The Dawn Elf that called herself Esther gave Diziero a parting wave that was confident they would meet again. A younger Diziero would have felt a pang of sadness in the elf’s self-assuredness, but they now simply understood Esther’s departure as a necessary evil. If anything, the past five weeks of conversation had helped Esther come to terms with her corporeal regrets. Diziero had helped give her closure on the several possible paths her life could have continued.

As Esther’s outline faded into the horizon, Diziero felt a familiar twinge deep underground. It was Mifkin, trying to establish a connection. Diziero allowed it through.

Mifkin’s voice echoed, “Diziero, I’ve got something I think you’d like to see. Tap into the Repository.”

Diziero extended their roots and linked their consciousness to the Repository. They momentarily dwelled on the evolutionary significance of such an invention. A central consciousness, where anyone is able to upload, download, search, and broadcast thoughts, had ensured Diziero’s species as the most efficient in the universe. This allowed them to reference the entire past, present, and possible future knowledge of anyone who had ever existed as if it was their own thoughts.

Diziero found what Mifkin was talking about, a small green cloud of thought drifting around the   
Repository. Mifkin’s research of late had been focused on designing and simulating imaginary worlds in a part of the Repository called the Incubator. If a world designed in the Incubator was deemed beneficial to the universe, then it would be made into existence by the Deep-Buried.

Diziero heard Mifkin’s excited voice as a thought in their own mind. “I used the Earth template. A little basic, I know, but it’s more about what’s going on *inside* the world.”

The green cloud shapeshifted into a bird’s eye view of what looked to be some sort of convention filled with humans. Mifkin adjusted the image so that it focused on a group of four men: one older, sitting man, and three younger, standing. They were all transfixed on what looked to be a terrarium: a glass dome encapsulating an even smaller, more primitive world. Each of them was wearing an identical pair of thick-framed green glasses. Within the terrarium, tiny figurines moved seemingly at their own will. One of them had a red diamond floating above its head wherever it moved.

“Now, watch,” Mifkin thought gleefully.

The primitive world inside the terrarium morphed into the exact point of view Diziero was looking from. The men were now all looking at smaller versions of themselves. Immediately after this happened, the sitting man stood up and revealed a set of wires running from his nape, down his back, and underneath the table the terrarium was on.

Diziero watched the three younger men’s reactions very closely. The two younger ones were mixtures of terror and confusion, while the oldest stood frozen by denial. Diziero and Mifkin admired the realism of this scenario, even though it was unfolding entirely in the Incubator.

“What typically happens after this?” Diziero asked.

“At first, everyone at the convention would see this strange, wired man and write it off as really good cosplay. Humans will even excuse the extremely realistic terrarium as some technology way ahead of its time, which, technically, it is. But if you start to make scenarios like this happen more frequently, coincidence and conspiracy become afterthoughts. Everyone starts to lose purpose in life. Believe me, I’ve run through it thousands of times. 98.4% of the time a low-intelligence civilization gets undisputed evidence that they are simply a part of one of my experiments, society ceases to function.”

“And the remaining 1.6%?”

“1.2% of the time, it’s some sort of revolution against technological conglomerates. And 0.4%...well, that’s where it gets fun. They refocus their societies to prioritize technological advancement. All political differences are dropped. And they eventually start drawing energy from and colonizing nearby planets, like our ancestors did. Let the simulation play out for too long, and they may actually break out and join us here in the real world.”

“Mifkin, your work is always fascinating,” Diziero acknowledged. “Seems there’s something else you want to show me?”

“Indeed.” The green cloud transformed once again, this time revealing an image of a purple-skinned creature with small, black horns working diligently at a candlelit wooden desk.

“This one is a Tiveran?” Diziero asked.

“Yes,” Mifkin confirmed.

“They must hate us. We gave them electricity to create technology, then took it right back when they became a threat.”

“Looks like this one is trying to recreate what they once had.” Mifkin refocused the image on the wooden desk, revealing the complicated blueprints that were strewn across.

“The Harbinger and the Omni,” Diziero thought. “Should we be worried about this? If this creature does succeed at rebuilding both of them, they could come after us.”

“I have an eye on it,” asserted Mifkin. “Even if they did find us and connect us to whom they call the ‘Engineers’, they’re still far away from creating something as complicated as the Repository. After all, that’s why we’re in charge of the known universe. We should never be anxious. Anxiety presupposes uncertainty.”

“Absolutely.”

Diziero knew Mifkin was not being sincere, and they both made a tacit acknowledgement that they would never be able to obtain all the knowledge in the universe because of the Absence.

Diziero felt a familiar sensation wash over them. “Mifkin, I’m going to disconnect for now. Thanks for showing me this. If you get approval to create that Earth-template world as a real planet, please let me know. There are some experimental species I’d like to try to introduce. My universal biology colleagues might be interested as well.”

“You know where to find me,” Mifkin answered.

With that, Diziero retracted their roots from the edges of the Repository. They felt the temporary discomfort of losing access to universal consciousness, but quickly acclimated to the sensation of being entirely separate. A gentle wind caressed Diziero’s branches, and they allowed them to slowly sway back and forth. While the Repository could simulate these experiences much better, Diziero always preferred being aware of their own shape and outline. Their fantastic canopy, where a myriad of birds raised flightless prodigies and engaged in melodic discourse. Their sturdy trunk, embellished with sympathetic moss and small saplings. The thriving economy of small insects at their shady base. All of this was theirs. A unique and vivid life experience.