

On the morning of the third day, a six-person Naval Security team came into Robert's cell with a set of leg and wrist chains and a hood. The smallest of the team of guards held the restraints, she ordered him to spread his legs and present his hands & not to resist. Her voice was calm but cold. Robert fought his sense of growing panic as he complied, spreading his legs and holding his hands out in front of him. The ankle restraints clicked into place, then the wrist restraints. As the first wrist restraint snapped into place true panic started to take over, his hands started to shake, his jaw was quivering, and his breath quickened and became erratic, making it difficult to restrain his left hand.

One of the guards blocking the cell door spoke up "Oh what a little cutie, isn't he just adorable, quivering with anticipation. I bet he likes it rough! Maybe we should pat him down once he's secure to make sure there's not any contraband hidden away."

The guard securing his restraints forcefully retorted. "Kaynigne, shut the fuck up, you are not being helpful." "Keitrin, don't get your panties in a knot! I'm just having some fun, besides these little sex monkeys only think about fucking at this age. I bet he could take care of all our needs and still have juice left over." Kaynigne laughed.

Another guard spoke up as Keitrin secured his left hand and began to connect the ankle restraints to the wrist restraints, "Kaynigne, you slimily, clam-licking, sand smasher, it is shit talking like that keeps you from getting a date."

Closing his eyes, *'Stay calm, let me out,'* the voice in Robert's head said.

The guard wrapped the restraint belt around his waist, in his mind, he was shaking in fear "No..." he whimpered.

The guard attached the chain. *'Stay calm, I can make it safe, now let me out.'* the voice demanded calmly.

Kaynigne felt his eyes on her in a way that curved her tongue. *'They will hurt me like the others, I need to get to safety'*. Before finally losing himself to the panic.

Calmly the voice replied, *'I will be safe, I will not be hurt, I will stay calm.'* The guard opened the hood and placed it over Robert's head. Kaynigne looked into the boy's eyes as the hood went over him, she shivered but did not know why. The hood was attached front and back to the belt around his waist. He slowed his breathing, forcing the panic down deep into his mind, not banished, but subdued. The hood had a thin mesh material where his mouth and nose were, allowing him to breathe, but not see or hear well.

"All right, the subject is secure. Let's get him on the transport and to the research site." The voice he thought belonged to the guard that had chained him said before the other voices became only muffled noise.

His voice calmed, '*Breath, stay aware, stay calm,*' he thought, '*count, start the count in beats*'. He felt his heartbeat slow

347 beats from the cell to sit down.

1413 beats from sit down to stand up.

757 beats from standup to hood removed.

2517 beats later the hood was removed, and the belt and connecting chains came away. He was made to sit in a metal office chair with four legs, behind a metal table. His wrist restraints were attached to an eighteen-inch chain welded to the table. His palms were flat on the table as the guards made vile small talk about liberty shel. Ironic. They talk of liberty while they chain him to a table, locked in a twelve-by-twelve room. They left him alone, motionless in an off-white-colored room, he had been '*disappeared*', he thought.

Dr Norroe, A Commander in Naval Intelligence working as an asset profiler, had been studying the subject for three days. Or at least his documented history, medical records, psych profile, and most intriguing his drawings, and some notes connected to what looked like math equations. '*Chasing gremlins*' was a common note in many places, but the one that had caught her attention was about *challenging 'the demon in the void.'* Opening the door to the interview room, Dr Norroe was pleased with the subject, patiently waiting, right up until she sat down. She tried to talk to him, only to stop before she uttered a word. Wordlessly she got up and left the interview room.

Crossing the threshold, she bellowed, "WHERE THE FUCK ARE THE GODDESS DAMMED TRANSPORT GUARDS?! I WANT THEM IN MY OFFICE IN NOW!"

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Governess Seskie dismissed her aides from the conference room and closed the door. Everyone who was connected to this, ten people in all, was seated around the conference table. She flipped open a keyboard and punched in her security code to seal the room from external surveillance. "The room is secure, we should be able to speak freely. Advocate Listian, the floor is yours."

Sitting forward in her chair, Advocate Listian took a deep breath, folded her hands on the tabletop, and began, "On the ride up from the detention facility we did some research on the '*strategic asset*' label. This designation can be applied to many types of things including people. People who have been designated as such are usually high-ranking military officers, admirals, generals, and others at that level. Non-military persons are usually limited to personal doctors, advocates, and accountants for the members of the Imperial family. Now this is in our favor because all these people can refuse to serve the Imperial family. This is very similar to personal service contracts for corporate officers tied to noble families. Now the problem is, there is precedent to force this on an individual, but it has not been done since the Generation of Woe, over one hundred years ago."

Nanorix broke in, "So the admiral wants to make Robert a personal servant to the Imperial family?"

Advocate Listian shook her head, "No. It is more akin to the geneticist and doctors that were forced to work to find a cure to save hundreds of millions of young Shil'vati boys from dying a horrible death."

Advocate Listian paused, waiting for any other questions when none came, she continued, "The fact that this has not been done in over a century, and he is still a minor and does not have legal agency, a high court might block it, but I doubt it. So given that he is of value, capable of producing value, or has already produced something of value for the Empire, this means we have to exploit the value proposition. So we need to incorporate him. In this case, a corporation would have more rights than an individual. This is especially true for intellectual property."

Max broke in, "What intellectual property?"

Advocate Listian smiled, "According to the receipts that Nanorix was given by the Navy, Robert produced over six thousand pages of notes, drawings, diagrams, calculations, and other items. The flying car is the most obvious example."

Opening her data slate, Advocate Listian added, "I am going to add a couple of our associates to this meeting. Activating the conference screen, two new Shil'vati were added to the meeting. "To the right, Advocate Spenigna, specializing in corporate structures and trusts, to the left, Advocate Roskin, specializing in intellectual property."

Tommy looked at the two new advocates on screen and couldn't help but think of them as characters from some melodrama that his mom loved to watch. Speaking up, "So do Garquile and I need to be here? This seems like.." raising his hands in air quotes "..adult stuff."

Advocate Spenigna responded while trying not to sound condescending. "Yes. Both of you should be here unless you do not care what is being done to protect your futures."

Slumping into his chair, "I guess. I don't understand how this affects either of us. We do not know anything of value. I couldn't even *attempt* to explain any of it, and Garquile knows even less. No offense Gee".

Garquile smiled at his friend, "We're good. Mostly I am hanging out just hiding from my sisters, or using Tommy and Robert as taste testers for my latest attempt at cooking."

Advocate Spenigna suppressed a chuckle of mirth, only thinking, '*Boys*'. "You both provided material resources and time. That means you both have a vested interest. If not addressed now, it will cause problems in the future. Understand that property law favors the family matriarchs in cases where a minor has assets in their name. What we are proposing is the creation of a corporation and a jointly owned subsidiary. The subsidiary will have ownership of the *flying car* and related assets. All other assets will be solely Roberts, held by the parent entity. This is

required because there has been no identified material resource contributed to those elements. The individual trusts will hold their portions of the corporate entities.”

Garquile had heard this type of talk before when his father explained the basic difference between personal assets and family assets. “So who are the trustees and when do we attain agency?”

Advocate Spenigna nodded to acknowledge the question. “You will get partial agency when you are legally an adult, then full agency within six years or ten years for a human. We recommend a parent or guardian act as an administrator that manages the trust and protects the interest of the minors.”

It was Advocate Listian’s turn to jump in. “While they are working on the corporations and trusts, we will be working on getting Nanorix visitation access. It will take about a week to complete and file the paperwork and allow the entities to come into existence. Once that happens, they *cannot* deny you access to Robert.”

Advocate Roskin waited patiently to let the discussion of the corporate details complete. “Now for the difficult part, protecting what Robert has. Fortunately, he wrote everything down and nothing is device accessible yet. This has already made some local news. We need to make sure it does not go any further by obscuring the importance of his existence to the Navy. Once the High nobility gets a hint of this, they will do anything and everything to steal it.”

After the meeting ended Nanorix unsilenced her data slate to check her messages. There was only one.

DogGroomer: *Did you forget your appointment for Rufus? I still have an open slot.*

Nanorix: *Yes, I did forget. Thank you for the reminder. How does six pm work for you?*

DogGroomer: *Perfect, see you then.*

Driving home gave Nanorix a chance to think about what the advocates had told her, and the plan they had come up with. It wasn’t enough. She had thought about reaching out to her old pod mates who were still on Earth, but that would mean doing something really stupid, and she needed to be smart. But she did send out a “*How are you?*” message to her pod sisters just in case. Rufus was waiting for her in his normal spot, stretched out on the tiled floor, just inside the front door.

Rufus was a five-year-old, fifty-pound, gray and black dog. The *DogGroomer* had given him to Robert because Rufus needed a friend. At that time Rufus had been about 4 months old and was an adorable little furball. Now he was a much larger furball whose presence in her home required her vacuum every other day, as his fur got everywhere. “Rufus, Truck” was all she had to say for Rufus to get up and run and jump into the back seat of her old Dodge Ram pickup.

Andre Jandger, the dog groomer, waited for Rufus and Nanorix. He was getting old, and feeling it. He spent too much time playing soldier and spy in his youth. While he was not a 'special-forces-badass', he still did some crazy shit in his youth. His greatest attribute was that he was average. So average that he rarely seemed out of place in many parts of the world. Most of his work was low-level extraction and courier duty. He had gotten out of the game long before the invasion. and had started working with rescue dogs to deal with his demons. The Barneys had pulled him out of retirement for a time, but after three years, he was spent, and the survivors in his cell were as spent as he was. When amnesty was offered, they were not the first group to take up the offer, but they were not the last and were able to avoid prison. He had even facilitated the stand down of other groups, which brought him a lot of goodwill in some areas.

The goodwill had been put to good use over the years, helping the Governess clean up corruption. Helping take out the worst of the local 'barneys' meant he had contacts in the active resistance. When the boys had been taken, he reached out, mainly to keep the peace, and provide intel to both sides. There was a great deal of things going on. The big piece of information was that Nanorix's son, Robert, had been moved to a new hangar out at the old Luke Air Force Base. The other useful piece of information was that at least five different Shil'vati noble families had moved assets to figure out what had triggered a planetary defensive information scrub. The same families that had major stakes in the pre-invasion defense contractors. None of them had great reputations.

Nanorix arrived with Rufus in tow. He was happy to see Andre, and when Nanorix opened the truck door Rufus rushed over to greet him, rolling onto his belly and begging for tummy scratches. He exchanged pleasantries with Nanorix and commented that Rufus looked good. After giving the tummy scratches Andre commanded. "Rufus Table," Rufus responded by getting up and jumping onto the grooming table. Andre made small talk with Nanorix as he brushed out Rufus and trimmed his nails. Thirty minutes passed, but when he returned her credit chit, he palmed her a small flash drive and asked if she wanted to set up the next appointment in two months. She said yes. He confirmed the data, and she collected Rufus and left.

Nanorix suffered through Andre's nattering, engaging in small talk as he worked on Rufus. Rufus for his part enjoyed the attention. Despite Andre almost killing her when they first met, she trusted and respected him. He was an honorable enemy, and his information was always good. The drive home seemed to take longer than usual. When they got home Rufus excitedly ran to Robert's room and came back dejected finding it empty. Nanorix sat on the couch and was joined by Rufus, lying down with his head on her lap. Rufus's presence helped her deal with this shit, he was goddess sent. He was an anchor for her, not that she would ever admit it to anybody other than Rufus. Giving Rufus an absentminded ear scratch, she opened the data file on her slate and dug in.

There was a great deal of intel. There was Robert's movement timeline, sixty-plus pictures with limited basic information of his guards attached, name, rank, and current assignment. Andre never failed to impress her with the completeness of the information provided. The pictures of Robert in full body restraints and a head bag hurt. Rufus picked up on this and did his best to

distract her, forcing her to put down her data slate. She would get this to the advocates and Governess in the morning.

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Advocate Listian drove through the remains of a Terran military base that had taken several orbital strikes. They had left the runways intact to be used by the *liberation* forces. The irony was that most of the human casualties here were families of military personnel. The combat forces had been deployed throughout the city, using the freeway system as improvised runways, and underpasses as fuel and ordnance depots. It had been an effective strategy, the marine landing force had been made to bleed, but the heart of the city they were trying to defend had been leveled in the fighting. She now hoped that *her* strategy would prove more successful in the long term.

It had taken her three days to get clearance to see her client. She reached the checkpoint where she parked her ground vehicle. After presenting her credentials, she and all of her belongings were thoroughly inspected. They had been very direct about what she could, and could not bring, inside the perimeter. She waited about ten minutes before a vehicle arrived to pick her up to take her to the hangar facility. Her driver did not speak save for basic pleasantries. The hangar was a standard prefabricated military structure that had been built right after the *liberation*; *it was* complete with barracks that could house over two hundred. The only thing out of place was a pair of human commercial food trucks emblazoned with "*Poncho Panda's Mobile Kitchen*", complete with a stylized panda mascot wearing a weird hat and holding a plate of food.

The ground vehicle was met by a naval security guard. "Ma'am, I will be your escort for the day. If you follow me, I will see you to your client."

"Thank you." Replied Lorian as she fell in beside the guard. She was led to a secure interrogation room. Her client, Robert, sat chained to a table in an oversized chair, while looking straight ahead, hands flat on the table.

Placing her data slate on the table and taking a seat, Lorain spoke. "Guard, I would like those restraints removed."

"Sorry ma'am, I do not have authorization to do that." the guard said before turning to leave.

Looking up from the table "Then if you would be so kind as to go get authorization." Lorian said forcefully.

Leaving, the guard responded. "I will forward your request up the chain of command. Is that all?"

"Yes, thank you."

Taking a deep breath and clearing her thoughts, she began. "Robert, my name is Lorian Listian, and I am here to represent you, I am your advocate. Do you understand what that means?"

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Robert had lived the last three days in either a cage or chained to a table. Only fed once in that time, and only then because Dr. Norroe decided to share some of her lunch with him. She had told him she would make sure that somebody would take care of *him*. *Just another lie*. It didn't matter. They were just going to disappear him anyway. Today they had brought him to the interrogation room later than normal. They usually brought him out of his cage as soon as the work crews got busy in the morning. He was close enough to the hanger to pick up some of the more heated conversations.

Robert mused that if these people couldn't understand the math and related technical drawing of how the AG fields were set up, and their basic interactions with each other, then '*How in God's name did they even get to space before us?*' Today's shouting match was about the AG field control law database, and why it was interfaced with a child's toy. The answer was simple: the analog circuits acted as a poor man's adaptive field strength controller that allowed the system to adjust the strength, position, and shape of the AG field. The analog circuit was cheaper and faster than hacking and rebuilding the existing software. Most of the AG units were dodgy at best, so not cracking the software seemed like the best idea. Add to that, they used three different manufacturers. It was an easy decision. The control law database was simple to modify, the instructions were in the maintenance manuals and were not considered classified material. The database tools were available to the maintenance crew. All you needed was a part number and service tag, and the vendor sent it to you.

Robert's attempts to listen to the work crews were interrupted when the door to the interrogation room opened and the female Shil'vati he had met at the other facility entered, followed by one of the guards. He just watched as she entered and took a seat. She engaged with the guard about getting the restraints removed. The exchange got a little terse when the guard said no. Robert wanted to smile and say 'Good luck with that'. These people were so rigid in their thinking they wouldn't ask how high when told to jump.

She took a moment and took a deep breath before looking at him. "Robert my name is advocate Lorian Listian and I am here to represent you, I am your advocate. Do you understand what that means?"

Based on their limited conversation last time he figured that meant she was a lawyer. Using his hand to speak as best he could, "Yes, if I understand the term, advocate means you represent me in legal matters?"

Smiling and relaxing a little, she continued. "Good. How have they been treating you? Is everything ok?"

Dropping his head in dejection, Robert could only think that she was completely unobservant. He wanted to call her out on it, but antagonizing her would not be helpful. Choosing his words carefully, he continued. "Their treatment borders on criminal neglect, but this seems to be closer to the norm of how humans are treated by the Imperium. We are a little spoiled here with our

Governess. She does try to reign the shit in.” He spoke the truth about the local government from the actions he witnessed and heard. “Nothing is okay unless you think keeping me in chains since I got here three days ago is. In that time, I have only eaten once. The only water I get is when I drink out of the sink in the bathroom. The only person I have communicated with is Dr Norroe. But to her, I am some sort of weird oddity, not a person. You can choose to believe me or not, I expected to disappear soon enough.”

Lorian sat in stunned disgust looking him over. He was still wearing his original clothes and hair visibly growing on his face, he was not lying. “ Wait right here,” pausing, “Sorry, poor choice of words. I am going to get you some food and water”

Robert smiled just a little. “Don't worry, I will not speak a word of this faux faux to anybody, it would kill your bill rate.”

Standing and scrunching her brow, “Ouch, I hope you are not mocking me.”

Robert genuinely smiled slightly, “Too bad, I mock everyone.”

Lorian pounded on the door and waited for the guard to respond. She exited the room as soon as the door opened, and controlling her anger, though Her tone was harsh, addressed the guard, “Food Truck Now”. She walked past the guard and headed towards the hangar where the food truck was. He hoped maybe she would remember the water.

“Yes Ma'am” was the only response.

The food truck was not a truck, but rather a large, enclosed trailer set up as a kitchen. With a service line set out along the side of the trailer, just inside the hanger door. Two humans were working to clear the service line as she approached. “What do you have left ?” speaking to get the attention of the humans. Without looking up from their work the younger male pointed to the far end of the service line “All leftovers are on the end, take what you want, they're fair game until lunchtime in two hours.” Reaching the end of the service line Lorian grabbed a tray. She loaded the tray up with a cup of fruit, something the size of a loaf wrapped in foil, and four bottles of water. With a tray fully loaded, she indicated to the guard to take her back to the interrogation cell.

Robert watched Advocate Listian leave. He had gotten used to being alone. It was not that he liked being alone, but it was safe. No feeling out of place except, even here all of the little things were becoming distractions. There was no *'getting stuck'*, as he called having so much to say and unable to get it out. At least here he could take the time to continue his thought experiment; trying to figure out if the negative energy state was a result of a negative gravity pulse, or did the negative gravity pulse created the negative energy state. Solving this should get him to the point where phase set collapse could be completely mapped out. He was so focused on the problem that he was startled when advocate Listian returned, carrying a tray of food and water.

Lorian told the guard thank you, putting the tray down in front of her client, & looking at Robert “You can eat while I talk, ok?”



Robert was not in the mood to be cooperative, but the sight of the cup of fruit, and a breakfast burrito, and his growling stomach ended any idea of being stubborn. Robert felt a little ashamed thinking like that, she appeared to be looking out for him. He told her "Thank you," and meant it before tearing into the burrito. On the second bite, Robert slowed down to give his stomach a chance. The first bite tasted so good, but it hit his stomach like a lead weight. Completing his second bite Robert put the burrito down and reached for the water.

Lorian waited until Robert had a couple of bites of food before beginning. She started with the general state of things. Thomas and Garquile had been released the same day he had been transferred here. His mom and the rest of the family were fine. The Governess had done everything within her power to make sure he was not to be removed from the planet.

As Robert ate, he listened to Advocate Listian describe the situation, everyone seemed to be ok for now. He was worried about his mom, but she had Rufus to keep her from going crazy, he hoped. The part about not being disappeared was good news and he was surprised that Garquile's mom had gone to the planetary Governess for this. Garquile's mom had always seemed cold and distant, or maybe it was pure professionalism for her job, that she could never let anybody outside her family see her as anything but the Governess. He would be adding her to his prayers.

Lorian had completed the explanation of why a corporate structure was needed to protect him and his intellectual property before she noticed that Robert was eating slowly "Why are you eating so slowly? "

Still chewing, "If I eat too fast, I'll get sick.... I would spare you that." Putting down the remainder of his burrito, I have a request about MY company."

Lorian smiled, "So long as it is legal, sure, what is it?"

"The parent company should be called 'Promethean'. I want to name it after the Greek Titan Prometheus, he defied the Olympian gods and presented mankind with the gift of fire. And for his defiance, they chained him to a great boulder, and set two giant vultures to devour his liver every day for eternity."

Mankind was an odd word to hear, a male-centric word. Curiosity had her question the name, "Do you think you are like Prometheus bringing fire to humans."

"No, I may be angry and arrogant, but I do not have that much hubris. I would like to believe that I have been given both blessings and curses, so I was given fire and now I must endure what comes. Dr. Norroe says I exhibit a nonlinear developmental psychosis, Humans call it dyslexia. "

Lorian had never heard of either of the things Robert had mentioned, "Is this *dyslexia* common among humans?"

Shrugging, "About fifteen to twenty percent of the population have it to some degree. And there is a big discussion by the Imperium health and educational services about whether it should be fixed in utero."

It would be an easy choice for Lorian she thought, she would correct it in utero. "I think any mother or father would love to have a cure for this."

Sadly shaking his head no, "I would not, what would I lose to be....normal? I would not be me. We know how to identify it, and how to work with it. If you take away the struggle, we would be weaker, not stronger."

"I had not thought about it that way. Something to think about." Smiling, "Now let's get back to business. They can only keep you for thirty days total, but they have to pay you, so the bill rate we have decided on is two thousand credits per hour."

Robert interrupted, " Plus three thousand credits per hour for cruel and abusive treatment! Give them a reason to play nice."

Smiling wryly "We were going with one thousand, but three works just as well. We hope to get you visitors after shel."

Robert continued to eat as Lorian finished up and excused herself. Robert savored every bit of his meal. He did not know when, or if, he would get another. He had limited faith in his advocates, he did not want to get his hopes up. *Plan for the worse, hope for the best* he supposed.

As Lorian knocked on the door to leave she turned to Robert and asked, " Is there any insight or hint you would be willing to give me to pass alone?"

Pausing with the last piece of fruit, "If they had asked me on day one I would have been willing to work with them, but now... " pausing to think about what he wanted to give them, "The hint is the name of the car."

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When Lorian left Robert, she was in a foul mood. This bunch of clam-digging flotsam needed to be investigated for criminal negligence and abuse. If things did not change before she left she would be contacting Naval Criminal Investigations. She could not go to the Interior due to the classified nature of the evaluation for being declared a strategic asset. She asked the guard to take her to the facility commander's office.

When she entered the facility commander's office, three naval officers were waiting for her. The only one she had met to this point was Lt Cmdr Ashix, the security officer who had cleared her and her team for entry into the facility; she was seated to her left as she entered. To her right

appeared to be an Edixi Lieutenant Commander, also from Naval Intelligence, with medical insignia, and the woman behind the desk was a full commander from engineering.

She took the last seat as the guard closed the door and remained outside. "Before we get started, I would like to know why I should not be in contact with NCI to investigate the abuse my client has endured at your hands?" The stunned looks told her they were not prepared for that.

Commander Vashini was many things, but a boy-bashing child abuser was not one of them. This sand clamed piece of turox shit dared to claim that she was ... she did not complete the thought she pushed her temper down growling, "Explain yourself."

Smiling predatorily, "Certainly. A fifteen-year-old human child was kept in chains and solitary confinement for three days. Also, there was no food or water at that time. Other than a few pieces of food he took from your lunch," pointing at the woman with the medical insignia, "and no basic hygiene since he was taken into custody. Now if you do not believe me, ask the guard outside if she is allowed to remove my client's chains."

"I am Dr. Arandis Norroe, and if that is the case then why did he not speak up?" Arandis realized just how moronic her statement was out of her mouth, closing her eyes, "He does not vocalize, and none of the guards knows hand speak."

Lorian continued, "Add in the fact that a large number of young males from this world disappear all the time, and he believes he is next on that tragic list. The only reason I would not get the Interior involved is because if I did, the odds of him ever going home drops below fifty-fifty."

The woman to Lorian's right, Lt Cmdr Ashi, spoke next. "I had heard stories that it was happening, but I thought it was an exaggeration, you know, just stories. Is it really that bad?"

Looking at Lt Cmdr Ashi, "In the almost five years since the Imperium liberated this world there has been a loss of almost six hundred million people, and those are the Planetary Governesses' own numbers, and if you ask a human that would give you an honest number, it would be closer to an eight hundred million. With either number, I would start calling it genocide, or mass enslavement. When I first arrived, I came to get a man and make a ton of credits. I naively used to believe that we in the Imperium were the righteous and virtuous ones, not anymore. The Interior and the nobility are all out of control of this world. Now, some are doing the Empress's good work, but there are not enough of them."

Zirlyn turned to Cmdr Vashini "This changes things, we are going to need to protect him from not just external, but internal threats also. I will take care of the boy, Robert, and make sure he is safe and not abused and has everything he needs. I will make sure he has access to communicate with family and other involved persons. Once my background investigation is complete."

Cmdr Vashini was reeling, she was almost complicit in boy bashing, almost. She had fucked up, now she had to fix it. "Advocate, LtCmdr Ashix will see to all of the issues you have raised" Raising her voice, "Guard, Please get in here."

The guard replied as she entered, "Yes Ma'am"

"Please get our guest fully kitted out except for weapons, armor, and electronic devices he will not need those for now. And return any personal items with exceptions identified. All personnel that need to interact with our guests will be equipped with a translation program for Terran hand speak. Once kitted out, you and two others will escort our guest to an area where he may take care of his personal hygiene needs without intrusion. Per Naval protocol, our guest will not be restrained unless he is being interviewed by a technical person. That means leaving the restraints in the interview room. Dismissed."

When the guard acknowledged her orders and left, Cmdr Vashini said "That should improve his treatment. The restraints are required unless overridden by a flag officer. Advocate, is there anything I can do right now to correct his mistreatment?"

"That should be sufficient for now. When this meeting is over I will check in with my client and see if he needs anything else and coordinate with LtCmdr Ashix ", Lorian replied, relieved that there was no fight or recrimination, just fix the problems and move on.

Cmdr Vashini turns to Dr Norroe, "Doctor, you're up."

Dr Norroe sat up and began her presentation. "I started with a complete review of his medical and educational records, which are interesting, to say the least. I was able to verify four items identified by a human psychologist from before the liberation. For one of these, if he were not human, he would have been institutionalized with the expectation of a pending psychotic break, and becoming a danger to himself and others. In curd terms, he is defective and was labeled as so when his mother moved him to Prescott. Fortunately for us, his mother chose to parentally educate him."

Lorian broke in, "Don't you mean fortunately for him, not us?"

Bemused by the interruption, " Yes, you are correct. "Where was I," looking back to her notes "parental education option. To say I am impressed with her success is an understatement. He completed the Imperium basic primary education curriculum in less than three Terran years, with exceptional marks in every subject except language-related courses. This shows his raw intelligence is very high, and my cognitive test confirms he is at least one in a hundred thousand intellectually."

Dr Norroe paused to let the good part sink in," Now the four items I mentioned earlier are Dyslexia, digraphia, low latent inhibition, and manic depression. We have different names for them, dyslexia is called 'non-linear developmental psychosis', and digraphia is called 'limited developmental cognitive articulation'. These are both defined by humans as learning disabilities and have been aware of this for some time, though most of the time it is misdiagnosed. When correctly identified, there are several strategies to work around and adapt the educational environment for this. As for 'low latent inhibition' or 'hyper-process stimulation'; this is so rare for us that there is almost no research on the subject, except to indicate that it is a death sentence by the age of ten and mostly affects boys.

Cmdr Vashini broke in, "Are you telling me that humans deal with this all of the time."

Dr. Norroe had to laugh," Hardly, they do not just deal with the learning disabilities, they have used it as a species to drive their technological advancement. Without dyslexia, I do not think humans would have gone from the first powered flight to their lunar landing in one human lifetime, research on the subject showed that half of the engineers involved had the condition. The condition affects about fifteen to twenty percent of the population, so I believe there was an evolutionary advantage. About the same number of humans are left-handed, for the Shil'vita left-handedness is about three percent."

Lorian remembered something Robert had said: it is a blessing and a curse.

"With humans, there is a very diverse spectrum of these learning disabilities." Dr Norroe continued. " In His case, the manic depression is directly tied to his limited ability to articulate what he is thinking. This may be why he produced so many abstract art pieces, he is expressing an idea the only way he can.

Back to the testing I did with Robert showed not only is he very intelligent, but he is very creative as well, and like all the others who have dyslexia, he just thinks differently."

Dr Norroe paused waiting for any questions and pulled up an example, "Here we have two images, one titled Rain Drops on glass next to one titled gravity lensing optical distortion. The first one would be considered art, the other science. This is an example of true non-linear thinking, it is clear that the first triggered the second."

Cmdr Vashini rubbed her forehead." I do not understand how somebody could go from raindrops on a piece of glass to an understanding of gravitational lensing. There is no logical way to connect the two."

Lt Cmdr Ashix countered, "No, it is a form of pattern recognition. I am trained to see things that do not belong, and that took years, he connects things instinctively. I bet if he did speak, he would be finishing your sentences for you, and be correct better than half of the time."

Cmdr Vashini, " Now that we have taken Dr Norroe up a side stream, the idea of pattern recognition begs the question if that thing out in the hanger is a piece of a pattern, if it is, then is it the start or the end. If this is the end of the pattern, the kid will be rich off all the things that come out of it. We have figured out about ten percent of what he created, but no real idea why. From that ten percent, the team has identified six or seven applications for just the Navy."

Lorian had to smile at the commander's admission. Six or seven new applications in just a few days, this was very good news. "I will need that information in basic concept form, no technical data. It is legally his, is it not? "

Advocates, Cmdr Vashini thought bemused, always looking for a quick credit," Yes, it is all his if we ever figure out what it is. Now if we are done with this subject, Doctor please continue."

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Garquile was as close to his happy place as the situation would allow. His ankle was chafed by the monitor he wore around it as he tried to move around the kitchen. Two things in his life brought him great pleasure. Cooking and barrel racing. Cooking was a creative passion, a chance to tune out the world and concentrate on the creation of a flavor and texture, a single note of a song that would make up a meal. He had prepped all of the fruits, and vegetables and was now working on the main dish, two large Copi, fresh from the upper Mississippi River. Deboning and deveining was the tedious and delicate part. If you rushed, you could leave the meat unpresentable. Finishing his cleanup of the filets, he surveyed his handy work, *perfect* he thought.

Three perfect filets for the adults doing their important adulting stuff, even with all four advocates here. The kids, himself included, would have the other filets, with the gill meat and the trimming from the other filets that were too thin to be cooked the way he wanted. The Copi was covered in a mango lime jerk chutney to give the fish a delicate crusted glaze when cooked in an outdoor brick oven. Waiting for the Copi would be individual bowls of pad thai, served with a reduced coconut milk jerk spice reduction.

The kids, himself, and his siblings, would get fish tacos. Fish tacos were not something he made very often for dinner, it was finger food, it was not appropriate for the evening family meal in the dining room, but they were not having a real family meal tonight, so guilty finger food was on the menu.

Tonight's meal would have been fun if not for the fact that he and Tommy were both wearing ankle monitors, and Robert was locked in a cage being treated like an animal, from what he had overheard. Afterward, the adults sealed off the dining room so they could talk in private. The family dining room was the only place in the house that could double up as a conference room.

Tommy had been pretty freaked out over the three days they had been detained. Tommy had explained it to him the day after they got back. Humans, until very recently, were not citizens of the Imperium and had no legal status for due process, so if he did anything the powers that be could just ship him off to the Marines. It was a favorite tactic of the Interior to deal with the troublemakers. Now he was a muted version of himself. Tommy always seemed to want to protect Robert, mainly from family shit with his grandfather.

He had met both Robert and Tommy about a month after they had moved to Earth in a Kung fu class. One of his mother's security detail had started training long before he and his family arrived and suggested it as a way to integrate into the local community in a controlled environment. His sisters loved it from the start, mainly to interact with boys. It was not until he shifted into the Tia chi that he began to enjoy Kung Fu. The only thing he still dreaded was sparing. The human boys would take the opportunity to hit him a little harder just to piss off his sisters. He remembered that early on Robert never attacked when he sparred, only using counterstrikes.

He remembered his father telling him that every young woman should defend their family, and every young man should have the poise and confidence to allow them to do it. Having confidence in your wife's ability to defend you showed in how you presented yourself, you would never cower because you would never have to. Public displays of confidence in your wives are one of the most powerful displays of love and devotion the world can ever be shown. At least according to his father, he had eleven wives in his forty-six years and his youngest wife, Lalanía, was almost twenty.

The timer on the oven pulled Garquile out of his thoughts, the Copi was done and needed to be plated. Presentation was important, Mother had an image to maintain, he could not and would not serve anything that was just thrown onto a plate. He and three of his sisters would serve the adults restaurant style since this was working dinner. Tommy would be serving the wine, he had the advantage of working as a server in the local casino's restaurant. Servers worked with the waiters to refresh the drinks and bring out the food for the waiters to present to customers. The server position was just a dodge to get around the law requiring waiters to be eighteen human years old to serve alcohol.

Garquile's mother only tolerated having a large household staff to serve official functions. She had been very forceful when she had become Governess. So that her children would not become lazy bottom feeders, all of the children had chores. Garquile had traded his sister, Valenlína, laundry for cooking. She hated both chores, but laundry took less time than cooking the family meal four nights a week.

Garquile had chosen a pair of white wines from the Sonoita region, an Albarino and a Verdejo. Tommy had suggested these because they were very popular with fish at the restaurants. The guests would get to choose and the family would get the leftovers. Garquile had Valenlína call their father and tell him that dinner was on its way. When they arrived with the food the table was not cleared but all the papers and data slates had been moved to the side of their owners. Garquile sighed. So much for his proper presentation, they were too engrossed to care, but the show must go on. As his sisters presented the meal to their guests and family, Garquile described the meal, detailing each aspect. Tommy picked up with a well-practiced description of the wines when Garquile finished.

With the meal served, the children retreated to the outdoor patio. Garquile and Tommy brought out the tacos and chips and set them up near the fire pit. Valenlína came out last carrying the blender and margarita mix, the only thing missing was alcohol. Garquile intended to fix that at least.

Tommy had been looking out for Robert ever since they had met, not that Robert needed protection. Tommy acted like a filter, keeping the B.S. to a minimum and keeping him engaged with the people around him. When Tommy had asked him and Valenlína to help with the car, both of them had been excited. For Valenlína, a classic human car was a *maybe, someday* dream, but time with Tommy was time with Tommy. Tommy explained that Robert had started engaging with people when they started the car. It was something he could talk about that others could understand.... right up until the motor that had taken six months of hard-core

scraping to buy. When the motor had turned out to be a worthless boat anchor, Robert had reverted to being disengaged. Lost in his data slate shell as he had been before, Garquile still did not know what had gotten Robert to re-engage, so to speak.

As everyone was chowing down on the tacos, Garquile got the mixer going on the drinks. Valenlina had started giving Tommy a back rub in the hope he would relax for a little while when she asked, "So Tommy, I never asked, whose idea was it to make the car fly?"

Sighing in pleasure Tommy replied, "You keep that up I will tell you all of my secrets, and maybe a few lies to make you believe in Santa Claus."

Garquile brought over a tray of drinks, "Mother would be aghast if she saw you handling a boy like that, and what do you mean Santa Claus isn't real? You have destroyed my innocence!" He chimed in mockingly.

Tommy grabbed the drink when offered, and Garquile made sure it was the one that was spiked. Tommy noticed the special ingredient, "Trying to help your sister loosen my resolve to her charms I see".

Garquile feigned ignorance about the fact Tommy and his sister had been having sex for over a year now. Valenlina had told him, as soon as it happened, because she had to tell somebody, and he could keep a secret. There was a problem with the secret as it was not a secret. All of the parents knew and let Tommy and Valenlina believe they were being discreet. Valenlina had explained to him that Tommy was amazing, but he was also safe, and he felt the same way. They were not using each other, just enjoying what they had. Knowing it would be over in less than a year when she would travel to Shil for University. "Please, my sister has no charm, as well as limited manners, but if you are going to spill your secrets.... I am listening."

Valenlina worked her hands from the top of Tommy's shoulders to just below his shoulder blades, "As I am putty in Valenlina's hands, I will tell you it was all Bobby's idea. The reason he withdrew was he was afraid Granddad would get pissed about wanting to do a Shil'vati-based retro mod on a sixty-nine Charger."

Garquile finally got his drink "I would have loved to watch your Granddad's reaction. I bet he blew a gasket?.. I think that was the right way to say that."

"It was, but not the way you would think. His first reaction was to snarf the beer he was drinking right through his nose laughing. The guy he got the car from, Martinez, had a couple of requests, *'make it cool, fast, and no shit purple shil metal on it'*. He hates the purple metal because it is a pain to shape by hand." Pausing for another sip of his drink. "It took my granddad a good five minutes to stop coughing while Robert was sitting there waiting for him to lay down the hammer on him, but then Granddad said something neither of us was expecting, *'show me what you have.'* Robert just sat there stunned, then like a dam breaking Bobby asked *are you sure* and my granddad just said *'Show me what you have'*."



Getting up to sit next to him, Valenlina leaned over to wrap her arms around him. "It took Bobby about three hours to explain what needed to be done to make the car fly, with a top speed that he guessed was around two hundred and fifty miles an hour. When Bobby dropped *that* little tidbit about going faster Granddad asked how much faster. Bobby only said that if he didn't deal with the heat, the car would melt. My granddad couldn't think how fast that would be and just told Boddy "Let's *just make it fly first then go for speed records.*"

Garquile then asked, "So how long did it take to design all of this, to me it seemed that it was all in his head?"

Tommy rolled his head back and laughed "To be honest, I have no idea, he could have been thinking about it since we started. He is like a dog playing fetch and then suddenly he sees a squirrel and it's off to the races, then ten minutes later he comes back with a rabbit and toy boat."