

The Time Dilated Generations

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Chapter 19: Foreseen Panic



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The second Great Filter cataclysm shattered the very foundations of the time-dilated network society. The tragedy of Rigel One had been a devastating loss, but at least it had been attributed to the unpredictable nature of planetary colonization—an inevitable miscalculation in humanity's first attempt to thrive beyond Earth. But Naguice was different.

The second extinction event was not the result of misfortune. It was deliberate.

In the final weeks before the colony's last transmission, scattered fragments of data revealed a horrifying truth: the virus that doomed Naguice had not been a natural mutation or an environmental consequence of colonization. It had been engineered. Someone had created it.

The discovery sent shockwaves through the generational fleet. They searched for answers, launching an exhaustive investigation across every scrap of remaining data. They analyzed transmissions, medical records, and classified reports, but the perpetrator—whoever they were—had left no trace. No message. No manifesto. No claims of responsibility.

It was an act of annihilation devoid of ideology, a silent and absolute erasure of an entire civilization.



Something had gone horribly wrong.

For centuries, the interstellar fleet had operated under a singular principle—humanity's survival above all else. The same unity that had driven them to abandon Earth, to endure the unthinkable isolation of space, and to forge new worlds from the void, was now unraveling under the weight of an unspeakable crime.

The notion that one among them—one of their own—could intentionally exterminate a colony was incomprehensible. The very idea of such an atrocity defied the logic of survival, and yet, there was no other explanation.

For years, Naguice's history was dissected with excruciating precision. The conclusions were unanimous.

The colony had collapsed under the weight of its own civilization.

The economic and political cycles that once served as stabilizers had been pushed beyond their breaking points. Late-stage capitalism, unchecked and unregulated, had spiraled into something worse than even the darkest chapters of Earth's past. The generational fleet's historical archives had recorded the extremes of wealth disparity on Earth's XXI century—but Naguice had exceeded even those horrors.



Corporations had not merely influenced governments; they were the government. Billionaires had replaced elected officials, and legislative bodies had become hollowed-out relics, maintained only to give the illusion of democracy. With unchecked corporate dominance, the masses had been reduced to a state of perpetual, oppressive desperation.

The masses toiled under the rule of an elite who had long ceased to recognize them as human beings. Meanwhile, AI automation replaced nearly all forms of labor, eliminating any hope for economic mobility. Entire generations were born into a world where employment was an impossibility, where survival was dictated by corporate goodwill—or the lack thereof.

The fleet's historians, sociologists, and philosophers reached the same grim conclusion:

When billions are forced into despair, when they are stripped of autonomy, of purpose, of dignity—they will either break... or fight.

And someone, at least, had experienced both.

With artificial intelligence advancements no longer restricted, individuals with the right knowledge and desperation could engineer weapons of unimaginable scale. Someone on Naguice—or perhaps an entire faction—had decided that if they could not reclaim their future, then no one would have one at all.



The virus had not merely been an act of vengeance. It had been an extinction event by design.

The interstellar fleet's response was immediate. Every ship implemented emergency reforms to prevent their societies from following Naguice's path. Measures were enforced to ensure that extreme capitalism could not destabilize their fragile civilizations. Every AI development, every financial system, every power structure was scrutinized under the harshest light. Yet, even as they acted, a greater fear loomed over them. This was not just a failure of governance.

It was a failure of humanity.

For the first time since leaving Earth, an existential question consumed the minds of those still aboard the fleet's vessels:

Was survival even possible?

Were they doomed no matter what they did?

It was a quiet terror, one that seeped into every conversation, every broadcast, every moment of reflection. And for a year, that fear remained unchallenged, festering in the depths of their collective consciousness. Until someone challenged it.



Someone had foreseen the Great Filters. Someone had predicted everything that had happened.

And worse still—

She had foreseen what was yet to come.

Ellie Anderson had embedded a fail-safe into the heart of the interstellar exodus—one that would only activate under the direst of circumstances. She had programmed a message to be released under a single, grim condition: if at least two generational spaceships failed catastrophically in their mission. Only then, one year after the second tragedy, would the truth be revealed.

The message contained the final work of Emma Anderson, a woman whose influence on humanity's survival stretched beyond science, beyond governance, into something deeper—something prophetic.

But this was no ordinary public broadcast. The video and accompanying text were restricted to only five individuals on each generational ship—those entrusted with the critical knowledge and authority to make decisions about the future of the networked, time-dilated society.



When the notification arrived, they watched it immediately, knowing the sender's name was one etched into human history. Ellie Anderson, the architect behind the Offloading Internal Mass Quantum Drive, the very technology that had made interstellar travel possible, had left behind a message for them—a message she had hoped they would never need to see.

The video began.

A woman with graying auburn hair and tired yet resolute eyes appeared on screen, standing in front of a simple, dimly lit background. She took a deep breath before speaking, as if the weight of her words could barely be contained.

"Please, allow me to introduce myself. I'm Ellie Anderson. I was responsible for the construction of the Offloading Internal Mass Quantum Drive. But I'm not here because of that. I'm here because of a promise I made to my mother, Emma Anderson."

She hesitated, gathering her thoughts before continuing.

"My mother was a science fiction writer. In her final years, she devoted herself to a single story—her most important work. You already know some of her contributions. The interstellar sport that now unites the generational fleet? That was her idea, a concept designed to foster passion, connection, and motivation among our people as they drifted through the void."



Ellie glanced down at the tablet she held, her fingers gripping its edges.

"I don't know if you truly succeeded in making that sport a reality, but if you are watching this, it means that at least two generational ships have reached their destinations."

Her expression darkened.

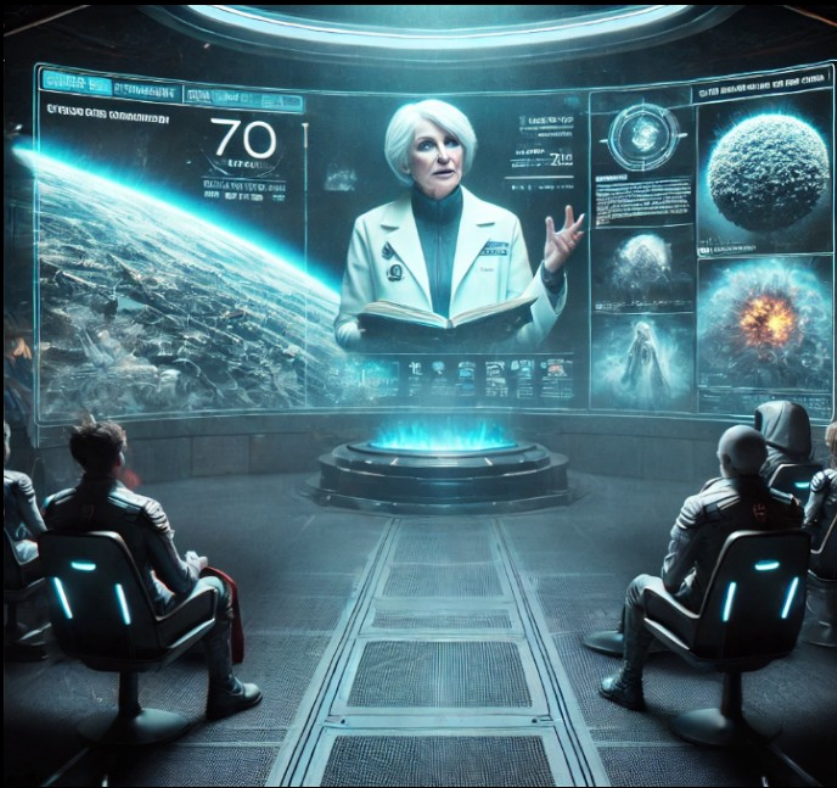
"Unfortunately, it also means that at least two missions have ended in catastrophe."

The weight of those words seemed to press down on her shoulders.

"I made a promise to my mother—to decide when, or if, her work should be released. She was a woman of extraordinary imagination, but she was also a pessimist. Her stories... they never ended on a hopeful note. That's why, given the precarious situation of mankind when I recorded this message, I withheld her final work. I hoped it would never need to see the light of day."

She swallowed hard, struggling to continue.

"But the event she predicted has happened. Twice."



Ellie closed her eyes briefly, as if trying to reject the reality of her own words. When she looked up again, her gaze was steady.

"And she didn't stop at just two failures. My mother wrote scenarios where every generational spaceship's mission would end the same way. In her vision, humanity could not outrun its own destruction. She had no hope that we would survive ourselves."

A heavy silence filled the room where the five leaders of each ship watched, their own doubts and fears reflected in the screen before them.

"But I refuse to believe that."

Ellie's voice hardened with resolve.

"My mother was free to let her imagination take her wherever it led. But make no mistake—more than anything, she wanted humanity to succeed. She wanted to believe we could surpass our limits, to see us survive and thrive as a galactic civilization. But no matter how hard she tried, she could not envision a future where we overcame ourselves."

Ellie took another slow breath, as if preparing to relinquish the last burden she had carried alone for so long.



"That is why she entrusted me with her story. And now, I am entrusting you with it."

She leaned forward slightly, her expression fierce, determined.

"You bear an unimaginable responsibility. I do not envy you. But I believe in you. I believe that every dark scenario my mother explored will serve as a warning, not a prophecy. You will learn from them. You will be prepared."

A small, almost imperceptible smile flickered on her lips, though it did not reach her eyes.

"Even in the darkest of times, I choose to believe in our future. Humanity will prevail—if we stand together."

With those final words, the screen went black.

Ellie wasn't exaggerating.

Emma Anderson had written, with chilling precision, the downfall of every generational spaceship—not through acts of nature, not through cosmic indifference, but through the deliberate, inevitable failings of humanity itself. What made her stories even more disturbing was how accurate they were, down to the smallest detail.



The apocalypses varied, but they all shared the same core truth—humanity was always its own worst enemy.

Some colonies collapsed under the weight of militarization. Military coups, fueled by political corruption or the fear of rising socialism, led to authoritarian regimes where nations sought absolute dominance over their world. Escalations turned into war. War turned into total annihilation. Weapons of mass destruction, developed in the name of security, ended up erasing all life.

Other worlds fell to the arrogance of unchecked scientific ambition. Desperate for faster results, researchers abandoned ethical safeguards, pushing experimental technologies beyond their limits. One colony's fate was sealed when a high-energy fusion experiment literally tore the planet apart.

Then there were the nightmares of genetic engineering. Governments and corporations, seeking to create the ultimate soldier, experimented with self-replicating nanobot-enhanced biology. The result was not an army of perfected warriors, but a self-sustaining predator—a force of engineered monstrosities that wiped out the very species that had created them.

Each account was detailed with terrifying specificity. One by one, Emma had chronicled the extinction of every human colony.



But two stories stood out.

Two scenarios that hit far too close to home.

Emma herself acknowledged that this first story wasn't even original—it was a direct parallel to something that had almost actually happened on Earth.

She based it on the real-world history of lead additives in fossil fuels, a crisis that had plagued Earth's 20th century. For nearly a hundred years, lead had been used in gasoline, poisoning entire populations before the scientific community, after decades of struggle, finally forced industries to stop. It had been a slow war of evidence against corporate greed, but eventually, the truth had won.

Emma's version did not end so optimistically.

In her story, an exoplanetary colony built its economy around a material as essential as lead had been to Earth's fossil fuel industry. This material, widely used in construction, agriculture, and even medicine, was unknowingly poisoning every living being on the planet.

A single scientist, much like those who had fought against lead poisoning on Earth, discovered the horrifying truth. But unlike in real history, this time, there was no redemption.



The scientist was silenced.

Before he could publish his findings, before he could warn the world, he disappeared. His research was erased, buried under layers of corporate propaganda. By the time the truth became undeniable, it was too late. Generations had been exposed. The damage was irreversible. The planet's entire population, unknowingly poisoned, dwindled into extinction.

And as the readers absorbed Emma's words, they realized—this was not just a hypothetical scenario.

They had probably just lived this story.

The tragedy of Rigel One had unfolded in a chillingly familiar manner. The insidious accumulation of a toxic element—Zelthane—had sealed the colony's fate. Unbeknownst to those within the time-dilated network, someone had discovered the massive poisoning decades before the first fatalities occurred, only to be silenced.

The second story was even worse.

Emma described a world eerily similar to Naguice—a beautiful, thriving planet where capitalism had followed its natural trajectory into its most extreme form. A world where wealth had consolidated into the hands of the elite, where the working class had been reduced to a permanent underclass with no future, no hope.



The perfect conditions to create high-functioning, desperate individuals. Emma's version wasn't about a viral bioweapon. Instead, it was about information.

A single piece of knowledge, distributed freely across the planet's digital networks. It was a detailed, step-by-step guide on how to construct incredibly small, incredibly powerful nuclear devices.

A knowledge bomb.

In her story, the moment that information became available, the countdown to extinction had already begun.

With billions of people driven to despair, it only took a handful of them—just a few thousand—to set off a chain reaction. Within months, nuclear detonations became an unstoppable cascade, launched not by nations, but by individuals. The elite had fortified themselves in underground bunkers, but it didn't matter. The nuclear winter that followed suffocated the entire planet, wiping out the last remnants of human life.

Emma's nightmare had unfolded in an eerily similar manner to Naguice's own destruction.

Only instead of nuclear weapons, the desperate masses of Naguice had created something worse. A virus engineered from the shadows, designed to erase the very system that had oppressed them—by killing everyone.



The more they read, the worse it became. Emma Anderson's stories were not just fiction. They were prophecies.

Not because she had supernatural foresight, but because she understood a brutal truth about humanity. Left unchecked, the same cycles would repeat. Over and over. Until there was nothing left.

For the leaders of the generational fleet, the implications were horrifying. They had spent over four centuries drifting through space, believing that they had finally broken free from Earth's doomed fate. They had thought that with careful planning, with controlled governance, with the unity of a species on the brink of extinction, they could forge a better future.

But now, doubt crept into their minds. Had they truly escaped Earth's fate? Or had they merely delayed it?

Emma Anderson had foreseen the failure of every generational ship. And so far, two of them had met their demise in a manner strikingly similar to her predictions.

That meant the others were still waiting for their turn.

Waiting for their apocalypse.



The emergency high-level summit between the eight remaining generational spaceships was convened with unprecedented urgency. Within just 24 hours of receiving Ellie Anderson's message, the leadership of every vessel had read Emma Anderson's story in its entirety.

The most brilliant minds aboard each ship had gathered—not to debate governance, resource allocation, or interstellar logistics, but to address the unthinkable: How do we proceed when a fictional warning has proven prophetic?

The presidency of the networked interstellar government rotated among the generational ships, and at that moment, the responsibility lay with Wolf-Rayet 124, a vessel still 60 years away from its final destination in the Sagittarius constellation.

The meeting was held in the virtual reconstruction of the fleet's grand council chamber—a somber, semi-circular parliament hall where the representatives of the remaining ships convened. The room, though only a simulation, was steeped in symbolism. Ten empty seats stood as silent testaments to the lost vessels—an ever-present reminder of their failures.



Ashley Welch, the designated moderator for the session, took her place at the head of the chamber. A retired scientist once renowned for her expertise in sustainable biomes under extreme conditions, she had long since stepped back from active research. Yet, her reputation for level-headed pragmatism and unshakable resolve had kept her firmly within the administrative ranks. Now, in what was arguably the most important meeting in human history, she bore the weight of ensuring order amid rising uncertainty. Her voice was measured, but firm.

"We now begin this extraordinary session. There is only one point of discussion: Should we make Emma Anderson's final work available to the public?"

She turned to the representative from P Cygni, Ethan Reid.

"Ethan, the floor is yours."

Ethan's avatar materialized at the central podium—a near-perfect holographic reconstruction, down to the sharp creases in his uniform and the tension in his jaw. He glanced around the chamber, his gaze lingering momentarily on the empty seats before addressing the assembly.

The atmosphere was heavy, not just with the weight of their losses but with an emerging division that had been growing over the past year.



It had become increasingly apparent that there was a stark difference in perspective between those aboard ships nearing their destinations and those who still had centuries ahead of them.

Three ships—Sadr, Wolf-Rayet 124, and VY Canis Majoris—were nearing the end of their journeys, with only 30, 60, and 130 time-dilated years remaining, respectively. But the remaining five ships—VV Cephei, P Cygni, Mu Cephei, Eta Carinae and Rho Cassiopeiae—were still bound to the void for generations to come. Some had over 300 years before they reached their designated exoplanets. In the case of P Cygni, they were nearly 400 years away. For those closer to their new worlds, hope remained within reach. But for those adrift in the abyss, faith in survival was beginning to wane.

And in that growing divide, the future of humanity teetered on the edge.

Ethan adjusted his stance, exhaled, and prepared to deliver his verdict. He wasted no time.

"Let's go straight to the point. We cannot publish this story in any way."

His voice was firm, edged with an undercurrent of restrained aggression.



The reaction was immediate.

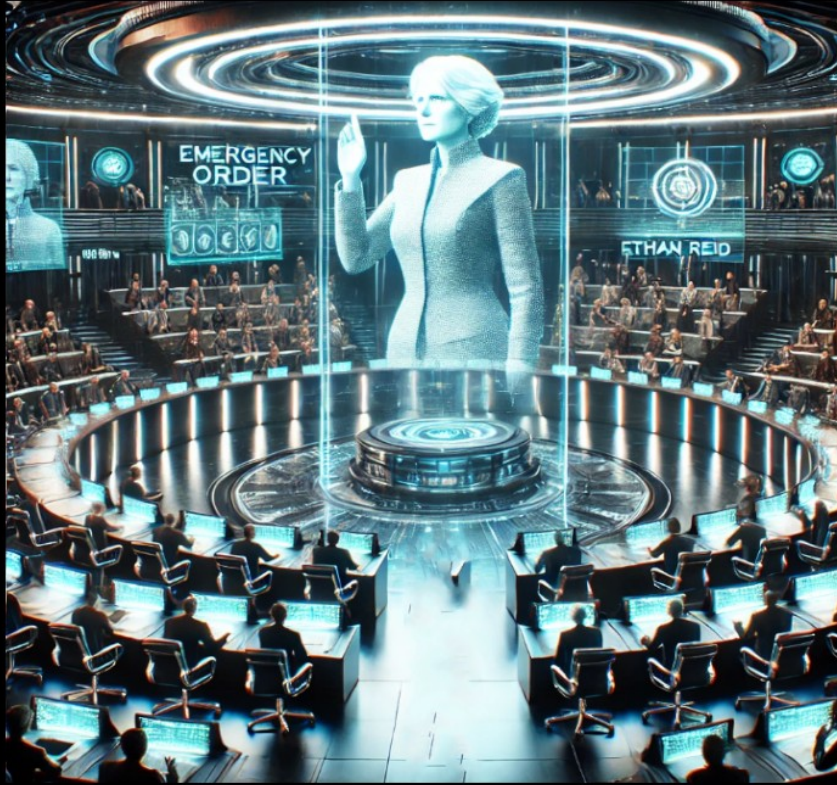
Gasps, muttered protests, and outright shouts filled the virtual chamber. The system, designed to faithfully replicate speech and body language, did not filter the chaos. For several tense seconds, the conference room was in complete disarray—representatives speaking over one another, hands slamming against virtual desks, accusations cutting through the uproar.

Ashley Welch stepped forward, triggering the override. The room fell into silence as the meeting's control system muted all unauthorized voices. Ashley exhaled, steadying herself before addressing the assembly.

"I need to ask for restraint. I understand that the past year has been overwhelming, but we must do better. We cannot allow emotion to override reason." She scanned the chamber, her gaze firm, her presence commanding.

"Let me remind you—now more than ever—that the last surviving remnants of Earth depend on us. They look to us for leadership. We must set the example they will follow."

She turned back to Ethan.



"Ethan, I will ask you to explain your position before you set everything on fire."

A brief pause. Ethan nodded, his expression unfazed.

"I apologize, Madam President," he said, then turned his attention to the other representatives, his gaze hardening.

"I spoke bluntly because I believe this is the most dangerous decision we have ever had to make."

The chamber remained silent, though the tension was palpable.

"We all know the truth—morale across the entire fleet has not recovered since last year's catastrophe. And worse, all indicators suggest that it never will."

His words hung in the air like a storm cloud.

"Some of us are still hundreds of years away from our destinations. The last thing we need is to deteriorate the fragile psychological state of our travelers any further. We all know what has been happening. Suicide rates have risen dramatically. Anxiety and despair are spreading like a disease through the ships that are still centuries away from hope."



"We know the value of a single human life aboard these vessels. We cannot afford to lose more than we already have."

Ethan's voice darkened, his next words deliberate and weighted.

"If we make Emma Anderson's story public, the emotional fallout could push us past a threshold we cannot recover from."

A slow, heavy silence followed. He let the weight of his words settle over the chamber before continuing.

"That is why my proposal is simple. The story will remain classified. Only those of us—the fleet's administrators—will have access. We will study it. We will use it as a warning, a tool for preparation. But we will not expose our people to a truth they are not prepared to handle."

"This is my proposal."

"For the survival of the fleet, I urge the council to consider it carefully."

With that, Ethan's avatar dissolved, teleporting him back to his seat. The room remained still. The weight of his words had landed. Ashley gave them time—time to breathe, time to absorb the ramifications of what had just been said.



Then, after a measured pause, she took a slow step forward and spoke.

"I want to thank the representative of P Cygni for his contribution. Now, the floor belongs to the representative of Sadr."

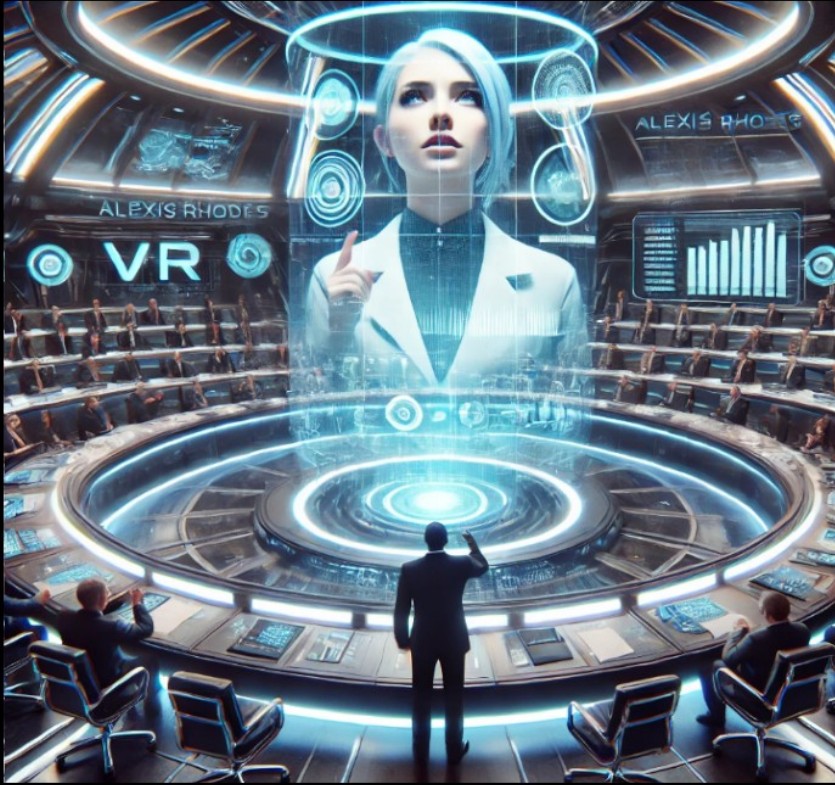
A hush settled over the virtual chamber.

The Sadr generational ship was unique among the remaining fleet. It was the last vessel still traveling at 97% the speed of light, which meant its crew was living nearly twice as fast relative to the rest of the networked society. More importantly, Sadr was the next ship set to reach its destination—just 30 years away.

Its representative, Alexis Rhodes, materialized at the podium.

She was young by the fleet's standards—only 40 years old—but she carried the presence of someone who had spent a lifetime studying the evolution of societies over long periods. A specialist in social dynamics and generational stability, she had dedicated her life to ensuring that civilizations, even in the void, could endure.

She met the eyes of every representative before speaking.



"To follow the same approach as my colleague from P Cygni, I'll be direct. For the survival of mankind, Emma Anderson's story must be made public. Immediately."

Her words shattered the fragile stillness in the chamber. A murmur swept through the assembly, then escalated into a cacophony of hushed arguments.

Then, Ethan Reid stood—and he did not hesitate.

"You're biased!" he all but shouted, his frustration barely restrained. "Your ship is 30 years from its destination! That's nothing compared to the centuries some of us will still have to endure! You have no idea what it means to keep people from falling apart for 400 years! You have no idea what you're proposing!"

The chamber erupted. Representatives from both factions raised their voices, some hurling accusations, others desperately trying to restore order. The system's real-time simulation, designed for seamless diplomatic interaction, struggled to process the overlapping movements and gestures. For the first time in the history of the fleet's virtual governance, the chamber felt like a battlefield.

Ashley, barely concealing her exhaustion, activated the override again—forcing an abrupt, artificial silence. She let the tension simmer for a moment before speaking.



"I understand that emotions are high. But I will remind you all—we are the last survivors of Earth. If we cannot control ourselves, who will?"

She turned to Alexis.

"Alexis, you can continue."

Alexis gave a small nod of appreciation before facing the room again.

Her voice was calmer this time, but no less resolute.

"Thank you, Madam President. I needed to be blunt—just as my colleague from P Cygni was. I needed to make sure that every single one of you is fully aware of the stakes of this decision. Because today, we are not just deciding whether or not to publish a story. We are deciding whether or not we trust humanity to survive itself."

The silence in the room shifted. It was no longer charged with anger—but with something deeper.

She continued, her tone unwavering.

"I understand the fears of those who still have centuries ahead before reaching their planets. I respect the burden you carry. But if we are to survive as a species, we must confront the limits we impose on ourselves—because that is what has always led to our downfall."



"So, let me remind you of something. Look at what we have already done."

"Six hundred years ago, we stood at the precipice of extinction. Our odds of survival were near zero. But we prevailed."

"We escaped Earth's gravity when all logic said we wouldn't. We built the orbital stations with no room for failure. And we didn't fail. Against every conceivable obstacle, we set an impossible plan in motion and made it a reality."

"We proved, again and again, that we are the most extraordinary species that has ever lived. That we have no limits—except for the ones we impose on ourselves."

She paused, scanning the room, letting her words settle.

"And that is why it is critical that this story is made public. Because humans are not fragile."

"They are not children to be sheltered from hard truths. They are fighters, innovators, survivors."

"To withhold this story is to deny them the very thing that has allowed us to come this far—the ability to adapt, to face the impossible, and to overcome it."



"Emma's story is not a prophecy. It is a warning. And warnings are meant to be heard. If we let fear dictate our decisions, we are no better than the civilizations Emma wrote about."

"This is not a test of survival. This is a test of who we are. And I refuse to believe that this is where humanity stops fighting."

She took a slow breath, straightened her posture, and finished.

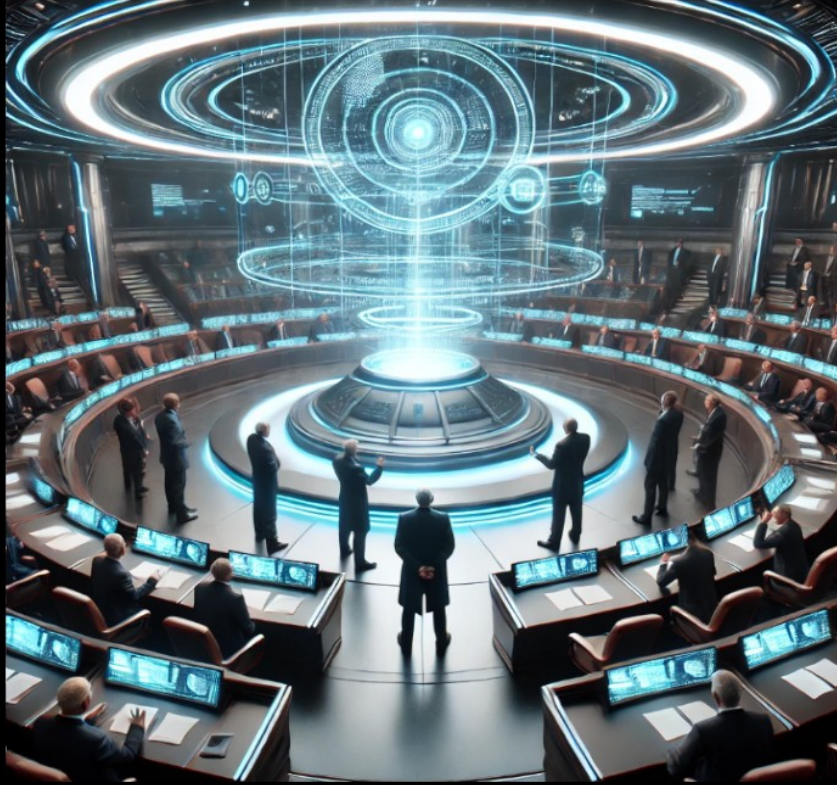
"The door to our next evolution is open. All we need to do is step through it."

"That is our proposal. Hope for mankind."

"Thank you."

Alexis Rhodes' words lingered in the chamber, an echo of defiance and hope against the crushing weight of fear. They were beautiful, reminding the fleet of what humanity had already endured—of how they had defied impossible odds time and time again. For a fleeting moment, she had rekindled something long buried beneath grief and exhaustion.

For the first time in years, someone had reminded them that humanity was capable of anything.



And for that moment, the room remained silent. Because no matter where they stood on the issue—whether gripped by fear or driven by conviction—everyone wanted to believe she was right.

The debate continued for another four hours. Each ship's representatives gave their arguments, their reasoning, their desperate pleas—some advocating for caution, others for courage. But the battle lines had already been drawn. The decision boiled down to two stark choices.

The first was to keep Emma Anderson's story classified, shielding the fleet from the psychological fallout and preventing what could become an irreversible collapse of morale. The second was to make it public, trusting that humanity could rise to the challenge and use the knowledge as a catalyst for survival rather than a harbinger of doom. By the time the meeting concluded, it was evident that most had already made up their minds.

The council granted each representative 24 hours to finalize their vote, a formality more than anything else. The dynamics of the previous day's debate had rendered the outcome almost inevitable.

When the results came in, they merely confirmed what everyone had feared.



Five votes against revealing the story. Three votes in favor.

For the first time since leaving Earth, the generational fleet was no longer one. The networked society had begun to fracture. And soon, the consequences of that division would shake the very foundation of what remained of the human race.