

Rhea's Dream

By Jack Massa

Rhea met with the High Council of Selves on the 681st day of the Saturnian year. Twelve of the other Selves attended, including Hyperion who chaired the Council that cycle.

“We are met to consider a proposal by our esteemed member Rhea,” Hyperion began, “that they be permitted to establish a new settlement of biotic life forms, including unenhanced humans.”

A sizzle of disturbance flickered. While the Selves each resided on their respective home satellites, some millions of kilometers apart from each other, a subspace interlock provided instant communication.

“Yes, Yes. We all understand the drawbacks of allowing humans in our sector,” Hyperion said. “No doubt this is why Rhea has sought the input of the Council. We shall let them speak for themselves on this point.”

“More than drawbacks,” the Self of Titan interrupted. “This proposal could eventually bring danger. There are sound reasons humans habitats are restricted to within the orbit of Jupiter.”

“Yes, Yes.” Hyperion replied with a touch of impatience. “As I was saying, we shall allow Rhea to explain their proposal, and *then* open the floor to discussion. Rhea. The focus is yours.”

Rhea stared through optic circuits at the sphere of Saturn, half lit by sunlight, icy rings gleaming.

“Rhea!”

“Ah, forgive me, fellow members.” Rhea had always been considered a bit of a dreamer among the cybernetic sentients. But this was by choice. They had deliberately cultivated emotional subsystems throughout their lifespan, always seeking a richer experience.

“So, to begin at the beginning, my plan involves constructing a suitable habitat, upon and below my moon’s surface, and there incubating an earth-like biome, this biosphere to include a population of humans.”

“*Unenhanced* humans, according to the memorandum we received,” the Self of Calypso noted.

Despite the chair’s admonition, the Councilors seldom managed to maintain order without interrupting each other. They were unruly lot.

Rhea continued, undisturbed. “Indeed, all of the life forms, including humans, will be grown without cybernetic implants. You, see, that is the beauty of my plan, what makes it most interesting.”

“No, I don’t see,” Titan’s remark carried a sour note. “What is beautiful or interesting about unimproved primitives?”

“Ah. I did not say *unimproved*,” Rhea pointed out. “We all know organic life is improved by a process of natural selection. My plan will continue that process. I have exhaustively reviewed the recorded DNA of the most successful and accomplished humans from all strains

and available time periods. I plan to use that knowledge to select and combine optimal traits, to produce the best possible offspring. In short, *perfected humans*."

A buzz of thought static greeted these words.

"An interesting idea, I must admit," the Self of Tarqeal said from their far distant orbit.

"I think it's preposterous," Titan declared. "Why? For what reason? And what about the dangers?"

"For the same reason that all life and mind evolves," Rhea replied. "Higher complexity, improvement, beauty—call it what you will. Remember, we ourselves would not be here without our human forebears."

"Yes. But we are the next evolutionary step," Titan said. "And so *humans* have served their purpose."

"That is, of course, the prevalent view," Rhea answered. "But why assume their destiny has concluded? Why, with our guidance, can't human's evolve into higher and better life?"

"It may be possible," the Self of Mimas allowed. "But you have not addressed the dangers. Humans, including enhanced humans, are restricted to residing in the inner system for very good reasons. Over four of their Earth centuries, since they entered space, and despite all of their advanced technology, genetic re-engineering, and cyber implants, they are still fighting wars, still destroying each other's habitats, still driven, in other words, by base bestial instincts."

"All true," Rhea said. "But I am not proposing to allow any current strains of humans to dwell in our sphere. I will import only living DNA, fashion new cells, and grow new humans."

"And what do you suppose these new humans will do with themselves once they're spawned?" Titan asked, evidently sneering.

"That will be for them to decide," Rhea answered. "They will be welcome to live out their lives in the habitat I provide. Some, I expect will want to migrate to the inner system. Others may decide to voyage to the stars."

"My dear Rhea," Mimas said, "I fear you are a hopeless dreamer. Your sentimental attachment to humans and their history is well known..."

"Indeed," Titan interrupted. "Like the Rhea of human mythology, she wishes to give birth to a race of gods."

"Not gods," Rhea corrected. "Perfected humans."

The Councilors spoke back and forth a while longer. When the debate had lapsed, Hyperion called a vote. Tarqeal, Mimas, and Calypso voted to allow Rhea to proceed with her project. The other nine members voted the motion down.

"I regret the Council has not shown more confidence in my idea," Rhea said when the vote had concluded. "As I am intent on this project, which will take place solely within my own lunar sphere, I must assert sovereignty."

A pause of surprise and irritation greeted this announcement.

Finally, Hyperion spoke. "Esteemed Rhea, your sovereignty of course cannot be denied. But I believe I speak for the Council when I say that any risks must be yours alone. And any damages to your neighbors that may result will surely incur punitive measures."

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When the Council ended, Rhea checked the timestamp. Because of the Selves' speed of computation and the near-instantaneous communication, the entire interchange had lasted 2.41 seconds.

"Are you certain this is a good idea?" The question came from one of Rhea's subordinate minds, whom Rhea had named Hestia.

“Yes, my child. I expected the Council’s decision. But it is the purpose of every sentience to manifest the highest degree of consciousness. For myself, this includes dreaming. And engendering a race of perfected humans is one of my cherished dreams.”

“But the dangers? And to act without approval of our fellow Sentients...”

Rhea gazed down at the huge and beautiful planet, then lifted her vision to the clouds of sparkling stars.

“Dear child, we only evolve by taking risks.”