

## CHAPTER 15: RECALL

**Log date:** Unknown

**Location:** Zovitalia

**Log note:** The next step

FOR THE FOUR CREWMEMBERS of the *Vaughn*, the journey had been a long and eventful one. They had gone places no one in their race had ever been and they had seen amazing new sights. Yet, even though their voyage had been a joyous one, they were still glad when it was finally time to return home. The void they had visited had been full of secrets but it lacked a world like the one they had left.

Once their mission was complete, the Navigator, the Specialist, the Engineer, and the Messenger left the *Vaughn* in space and slipped back to their own world. It seemed strange to them to leave their vessel behind; their long period of interaction with it had turned the ship from a stranger into a friend. Yet they knew the ship still had a part to play. Their first mission was done, but the ship's work was just beginning. Its day of homecoming would arrive but it was not yet time.

When the four explorers stepped back onto their homeworld they were greeted with great excitement and enthusiasm. Never before had any of that race been missing from Zovitalia, and their absence created a hole in society. Those who wanted their company or expertise had to look elsewhere, for the explorers were out of reach. It was an odd feeling to have someone missing from the world – but it was a very good feeling to have them back, safe and sound and with many stories to tell.

For the first few weeks after their triumphant return they spent their time sharing with the citizens of the world what they had done and what they had learned. They got caught up with old friends and they celebrated with feasts and merriment. The First One had much he wanted to discuss with them, but he decided to wait. They had been gone a long time and there was no reason to rush the matter. The treasures of space could wait.

Once the festivities had died down and their lives had returned to normal, the First One called a meeting with the four explorers in the Elder Tree. It was time to make some important decisions and he was unwilling to act without their input and guidance.

The meeting room in the Tree was large and spacious. In the center of the room was an ancient table that was nearly as old as the world itself. The chairs around the table had reconfigured themselves to match the five beings who had taken them as seats. There were no electronics or screens in this room, for such things were not common in the woods. The meeting was held late in the day, as the light began to leave the forest and the night arrived.

The First One began the meeting. "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I know your time is precious and I know you still have much to do. You have been away from your lives for a long time, and much has happened in your absence. We are all grateful for what you have learned for us. I do not wish to keep you here but it is important that we begin making plans for that which is still to come. In order to make those plans I have some questions for you."

"Of course," the Messenger said. "What do you wish to know?"

"My first question is the hardest. In fact, you may not be able to answer it. My question is this: where did you go?"

The Messenger was surprised. "What do you mean? We went to the other side. We crossed over into the void – the dark realm. I do not understand."

"But what was that place? If you were to tell me that you crossed over the wood and came to the other side, that would only tell me the path of your journey. There are other countries beyond the wood, and each one is different. I understand that you crossed over into a new place. But what new place did you visit?"

The Navigator spoke up. "There is no way to know. We saw no life forms during our time there. The Singularity was our only clear point of reference. Everything else in the void was vague and difficult to distinguish. Our instruments told us that we were in a large area with very little matter. There was very little light, and the sources of that light were dim and far away. It was a strange realm. Light seemed to come from a few areas that were very large and yet very sparse. The light was not alive, as it is in our world. In fact, nothing seemed to be alive."

"The realm seemed to be empty," the Specialist added. "Perhaps we visited a place that had not yet seen life. Perhaps that realm is still full of darkness and void."

The Engineer nodded. "Exactly. That was my impression as well. It was an undefined place that did not seem to know love or joy. But perhaps we could fix that. We might be able to bring life there."

The First One smiled. "I am sure there is much that can be done, but we must stay focused on our goal. The *Vaughn* was not built to explore the void. You are confirming what we already guessed: there is very little in the void that is worthy of our time or study. That is why we built a vessel to go beyond it. The void is just a path to the real mystery. What have you learned about the passage through the barrier?"

"The ship has proven strong and worthy," the Engineer replied. "It crossed the void without strain and has provided much data. We have learned a great deal."

"But we have not learned enough," the Messenger commented. "Although we have discovered many things, we have not learned the one thing we set out to learn. We have not discovered how to cross over. We have not found a way to achieve passage through the barrier. That secret eludes us."

"What if we gave the ship more time?" the First One asked. "Perhaps if we allow the *Vaughn* to continue to gather information, we will learn even more about the barrier. The information that you seek may be just around the corner."

The Engineer spoke up. "The *Vaughn* is continuing to operate. We have left it parked in the void, and it will monitor the situation for changes. But I believe the reason we did not succeed is because we lack the tools we need to ask the right questions. We now know more than we did before, and we have discovered that we are not as well-equipped as we thought. We need to enhance the *Vaughn* if we want it to answer our questions."

"I agree," the Specialist said. "It is a good ship, but it cannot accomplish its goals. We need better instruments. Instruments that are designed to explore the barrier and reveal its secrets."

"Is that possible?" the First One asked. "Do you know how to build these new instruments? Will they not be subject to the same limitations as the ones currently on the *Vaughn*?"

"We will have to learn some new things before we can build them," the Engineer admitted. "I do not say this will be easy. But perhaps we will be met with success. The *Vaughn* has told us that the barrier is resistant to certain types of examination, but our research has discovered that there are other types of examination which are also possible. We believe we could upgrade the *Vaughn* and expand its capabilities. It is true that it may not work. There is much that we do not know. But if we do not try then we will never succeed."

“That is wisdom,” the First One agreed. “I believe you are right. We made one attempt and we learned that our old methods will not work. Therefore, if we wish to reach our goal we must make a new attempt with new methods. If we do not make a new attempt then we must abandon our goal – and that is one thing we will not do. We will find a way. It is simply a matter of trying again.”

“Exactly!” the Engineer said. “Let me show you our plans.”