

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the central text.

# **Revelation7**

**Fel**

## Chapter 7

*Raista, 24 Toraa, 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar*

*Friday, 8 October 2023, Terran Standard Calendar*

*Raista, 24 Toraa, year 1333 of the 97<sup>th</sup> Generation, Karinne Historical Reference Calendar*

*The White House, Karsa, Karis*

Everything was ready, and he had a good feeling about this.

Half sitting against the edge of his desk, arms crossed, Jason read through a checklist being projected in front of him on a flat hologram, his green eye and off-color eye scanning through the text. A hologram of Cybi hovered beside him in that phantom-like no legs version, her hands behind her holographic back as she waited for him to finish. The list held everything in the presentation set up as a checklist, and every single item on the list had been finished. Ayuma finished the presentation for the Academy, Myleena and Siyhaa had finished the technical presentation for the comm nodes, and a combined team of Karinne, Ruu, and Moridon specialists had developed the presentation for both the civilian galactic resonance network and the separate government-only resonance network for use in diplomacy.

Word had already gotten out about what the summit was about, and there was a whole lot of buzz from the 1,571 spacefaring empires in the galaxy over it. News of the resonance breakthrough had spread quickly

through the galaxy, because virtually all of them had access to the Academy mainframe, or had diplomatic contact with an empire that did. Once they started to understand exactly what was put there, they got very, very interested and excited over the concept of it. They were equally excited about the idea of a galaxy-spanning Civnet, because information was power, information was profit, and the network would give everyone access to information. It would benefit the common citizen as much as corporations and governments. It would increase trade by making it easier for small businesses and corporations to sell to more distant empires, for governments to set up new trade agreements, form new trade routes, and most important of all to Jason, foster peaceful relations between empires.

And since bionoid technology was starting to spread beyond the Confederation and Coalition, the idea of being able to utilize bionoids nearly anywhere in the galaxy was a major reason that many corporations were excited about the idea. A resonance network meant that bionoids could be used in other star systems in real time. They'd seen that in action at the first summit, when a good half of the Confederation and Coalition rulers attended using bionoids.

And every one of them put money in Yila Trefani's bank account. What she didn't build in her own factories, she licensed out to other manufacturers.

*[Looks like that's everything,]* he noted in satisfaction to Cybi, glancing at her. *[Can you upload it to the bionoid on Imbiri?]*

*[Doing it right now,]* she answered. *[Mesaiima wants a copy of it so she knows what you're going to do.]*

*[Go ahead and upload it to her office,] he told her. [Nothing in those presentations is classified. Hell, I'll be explaining it all to the entire galaxy in seven hours. Gotta say, she's done a fantastic job,] he communed, approval shimmering through his thought. [We so got it right asking her to host this. The sheer logistics of hosting so many dignitaries it was one thing, but to do it all with a smile...I don't see how she does it.]*

*[She's older, wiser, and much more patient than you,] Cybi told him.*

He made a move to whack her, which made her laugh as she ghosted her hologram away from him. *[I just wish these important meetings would happen during the freakin' day. It starts at 02:40,] he complained.*

*[Imbiri has a 26.32 hour day, so at least the start time will get earlier and earlier for us,] she returned. [This summit is scheduled to last for ten days.]*

*[Which puts the start time right back in the middle of the fuckin' night by the end,] he noted sourly. [It took me almost five years to adjust to a 29 hour day, and now I'm on someone else's clock. I envy Rann and the kids. they've never known anything different.]*

*[Rann should start getting used to operating at odd hours.]*

*[Not yet. I want him to enjoy being a kid as long as possible, before the weight of this job starts pressing down on him.]*

*[He's very resilient, Jason. More than you think.]*

*[I know he is. I just want him to enjoy these years, the chance to be a kid, and do all the crazy things that kids get to do before it lands them in jail.]*

*[Kind of like Aria, hmm?]* she asked coyly.

*[Hey, hush now, I don't want her to know that I don't entirely disapprove of her shenanigans,]* he countered. *[I told you before, after what she went through, she gets to do more or less whatever she wants. As long as she's happy. And if palling around with Sirri and getting into constant trouble makes her happy, then it makes me happy. I just have to rein her in whenever she gets a little too outrageous.]*

*[That goes for more than Aria,]* Cybi accused lightly.

*[Their antics amuse me,]* he admitted in a deadpan way that made her laugh. *[And as far as Aria goes, it's just as good for Sirri as it is for her. She needs real friends, deep connections, so she doesn't feel quite so lonely as Dahnai did when she took the throne. She'll know that no matter how heavy the burden, she has friends in Aria and Yuri that will help her shoulder it. That's important for an Empress.]*

*[My, that's surprisingly mature. So, your attitude about them hunting boys has changed?]*

*[Oh hell no. I keep a list, and those boys are going to find out how long my arm is when they start applying for jobs or the Academy,]* he returned darkly, which made her burst into helpless laughter.

*[You are awful,]* she accused.

*[Moderately,]* he agreed without shame.

*[Revered Hive-leader, honored Hive-leader Mesaiima requests to speak with you.]*

*[Not surprising. Send her through,]* he answered. A flat holo appeared of Mesaiima, sitting at her desk, using a stool because her wings made it very hard for her to sit in a chair with a back. “Well that certainly didn’t take long,” he said lightly.

“Just letting you know I received your files, Jason, and I’ll review them before the start of the summit. Shouldn’t you be asleep? We start in seven hours.”

“I’ll be taking a nap in a bit. Shouldn’t you be asleep too?”

“The advantage of living on a planet with a 21 hour day is we don’t sleep as long as you do,” she replied with a smile. “I’ll be ready in the morning.”

“You better be, or this’ll be a disaster,” he teased, which made her smile.

*“I’ll make sure he’s ready, Mesaiima,”* Cybi assured her. *“Luckily for him, he has me to keep him on the straight path.”*

“Gee, thanks, Mom,” he said dryly, which made Mesaiima laugh.

“I’m surprised you’re not attending via bionoid, Cybi.”

*“We tend to be a little too distracting to others when they find out who we are, so we prefer not to attend in person. But we’ll be keeping up to date on everything going on. Jason allows us to tap the sensory stream of his bionoid,”* she answered. *“It’s how we babysit him.”*

“Stop it,” he chided, trying to elbow her hologram, but it passed right through. “And keep that in mind, Mesaiima. When you’re talking to me at

the summit, you're not just talking to me. These parasites will be listening in," he warned, pointing at the hologram.

*"Parasite?"* she challenged, giving him a cool look.

"Buncha primadonna freeloaders, the lot of ya," he said with a slight smile. "They even demand allowances. Computers that want allowances, how ridiculous can you get?"

*"It's called a salary for the work we do,"* she countered.

"I call it insanity, paying an overglorified toaster oven for the bread it bakes," he retorted, ignoring her sudden withering look. "I should pull your plug, you know that?"

Mesaiima gave them a bright smile. "I see he's feeling a bit chippy today, Cybi," she noted. "You should get him go to take a nap, or he'll be an unmanageable lout at the summit."

*"He's always chippy, Mesaiima,"* Cybi returned, giving Jason a slightly malicious smile. *"But I agree, he does need his naptime. He's like a toddler that way."*

"You say that like it's a bad thing," he noted. "If there's anything I treasure, it's my sleep. In a house full of kids, that's a rare and precious commodity."

"Speaking of naps, I'll let you get to yours. I need to read these files and get some sleep myself," she told him.

"You don't need to read all of them, there's an appendix with the changes from the last version I sent you," he told her. "It shouldn't take you

too long to read through it. I don't want to do to you what Krazrou loves to do to me."

She laughed. "He is a very thorough fellow," she smiled.

"He can't fathom the concept of just sending a list of changes, not everything, which means I have to go through it to figure out what's new," he grunted. "I think he does it on purpose just to mess with me."

*"He thinks everyone reads as fast as he does,"* Cybi noted.

"Oh hush, miss I can read five thousand books in a microsecond," he accused, which made her give him a wink.

*"That's miss I can read five million books in a microsecond,"* she corrected playfully.

He gave her a dark look, which made Mesaiima laugh. "I'll leave now, so I'm not witness to violence," she smiled.

"She's being a weenie and leaving her hologram intangible," he told her. "But that doesn't mean that her bionoid is safe. I do know where she lives," he said slyly.

"You have an apartment, Cybi?" Mesaiima asked.

*"Me, no, but the others do,"* she replied. *"My and Cyra's facilities are here in Karsa, so we keep our bionoids there. The others keep apartments here for when their bionoids are in town."*

"I had no idea. I thought you just kept them stored somewhere when not in use."

*"They're always in use, Mesaiima,"* she smiled. *"We consider them to be our physical bodies, and we don't delink from them. The closest we get to*



*that is putting them in standby during routine maintenance, almost like sleeping.”*

“I had no idea. I thought you’d find being linked to them when you didn’t have anything for them to do to be, well, boring.”

*“Boring is a point of view,” she replied. “We find the idea of just living a normal life to be quite enjoyable. Going shopping. Making meals. Watching holo. Cleaning the apartment. Just...being. We’re very fond of it.”*

“Cybri once worked a part time job in a bakery for a few months, to experience what it was like to be just an average person,” Jason told her. “It was very enlightening for her. She wanted to truly understand what it was like to be an average working class member of the house, so she moved into a different apartment and got a job at one of the resorts in Sarsa, and lived completely on her job’s salary. I was very impressed by how serious she was about it. And it was enlightening for her, she instituted a series of reforms not long afterward to address some of the issues she discovered during her time working. That’s why Sarga’s probably the best run continent on the planet,” he chuckled.

*“Cybri is definitely hands-on,” Cybi mused. “The others prefer to run things in the background and let their citizens do things on their own, in their own way.”*

“We’ll have to talk more about that later, but I’m afraid I have to go,” Mesaiima declared. “I just had a big list of things to check over land in my in box, so now I have more to do after reading through your changes.”

“I know that feeling. Make sure to get some sleep, Mesaiima,” Jason nodded.

“See you soon, my friend, even if your bionoid isn’t nearly as pretty as the real you..”

“Oh hush and go do your job!” he retorted, which made her laugh and cut her comm. She’d remarked that she rather liked his current mismatched eyes, and she’d been teasing him over it since finding out that Jason didn’t share her opinion.

*[I so cannot wait for Soga to fix this, it’s getting super annoying,]* he grumbled to Cybi, touching his cheek under the blue eye irritably.

*[Five more days, Jason, and it’ll be all better.]* Cybi soothed.

He gave her a slightly accusing look, and she slowly grinned at him.

*[Bitch. You’re asking for it.]*

*[I’m not afraid of you, Jason,]* she replied smoothly.

*[I need to fix that.]*

She laughed and rose up a tiny bit, as if to run away. *[You really do need to get some sleep, though,]* she continued in a reasonable frame of mind. *[It’s going to be a very long night, and you know the first day isn’t going to be all that interesting. All those welcoming ceremonies and opening statements. All the boring stuff.]*

*[Amen. I think you’re right. Do me a favor and keep an eye on things while I’m sleeping, and have a summary ready when I wake up.]*

*[Surely.]*

*[Chirk, I’m gonna go ahead and get some sleep before the summit starts,]* he called out to the office. *[Cybi’s gonna be managing any last*

*minute changes, so direct everything to her if it doesn't come through the office.]*

*[I will do so, revered Hive-leader,] she answered.*

Jason accessed the special segment of the biogenic network used only by him, the CB units, Jyslin, Rann, and Shya. *[I'm gonna go to sleep now guys, so I'm fresh and ready for the start of the summit,] he announced. [Rann, I want you in the office before school to get a briefing from Miaari about how things went. Your school already knows you'll be late.]*

*[Sure thing, Dad,] he answered.*

*[Alright, love, here's hoping it goes well,] Jyslin added.*

*[Thanks, love. Cyra, let Miaari know I'm taking a nap.]*

*[She already knows, Jason.]*

*[Not gonna ask how, I won't like the answer,] he noted wryly, which caused some amusement to ripple through the network segment. [Rook, are the new high security Kimdori bionoids gonna be delivered on time?]*

*[So long as nothing goes wrong, they'll be there in four hours,] he answered. [They're slated to come off the production line in two hours, an hour for final testing, and then an hour to get them there. The KMM has a KT-800 waiting at the factory loading dock to deliver them to Imbiri. They'll be on the way as soon as they pass final QA.]*

*[Sounds good. Now here's hoping they're ready to drive them,] he mused. [Not sure Zaa's people have as much experience with these second gen Kimdori bionoids as the Kimdori here on Karis..]*

*[They're Kimdori, Jayce, they'll be fine,] Cybi assured him. [Now go to sleep.]*

*[Yes ma'am,] he replied cheekily.*

He retreated to the small bedroom off the office, holding a small but comfy bed and a merge pod, and got a pretty good nap in, waking up before the alarm went off. He then called in his primary bionoid to watch the merge—no need to tie up Rivlin for something like this—and climbed into the merge pod. *[Any special instructions?]*

*[Nope, this isn't dangerous. Just monitor the merge for any unusual fluctuations, because the CBIMs will have a tap on my sensory stream. That's the primary reason I want an observer, just in case there's a hiccup in the network.]*

*[Understood.]*

*[Alright, here we go.]*

He merged up to a bionoid well over into the next sector, then opened its eyes once he had a firm grip on it. The bionoid was standing in a stateroom in the building where the summit was being held, in independent standby mode. He blinked the bionoid's eyes and stepped forward, then looked back to see if he was the first one here. Jason had six people in his assigned retinue, who would be representing the house in the side-dealing that was sure to go on here. Yeri, Kumi, and Temika were here for that, each of their bionoids standing motionless with its eyes closed, all dressed in formal robes. Along with them were Miaari and Kemaari from the intelligence office, here to gather information, and his final retinue member was Ayuma, her short bionoid at the end. She would be doing part of the presentation dealing with expanding the Academy to more planets and

building the orbital mainframes that would allow the expansion, but she was also here to represent the Academy in any discussions with others, so she was part of his official retinue. To the other side were Myleena and Siyhaa's bionoids, but they weren't here as part of his retinue, they were here to present part of the resonance comm plan, doing the technical part of it that explained exactly what resonance was and how it would be used to build the network. Once their part of the presentation was complete, they'd be done here and their bionoids would be shipped back to Karis.

Before he could take a closer look at them, Yeri, Kumi, and Temika clearly merged to the bionoids within seconds of each other, for they opened their eyes and began to move. "I was starting to think I was too early," Jason noted to them as they took stock of themselves. Jason had been using the bionoid for a few days to confer with Mesaiima, but the others hadn't.

"Formal robes. Ah hate formal robes," Temika complained in English, plucking at them with a slight frown.

"You'll live, delicate little flower," Jason teased in French.

"Would you stop that? You know I don't speak either of those languages!" Yeri complained.

"We can't help it if you're an uneducated barbarian, Yeri," Jason said with a smile. "Besides, there are scant few people around that speak French that I didn't teach myself, so it's a refreshing challenge to deal with her atrocious Cajun accent."

"Way better than that Quebec accent of yours, Jayce," Temika teased in French.

“You two don’t need to be continuing this argument here,” Kumi chided them. “I swear, Yeri, you should hear them fight like two angry *kree* at the office,” she accused with a slight smile.

“Can’t let her think I’m getting soft, Kumi girl,” Jason said shamelessly. “Our relationship is based on strength. Always has been. If I show throat, she’ll try to plow me over. She wasn’t known as the most ferocious player in women’s college basketball for nothing.”

Temika laughed. “True enough,” she agreed with a sly wink at him.

The others activated their bionoids almost at the same time, forestalling any further banter. Kemaari ran a hand up her arm curiously as she walked forward, then patted her upper chest. “These new bionoids are impressive. Much more immersive,” she declared.

“Rook outdid himself with this new generation of Kimdori bionoids,” Miaari agreed, patting her white-banded stomach. “I may be able to achieve a full merge only using a memory band.”

“I told you he could figure it out, Mee,” Jason told her. “If your bionoids are here, that means that Zaa and her retinue also got theirs here in time. I hope they’ve been practicing merging, or they’re gonna look a little silly out there.” He pulled a bit at the lapel of his outer robe. “It’ll be nice to see Denfather attend something official.”

“With him using a bionoid, it means it’s safe for him to come,” Miaari said. “So Denmother allowed it.”

“Sometimes it sucks to live in a glass box,” Jason grunted. “I dealt with that from the Faey when we first formed the house. And we won’t mention the fight I had with Aya over running merged combat missions in a

mecha. Anyway,” he said, raising his head a little and turning it. *Mesaiima, I’m here*, he called using the resonance unit in the bionoid—one of the demonstration units to show how it worked in practical situations—and sending to the resonance crystal Mesaiima had installed her in office comm. *Are we early, late, or on time?*

*On time. You and your group can go to the auditorium, the others are gathering there now.*

*Thanks*, he replied. “Alright, troops, let’s go do this,” he declared, punching his open palm, then he offered his hand to Ayuma. She smiled and took it, and he led them from the antechamber.

They walked among groups of other dignitaries along a richly appointed, slightly curved passageway, walking among kings and emperors, council leaders and elected executives, who like Jason were surrounded by both advisors and members of their diplomatic corps. Many of them were bionoids, mainly those from the Generation side of the line, given Imbiri was a non-Generation planet. Mesaiima had left their disposition in that regard up to her people, and a referendum to vote on it was scheduled for later this year. Though, Jason had the feeling that the Imbiri were going to opt in, given virtually the entire rest of their sector was doing so. He made a little space when Holikk hurried up to them and slowed to match his pace, looking up at the impressive man’s face. Like Jason, he was here via a bionoid, given Holikk was a Generation. “Cousin,” he greeted warmly.

“Jayce, I was getting a little worried you were gonna be late.”

“Nah, the others have everything all organized. I’m just here to listen to what they’ve been telling me about a hundred different ways for the last couple of months.”

“In other words, you’re gonna delink during the presentations and go do something else.”

“Nah, they’d murder me,” he said lightly. “But I don’t need to delink to entertain myself elsewhere. You forget, cousin, I can control a second body through a split. And since this one won’t be doing anything other than sitting and listening, it frees up my dominant split to go do something more fun.”

“I’m still learning the intricacies of splitting,” Holikk chuckled. “I had no idea you could control two bodies in a split.”

“It’s an advanced technique. Just keep practicing and you can pull it off,” he told him confidently. “I think splitting is the most underestimated of our abilities. The others don’t practice it nearly as much as they should.”

“I think I’m feeling a bit of shade fall over us, Ayuma,” Kumi noted lightly.

“That was aimed at me, dearie, I’m afraid I’m terrible at splitting,” Ayuma laughed. “And I was even born a Generation! It’s almost a scandal I’m getting shown up by you young pups.”

“You’re just an old lady now, Ayuma,” Kumi teased.

“Watch it girl, what I can’t do splitting, I can do with TK,” she threatened, which incited some laughter. “Besides, Jason couldn’t even do it until Kellin could.”

“We’re a bunch of hypercompetitive nits, Holikk,” Jason said lightly, which made him laugh. “I couldn’t believe some newly transitioned little punk could do something I couldn’t, so I made damn sure I learned how myself.”



“Something tells me I’m glad I’m not on Karis, living around you must be exhausting,” he noted.

“It is,” the others all said in perfect unison, which made Holikk burst into helpless laughter.

With Holikk and his trade experts as delightful companionship, they entered the auditorium that would serve as their council chambers. There were far too many of them to fit in even the largest council chambers, so Mesaiima had arranged the presentations and some of the ceremonies to be conducted in a theater not far from the Presidential complex. The deliberations between rulers would take place in the complex, in a newly constructed deliberation hall built more or less for this conference. The trade delegations and retinues wouldn’t be attending those in person, but would be watching via holo feeds from this theater.

Jason didn’t need to pay too much attention to this. He wouldn’t be speaking during the presentations, that was the job of Myleena and the others, so he wasn’t really joking when he said he’d only be keeping tabs on things using a split. But he wasn’t going to be slacking off either, he’d be doing some paperwork Chirk sent him while the presentations were done, after the opening ceremony, as well as reading a pretty long report Myleena’s team sent him over the QE device plans that the Republic had sent them. The device was fucking ingenious, and they’d even included methods and techniques to more easily gathering, entangling, and managing the particles that would form the bridge between the two devices. The report went over the steps it would require to convert the unit to biogenics or moleculartronics—this had definite use outside of the house—and the estimation was that they’d have a prototype pair of units built and ready for testing in about a month. The Republic, naturally, was already past the

development stage and was building a prototype, but they wouldn't be sending it because it contained their technology. But, they could use it in other ways that didn't involve the Karinnes, mainly as a way to explore well beyond their cluster without having to send live crewmen.

They did have intergalactic capability, but they didn't send out ships because of the Bru. The Bru would follow any ship they sent out and try to destroy it, which turned their fortress of a galaxy into a prison as much as it was a sanctuary. Both the Republic and the Bru utilized a different kind of propulsion from translight to achieve intergalactic travel, exactly what it was and how it worked Estrella wouldn't reveal for obvious reasons, but it wasn't superior to the Bru system, so the Bru could keep up with them. But that told him that it wasn't as fast as translight, since what they knew of the Bru was that it took their ships days to travel from C6A to C6D, where a KES ship could do that in about an hour.

That was further proof that while the Republic was more advanced than the Karinnes overall, they weren't more advanced in every respect. Their translight drives and bionoid technology were beyond the Republic.

He sat on the front row along with the others, since some of them would be speaking, and listened as Mesaiima got them in order, then he tuned out during the boring opening ceremony. Of course, a bunch of rulers gathering meant boring and overblown ceremonies, something that the Prakarikai attending found absolutely enthralling. But he found it tedious, so he put a rather passive split in control of the bionoid so he could at least listen and sent his dominant split off to do paperwork.

He tuned back in when the actual meat of the presentation began, and that was with a basic overview of exactly what resonance was. Myleena gave that presentation, standing up on the stage with holos winking on and

off behind her as she walked the non-technical rulers and staffs through exactly what resonance was and a basic idea of how it worked. He was rather surprised at the total silence and gravely intense expressions on many of them, which showed just how much they were paying attention. He wasn't surprised by their interest, but he was by their total rapt attention.

That boded very well.

After Myleena finished, Siyhaa took her place, and then expanded on Myleena's presentation by describing what they wanted to do with resonance. She explained the galactic-spanning comm network they wanted to build, where every spacefaring planet and settlement in the galaxy was connected to a galactic version of Civnet, giving every civilization in the galaxy the ability to communicate with every other civilization. Siyhaa made sure to stress how it would expand commerce and trade by making it much easier to coordinate business, from placing orders to shipping goods to customers, and then the Moridon in her took over and she got maybe a tiny bit too technical when it came to explaining how all the various empires would use a standard protocol, one compatible with all the various computer architectures used by the galaxy's empires because the conversion to the resonance protocol would happen in the comm node. She then showed holos of the nodes, at least simulations of them, and explained how they would orbit planets and settlements so the resonance systems wouldn't overly annoy any telepathic inhabitants.

After she was done, they had a short break. And when they returned, it was Ayuma's turn. She got up and used her earthy, warm style of speaking to explain what the Academy had in mind for the nodes, and that was to expand the Academy to every planet or settlement that wanted it. She explained how the Academy would build mainframe nodes at every planet

that would support local campuses, and that all of it would be connected on a dedicated resonance network only used for the Academy, which would dramatically increase transfer speeds for the nodes and the systems they supported. She used the Jirunji Academy system as an example, showing holos of the local campuses used by the males on their homeworld, then showing through diagrams how the Jirunji system interconnected with the main Academy computer system, how the Academy supported the Jirunji's local classes, allowing local instruction and local organization of some classes and direct Academy classes in others, allowing the Jirunji to tailor their education to their personal tastes and have control over the curriculum when presented on their own soil. She then explained how the mainframes would work on a dedicated network to keep their traffic off the general comm network, and how access to the mainframes would allow empires to transfer data at much higher speeds, would give every empire access to the entire Academy archive. That was a *big deal*, and probably the biggest sell of the entire thing, because as it was now, empires had restricted data transfer speeds to prevent the Academy system from getting overloaded. With the Academy network up and running, every member of the Academy's system would enjoy unfettered access to the Academy's entire archive.

That was the hook that was going to reel quite a few empires in.

After she finished, it was Overseer Brayrak Kruu that returned to the stage to complete the presentation. He presented the final aspect of the system, which was the separate diplomatic network. It would be a separate resonance system built purely for diplomatic and government use, allowing governments the ability to communicate with each other using a real time, completely secure network. He explained how the Moridon would help

local governments build the nodes, that way each empire had complete control over and knowledge of what was inside them, and that Moridon involvement would be purely with developing the crypto system that would keep the communications secure. He explained that the system would support the use of bionoids for diplomatic use, so diplomats and emissaries could use the system for official business, and that business would be secure. That shouldn't be a big problem in Jason's opinion, because the galaxy at large already had exposure to the Moridon, and the fact that they were absolutely and utterly neutral on top of being the premier computer experts in the galaxy. If anyone could build a completely secure diplomatic network, it was the Moridon.

The official part of the day ended after Brayrak's presentation, which would give rulers time to digest the information and do some research through the written materials they provided, but it wasn't the end of the day for Jason. Now would come the unofficial meetings, where he would basically sit in a conference room and make himself available to any ruler that wanted to discuss various parts of the presentations and have questions answered. For this, he had Myleena, Siyhaa, and Ayuma with him, and Brayrak decided to join them after they settled in one of the larger rooms that Mesaiima had provided for them. "Hey cousin," Jason called as the Overseer entered. "Great job on the presentation."

"Thank you, Jason," he replied. "And it would be best if you didn't refer to me as *cousin* at this time, it might create an impression of favoritism. Those not Generations may not understand the reference."

"True," he nodded as the Moridon sat down at the end of the table. They didn't have to wait long for their first contestant to enter, a very tall, fur-covered primate species from the far side of the Q quadrant, whose

name and species Jason didn't know off the bat. His gestalt supplied that his—it looked like a he—species was known as the Karvu, a small civilization on the edge of the Q quadrant where it bordered the R quadrant. The Karvu was their ruler, an elected executive known as the Chief of Clans, named Sabara, and he wasted little time sitting down and asking Jason several questions, all about the Academy expansion plan. And that set a precedent, because over the four hours he answered questions informally, virtually all of them were about the Academy. As Jason suspected, the Academy was the biggest hook of the presentation, the one thing that most of the attendees of the summit were most interested.

After four hours, they went on to another official ceremony, a state dinner for those attending in person. Jason and Brayrak Kruu attended that as a personal favor to Mesaiima. She wanted them there to be available to the rulers, and turned more into another question and answer session as he sat at one of the circular tables. Mesaiima had arranged seating so the largest and most powerful non-Confederation empires were seated with him and the Moridon, the Subrians being one of them as representatives of the Coalition, given those rulers additional access to Jason and Brayrak Kruu. Since neither of them could eat, only drink juices and wines provided for them, it made it fairly clear to those who were here in person both that they were using bionoids and that they'd come to the dinner purely to be available to the rulers for discussions.

“I thought they solved the eating problem for standard bionoids,” the slim, willowy, long-necked humanoid female named Usai Shoisi noted. She ruled one of the largest empires in the R quadrant, the Kur, an empire spanning 187 star systems on the far side of the R quadrant from the empires that belonged to the Confederation.

He got into quite a discussion with the rulers sitting with him, to the point where he put up holograms over the circular table to further describe how the Academy system would work, going into greater detail because a few of them were curious about how the system was going to function from a nuts and bolts perspective. “So, all local traffic is managed by the node, then the node transmits back and forth with the main system on Terra,” Usui Shoi surmised, who was a tall, long-necked, willowy humanoid species that ruled one of the largest empires in the R quadrant.

“Yes, that keeps the archival system separate from the local management network, preventing either from slowing the other down,” Jason agreed. “Your empire will have partial control over the local management network, so local instructors can arrange lesson plans and schedule classes. That’s the everyday operations side of the system. The various planetary mainframes in your empire will coordinate with a master node at your capitol system, and that one will be the one that manages the primary data transfer between your empire and the Academy. It’s located at your capitol so your primary science division has access to its bandwidth for data transfer from the Academy archives, giving your people complete access to everything the Academy know. The size of your empire means that you’ll more or less have the entire node to yourself, but smaller empires will be grouped by size and location so the nodes aren’t just sitting idle. The design we have for them makes them seriously beefy, able to handle a whole lot of data transfer. Resonance comm nodes have a tremendous amount of bandwidth for us to utilize, far more than standard gravband systems.”

“Ah, so that’s how they upgrade from gravband.”

“On top of being real-time comm over any distance,” he nodded. “Since the nodes utilize a form of artificial telepathy, they ignore time and space like organic telepathy does. They’re only restricted by the power of the transceiver, and we fix that by having a pretty heavy-duty transceiver for the system. The strength of the transceiver in your local mainframe nodes don’t matter. So long as the main array has the power to reach them, they can communicate with each other.”

“And this one array will handle all traffic for the entire network?”

“Four, located in strategic places so they don’t interfere with each other,” he answered. “Each array will be responsible for one quadrant of the galaxy, and trust me, those things will be more than up to the task. Each one will be the size of a large city, and able to handle simultaneous traffic with every node in its quadrant simultaneously.”

“Ah,” she nodded, which looked a little odd given she had a neck five times longer than what was normal for a Terran. It made her look a tad eerie. “I see great potential in the system, your Grace.”

“Thank you. If you want to get an idea of how the system works, you need only speak with Queen Sovial of the Jirunji. She’s had this system in place in her empire for several years, a necessary thing due to the rather special travel restrictions from which the males of her species suffer. It’s the model for the system we’ve designed,” he told her. “They developed the system to serve their needs, and it’s such a good one that we’ve more or less stolen it from them to serve as the model for everyone else,” he smiled.

“Stolen?” she asked lightly.

“A joke. I don’t want to get bitten. Jirunji have very long fangs,” he said in a tone that caused some laughter.



“What’s to stop a telepath from accessing the system?” another asked.

“Not much except for the fact that the comm nodes won’t respond to them, and the nodes will be transmitting raw data that’s modulated to allow much more data transfer, so good luck understanding what they’re saying to each other,” Jason noted. “The nodes transmit on a range of telepathic alpha wave frequencies that very few telepaths can hear, so the nodes themselves won’t cause any telepaths in your empires any problems. Some few can, but it’s easy for them to block out,” he added.

“Modulated? What does that mean?” another asked.

“Simply put, it doesn’t transmit organic sending, it doesn’t send ‘words’ as you’d understand them. It loads the data onto a carrier wave frequency, like old fashioned EM communications, which has layers that allow multiple blocks of information to be transmitted at the same time. We even utilize the harmonics as additional throughput, increasing the resonance node’s data transfer capacity by nearly thirty percent. And of course, it transmits at such a high speed that nobody who can hear it can understand it anyway, unless it’s a computer. I have to say, the ability of resonance nodes to send at such speeds is one reason why they’re so useful.”

“The diplomatic system will carry the additional defense of being encrypted,” Brayrak Kruu injected. “It creates an additional layer of security to ensure that all communications between empires and the use of bionoids by government officials are done so in complete and utter privacy. Not even we Moridon will have access to those systems once they’re built. We are only providing the encryption protocols, and it will be up to each empire to set up the encryption protocols on their side of the connection. In effect, they will decide on the password, to use a term, one that we Moridon

will not know. Even though we designed and built the system, we will have no access to the data of those who use it.”

“I heard that the Ruu are involved in this project,” Usui noted.

“In the design of the Academy system primarily, but not in the construction or the operation,” he nodded. Usui was more familiar with the Ruu because her empire was fairly close to Ruu territory. “As you know, the Ruu are very involved with the Academy. Observer A often jokes that it’s nearly a crime that the Ruu didn’t think of it first.”

“They’re too secretive to share that much knowledge with others,” Usui noted. “But they’ve been much more open since the Academy rose to prominence,” she added. “I’m surprised that they’re attending this summit. They usually avoid such things.”

“They’ll be part of the network, so they need to be here,” Jason said.

He spent the rest of the dinner answering questions, and then, finally, the official part of the day was done. Jason delinked after stowing his bionoid and hosted Miaari, Ayuma, Kumi, and Yeri in his office, as they discussed what the others had been up to while he was in the meetings. “After the presentation, I talked three empires into deals on replicated metals,” Kumi declared proudly.

“That’s what we’re there for,” Yeri mused. “I had quite a few chats with envoys from dozens of empires, asking either about the resonance system or the Ten Year Plan.”

“They’re still going on about that?” Jason asked.

She nodded. “We may see more empires signing on with the release of resonance technology. They’re putting it together that telepaths can use

them the way we use biogenics, mainly being able to merge without jacks.”

“I wasn’t going to go over that until tomorrow, that’s why it wasn’t part of the official presentation,” Jason noted. “But it’s good to see that people are seeing the potential without us having to spell it out for them.”

“Be nice, Jason,” Miaari warned lightly.

“I’m just tired and cranky, Mee,” he told her. “You know I hate these things.”

“At least you take them seriously,” she said playfully.

“I’d better, else you’d bite me,” he retorted. “You pick up anything worth noting?”

“Nothing momentous,” she answered. “I had a few discussions with other envoys, but it was much the same as Yeri’s experience. Everyone I spoke with was very eager to get their hands on resonance, and they were highly enthusiastic about the proposal, specifically the Academy system that gives them unrestricted access to the archives.”

“Same here,” Kumi said. “Everyone I talked to was trying to get production templates from me. As if I had them in my panties or something,” she laughed. “I mean, they’re on the Academy system, they can just download them.”

“You should start looking into closing deals on the raw materials to make resonance crystals,” Jason told her.

“Oh, I’ll be doing that, babes, trust me,” she assured him. “Empires with replication technology are gonna make a killing once resonance goes into widespread production.”

“I take it Imperium replicators can produce the materials?” Yeri asked.

“Yup,” Jason nodded. “The crystals are mostly made of out of carbon, silicon, and germanium, and their replicators can do that. They can also replicate most of the elements that make up the proteins the crystals use. There are a few trace elements that they can’t replicate, but they’re relatively cheap on the markets.”

“Our replicators can do it, though,” Kumi added. “I checked the materials list, and our replicators can replicate every element in a resonance crystal. That way I knew what deals to make,” she grinned.

“Cybi, you guys pick up anything from my sensory stream worth mentioning?” he asked, looking up at the node in the ceiling.

*“Nothing stands out, Jason,” she replied. “This first day has been quite unremarkable.”*

“Here’s hoping the entire summit goes the same way,” he replied. “Alright then, I think we’re done for today. I don’t really expect any reports over today, since nothing really happened. But I know you’ll torment me with one anyway,” he said, giving Miaari a sly look.”

“The uninformed is the loser in nearly any contest, cousin,” she replied shamelessly.

“I can see it now, an exhaustive ninety page report that sums up the day as ‘nothing happened worth mentioning.’”

“Then I guess you don’t have to read it, do you?” Miaari challenged.

“And then face ten months of you snipping at me for not doing my job?” he countered, which made Kumi snicker a little.

“It’s gonna be ninety pages now, Jayce,” Kumi warned.

“Oh, I’m sure it will be,” he said blandly. “At least I’ll get to see how many ways Mee can say the same thing using different words. I’ll even grade it for her on originality and everything.”

Miaari gave him a tart look.

“We’re done here,” he said, giving her a slight smile. “Everyone be back and ready to go at 23:00 tonight.”

*Raira, 2 Suraa, 4408, Faey Orthodox Calendar*

*Saturday, 16 October 2023, Terran Standard Calendar*

*Raira, 2 Suraa, year 1333 of the 97<sup>th</sup> Generation, Karinne Historical Reference Calendar*

*The White House, Karsa, Karis*

The summit went almost exactly the way he hoped, and it had been very good for the House of Karinne.

After seven days of debate, discussion, and answering questions, the galaxy as a whole, *unanimously*, had opted in to all three proposals, the galaxy-spanning resonance Civnet, the Academy expansion, and the diplomatic-only encrypted resonance network. As he expected, not a single empire or civilization had opted out, because they could see the advantages that such a system would bring. For the people and for businesses, it would

open up the entire galaxy to them, giving them almost unlimited options. It meant that bionoids would be usable virtually anywhere in the galaxy, allowing anyone to go almost anywhere in the blink of an eye. The expansion of the Academy to give schools and governments complete access to the archives and introducing local campuses also had almost immeasurable worth, spreading knowledge across the galaxy, which was the primary goal of the House of Karinne. Every local Academy campus was an advancement of the house's goals, and that was to bring education and knowledge to anyone who wanted it. Every empire had loved the system that they'd devised, using the Jirunji model of local campuses, because it gave each empire local control of the curriculum while also giving each local campus access to the Academy's archives on Terra. Each local campus would still be part of the Academy system, and the courses they provided on a local level would be accredited.

The eight days had been good for the house as well. Kumi and Yila had made quite a few side deals during the summit, from metals and raw materials to finished products, which was just a tiny portion of the commerce that had been going on in the back rooms while the rulers were in the main auditorium. Jason doubted that anyone was unhappy with the outcomes of those deals, which were a reflection of the upcoming expansion of trade throughout the galaxy. The Confederation standard technology bridges and catapults that the Karinnes and the RK empires that originally invented them like the Keelo and the Hrathari had been selling to distant empires had opened up the entire galaxy to commercial transport, which allowed businesses to sell to virtually anyone anywhere and get the product to its destination in a reasonable amount of time. And with the resonance network, it would allow governments and businesses to organize those deals, to buy and sell across the galaxy.

The last day of the summit had been about the implementation of the plan once it was agreed upon, where Myleena, the Academy and the Overseer proposed a schedule for building the three separate systems, and spelling out the responsibilities of the empires to build the node units using blueprints sent by the Academy. Once constructed, they would observe what went into the nodes when the Moridon and the Karinnes came in behind them to install the node hardware. As that was going on, each empire would be building their local campuses and local computer systems as the Karinnes towed in the Academy mainframe stations that would be in orbit. The Academy mainframes would double as the Academy-only resonance node that would both communicate with the planet or station and also connect the node to its regional data management transceiver. Those local nodes would connect to the regional archive station, and that station would be the one that would communicate with Terra.

At first, the Karinnes had offered to allow the local empires to build the station hulls and allow the Karinnes to install the mainframe and resonance system, but every one of them opted instead to allow the Academy to build the entire units themselves. That would make it easier for everyone, since the Academy could build them faster and easier than the hybrid offer. The Academy would be allowing the engineering school do build the nodes, with the assistance of the Moridon and the Ruu. The three empires would be building the Academy mainframes together, which was a major step in cooperation for the Ruu.

Jason was surprised as hell when Observer A announced that the Ruu would be involved in the construction efforts, and not just the design of the nodes and regional transceiver stations. Then again, perhaps he shouldn't have been so surprised, given the Ruu's deep involvement in the Academy.

In all, as Jason delinked from his summit bionoid for the last time, he was very satisfied, even happy, about how things had gone. The plans were all in place to build the Galactic Civnet, the protocols for routing traffic through it had already been approved, and the Academy expansion and the creation a galaxy-spanning Academy network was on the schedule. But the first thing they were going to build was the government resonance network, to connect all the spacefaring empires together so their diplomatic offices could communicate both in real time and over completely secure comm. Part and parcel of that deal was providing a bionoid for the executive of every empire and their appointed diplomatic and trade envoys, which would be kept at the Academy on Terra. They would have unlimited use of those bionoids, for both business and pleasure, which would allow them to conduct talks in person, sightsee, whatever they wanted to do with them. Anyone not able to merge to a bionoid was being supplied with Karinne interface technology, which they'd converted to resonance technology, so they weren't risking biogenics to provide them. So, those who were neither telepaths nor jacked would have the option to use interface technology to drive a bionoid from remote, though they wouldn't get the sensory stream. They'd only be able to see and hear with viewscreens and speakers. So, that would at least give rulers and their staffs who couldn't merge either way options.

He picked up Sasha, who had climbed into the merge pod with him and had curled up on his lap for a nap, and entered the main office. Chichi was sitting on the desk, grooming herself and looking entirely too cute for words, and Miaari watched her with a nearly predatory gaze, sitting on her hip in that demure pose Cybi and the other female CBIMs loved to assume. "Don't even think about it," Jason warned in Kimdori as he came into the room.



Miaari gave him a look. “Oh please, she would be no entertainment at all,” she replied chidingly. “I’ll have the final report ready for you in the morning.”

“Good deal. The cabinet ready?”

“In the conference room.”

“Then let’s go.”

The two of them went down a floor and entered the room, where everyone was waiting for him, along with the CBIMs, Myleena, and Siyhaa present as holograms and Admiral Dellin present via bionoid. “I’m sure everyone knows, so let’s get right to it,” he declared in an animated voice, speaking because Miaari was attending the meeting. “The summit is over, but the work just started for us. Bunvar, Tren, you have everything ready?”

“My team’s ready to move, Jayce,” Bunvar answered. “The construction docks are set up and ready to roll, and Dellin’s got everything set up to add his people to my crews. We’ll be cranking out nodes in no time.”

“I have the production schedules organized, and also the logistic schedules all set up with Jrz’kii,” Trenirk added. “Everything the factories crank out will be on a freighter before it can get cold. Dellin’s people are going to be keeping track of everything from the moment it comes off the line.”

*“The KMM is in position and ready to begin supply operations,”* the Kizzik stated. *“Both on Karis and Terra.”*

“Jerrim, the Academy people in place?”

“They’re all here and ready,” the Shio answered. “Both the engineering and construction teams are ready to go.”

“Awesome. Songa, you have the annex clinics ready up in Kosigi for the increased workers?”

“We have them staffed, including students from the Academy’s medical programs here for some practical training,” she answered.

“Jrz’kii, are the nodes we already built ready to move?”

She nodded her mantis-like head. *“We have 117 nodes ready for shipment, as soon as we have destinations set for them.”*

“They’re going to the Imperium,” he replied. “We’re going with the installation schedule we drew up last month. The Accords members have already done a lot of the work to install the systems, so we send the nodes where they can be used.”

*“Most of the Imperium only needs the nodes,”* Cyra supplied. *“Nearly three quarters of the Imperium is already using resonance on local planets, so they’re ready for connection to the Galactic Network.”*

“Hadjha, is that ready to go?”

“We only need flip the switch, Jason,” she answered. “The network connecting the Accords empires is already set up to accept the new network communication protocols. I have a schedule in place to transition both the Accords network and the Confederation network to the new protocols and phase out the older ones. Once the nodes are operating, we’ll begin the changeover.”

“What about the Academy network?”

“We’ll need more nodes to install that,” she replied. “But it can’t be activated until the mainframe is ready, which won’t be for two months.”

“The Academy’s not ready yet anyway,” Jason said. “Ayuma sent me and Jerrim a report on that. I’m surprised you haven’t seen it yet.”

“She sent it to me,” Myleena supplied. “I’ll be overseeing the mainframe facility project while the Hadhja is working on the new Civnet. She’ll switch over once we have the mainframe facilities built to oversee the Ruu and Moridon as they install the mainframes.”

“I have my teams ready for that,” Dellin stated. “We’ll be building them using open cruiser and battleship docks. We have the blueprints loaded into the docks, so the automation is ready to go. We can have one facility built every eight days once we have the logistics flowing. The nodes are being built in frigate and destroyer docks, and we have all of them available for the project now that we’ve cleared out the last of the inspection rotations.”

“Security for the Academy workers is in place,” Miaari told them.

“Outstanding,” Jason replied. “As long as Kumi stops trying to steal all our income and keeps the checks from bouncing, it sounds like we’ve got this.”

“Bite my ass, babes,” she replied tartly, which caused some laughter.

“Alright then, I’m not gonna keep everyone here with constant babbling. We have the plans in place, all of us have to keep an eye on our parts of it, and it sounds like they’re ready to go. So let’s do it,” he declared. “Cynna is going to be managing the Civnet project, Cybi is heading the Academy project, and Cyra is managing the diplomatic network project, so

send your status reports to them. They'll tell me what they want me to know in order to keep me out of your hair," he added, which made them all laugh, even Miaari. "So let's get it done."

He had a reason to be abrupt, and not just because everyone already knew what to do. If things were still on schedule, then the *Astra* would be arriving home from C6D in about an hour, and it was carrying the prototype QE device that the Republic had built. They did it using moleculartronic architecture, protecting their own tech, which was by Jason's own request. He saw use for them far beyond just talking to the Republic, they were the answer to all their problems with extreme distance communications. They could place a resonance node in KES ships connected a QE device, and that would allow them to utilize intergalactic comm without risking any biogenics being captured. The QE device the Republic built was ready to be used, already attached to a resonance node that the *Astra* took with them, one more or less devoted just to allowing them to talk to the Republic. Their side of it was the bionoid of Estrella sitting in one of the chairs in his office, one diligently modeled after her body and carrying all the latest biorhythmics so she felt quite at home merged to it. The Republic had already tested merging at long distance using the QE device, using bionoids they built themselves using the specs Yila sent them, so Estrella wouldn't be beta testing it. They knew it worked, and all they needed was a bionoid on this side to connect to it.

Jason passed the time waiting for them to get back studying the blueprints of the device that they were going to build using their own research. They'd successfully tested a prototype four days ago, while he was at the summit, and it hadn't taken Myleena and Siyhaa long at all to build a full-scale prototype, a unit capable of supporting 1,300 simultaneous

merges. They'd install those on their KES ships, which would let them stay in contact with Karis at all times, as well as allow remote merges to bionoids anywhere within the range of the resonance node paired with it.

He got involved enough with the paperwork to be honestly surprised when Captain Suraki's face appeared via hologram, hanging over his desk. "Your Grace, we're back in normal space," he reported. "We're about to deploy the node. If things go according to plan, Lady Estrella should be activating her bionoid in about ten minutes or so."

"Outstanding, Captain," Jason said, leaning down on an elbow as Chichi jumped up onto the desk. "Estrella is going to contact me as soon as the QE relay is up and running."

"I'm surprised you managed to finish the summit in time."

"I did rush things a bit," he chuckled. "And they're still doing the closing ceremony, but nobody minded me skipping them. They know how much work I have to do with them accepting the proposal."

"Ah, they did eh? Good to hear," he smiled, which was a bit chilling given his mouth was filled with sharp teeth.

"Yeah, so we'll be busy as sin for the next couple of years building the Academy network," he nodded. "And everyone else will be busy building the resonance network. We'll be providing some of the pieces, mainly the main comm nodes that handle long distance comm, but each empire is responsible for the rest."

"Sounds like I'm glad we'll be in some other galaxy while all that is going on," he noted slyly.

“Not now, you’re on cargo hauling duty,” Jason threatened, which made him hiss in laughter.

“I’ll let you know when we have the node placed,” he said.

“Good deal. I’ll make sure Estrella merges to find me feeling her up.”

“You mammals and your fascination with mammary glands,” he teased.

“Better than getting turned on by bony spines,” he retorted.

“Hey now, you don’t talk about a Crai female’s spines that way, Jason. She’ll bite you.”

“Let’s change the subject before I learn way more about the Crai than I ever wanted to know,” Jason hedged, which made Saruki laugh earnestly.

“Weakling. I’ll call back when we’re done.”

“I’ll be waiting.”

It only took about fifteen minutes for Saruki to call him back, and barely five minutes after that, a hologram winked on in the air on the far side of his desk, one of Estrella in her private quarters. She focused her eyes on him and smiled. “Jason,” she called, looking past him, no doubt out the window. “Where are we?”

“My office,” he replied, standing up. “And as you can see, I decided to make this a casual meeting,” he added, motioning to his tee shirt, then he moved his chair to the side and let her see out the window, motioning towards it. “Welcome to Karis, Estrella. Home planet of the House of Karinne. It looks like the QE device is working perfectly.”

“No problems on our end.”

“Have you been practicing using a bionoid? As soon as we have everything tested, we’ll be able to allow merging back and forth. And I’d be more than happy to welcome you to Karis in person, at least as it were, letting you merge to one that will look as closely to you as possible given how much of you we’ve seen.”

“I’ve been practicing using that simulation software you sent to us,” she told him. “And we’ve produced a few prototype bionoids using the specs you sent us, but I haven’t been allowed to use them. I’m too important to beta test, they said,” she said, rolling her eyes a bit. “And just how *faithful* is this bionoid going to be of me, hmm?” she asked lightly.

“Simsense lets us produce measurements using organic memory, the data pulled out of the sensory stream, so your bionoid will be perfect of everything I’ve seen of you...which is quite a bit,” he told her with a chuckle. “As to the parts of you I’ve never seen, we do make bionoids anatomically accurate, to make them as natural as possible for the driver. We used anatomical data for those parts of the bionoid from the Faey, since you’re identical races. I can’t vouch to the accuracy of, ah, certain parts of the bionoid being anatomically accurate compared to your body, but if you don’t like how things were done, you can always have our high security bionoid designer fix them. You’ll just have to provide him with accurate images to go by to make the necessary adjustments,” he said dryly, which made her laugh brightly as Chichi jumped up onto the desk. “Chichi, this is Estrella Nine Rings, a friend of mine. Estrella, this is Chichi, one of my tabis.”

“My, what an adorable little creature!” she said with an earnest smile. “How old is she?”

“About four,” he replied. “And this one is only about four months old,” he added, setting Sasha on the desk beside her mother. “This is Sasha. She’s Chichi’s kitten. Sasha, this is Estrella Nine Rings.”

Sasha gave a chirp of greeting, then looked back at Jason inquisitively.

“No, she’s not a Dreamer, she’s Ulalan,” he told the tabi. “I told you that before, do you ever pay attention?”

Sasha gave him a scathing look of defiance.

“I didn’t know you could send to animals, Jason,” Estrella noted.

“I can’t,” he replied. “You once asked me about my magic. Well, congratulations, you’re seeing one way that my magic works,” he told her, scratching Sasha behind her ears, which made her lean her head up and back, against them. “I could drive you crazy trying to explain how it really works, or I could just say that I have a special connection to animals. They can understand my words, and I can understand what they say in return.”

“And what’s the real reason? I’m curious enough to risk insanity,” she smiled.

He looked at the hologram. “It really is magic,” he told her calmly. “The magic explanation is a metaphor, but when it comes to this,” he said, patting Sasha on the head, “it really is magic. A race called the Parri taught it to me. They’re a race of mystics, and some of the things they can do...I can’t explain it as anything other than magic. They don’t call it magic, but there’s an old saying among my people that technology that’s sufficiently advanced appears to be magic to those far below it. The Parri are so far above us that we are like cavemen compared to them, at least when it comes to the things that they can do. I don’t know what it is. It’s not telepathy, it’s



not psionic, it's not science. But I've seen it with my own eyes, the things that they can do. What they've taught me to do. And I can't call it anything but magic." He gave a soft, wry little laugh. "Anyway, it seems that I was born with a tiny bit of their ability, their magic. When I speak to someone, when I speak the truth straight from the heart, speak words that I believe with my heart and soul, they can understand them. It doesn't work on intelligent beings quite so much because their own experiences and motivations cloud things, but for animals, who don't have ulterior motives, they can understand me. And over time, I've learned how to understand what they say, to learn to speak their language, so to speak."

Sasha gave an agreeing chirp.

"So Sasha and Chichi aren't my pets, Estrella. They're part of my family," he smiled, looking down at the young juvenile as she rubbed her head and shoulder against his arm. "And what I can do means I live in a slightly different world than everyone else. After all, I can speak to what most people would consider to be a pet, so I can tell them the rules...when they feel like obeying them, anyway," he said with a slightly stern look at the juvenile, who looked entirely unrepentant. "My world is filled with conversations that other people can't hear. Sometimes it's a little hard to explain to people, but it never makes me feel lonely. Most people who know me know about this, and they accept it as simply a part of who I am. They know I'm a little strange, and they love me despite my many, many faults," he said wryly, which made Chichi give a little chirp of sly agreement. "So, while you and me are friends, Estrella, you have to accept that I'm not what you'd call normal, not by any stretch of the imagination."

"We're all strange in our own ways, Jason," she smiled. "And I find it absolutely fascinating, what you can do. I hope to see it in person when I

can merge to a bionoid there.”

“Hopefully within the next ten days,” he said. “We have to make sure the QE link is completely stable to avoid possible dump shock.”

“And what is that?”

“It’s a condition that can happen if you’re forcibly delinked from an asset you’re merged to,” he answered. “It causes a psychosomatic reaction that puts you in a coma for a couple of days. It does no permanent damage, but a coma is a coma, which means you’re out of it until you wake up. Since the QE device is new tech, we want to be absolutely sure that it’s working properly before we try to merge to a bionoid using it as a bridge. But, once we’re absolutely sure it’s safe, I’d be glad to host you here. On your side, make sure you’re using the merge pod tech we sent you. The merge pod is required equipment while operating a bionoid here, and it should be for you too.”

“We’ve already built the device using the specs you sent, adapted to our technology,” she assured him. “And we’ve tested it. Does it prevent dump shock? The specs said that it helps stabilize the merge and acts as a safety feature, delinking the driver from the asset if the merge becomes unstable.”

“That’s why it does it,” he nodded. “The merge pod will delink you if the merge goes outside of safe parameters. It’s those unsafe parameters that we’re making sure won’t happen because of the relay, because the merge pod isn’t a guarantee you avoid dump shock if you lose the merge.”

“Then I think both of us will be waiting impatiently for the work to be complete,” she smiled. “But I must say, I find it quite...amazing that we’re talking across who knows how many *sepla*.”

“I’m not answering that, since the distance would let you home in on our location,” he said lightly.

“Why Jason, we already know where you are,” she smiled, glancing down. The screen split, and an image of several galactic clusters appeared. “You’re right here. We’ve known that for a while,” she said as a dot blinked...and it was dead center right on the Milky Way.”

“Somehow I’m not surprised,” he said ruefully.

“We haven’t shown you everything, Jason,” she winked. “Your engine technology, I must admit, is far superior to ours. That you got the QE device from here to there in just nine days, that’s far better than we could have done it. It would have taken us nearly a month.”

“I hope this doesn’t mean that we’ll be seeing a Republic task force show up on the edge of the galaxy in a month.”

“Of course not. I’ve told you, the Republic wants our relations to be good, amicable, for us to form a lasting, permanent relationship. Sending ships to your home galaxy against your wishes doesn’t accomplish that goal. Besides, we can’t risk sending ships because of the Bru. Our ships can’t outrun them, but *yours* can. If they were to track our ships leaving and move to intercept us, we wouldn’t be able to shake them, not when their galaxy is between us and you. No matter what vector we try to use, they can intercept us.”

“Can they track us like you can?”

She shook her head. “This we know for a fact. Your ships move too fast and you’re very careful to avoid their galaxy when you travel here, which keeps them from tracking you back to your home galaxy. So long as

you continue to approach us from the vectors your ships use and go out at least sixty thousand light years before you change course, they can't track your ships."

"I'll send that down to the KES," he told her. "Have they tried to track our ships?"

"Yes. Once they tried to send out an intercepting task force, but your ships outran them and got beyond their sensor range, so they weren't able to track their course change."

"That wouldn't have helped them, our ships take a very roundabout route to our forward checkpoint in cluster C5," he said absently, looking at the map still on the hologram. "They don't take a direct course back here until they get there."

"We've seen that, and it's the wise thing to do. They should keep doing it, at least in the short term," she nodded. "But there may be another way. We noticed that you've developed wormhole technology, and you've developed it to the point where you can link devices between galactic clusters. We have similar technology. I've been asked to confer with you about the possibility of trying to link one of your wormhole devices with ours. That would allow your ships to move in and out of the galaxy without risk of the Bru tracking you."

"If you have Stargate tech, why don't you use it to link to other galaxies?"

"Because we have no real need to do so," she answered. "We don't have any exogalactic colonies, and we've already explored the surrounding galaxies. We only use wormhole devices inside the galaxy, to make system to system travel fast and easy. To keep that technology away from the Bru,

we don't build them outside of the home galaxy. But, if we can link one of ours to one of yours, we can use it as a way to get ships in and out of the galaxy without the Bru being able to track them. The Bru lack wormhole technology, and they lack the ability to analyze space to detect the wormhole linking two devices together."

"That's how you tracked us."

She nodded. "The Bru can't do it. We can. We traced your wormholes back to your home galaxy."

"Well, that's what we get for trying to be efficient," he said with a bit of dark edge to his tone.

"Consider it an act of honesty to gain your trust, Jason. I told you this even though I didn't need to, just as you told me about your magic."

He gave her a long look. "What are they fishing for, Estrella? What does the Supreme Council want from us?"

She gave him a sober look. "For the last sixty years, the Republic has been gearing up for an invasion of the Bru galaxy," she said seriously. "We've organized this with the other civilizations in our cluster, and we're all agreed to it. Early next solar cycle, the 29 surviving empires of the cluster will launch an organized invasion of the Bru galaxy," she told him gravely. "We intend to end the Bru threat, once and for all, no matter what it takes, which will free us from our self-imposed prisons. We understand that we're talking genocide, extermination, but we simply see no other way. For nine millennia, Jason, we have all lived with the threat of annihilation by the Bru, and have watched as they have worn down and destroyed civilization after civilization. We have watched and waited, hoping that something would change, but it was a futile exercise. They haven't

changed, and we simply cannot wait any longer to see if they do. We don't want your help in fighting that war, Jason," she said firmly. "Truth be told, your military technology as we've analyzed it would be of little aid to us, and this is honestly not your affair. But what we do want, what we need, is a trading partner, one with sufficient technological advancement to be able to offer the raw materials we need, raw materials a civilization with your technology level can produce, to help supplement our domestic production. Heavy gases and metallic elements mined from gas giants, extreme heavy elements created by hypernovas and black hole inversions, hyperspace-derived materials, the House of Karinne can supply these things to us, which we desperately need. We're fully aware of your House's strict neutrality, and we will not ask you to violate it. We just hope that that neutrality doesn't extend to having a trading relationship with a civilization at war, and a war that will get very...brutal."

"No, it doesn't. Our oaths only apply to our technology," he told her. "And I can understand the position you're in from a military perspective. The Bru want to annihilate your people, kill you to the last child. You have the right to defend yourself against that kind of insanity, so you won't get any judgment from me. But I'm surprised you need us, Estrella. You have an entire galaxy of resources."

"Which we have slowly depleted over the last twenty three thousand years of our history," she answered. "That's another reason we're taking this step, Jason. We're in danger of running out of resources within our galaxy. Until the Bru threat is removed, we need a trade partner to supply us with what we need that we can't easily get anymore, at least until we can leave our prison and establish colonies."

“Why not just use Stargates? I’m sure you realized long ago you can link them to other clusters.”

“You can. *We* can’t,” she told him. “The protective devices that enclose the galaxy disrupt any attempt to form a wormhole through them, which we need to keep the Bru out. They also have Stargate technology, as well as the technology to create temporary one way wormholes stable enough to send ships through them. And since the Bru can track and intercept ships we send out, we can’t send out a ship to build those devices elsewhere. We’ve tried, and the Bru invariably find them and destroy them. But your ships can, Jason. Your ships are faster than anything we or the Bru have. You can bring in the supplies we need without the Bru being able to stop them or track them back to your home galaxy. I can’t claim that it would be completely without risk, which is why we’re going out of our way to establish a strong relationship with you. It’s why we gave you resonance technology. If we didn’t need your help, we would have said no,” she said honestly. “But on a personal level, the Ulala want this because the Faey are us, we are the Dreamers, the Dreamers are Faey, and all three of our species are closely related to yours, so closely that we are cousins. We are family, all of us, and while the Republic stands to benefit from that relationship, the simple truth is, we want closer relations because we are *family*, and family is important to the Ulala.”

“That I know well,” he said earnestly, which was the truth. He’d read some of the historical and sociological files the Ulala had shared, and they were a people deeply, deeply rooted in the concept of family and clan. Estrella’s last name, Nine Rings, was actually a title, and it represented the nine clans of the Ulala and her position as the head of the council of the nine clans. Estrella surrendered her family and clan names when she

became the executive of the Ulala, symbolizing cutting her ties to her family and her clan to serve the Ulala as a whole. She was the only Ulala that didn't have a proper family name. "I'd be inclined to open trade relations with the Republic, Estrella, so it'll just come down to negotiating what you want, and what you're willing to give us for it."

"What would you want?"

"We won't ask for your technology. Not your military technology, anyway," he said. "There might be some civilian technologies that you could share that will be useful, things we can share with the rest of our galaxy through the Academy. Quality of life tech, nothing that can be militarized, stuff like that. The last thing I want to do is increase the arms race in the home galaxy any more than it is now. Like I told you at the party, the balance of power here is very delicate. We can talk about specifics later, at least about tech. Materially, I don't think there's anything you can trade that you won't need for your own war effort. Trading it to us takes it away from your military, and you need it right now. But the one thing the Karinnes are *always* in the market in trade is food, both harvested food staples and seeds of your native crops so we can grow export crops on our own farms," he told her. "We export a lot of food to the rest of the galaxy to help maintain peace and stability, because hungry people is one of the fastest way to have a war flare up. The House of Karinne is considered the breadbasket of our home galaxy," he said with a bit of pride. "Our two main products are scientific research and food. I think we can make some deals, the resources you need for the food we can export, and a couple of civilian technologies that will increase quality of life without disrupting the balance of power here."



She was quiet a long moment, then she smiled. “It makes me happy to hear you say that, Jason. I think we can reach an agreement that makes both sides happy,” she told him confidently. “We do have a food surplus, and we’d be happy to see it go to good use. And I think there are ways to trade you what you consider to be acceptable technologies, mainly with improvements we can provide to your existing technologies based on the information you traded to us for resonance. None of those are military in nature.”

“Sounds good. Once we have the QE system fully certified, we can negotiate the details in person. And I’d be delighted to show you my home, let you meet my wife and the rest of my family.”

“And show me some more of your magic?” she asked hopefully.

“Not quite yet, because I don’t want it to tear the Republic apart, or cause the Republic to invade our home to capture us and force us to use our magic against the Bru,” he answered honestly, then was quiet a long moment. “And for you to fully and completely understand the truth of that, I think that instead of you visiting in a bionoid, you need to see things with your *own* eyes, in a way that can’t be intercepted or overheard, like virtually any comm can. And as far as you being...exposed to the force that gives us our magic, that won’t be an issue, Karis isn’t the place where that happens. So, my friend, how would you like to come visit my home? I can explain things in more detail face to face, as in *really* face to face, and I’d love for you to meet the rest of my family. Since you already know where we are, it’ll be a moot point to bring you here. You’ll have to come on one of our ships, and we’ll have to put you in a stasis pod for the journey to keep you from having your mind turned to jelly from hyperspace exposure. If you’ll trust us enough to let us bring you here, alone, the offer is on the table.”

“When can the *Astra* return?” she asked with a smile.

“Eight days,” he replied. “But it won’t be the *Astra*. You’re too important to risk on an exploration vessel. With the permission of the Republic, I’ll be sending a military vessel to bring you here, a squadron of six of our stealth frigates. One to carry you, the other five to protect you. The reason why is that our frigates are equipped with stealth technology, and they’re also the fastest ships we have. You said the Bru can’t keep up with our ships, so it’s logical to put you on the fastest ship in the fleet to get you here safely. It’ll be small and a bit cramped, but given you’ll be in a stasis pod and thus asleep for most of the journey, I doubt that’ll bother you that much. You’ll have to come alone, Estrella, to protect the secrets of the House. I’ll entrust them to you, and only to you. If you’ll trust us with your safety, both on the trip here and while you’re here, I’d be happy to host you.”

“You are my cousin, Jason. I would trust my cousin with my safety,” she told him without hesitation. “Send your ships. I will await them with eager anticipation.”

“Cybi,” he called. Estrella’s eyes widened a bit when Cybi manifested a hologram, already sitting in her favorite spot on his desk. “Have Juma dispatch the *Javelin* and five frigates with experienced captains to the rendezvous point. Make sure the *Javelin* is equipped with hyperspace stasis pods. Oh, and by the way. Cybi, Estrella Nine Rings. Estrella, Cybi.”

“*It’s a pleasure to meet you, my Lady,*” Cybi said with a graceful nod of her holographic head.

“If you’re going to come here, Estrella, then a few things have to be made known to you. And Cybi and her brothers and sisters is one of them,”

Jason said. “Which includes Cyrsi. Cyrsi isn’t just an unusual but intelligent young lady, Estrella. She’s a computer. A *living* computer,” he said evenly, giving her a direct look. “They’re known as CBIMs, computers that are based on an organic computer architecture that makes them self-aware. Cyrsi is one of the CBIMs. She runs the continent of Virga, but she also serves as the primary CBIM attached to the KES, there to lend them her computing power when they need it. Her adventurous spirit and inquisitive nature makes her the perfect CBIM for that role.”

“Cyrsi is a computer?” Estrella asked.

“*Yes, my Lady,*” Cybi answered for him. “*But while we are computers, we are not mere machines.*”

“That...I can believe. I’ve grown quite fond of her, and she has a personality. Emotions. Machines do not have emotions,” she declared. “But I’m surprised that you utilize artificial intelligence, Jason. We experimented with the technology in the past, but we found it exceedingly unstable, and the technology was abandoned.”

“Most likely, our system is very much different from yours,” he told her in reply. “I think the difference is, we accept that the CBIMs have free will. We don’t try to control them, and that means that they are part of our system, part of our House, because they want to be.”

“*Jason speaks truth,*” Cybi agreed. “*We CBIMs serve the House not because it was what we were built to do, but because we want to. We are considered citizens of the House, my Lady, with all the same rights as any other member, as well as the same responsibilities. We even receive a salary for the work we do, though I often feel that Jason underpays me for my work,*” she said with a slight smile, glancing at Jason.

“Oh no, you’re not gonna harp on that to a complete stranger, Cybi,” he warned.

*“This is war, Jason, and I see nothing wrong with opening up a new avenue of attack to get what I want,”* she replied shamelessly, which made Estrella laugh. *“You have come to know Cyrsi in your meetings with the Karinnes, my Lady. What do you think of her?”*

“I like her, quite a bit,” she replied with a smile. “She’s an earnest, kind, very clever and curious woman. We have had a great many delightful conversations. But, now that I know her secret, her intelligence makes a lot more sense,” she mused.

*“Being a CBIM is no guarantee of intelligence, my Lady,”* Cybi said with a slightly wicked tilt to her voice.

“No holy wars in front of the people we’re trying to impress that we’re not all crazy, And before Cyvanne decides to take revenge for the insult intimated but not delivered,” Jason warned, which made both Cybi and Estrella laugh.

*“Just impressing upon Lady Estrella that we’re not machines,”* she said impishly.

“I think I am going to enjoy getting to know you, Cybi,” Estrella said with a charming smile.

“Cybi is a scamp, Estrella,” Jason told her, giving the hologram a knowing glance. “The only advice I can give is don’t let your guard down around her, and don’t *ever* let her drive if you get in a hovercar with her.”

“And why is that?”

“She may be a living thing, but she *does* have the brain of a computer. And she sees nothing wrong with missing a building or another car by the width of a fingernail, since she can calculate the distances and vectors far beyond an organic person. And she’s gotten to where she likes to do it on purpose just to scare her passengers. Let’s just say that anytime someone rides with her, they make her sit in the back seat.”

Estrella laughed brightly. “You are a very naughty woman, Cybi. I think I like you already.”

“Don’t encourage her,;” Jason grunted, which made Estrella laugh again.

“I take it you use a bionoid?” she asked.

The hologram nodded. “*We find them to be quite enjoyable. They give us the same sensory experience as an organic being, which we find almost addictively intriguing. They also give us the ability to interact with others on a personal level. It’s easy for others to not be intimidated by who and what we are when they interact with a bionoid built to mimic a living being as closely as possible.*”

“Now that I can understand,” the Ulala nodded. “The initial testing we’ve done has made me very, very interested in bionoid technology.”

“*It’s going to change the Republic, Lady Estrella, but that change will be for the best.*”

“I believe you.”

After working out the details, they ended the call, and Jason had to lean back in his chair and look out the window as he considered things. The Republic is going to do with them what they did with the Syndicate. That

was the best of both worlds in his opinion, because it would help the home galaxy, and the Republic wouldn't think that they were giving away anything critical. It may also help the Karinnes, because they might be able to get some assistance with some projects they'd been working on, primarily the nexus project. With Republic help, Myleena might be able to build one inside a gravity well, which would make them much, much cheaper to operate. And he was certain they could do it, because it was clear that their Stargate technology was significantly more advanced than Karinne technology, if they had the ability to trace Stargate links from that far away.

Seriously, if they could do *that*, then their technology must really appear to be magic to someone like him.

He was looking forward to it. He sincerely like Estrella, considered her a friend, and he would relish the opportunity to interact with her in a much less formal environment. She wasn't one for formalities, for ceremony. But he would also have to be careful, because she did represent a government that wanted something from him. And he had the feeling that it was more than simple trade. Getting her here would let him get to the truth of that, and also give him the chance to explain some things to her that would hopefully put everything in perspective.

There was much to gain from a permanent relationship with the Republic, but there was also great danger in it, the main one being them considering the House a client state to use as they see fit, one not advanced enough to be a threat but also advanced enough to be of use to them. And it would be up to him to navigate that minefield and get the House of Karinne safely to the other side.

He was confident he could do it.

*[She's quite something, isn't she?]* Cybi asked, looking down at him.

*[Yes she is. And now I have to make sure not to fall into the trap she represents.]*

She tilted her head slightly, which he found quite endearing, then nodded. *[I think I understand what you mean, both personally and politically.]*

*[This is going to be delicate. They want something more from us, but more than that, we have to be very careful,]* he communed, his thought sober and a touch anxious. *[The hand they reach out to us in friendship may be holding the shackle they intend to lock around our wrist.]*

*[A wise concern,]* she agreed. *[But we can see it in their hands, so we should be able to avoid it when they try to snap it shut.]*

*[Hopefully, my friend,]* he returned, turning his chair again and looking out the window, his expression neutral. *[Hopefully.]*