

## Archaeological Survey Report #47,291

The ruins stretched along what had once been called the eastern seaboard, now submerged under forty meters of acidic brine. Kythara adjusted her scanner's frequency as she descended through the murky water, her partner Vexx trailing behind with the specimen containers.

"Fascinating species, this one," Kythara transmitted, her voice crackling through the water's interference. "Classic Type VII transition pattern. Look at these structures—" She gestured toward the skeletal remains of what had been Manhattan. "Remarkable architectural complexity for such a brief existence."

They had studied the timeline: a mere two centuries from initial atmospheric awareness to total systemic collapse. The temperature records showed the cascade—first the ice sheets, then the methane releases, finally the ocean chemistry collapse that had triggered what their historical reconstructions termed "the great dying."

"The last populations retreated to the polar regions," Vexx noted, examining a cluster of crude shelters built from salvaged metal. "Subsistence living for approximately 200 years. Diet primarily consisted of jellyfish and algae—the only protein sources that survived the pH shift."

Kythara's scanner beeped as it identified organic compounds in the sediment. "Here's what's truly remarkable, though. They *knew* this was coming. Look at these data fragments—climate models, emission projections, impact scenarios. They understood the chemistry perfectly."

"Insufficient intelligence to coordinate solutions at the required scale," Vexx observed, uploading a fossilized smartphone to their analysis buffer. "The cognitive architecture was fundamentally tribal. Could solve local problems brilliantly, but when the challenge required species-wide cooperation..." He gestured at the drowned cityscape.

A school of bio-luminescent squid—one of the new dominant species—drifted past the ruins of what had once been a stock exchange.

"Any artifacts worth preserving?" came the voice from their orbital station.

Kythara considered the question, her sensors detecting traces of music, literature, mathematical theorems in the quantum storage devices they'd recovered. Beautiful work, really. But the universe was vast, and consciousness would surely evolve again elsewhere, probably many times over.

"Negative, command. Standard Type VII documentation complete. Nothing anomalous. We'll see you back onboard."

As they ascended through the silent water, past the coral formations that had begun colonizing the subway tunnels, Kythara felt the familiar sense of perspective that came with archaeological work. Another civilization that thought it was permanent, that its particular pattern of matter and energy was somehow special, chosen, destined to persist.

Above them, the modified atmosphere blazed with colors that human eyes had never seen, beautiful in its own alien way.



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*"Negative, command. Standard Type VII documentation complete.  
Nothing anomalous. We'll see you back onboard."*