

Chapter 10

Home System, Planet 16

Exiled by the Elders and condemned to stasis, Reus was allowed no visitors. That mandate did nothing to dissuade his two colleagues, whom he designated Alpha and Beta, from engaging in deviant behavior, defying Elder mandates and Community law.

Patiently studying the observation patterns of their citizen monitors, Alpha had devised an escape plan to exploit any security lapse, should one occur.

Eventually, after hundreds of planetary rotations, their perseverance brought a reward as they detected a brief surveillance gap.

They quickly departed Home World, undeterred by the Elders' mandate. Upon arrival at the primary satellite orbiting planet 16, they discovered Reus' security chamber and promptly released him from stasis.

"Status?" he inquired as soon as he recovered from the lingering effects of dormancy.

"Two cycles have transpired," answered Alpha.

Beta anticipated what would be of most interest to Reus. "Three citizens from the yellow-star community reside on Home planet, undergoing emissary training by Sentinel."

As one of the Elders' anointed citizens, Sentinel commanded little respect from Reus, their last encounter resulting in another reprimand from the Elders after Sentinel intervened in his attempt to incite dissatisfaction with a group of citizens new to the community. Reus yearned for a future encounter with Sentinel.

"The Elders invite risk. The yellow-star system must be assimilated," Reus declared. "We will act."

The three malefactors accelerated from the surface and proceeded directly to Home World.

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One day, Carver asked Sentinel about the Community's past. "Is there conflict in your history?"

EACH SPECIES IN THE COMMUNITY BEGAN AS A PRIMITIVE AND VIOLENT AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY, ALONE AND ISOLATED. SOME DESTROYED THEMSELVES. THOSE THAT UNIFIED IN PEACE SURVIVED.

"What about the Elders?"

OUR SPECIES WAS BIOLOGIC IN THE DISTANT PAST. CONFLICT NEARLY DESTROYED US. THE ELDERS MANDATED PEACE AND PROVIDED OVERSIGHT.

"All of the species in the Community overcame violence?"

YES. ONLY A PEACEFUL SPECIES IS ALLOWED TO JOIN THE COMMUNITY.

"Did the Elders help them?"

NO. INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES MUST INDEPENDENTLY LEARN PEACE BEFORE THEY ARE ALLOWED TO JOIN THE COMMUNITY.

“If the Elders have it within their power to help an inherently violent species realize peace, why do they not help?”

SPECIES MUST TEACH THEMSELVES. TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY.

Carver reflected on this for some time. All life on Earth had known violence and conflict since the dawn of time, driven by a fundamental law of nature: Only the strong shall survive. This was evident in virtually every aspect of Earth-indigenous life, plants and animals alike all competing to stay alive, to thrive, with the strongest overtaking the weakest. Earth’s circle of life was inherently counter to the tenet mandated by the Elders. What fate then awaits mankind, he wondered.

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Later, he brought up the conversation with Sentinel to Peggy and Davis. “Have you guys given any thought to what this Emissary training is all about?”

“I assume it is to teach us how to liaise between this world and Earth,” Davis offered.

“Right,” Peggy added.

“I thought so too, until my chat with Sentinel this morning.”

“What do you mean?”

“We’re not being trained to be liaisons. I think the Elders want to send us back home to start a peace movement. One that is planet-wide, and permanent. ‘Only a peaceful species is allowed to join the community,’ he said. That has been a recurring theme with him since we first met in orbit all those years ago.”

“That’s consistent with something Sentinel told me a few weeks ago,” Peggy added. “I asked him if the Community would welcome people of Earth; he said ‘A violent species would not be welcome.’”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Davis complained. “Why bring us all the way out here and teach us about their world if they’re not ready to establish relations?”

Peggy speculated, “I think they want us to form a peaceful society before we will be invited to join the community. Frank, is that your take?”

“Exactly. Humans have to earn that right on our own.”

“So the human race has to teach itself to be completely peaceful first? That could take decades!”

“Or centuries,” Carver said.

“Dammit, man! You’re the leader here, you need to demand a meeting with the Elders and clear this up.” Davis turned and stomped off.

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Reus remained patient. Entering the proximity of Home City without careful preparation risked detection by the Elders. Thus, for many Home World rotational cycles, he was resigned to lie in wait outside the security envelope that protected the yellow-star biologies. He knew that sooner or later he would gain access to one of them and conduct his own examination.

Finally, that time had arrived. A single biologic had wandered away from its shelter, exiting the protective shield.

He would inspect this creature and expose the fallacy of the Elders' mandate of emissary training and possible inclusion in the Community.

Reus moved quickly.

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Ben Davis had been stomping around for over an hour, pissed off. Having spent his whole career searching for intelligent life beyond the Solar system, he was proud of the fact that he alone had succeeded where thousands before him had not. These years on Home World were the highest of highs; he was hoping to return to Earth a hero, front and center as mankind ushered in a new era, the human race finally joining a galactic society. Perhaps even a modern day apostle that would unify the planet as they envisioned a future of limitless possibilities.

And now his aspirations might never be realized. The Elders planned to sit back and watch the human race continue to go it alone for decades more, perhaps generations, sorting out how to be a 'peaceful society'. Hmph! What the hell good was discovering an advanced intelligence if all they were going to do is stand idly by? Where was the goddamn pot of gold at the end of the rainbow?

HUMAN.

Davis grabbed his temples and screamed as the thought exploded painfully in his brain. Hovering before him was a very bright sphere of light, about the same size as Sentinel during their first encounter on Earth, but much more intense. Like a tiny sun, it was too painful to look at directly.

"Who—what—are you?" he said, grimacing.

YOUR SPECIES IS PRIMITIVE AND UNINTELLIGENT.

"Please, your thoughts are...you're hurting me. Please dial it back a little, would ya?"

WEAK. Reus ignored the humans' plea. WHAT VALUE DOES YOUR SPECIES OFFER THE COMMUNITY?

"What do...you mean?" Davis struggled to get the words out.

THE ELDERS MUST MANDATE INTERVENTION, NOT OVERSIGHT.

"I...don't understand."

Reus realized he was not obtaining useful data from this specimen.

Davis slumped to the ground as the sphere of light diminished in intensity, the pain in his head subsiding to that of a really bad migraine. "What do you want?"

YOUR COMMUNITY: HAS IT ALWAYS BEEN VIOLENT?

"Human history has sometimes known conflict, yes."

GROUPS WITHIN YOUR SOCIETY EXECUTE WAR WITH OTHER GROUPS?

"Yes," Davis conceded. "But, our leaders have recognized we can no longer afford to do so."

YOUR COMMUNITY HAS DEVELOPED TECHNOLOGY THAT CAN DESTROY ITSELF.

It seemed a statement more than a question. Davis did not answer.

YOUR COMMUNITY WILL EVENTUALLY USE THAT TECHNOLOGY UPON ITSELF, OR AGAINST OTHER COMMUNITIES. AGGRESSION IS INHERENT IN PRIMITIVE AND VIOLENT SPECIES. YOUR COMMUNITY WILL DESTROY ITSELF, OR HARM OTHERS. IT IS INEVITABLE. DATA FROM OTHER SPECIES CONFIRMS THIS CONCLUSION.

“No! We have the capacity for peace. Our race is young, in time we will learn.”

THE ELDERS INVITE AGGRESSION UPON THE COMMUNITY.

Davis was horrified as he began to realize he may have made an enormous miscalculation, reaching to the stars to establish contact with an advanced intelligence before his own world was thoroughly prepared. He had always assumed an advanced intelligence would be benevolent. This particular one seemed to be judging the entire human race right before his very eyes. “Please, give my world a chance. We can change.”

Reus had the data he needed to formulate a conclusion. **WHERE THE ELDERS MANDATE INACTION, I WILL ACT TO ENSURE COMMUNITY SECURITY.**

The sphere of light drifted upward, getting brighter as it gained altitude. Davis panicked. “Wait!” He grabbed his temples as intense pain once again exploded in his head. He had never felt so insignificant in his life. He was nothing more than an insect to this alien.

YOUR SPECIES REQUIRES INTERVENTION AND OVERSIGHT. I WILL ACT TO PRESERVE THE COMMUNITY.

Davis’ cries came to an abrupt end as he collapsed.

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Dusk was near. Uncharacteristically, Ben had been gone most of the day. They had been searching for him for over an hour.

“Frank, over here!” Peggy waved her arms before turning to run down a small rise.

Carver crested the hill and saw her kneeling at the bottom. When he caught up to her, she stood, holding something in her hand.

“This looks like Ben’s tunic.” Her voice quivered. “There’s blood on it.”

Carver knelt. “Look at the ground. It looks...scorched. What the hell happened here?”

Sentinel suddenly appeared. **CARVER.**

“Davis is missing.”

EMISSARY DAVIS TRAVELED OUTSIDE THE SECURITY SPHERE AND WAS APPREHENDED.

Carver’s eyes narrowed. He stood and spun around to face Sentinel. “You better damn well explain that,” he snarled.

“Apprehended by whom?” Peggy asked.

THE SECURITY SPHERE PROVIDES CONCEALMENT AND PRECLUDES OUTSIDE INTERVENTION DURING EMISSARY TRAINING. BEYOND THE SPHERE, EXPOSURE WITH A ROGUE ELEMENT OCCURRED.

“What do you mean? Where is Davis?”

UNKNOWN. RETURN TO YOUR SHELTER. PLEASE.

Carver grew furious. “Who the hell is this ‘rogue element’?! I thought there was no aggression in your community.”

Sentinel did not respond.

A moment later a transportation sled crested a rise and drifted toward them.

“Who, or what, is this ‘rogue element’?” Carver yelled. “Why would he take Davis?!”

YOU MUST RETURN TO YOUR SHELTER.

“Tell us what you know!” Carver screamed as Sentinel accelerated away in the direction of Home City.

Fuming, he sat next to Peggy on the edge of the hovering sled; she clutched Davis’ clothing. He put his arm around her as they drifted back to the shelter.

They traveled in silence.