meeting, seating had always operated on a first-come, first-served basis, and this tradition was well-respected.

With everyone arriving so early, the room was filled with quiet conversations and activity. The officials used the extra time to prepare, run final checks on their materials, and engage in light discussions with those seated nearby. It was a calm before the storm of important decisions and discussions, as they waited for the meeting to formally begin.

There was no chaos or disruption as the attendees conversed calmly with one another, fully aware of the need to uphold the dignity of the council chamber. Their measured tones were not just out of respect for the setting, but also because the meeting was being broadcast live across the entire empire. Viewers had the ability to tune in and focus on any part of the conversation simply by highlighting specific sections of the stream.

The Proximian heads of agencies blended in seamlessly with their human counterparts. The only exception was the giants, whose sheer size naturally made them stand out. However, even they didn't appear out of place. This was far from their first council meeting, and they had become well-versed in the formalities and expectations of the process. Despite their imposing presence, they carried themselves with the same decorum as the rest of the assembly, waiting for the meeting to officially commence.

As the final minute ticked down, the emperor made his entrance into the chamber, commanding immediate attention. This time, however, he wasn't alone—his younger brother accompanied him, a sight that took both the officials present and the empire's live audience by surprise. Whispers of curiosity rippled through the crowd, but the surprise was short-lived.

Within seconds, every imperial official in the chamber rose from their seats in unison, showing their respect for the emperor. The atmosphere shifted to one of solemnity and reverence as they welcomed him into the chamber, ready for the meeting to begin.

Be seated," Aron commanded as he settled into his throne. The council chamber, designed like a grand clamshell amphitheater, placed the emperor and his key ministers on a raised platform, flanked by the AI leaders who served alongside them. Today, however, there was a notable addition. To Aron's left, the crown prince, Henry, sat in a specially crafted chair—a design that mirrored Aron's throne but in a smaller, more modest form. It was still larger than every other seat in the room, symbolizing his unique position within the council.

Although Henry held no actual governing power yet, his place in the hierarchy was unmistakable. The chair represented not only his role as crown prince but also the weight of responsibility that would fall upon him if anything happened to render the emperor unable to rule.

Gaia, as usual, took charge of initiating the meeting. {Ladies and gentlemen of the Imperial Council, thank you for your attendance today. Since all of you are here for at least the second time, I won't waste time reiterating the rules. Anyone attending without knowing them would indicate a lack of due diligence in their role, and such negligence will be addressed accordingly.}

Her voice was calm yet authoritative as she continued, {Today's session has only one item on the agenda: progress reports from each of your agencies' ongoing projects, if any. However, I fully expect this to be a lengthy meeting. Nearly everyone in this room has been tasked with a project aimed at strengthening the foundation of the empire. We are not here to judge, but to assist. Share the challenges you are facing, and rest assured, those challenges will be resolved.}

Gaia's gaze panned across the room, her professional demeanor matched by the inhumanly perfect smile on her elfin face. {As always, once your progress reports have been entered into the Akashic Record, you will receive individualized feedback based on your specific circumstances. Even if everything seems to be progressing smoothly, there is always room for improvement.}

She paused, and with a respectful bow—small but significant—she concluded, {With that said, please welcome His Imperial Majesty.} Unlike her kneeling at the first meeting, Gaia had adapted to Aron's preference for minimal formality during these moments, respecting his request. She then opened the floor for Aron's opening address, signaling the true beginning of the council's session.

Aron stood from his seat, and as he did, the desk before him transformed into a podium adorned with the imperial seal, symbolizing his authority. He cleared his throat, not out of necessity, but as a gesture of tradition, and then began to address the council.

"Ministers, councilors, and imperial citizens, good morning, afternoon, and evening. Today marks almost six years since the foundation of the Terran Empire. At our very first council meeting, I said, After every trial comes an opportunity, as a wise man once said in the past, and that is on display before us already. And better things are on the horizon, as well. The last three years have embodied that sentiment in ways beyond expectation.

We began by addressing the most pressing concern—eliminating health problems—and swiftly moved to ensure that the basic human needs of our citizens were met. From food to shelter, from education to reducing crimes, we have made leaps that few could have imagined when this journey began.

We cannot express enough how fulfilled We are to see that the vision We laid out for this empire has been realized even faster than projected. This rapid progress has allowed our citizens to live their lives without the burdens that once weighed on them. A life of ease and opportunity is no longer a dream but a reality, and for that, We stand before you with immense gratitude and pride in all that has been accomplished."

Aron paused briefly, allowing the significance of those words to sink in before continuing his address.

nt of happiness should not become a place of rest. There remains an unresolved matter—one that has been with us from the beginning and, in many ways, served as the catalyst for the war that led to the foundation of this empire. It is a question mark that still looms large over us, and until it is answered, we cannot truly say we have entered an era of peace and prosperity.

Though we are gathered here today to hear progress reports from all agencies, the majority of our focus must center on the progress we've made in addressing this matter. Our citizens look to us for reassurance, for calm, and as a reminder of the promise We made to them—that we would be ready for the arrival of the visitors within a five-year period.

With that, We conclude this address and yield the floor to the agenda of this imperial council."

With those final words, Aron turned and made his way back to his throne as the podium seamlessly returned to its original form, once again a simple table.