

Hivemind High

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Introduction

They told us that linking minds would make us faster, kinder, and smarter. They were right about two of those. What they didn't say—what no brochure can say—was how good it would feel. Imagine every answer right there, like a word on the tip of your tongue that finally clicks; imagine never being alone in a problem, not even for a breath. Imagine a warm current you can step into any time you're tired of swimming by yourself. That's the Weave. That's what we call the shared space when our

thoughts meet.

No one calls it the Academy for Distributed Cognition, not even the teachers. Around the dorms and the dining block and the fields stitched together with antenna spines, we call it Hivemind High. It sounds like a joke, like a dare we play on ourselves: can we be this close and still be okay? I arrived with a duffel full of clothes, a secondhand datapad, and a list of rules that made my stomach cold. Rule One: Consent is a toggle only you can set. Rule Two: Never coerce a link. Rule Three: Silence is a right. Rule Four: Shared work is shared credit. Rule Five: You can always step out. Simple, right? On paper, anyway.

Here's how it works, if you're wondering: a soft band kisses the back of your neck, reads the little languages nerves use to whisper, and sings back to them. When you enter a class, everyone can open a channel. The teachers call it quorum. You don't have to jump in, but you'll feel the current brushing your ankles. When you do step in, there's a hum at the edges of your skull, then the sudden impossible nearness of other minds. Not words at first. More like textures of thought, moods, trajectories. If someone across the room understands a theorem better than you, you feel the tilt toward comprehension. If someone is anxious, it prickles the link like static. Most days, the Weave is a chorus. On exam days, it's a storm.

I didn't come here to be absorbed. I came because my teachers at my old school said I was "hungry" in a way the Weave could feed. I came because my mom framed it as opportunity and my dad called it an experiment, like both could be true at once. I came because I wanted to see if community could be something other than cafeteria tables and algorithms arranging our feeds. I was good at going it alone: solo projects, quiet victories, the satisfaction of a proof no one helped me find. I liked my own head. It had messy corners, sure, but they were mine. I figured I could keep those corners and still learn the shorthand of together.

But consent in theory is different from consent when your friends look at you with bright linked eyes and ask if you're coming in. It is different when a group lab depends on your input and they're all already synced, humming and efficient, and you feel like the one kid unplugged at a dance. It's different when you discover that the Weave doesn't just share answers; it shares feelings, and sometimes you don't know where yours end and someone else's begin. If you've ever laughed just because your best friend was laughing, you know a little of it. Now scale that up. Multiply by a building, a campus, a generation.

This is a story about how we learn and who we are when learning becomes a team sport so deep the team lives in your head. It's about crushes that feel like feedback loops, secrets that slip across a link like sparks, and the weight of saying no when yes would make everything easier. It's about rules that try to keep us safe and the work of actually being safe, which is trickier. It's about teachers who remember what it cost to

be first and classmates who can't imagine a before. It's about the magic of thinking together and the stubborn, unglamorous miracle of being a person.

If you're looking for a warning, you'll find some here, but not the kind with red tape and sirens. If you're hoping for a love letter to the future, there's some of that, too. Mostly, it's a map with smudged edges. It's a record of the days I learned that "we" can be honest and generous and real, and that "I" doesn't have to be an island to be true. I can't promise I always chose right. I can promise I chose—over and over, with help, and sometimes against the current. If you've ever felt the pull to belong and the pull to be yourself at the same time, maybe you already speak some of the language. Let's learn the rest together.

CHAPTER ONE: Arrival at Hivemind High

The shuttle hissed to a stop at the edge of the clearing, its vents exhaling a faint ozone tang that clung to the morning air. I gathered my duffel, the worn datapad thudding against my thigh, and stepped onto the gravel path that wound between low, silver-sheened dormitories. Antenna spines rose from the ground like slender reeds, their tips catching the sun and throwing tiny rainbows onto the walkway. A soft hum vibrated through the soles of my shoes, a reminder that the Weave was already awake, humming beneath my skin even before I chose to tune in.

A group of students lingered near the main entrance, their faces lit by the faint glow of personal links. They moved in clusters, shoulders touching, heads tilted as if listening to a melody only they could hear. I felt a prickle of curiosity and a sting of self-consciousness; the way they seemed to share thoughts without speaking made the air feel thicker, as if I were walking through a warm bath. I adjusted the strap of my bag and forced a smile, hoping it didn't look as strained as I felt.

The dormitory doors slid open with a whisper, revealing a common room that stretched farther than I expected. Walls were lined with interactive panels that displayed shifting patterns of light—visualizations of thought flow, the teachers called them. In the center, a circular platform pulsed gently, inviting anyone who wished to step onto it and feel the collective rhythm. I hesitated, my hand hovering over the edge, then retreated to a nearby chair where I could observe without committing.

A girl with short, copper-colored hair approached, her link band flashing a soft amber as she neared. "First year?" she asked, her voice carrying a faint echo, as if she were speaking both aloud and through the link. I nodded, surprised at how easily the question formed. She smiled, and I felt a warm ripple travel up my spine, a sensation that was both hers and mine, though I couldn't tell where it began. "I'm Lia. Welcome

to Hive-mind High. Let me show you where you'll be sleeping."

We walked past rows of bunk beds, each equipped with a personal console that glowed softly when occupied. The beds were spaced to give privacy, yet the thin mesh of the link band meant that even in sleep, a faint current could pass between roommates if they allowed it. Lia explained that the dorms were divided into "clusters," groups of eight rooms that shared a common sync space for study sessions. I imagined the hum of eight minds working together, a sound that was both comforting and a little intimidating.

Later, after stowing my belongings, I followed Lia to the dining hall. The room was vast, its ceiling a lattice of translucent panels that filtered sunlight into a diffuse glow. Long tables stretched the length of the hall, each embedded with micro-antennas that allowed diners to link while they ate. The scent of spiced grain stew mingled with the metallic tang of the air filtration system, creating an oddly comforting aroma. I took a tray, chose a portion of protein paste and a side of crisp vegetables, and found a seat near the window.

As I ate, I noticed how the conversation flowed—not just in spoken words but in the subtle shifts of expression that seemed to ripple outward. A boy across the table laughed, and a faint chuckle echoed in my own chest, even though I hadn't heard the joke. I felt a momentary lift, a lightness that was not entirely my own, and I wondered how often I would mistake another's joy for my own throughout the day.

After lunch, we were ushered to the orientation auditorium. The space was circular, with tiered seating that faced a central stage where a tall figure stood beside a holographic display of a neural lattice. The speaker, Director Vahl, began with a calm tone, explaining the academy's mission: to cultivate thinkers who could harness the Weave without losing themselves. She spoke of consent as a personal toggle, of silence as a right, and of the responsibility that came with shared cognition. Her words were clear, but the underlying current of excitement in the room was palpable, as if the audience itself was humming in anticipation.

When the director finished, the lights dimmed and a soft chime sounded. Students rose, their link bands flashing in synchrony as they prepared to head to their first classes. I felt a tug at the base of my skull, a gentle invitation to join the flow. I resisted, choosing instead to walk beside Lia toward the science wing, where my first lesson awaited. The corridors were lined with living moss that glowed faintly underfoot, a bio-engineered touch meant to remind us of the organic roots of our technology.

The science classroom was a dome of transparent polymer, allowing a view of the sky that shifted with the time of day. Desks were arranged in concentric circles, each equipped with a neural interface port. Professor Kade, a woman with silver-streaked

hair and eyes that seemed to constantly scan the room, greeted us with a nod. She explained that today's lesson would be on basic signal modulation—how to adjust the strength of one's link without overwhelming the network. She demonstrated by linking with a volunteer, and a wave of soft blue light spread from their joined temples, illustrating the concept of bandwidth.

I watched, fascinated, as the volunteer's expression shifted from concentration to ease, then to a brief flicker of fatigue before they disengaged. The professor emphasized that the link was a tool, not a crutch, and that mastery lay in knowing when to amplify and when to retreat. I felt a spark of excitement; this was precisely the kind of challenge I had hoped for—a chance to learn a new language of thought while still keeping my own voice.

When the class ended, I found myself standing in the hallway, the echo of the lesson still resonating in my mind. A group of seniors passed by, their link bands flashing in a complex pattern that seemed to convey a shared joke. I caught a glimpse of laughter in their eyes, and for a moment I felt the urge to step into their rhythm. I paused, hand hovering over my own band, and reminded myself of the rule I had read in the orientation packet: consent is a toggle only you can set. I took a breath, let the impulse pass, and continued toward my dorm, deciding to observe first and participate later.

That evening, after dinner, I returned to the common room where a few first-years were gathered around a low table, their links engaged in a quiet sync. They were working on a collaborative puzzle, each contributing a piece of the solution without speaking. I watched as lights danced across their temples, indicating the exchange of ideas. The scene was both beautiful and slightly unsettling; the seamless flow made it hard to discern where one thought ended and another began.

I sat nearby, notebook open, and began to sketch the antenna spines I had seen outside. The act of drawing grounded me, reminding me that I still possessed a solitary hobby, a way to process the world on my own terms. As I shaded the lines, I felt a faint pressure at the back of my neck, a subtle nudge from the Weave, as if the environment itself was checking in. I acknowledged it with a mental note, then returned to my sketch, allowing the sensation to fade without acting on it.

Lia appeared beside me, her band glowing a gentle green. "You're doing great," she said, her voice soft. "It's okay to take it slow. The Weave isn't going anywhere." I nodded, grateful for her understanding. We talked briefly about our hometowns, about the movies we liked, about the strange feeling of hearing a song in your head that you hadn't chosen to listen to. The conversation flowed naturally, alternating between spoken words and the quiet undercurrent of linked feeling.

As the lights dimmed for night cycle, the dorms fell into a gentle hush. Each room's

lights lowered to a amber glow, and the link bands shifted to a low-power mode, emitting only a faint pulse. I lay on my bunk, the soft mattress conforming to my shape, and let my thoughts drift. The day's events replayed— the shuttle ride, the orientation, the first class, the quiet puzzle session—each a thread in the tapestry of my new life.

I thought about the duffel I had brought, the clothes that still smelled of home, and the datapad that held my old notes. I wondered how much of those fragments would remain distinctly mine as I learned to navigate the shared currents. The idea was both thrilling and a little terrifying, like standing at the edge of a pool and feeling the water invite you in while still hearing the call of the shore.

Sleep came gradually, the hum of the Weave a distant lullaby beneath my consciousness. I drifted with the awareness that tomorrow would bring new challenges, new opportunities to decide when to link and when to stay apart. In the quiet darkness, I held onto the simple truth that I had arrived with a suitcase, a datapad, and a resolve to explore the edges of both self and community—one mindful choice at a time.

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