

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a light gray color, framing the central text.

Revelation4

Fel

Chapter 4

Kaista, 17 Romaa , 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar

Friday, 13 May 2023, Terran Standard Calendar

*Kaista, 17 Romaa, year 1333 of the 97th Generation, Karinne
Historical Reference Calendar*

Foxwood East, Karsa, Karis

The time just before dawn was one of the few times of day that the strip was a place of relative peace and calm. The kids were still asleep, and it was just before most of the girls started coming out to do their morning workouts, who preferred to come out after sunrise. It was the time when it was quiet enough to hear the waves crashing on the beach not far away, it was the time when there was just enough light to cast the back yard and the houses and barracks that surrounded it in steely light that cast no shadow, creating a nearly surreal image out of a noir comic book. It was in this monochromatic setting where Jason sat with his back to his tree, sitting on a small cushion with his legs crossed, his hands on his knees, and his eyes closed as he practiced the meditation techniques that the *shaman* had taught him, part of his training to try to seek truth. And as usual, the truth he was seeking lay in the small mirror that sat on a stand in front of him. He sought to unlock the truth of what lay behind the glass, which was but a metaphor for unlocking the truth hidden within his own soul. What the mind has forgotten, the soul remembers, and Jason was trying to see an image of his mother, to see her face in the mirror, to finally know what she looked like.

His memories of her were tied up in the piano, in her hands, in her voice, which always—*always*—in French. He was dwelling on those memories in his meditation in an attempt to unlock the memories bound within his soul, to let his soul show him what his mind had forgotten.

But today was no more successful than any other day had been. He'd been working on this for several months, and he still had yet to have a single success. The *shaman* told him that what he was trying to do wasn't easy, that it may take him *years* to finally succeed, and that perseverance was the only path to victory. But that was no problem for Jason Karinne. He could be bullishly stubborn when he wanted something, and this was something that he very much wanted. The truth was a mystery, a puzzle, a goal, and the engineer in him absolutely could not resist solving this mystery. He would learn the truth if only because it would drive him absolutely crazy *not* to know.

That was the Kimdori in him, a nearly overpowering curiosity that he had to placate. And it wasn't the only way that he was similar to his furry relatives.

He usually wasn't alone for these meditation sessions. Something about them never seemed to fail to attract an animal or two to him, and his usual companion for these meditation sessions was one of the newer inhabitants of the strip, a Menodan water dog. They looked more like otters than dogs, part of the wildlife seeding program. They were otter-like animals that lived on the coast of salt oceans, eating fish, crustaceans, and mollusks. They had a particular taste for sand crabs, and there were a ton of them infesting the beach, so there was more than enough food for them to hang around. Water dogs were intelligent, playful, and very social, and since it had moved in around here, Jason had had to work to keep the strip

kids from trying to treat it like a pet. It wasn't a pet, it was a wild animal, though granted that it wasn't hostile or aggressive because Jason had explained the rules of living on the strip to it when it moved in, and it had obeyed them. And the first rule was no hostility towards the kids, that some of them were too young to understand the difference between a pet and a wild animal.

The other companion this morning was the alpha male wolf. The pack had decided to come visit a few days ago, so the rest of them were sleeping in the barracks hangar while the alpha male was up and about, enjoying a little quiet company with Jason as he did his morning meditation. The wolf's presence had frightened the water dog at first, but Jason explained that *these particular animals* were no threat to it. Other animals may be, but not the wolves. The wolves visited quite often, around once a month, because they had made many friends while they were here to be trained, and they were very social animals that liked to be close to friends and family. They also came over to get a little additional telekinesis instruction from Mrar, who was teaching them some of the more advanced techniques that Jason hadn't taught them.

Today was a good day to start off in meditation, because today was *important*. After nearly a month of the *Astra* going back and forth to C6D, they'd finally set up an official meeting between Jason and the Republic. That meeting was going to be today, and it was going to be in person...at least if a bionoid was considered in person. Jason was going to meet with a member of the Republic's Supreme Council, their executive authority, to discuss the trade of technology. Jason had no idea what to expect, because they'd been almost suspiciously tight-lipped in their communications with the *Astra*. They'd declined to discuss anything until the official summit.

And while Jason was a generally optimistic person, he also was suspicious enough to not like what he was hearing. So, he'd had the engineers on the *Astra* make a few special modifications to his and Cyrsi's bionoids...just in case.

There was another visitor on the planet right now, one that had kept Jason busy the last couple of days. Jason had approved Bei's request to do some additional training with the KBB after Kyva and the KBB had gone to Prakka for a training exercise with the Reavers, and he'd had a bionoid built for her that was Terran size, which she'd been using when not merged to a Marauder, one of the training units they kept for the Reavers that were exactly the same as their usual units Bei being here was a test of the Syndicate cyberjacks that the Reavers used, testing their ability to piggyback over the biogenic comm array at Prakka that gave them the ability to communicate with Andromeda in real time. From the Wheel, Bei was merged to her Marauder or her bionoid here on Karis, using gravband from the Wheel to the biogenic comm unit hidden not far from the E Chao system, then going over commune from there to Prakka, and then from Prakka to Karis using the main intergalactic array at Prakka. There was a tiny bit of delay, mainly where the gravband was picked up by the array and transmitted by commune. Since she was Benga, her merge was being monitored and her movements on the planet restricted—Jason trusted Bei, but not *that* much—but she'd behaved herself admirably over the last few days.

She was here for another reason, and that was to get her first look at the X prototype of the Jaguar. An X prototype was little more than an empty shell, the mecha's superstructure and external armor sections built out of foamed aluminum and assembled to give the engineers an actual physical

model to use as a guide as they tweaked the design of its internal systems. X prototypes were little more than full size models of the mecha, and after a project was complete, they were converted into statues and placed on military bases. The Titan X prototype sat at the entry plaza on Joint Base Alpha, the first thing a visitor to the base saw when they came out of the starport terminal. The Cheetah X prototype was installed at the entry plaza on Joint Base Sigma. Jason had mentioned that they'd built the X unit already as part of the design process, and Bei had asked to come do some training runs with the KBB barely an hour later.

So far, the Jaguars had been showing some real potential, so much so that the design team was designing a version of the mecha using Karinne technology for possible production. It was larger, heavier, and slower than a Cheetah, but it made up for that with some serious armor, powerful Teryon shields, and some major firepower. The Karinne version was armed with particle cannons like a Cheetah, but it was also armed with a disruptor gatling cannon that extended from a recessed bay in the back. And being slower than a Cheetah was a misleading comparison, because Jaguars were fast, nimble, and agile, and it was that speed and agility when combined with their stronger defenses and greater firepower that made them so impressive. It was like a Juggernaut when compared to a Gladiator, or a Titan when compared to a Valkyrie, the bigger, tougher "big brother" that was a great complement to its smaller, faster sibling.

Sioa was paying very close attention to the Jaguar project.

Bei was scheduled to merge over to her Marauder in about three hours to start her training sortie with the KBB, who were over on Karga to do some training at the desert terrain range, but her bionoid was over here. Jason had given her her first look at the X prototype yesterday afternoon,

and as a result her bionoid was currently being stowed in one of Rook's labs downtown.

Kyva and the KBB had a very interesting relationship with the Reavers, and with Bei in particular. Kyva had a personal interest in the Reavers because they were Gen's hand-picked elite warmech squadron, and her friendship with Gen made her all but consider them to be an extension of the KBB. That meant that she wouldn't be satisfied until they were as good as her own unit, so she trained the hell out of them when she had time away from her duties with the KBB. And when it came to Bei, Kyva had taken the young Benga under her wing to train her personally, because she saw the same potential in Bei that Gen did. Both of them believed that Bei would be equal to them in a few years, once she had more experience, and both of them were very invested in making Bei good enough to challenge them. But more than that, Kyva considered Bei to be a friend, a personal friend, as did many in the KBB. Bei was different from most Benga because she was young, hadn't been hardened by Syndicate society quite yet, which let Kyva get her claws in her before she became like the other Benga. In Kyva, Ebri, and quite a few of the KBB, Bei had real, sincere friends, and that let her keep what the Benga called her *youthful idealism*.

Gen and Bei were promising examples of what the Benga *could* be, with time and patient attention. Gen was no soft-hearted man, he was too old and too long in Benga society to be anything but, but his loyalty to his men and his powerful sense of honor made him very much unlike other Benga. Gen had been able to forge a true friendship with Jason, one in which his military loyalty had been transferred to a person, and that allowed Jason to trust Gen in ways he'd never trust another Benga. Gen was loyal to the trust that had been cultivated between them over the years, to the point

where Gen knew things about Karis and the Confederation that nobody else in Andromeda knew that wasn't a Kimdori. Bei represented how young Benga, who had not yet been completely poisoned by the culture in which they lived, could be saved from that particular kind of damnation with attention and care. There were certainly other Benga like Bei out there, but they were alone in a sea of uncaring animosity, so they kept their views to themselves and simply did the best they could with what they had. Bei was nearly as trustworthy as Gen.

Jason didn't open his eyes when he heard the unshielded thoughts of his daughter Julia as she managed to get the back door open and amble towards him, something he usually couldn't hear so he wasn't constantly distracted by it, and also to give his unexpressed children some privacy. These early morning visits were fairly common, because Julia was a bit of an early riser, and she'd learned that pre-dawn was the best time to come find him and get some devoted, personal attention. The kids were very gracious about sharing his time, but the sad truth was, there were 24 of them and only one of him, so sometimes it took being aggressive to get him without having to compete for his attention. It helped that Julia was turning out to be quite the early bird, often up long before her brother Jon or her siblings in the house, which allowed her to sneak personal time with her father while everyone else was asleep. She ambled right to him, and he opened his eyes and settled her into his lap when she climbed up onto his crossed legs so she could give him a hug. The alpha male stood up and stepped over to them, sitting down and looking down at them with gentle eyes. The wolves adored the children, and were very protective over them. "Well, good morning, my little beauty," he said in French, smiling down at her as she hugged him around his neck. It was a reflection of his own life, for Julia had features that Jyslin was convinced came from his mother, and

some part of him had to agree with her, even though he couldn't remember what she looked like. He just...knew that Jyslin was right. Because of that intimate connection, Jason was of a habit of never speaking to his daughter using anything other than French, just as his cherished mother had never spoken to him in anything but French. Or at least, he couldn't remember her ever speaking to him in English. Each and every memory of her voice was her speaking French.

It was their language, the language of a mother and her son, and now he had continued the tradition and made it the language of a father and his daughter.

“Morning, Daddy,” she said, snuggling against his chest. “Are you staying home today?”

“Afraid not, love, I have a really important meeting today,” he answered, wrapping his arms around her a little more.

[What did she say? You didn't teach us that language.]

*[Trying to talk me into staying home from work today,] he answered.
[She does this a lot. She's very good at it.]*

[I think that's more along the lines of you're easy to be talked into not working.]

*[That might have something to do with it,] he agreed shamelessly.
[Staying at home playing with my kids is way better than reading endless boring reports.]*

“Aww. Stay here, Daddy, we can hunt for treasure on the beach!”

“Afraid I have something very important to do today, but the wolves are going to be here. I’m sure they’ll spend some time with you,” Jason deflected.

“Really? Wanna hunt for treasure?” she asked, looking at the alpha male.

“He doesn’t speak French, little beauty, use Faey,” he reminded her.

“Wanna hunt for treasure today, daddy wolf?” she asked in Faey.

That sounds like quite a fun adventure, the wolf replied, sending so she could hear him.

“I love it when you make the think out loud words,” she bubbled. “Daddy says someday I’ll be able to make them too.”

In time. I’ve been told that you have to grow up a little bit before you can.

“Not really. Mommy says Kyri and Siyara could do it as babies.”

“Well, those two are a bit of a special case,” Jason chuckled. “You shouldn’t compare yourselves to them, little lady. After all, there’s only one Julia in the whole world, and here she is!” he declared, hefting her up over his head, which made her laugh and smile down at him. He laid down on his back and hefted her up and down, which made her giggle, then she gasped when the alpha wolf took hold of her with his telekinetic power and lifted her away from him, putting her on his back and neck.

Swinging isn’t good enough for you, little cub! Let me give you a real ride! he declared, then he stood up, turned, and galloped off, making sure to use his power to keep her firmly in place at the juncture of his neck and

shoulders. Julia's laughter dwindled away as the wolf carried her off, which made Jason rise up on an elbow and smile as he watched them go. The wolves all but considered his kids part of the pack, and they were very playful, even the alpha pair. And Jason had not even the tiniest bit of concern for his daughter. She was as safe as safe could be with the alpha male.

And soon, there would be more. The alpha female was pregnant, and she'd be having a new litter in a few months. They were planning on having them at the vacation house, raising them in the shelter there because it was a secure location, and it would be a safe place for the cubs as they grew up. While the wolves were the apex predators in their forest home, the wilds were a dangerous place for cubs, vulnerable to predators that wouldn't otherwise attack them and also at risk from the environment itself. The shelter was a well-protected place, and the compound would be a very safe place for the cubs to grow up until they were large enough and mature enough to be introduced to the forest and its dangers.

And of course, Jason was already planning on spending some time at the vacation house when they were born, because the pack were his friends and he wanted to be present for a joyous occasion such as welcoming new members. Songa wanted to be there, too, but her interest was medical. She wanted to examine the first cubs born to the pack after they transitioned, and see if being transitioned would cause any unforeseen problems. The wolves were one of the most exotic species to be transitioned, and Songa wanted to both study the effect on their offspring as well as make sure those offspring were healthy.

[Don't eat her or anything,] Jason warned lightly as he stood up.

[Hush, she's my cub now. Go do something useful,] he replied. [Don't you have an important meeting today?]

[Yes, but if I tell Chirk I'm up, she'll inundate me with reports. I'm not gonna go looking for work that's looking for me. But...I think you're right. Today's too important for me to be my usual procrastinating self. I'd better review some stuff before breakfast distracts me.]

[I'll bring the cub back eventually. I may keep her.]

[You do that and Jyslin will hang your bloody tail off our balcony as a warning to all other naughty wolves what happens when they mess with her children,] he predicted cheekily.

[I can take Jyslin.]

[Not when she's in her Gladiator you can't,] he countered. "Well, I do think it's about time for me to start getting ready," he noted to the water dog, who was looking up at him curiously. "You'd better get down to the beach before the crabs start digging themselves out and heading for the water."

The otter-like creature got up himself, gave a chitter of farewell, and bounded towards the deck connecting his and Tim's house, heading for the beach so he could be in position when the crabs emerged from their sandy burrows and made their scramble for the water. He went up to his home office and reviewed several files holding his meeting notes, what he expected to talk about, what he was willing to give the Republic, what he might glean out of them if he got the Supreme Council talking. He discussed the upcoming meeting with Cyrsi, who would again be attending, with all the CB units present in the office as holograms as he and Cyrsi went over things. The talk was put on hold when breakfast was put on the

table, as he went down to eat breakfast. Aran and Sora were over for breakfast, both of them talking excitedly about what would be happening after school. Both of them had just begun the exomech program, and today after school would be their first official lesson. With them in, that was all of his older kids as well as Danelle in the program, something they'd all be looking forward to since Zachary started it months ago. Aran and Sora had been mature enough to do it, but they'd had other lessons and activities that had kept them from starting until now. Jason wouldn't let them quit their sports teams or clubs, they had to honor the commitments they made, so they had to wait until the new school semester before beginning exomech training.

After breakfast, Jason was back in the office preparing for the meeting, but there wasn't much more to do than rehash everything and debate with Cyrsi and the others what the Supreme Council may talk about. But that kept him busy up until it was time to go. He went to the office and checked in with Chirk before heading to his merge pod, then cast his consciousness hundreds of millions of light years away from Karis, merging to the bionoid he had on the *Astra*, which was sitting deep in flat space about an hour from C6D in mode two. It was out that far mainly for self protection, sitting away from the C6 cluster so they'd see anyone coming long before they got anywhere near them. Saruki got them underway once Jason and Cyrsi had stable 100% merges, heading for the rendezvous point on the far side of C6D from C6A, which was the galaxy holding the hostile empire they called the Bru. Jason and Cyrsi made the trip up on the bridge, discussing the upcoming summit with Saruki, which whiled away the time.

They arrived at the designated point right on time, dropping back into normal space to find themselves facing a task force of nearly 50 ships,

including one that was nearly the size of the *Tianne*. That task force made Jason frown, and he gave Saruki and Cyrsi a long, tentative look. They'd made no mention of sending a task force, though it wasn't a stretch to think that they'd send one, given they were carrying a member of the Supreme Council, whom Captain Aruk Ma had said was a member of the highest executive entity in their government. Jason had no idea how many members of the Supreme Council there were, but the size of the task force made it clear that they were considered to be very important people.

“We're being hailed over gravband, Captain,” one of the four comm officers on the left side of the bridge called. “It's video.”

“Put it on the main holo,” he said, referring to the forward bulkhead that held the main viewing holo. Jason found himself looking at an Ulala, a female Ulala, one that looked mature without looking old...maybe a tiny bit older than Dahnai going by looks. She had bone white hair and lucid green eyes not far from Jason's own, and she was wearing a rather unusual outfit that showed a hell of a lot more skin than it concealed. It almost looked like a gypsy dancer's costume, with a cropped bodice that had flared sleeves that ended at her elbows, chains going from the cropped bodice that showed off her lean stomach that went around her sides, a waistchain, and golden chains hanging at intervals from the waist of her skirt, which he could only barely see in the holo. The cropped bodice and the top of the skirt he could see were a creamy eggshell color, with multiple colored scarves attached to the waist of the skirt, and the chains hanging from it, her bodice, and the several bracelets she wore were all gold. “Your Grace,” she said with a nod, her voice soft and velvety, hinting that she was a wonderful singer. “I am Estrella Nine Rings, representative of the Ulala to the Galactic Republic and member of the Supreme Council.”

“Greetings. I am the Grand Duke Jason Karinne, ruler of the House of Karinne, and this is Cyrsi Karinne, governor of the continent of Virga on our home planet and overseer of the Karinne Exploration Service,” he returned. “How may I address you?”

“The Ulala hold little water with titles, your Grace,” she smiled gently. “You may call me Estrella.”

“Then we are of like mind, because I don’t either,” he replied. “I’d be more than happy for you to call me Jason.”

“I invite you aboard my ship, the big one in the middle,” she said with a winsome smile, “so we may talk about your offer.”

“We’ll be on our way as soon as we reach the landing bay,” he answered her, gesturing towards the hatch. The image winked out, and he looked to Saruki. “Back off as soon as we’re out of the landing bay,” he ordered. “Surprising us like this is not getting this meeting off to a good start.”

“I’ll pull back four minutes in mode two. That puts us within seconds to here in mode three.”

“Sounds good,” Jason nodded.

The two of them boarded a standard small personnel dropship, with only four seats, and Jason was again escorted by a Republic shuttle. They landed in what had to be the main landing bay of the giant flagship, an absolutely cavernous bay on the underbelly side of the bow. Estrella was standing in the landing bay waiting for them, along with an honor guard of Republic soldiers and sailors, every one of them Ulala, which Jason found very unusual. He got a chance to get a good look at her as the dropship

landed. She was tall and sleek, not as buxom as he would have first guessed seeing her on holo, but she was very fit, her exposed belly showing signs of muscular definition. Her skirt was ankle length and fuller than he expected, and it was made of a multitude of long, thin scarves that were all different colors, each scarf a different shade of color than the last, creating a rainbow effect as the scarves moved through the color spectrum around her hips. She stepped up to the dropship when Jason opened the hatch and lowered the stairs, and he gave Cyrsi a look as they unbelted. “Here we go,” he said in English, to which she nodded. The two of them exited the dropship and met the woman by the stairs, where she gave a florid, elegant bow. “Welcome aboard the *Setrai*, Jason, Cyrsi. We welcome you among us.”

“I notice that there’s a distinct lack of diversity aboard this ship, Estrella.”

“This is an Ulala ship, Jason,” she told him. “Each member of the Supreme Council has a personal ship, and the *Setrai* is mine. And I’m quite proud of her,” she added with a smile. “Now then, shall we retire to my chambers and discuss your proposal?”

“Lead on, Estrella,” he said with a motion of his hand.

They were led down a long passageway and to a very richly appointed room holding furniture, pillows, and buntings all in bright colors, the most unusual feature being the ribbon-like tassels of cloth sewn onto long cords and hung ceiling, the cords attached to the ceiling at regular intervals almost like party streamers. The cloth looked soft and supple, like silk, and the colors were bright and cheerful. The only furniture in the room were two tables by the bulkheads, with large white pillows being the obvious means by which they would sit down. Estrella confirmed his suspicions by sitting on a pillow in the center of the room, sitting demurely on her legs as Jason

and Cyrsi advanced up to the two pillows facing her, then they did the best they could to sit in their formal robes. “Now, before we begin, I absolutely must ask. Is that an accurate representation of you, Cyrsi?”

“If you mean do I accurately portray a Faey, yes I do,” she replied. “As I’m sure you’ve been told, the Faey and the Ulala are strikingly similar in both appearance and in that both species are fully telepathic. That’s one of the things we hope to speak to you about while we’re here, to share samples of DNA with each other so we can explore this curious coincidence, to see if the similarities are only skin deep or if they go deeper.”

“That’s something we could definitely discuss,” she replied as a much less clad teenage Ulala boy came in from another room carrying a tray. The young man was wearing only a loincloth of a sort, a simple cloth cord around his waist with a length of cloth pulled through it to cover his crotch, the ends of it draping down to his mid-thigh. “Ah, thank you, Siuwil,” she said as he came up to her and offered her a tall glass of amber liquid. She took a drink, then held the glass as she looked at them. “First off, let me tell you that the Republic is glad to know that we have friends beyond the galactic cluster. We’ve sent explorers to the neighboring clusters, but our interactions with the natives there have been quite strained, most likely due to the Bru. We know for a fact that they have sufficient engine technology to reach other galactic clusters, though it takes them a long time and requires a great deal of effort. We speculate that they’ve sent exploratory missions out to the two neighboring clusters, encountered advanced species, and then attacked them. And that has poisoned the wine for the rest of us.”

Jason steered away from answering that, seeing it for the subtle interrogation technique that it was. If he were to mention what they had and had not explored, it would give her an idea of where they’d been and thus

how much reach they had. “It’s good to know that you consider us friends, Estrella,” he deflected in a mild tone.

“Your people have been nothing but polite and lovely to us,” she smiled. “That being said, let us get to the matter at hand. The Republic might be swayed to share our resonance technology with you.” She took a sip of her drink, then set it on her leg, steadying it with a hand, and looked at him. “We can’t give you physical components of the technology itself, because it’s reliant on our computer architecture, which we are not willing to share. However, we would be willing to release technical data concerning the technology, what the technology is, how to build resonance units, and the science behind how it works, as well as giving you information on how to produce certain components of it that are required for its operation, so you might attempt to adapt it to your own computer architecture. In return, as I’m sure you’ve guessed, we are most interested in the exact technical data behind those marvelous bionoid machines. We have comparable robotic technology, but we have nothing like the sensory transfer system you’ve employed with them, which gives them the same senses as a living creature. That is new to us, and you’ve mentioned that you’re willing to trade it to us. However, the sensor transfer technology is only a portion of what we want in return,” she continued, looking at him with her pale rose eyes. “Given the high value and worth that a technology like resonance would be, it’s only fair that we receive what we feel is an equal exchange. So, we would like *all* of the technologies that you offered in our first meeting. All of them but the sensory transfer technology are technologies we already possess, but we want your data about them so we might study how you have developed them differently than we have. Perhaps your approaches will teach us something new.”

“Done,” Jason said immediately, tucking his hands into his sleeves. “We have all the pertinent data for all the offered technologies stored in a data module on our ship, already translated into your common trade language, that we can bring over on a dropship. The module is equipped with a shortrange gravband comm, so you should have no problems reading that data and transferring it into your computers.”

“Well, that was easy,” she smiled.

“What you ask isn’t unreasonable, so I have no reason to argue over it,” he told her evenly. “Besides, that gives us more time to discuss something much more interesting to us.”

“What is that?”

“The Ulala,” he replied, pulling a small panel out of his sleeve. “This holds data on the DNA of the Faey, the race that looks just like you. We were hoping that you could supply similar data on Ulala DNA so we might compare them, to see how closely related you are to each other.”

“You seem quite interested in the matter. I’ll have my medical officer analyze it, which shouldn’t take too long. They might be done before you leave,” she said, looking to the side. The young boy hurried over and took the tablet from her, then he rushed from the room.

“It’s been quite a mystery to us since we first heard about your people, and it’s something we’ve encountered once before. In our exploration of our home galactic cluster, we stumbled across a race that is so identical to the Faey, both in appearance and genetically, that it’s like they’re the same species. Yet they come from a different *galaxy*. My own people are so genetically compatible with the Faey that we can produce children together. A fact that makes me very happy, since I’m married to a Faey,” he said

easily. “That species that evolved on different planets, even in different galaxies, are so similar to each other is one of the biggest scientific mysteries being studied by our house. So, what interests us is if the Ulala share this similarity, and if so, how this may have come about. That’s why we want to study Ulala DNA. But more than that, we want to learn more about your people, Estrella. Your history, your customs, your society, to see if the similarities between you, the Faey, and us Terrans are more than cosmetic. We’ve all evolved in similar ways, but that’s biology. We’re most curious to see if you’ve developed a similar culture as well.”

She smiled. “And I’d be most curious to hear about your culture, Cyrsi,” she said, looking at her.

Cyrsi gave a soft chuckle. “Faey culture can be complex and convoluted, Estrella. But it is only one culture that exists within the house, and the house’s culture is much different.”

“The House of Karinne isn’t just a few species,” Jason supplied. “Currently, it counts some 362 different species among its citizens.”

“That sounds quite unlike your declaration of peaceful neutrality.”

“I’m sure it does,” he nodded. “But the House didn’t conquer anyone. The House reformed after nearly being destroyed in a terrible war a very long time ago, and it repopulated by having others immigrate, to come join the house from their original home civilizations. Every member of the House of Karinne that’s not a child born into the house *chose* to be a Karinne, Estrella. They actively applied to join the house, and once they were approved, they moved to Karis and helped rebuild what was destroyed long ago. I am honored beyond all measure that they have allowed me to guide them during this rebuilding. Because of that, because the House is an

amalgamation of many, many different species with many different cultures, the social structure of the House of Karinne is considered quite unique in our galaxy. Each species has contributed its history, wisdom, and intellect to the culture of the house, and they have made it stronger for their contribution.”

“It sounds like there’s quite a story behind that.”

“There is. I’d be happy to tell it to you, if you’d like.”

“I very much would, indeed,” she smiled.

Jason found the Ulalan to be quite a delightful lady, very witty but also very intelligent. She listened with sincere interest to the story of the reformation of the House of Karinne, though Jason did edit it quite a bit mainly to remove himself from the tale—he didn’t want to sound like a braggart—and used the tale to elaborate more on the House’s focus on scientific advancement and peaceful existence. She asked very insightful questions as he told her about it, digging for as much information as she could get out of him. But, she did reciprocate, telling them about Ulala culture, and getting quite detailed. Like the Faey, it was a female-dominated society due to females having stronger talent than males, but unlike the Faey, the Ulala were much more gender equal. Male Ulala performed all the same roles and jobs as the women, but there was one *very big* way that the old customs were maintained, and that was that all male Ulala were considered *property*.

It took her a bit to explain it, because it sounded an awful lot like slavery, but it was not. Ulala men were owned by women, but those women didn’t control them or could tell them what to do. It was basically a custom that dictated that Ulala men could not live alone, so they lived with the

woman who owned them. The woman was expected to help support the man as if he were a dependent, a relationship where the man actually had a lot of power. If a man didn't want to work, he didn't have to, he could stay at home and live off of the woman's support. But the woman did have power in that dynamic in that she only had to meet his basic needs, and that was food and shelter. If he wanted money to do things, he had to earn that money himself, so a woman had ways to deal with a primadonna man that expected to be kept in luxury while he did nothing. Men had the right to force a woman to sell them in case they didn't get along, so they weren't stuck with women they didn't like, and a woman could sell a man at any time, even if the man had a bad reputation and no woman wanted to buy him. If a woman couldn't find a buyer for a man she wanted to sell, the Ulalan government would buy him to get him out of her house. That was the greatest shame for an Ulala man that wasn't in the military, to become property of the state rather than a woman, so they tried to avoid it at all costs. Ulala military men who had jobs that required deployment, like a sailor on a naval vessel, were often property of the Navy to make things easier on both the man and the woman that may have owned him, then they were bought back by their previous owner once they finished their military service. Ulala men had absolutely no problems with the custom, because it meant that they always had help or support from the woman who owned them. Women had their own cultural expectations, because a woman was *expected* to own a man. Any woman that didn't was looked down upon by other women, seen as irresponsible and immature.

“Things are considerably different among the Faey,” Jason said as they walked along a passageway. Estrella was giving them a tour of the ship as they talked, showing them the low-security parts of her vessel. She offered the tour because she was very, very proud of her ship, which was *her ship*.

The ship's sole mission was to carry her around, and in many ways, the ship was her home as much as it was her official conveyance. She had many duties all over her home galaxy, so she spent far more time on the ship than she did at her residence on the Galactic Republic's capitol planet. "Men in Faey society are seen as in need of protection by women, so there's sexism there. I had quite a few problems with it because I'm married to a Faey," he chuckled. "My wife is the dominant gender in her society, but I'm the dominant gender in mine. So there were some culture clashes between us while we were courting."

"I imagine," Estrella chuckled. "Are such interspecies relationships common?"

"Between Faey and humans...fairly," he answered. "Humans and Faey are very similar in appearance, genetically compatible so we can have children together, and the two species find the other to be physically attractive. And there's a lack of xenophobia in the Faey race, so they see no problem with marrying outside the species. Terrans...not so much, so quite often the Faey has to be very determined to wear their Terran target down," he said lightly, which made Cyrsi laugh and nod.

"It sounds like that was the case between you and your wife."

"We had our issues for different reasons. The first time we met, I literally kicked her in the face and knocked her out," he replied mildly, which made Estrella laugh brightly. "So yes, Jyslin very much had to wear me down before I married her. She had to go from me kicking her in the face to making me want to marry her. But if there's one thing you need to understand about a Faey, is that when it comes to matters of the heart, they can be absolutely relentless. I don't think there's anyone more determined than a Faey in love, be it a woman or a man. It's an aspect of Faey culture."

“It is for my people as well,” she told him. “But it’s always approached with great care. Given you’re a telepath, you understand the power of a telepathic pair bond.”

“Intimately.”

“Then you should know that Ulala don’t marry unless they’re absolutely sure of it,” she said. “Add to that the fact that marriage is irrevocable in our society. So if you fail to pair bond with your spouse, then you’re spending the rest of your life stuck with him. You can’t sell him, he must live in your house, and you’ll be together for the rest of your lives. So women are very sure of themselves before they propose marriage. They often won’t unless they’ve owned the man for many years, after the pair bond has already formed. That way, the marriage is only an official recognition of what already exists.”

“I can see that,” he nodded as they went through a hatch and entered a large garden, filled with flowering plants and small flower-laden trees.

A woman in a Naval uniform scurried in and bowed. “Results, *Surabe*,” she said, her expression surprised. “The DNA profile brought by the Grand Duke is a 99.9995% match to Ulala DNA. The Ulala and the Faey are virtually the same species!”

Jason and Cyrsi traded glances, both of them thinking the same thing... that it very well may not be a coincidence.

“My, that’s definitely interesting,” Estrella said as she took a small display device from the medical officer and looked at it. “There are many other species in the Republic that greatly resemble us, but our DNA is very different. Yet the Faey, a species not even of our galaxy, is so closely related to us that we’re cousins.”

“A phenomenon we’ve already encountered between the Faey and the Terrans,” Jason said. “So, in a way, that makes us cousins as well, Estrella.”

She gave him a smile. “Then happily do I greet my new cousin,” she said grandly, giving him a little bow.

“This confirms our suspicions,” Cyrsi said. “That the Faey and the Ulala more than resemble one another. This means we need more data, Jason, about the home planet of the Ulala, so we can compare its conditions to Draconis and see if that similar environment is a factor.”

“What do you mean, dear?”

“We have a theory, a theory of the parallel development of species called Gora’s Law,” she explained. “It states that species that evolved and developed in similar environments display similar traits a result of that similarity. The environmental conditions of Terra and Draconis are nearly identical, and produced two species that are so similar that they can interbreed. Though it’s called a law, it’s actually an unproven theory that we seek to validate. And this definitely advances the theory quite a long ways,” she said speculatively, looking at Jason. “For two species in different galaxies to evolve so similarly that they have virtually identical DNA, that will be hard for the scientific community to refute when it comes to proving Gora’s Law. I think it might warrant sending a scientific delegation to the Republic, or allowing an Ulala scientific delegation to return on the *Astra*, if we can find some way to get them there without their minds being destroyed by jump psychosis,” she mused. “It would be easier to send a delegation here. A Faey delegation, so they could study this even as they come to know their distant cousins better.”

“Psychosis?” Estrella asked.

“We travel by jumping into the upper dimensions of space/time, which we call hyperspace, where distances are much shorter. It has a detrimental effect on the minds of us three dimensional beings, Estrella,” Jason answered. “We get around it by shutting down the senses of our sailors and having them use artificial sensory input, which isn’t affected by hyperspace.”

“Ah, so your simsense technology has a very practical use,” she said, looking at him.

He nodded. “I doubt that your resonance tech has the same functionality, because it’s not really designed for it. And it would take us so long to get home, anyone we brought with us would be little more than a mindless husk by the time we got there. So, the safest thing to do would be for us to come back bringing a Faey delegation. If that interests you, that is.”

“Very much so,” she said sincerely. “One of the things I wanted to talk to you about was establishing more permanent relations between our peoples. The fact that we happen to be related only gives us even more reason to want it.”

“Related,” he said, tapping his chin with his finger. First the Dreamers, and now the Ulala. As ridiculous as it sounded...perhaps the Ulala and the Faey *were* directly related. Maybe whoever picked up the Dreamers 40,000 years ago and deposited them in Andromeda had also deposited the Ulala here, in C6D...*millions and millions of light years away*. A distance so vast that it would take a ship using conventional jump engines nearly 22,000 years to travel from Draconis to C6D’s nearest star system.

The question was...why? What purpose did it serve? It had made no sense to him that whoever had put the Dreamers in Andromeda had done so, but this? Putting another group of ancient Faey in a galaxy so vastly distant that the odds that the Faey and the Ulala would meet would be infinitesimal at best? It made no sense. It was as if there *was* no plan, because if there was one, then it was way, way beyond him.

But one thing was certain, at least in his mind. Whoever put the Dreamers in Andromeda put the Ulala here in C6D...or whichever way it had really happened. It was entirely possible that the Ulala were the original Faey, and the Faey were the transplants. Or the Dreamers were the originals and the Faey and Ulala were the transplants. There was no real easy way to tell.

Or was there? Humans shared large segments of their DNA with animals native to Terra. Humans and chimpanzees shared 98% of their DNA. Perhaps the key to solving the mystery of who was the original race was to study the animals on the planets they now called home. That would be impossible for the Dreamers, since they didn't know where they were from, but they could do it for the Faey. They could at least confirm or eliminate the theory using Draconis, to see how related the Faey were to the animals on their home planet...at least as much as they could while taking Gora's Law into account. There were a great many animals on Draconis that were more than visually similar to animals on Terra, animals that shared behavioral and even genetic traits on top of appearance. Vulpars were a great example. They looked like Terran foxes, and elements of their DNA were the same as foxes, but they had some very strikingly different aspects, like the cat-like retractable claws and purring, and the biggest difference of all, the fact that vulpars had two tails.

Attacking the problem from that angle might be best. But in the here and now, the fact that the Galactic Republic wanted to open permanent relations was actually a good thing. It might get their foot in the door in getting access to some of their highly advanced technology beyond resonance tech.

“Cyrsi, talk to Meya and arrange another ship to jump here, one manned primarily by Faey and carrying Faey sociologists and historians,” he told her. “Have them bring historical data of the Faey race so the Ulala can see where they came from, compare it to their own history to see if there are similarities there that might be of use to Ulalan scholars.”

“I’m certain my people would find that information to be very interesting,” Estrella nodded.

“As to establishing more permanent communications, We can’t establish permanent real-time communications because we can’t leave our comm relays out in flat space unguarded, but we can establish a visitation schedule of KES ships bringing information to the Republic, as well as give us the chance to learn about the Ulala and the other races of the Republic. That way, we both have the chance to learn more about each other. Oh, and have them include a couple of Terran historians as well, in case the Ulala are curious about us too. We are similar enough to be cousins, after all.”

“I have Meya on comm,” she answered. “I’m relaying it now.”

“You’re talking to someone in your home galaxy from here?” Estrella asked.

“These *are* machines, Estrella, and we’re controlling them from our home galaxy,” he said mildly, touching his own chest with his hand. “That’s

something you could do with your resonance technology as well, but I don't think you've ever thought to try."

"We never developed your simsense technology," she admitted. "That's what makes it viable."

"Well, we're happy to supply it to you, it should expand your capabilities. I have no doubt that the next time we visit, you'll have even better bionoids than ours in full production," he said with a smile. "Cyrsi's bionoid model is set up with access to the Academy's archives, so she can send to and retrieve data from it. She can't download a whole lot and it's not fast, but she can do it. Given how long ago you gave us the data, no doubt she's already uploaded the technical specs on the resonance system you supplied to us."

"I have," she confirmed. "Hadjha Siyhaa and Myleena are studying the data as it transmits in, as we speak."

"Our top computer specialist and best engineer," Jason supplied to Estrella. "If anyone can learn how build resonance units using our technology and adapt them to our computer architecture, it's those two."

"You speak as if you know them well."

"Myleena is my best friend, as close as a sister to me," he said immediately. "We are family in all ways but blood. My relationship with Hadjha Siyhaa isn't quite so personal, but she is most definitely a friend as well as my best computer specialist. They both work in my government in a special unit devoted to studying cutting edge technology. Many of the scientific advancements we've disseminated through our home galaxy have come from that research unit. Bionoids are a perfect example," he said,

patting his chest. “These are the invention of a member of that research unit.”

“It sounds from her name that this Hadjha Siyhaa isn’t Faey.”

“She’s not, she’s Moridon, which is a race of generally Ulala-shaped beings about twice the size of an average Ulala and with horns. They look a little fearsome, but they are a highly intelligent people and a staunch ally of the House of Karinne,” he replied. “I told you that the House is comprised of many different species, and Hadjha Siyhaa is a great example of that. Her people are considered our galaxy’s most accomplished computer experts, and Hadjha Siyhaa did some work for us as a consultant. She liked what she saw of the house when she saw how it worked from the inside, and she joined. It was a true boon to the House for Siyhaa to join, she’s one of the best computer experts among the Moridon, and her being in the house enriches us with her exceptional skills and education in computer science. We wouldn’t be anywhere near as far along as we are now if she hadn’t joined the House,” he said honestly.

“Many of us in the Republic would see this as a good thing,” she nodded. “We would not be where we are now if we hadn’t come together. We may very well all be dead,” she said with candor. “Had we not joined together to fight the Bru, they would have destroyed us one by one.”

“That is very much a tale I’m interested to hear, Estrella,” Jason told her. “How the Galactic Republic came to be.”

“A tale I’d be happy to tell you,” she smiled. “But maybe during your next visit, given it’s a very long story. Perhaps some historical data would suffice in the interim?”

“If you’re willing to share it,” he replied.

“Of course. I’m sure you’ve brought an empty data unit to bring back additional information.”

“You can just upload it to the panel I gave you. That device should have sufficient storage for simple historical archive data. I doubt it will be overly technical.”

“Indeed,” she smiled. “And it will be easy to read on your voyage home.”

“Well, I won’t be voyaging,” he said lightly. “I’ll delink from this bionoid after we return to our ship, and they’ll put it in storage for the voyage home. I’ll most likely go straight to the warehouse to discuss the resonance data with Myleena and Siyhaa. I was an engineer before I came to rule the House of Karinne, and was a member of the research division that’ll be handling the resonance project, so I like to get my hands deep in that aspect of things.”

“Much to Myleena’s annoyance,” Cyrsi added, which made Jason laugh.

“True enough. Sometimes I think she wants to lock me out of the warehouse,” he agreed cheekily.

The visit wound down. The two of them hashed out the next visitation appointment by a KES vessel, setting a time and a date as well as what information each side wanted to bring concerning the exchange of information between the Faey and the Ulala, and Estrella supplied them with data on Ulala DNA, downloaded to the panel he’d given them, for them to take back to the Medical Service and have them analyze it. Estrella walked them back to the landing bay after the tour and the discussion, which was much more intimate setting, without the honor guard. It was just

the three of them and the usual landing bay crew, which didn't seem to bother Estrella at all, being relatively alone with them. She dared kiss Jason on the cheek, her hand on his shoulder, and she couldn't resist putting her hand on his cheek. "I can't get over this," she said. "I hope the technology you gave us will let the ones we build feel this life-like."

"That was part of the specs we gave you, so I'm sure your factories can do a good job," he assured her. "And I must thank you again for your data, Estrella. Resonance technology will let us build a real-time communications network throughout our home galaxy without us having to use our own system, which should foster peaceful relations among the civilizations in the galaxy. The Galactic Republic will help us foster peace in our home galaxy, and that is a precious thing to the House of Karinne."

"Peace is a goal worth any effort," she told him with a smile.

"Well said. I'll have a bionoid on board the next ship to visit, so hopefully we can meet again."

"I'll make sure of it," she said easily. "The Republic has tasked the Ulala with relations with your people, Jason, so you'll be dealing with us in all matters."

"That sounds just fine to me," he smiled.

"And me as well," she agreed pleasantly.

She kissed Cyrsi goodbye, and then stood back as they boarded the dropship and closed the hatch. She waved as Jason picked the ship up off the deck, and they waved from the cockpit as he turned the ship towards the bay doors. He exited the bay and turned towards the *Astra*, which Cyrsi had called while they were boarding and had returned to pick them up. [*That*

went better than I expected,] Jason communed from his real body, which didn't touch his bionoid. [What's the initial impression of the resonance data?]

[You're not going to believe this, babes,] Myleena answered. [Their resonance technology is scarily similar to biogenic tech. They use special organic crystals to send and receive telepathy, just like we do. But they're a completely different composition. The protein matrix of a resonance crystal is completely different from a biogenic crystal. They developed a parallel technology to biogenics, one that's better in some ways but not as good in others.]

[Seriously?]

[Yes,] Siyhaa answered. [From the initial technical parameters, resonance crystals can't augment psionic ability the way biogenics can, and don't operate on communal parallel, but in return for those shortcomings, resonance crystals have a much longer range than biogenics when using the same applied power. What we'll be building are pods holding many different resonance crystals that each represent a specific "channel" of telepathic communication, all controlled by a master computer, where with biogenics, we'd only use one. Crystals are made to operate on a specific alpha-wave band of frequencies that allows the Republic to create multiple telepathic channels. In effect, they can mimic commune by using multiple resonance crystal arrays.]

[Can we adapt moleculartronic computer architecture to govern resonance?]

[Easily,] she answered. [As well as biogenic systems. Biogenic crystals will be compatible with resonance crystals, since biogenic crystals can

transceive on any frequency that a resonance crystal can be produced to use.]

[Outstanding!] Jason communed brightly. [How quickly can we build a production unit to produce prototype resonance crystals?]

[From the look of this data, not long,] Myleena answered. [Our own biogenic growth units could be adapted to produce resonance crystals. But I don't think we wanna do that for the units we release to the Academy. It would be too easy for someone to try to reverse engineer a resonance growth unit to produce biogenic crystals.]

[Yeah, I don't want to use any biogenic tech in the resonance system, Myli.]

[Me either, so I'll come up with a system that can't be used to try to make biogenic crystals.]

[I can't stand this. Cyrsi, take over and get my bionoid stowed. I have to get to the warehouse.]

[Of course, Jason,] she replied, slightly amused.

He delinked from the bionoid on the dropship and linked to the bionoid he kept at 3D, and all but barreled out of the cramped space that was his office. Myleena, Siyhaa, Eraen, Emia, and Talty were crowded around the main holo table, with Bo, Maggie, Ska'vek, and the hulking Ubutu Kekik behind them. The Ubutu was one of the most recent recruits into 3D, and had quickly made a name for herself with her very creative mindset. It was almost impossible to tell male Ubutu from females, even if they were nude, because both genders had their genitals protected by a thick layer of ruddy white fur. Most Ubutu didn't go naked, however, favoring very loose robes

that didn't snag their fur, which were purely decorative. They wore them as a social convention, not as protection from the cold.

3D mirrored the outlook of the house, and that was inclusion. While humans and Faey outnumbered everyone else, that was because they started with humans and Faey. Intelligence and creativity knew no limits when it came to species.

“What have you learned so far?” Jason asked pushing his way up to stand between Myleena and Siyhaa.

“Well, what we've figured out so far is that resonance crystals are the same basic technology as biogenic crystals, but with some big differences,” she answered, pointing to the hologram over the table, which was displaying what looked like a chemical structure. “Biogenic crystals use an organic crystalline formation that's governed by an artificial DNA strand that acts as the crystal's programming. Resonance crystals are also organic, but they have a different chemical composition, and they have no programming. They rely on a series of artificial proteins related to the brain chemistry of a telepath to govern their ability to receive and translate telepathic energy into computer language, acting like an antenna rather than an active participant. Biogenic crystals can commune, but resonance crystals can't send by themselves. They rely on a computer to tell them what to do and how to do it. Biogenic crystals can do that by default because of their DNA programming. The good news is, we could fairly quickly convert a few biogenic crystal growth units to produce resonance crystals. The bad news is that a resonance system is going to be much larger and more bulky than a comparable biogenic system, because resonance crystals aren't an integral part of the computer architecture. They're an addition.”

“The counter to that weakness is that they’re more powerful,” Siyhaa added. “Just going on the initial data, a resonance transceiver of the same size and power as the intergalactic array on Kosigi would have nearly one half again the effective range of a biogenic unit. But the comm nodes won’t be smaller, because we’ll need a sizable number of resonance crystals in the array to achieve the same bandwidth as a biogenic array. And we’ll need that bandwidth to handle the traffic the node is going to carry. Regardless, the fact that biogenics amplify psionic powers makes biogenic systems superior.”

“So, even though they’re far more advanced than we are as a baseline, when it comes to this, our biogenics are better than their resonance,” Bo surmised.

“Yup,” Myleena nodded, looking back at him. “Not the first time we’ve run into this. The RK empires had ion tech that was way beyond any ion tech we had, plus they were the original builders of catapults, we just improved the design. Advanced doesn’t mean advanced in every respect.”

“And don’t forget, the Hrathari are the reason we have translight drives,” Emia murmured. “If not for their research and advancements in translight technology, we’d have never built mode three drives.”

“I think we could have a working prototype ready for testing in about a month,” Myleena told him, getting them back on track. “The resonance crystals won’t be that hard to produce using our own systems. In truth, biogenic crystals are harder to make than resonance crystals,” she mused. “The tricky part is going to be the protein sequences. We’ll have to rebuild one of the DNA sequencers to work with these protein chains. DNA helixes are more complex, but these protein chains have more chemical

components. That means we have to rebuild the sequencer to handle the additional components.”

“I shouldn’t have too much trouble designing an interface system that will allow both biogenic and moleculartronic architecture to interface with resonance crystals,” Siyhaa added. “Since we already have a system that can translate telepathic communication into computer data, we can adapt that to resonance technology. And our simsense systems will allow us to include sensory data in resonance broadcasts,” she added absently. “This should not be that hard, given these data give us a complete picture of how resonance crystals interpret telepathic communication. My team should have the initial prototype unit and the programming requirements ready before the crystals are grown.”

“Remember, we need to baseline everything off Confederation standard tech,” Jason reminded them. “But we also need biogenic variants for our own use.”

“I’ll have half of my team working on each application,” Siyhaa answered, referring to the eight Moridon from her company that she’d brought into 3D to work with her, forming the basis of 3D’s computer research division. “They can build the initial units while another team handles the hardware for the crystal production units.”

“Yeah, the data the Republic sent us is enough for us to work on both sides of it at the same time,” Myleena nodded. “They were very thorough with both the operating theory and the technical data. More than enough for the computer team to build the interface units while we build the crystal production units. They sent us everything we need to get a prototype on the table by this time next month,” she predicted confidently.

“Then that’s our objective, to have the initial prototype one month from today,” Jason announced. “Myli, I don’t think I have to say it, but this has complete priority. Everyone works on this,” he declared. “The faster we can get resonance tech out, the safer we’ll be.”

“Yeah, they may decide it’s good enough, and that’ll keep them from trying for biogenics,” Maggie said.

“I’ve already got the teams chosen,” Myleena said. “Eraen, Vaari, you two are heading up the crystal production team. We need a protein sequencer built from scratch able to produce these complex protein chains *exactly*. Eraen, that’s your job. Vaari, you handle the tank itself, you’re best suited for it given your work in the Shimmer Dome.”

“There are some similar systems we can borrow from the Medical Service from their medical cloning systems,” Eraen said. “I shouldn’t have too much trouble with that.”

“I can have an initial plan for the cultivation tank ready by tomorrow afternoon,” the slender, somewhat short female declared, one of the six Kimdori members of 3D, who doubled as the main engineers over in the Shimmer Dome.

“Kekik, this is your first real chance to get your paws in a project since you came on board,” Jason injected, looking up and over his shoulder at the Ubutu female. “Once we have a viable production unit, I want you and Talty to work on the designs for the large scale macro units, since they have much different power requirements and output thresholds. Your engineering background is perfect for the job, given your experience with extreme distance gravband comm systems. So, you two dig deep into the specs the Republic gave us, get with Siyhaa’s team so you know how the crystal

interface system is going to work and start working on the system to system comm nodes we'll need to build a real-time pan-galactic resonance network. Figure out the power requirements, required minimum distance between nodes, resonance frequency blocks, gravband to resonance conversion algorithms and vice versa, the scaling of the interface circuitry Siyhaa's team will develop to handle multiple telepathic channels, additional required systems in the macro units and so on. Leave the hard designing to the other teams, be ready to help them with your research when it comes time to start building the nodes, and also be ready to scale up their designs for the system to system units. Both of you are more than capable of that kind of work."

"Not a problem, Jayce. As soon as we have solid specs on the resonance system, we'll start designing the large-scale node units based on them."

"And in the meantime we can hammer out the math based on the stuff they sent us," Talty agreed. "So we have all that already figured out. It'll just be designing the hardware after that."

"Then it sounds like we have a plan," Myleena declared. "As soon as Jayce gets his real butt over here, we can start work on unpacking the data and going through it much more carefully."

"I'll be over in a bit. I have a couple of little things I have to wrap up, mainly talking to Yeri and the twins about our next scheduled visit to C6D. Dunno if Cyrsi told you, but the Ulala are just like the Dreamers. Their DNA is almost *exactly* the same as Faey, and that means that there are a whole lot of very uncomfortable questions we have to start answering."

"Seriously?" Luke asked.

Jason glanced back at him and nodded. “That means something weird is going on, and I want to know the answer,” he said. “I want to know how three species could be from three different galaxies, one of them fuckin’ *billions* of light years away, and still be so genetically identical that they have to be descended from the same race. There’s no way this can be a coincidence, Gora’s Law be damned. And it’s not just the Faey. The Terrans are almost identical to the Faey genetically as well, compatible enough to produce children, so we’re as much part of this as the Faey are. The only thing tying us together is we’re from the same galaxy.”

“Sounds like we need to bring a few biologists into 3D,” Myleena chuckled. “The only member with a medical background is Zidros.”

“My training is mainly in Shurai biology,” the willowy female Shurai noted.

“Still, you’re the closest thing to a geneticist we have in 3D, Zid, so I may have you look over the data, if only to get your impression,” Jason told her.

“I can do that, but understand it won’t be nearly as comprehensive as what you’ll get from the Medical Service. And our own service, you can trust.”

“Truth,” he agreed. “I think we’ve overlooked something, though, cousin, and we should fix it.”

“What?”

“Songa was an original member of the Legion. I think it’s well past time to officially bring her into 3D, just for these kinds of things. We’ve worked with her in the past, we’ve just never pulled the trigger on bringing

her in as a full member. She won't be an active member, though, more of a consultant, someone we can take things like this to and get an informed, honest opinion. If we put active projects on her on top of her workload running the Medical Service, she'd poison us all," he noted, which made several of them laugh. "And she's certainly trustworthy enough to know what we do in here."

"No objection from me," Myleena nodded. "Still needs to go through official screening, though. *Nobody* gets out of the screening."

"I'll have Miaari take care of it," Jason promised. "Now let me delink and go hunt down Yeri. No doubt Cyrsi's already briefed her on our meeting with the Ulala."

"She's waiting for you in her office," Cyrsi's hologram affirmed.

"Then I won't have to hunt very hard," he mused. "See you guys in a bit."

Koira, 34 Shiaa , 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar

Tuesday, 7 July 2023, Terran Standard Calendar

Koira, 34 Shiaa, year 1333 of the 97th Generation, Karinne Historical Reference Calendar

The White House, Karsa, Karis

He was almost pacing, he was so impatient for the council meeting.

He had a lot to announce today, and it was all over the resonance units. 3D being 3D, they had taken the massive amount of technical data that the Galactic Republic had given them and produced viable release-worthy resonance units in a mere 49 days, producing the prototypes in 23 days and then certifying their work for official release just 26 days after that. That was four days ago, and those four days had been spent organizing their data and their technical specs for release to the Academy so just about anyone could download the data and understand it, which would allow anyone with access to it to produce their own resonance units, from personal interfaces all the way up to massive intergalactic comm nodes. The Republic had truly supplied them with all the data they needed to get the units ready for release quickly, which was only helped by the fact that biogenic crystals were similar to resonance crystals, which meant they had equipment already built that they could quickly convert to producing the new technology. They'd taken several units from the Shimmer Dome and converted them to producing resonance crystals, and that had allowed them to get that side of the prototype built quickly.

The other side of it, the interface between the crystal and a computer, had been no real challenge for Siyhaa and her team. Siyhaa had effectively built a computer algorithm from scratch that allowed full translation of telepathic sending to data the computer could understand, and she borrowed a bit from biogenic systems to build an encoder system that allowed the computer to transmit virtually any kind of information over resonance, including sensory stream data. If not for the fact that they already had technology that allowed a computer to both receive and transmit sensory information, it would have taken her a lot longer to pull that off.

One thing Jason found interesting was that the Republic's advanced technology hadn't fully solved the mysteries of telepathic communication either. They'd managed to get further than the Faey, having defined the "frequencies" that telepaths used to communicate which they called *alpha band*, and had managed to design resonance crystals capable of sending and receiving telepathic messages on telepathic frequency blocks not used by most living things, which kept high-powered resonance tech from injuring telepaths. But, they'd found that *Generations* were sensitive to those upper frequencies, were part of a Generation's bandwidth—as well as some highly skilled or very powerful Faey telepaths like Yana and Dahnai before they became Generations—so that meant that Generation planets would have to put their system to system transceiver well away from the planet else its power would injure people.

That was why their intergalactic arrays were out in the middle of nowhere. If the array they had at SAR-12 was on Kosigi, it would have burned out the brain of every Generation within seconds of powering up. They *did* have an intergalactic array on Kosigi, but it was only just strong enough to reach Prakka, which put it within the safe tolerance limit of nearby Generations. when it was cranked up to full power. Its primary function was to act as a relay between Karis and the main array at SAR-12, and only transmitted intergalactic if the main array was down.

So, for Generations, resonance units designed to only communicate with other resonance units would be audible to them, just like biogenic systems were. But, Generations were good at tuning that out, so it shouldn't cause too much trouble. Generation-intended resonance units were going to have a slightly different design than the units they were building for the

non-Generations who had telepaths in their populations, having them operate in the upper alpha band, which most telepaths couldn't hear.

After nearly two months of constant, intense work by 3D, MRDD, and DRD, 3D coming up with the initial designs and then sending out smaller parts of it to MRDD and DRD to incorporate back into the main project, they had everything ready for release, and Cyrsi and Cybi would be uploading all that data to the Academy mainframe just before Jason announced it in the meeting. After the meeting, Jason would be contacting several non-members like the Jun to tell them about it, so they might be able to take advantage of the technology themselves, as well as sending out a missive to every single empire in the galaxy so those who weren't members of the Confederation would be made aware of the availability of resonance tech. He would also be requesting another meeting of the entire galaxy so they might discuss creating a pan-galactic comm network, where every spacefaring empire in the galaxy had real-time communications with every other empire. Given how trade and commerce absolutely exploded in the Confederation when Jason installed the biogenic system, it would be an economic boon to everyone, on top of going a long way to preventing any possible wars against empires in the future. And Jason would make sure to stress how the system could be a lucrative endeavor for an empire from increased trade revenues, when citizens in individual empires had the ability to buy goods from virtually any business in the galaxy and have it shipped to them. Then there was the fact that the resonance system would support bionoids, so that opened the entire galaxy to tourism on both sides of the Generation line by using bionoids.

The system to system nodes that Talty and Kekik were designing were going to be *hardcore*, capable of handling *billions* of individual comm

connections simultaneously, including data-intensive ones like simsense and driving bionoids. Each planet would have three nodes, one for outbound transmissions, one for inbound, and one for routing data to and from the nodes and the planet, and the three combined could handle having billions of people and computers accessing them simultaneously. And if the nodes got taxed by the workload, they could just add more nodes, until there were enough there to handle a planet's comm traffic. So, high population hubs or major commercial or industrial hubs like Draconis, Exeven, Veruta Prime, Skaam, Craia, Subria, and Grimjar were going to have full service to their high populations with their plethora of computers without lag.

Nobody would own the patent for resonance technology. Like many technologies in the Academy mainframe, it was considered public domain information. Any government or corporation could take that data and use it in any way they wished, even sell the results of their labor on the commercial market, which created an absolutely level playing field for everyone. They'd let the entrepreneurs design and build resonance interfaces and resonance bionoids...though those who held patents on other aspects of those technologies, like Yila, would have first crack at converting their current products to resonance tech. Just slapping a resonance unit into a bionoid didn't get around the patent Yila held on bionoids. But, entrepreneurs could take resonance tech and find ways to use it in ways that didn't violate someone else's patents.

But there were a few reservations about it. Jason, for one, didn't like that resonance growth tanks could easily be converted to biogenic growth tanks, mainly by changing the ionic solution in the tank and swapping out the protein sequencer with a DNA builder unit. But his reservations, and the reservations of Myleena and Siyhaa about other aspects of the technology,

didn't trump the simple fact that they needed this technology to be out there in order to foster peace throughout the galaxy, on top of protecting the House of Karinne from potential attempts to try steal or take biogenic tech by force. The key to it would be security, security, security, making absolutely sure that nobody ever got their hands on a single biogenic crystal, which might let them analyze them sufficiently to convert a resonance production system to biogenic. The key to that was protecting the DNA sequence that governed the chips, acted as both programming and governed their ability to commune. A hostile empire might be able to scan a crystal and reveal its chemical composition, but without the biogenic DNA sequence, it was nothing but a paperweight.

Which was why trying to get their hands on the technology that produced those metal shells that blocked all scans was Jason's next major item on his *get from the Republic* list. If he could encase biogenic crystals in that metal, it would protect them from any attempt to scan them to find out what they were made of and how they worked. There were several empires that had sensor technology capable of allowing them to decode a DNA sequence just from a scan, and those were the empires that posed the greatest threat to the house's security.

In that respect, things were going fairly well with the Galactic Republic, and with the Ulala. They'd visited C6D twice over the last two months, each time bringing more information to share with the Ulala about the Faey, the Terrans, and even the Dreamers, who were all their genetic relatives, and received more information about Ulala society in return. And it was a very interesting one, much different from Faey society, and definitely unique. For one, the Ulala's main source of artistic expression was dancing, and it was a fundamental core part of Ulala culture and

society...and explained Estrella's outfit when he met with her. That was almost a dancing costume, and now he knew that it was a common Ulala style of dress because virtually every Ulala danced. So their clothing reflected that part of their core identity. All Ulala clothing was designed to move with the wearer, but also to accent their dancing, and Estrella's skirt was a wonderful example of this. That skirt of many long colored scarves would flow and shimmer when she danced, creating a cascade of motion and color that she could manipulate with her movements to produce different visual effects. The Ulala had over four hundred distinct dances used during their customs, dances of religious worship, dances during important events, dances during courting, there was a dance nearly for every major event or aspect of Ulalan life.

The even stranger part? Ulala didn't really sing. Song wasn't a very big part of their culture, but music was. After all, music was critical to a good dance, so music was a core part of Ulalan identity, and musicians were some of their most respected members of society, right up there with doctors among the Faey or chefs among the Shio. A good musician was a valued and honored member of their society, and the fact that Jason was a master of a musical instrument gave him great weight and honor in their eyes. They'd sent quite a few recordings of a variety of their musical styles, and it was as wide-ranging as Terran music, ranging from slow blues-like music to head-banging, bass-heavy heavy metal style music. They had a very wide array of musical instruments that had similar sounds to most any instrument used by just about anyone, with a few curious exceptions, and that combination of similar instruments and many different musical styles made Ulalan music easy for just about anyone to appreciate. They had a style that someone was going to like.

Terran culture was well known through the Confederation, and slowly through the galaxy at large, for its wide array of different styles of music, with music lovers through the galaxy starting to include Terran music into their listening libraries. And the Ulala would challenge Terrans for that melodious throne.

He'd sent recordings of him playing the piano at Estrella's request, and she'd absolutely loved it. The Ulala had a similar harpsichord-like instrument they called a *sako*, so the concept of his piano was a familiar one to them, but not the sound of a piano itself. The piano was one of those rare instruments that the Ulala did *not* have an instrument that sounded similar to it. The *sako* sounded closest, but that was a general comparison.

The specs on how to build a piano was part of the last cache of data they'd given to the Ulala just last takir, because Estrella wrote that every Ulala that heard him playing fell in love with the sound of a piano, and some musicians wanted to learn to play it. So, Jason had included the blueprints for building a piano with the last data swap, as well as instructional videos on learning to play and recordings of several more songs he'd done just for Estrella, playing on the grand piano at home rather than the upright in his office.

He had to admit, it was almost mesmerizing watching an Ulala dance. They'd sent holos of their important dances as part of the cultural exchange with the Faey, and *damn* were the Ulala graceful. Faey and Dreamers were graceful too, but they came nowhere near to sinuous grace and beauty of an Ulala dancing.

The most surprising part to him was that the Ulala were nowhere near as aggressive as the Faey. Yes, they were a bit aggressive, if only because their telepathy gave them a major advantage over others, but their society

was one of unity and inclusion. The Ulala had fought other species before the Republic formed, but they *did not* fight each other. That was a major taboo in Ulalan society, much more like the Dreamers than the Faey or the Terrans. And for one, Jason was glad to see it.

The door opened, and Rann filed in, wearing his school uniform. Jason had increased Rann's lessons in how to be Grand Duke since the pandemic, which included him spending some time every day with Jason in his office to be exposed to the everyday aspects of the job. Jason had been doing it before, but not having him come every day, if only to give him a little free time from all his other lessons. But as Jason got older, him being ready to take over was becoming more and more important, if only for the day that Jason abdicated and let Rann take over his duties, so he could enjoy his retirement.

Jason had no intention of sitting on the house throne until he died. He wanted the chance to enjoy his golden years. His plan was to have Rann take over as Grand Duke when he turned 30, which would let Jason enjoy his retirement years without the responsibility that came with the throne. And that was a tradition he wanted instituted very early in the House's new era, that the Grand Duke did not rule until death. That would make it more like a job and less like rulership, help prevent a Grand Duke from trying to amass power. It would also give the average Grand Duke about 35 years on the throne before he retired, which would be around the age of 55 or 60... and since all Grand Dukes after him would be part Faey, with their Faey genes extending their life span, it meant that 60 would be more like 45 to a Terran. That created what Jason felt was a good balance of service to the House without that service consuming the Grand Duke's life, give them a chance to enjoy their later years without worry, and also instill into the line

of Karinne the idea that being the Grand Duke was a *job*, not some kind of divine right. It would help keep his descendents grounded, and that was critically important given how much power the House had in the galaxy.

The Grand Duke served the House. The House did not serve the Grand Duke. That was the one thing that Jason wanted Rann and his descendents to take to heart.

[Hey Dad.]

[Hey. How was the math test?]

[Easier than I expected,] he replied as he took off his uniform blazer, as Shya came in, carrying Chichi. Chichi was still a bit depressed since her kittens had been sent on to their new home last takir, so Shya had been paying her lots of attention the last few days. Chichi adored Shya, so she very much appreciated the girl's efforts. *[Shy's tutoring in math helped me.]*

[That almost sounds like you two are cheating,] Jason communed lightly.

[It's only cheating if you get caught,] Shya replied cheekily, then laughed aloud when he gave her an icy stare.

[Girl, I spent way too long scouring your mother's conditioning out of you for you to start backsliding now,] he warned in a completely insincere aggressive tilt to his thought. That made her grin at him impishly.

[Nothing you can do about it now, Dad,] she teased.

“Chichi, bite her,” he ordered, and Shya yelped when the tabi did as he commanded, sinking her little fangs into Shya's finger. She flinched her

hand away, then laughed helplessly. “Don’t ever think I can’t do something about anything, girl,” he warned aloud.

“You traitor!” Shya accused, holding Chichi up and looking into her eyes.

Chichi rolled her eyes at the Faey teenager.

“I don’t need Dad to tell you what you just said,” Shya grinned at her.

“That’s good, because you wouldn’t have liked it,” Jason told her dryly. “I’ll be attending the council meeting in person today, followed up by personal calls to about twenty different rulers,” he told them. “You two don’t need to be here for that. So, you two go ahead and take the rest of the afternoon off.”

[The resonance system?] Rann asked.

He nodded. *[Myli certified the last system this morning and finalized the technical specs, so we have everything all set up. Cybi will be uploading it to the Academy mainframe in just a few minutes. She wants everything in place before I announce it. You two haven’t had an afternoon off for a while, so go enjoy yourselves.]*

[Don’t have to tell us twice, Dad,] Shya beamed at him. [Let’s go down to the shopping district, Ranny. I want to look for a cool gift for Maer’s birthday.]

[Let’s not spend all day there. I wanna go to Janja and see the lantern festival.]

[You better clear going offworld with Aya,] Jason warned.

[I will,] Rann assured him as he picked up his uniform blazer. [Mind if we take the big skimmer?]

[What for?]

[In case someone else wants to go, that way we don't have to ask you while you're in a meeting.]

[Good point. Yeah sure, you can use it if you need to,] he nodded towards him.

Sometimes he wasn't sure it was smart to let Rann and Shya get their class 3 licenses. Already he'd caught Rann trying to talk Cybi into unlocking his Thrynne skimmer so he and Shya could take it for a joyride.

Perhaps it was time to get Rann a skimmer of his own, like he had with Aria. But, the problem with that was that it would set a precedent and *all* his kids would want one, since all of them either had or were training to get a class 3. A class 3 was mandatory for exomech training, so if they were in the exomech program, they were getting a class 3.

Hmm. Maybe he could swing that, and it might even be fun. He'd do what he did with Aria, buy used skimmers that needed work, then make them help him restore the skimmer before they could have it. It would give him a chance for some quality one on one time with his older kids that didn't live in the house, and that was the kind of work he enjoyed doing, so he'd have fun with it. And used skimmers that needed work were cheap enough to justify buying five of them, for his biological older kids and Danelle, who he considered to be his daughter. And for that matter, Danelle had always thought of him as her father.

Yeah, he liked that idea. It would be a fun project, plus it would be a very strong message to his kids that he trusted them...after all, he was training them to operate sophisticated military equipment, he had no business fretting over them flying a skimmer, outside of the trouble they could get into because they had that kind of freedom. Though, the only kids he really needed to worry about in that regard were the girls, Kyri, Sora, and Danelle, and mainly because he didn't like the idea of them having a very convenient way to pick up boys.

Aria had certainly poisoned that well for her sisters.

Shya handed Chichi off to him, then took Rann's hand as the two of them left. He cradled the tabi as he sat back down at his desk, and decided to make sure that Rann didn't forget. *[Shen, warn Aya that Rann and Shya want to go to Janja later this evening to see the lantern festival they're having. They have my permission to go.]*

[I doubt the Captain will object, since that's house territory, but she may require a guard escort. I'll let her know.]

Good enough. Jason didn't gainsay Aya's decisions when it came to security, if only because she'd skin him alive if he started meddling.

It was nearly time for the council meeting, so he sat down at his desk and confirmed that Cybi had uploaded all the data, then activated his holo—they'd been attending via holo lately, now that the crisis was over—and immediately sent a request to the Speaker, who was currently Master Mo, for the session to be opened for public viewing, which would allow non-members to observe the meeting. This was something that many empires did whenever the council had a public meeting, such as the Jun and the Subrians, which would allow the news to spread faster. He waited for the

usual pictures of various aides, flunkies, and the occasional actual ruler populate the flat holo sitting just past his desk, until there was a quorum for Mo to begin. He took immediate note of Jason's request and the fact that he was there in person. "A request has been made to open this meeting to public view. Is there any objection?" he asked, and when silence greeted him, he nodded. "Then on general acclimation, this meeting will be considered open. Remember that no classified information should be discussed while the proceedings are in the public venue. Grand Duke Karinne, I take it you have something on your mind?"

"I do, Master Mo," he replied. "The House of Karinne has released to the Academy the technical specs for a new technology, called resonance technology, that allows computers to interact with telepaths, as well as computers to communicate telepathically with each other. This is not biogenics, it's a sister technology that will give everyone some of the same capabilities that the House of Karinne has with our biogenic tech. Resonance technology will allow a computer to communicate telepathically with a telepathic being, or with other computers outfitted with resonance technology. It doesn't amplify or augment psionic ability the way biogenics does," he warned. "We developed this technology with the main goal of building a comprehensive galaxy-spanning real-time communications network, allowing anyone in the galaxy to be able to communicate with anyone else in the galaxy in real time, no matter how far apart they are."

Very quickly, aides and flunkies vanished off the holo, and were replaced with the rulers they served...and some of them were clearly not dressed or prepared for attending the meeting. Enva had a towel wrapped around her hair, and Assaba wasn't wearing his ceremonial bandolier or his spine caps. Dahnai appeared on her holo topless and looking sweaty, her

glorious breasts visible to everyone. “We’ve developed this technology to mimic biogenic tech as closely as possible,” he continued. “It scales from an interface all the way up to an industrial comm node, which will give everyone some of the same functionality that we Karinnes have with these,” he said, tapping his gestalt. “The tech is fully compatible with both regular telepaths and Generations, so any kind of telepath can communicate with a resonance unit.”

“It took only, what, six thousand years for the Karinnes to finally crack the machine telepathic barrier?” Dahnai asked with a big smile.

“About that,” he said dryly. “We had some extra help for this, however, mainly from the Ruu and the Moridon. Some of their research and study in the field helped us develop this technology, so my most sincere gratitude goes to Observer A and Overseer Kruu,” he said with a nod. “As far as the tech goes, this is being released in its entirety into the public domain, which means that anyone can download and use this as they see fit,” he declared. “Anyone from an empire to a corporation to a private citizen will have complete access to all data and equal rights to use it in any manner they please. The specs contain everything you need to build resonance units and comprehensive information on how to integrate it into standard Confederation technology and equipment. Each empire can build their own proprietary resonance systems, and companies and corporations can produce and sell equipment and appliances that utilize resonance technology.”

“How does this work, Jason?” Observer A asked.

He spent nearly an hour explaining exactly what resonance was, how it worked, and how it integrated with Confederation systems, including giving them some examples of how it could be used in practical ways. He also

invited the rulers to send their technical and engineering specialists to Karis via bionoid to get a more in-depth briefing about the technology. He finished up his presentation with his main objective in this. "I'm asking the council to authorize another meeting of all spacefaring empires in the galaxy with the intent of discussing building a complete pan-galactic real-time communication network, in effect creating a Civnet that spans the entire galaxy," he finished. "This network will need every empire using it to sign on so we have one standard protocol that everyone uses, a universal protocol any computer and communication system that uses the network can understand. We also want the Academy's Computer Sciences division, in partnership with the Moridon, to build, maintain, and oversee this pan-galactic Civnet. That puts a neutral party in control of it, and two neutral parties will design and build it. As to more sensitive or secure comm, like between governments, we wish to build a secondary system we use to talk to each other, one in which each empire builds and controls the comm node connecting them to the network, but using a common protocol so our systems can interface with each other. I would ask the Moridon to design that encryption protocol, both for comm and for computer data transfer," he said, glancing at Brayrak on the holo. "Their neutrality is beyond doubt, and their skill at such things is recognized by every empire in the galaxy. With each empire having complete control of their comm nodes and everyone using a Moridon protocol, it ensures complete impartiality within the system, as well as complete security. Nobody's going to crack that system if the Moridon design it, and the Moridon would never use the fact that they designed it for nefarious reasons. Overseer, would the Moridon be amenable to those rather difficult tasks?"

"We would be honored," he replied immediately. "I'll arrange a meeting with Dean Ayuma to discuss it."

“I haven’t briefed her on this yet, so hold off on the appointment until I can get her up to speed,” he warned. “Right now, the only people who know about resonance technology are the people who designed it and the people privy to this meeting. I haven’t even sent it down to my technical divisions inside the house yet.”

Brayrak nodded as Mo activated the voting feature. “A motion is on the floor to call for another pan-galactic summit,” he called. “Members will vote on the matter. A yes vote is in support of the idea.” It didn’t take but a few seconds for the council to pass the motion unanimously. “The motion passes,” he called. “The chair will inform the Confederation Bureau of State to contact all spacefaring empires and inform them of the summit. Grand Duke Karinne, it falls to you to set up the temporary comm system so rulers can attend via bionoid.”

“I already have Cylan on it. We have a standing operational plan for deploying temporary biogenic nodes for exactly this scenario. We’ll have the system in place and ready to go in ten days.”

“Very good. President Mesaiima, would you object to holding the summit on Imbiri once again? The Imbiri were nothing but perfect hosts for the first summit.”

“We would be happy to offer our services as hosts and moderators, Master Mo,” she replied with a smile. “I’ll start making the preparations, we only need to decide on a date for the summit.”

“I think sixty standard days from today should give us enough time to contact everyone and give all parties time to study the material and prepare,” Mo speculated. “Is there objection to sixty standard days?” When nobody said a word, he nodded. “Then by general acclimation, the date of

the summit is set for sixty standard days from today,” he announced. “That should give the Grand Duke time to assemble his proposal.”

“It’s not ready yet, but it will be,” Jason said.

“Then I move that we adjourn for two standard hours so we can further study the information,” Master Mo called.

They adjourned, and almost immediately, the calls started rolling in. The first one to get through to Chirk was Holikk, who had been watching the meeting, and Jason had her put him through. “Holikk,” he said as he sat back down at his desk, holding Chichi.

“I think it goes without saying that we’d like the Academy’s help in setting up the system you described inside the Authority, even if the plan to make it galaxy-wide falls through. And to connect it to the Confederation’s network.”

“I was expecting you to ask for that,” he smiled as Cyman manifested a hologram. “You have that plan to convert the Coalition’s Civnet to resonance ready, Cyman?”

“It’s fully planned out, all the way down to the installation schedule to replace local comm nodes on Coalition planets with resonance units,” he answered.

“There ya go,” Jason said, motioning at the hologram hovering behind his left shoulder. “Cyman’s the CBIM I put on preparing the plan to upgrade the Coalition to a resonance-based network, that you can propose to the Coalition so they don’t think it’s a big spying operation. That way our involvement in it is indirect. We’re just giving you a logistical schedule, all the actual work, including producing the parts, is up to you.”

“Sounds entirely reasonable to me,” Holikk agreed with a smile. “It gives the Authority the chance to make some money out of it, if I prove that we’re ready to produce resonance units immediately for the upgrade project. So, I’d like to send my R&D team to Karis to get that in-depth briefing on resonance you offered.”

“No problem. Cyman will handle it for you,” he said, glancing to his left. “Given you two’s personal friendship, he was the best CBIM for the job.” And that was no lie. Cyman was best friends with Holikk, which showed that the CBIMs both had their own lives and were definitely individuals. And Jason saw nothing wrong with it, it would be ultimately hypocritical of him to not allow Cyman to hang out with Holikk when he hung out with Kreel all the time.

“Outstanding. Mind if I’m there with my team?”

“Not at all. Cyman, authorize him to activate his Hall of Peace bionoid,” he ordered.

“I’m talking to Yeri as we speak.”

“You wanna come over now or later?”

“I’ll be over in just a bit. My team will be over as soon as I arrange it,” he answered. “There’s a few things I’d like to discuss with you, which I’m sure I’ll be doing around a table at your house with some other rulers who no doubt are waiting their turn to talk to you,” he smiled.

He laughed. “Ayama and Seido are preparing a barbecue as we speak,” he admitted. “At least for those who can attend in person.”

“If there’s barbecue made by Seido and Ayama involved, I’d rather be there in person,” Holikk declared. “Mind if I come over?”

“Nope. I’ll send the *Pegasus* to come pick you up, that way you don’t waste a couple of hours trying to get over here.”

“Then I’ll be over as soon as I can,” he replied. His image winked out, Cyman gave a slight chuckle.

[I think Seido and Ayama are even more popular than you are among the rulers, Jayce.]

[Seido and Ayama feed them, and always give them good food. I can’t compete with that, no matter what I do.]

Cyman grinned a little, looking down at him from over his shoulder. *[The power of an empty stomach being filled is not to be underestimated, it seems.]*

[There’s a reason Shio culture revolves around food,] he answered lightly. *[Myri.]*

[Yah?]

[Send the Pegasus to Subria and pick up Holikk. He’s coming over for a meeting.]

[You got it. I’ll get Jeya moving right now.]

[Thanks. Chirk, send in our next contestant,] he called to the outer office.

She returned pure amusement. *[Empress Voss of the Crai is awaiting your attention, revered Hive-leader.]*

[Okies. Put her through.]

That was what he expected, so he'd made sure to keep his afternoon free of appointments or meetings so he could handle the calls. But, it also told him that his prediction was spot-on. The other empires wanted resonance, they wanted it *fucking now*, and they were extremely eager to start producing resonance units as fast as possible. That sentiment was strongest in the empires that had opted in and were scheduled to transition to become Generations, they wanted a network like Karis' biogenic network in place for their populations before that transition began, so it was there and waiting for them when they finished transition and got some practice with their telepathy.

They'd seen the biogenic network on Karis. They knew just how powerful it was, what kind of advantage it gave the Karinnes even before the pandemic, because every Karinne's interface could connect to that network and emulate some of the things that a Generation could do. The ability to remote merge, to remotely control equipment, the ability to communicate in real time with any other Karinne anywhere in the universe, they'd seen it all, and now they could see a way to get it for themselves.

It was the fulfillment of a promise Jason had made to the Confederation, to find a way to give them something as close to biogenics as possible without actually giving them biogenics. The Confederation didn't exactly need to know that the Karinnes hadn't invented it themselves, but that wasn't because the Karinnes wanted glory. It was to keep the fact that they had contact with an extremely advanced exo-galactic government a secret, and also keep themselves as secret as possible from the Galactic Republic. Jason didn't want the Galactic Republic getting involved in domestic affairs, and he sure as hell didn't want anyone in the home galaxy to piss them off. With their technology, they could absolutely *steamroll* the

entire galaxy. They were as far above the home galaxy as the Faey had been above the Terrans when they first took over the planet.

He wanted no part of getting dragged into a war involving the Galactic Republic, either against them or *allied to* them. That meant that they kept themselves out of C6D's politics, kept themselves a secret from the Bru. He was not going to let the Republic pull them into their war with the Bru. That was a delicate dance because the Ulala were clearly another of the mysterious Faey splinter races, and they needed to learn more about them and their history to try to solve the mystery of why what was a single species had branch subspecies which were galaxies apart, but he was confident they could pull that off.

And he had to admit, he *liked* Estrella. He was very much looking forward to talking to her again.

He had the feeling that Estrella, and the Ulala, were going to be much more involved in his life than even he wanted to admit. But why he felt that way, and what it meant, he wasn't sure.