

Chapter 1

The chapter opens with the announcement of Joseph Ricardo's death, the last human born on Earth, who perished in a pub brawl in Buenos Aires at age 25. The news is delivered dispassionately on British state radio, coinciding with the narrator Theodore Faron's 50th birthday and New Year's Day. Faron, a solitary Oxford historian, begins a diary as a personal defense against existential emptiness, reflecting on his insignificance despite his connection to Xan Lyppiatt, England's dictator. He muses on humanity's futile efforts to preserve its legacy for hypothetical future extraterrestrial visitors, questioning whether they will understand or care about human achievements.

The narrative shifts to the global obsession two decades prior with identifying the last human birth, a contest ultimately won by Ricardo. His birth, officially recorded in 1995, became a symbol of national pride, though the search was acknowledged as inconclusive. Ricardo's fleeting celebrity faded as the world moved on, and his death now passes with little notice. Faron doubts anyone will revisit the search, highlighting humanity's resigned acceptance of its impending extinction and the futility of such symbolic gestures.

Faron critiques humanity's failure to uncover the cause of universal infertility, a blow to the supremacy of Western science and medicine. Despite past triumphs over disease, science has been unable to explain or reverse the sterility plaguing the species. This failure has shattered collective faith in science, once a revered "god" that provided comfort and solutions. Faron, though scientifically illiterate, shares in this disillusionment, comparing it to a deity's death. The inability to procreate, a basic biological function, has left humanity humiliated and resentful, stripping away its sense of control and purpose.

The chapter concludes with a reference to 1995 as "Year Omega," marking the beginning of humanity's decline. Public debates once centered on whether a cure for

infertility would be shared globally, but these discussions have since faded into irrelevance. Faron's reflections underscore the paradox of a civilization that mastered its environment yet remains powerless against its own extinction. The tone is one of resigned melancholy, emphasizing the fragility of human achievement in the face of an inexplicable and insurmountable crisis.

