

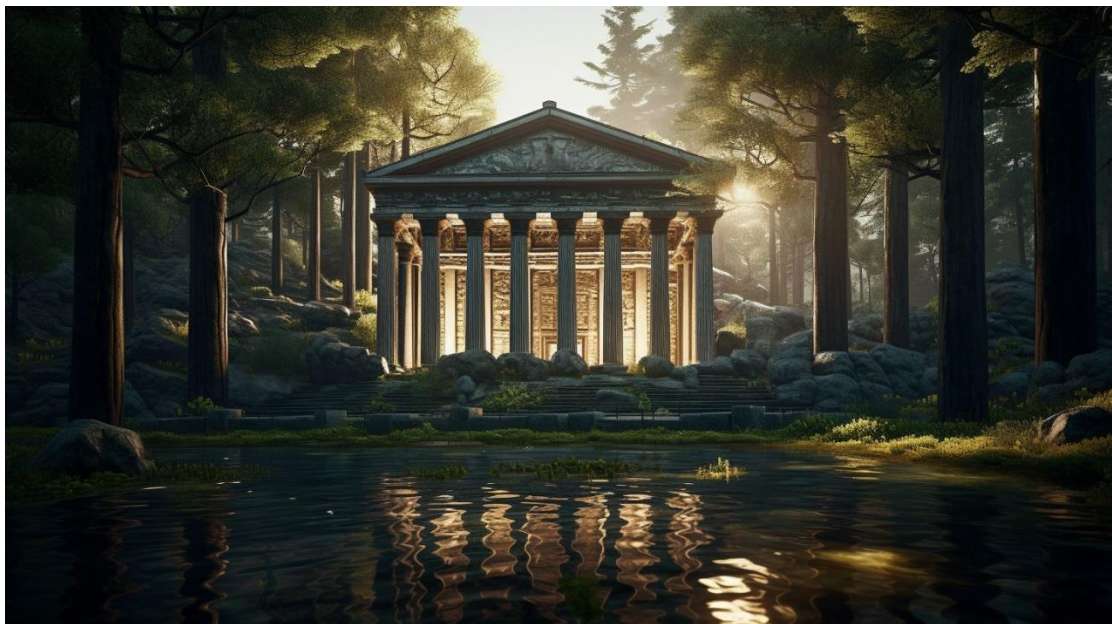
Fragments of Power: The Crisis of the Green Spheres

Chapter I : The Decentralized Tribal Society

The Byzantium Continent is a technologically advanced, decentralized society where humans lead a tribal lifestyle alongside modern technology. Various tribes are scattered across the continent, each with its unique culture, traditions, and values, enjoying the right to independent self-governance. Tribe members contribute to the community's smooth functioning through daily tasks according to their abilities. Thanks to advanced productivity and collaboration with AI, their workload is not burdensome, and they can enjoy life after a five-hour workday.

When faced with crucial decisions, tribe members gather at a specific location known as the "Pnyx," derived from the ancient Greek city-states democratic assembly place, symbolizing democracy, fairness, and unity. Situated in a serene forest, adorned with lush trees and sunlight filtering through leaves, casting mottled shadows, the Pnyx exudes a captivating beauty. They employ a decentralized autonomous organization (DAO) approach to decision-making. Gathering in this place, community members typically begin by someone posing a question, followed by democratic discussions that present several alternative proposals, ultimately decided through a vote by the entire population. This society is regarded as a model of democracy, freedom, and diversity. People respect each other's perspectives, upholding principles of peace and cooperation.

Specifically, the continent hosts more than a dozen tribes, ranging from small to large, with around five major tribes: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, and Theta. They maintain a friendly relationship based on mutual respect and collaboration. Material exchanges are facilitated through advanced transportation systems, while information and cultural exchanges thrive through sophisticated communication devices and social networks.



Chapter II : The Expansion and Catastrophe of the Green Spheres

However, the tranquility of the Byzantium Continent was disrupted by the presence of small green spheres. These spheres seemed to have always existed within the jungles, yet no one paid them much attention until they began to rapidly reproduce and expand through space. They covered everything that could grow, including land, trees, and buildings. Initially, people were merely curious about the arrival of these spheres. However, it didn't take long for them to realize the problems associated with their expansion. The areas where they grew no longer provided space for other plants and animals to survive, and the structures they covered suffered damage. These spheres clung stubbornly to the surfaces they enveloped, making them difficult to remove. Ultimately, they brought about a massive disaster for the tribes.

These spheres initially appeared in areas with less human activity and management, such as forests, lawns, and wide fields. They didn't appear individually but rather formed clusters of various sizes, interconnecting and creating a patch that resembled green mounds of grass or tumors growing from tree trunks. Upon closer inspection, one could observe their slow, squeezing movements, almost hearing a creaking sound like rubber rubbing against each other.



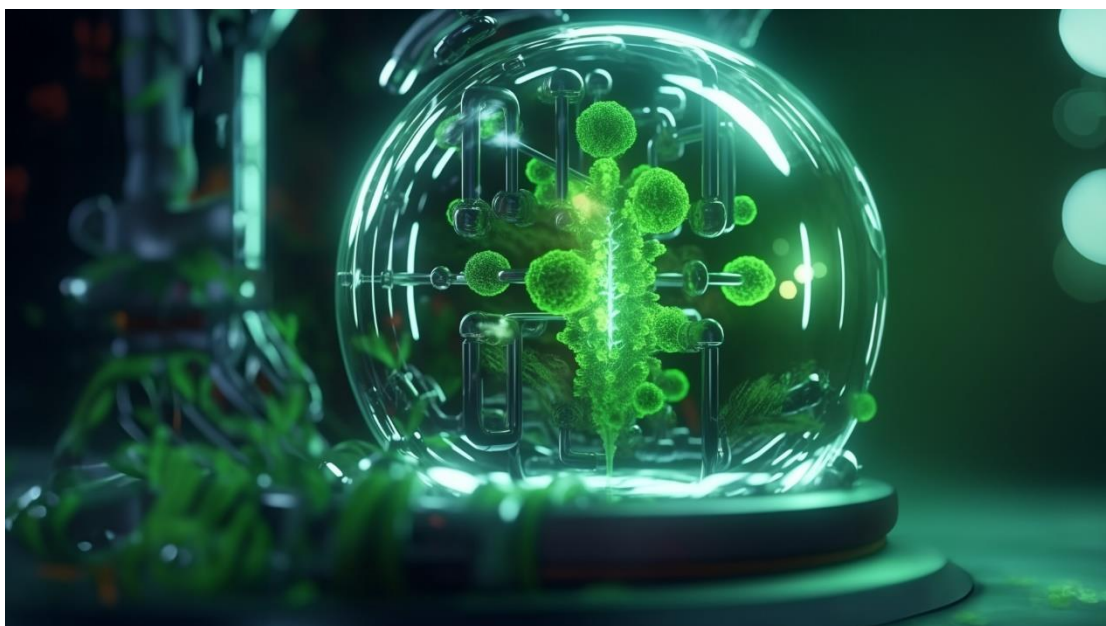
The patrol robots in the farmlands were the first to discover them and reported to the farm managers. Initially, the farm managers thought they were a rare type of weed. Therefore, they instructed small automated weed removal machines to eradicate the green patches. However, the machines proved useless against them. Instead of being cut up, a small number of spheres got entangled in the machines, rendering them useless. To complicate matters, the spheres tightly enveloped the land, imprisoning crops as if they were food. This invasive threat posed great harm to crops. Simultaneously, some residents discovered sporadic green clusters on their rooftops and building walls. These clusters clung tightly to the surfaces, resembling creeping plants like ivy but emitting an eerie aura.

The spheres appeared almost simultaneously in various tribes, and Tribe A was the first to react. The

farm managers attempted traditional methods such as automated weed removal machines, insecticides, and corrosive agents, only to find that they were ineffective. Moreover, there was no information about this substance in their databases. Adding to the fear was the rapid reproduction rate of the spheres. Overnight, the spheres visibly grew larger, shocking the administrators. What was once a small patch had nearly doubled in size, prompting the farm managers to promptly contact each other and convene an emergency meeting at the Punix. When they presented the visual evidence of the spheres' reproductive speed, there was no doubt, and the proposal to address the sphere problem was immediately approved.



Botanical experts, agriculturalists, and other professionals formed a temporary specialized team to conduct comprehensive scientific analysis of the Green Spheres. The shocking conclusion they reached after extensive scientific examinations was that this was an entirely unknown substance, with a material composition and structure not native to this planet. Its reproductive mechanism was also unlike any known on Earth. It didn't rely on the nutrients from the land, but it exhibited an extremely exclusive occupation of space. It tightly covered every surface it encountered and deeply infiltrated into it. It could adapt to spaces of various sizes, whether uneven terrain, cracks in rocks, or the barely perceptible undulations on building materials. Its infiltration occurred at a molecular level, making it highly destructive and challenging to separate.



Initially, Tribe A (referred to as Alpha) couldn't find any method to eliminate the Green Spheres. After a week, they discovered a temporary solution: using materials at the atomic level to "enclose" the spheres, as they couldn't adhere to surfaces composed of atomic structures. They constructed a "fence" using metallic elements, confining the spheres to a limited area and preventing their outward expansion. However, this was only a temporary measure because as the spheres continued to reproduce and grew taller than the "fence," they would escape and infiltrate unharmed areas. They attempted to increase the height of the fence, but excessively high barriers would obstruct visibility, sunlight, and hinder transportation. The team had to find a solution before the spheres escaped from the fences that couldn't be made any taller.



"The scene was incredibly bizarre, as if we were keeping an extraterrestrial terror as an ornamental animal in a zoo, except that you could see that one day it would escape from its cage and tear us apart."

Meanwhile, Tribe A shared information about the Green Spheres with other tribes. The other tribes faced similar challenges, and like Tribe A, they hadn't found a solution to the problem. Some tribes even underestimated the threat, considering the spheres to be merely peculiar plants. However, after continuous sharing of information about the Hekavine disaster among the major tribes, almost all the tribes realized that the Byzantine Continent was facing a "Green Sphere Crisis." In their communications, they named the spheres "Hekavine," derived from the Greek goddess Hecate, associated with darkness, death, mystery, and witchcraft, as well as with life and reproduction.

Three months passed, and the most brilliant scientists from each tribe were still at a loss. They attempted physical and chemical destruction but couldn't find an effective method. However, Hekavine would not wait for them. The metal fences, reaching tens of meters in height, were no longer able to intercept them. People had to establish multiple layers of new barriers to contain the escaping spheres. To make matters worse, new spheres would inexplicably appear on previously "clean" ground. They seemed like mysterious and malevolent extraterrestrial entities, capable of manifesting in any possible corner. To address this, each tribe assigned dedicated patrol robots. During the weekly decision-making

meetings, a variety of proposals and discussions concerning Hekavine took place.

Chapter III: Towards Unity

Under the pressure of the crisis, several tribes coincidentally passed proposals for collaboration to seek a solution. They hoped to find a way to resolve the crisis through the exchange and cooperation of technology and resources. Tribe A, Tribe B, and Tribe D took the lead and sent out cooperation requests to all the tribes. Most of the tribes participated in this collaboration, with only a few small tribes refusing. This large research team consisted of 34 individuals who were research elites from various tribes. Under the pressure of the crisis, they immediately devoted themselves to intense work. Within the team, they continued to utilize the DAO organizational structure, with democratic voting determining decisions regarding funding, research, and other aspects. Everything ran smoothly, and countries actively contributed funds and resources to support this collective challenge. All research progress and experimental results were shared openly.



After three months of concerted efforts, the fenced-off areas for Hekavine had occupied nearly one-fourth of the tribal territories. The regions had suffered tremendous economic losses, and the economies of some small tribes were on the brink of collapse. Finally, some good news arrived. A significant breakthrough was made in the research: a substance called Aetherite extract was proven to react with Hekavine, corroding the spheres. The tribes finally glimpsed a ray of hope for the future. Even more encouraging was the rough estimate that if they could obtain 85% of the existing Aetherite, the Hekavine crisis could be largely resolved. People would have the opportunity to rebuild their homes and restore their former lives.



Aetherite is a rare and mysterious mineral found in deep veins within tall mountain ranges. So far, only Tribe B in the east and Tribe T in the south have discovered sizable Aetherite deposits. Among them, the Aetherite mines of Tribe B are the largest, accounting for 70% of the total Aetherite production on the continent. In the culture of Tribe B, Aetherite symbolizes ancient and mystical power, representing luck and heritage. Many members of Tribe B's households have passed down Aetherite from generation to generation as part of their ancient culture. A mature industry chain has developed around this cultural significance. At this moment, Tribe B is facing the first major crossroads that will determine the fate of the tribe.



Chapter IV: Division and Destruction

After the publication of the research report, Tribe B became embroiled in intense arguments. Some

believed that in the face of a crisis capable of destroying the entire civilization, Tribe B should contribute its Aetherite. However, many others found it difficult to accept this "sacrifice." They viewed the deprivation of Aetherite as a great injustice, a contempt for the cultural heritage of Tribe B. Moreover, it would cause a significant blow to the tribe's economy, a cost that would be irreparable. This was seen as an oppressive exercise of power, violating the democratic and fair principles they believed in.

In an emergency decision-making meeting, Tribe B decided to refuse to provide a large amount of Aetherite, but they would still offer a small quantity. Tribe T, which did not possess the longstanding Aetherite culture of Tribe B, was willing to contribute all of their mines, albeit with a demand for priority usage rights and economic compensation from other tribes. However, these Aetherite reserves were far from enough to mitigate the disaster. In the end, the internal conflicts within the alliance and Tribe B became irreconcilable. Tribe B passed a proposal to withdraw from the alliance, breaching the agreement and forcibly exiting the group. Surprisingly, Tribe T also reconsidered their previous decision. It was understandable that they acted out of self-interest, as the amount of Aetherite they could contribute was insufficient for shared usage among all the tribes. From a pragmatic standpoint, the best solution for Tribe T was to withdraw from the group and retain control over their own tribe's minerals. Thus, Tribe B and Tribe T began constructing tall metal walls along their borders to protect their own efforts from going to waste.



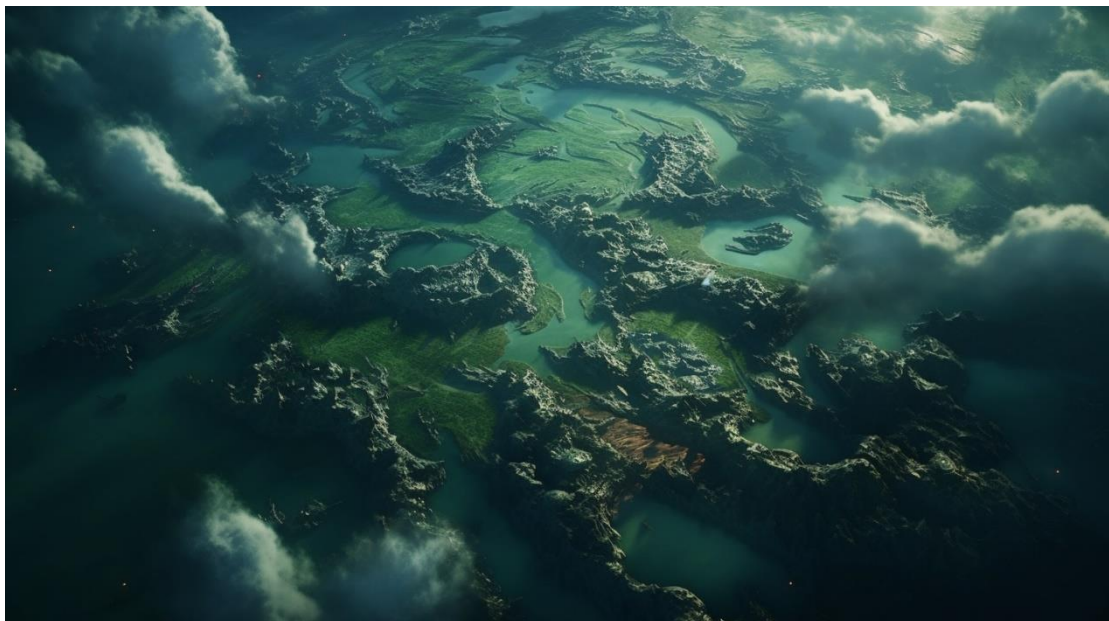
In response, the other tribes, who were left with no other choice, reacted swiftly. Tribe A, Tribe G, and Tribe D took the lead in forming a coalition and passed a decision for war, attracting half of the smaller tribes to join the mining conquest. The other tribes that had previously participated in the alliance did not support this war. However, faced with the current situation, they chose to cooperate with Tribe B in resisting the pillaging, under the condition of obtaining a portion of the Aetherite. After all, Tribe B still had Aetherite reserves remaining after addressing their own sphere problem. Several smaller tribes that had not initially joined the alliance also voluntarily joined the two major factions. Being neutral meant that regardless of which side emerged victorious, they would not receive Aetherite to address their own issues. Thus, the "defending side" led by Tribe B and Tribe T and the "sharing side" led by Tribe

A, Tribe G, and Tribe D formed opposing camps. They had no choice but to resort to violence to fight for their chances of survival.



This once peaceful continent experienced its first large-scale war. Advanced technology brought forth top-notch weaponry but also resulted in enormous casualties. The entire continent was enveloped in smoke and gunfire. Ironically, in such a hostile environment, the rampant green spheres remained unaffected, thriving as ever.

...Soon, these mysterious spheres of unknown origin engulfed the once magnificent but now ravaged continent.

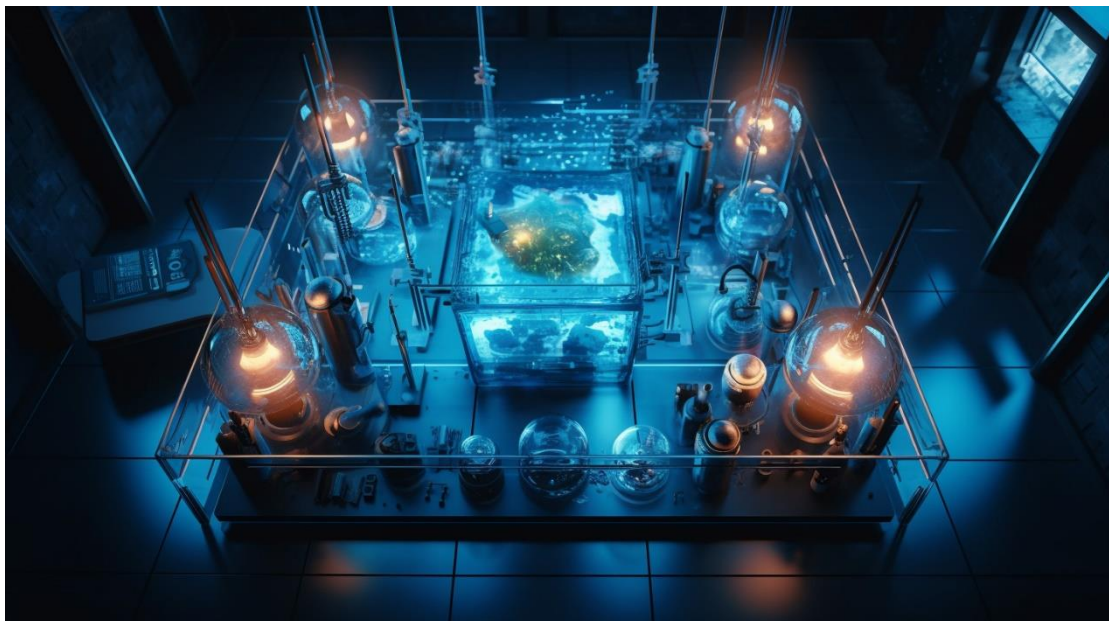


Chapter V : Failed Experiment

"The 33rd decentralized society experiment has failed. The third control group repeated the experiment under the same conditions three times, with an error margin within 0.2. The failure reason has been confirmed to be..."



Inside the laboratory, a mechanical female voice echoed. It belonged to Research Robot 0526, responsible for recording and reporting the results of the experiment. The laboratory was filled with flickering lights, and a large transparent tank was placed on a table. Countless instruments maintained the ecological environment within the tank, which contained the Byzantine continent.



0526 felt perplexed in the face of yet another failed experiment. Why did the powder she sprinkled have

such devastating power, causing the extinction of human civilization in 33 instances? It was nothing more than an ordinary algae in their world.