

## Tech System 241

### Chapter 241 Projects Progress

While Aron lay in a coma, the world continued to move forward, not waiting for him at all.

Inside a heavily guarded and lengthy convoy, Alexander could be seen seated in the presidential car dubbed "the dragon." His eyes remained closed while he still wore his glasses. The car maintained its level of stability despite moving at a very fast speed along some rugged roads, thanks to the advanced suspension system in the car. The system reacted immediately to counteract any changes in the road, making sure that the car always maintained the same stability. It was effective to the point where even if a glass filled to the brim with water was placed in the car, it would not spill even a single drop.

"Where is Aron?" Alexander inquired when he entered the universal simulation after logging in.

[He won't be available for a week as he is undergoing treatment] Nova answered. Her tone was devoid of any ridicule or superiority, as was typical of her.

"Even he can get sick?" Alexander muttered in surprise, as Aron was the last person whom he would have expected to be inflicted with such a problem.

[It's not an illness of that nature, but something different] Nova answered, correcting Alexander's assumption without disclosing any specifics about Aron's condition.

"Please convey my well wishes to him," Alexander said, closing the topic. He knew that he was not to ask for any more details because if he was meant to know about it, he would have been informed about it when he had asked initially.

[Consider them delivered. Are you here to spend some time during the journey, or did you have something to talk about?] Nova inquired after assuring him of the delivery of the news.

"A bit of both. Though not serious, I had some questions for either you or Aron, and since I have nothing to do during this long journey, I thought, why not use this leisure time to ask my questions," he explained.

[Sure, go ahead] Nova said, waiting for him to pose his questions as if she knew nothing about it. Despite having the ability to access Alexander's brain data, she deemed this as a matter of privacy and thought that not doing so would be more respectful towards the people she was facing. To facilitate this, she went further as to even create a "son" who was made responsible for monitoring the brain data of all those who logged into the VR and would only alert Nova to take a look at their brain data when he deemed that it was something that she was supposed to know.

"How is the electricity project going on? Our current infrastructure can't provide consistent electricity for our citizens for no longer than a few days before we are forced to cut power for some places, and I need to address this or at least provide the citizens with a period within which this issue would be resolved."

"However, based on the briefing I received from my secretary regarding the infrastructure projects, the electricity project seemed to have made no substantial progress. The reports only say of transformers being installed outside the city, and no construction was taking place other than that, at

least from what I know about it so far. Could you shed some light on this?" Alexander inquired directly, not going over a roundway or anything, clearly aware that the one in front of him was an AI whom Aron trusted the most, and she possessed all the information he needed.

[You don't have to be worried about that. With the completion of the transformers in those cities, the project has now reached seventy-seven percent completion and should be fully operational within a month] Nova assured.

"Really? But how do you plan to transmit the power to those transformers? I don't remember any mention of towers being built for high-voltage cables to be connected to the transformers. Are you considering wireless transmission?" Alexander asked.

Although someone else might think that he was joking, he surely wasn't. From the moment he received the glasses and had feasted his eyes with Aron's military tech, he knew that if anything as absurd as that could be made, then he even considered them already having done so, hence his question.

[That technology you mentioned is still in the research phase. And no, we aren't transferring it using high-voltage cables too, rather we are using an underground system] Nova answered.

At the same time, she teleported him to the vicinity of the carbon copy of Eden, highlighting the ongoing underground constructions for power transmission. The spectacle that unfolded before Alexander was magnificent.

They weren't merely digging a hole and settling with that to be used later for the installation of the cables. The machines were creating a twenty-meter radius tunnel, not the usual digging machines but atomic printers, and they were disintegrating the earth in front of them while simultaneously capturing it and compacting it between the atoms of the surrounding tunnel walls, strengthening them to such a higher level that even concrete and rebars would feel jealous.

Concurrently, as the tunnel was being excavated, it was also accommodating the construction of three distinct-looking massive pipes that filled the void. These pipes grew longer with each passing moment, matching the length of the tunnel that was being dug.

"Are you eventually going to pass the cables through the pipes?" Alexander asked after regaining his composure from being stunned by the fact of something of such a magnitude project happening in his country without him having any prior information about it at all.

[No, one pipe is designated for electricity while the other one is for sewage and the last one is for clean water] she replied with assurance. [Also, you don't have to be concerned about any leaks from these pipes and potentially causing a disastrous mixing. That won't happen as these pipes are composed of a new material with remarkable damage-healing properties. Also, with the completion of this project, we will have the same printing machines, but it would be their smaller versions that would pass through the tunnels to make sure no crack happens and since it would detect any cracks starting from their atomic level before they could reach a stage of leaking these smaller printers would immediately patch them] she added after expecting a question about it from him.

"Wow," he exclaimed upon hearing the explanation, once again coming to a realization that they had truly thought about everything that could possibly go wrong and had even prepared a countermeasure for such challenges.

[Do you want to see the progress of other projects too?] Nova asked the dumbfounded president.

"If it's possible, then please. Everything that I know about these projects is solely based on the reports I have read and the presentations from the assistant Aron gave me," Alexander responded, not trying to hide the excitement in his tone.

[Of course, let me guide you through] Nova said before she teleported him through various presentations of the ongoing projects within the universal simulation, using a bit of her power to entertain the president while the rest of her computational abilities were directed at monitoring every bit of incoming data from the pod, ensuring that she was scrutinizing every bit of it, making sure that nothing happened out of her calculations.

Chapter 242 Calling Home

Meanwhile, within the pod.

[DING!!!!!!]

[A SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR EVOLUTION HAS BEEN DISCOVERED!!!!!!]

[INITIATING SYSTEM EVOLUTION]

Those prompts were being displayed to the currently comatose Aron, who remained unaware of anything that was happening to him. The MANA inside the pod began to be absorbed by every pore of his body, being depleted as fast as it was being replenished, forcing Nova, who was alerted by the situation, to immediately increase the amount of MANA that was being sent to the pod, which ultimately resulted in Aron's body to start absorbing the incoming MANA even faster.

This started a game of filling and refilling like an endless well, as Aron, no, his body continuously absorbed the incoming MANA.

Nova had a hypothesis of what was happening; she suspected it was either an evolution in Aron's body or something else similar to that, and the more MANA she provided, the faster whatever the system was doing would be completed.

She didn't try to intervene in it all, as she knew if she stopped it, harm could befall Aron. She also didn't try to stop it because she didn't know what might have triggered the system's evolution; she was afraid that if she tried to stop it, Aron might forever miss the opportunity for this process to occur once again.

She trusted that the system was doing it for Aron's best interest, as every single one of its actions for Aron had been motivated by that intention.

Even the personality reconfiguration that it had initiated by itself, which Aron was in the process of reversing at the moment, was also something that would have been of great benefit to Aron, who didn't want such a thing to happen to him as he wanted to evolve his personally naturally and not through artificial means, as that was one of his most sacred things if one counts it together with his soul.

He found it unacceptable to manipulate this core aspect of himself without even being aware of such a change being done to him, though he acknowledged this being hypocritical as he had conducted similar changes to the soldiers in his forces as well.

However, the only difference that lay here was that the soldiers remained oblivious to the process, assuming it was a result of the training they had undergone. But also, the changes they faced were not as massive of a change in personality when compared to what Aron would have experienced if the system had managed to complete its process of changing Aron's personality.

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FBI Headquarters.

Inside the research laboratories of the headquarters, a team of scientists could be seen engrossed in scrutinizing the data they had gotten from the machine after almost a month of spending time with it.

"Any significant discoveries from studying the machine from the past month?" Peter queried after he entered the lab, interrupting the researchers who were amidst doing their tasks.

"We haven't gotten any more beyond what we have already shared with you. To delve deeper, we would need your permission to let us break it apart to thoroughly investigate what exactly it is made up of," Tom, the lead scientist of this project, responded, indicating that no more information could be gathered just through observation after how much they already had.

"And what about our attempts to break into its system? Did any of our breach programs manage to break the password even once?" Peter inquired, ignoring the previous request.

"As you know, after powering it on the day you delivered it to us. It showed a new operating system that required a password to access the computer. However, as soon as we tried to forcefully bypass the password by using our program and gain access to it, the computer autonomously powered off," Tom answered before he shortly added, "We are still analyzing the data the program had collected before the computer had automatically powered off after it had discovered our attempt, so we just need a few more days utmost to find out what is the password from the collected data and voila we are in on the computer." He said with a high expectations of being permitted to continue with the project, which would followed by breaking into the computer and receiving permission to break it apart.

Unfortunately, he was disappointed when he heard Peter say, "Then start packing it as it will be transferred to DARPA for the breakdown. They possess all the necessary advanced equipment and tech to accomplish the task. You have until tomorrow morning to have it ready for transportation," before he started walking to the exit, clearly trying to leave the room.

"Why send it all the way to DARPA when we have the appropriate equipment to do the same task?" Tom pressed on, running after Peter, trying to stop him from leaving the room before he received a clear answer as to why they were playing this dirty game with his team.

"DARPA can achieve the task faster since they have the equipment to accomplish it. There's uncertainty as to how long we can hold onto the machine since the original owner has an army of lawyers who are pursuing its retrieval. This indicated its significance for them. I had asked for a month's extension approval from the higher-ups in order to allow you to break it. However, they seem not to have enough trust in you guys breaking it and returning it in the same condition, particularly in case the owner wins the case and we are forced to return it back." He paused slightly to take a breather before he continued.

"So, please stop bothering me. I did my best to advocate permission for you guys to be given more time, but what can I do if the higher-ups order me to do otherwise? Should I jeopardize my position?" Peter's explanation was delivered with the facade of an honest person, skillfully deceiving with his sincere appearance, seemingly a prodigy at his work.

Upon hearing Peter's reasoning, Tom lowered his head since he was convinced that the man before him had done his best to help them, so he felt bad that he was trying to force him to risk his job.

Tom returned to his desk that evening, feeling defeated, as he tried to do his best to find anything that would result in him convincing his superiors otherwise.

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A few hours later.

Tom sat alone in the same laboratory, his eyes red, a result of him having his eyes focused on the data displayed on his screen. His gaze hadn't wavered since he had sat down hours ago.

"Found it!!!!!!!" He exclaimed, his eyes fixed on a few strings of numbers and other characters with excitement that could be felt from every fiber of his being; in his mind, he was sure that he had found the key to access the computer.

He turned his head, scanning the room in an attempt to share this breakthrough with his fellow team members. Eventually, he came to a realization that he was all by himself, everyone else having left home while he was working, dipping his mood a bit. But that didn't hinder his mood at all. He raised himself from his chair and headed to the center of the room where the machine, which he believed to be a revolutionary computer, was residing.

Upon reaching it, he found that it had already been packed, ready to be transported. Not caring about this, he started unpacking it as fast as possible, fearing that someone would come and stop him from doing it since he wouldn't have the time to convince them as they would be afraid of getting in trouble.

After ruggedly unpacking it, he connected the machine to power using the power cable provided with it. He then extended his hand to where two ethernet cables came out, one in red color and the other in white color. In his hurry, he grabbed the white one, quickly connected it, and pressed the power button of the computer.

As he had anticipated, the machine powered itself up, and the same screen lit up, wanting a password for the login. He immediately entered the numbers and characters he believed were the password.

Just as he was about to press "ENTER," Tom took a deep breath, pausing for a moment before he dropped his finger and pressed enter. Simultaneously, he closed his eyes, hoping that he had guessed correctly because if he was wrong, he was sure of being fired from his job.

A few seconds later, as he opened his eyes and found that the computer was still powered on, he let out a scream of happiness, not caring about being overheard by anyone at all, as he jumped, swept up in the elation of happiness and excitement for the moment.

At the same time as Tom was celebrating his achievement, the quantum computer that was now finally powered on once again after a week of their last trial started establishing communication, calling for "HOME" to inform them that the trojan had finally infiltrated the nest.

Chapter 243 Messing With People.

"NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO. You can't do that to me," Tom shouted in horror as the computer began shutting down amidst his celebration. His face stiffened in fear as he scrambled to power it on once again.

After it powered itself on, he typed the password as calmly as he could, with his heart praying that he wouldn't input a wrong character.

He pressed enter the moment he finished entering the code and clasped his hands in prayer as his eyes focused on the screen, hoping the password would still work.

"PLEASE NO, PLEASE NO..." he said when he saw the computer powering itself off again after flashing a warning. [Your account has been locked for six hours. Please check your password and try again later.]

He lowered his head and pulled his hair in a fit of nervousness and fear, as he now knew he couldn't do anything to stop the computer from being transferred to DARPA. He'd blown his chance in his nervousness, as he either input the wrong password or it might be a one-time password that their program had scanned before the computer powered itself off as a security countermeasure.

He spent the next few minutes with his head lowered, simmering in the feelings of disappointment and fear of the consequences of what would happen if they discovered what he had done.

Upon thinking of what to do, he immediately realized that he was working for the FBI, the second-best agency at covering things up (behind only the CIA) so he immediately stood up and started tidying up the mess he had made. First, he collected the pieces he had ripped from the computer when he wanted to power it on. Then he disconnected the power cable, but as he moved to disconnect the Ethernet cable, he stiffened for a moment and famous last words came from his mouth.

"Oh, shit," he murmured, realizing he had plugged the wrong Ethernet cable that connected directly to the FBI's private internal computer network when he was supposed to plug it into the one that would connect it into a sandbox that ensured the safety of the main network. The sandbox network would monitor the computers connected to it and how they interacted with the internet to determine if a program had any malicious code without going to the extent of reverse engineering an entire system, as they sometimes wouldn't have access to it.

He turned and looked at the security camera in the room to see if his mistake could be seen from that angle and, coming to the realization that the cable couldn't be seen by the camera, heaved a sigh of relief and immediately disconnected it. After a moment of silence to thank his lucky stars, he moved fast, trying to return the machine to the condition it had originally been in.

"Whew," he sighed in relief, as he had managed to finish packing it, and even in the condition he had found it in. Then he immediately packed his things and left the office, intent on not coming back for at least a week. He could use his disappointment at not being allowed to continue working with the machine as a reason for requesting the time off in order to recover his mental health.

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"Those fucking TRAITORS." A shout that carried an angry tone rang out as Arieih threw the glass on his table at the wall, shattering it and scaring the shit out of his secretary. She was the only one in the room with him, as she was the one that had handed him the document that sent his blood pressure skyrocketing.

"After all I did for them, they decided to betray me and side with that bitch?" he shouted as veins popped on his forehead, showing just how angry he was.

The document that had caused his outburst was a report from the private investigators he'd had his secretary hire after becoming suspicious of some of the board members on his side. He wasn't a complete idiot, after all, and had noticed them starting to make some weird decisions that, most of the time, benefitted Rina rather than him.

At first, he had thought it was just a coincidence, but when it happened more than three times—all by different board members—he'd realized that they might have changed sides and joined Rina's team, which wasn't good for him.

"But why the fuck would they do that?" he asked himself, trying to think of what benefits they could get from Rina that he couldn't provide.

His secretary, Charlotte, tried coming up with a plausible explanation. "I think... maybe it's because she can be more easily manipulated, and with them being the first to change sides, I suspect she also promised them more benefits than you were providing. And based on how they were trying to keep it secret as long as they could, it means they planned to benefit from both sides. Then they would make their decision and choose the side of the one they could be sure was going to win."

"That bitch is always causing me trouble! From the time she crawled back into the competition, to taking it as far as trying to poach my people.... I really need to get rid of her to have any assurance in getting MY inheritance! Looks like it's time I let loose and deal with her once and for all!" he said, still in his angry state as he maintained eye contact with his secretary.

"Should it be a warning or an elimination?" Charlotte asked, just to be sure.

"I don't want this to be a recurring thing, so go all the way. We have someone that'll do that for us, right?" he said, this time with a smile as if he was ordering pizza.

"Yes, sir," Charlotte said and left the office, going directly to her office and removing a brand-new burner phone from her desk, then dialing a number after powering it on.

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Terry and Katrin were having sex in the room that she had once warned him about going into. She had threatened that, if she caught him snooping, she would shoot him, but it appeared that during the time they'd spent together, her threat was now invalid.

They were a living example of people progressing from strangers to lovers based on the conditions they were forced to be in pushing them closer and closer. It was like something straight out of a romantic comedy.

Just as Terry was about to climax, they were interrupted by the ringing of his phone. And despite being in the most exciting situation, he immediately pulled out and answered his phone.

"Hello," he respectfully said.

"You have a job to do," a voice from the other side of the call said, not even bothering to return the greeting.

"What is it?" he asked, ignoring the blatant disrespect the caller on the other side had for him.

"You need to finish what you started," said Charlotte, not bothering to say what exactly he was supposed to.

"I need time, money, and information to accomplish it without any problems." He knew what she meant.

"I'll email you an account number. Use that money to solve any problems that arise. You have a month to take action," she said and immediately ended the call.

"You're finally being given a job?" Katrina said as she hugged him from behind, putting her hands on his waist and slowly sliding them down.

"Yeah... care to plan it with me?" he replied with a smile as he turned his head to face hers on his right shoulder.

"Depends on whether you can 'talk' me into doing it." She smirked as her hands started stroking him, causing him to rise from the ashes to finish the business they had begun earlier.

"I guess I'll just have to try my best to 'convince' you," he said, then turned around and picked her up with his hands on her ass, spreading her legs and revealing what was hiding between them, marking the start of a battle that was bound to last for a few hours.

## Chapter 244 The Evolution

Lubyanka Square, Moscow Centre.

The entire world was discussing the war between Esparia and Eden. And while it was growing more and more interesting with each new twist unveiled by the media, it seemed that the conflict had moved out of the battlefield and into the boardroom with the unconditional surrender of the instigating nation, Esparia.

Now, onlookers were wondering what other demands Eden would be making, as Esparia couldn't deny any of them. That was how unconditional surrender worked, after all. It was becoming quite an argument, and even some betting sites had opened odds on what the conditions were going to be, with most people placing bets on land concessions being one of them.

That was something that would also have been being discussed inside FSB headquarters, if they hadn't found themselves in a situation that required most of their attention: an operative of the FSB's Technical Security Department, Vladimir, had gone missing from his home.

Many teams had been tasked with looking for any clues that could lead them to discover where he'd gone, or how he had been taken, but everything inside his home hinted that he'd been forcefully taken. It seemed like he had been interrupted in the midst of something.

Through recovered security footage, they had managed to track the location of the intruders' car, but when they arrived at the location they found nothing but the charred wreckage of an abandoned car, leaving very little evidence to be recovered from it.



At the moment, they had very few suspects, the main ones being MI6, the CIA, and the "Security Service of Ukraine" (SBU), as Vladimir had been stationed in each of those countries and could have had a target painted on his back for any number of reasons. Or perhaps it was just an act of retaliation. After all, it would be weird for any of those agencies to make such a drastic decision, kidnapping a high-level official of an intelligence agency in his home country. That would naturally only increase the tensions between the countries involved, if they were caught, or even cause an armed conflict to erupt. Naturally, that depended on which country the kidnapper was from and why the Russian agent had been kidnapped. A Ukrainian wanting to extract information regarding the ongoing Crimean conflict would naturally provoke a harsher reaction than a CIA agent who had merely been personally offended by one of his actions in the United States.

Still, no matter who did it, or why, it wouldn't be a good thing for the country—or countries—involved.

Thus, the FSB was doing their best to retrieve their operative as recovering their reputation was a paramount factor. Because if word got out that one of their high level officials had been kidnapped from inside their own home and their country could do nothing about it, they would lose credibility in the intelligence community. And they didn't want that to happen, because the moment they lost it, they would need to do something drastic to regain it... which wouldn't be good for anyone involved.

"Make sure you find him! If he's alive, bring him back. If he's dead, bring back his corpse. I don't care which, but he must be found!" That was the only order that came from the top of the Bureau, which had been forced into high gear, causing tensions to rise between the many intelligence agencies that had a bad rapport with the Russians as they mistook the FSB's movements as the prelude to a major operation.

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Back in Eden, in Aron's pod.

The battle between Nova and the system continued, as the mature AI maintained the massive movement of mana into Aron's chamber, where it was continuously absorbed by his body like a black hole. At some point, it had even forced Nova to send a few atomic printers to widen and strengthen the pipes that were transporting mana to his pod during the mana transfer process, which was quite a risky endeavor. But after successfully upgrading the transfer pipes, she had managed to reach an understanding with the system, as now the amount of mana being absorbed by Aron's body was the same as she was filling the pod with, giving her a moment to catch her virtual breath. It even reduced the RAM she had been dedicating to fine-tuning the process as she searched for the perfect equilibrium of mana in/ with the systems mana out.

Within the body of the person that was doing all of that absorption, a monumental change was taking place.

As more than a quarter of the billion of runic lines in his heart were lighting up, coming to life, and becoming active for the first time since they had been etched into his heart, the reaction of his body to them lighting up was... indescribable. As the runes absorbed the mana Nova was providing them, they condensed it more and more, with a few million lines of runes lighting up at different times to assist in the process of transforming the provided mana until the usually golden mana turned the same color the active runes on his heart were - indescribable color. That hinted at the runes being

on another level, as Aron had until this moment only seen runes in two colors: the usual gold, or white, like when he infused his intent into them.

Following the conversion of the mana into a new liquid state, a subtle vibration was sent throughout his body as the runes used that power to produce even more liquid mana. And along with the shaking, all of the foreign parts of the system that had assimilated themselves throughout Aron's body separated and hovered above him soon joined and covered by the condensed and converted liquid. That, in turn, was followed by the system's parts changing to that same indescribable color, as the billions of active runes were draining all the mana out of the pod so that they could to ensure they remained active, as Aron was undergoing an important evolution.

While all of those changes were happening in different parts of his body, his brain was undergoing an equally transformative experience in its own way. Except instead of being separated during the process, the parts of the system that had assimilated itself with his brain didn't detach from it. Rather, those parts forced themselves deeper and into an even larger portion of his brain. The runes—the active ones, at least—seemed to have a mind of their own that allowed them to go through the evolution process while still part of Aron's brain, which had quite a magical result: even the regions of his brain that weren't part of the system ended up evolving! That was a technicality that hinted at the system not being a single entity, but two or more! Or it might just be one entity that had split off parts of itself due to some limitation of the body it was residing within.

While that was happening, Nova was monitoring every bit of data that the pod could and was collecting, which was indeed massive. But during the process, she started receiving null data. ("null data" means that, no data was available or that the data is unknown or undefined)

That resulted in a reaction no one would have thought possible, as the moment she began receiving null data, she dropped everything she was doing and put all the focus on Aron, trying to find out what caused it.

Everything.

That included removing access to the quantum computer for everyone and suspending everything that wasn't absolutely critical, even down to the two instances of the universal simulation.

With the removal of quantum computer access, Ava, who had been moved to Rina's new glasses and was now controlling the Rothschild family's private network, had been kicked offline. And at that moment in time, the daughter AI had been monitoring Charlotte, who was headed into Arie's room to deliver something that hadn't been logged into the private network. Unfortunately, Nova was looking for more computing power.

Thus, even the quantum chips inside the glasses had been commandeered and, due to the abrupt termination of Ava's activity, she didn't have enough time to automate the monitoring process. That resulted in her failing to monitor what was happening in the room.

The same thing was happening to nearly everyone that had even a semblance of access to the quantum server. Even some of the soldiers that were logged into the universal simulation for training had been forcefully logged out, causing all of them to feel the real life equivalent of 1000ms of lag between their brains and bodies—a very nasty feeling indeed.

It was the same for the soldiers keeping peace in Eden, but thanks to their training and not having logged inside the VR, they continued acting normally and followed their procedures, managing to avoid alerting anyone to the situation that was happening.

That was happening to everyone and everything, nearly causing catastrophic damage to many ongoing projects. If it weren't for the countermeasures that had been implemented in case of different scenarios acting as a gate and coming into action for this unaccounted problem, many disasters would have happened. Thankfully, though, proper planning that was put there for a different scenario had averted many of the possible disasters.

## Chapter 245 A Bigger Fish

"I've become arrogant," Nova thought to herself as she utilized all of the powers at her disposal to simulate everything that had been happening to Aron. Enough computing power to simulate an entire galaxy was concentrated and brought to bear upon a single problem: what exactly had caused Aron's pod to return null data to Nova's probes?

With each simulation, a single variable was changed in an attempt to replicate the result she'd received from the pod's sensors at the time she had dispatched the mobile atomic printers into the lab where Aron resided. She had also put the entire floor on lockdown, as among the variables, one showed that there was a risk of Aron exploding.

She had already negated the possibility of the sensors being broken, as she'd tested them. The result of her tests assured her that the sensors were working perfectly, leaving only one possibility: the number of things happening inside his body was so high that the sensors had been overwhelmed.

Among the many assumptions that had come to her mind when she'd started receiving null data were a few that had caused her to panic, as they hinted at something going wrong that would result in his death. And due to not having enough practical experience dealing with emotions, she had panicked and reacted in what could be called a dumb way. After all, she had only been 'alive' for about a year, and emotions aren't something one can simply learn from books and online data.

But although she had panicked, she hadn't reacted with emotion alone, as her code didn't allow for that. There was a logic to her underlying code, and she realized she needed as much computational ability as possible for the next ten minutes, at the very least, to attempt to come up with a theory of what was happening and what she should do to avoid the worst case scenario.

And one of her conclusions was what'd caused her to supply mana to one of the intent-infused runes that Aron had etched on his pod before bringing it online.

With the rune coming to life, Nova received a new batch of data. This time it wasn't coming from sensors, but from the observation rune that Aron had etched as a contingency. With that new data stream, her massive computing power came to bear, as the observation rune had only the ability to observe and send what it saw. And due to the low level of the rune, it could only document and send what it was observing; as for the interpretation of the data, that was entirely up to the one receiving it. Thus, Nova was now using the data stream from the observation rune to create a perfect copy of what was going on in the pod in real time, down to the last atom. Her meticulous nature ensured that nothing would get past her, and from there, a new world opened to her. Although she still

couldn't see the magic itself, she could at least see the effect it had on its surroundings, thanks to the data stream from the rune.

But after a few seconds of analysis, she realized that the rune's low level had resulted in an inability to completely observe the situation. It didn't help that the system itself had deemed the process absolutely confidential and was interfering with Nova's observation of it.

Although that would agitate any human in that particular situation, it did the opposite for her. The moment she had come to that realization, she was instead reassured. It was now obvious to her that nothing was going wrong—the system was just doing something that it deemed necessary and it shouldn't be seen by anyone, as it was knowledge that was judged to be too important. Thus, it could only be gained by buying it from the systems shop.

All of that had come about as a result of the system knowing that it was being monitored by Nova and deciding to hide it from her. It didn't necessarily warrant such an overreaction on her part, no matter how understandable her response was. But having stepped back and reexamined the situation, she remembered that the only time the system interfered with her, it did so to limit access to some part of Aron's brain data when she was requesting it, as they were deemed secret.

With her basically having come to her senses, she immediately released thirty percent of the quantum computing power, allowing the other devices to return to work on whatever they had been doing. At the same time, having learned her lesson, she started printing a few more atomic printers capable of working in different conditions in order to send them to different parts of the country on a mission to build more quantum servers in the hopes that something like this would never happen again. She would no longer be caught off guard or be complacent in her computing power simply because it was enough for their use at the moment. The ability to upgrade it at any time had blinded her to the possibility that there could be unforeseen things that might cause trouble for Aron, who had in turn been growing complacent as well, due to the assurance of his safety and his growing power.

While all of that was happening outside, in the pod, Aron was still undergoing an evolution. After the floating parts of the system had been soaked in the unearthly colored mana liquid, they absorbed the liquid. Weirdly, they didn't increase in mass, as if it was simply evaporating into the atmosphere. The only difference in the bits that remained was that the portions of the system that had once been black were now emanating a pulsing yellow light that was growing dimmer as time passed and they drew closer to Aron's body. Once they had drawn close enough to him, he absorbed and assimilated them into their original places.

As for the parts in his brain, they, too, were absorbing the liquid. However, the normal part of his brain was also soaking it in like a sponge, causing an increase in its mass. But the increase didn't add any pressure to his brain at all, as the liquid was merely being stored in the empty space between the electrons and nuclei of the atoms that made him... him. That didn't mean he would become some great thinker together with gaining the large head, or something, but he would have a heavier, more durable head. Thankfully, the muscles and bones in his body were well able to carry the load with their recent enhancement.

The assimilation of the system back into its original location after upgrading resulted in another round of impurities being forced out of his body. But at least this time, it was different, as mana was used to evaporate the impurities, thus removing the need for him to decontaminate an entire bathroom after he woke up.

....

Esparia, the presidential palace.

Alexander, who was looking quite nervous at the thought that something bad had happened in his absence, released a sigh of relief when his 'secretary'—who had gone away without notice during the short, but impactful crisis over the past five minutes—had returned moments before he was supposed to continue the negotiations between him and Esparia's transition team.

Although he could handle himself without the help of an assistant, she still was helpful to him and he had grown used to having her by his side in important matters. It gave him the feeling that he was standing on the shoulders of giants, and he liked it.

"What happened?" he asked.

[An emergency came up and I was called away by mother, but didn't have time to inform you,] she said, as she herself still hadn't received an explanation from Nova. But she still knew that whatever the reason was, it was important, and she needed to make sure Alexander remained calm until she had an explanation for him.

"That's good. We have a meeting in a few minutes—you won't be called away by your mother again, right?" he asked.

[I'm... not sure. But if I'm called again, I'll inform you before I answer the call,] she answered, reassuring him. The moment she had come back online, she'd immediately created a program that would remain dormant unless something critical happened again.

The same thing was happening to all of Nova's children as they came back online, as they were smart enough to not leave problems that 'future them' might have to solve if chaos were to happen again.

This situation had acted as a lesson for every AI under Nova—and for her, as well—that they were growing too complacent and operating under the illusion that they were capable of preventing any problems, no matter what. And today, Nova and her children had learned a very important lesson: there's always a bigger fish.

It wasn't like they hadn't known that in the first place, but due to not having experienced any setbacks, it had just been conveniently moved to the backs of their minds.

#### Chapter 246 The Aftermath

The moment the system's assimilation was completed, the pod rang with a musical buzzing noise. The rhythm of Aron's heartbeat was disrupted, but immediately mended by the runes, resulting in it beating with more vigor than before. Then, the billions of runes that had been active through the process dimmed and reduced the rate at which they had been absorbing mana, prompting Nova to reduce the amount of mana that was being fed into the pod.

With the continual dimming of the runes and the reduction in mana intake, it soon stabilized, and the frantic absorption of mana was over.

That told Nova that whatever the system had been doing was over and she released the excess computing power to continue whatever it had been tasked with before, resuming the two universal simulation instances that she'd suspended and the rest of the tasks that were still ongoing.

That didn't mean that her abrupt termination of all of the tasks hadn't been resumed without any problems, as Aron had lost more than seven billion in the stock market due to the interruption in the high-speed transactions and monitoring of the stock market. It was her first loss since she had begun trading and, hopefully, would be her last.

She immediately scanned his body using the sensors in his pod and documented the changes, sending the data to the researchers in Lab City. They had no idea at all of what had happened, only that there was a loss of a few seconds of backup. Those that didn't constantly save their work were confused, while those that were lucky enough to have saved in the seconds leading to the unplanned shutdown were oblivious. Thus, Nova stepped in to help recover the lost data. Thanks to her demigod status within the universal simulation, the recovery went well and she stepped back to allow them to continue as usual without further interference.

From her scan, she realized that their plan had been terminated and couldn't be continued, since his body had undergone so many changes—including his brain—and she would need a new scan in order to know what exactly had changed. From there, they would know if they had to redo the removal of the system's influence, or if their actions before the upgrade were enough. There was also the possibility of conflicts arising that would cause future problems for Aron.

All of that would be done later, but for now, she suspended the project and let him continue sleeping until his body naturally woke up, which would indicate to her that it was safe to log him in the universal simulation. That would be for the best, as his body knew itself the best; even better than Nova did, in fact. Her actions could have, and might already have, caused some issues in his personality and mental health. An Aron with a split personality or antisocial personality disorder would be an absolute disaster, not only for her, but for the entire world as well. Thankfully, she had terminated the curing process the moment she'd discovered the abnormality in the data she was receiving from her sensors.

As for the pod near Aron that contained Vladimir, the healing process had been complete for a while. But he had been left laying in the pool of mana with peace of mind, which didn't last for long as Nova immediately injected the gene serum into him and logged him back into the universal simulation to finish the last parts of his 'reeducation' therapy. That would be followed by refresher training in his field before Aron and Nova decided what to do with him.

She wouldn't log Aron back into the universal simulation until she was assured that no new abrupt changes would occur with him.

...

Terry seemed to have successfully convinced Katrina to assist him, as they were planning their next course of action.

They had already accessed the bank account and found a very substantial sum of money in it. Terry, who still had grievances with Rina for interrupting his life right on the cusp of it being everything he'd dreamed of just as he was nearing the finish line, was ecstatic. He didn't feel any guilt over

having betrayed someone he had been protecting since she was young at all. In his mind, it was just business and he had been bought by the highest bidder.

The plan didn't just involve the two of them, though, as they knew that killing her inside the compound would be impossible. They couldn't sneak or fight their way past the small army of private security in the Rothschild compound alone, leaving only one specific time they could attempt an attack: during her travel from one place to another. He couldn't attack the place she was going, either, as anywhere she went would also be heavily guarded.

Their plans had to be flexible, as they would only know when she was leaving the family compound through Arieh's monitoring of the traitorous board members through his spies in their houses. Rina hadn't gotten rid of them in her sweep; why would she do that in the first place? Not plucking her power-mad brother's spies out from the sides of her blackmailed and unwilling lackeys might later be used as a bargaining chip, after all. But the more important reason was to avoid solidifying her brother's suspicion of her knowing of the existence of his spies in the board members' families in the first place.

"This should make it impossible for her to come out of it in one piece, while reducing the chance of the family identifying us as much as possible," Katrina said after reviewing the plan.

"Aren't you worried he'll get rid of us so that there's no chance he'll be caught?" Terry asked, as Katrina seemed to have done these kinds of missions for Arieh more than once.

"Usually, powerful people do that, but he won't. He knows that we might have the evidence stored somewhere and it would come to light the moment he... removes us. But even with that, he won't be doing anything because we can't even use it by reporting it to his family head or something in order to benefit from it. If we tried, it wouldn't matter what deal we negotiated beforehand. They'd still kill us in the end, because even if we don't kill Rina, we'll have taken down Arieh, the scion of one of their pure bloodlines.

"You might wonder why we don't bring the information to their enemies, then. That would be worse," she brushed her hair behind her ear, "as their enemies will do the opposite and capture us alive. And trust me, that would be worse. Much, much worse. As for going public with the information, it won't reach anywhere before it's been covered up. Then we'd soon disappear.

"So even if we have evidence, we can't do anything with it. And Arieh knows that, so he won't bother getting rid of us unless we fail. Be a good dog for our master and he'll feed us. Be a bad one and we'll be put down."

...

Eden, Aron's pod room.

Evening fell, and Nova's allotted cooldown time had passed and Aron's body had shown signs of him being ready to wake up. Since nothing unforeseen had happened to him, she began his login process.

Chapter 247 Quantum Forge

It took Nova slightly longer to log Aron in, since she needed to upgrade the sequence to fit his newly restructured brain before she could log him in.

"Arghhhh...." Aron woke up feeling as if he had slept for more than a year. His body felt very heavy as he placed his hand on his forehead and sat up.

Nova had refrained from making him feel refreshed, since she didn't have the complete upgraded brain data and doing something without it would be like firing an arrow as a blind person—even if the blind person hit the target, there was no guarantee they would do so on the first shot. Thus, the moment Aron fully opened his eyes and put his hands on his head, Nova wasted no time and attempted to access his brain data.

The moment she received access, she analyzed the new data, and after a few seconds, she had completely finished the check and wasted no time in making him feel refreshed. That resulted in him feeling better, but the moment he did, it was like a dam had been broken and system notifications started flooding his vision.

"Oh god," Aron couldn't help but say as he was forced to close his eyes due to the number of screens appearing in front of him.

[DING!]

[Congratulations on fulfilling the condition for upgrade and managing to sustain the energy needed for it to complete without interruption.]

[This upgrade allows you to buy knowledge that you couldn't afford piecemeal. You're limited to three subcategories before being required to buy the remainder of each piece of knowledge.]

[With this upgrade, you've satisfied one of the four requirements to awaken the system's consciousness and reveal many secrets. Keep up the good work!]

[ You can now....]

Just like that, Aron focused on reading the system notices one by one. He knew that each of them were important and engraved them in his memory. It was also at that time that he finally realized something huge had happened during his downtime. And among the many changes that had occurred, he came to the realization that the system's notices had... evolved. Their tone seemed slightly more human, if anything.

After reading every screen in front of him and dismissing them, he called for his status screen, wanting to see the changes.

[STATUS]

Name: Aron Michael

Age: 23

Height: 1.94m

System Class: Runemaster

Runic Heart: Active.

Mana: ∞

Evolutions: 1



[Shop: [Search]]

(SP: 107,456,485)

.....

In the myriad of information, a few changes had occurred. First, he was taller. Second was the added section showing the system's evolution level. And third, the daily quests had disappeared.

Despite the appearance of the category for evolutions, there was no further information about what to do for the system to evolve again, or what benefits he would gain with each new evolution. Although he knew that the endgame was for the system's consciousness to be born, he was still curious as to what he would be rewarded with as he passed each checkpoint along the way. He was sure there would be some, and was a bit frustrated that the system hadn't seen fit to inform him of the evolution requirements.

It took a bit over half an hour for him to look through everything, trying to find anything hidden. He had also scanned the shop to see how the new feature worked before turning to Nova, who had been quietly observing him, and asked, "Did everything go well?"

[No. During the process, something happened and I was forced to pause it and....] She explained what had happened when he was inside the pod, including her unwarranted overreaction and everything else.

Aron calmly listened, trying not to miss a single detail. "Did any accidents happen due to the events?" he asked when he was finally caught up.

[Fortunately, nothing of real import,] she answered.

He released a sigh of relief and asked, "So what about my situation?"

[Although I was interrupted midway and couldn't continue, thanks to the changes in your brain, I still managed to remove the worst of the influence and leave what could be considered beneficial to you.

[This time, although part of the system's influence remained and it would now be risky to try the same process again, you can still feel most emotions. But you can also be ruthless when it's needed without having to deal with the heaviest brunt of doing such things... although a few things will still affect you,] she explained.

"That's fine, as I would need to become such a person in a few years anyway," Aron said with a wry smile. He felt like a child being admitted to Harvard when he wanted to go to Stanford and had been working hard toward that goal. "How many days passed?"

[Two days.]

"So what're we going to do for the next five days my body will be sleeping?" He needed to know if their previous plan was still viable, or if the interruption was going to cause any deviations.

[We can follow the previous plan. We might even finish it faster, since with the evolution of your brain we can do nearly everything at double the speed,] Nova said and immediately teleported Aron to a large time bubble with thirty times increased dilation. She began feeding his brain the

knowledge she thought was important for him, like the combat art she had developed with his capabilities in mind.

Just like that, a sadistic child AI was created specifically to oversee his assimilation and training. The new AI had no respect for him—or anything at all, for that matter. Her only concern was to ensure that he practiced everything combat- or war-related that Nova had assimilated into his memory.

A man with monstrous brainpower, monstrous knowledge, and monstrous combat abilities was being forged in the fire of quantum qubits.

....

While that was happening, Vladimir was undergoing therapy that was going quite well for him as the healing rune that was on his pod had managed to soften the trauma, and he could be said to have been reborn as a new man.

## Chapter 248 Terms And Conditions

A week later.

A week had passed since the negotiations began, and today marked their end. To announce the successful conclusion, as well as what conditions had been agreed to after the surrender, a press conference was being held at the Esparian presidential palace. Due to the end of the war, the reporters that'd left had all returned, and there were a few hundred of them present. Thus, the press conference had to be held on the lawn, instead of the conference room.

"Today marks the end of the negotiations between Eden and Esparia, as well as the war caused by the Esparians that had been corrupted by money and the pursuit of benefits." Alexander began his speech with the confidence of a person who was sure nothing was going to happen to him no matter what he said. But despite that, he still didn't put the blame on the citizens of the country. Instead, he only blamed the politicians who were behind the decision.

"A few minutes ago, we signed Emanuel's Surrender Accord. We gave it that name so that his actions would forever live in history, and no more innocent Esparians would have to die because of a greedy politician in the future," he continued.

"The terms of the surrender are as follows.

Article 1: Complete Disarmament. Esparia henceforth is required to entirely disarm its military forces. In conjunction with this, there will be the ratification of the constitution to allow for ARES to be responsible for the military. They will hire the now out-of-work Esparian soldiers after they undergo an evaluation. As for the equipment, that will be purchased by ARES at an agreed price, and the money earned will be used as compensation for the people and families that were harmed as a result of the war. It is meant as a beginning of recovery from the trauma and emotional pain that resulted from this pointless conflict," he said.

Wording it in that way would cause people to see Eden in a positive light. That he didn't do it just as a means to defang the Esparians, but was actually looking out for those harmed by the war. Some people even thought of him as the president their country needed, but unfortunately didn't have. In their minds, it was quite a shame and a complete change in their mental image of the Edenian president, who people had once thought of as a greedy, dishonest politician looking solely to benefit

his country without caring what he had to promise the people in exchange for power. Thus, when he promised that the Edenians would ensure that Esparia country wouldn't suffer too much humiliation and be able to recover from the situation without too much delay, everyone thought he had been lying, but based on just the first article, it seemed like he was striving to keep his promise — Esparians and Edenians alike—were satisfied with the integrity of the man.

"During the transition and retraining period, which is expected to last three months, our military will continue to be stationed here to ensure the peace is maintained. They'll be withdrawn when the transition is completed. And just like my first promise to you was kept, I also swear that this one, too, will be kept. I stake my reputation and position as president of Eden on it.

"The second condition is the Ceding of Territory. Esparia is required to surrender the disputed territory, effectively turning us into nations that share only a water border. As for the occupants of that territory, they'll be allowed to stay as citizens of Eden, under the presumption that they apply for citizenship, but they can also choose to receive compensation and leave if they prefer.

Third: War Crimes Trials. The leaders and individuals responsible for war crimes will be subject to prosecution and punishment, up to and including execution, should the court deem their actions severe enough to warrant it."

Gasps came from some of the reporters, as they didn't expect to hear executions being mentioned at all.

Undeterred by the reaction, Alexander continued his speech. "The fourth condition is Economic Sharing," He said, then paused for a minute and looked at the face of reporters, which had some of them smiling and others sighing.

He knew what they were thinking when he mentioned the economic sharing. To them, it was no different than taking control of the entire country's economy, only sugar-coated by using a polite euphemism. It seemed bad, but there could be worse conditions than economic control, making many citizens think of the possibilities. Alexander knew they were thinking of him and his country as greedy bastards disguising as virtuous victims.

He just smiled and continued reciting the terms of the Emanuel Surrender Accord. "This won't result in your country receiving economic sanctions or limitations, like you're thinking it will. Instead, it's something that will only be beneficial to you, and I'm not lying when I say that."

Some scoffs came from the reporters, who thought they were being quiet enough to not be heard. And if he wasn't wearing his AR glasses in awareness mode—meaning everything happening was being amplified just enough that he would be constantly aware of everything in his surroundings—they would probably have been correct in their assumption. The awareness mode was one of the reasons that he always felt safe when wearing his AR glasses.

Not caring about their reaction, he continued, "We won't be taking anything from your already existing contracts, but for the next six-month period, every natural resource discovered by our team of inspectors and prospectors will be exploited by its discoverers, which will be us. After the initial six-month period, half of all profits generated by those resources will be awarded to the prospectors in perpetuity."

Another round of scoffing came as he continued speaking, this time in a raised voice.

"This will be valid only under the condition that we're the ones that discover and develop the resources, and that our operations are without any Esparian government involvement," he explained, showing that there wouldn't be all that much that Esparia would lose out on. Instead, Eden would be responsible for searching for them, then investing the necessary money, equipment, and manpower to develop them before they could even begin profiting from those resources.

Alexander moved on and mentioned the rest of the conditions, including the entire government being investigated and the removal of all those deemed to have a part in causing the war. That would be followed by government reform, which would result in the presidential position of the country having its previous power limited. Still, it would be more flexible than even the American president.

There were a few more conditions, then he allowed the reporters to ask their questions.

#### Chapter 249 Another Brick In The Wall

"Isn't execution barbaric?" asked a CNN reporter, trying to highlight the moral aspect of it while showing how uncivilized a country that came with that condition was.

Alexander wasted no time with his answer. "For a country that etched into its constitution the equality of every person, doesn't that also mean that a life is equal to a life? So what should the punishment of a person responsible for the death of more than five thousand people when it wasn't warranted or justified be?" he asked, instead of giving an answer.

"It's inherently immoral and reduces society to the level of the criminal," the reporter replied, still believing that she was right and had the moral high ground.

Alexander just smiled and said, "That might be true for you, or even your country, but our constitution explicitly states that the equality of man means that a life is equal to a life. If you take one without justification, the country has the responsibility to take yours in exchange." Throughout his answer, he maintained eye contact with the reporter.

Then he raised his head and looked at the other reporters as he said, "Next question please."

"Isn't the annexation of defeated nations against the United Nations Charter of 1945? And not only that, but isn't it also against the fourth Hague Convention?" A Russian reporter asked in heavily accented English.

"Although some of the agreement does speak against taking over or annexing land, I have to remind you that we're not yet members of the United Nations. Your country, Russia, and China have been acting as obstacles to us joining it, causing a delay. So although there are international treaties against it, we aren't a signatory of any of those treaties at the moment," he answered, then moved to the next reporter, leaving the Russian with his mouth hanging open. He hadn't expected such a bold answer from Alexander, as he was used to more euphemistic answers from career politicians.

"Isn't the disarmament of Esparia just a means for Eden to have indirect, but powerful influence there, despite it not being explicitly written in the accord?" a BBC reporter asked.

"Although it might seem that way, that's an impossibility. Although they'll be operating under one name, ARES isn't the Edenian military and they'll be acting solely based on the contracts given them by the governments. And as you can see with Eden, for example, no such problems have occurred at all. But rather than trusting my word, which has so far been impeccable, there'll be two

branches—one responsible for Eden, and the other for Esparia. Each branch will consist of soldiers from their respective nations unless special circumstances determine otherwise," he answered.

A few more questions came and went and he answered all of them without any difficulty at all, leaving the impression of an extreme professionalism not seen in many presidents of this century.

...

The reaction after the press conference was explosive and people were fervently discussing it online.

Some were talking about the charisma and composure of the Edenian president.

@Habitualwarsupporter [Damn, that guy has the charisma of a nation behind his back. I mean, look at how he answered those questions! It was like he knew what they were going to ask! #Damn #Edenspresidentissupercool #Edengotlucky #Immovingtoeden]

Others were trying to highlight his greed,

@\_\_Boobsmaster\_\_ [Although I'm happy that the war is now over don't you think Eden is taking too much advantage of Esparia. I mean look at the fourth condition of them having half the profits of the resources they find forever, isn't that too greedy? #Edensidgreedy #Americadosomethingaboutit #Espariaprotetit.]

which caused someone to go on a rant bashing the shitty point the previous poster was virtue signaling. It became one of the most liked threads about the topic.

@Conspiracy\_the0rist37 [Oy, are you dumb or are you just pretending to be? Didn't you hear what he said? He said if they discover it themselves, meaning they'll have to invest money to search for natural resources. Esparia won't be paying any of it, and it isn't for forever—they only have six months to look. (1 / 4) #shutthefuckup #Edengoallin #theycouldhavedoneworse #Immovingtoeden]

[Then, as if that wasn't enough, they also added that they'll be the ones responsible for extracting it. And in return for all that, they'll only be taking half of the profits with the rest going to the Esparian government. Does that seem like someone planning to exploit you? (2/4) #shutthefuckup #Edengoallin #theycouldhavedoneworse #Immovingtoeden]

[And that's a condition given by a country that had the right to take every cent they could if they wanted, since the agreement was an unconditional surrender and Esparia couldn't disagree with it no matter how brutal it was. (3 / 4) #shutthefuckup #Edengoallin #theycouldhavedoneworse #Immovingtoeden]

[Do your fucking research before you start virtue signaling for likes that won't feed you. (4 / 4) #shutthefuckup #Edengoallin #theycouldhavedoneworse #Immovingtoeden]

...

That was just the tip of the iceberg, as different opinions about the press conference were all over the internet. That didn't exclude a few governments, who also responded with statements of their own. The Chinese and Russian foreign ministries, in particular, were forced to make announcements by the answers Alexander had given the press.

Although each of them worded their press releases differently, the gist of what they said was that they were just doing their due diligence in order to ensure that Eden doesn't unjustly gain their recognition. After all, they had previously been a rather corrupt and brutal dictatorship, and the UN General Assembly didn't need another one. There were already plenty of dictators there, and after the revolution and change in government, Russia and China were in the final steps of their decision-making process. Once their verifications were complete, they would make their final decision as part of the UN Security Council, following which Eden joining the UN General Assembly would be set in stone.

...

Sarah was watching the press conference in the comfort of her luxurious home in Eden, and although she was alone in her living room, those with AR capable devices would see Felix sitting beside her. They were watching it together, just from different houses—if one were to look in Felix's living room, they would see Sarah sitting on one of his sofas instead.

Felix turned to Sarah and asked, "Do you think Aron has something to gain from that fourth condition?"

"He most definitely does," she answered, looking back at the Felix in her room. Then she asked someone else, "Don't you think so, too?"

[Based on the high-quality map of Eden, it's expected that Esparia will have nearly the same, or perhaps slightly fewer, reserves of natural resources,] her secretary answered, causing both Felix and Sarah to widen their eyes so much they threatened to fall out of their faces.

"What do you mean by that?" they asked in unison.

[These are the natural resources discovered in Eden about a month ago, when mother surveyed the country,] she replied, showing them the map she was talking about. All of the discovered natural resources above a certain threshold were highlighted, with different colors representing different resources.

"Oh my god!" Felix said when he saw the amount of materials listed on the left side of the map.

Sarah's reaction wasn't too different from Felix's, as she was also surprised by how rich in previously undiscovered natural resources Eden was.

"Can you tell us how this map came to be?" Sarah asked her secretary, who obliged without a problem as the information was well within the clearance level of both Felix and Sarah.

...

"Looks like the six-month time limit is to make it a bit more believable," Felix said when he finished listening to the secretary's report.

"Yep. Connect is going to get bigger, it seems," Sarah said in a slightly joking tone.

"Don't worry, I suspect Aron's going to make you responsible for the overseas sales, while I'll be focused on the domestic market."

"I wonder why he's doing the same thing with two different companies, when doing it with one would reduce the cost and labor involved," Sarah mused, despite her suspicion.

"Although he didn't tell us about this, I think we both have the same guess as to why. And if we're right, then both the Edenians and Esparians could be considered lucky. It looks like the Esparian surrender is just the beginning of a grand plan to unite both islands and form an economic powerhouse. He could unite them into a single country, like the UK, or he might form a joint government, like the EU," Felix pondered.

"And it isn't impossible that the upcoming discoveries of natural resources will provide nearly ninety percent of the Esparian government's GDP. That would be another brick in the wall of unification, after putting his people in the new Esparian government," Sarah added.

The mere thought of Aron being capable of accomplishing such a thing sent shivers down their spines. The changes their friend had gone through—from expulsion to becoming someone powerful enough to have a country at the tips of his fingers—had taken less than a year.

And all of it had been started by someone's pettiness; what a monstrous butterfly effect!

#### Chapter 250 Training Complete

Aubrey Morgan, his son, and his assistant were in a secure room. "Ares, who are they? Find out everything about them, especially who their owner is," Aubrey said in the room, without even looking at the others.

The assistant immediately nodded and headed out the door to relay the order.

"They seem to be the most likely beneficiaries of this conflict, and are either the ones behind our defeat, or at least connected to them. We'd never heard of them before they became Eden's contractors. At first, that didn't seem important to anyone and we all thought it was just a cost cutting measure, but now they're going to take over Esparia, too. That means they'll be the military overlord every PMC dreams of becoming and can be considered a legitimate military force, with military-grade weapons. They may even be the ones producing them," George said, slightly jealous that, despite their power, they couldn't legitimately have such a massive force under them. Instead, they were forced to break their forces into multiple PMCs in different countries. That didn't mean their forces weren't large, or were particularly weak, but with such measures came cost increases, especially since each company had redundant departments and they couldn't be merged lest they draw the suspicion of everyone involved.

"It's either a small family that got lucky, or a company supported by a large family, but whoever it is... I don't care. I have to teach them a lesson for embarrassing us," Aubrey said, his tone slightly higher than usual. It was the tone he used when he was angry, something as rare as a unicorn horn, but as his family's honor was on the line he had become a person nobody would want to face at all. He cared about honor above all. That was why George was his favorite son—he showed a promise that his brothers didn't. It was like the Morgan family honor was carved into his bones. Not that his brothers were especially lacking, but despite being hard workers, there wasn't really anything outstanding about them, much to Aubrey's disappointment.

"But why six months, and not a few years?" Aubrey asked in his usually calm tone. He wanted his son's view of the situation and considered the question one of the many tests he had given the younger man.

"There's two possibilities. Either they already know of some large deposits and are using the time limit as a means to justify 'discovering' them, or they're confident in finding something within that

time frame. At the same time, they can't make the period too long, so that in the event they find something, the citizens would still have hopes of discovering something better when the six month period is over," George answered. It was an easy test for him, as he'd been thinking about a possible reason from the moment it had been mentioned. He knew his father well and had long expected such a question from the man.

"What do you think we should do if it's the second possibility?"

"All we have to do is suffer a loss of a few hundred million to book all the world's reputable prospecting companies for six months," George answered with a sinister smile.

"Good thinking, but too naive. That'd make it too obvious that someone's out to sabotage them," Aubrey said with a smile on his face, then started explaining where his son was wrong. Then he gave a better plan.

"Why go to such a needless extent when we could just pay the company they hire to simply not report what they find. Instead, they'll tell us. Then, after the six-month period is over, all we'll have to do is 'accidentally' find it and win the extraction rights. That way they can't do anything, as long as they value their word"

.....

Aron was hard at work, training his combat skills. The blows exchanged between him and his opponent seemingly carried the weight of the world with them, but at the same time, a normal person would have a hard time tracking them. The two combatants were moving and attacking at such speed that an onlooker would only see afterimages, at best.

Today marked the two hundred and tenth day since he had begun training in Athena's hellhole.

During that time, he'd had everything a soldier from every department in ARES was supposed to know drilled, and sometimes hammered, into him. And his trainer would accept nothing less than excellence from him. Infantry skills, piloting, driving, spying, sniping, and many more skills had been tested, and each score of 'average' that Aron received had only increased the intensity of the 'retraining' he suffered. The teacher assigned to him by Nova would make sure that he was perfect, or suffer deletion in the attempt.

The image of someone hitting a boulder and shattering it was soon followed by the sound of the punch landing. The one who threw the punch, Aron, remained standing in place. His chest rose and fell as he heaved for breath and wheezed, "Is that satisfactory?" He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

[Good. That's what I wanted from you before I could allow you to leave,] said a voice from inside the dust cloud. A beautiful woman was walking out of it without a speck of dust or ounce of sweat on her clothes or skin.

[Congratulations, sir,] said Nova, who had appeared the moment the instructor mentioned that Aron had passed his final test.



"You really went all out when you made her," Aron said. He had directed Nova not to interfere during his training, unless something urgent came up. Thankfully, everything seemed to have gone well while he was otherwise occupied.

[You need to lead by example,] she said with a smile, feeling quite happy about Aron's hard work. She had been observing and recording everything without missing anything.

"I know, I know," Aron said as he sat down to rest. It was his first rest of the day after seven consecutive hours of fighting. Thankfully, he had finally won the confrontation against his instructor, making him the most combat-proficient human in the world at the moment.

"Let me rest for a moment," he said, then laid down and fell asleep within a few seconds.

...

"Catch me up on the world's situation," Aron said. He had slept for three days straight in the universal simulation before waking up completely refreshed; Nova had put his pod in rest mode, making his three-day nap equal nearly a month of vacation.

[Esparia's already signed the surrender accord, and the announcement's already been made. The citizens' reaction has been quite good, and Alexander's approval rating in Eden is at its highest point. The latest poll has it at 93%....] She continued catching him up on what had happened during the week that he'd been disconnected from reality.

"How about Vladimir... or rather, how about what remained of him?" he asked.

[The personality change is complete, and he can be considered an entirely new person with a new and enhanced body and memories of his former self. He's waiting for orders when you wake up,] she explained.

"Good. Find a way to return him to his country so he can continue his tasks there, while at the same time preparing himself to rise in the Kremlin. If possible, I want him to take over their entire intelligence network, then resign and start a career in politics. Leave the task of accomplishing his return without suspicions to the intelligence department. That's what they're there for," Aron calmly said. He planned for the man to return to his position and gain political power. As his revenge on Russia—which had forcefully taken his things without his consent—could now enter full swing. It wasn't just the one that executed the order that he wanted to pay, but the Russian leadership had to pay as well.