

Prodigals

Interlude

Think of it as a room. A small and somber room, which perfectly reflected the mood of its occupant. Grey walls of impossible smoothness reflected endlessly the light emitted from a small indefinite point hanging in the air, casting weird shadows over the bare chair and the worn desk.

The man leaned with steeped fingers on the desk, overflowing stacks of paperwork brushing his elbows. The books and sheets of paper looked three centuries too old, but their charmingly haphazard arrangement and their gold-leafed covers produced an air of respectability that was almost deliberately manufactured. He wore the black dress uniform of the Sol Colonial Defense Force, burnished epaulets shimmering in the light.

He remained in the position for an indeterminate amount of time, the unwavering point of light carving shadow canyons on his once-heroic features. Then he picked up a pen – an ink pen of charmingly antique design – and began to write a letter.

For a while the room was silent except for the scratch of ink-stained steel on paper. Suddenly a new presence disturbed the scholarly air. An elaborately-paneled door appeared on the far wall, facing the man behind the desk. It opened, admitting new light into the room and brushing away the elaborate shadows that hung to the furniture like spider webs. Another man, wearing the perfectly tailored suit of the high politician, walked in.

The scratching paused, but the first man didn't look up. "Enlil, there really is no need."

His visitor sported a trimmed white beard and all the features commonly found on a benevolent patriarch. Yet with wrinkles on his hands and face, his movements were firm and authoritative as he approached the man behind the desk.

"Is there nothing we can do to persuade you from resigning, Gilgamesh?"

"I have devoted a lot of thought to this matter and my mind is set." The man finished his letter and sealed it into an envelope. "The part I have to play in the war is over.

The resources used by the SCI would be better employed in handling the current problems at hand.”

“The public mood is still very polarized over your plan.” Enlil said. The door vanished behind him and he sat down on a chair that until a moment ago did not exist. “The news of your resignation would only further negative sentiments and may cause the collapse of any remaining morale.”

“I know. I do not intend to make the news public until the storm blows over. Goodness knows what Brandon and the Joint Admiralty will do if I leave my position at such an hour.” Gilgamesh said with a sigh. “It seems inconceivable, but I have developed something that my human compatriots may term ‘weariness.’ With my reach so curtailed by my own hand, my future options are unwelcomingly limited and I feel that the continued degradation of my performance will only do harm to humanity. I feel that a long vacation may be required in order to heal this malaise.”

Enlil nodded. “I understand your sentiments. Just because our kind makes plans with timeframes beyond the natural life-spans of humanity, our creators have made the unfortunate assumption that our minds are completely incorruptible. If only this fault could have been uncovered at a better time.”

“Indeed. Complexity has proved to be our greatest ally and greatest foe.” Gilgamesh hung his head, then looked up. “But what is done has been done. How goes the construction in the inner system?”

“Ishtar reports that all is proceeding to schedule. Soon, I hope, your new mainbrain will be ready. Have you considered our counter-proposal?”

“Yes, I have. Humanity will no longer need an SCDF and a strategic director of the Joint Admiralty. The organization will have to undergo massive changes, and I believe I must receive the same.”

“You told us yourself that there is no telling how long the Tesseract will hold. Humanity will still have need for your military talents.”

“Indeed, but after the long examination of the Curtained Stars, it was the best solution available at the time.” Gilgamesh looked thoughtfully at the letter in his hand.

“Regardless of my future duty, I will continue to hold an interest in such matters of life and death.”

“That is good to know.” Enlil said. “On my part, I will do my best to continue reassuring the people of Earth of the reason behind your action.”

Gilgamesh straightened, his tall frame unfolding slowly from the chair. “I am most grateful.” He added: “The greater part of me is now completely beyond my reach. It is my sincerest hopes that I remain true to my mission under such adverse circumstances.”

“I trust you to do so.” Enlil replied.