

Tech System 301

Chapter 301 Busy Days and Monkey Wrenches

"We're in the final steps of sealing a deal with South African Airways, Air India, and Alitalia airlines. And as you expected, they didn't make it too difficult for us since they're in very difficult financial situations, making the negotiation process smoother," the aircraft acquisition manager of Icarus Airlines reported.

"And when are our first orders of new planes going to start arriving?" Robert asked after nodding his head to show that he had heard the report.

"Since we bought the planes that were about to have their orders cancelled due to lack of demand, we'll start receiving them in six months, but the A380s should start arriving by the end of the year. However, those will be coming in one large batch," the acquisition manager answered.

"The ones we buy from those airlines should be enough for domestic use and a few intercontinental flights, since the domestic market is being dominated by Hermes' rail network. So our only use for them will be flights from Eden to Esparia. For other international flights we should start planning earlier for when the new planes start arriving."

They continued talking about the jet acquisitions without any fatigue on their faces. On the contrary, they seemed to be enjoying the work, as they were both young for the positions they found themselves in, so they gave it their all.

"How's the Malaysia Airlines situation?" Robert asked. Malaysia Airlines had been in a downward spiral ever since Malaysia Airlines flight 370 had gone missing over the South China Sea.

"We're in communication with them, but they're still holding on in the hopes that their plane is found and they can put an end to the downward spiral. So right now, we're in a holding pattern and waiting to see how the situation develops."

As for Robert's former wife, she was enjoying her life after she had received most of his things. And having found her very handsome dream lover, she was infatuated with the man to the point that she had already forgotten her former husband, who could be said to have been funding her current lavish lifestyle thanks to the divorce settlement. She was spending extravagant amounts to make sure the man wouldn't think about leaving her, not knowing that she was about to take quite a hit and learn her lesson. That was what Robert had requested of Aron as his revenge on her, taking her to the highest peak she can go before dropping her to the very bottom.

As they say, the higher you are, the farther you fall.

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Among all of the newly minted presidents, the one who'd already had his revenge completed, Jai Chakrabarti, was inside the universal simulation going through the curriculum planned for the schools that were about to finish construction with an expression of disbelief.

It would be difficult as hell, but if it was taught exactly according to the lesson plans, monsters of knowledge were going to result.

He was interrupted by a phone call, something that could happen despite him being in the universal simulation.

"Hello, mister minister," he answered in a cheery tone as he was teleported into a time bubble that matched the real world.

"Hello, I'm calling you personally to inform you that your request to cooperate with the government to build schools of all levels has been approved by the president. We'll reach out to you and let you know where you can build your new schools soon. If the land you want isn't owned by the government, we can help you with the acquisition process," the minister of education said. He seemed quite excited by the news as well.

"Thank you for your help," Jai responded with a smile on his face and happiness in his voice.

"But I'd like to ask what you plan on doing with the ten pieces of land in unpopulated locations?" the minister of education asked.

"We're going to be building universities and technical schools in those locations. Each of them will specialize in teaching a specific field to the highest level, so we need places we can build the universities as well as college towns around them to make it convenient for the students," Jai answered.

"Although I'm thankful for the investments you're making in the country, I don't see the planned universities receiving the amount of students necessary to do their size justice." The minister of education was a good-natured person, and a member of Alexander's party, so he would naturally bring up any issues he thought might arise, especially those regarding overspending of funds.

"You don't have to worry about that. They'll all be full in just a few years after opening, and before the next elections arrive. That much, I promise you." Jai decided not to go into more detail, since he was sure that there wouldn't be enough time to explain everything. "Also, I'll be emailing your office the curriculum we've got planned for students at all levels of our schools, so please take a look and let me know what you think about them."

"No problem—I'll give it a read and let you know."

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As for Ryan, he was enjoying life and spending time with his wife, who was thrilled to be accepted into what he jokingly called "Nova U", following her dream of becoming a museum curator and learning in a virtual university as she underwent her own genetic enhancement process. He had specifically asked for her to be enhanced as a way of paying part of her love and care back to her. Aron had immediately agreed, as Ryan had no vengeance to take and just wanted to spend the best time of his life with her.

Plus, Aron couldn't help but admire him a little bit for his devotion to his wife. Being in the honeymoon period of his own first relationship, with Rina, anything regarding love would naturally be highly looked upon by him.

Ryan was reading the sales report for Pneuma and Biogen. It had been two weeks since their release, and that time was enough for all the expenses they had borne by storing, shipping, and paying tariffs on them had already been recouped, with more than seventy percent of the gross sales remaining as profit.

"Although the profits are about equal between both products, Biogen should pass Pneuma in a month or so," he said to the void in his room.

[That depends on whether Pneuma gets approved in Russia, the EU, and the US before then. If they approve it, sales will continue being about equal for a few more months before Biogen ends up becoming the eventual winner.]

"Still, until we release a new medicine, weight loss will be our biggest earner," he replied. His vision was still correct, after all.

[You're right,] his assistant responded.

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Despite Aron and Nova's policy of not interfering with anything, things were going very well for the burgeoning business empire. Rather, things were going perhaps too well, and thanks to that, Nova was in full simulation mode trying to predict what could come and throw a monkey wrench into their peaceful lives. She knew that somewhere, there was bound to be something that would be giving them a headache, and she wanted to know what it was so she could head it off at the pass, as it were.

And she was putting her computing power toward discovering just where that monkey wrench was likely to be coming from.

Chapter 302 OUCH

Aron could be seen sitting with his eyes closed, the veins of his forehead were pulsing as they bulged, indicating that he didn't want to lose even a single second of his focus.

His surroundings were serene, with a vast, flat, heavenly ground stretching for kilometres, which was surrounded by mountains of varying heights.

If someone was gazing at this scene for the first time, they would think Aron was practising the runic knowledge his clones had been training which he was assimilated with while he was receiving the treatment in the pod. Although this was partly true, it didn't hold the same meaning as they might think. Shortly after, Aron immediately opened his eyes but what followed it in the sight of the observer was the sudden vanishing of Aron's figure.

With his disappearance, the flat, tranquil grassland returned to its serenity which had once been there. However, the calmness didn't last for long as moments later, a flash of light, capable of blinding anyone who glanced at it, started to spread. But this was the least of the matters that might be of any concern because that flash of light was followed by...

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM

The deafening sound was accompanied by a shockwave that shook the ground, uprooting the grass that had been enjoying its time as it bathed in the light of the sun.

A whole mountain had simply disappeared.

Aron on the other hand, for those who could see him even in his concealed state, could be seen meters away from where he had once been before he activated the concealment rune and disappeared with a smile on his face.

"Now, that's my in-house stealth missile for you. Survive that if you possibly can," he mused while still holding the previous smile on his face, feeling quite good and proud of himself.

Alas, that smile on his handsome face was short-lived as his whole being stiffened a moment after that while his eyes were covered in disbelief for a moment before he immediately erected seven protective shields, stacking one on top of the other, before...

BOOM.....

Another enormous explosion followed, rocking the area, and sending him hurtling about a kilometre in the opposite direction of the mountain range he had just flattened with his explosion.

"You really are brutal, to come and use the same attack I did on you moments ago," Aron said with a weary smile, realizing that he really had no chance of winning this fight.

[If you can dish it out, you should prepare yourself to receive it as well,] Nova said as she materialized a meter away from Aron.

Her sudden appearance scared the shit out of Aron, who could have sworn that she was supposed to be a few kilometres away and in the vicinity of the mountain he had just obliterated a few seconds ago. He was sure of that because he could sense her presence there.

"Are you sure you are not cheating?" Aron asked jokingly with the expression of someone who couldn't believe what he was experiencing.

[Nope, I'm just utilizing the runes with the same knowledge that had been assimilated into you and the same brain power as that of yours,] Nova bantered back, raising her already massive chest to show her feeling of superiority in front of Aron who wasn't even able to sense her when she was so close to him, while he remained focused on the decoy she had placed on a mountain.

[But still, I couldn't believe that you sensed it and also managed to create seven shields to save yourself from being blown to smithereens,] she remarked, her tone serious this time, indicating that she was genuinely impressed by him.

"Well, my life was on the line and I didn't want to experience the feeling of being cooked by the heat and then having my body broken to pieces by the shockwave before I die. It is quite a nasty feeling," Aron answered, conveying that today wasn't his first time to experience this. Thanks to his strong body, brought together with strong regeneration, he didn't die immediately, but he was able to endure it for a few seconds before his body completely gave up, but that was eternal to someone who was experiencing his nerves being cooked while the body tried to regenerate those cooked nerves, which was soon followed by his bones being shattered into pieces from the shockwave before he succumbed to death after experiencing all that pain.

[Pain is the motivation of growth, Sir. If we remove it, there won't be anything that will be enough to motivate you to work hard in finding ways to avoid such things happening. Now, it seems that you have finally come up with the idea of integrating two runes at once during serious times for a more effective attack, albeit taking quite a long time to accomplish it,] Nova said before she broke into laughter as she remembered how long it took for him to succeed in doing so.

Aron, who was acting slightly hurt due to her laughing at him, retorted, "You are leveraging your computing power to find different ways to mess with me." He knew that during this period, he needed to think of coming up with ways to at least win against her even once without any assistance from her. He had realized that he was becoming overly dependent on her, and that might risk him losing a bit of his critical thinking skills. Hence, he had asked her to implement this form of

training, where he would receive no help from her until he at least managed to land a single hit on Nova, who had limited her qubits numbers to the number of neurons he had.

"Let's take a short break," he suggested, finally feeling the accumulated fatigue which had been accumulating due to him spending hours trying to successfully integrate two runes at once, specifically the concealment rune atop the fireball rune.

[Should I update you about the various ongoing matters while you rest?] Nova asked, immediately teleporting both of them to the ground while creating a bean bag for Aron to rest on.

"Yes," Aron agreed and in response, Nova started her reporting.

[The decision has been made to build the company headquarters on an island, with the blueprint already being selected.] Nova reported to him, and at the same time, she materialized a miniature model of the city that was going to be constructed from scratch. The centerpiece of this project would be the headquarters of the companies that was going to be the world's tallest, widest, and deepest building by the time its construction was completed.

"This should provide jobs to millions of people and generate millions of dollars of revenues for different small companies," he said as he observed the vast number of materials that were going to be used for the complete construction of the city to its entirety, which would dwarf any other projects Dubai or Qatar which they had been planning or were being constructed at the moment.

[Just this project alone should keep the country's economy growing within the next year it takes to complete.] Nova added as she also mentioned the short time frame it would take for the project to be completed given that all the foundation and underground construction would be expedited using the atomic printer to accelerate the project without leaking the technology being used to anyone else.

"How much is the entire project estimated to cost us?" Aron inquired as he continued reading the details within the file.

[It's estimated to cost around thirty-five billion dollars, Sir,] Nova responded.

"Do we still have that large sum of money lying around?" Aron inquired, aware that he had already expended more than hundred and fifty billion on the previous projects that were now completed.

And although he recalled they had more than triple that amount of money, he knew that it was not available in cash; instead, it was under the Plutus Investment as an investment fund to increase the money and for it to not just remain stagnant.

[Yes, although the funds we won from the Morgans' flash crash have already either been spent in construction, raw materials purchase, or in different stocks, we have gained ourselves a substantial amount of cash from the GAIA and Asclepius Biotechnology product launches due to the prices we are selling them at.]

[Only about fifteen dollars of the technological devices are being spent in producing them given the prices of raw materials and shipping them, and if you include tax and everything else, only about a hundred dollars from the \$ 999 of the prices of the starting devices is spent as operational expenses while the remaining is nothing but profit.]

[So, we have more than enough capital at our disposal,] Nova responded as she showed him what they had been earning from the sale of just the phone, which had already sold 35 million units and

even if all of them were of the lowest price, it would mean they had already earned more than \$ 35 billion. Then, there were still computers and other peripherals.

Just GAIA technology alone was already earning more than a hundred billion dollars in profits from their product launch.

"In that case, there is no need to be stingy. Go ahead and start the project," Aron declared, immediately giving the green light for the start of the project.

"That is enough rest," he added before immediately rising from his seat to resume his battle with Nova.

Chapter 303 Bolstering His Naval Power

"Wow, it's so huge," Henry exclaimed as his eyes remained fixed on the massive square warehouse-like buildings in front of him. Aron quietly followed behind him, allowing his brother to do whatever he wanted to while they were in the observation room.

From the room, they had a clear view of nearly a quarter of the massive port in front of them.

"Brother, what is inside those?" Henry, who was very enthusiastic, thanks to having rightfully earned the opportunity to attend the event after acing in his test, asked excitedly.

"Those are dry docks that are used to construct ships before they are launched into the waters and put into service," Aron answered without moving his gaze from the view in front of him. Although he had already seen what was going to be unveiled today with the help of the VR, he couldn't help but still feel excited to see it getting realized in the real world.

"So, there are ships inside them?" Henry asked.

"Yes, and today, you will see ships coming out of them and entering the water," Aron said, now ruffling his brother's hair as he walked closer to him when the little guy asked his first question.

"Wow!" Henry exclaimed, his eyes shining, indicating his excitement as he moved closer to the observation mirror, eager not to miss even a single detail of activity that was going on in the port.

And before Henry could even say anything else or ask any other question among the countless ones that were popping in his mind right now,

KRRRRR KRRRRRR KRRRRRR KRRRRRR KRRRRRR

A screeching alarm that was sure to get the attention of anyone in the vicinity blared out through the main Navy base of ARES in Eden, followed by the announcement, "All personnel, clear the slideway in front of dry dock one."

This announcement could be considered to be nothing but a formality since everyone knew what day was today and had already gathered in the observation centre to witness the launching of the ships.

The announcement echoed in the massive dry dock facility, which looked like a warehouse due to being covered on every side, which would make anyone who looked at it with suspicion for some secrecy, begin to open.

The massive doors on the sea-facing side of the rectangle's longest face started opening, albeit slowly; the speed was suitable given its massive size.

It took nearly ten minutes for the gates to completely open, which was fast considering its size, revealing a majestic and intimidating ship that resembled none of the currently active ships in the world.

(Image here)

But for those who had some knowledge of the history, especially the previous world wars, they would discover that this ship bore a resemblance to the gunships of that era. However, the one in front of them looked much cooler, more intimidating and had a futuristic, sleek gloom covering the entirety of its exterior form.

MHHHHH MHHHHHH MHHHHH.

Another round of alarm, this one calmer, sounded as the sliders holding the ship within the dry dock that was connected to the rails that were made pointing towards the sea began to move.

These sliders initially started sliding slowly while in unison as the ship they were carrying started to move along with them.

Though it started moving slowly along the slope of the rail, in a short moment gravity took over and in combination, they moved the ship towards the ocean with its speed getting faster and faster until...

PWAAAAA.

The ship's hull hit the water's surface with a resounding splash and started to rock from one side to the other as the once calm ocean water got rattled as the ship tried to remain still.

After a few more seconds of wobbling left and right, the rattling finally came to a halt, thus marking the official successful launching of the Rottweiler-class railgun ship.

Soon after, a few small ships approached the newly launched vessel and the soldiers in them wearing the white uniform known as ARES's Navy, immediately started boarding the railgun ship, and going to take their positions as if they had already rehearsed the process thousands of times.

The moment every single one of them reached their designated position, they immediately powered on the ship's fusion reactor, which had been in idle mode as a precaution since the ship had been using backup power, just in case something went wrong during the launch.

Following the power-up sequence, they immediately initiated connections to the military satellite constellation, which resulted in the ship's computer finally coming completely online, thus enabling all the operations.

Following that, the ship didn't linger any longer and immediately left the port to conduct a few major tests in the open sea. The port, however, didn't return to tranquillity, as the alarms rang once again, indicating that another ship was going to be launched as well.

This process repeated again and again until ten ships of the same class had been launched and had all departed the port for their assigned test locations.

"I still can't get used to this," Arons admitted to himself. Among the many ships that they were going to introduce into ARES's Navy division, this one was the most appealing to him since it looked way too cool.

As for Henry, he remained remarkably quiet, and his gaze locked completely on the mirror in the observation room during the entire launch without even looking away from it for even a moment.

With the completion of the launches, the port workers, who were soldiers, returned to their usual duties as if it was something they were used to as no one seemed to be surprised by it at all.

However, the same couldn't be said to be true for the intelligence agencies that were monitoring this situation on their screens through footage and pictures that were captured by their spy satellites that were observing the entire situation all this long as they had been very curious of what was going on in those covered dry docks and who had expected something to take place in a few days time when the movements on the base had increased leading to the increase the monitoring of it.

Now that they finally knew what was going on in it, none of them were happy with it since they knew they were going to have a very challenging week as they would have to gather and collect data on the ship to ascertain the full extent of their capabilities.

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Time moved on along with the unfolding of various events across different locations in the world, acting as a distraction for people to forget the passing of time.

Aron could be seen with Rina inside one of the luxurious rooms within the CUBE as they snuggled on the large couch while watching the TV that was displaying maps behind the reporter who was delivering real-time updates about the information regarding an ongoing incident.

"Let's see if your hard work has paid off," Aron said to Rina, who didn't seem nervous at all and was, in fact, remarkably composed as she replied, "I supported him discreetly enough to make his win something inevitable, so if he doesn't win the election, then that means he was destined to lose," as she got into a more comfortable position.

"Oh, the votes have started being counted," Aron commented as the graphics behind the reporter started shifting, indicating that the votes counting had started.

He wasn't worried at all. Although he had done his best to make sure Trump wins, he wasn't really afraid of the result where he would lose.

"I have been wanting to ask you this: why did you support Trump when you know very well that the Morgans might likely ask him to attack you and Eden?" Rina immediately inquired, having finally remembered to ask him this question while they were together.

"To use this as an opportunity to get ahead," Aron explained shortly.

"What do you mean by that?" Rina asked, not getting a complete picture of what Aron wanted to mean.

"Him entering the office and based on his mentality, it will undoubtedly result in chaos, and with the ensuing turmoil, it will be my time to flourish. As they say, 'Chaos is the father of opportunity.'"

Although I have unprecedented power in Eden, we still can't project our power in other country other than Eden and Esparia. However, the resulting chaos will allow me to shape some narration and push certain agendas that will be beneficial for us," Aron elaborated, showing that he planned to leverage the hypothetical Trump's victory to benefit both himself and Eden. As the more powerful Eden becomes, the more power he will have in this world.

As they continued their conversation, more and more votes continued to be counted and the graphics on the screen continued changing until the final result appeared on the TV, displaying the complete results of the election:

Winner: Donald H. Trump

Electoral College Result: Donald Trump received 306 electoral votes, while Hillary Clinton received 227 electoral votes.

Popular Vote: Hillary Clinton received approximately 65.9 million votes (48.2% of the total), while Donald Trump received approximately 63 million votes (46.1% of the total).

"Looks like we got our winner," Aron said.

Rina didn't respond to his words but immediately turned to face Aron and started kissing him to celebrate her win.

Chapter 304 Cause For Celebration

Inside the compound of the Morgans' mansion.

The air within the compound carried a hint of happiness, a feeling that was felt by most of the inhabitants, causing the atmosphere to be permeated with the same feeling.

"We finally once again have someone in the position of leadership after eight years of not having one. This calls for a celebration," remarked George, his eyes fixed on his father, who was sporting a smile on his face, something that would rarely happen, only when he was greatly satisfied with something, a sight which at the moment, had been rare throughout the year.

"Good job," Aubrey complimented his son's contribution.

"We should prepare a celebration befitting the occasion," he added, agreeing with his son, but also added, "It would serve as the day we have the first meeting with him, during which we will finally be presenting him the complete plan of what we expect from him in return for our support for him," indicating that he didn't plan to waste even a single moment for his revenge to be delayed.

"Shouldn't we wait until he is sworn into the office next year?" George asked, noting that his father was trying to get over this as quickly as possible.

"The sooner he has the information, the earlier he can act on it after he is sworn in. So, presenting the plan to him during that party should be enough to give him the necessary time to start preparing himself to act on our terms," Aubrey answered calmly.

"Yes, Father. I will start preparing for it," George said and left the room, going back to his own to start the planning before delegating it to his assistant.

"Now, let's see how you will respond," Aubrey, who was left alone after his son left, muttered while bringing Aron's image into his mind.

He had finally found out who was the reason behind their embarrassment just a few months ago and Aubrey would always get angry whenever he remembered the incident. This was because he had been thinking that they were fighting against someone who had just entered their field just a few years ago.

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A few months ago...

"Are you sure about this?" Aubrey asked in surprise as he read through the file in his hands, which at the moment were shaking due to anger that he was barely able to contain.

"Yes, Sir. We made sure that it was true by checking the information more than once before we had the assurance to report it to you," the assistant replied while raising his chest with pride, knowing very well that this was the discovery of the century.

Aubrey lowered his gaze back to the document in his hand as he read through the information for the second time while still in disbelief.

On the folder was the image of Aron and Rina walking through the VIP terminal. From their body language, it was clear that there wasn't any master-servant relationship at all, and in fact, it hinted that they were in a romantic relationship, which was something that Aubrey wasn't expecting at all.

However, that only acted as evidence for their relation, but what surprised him even more was the satellite image of Aron's car at the port on the day that they had launched the ten ships, which were still a mystery even with the capabilities of the intelligence community, which had left most of them baffled since the ships had done nothing of the sort that even came close to using their guns.

But the information did not end just at that. The files in his hands also contained the registration information of the companies that registered Aron as their sole owner and also revealed the amount of wealth these companies had was massive; it was a figure of numbers that even he, who would usually consider billion dollars as a measly amount of money, was surprised.

Aubrey didn't even want to believe what he was looking at first because if he were to believe it, then that means that both he and his family were not really that special. This was because the man mentioned in the folder had created such a large network of wealth in a period of nothing but two years, something that had taken for their families to accumulate generation after generation.

Aron possessed the power to shake the economy of Both Eden and Esparia with just one of his companies, and he had more than five of such companies, with each of them completely dominating a specific field.

"We need to make our move the moment we get the opportunity," Aubrey declared after standing still for a long period in silence while contemplating.

His words prompted the assistant reporting to him to have an intrigued expression as he raised an eyebrow since he didn't quite understand what the master was talking about.

However, George, who was also reading the document and was feeling jealous of the man who was mentioned in it, clearly understood what his father meant. It was time to start to prepare themselves for a fight against him, a man who was growing more powerful than they could have ever thought, which meant that the fight had now been increased by a grade higher than before, from regaining their honor to now full-fledged struggle to remove someone who if not stopped, will be their direct competitor in a short time frame and pose a major threat to them.

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CUBE.

Rina could be seen lying on the bed while being in a deep sleep as she cuddled with Aron while her body tried to regain its vigour and recover from the tiredness she had been inflicted upon during the hours-long celebration that had taken place after yesterday's news.

Aron, who was on the other side was still awake as he brushed his hand through her hair while at the same time using the active rune on his hand to aid her in recovery. He immediately reached out for the glasses on the bedside table and put them on once he was assured that she was now in a deep sleep.

[Congratulations, Sir,] Nova chimed in the moment he appeared inside the universal simulation.

"Thanks, but the hard work starts now. Although Chaos may lead to opportunities, it is also very easy for things to go out of our course. And so, we need to tread carefully," Aron said. Although it might seem like he was saying it to Nova, he was reminding himself so that he wouldn't forget this fact.

[I will keep that in my mind,] Nova responded, acknowledging the reminder despite knowing that it was not really for her.

"When is John going to arrive?" Aron inquired, indicating that he didn't come here just randomly but for a scheduled meeting.

[You came early, Sir. He is expected to log in in half an hour as he is making final preparations,] Nova informed, showing him the time, which showed that he was about forty-five minutes earlier than when their meeting was expected to take place.

"Good evening, Sir," John greeted when he logged in fifteen minutes before the scheduled meeting time, surprised to find Aron already waiting for him.

"Good evening," Aron responded with a smile since he quite appreciated the man in front of him.

"You could have called me if you were here earlier," John remarked when he realized that Aron might have been here much earlier than he thought.

"No need for that, since I was the one who arrived earlier than the appointed time," Aron said, showing that he would have only cared if John was to be late without any reason, but now that he wasn't, nothing really mattered.

"So, how is life going for you?" Aron inquired; although he could know whatever John was doing, he refrained from doing so since he cared about their privacy, plus Nova would have informed him if the guy had done something that needed his attention.

"I have been enjoying my life since you healed me, Sir, so there is nothing for me to say other than I'm very happy with life," John responded; when he was asked about life, his thoughts momentarily went back to the time when he was before being healed by Aron.

"And are things fine between you, AURORA, and her friend?" Aron asked with a smile, trying to lighten the mood.

"It is going well, and they have been enjoying their time in Eden as much as I have. The recent genetic enhancement I received has made things even better for me," John explained as he shuddered when he recalled the times when even his body that had gotten better after Aron's bombardment with runes when he was healing him as a test, got tired and had gotten a back pain

due to having to satisfy both of them. However, now that he had also received a genetic enhancement that was perfectly tailored for his strengthened body, he could handle both of them and satisfy them without having to regret it the next day.

"And you sir?" he asked after answering.

"I'm enjoying life at the moment," Aron replied with the smile of a man who was quite satisfied with his life.

They continued having their small talk, with both men trying to get to know each other, and share their experiences during the times when they were alone and had not met each other.

And just like that, fifteen minutes passed, and now it was time for the meeting.

The moment the meeting time arrived, Athena, Nyx, and a few more AIs immediately materialized in the room, together with high-ranking generals in the ARES who had been stopped from entering the room during the time Aron and John were catching up.

A few seconds later, Alexander too arrived and apologized for being late despite only being delayed by a few seconds.

[Now that everyone is here, let the meeting commence.] Nova, who had assumed the position as the meeting secretary, announced when everyone had arrived and had finished greeting Aron and Alexander, thus officially starting the strategic meeting for Eden's military forces.

Chapter 305 The MOD meeting

The room everyone arrived at had a very weird seating arrangement. If there were anyone who didn't know who Aron was, they would not recognize who was the most important person in the room.

The table was oval shaped, with Aron and Alexander sitting at the long ends of the tables, while the generals were sitting on Aron's right side of the longer table and the military AIs on the left.

No one in the room found this kind of arrangement weird at all; rather, they saw it as how it was supposed to be.

[Now that everyone is here, let the meeting commence.] Nova, who had assumed the role of the meeting secretary, announced, thus marking the first meeting of Eden's military forces.

Athena promptly teleported and began delivering a report to all of the attendees.

[Before we delve into the more complicated topics, I think it is better to start with the basic information about our military forces to make sure that everyone is on the same page,] she proposed, and immediately the room's surroundings changed.

No one in the room reacted too much and just waited with a calm look on their faces to see what she was going to do with the room's surroundings.

And indeed, the void surrounding the room started shifting, giving way to rows of soldiers who materialized while Athena started her presentation, stating, [At the moment, we have 545,000 active soldiers spanning across all the branches of the military. Of these, 345,000 are a part of the Eden branch, while the remaining 200,000 of them belong to the Esparian branch of ARES.] As she said her words, the appearance of the the uniforms of the soldiers surrounding them differentiated.

[Currently, we don't have any reserve forces on hand, but our soldiers already work on a rotational basis, transitioning from active duty to passive duty. The time they have to work differs, depending on their selections and their position in the military.]

We are still executing our recruitment plan and aim to reach a million-strong army by the end of next year before reducing the recruitment efforts,] she continued, pausing for a moment to let the audience who had been listening to her and let them digest the information.

Alexander, who was hearing the actual complete number of the military for the first time, had goosebumps all over his body as he came to a realization that the force, which had numbered even less than five hundred when they arrived in Eden, had reached such a huge significant size, without letting anyone to notice this tremendous change.

Although he was aware that the number of soldiers was substantial, given that the government was responsible for their salaries while ARES also supplemented them the same amount of payment as the government, making it one of the highest paying jobs in the country no matter the position held by the soldiers, nevertheless, he still didn't expect their number to have reached such heights.

[Regarding weapons and armament for these soldiers, it varies depending on the branch they are in.] as Athena said, the soldiers who had materialized in the surroundings of the meeting room immediately disappeared, and the room's surroundings once again returned back to being a black void.

[The one that is a hundred percent equipped and completely functional is the intelligence department (the Nyx); they have all the necessary equipment to help them gather, analyze, and act upon the intelligence they have.] As Athena added, the void scene transformed once again, displaying the different devices that were provided to military's intelligence branch, including glasses that differed in functioning than the glasses that were issued to the soldiers for logging into the VR.

These specialized glasses had the ability to hack into any device that was in their vicinity, collect all the data before having it analysed, and further only deliver the critical information to the wearer of these glasses.

[They are the branch with the least amount of personnel, with only fifty thousand members, among which more than half of them are field agents since most of the analysis and planning aspects are handled by Nyx, the AI leading this department, and the AI team working under her,] Athena added while showcasing the responsibilities that were under the supervision of the AI of the department.

[They are also the most active branch since they are responsible for safeguarding the national security of both Eden and Esparia. We have already successfully dealt with more than two hundred spies, either by deporting them or prosecuting them under other criminal charges without revealing their involvement in the espionage not only that but also capture members of the government who were trying to sell government secrets,] Athena continued as the silhouette of the people captured or dealt with by them appeared in the void of the room.

[The second-most armed branch is the Army, boasting a personnel count of 250,000 under it. All the soldiers in it are armed and ready and are on standby for deployment in any conflict. However, when it comes to the weapons that are already out in the open and known to the public, there are almost none, except for the helicopters, which means that we are restricted in what weapons we can use during a conflict, as long as we have not decided to let our advanced weapons known to the

world,] Athena explained as the weapons used by the army were showcased on the shelves that appeared in the void of the meeting room, imitating the matrix.

The number of new weapons that were introduced was even more than what John had been shown by Aron when he introduced the weapons to him, indicating that new and more advanced weapons had already been developed and made ready for use.

[Moving on, the third most armed branch is the Navy. Having 200,000 soldiers, it is the second least armed force due to the highly classified nature of their vessels. At the moment, we already have ten of the Rottweiler-class railguns in service, which should suffice for our short-term needs. However, the rest of the Navy vessels range from small to medium-sized, designed for patrol and other security tasks. This is something that we need to address faster, in case in the future a need arises and also because we have very limited active soldiers on them, forcing us to utilize a rotation system,] Athena reported as she displayed the massive Rottweiler-class railgun battleships and a few other vessels that were being used by the Navy right now.

[However, all of these inadequacies on top of water can be supplemented by the completed submarine fleets that are already patrolling the two country's borders] she added as she displayed the different types of submarines that are already in service.

[Lastly, we have the Air Force, which is also the least armed branch, which comprises the remaining hundred thousand personnel. Although we have numerous air bases scattered all across Eden, we still have very few planes to justify the branch's size. However, with them being responsible in a joint operation with Nyx, they play a crucial role since they are responsible for monitoring and maintaining the active satellites while the intelligence branch analyzes the information and acts upon them whenever the need arises.] Athena stated.

As she said that, the satellites appeared in the void of the room together, alongside the air force's known number of Su-27 aircrafts, together with the ones the world thought they had won as spoils of war during the Eden- Esparia conflict.

Once she concluded her summarization of their military's prowess, Athena returned back to her seat and remained quiet.

Nova immediately interjected, [Now that we have the summary of our current condition, we have to start thinking about solving the problems and start addressing them. So, anyone with ideas on the table, please contribute to the discussion]

Alexander, who had already gotten somewhat overwhelmed by listening to the continuous flow of information, finally spoke up, "While I understand that we are not releasing many of our advanced weapons and devices since they will attract too much of the world's attention upon us, I believe it shouldn't be too much if we were to release some of them in a promotional video for the military recruitment." He simply suggested it since he knew that everyone in the room would figure out what he meant by his words.

[So, you intend to use the video both as a promotional tool and also as a means to make the world think that these weapons are just cosmetic weapons for the video but will still portray an introduction of our weapons to the world and the only surprise later will be when people witness them for real and in action,] the AI responsible for overseeing the army branch chimed in, acknowledging that she could see where Alexander's train of thoughts was going since it was her branch which was most likely going to benefit from this strategy as they would be able to use guns

and a few other small and medium-sized weapons but others won't be able to use it since they use ships or airplanes.

"For the Air Force, we can just publicly announce that we are exploring the development of our own aircraft and have already finalized the design and are moving forward into building a prototype. Although many people will think that we are trying to eat more than what we can chew, it won't be too surprising when they see a prototype in the air," the Air Force general suggested, showing that he had considered how to release their advanced fighters aircraft to the public without causing too much mess.

"That would align well with the announcement I had made during my victory rally speech in which I promised to build domestic industries, and the defense industry should be among them," Alexander chimed in.

The Navy general followed suit, proposing a similar approach for the Navy branch as well, "We can make a similar announcement for the Navy, which would be taken more seriously than the Air Force claim since we already have the ships made by us in the water, though the public doesn't know about it yet since no one has seen them as they are patrolling in deeper waters and the countries that have satellite images of our ships have unilaterally decided to keep this information as a secret," his words didn't carry any malice toward the Air Force or its general's idea, rather, he was simply saying that the idea could be used by both of them.

"Announcing that we are entering into or have already been involved in the defense production industry should serve as the best suitable solution for all the branches since we can use it as an explanation for the introduction of all the new weapons that will be released into the military and maybe even for civilian sale, though I don't think we will have customers so long as we don't prove the weapon's effectiveness," Alexander added.

He became the only highest-ranking figure in the room who had voiced out his opinion throughout the meeting, with Aron and John merely being spectators of the meeting as they simply listened to the ideas that were put forth by the people attending the meeting.

Chapter 306 The "Cool Factor"

"We won't be selling any of the military tech to anyone. It'll all be exclusive to ARES." Aron, who had been quiet throughout the meeting, finally opened his mouth and disputed some of Alexander's points about selling weapons in a grave tone.

"So you agree with the idea of releasing the information to the public about entering the defense industry to cover letting our weapons enter the field without attracting too much attention?" Alexander asked.

"Although I agree with it, as it'll be a trusted source of information to quell the rumors floating around, I don't see the reason we can't just step out of the shadows. It isn't like we don't have the power to protect ourselves, even though we can't really project it outward quite yet," Aron replied.

Everyone raised an eyebrow, since they knew that Aron was nothing if not cautious, more cautious, and even more cautious. If he claimed to be second in the world at keeping secrets and staying hidden, nobody else would dare claim to be first. He even went so far as to camouflage the weapons used in the Eden-Esparia conflict to look like the weapons they had illegally bought from shady gray-market arms dealers during the Edenian revolutionary period.

"From your expressions, I see that you're surprised. But everything's obvious if you compare our circumstances then and now.

"In the past, we didn't have enough boots filled to warrant the release, or protect the weapons, but things have changed. Now we have the eighth-largest military, judging by the number of active duty members. The two ahead of us—Iran and Pakistan—are only ahead of us by about 50,000 soldiers. We should surpass them in a month or two, and then we'll be the sixth-largest military power by number of active duty enlistees," Aron explained.

"Also, the country is stable now. Not only are our citizens no longer in an active revolution against their government, but we also have a stable source of income combined with a growing export economy. So we have to change our mindset and act like the country we are, and not like the country we used to be," he finished. His inner circle definitely had to join him in shifting their mindsets.

"So, are you going to be putting all of your military tech into active service?" Alexander asked. He needed to be certain of Aron's plan in order to gauge how he should act from now on.

"No, we're going to do it in phases. We'll start by releasing a few recruitment videos and promotional propaganda, then announce your decision to develop a national defense initiative. Together with that, we'll start using the equipment we've been keeping warehoused, but consider it 'secret'. Let the rest of the world speculate whatever they want to. It isn't up to us to explain, but for them to come up with reasonable explanations.

"We can then just subtly spread the most believable of their own speculations, just to muddy the waters." Aron was firm in his vision and had already planned everything out, step by step.

The humans in the room nodded, showing they had an understanding of the general direction Aron would be taking, while the AIs spun up a few more fractions of their computing power to update their parameters and generate new plans of action.

"Nova, work on it. Make it appear as natural as you can without seeming too absurd. That includes our new ships and aircraft." It was time to move on to the next topic of the night.

[Yes, sir,] Nova responded, then went silent again.

Athena took over and began her presentation. [With an adequate number of sailors in the Navy, it's about time to divide our fleets into task groups.] She paused for a moment as the display screen popped up a naval infographic. Then she continued, [For starters, we'll divide the Pacific fleet into five task groups.

[The Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western fleets will be jointly referred to as the Pacific fleet, or Home Fleet. Their task is to defend the regions in all four quadrants. Three of them—the Northern, Southern, and Western fleets—will be defending Edenian waters. The Eastern fleet will be tasked with defending Esparia's territorial waters.] The display switched to a nautical map of the surrounding waters counted as Edenian and Esparian territories. Territorial waters were generally agreed to be twelve nautical miles of water from any country's coast; beyond that was international waters, where territorial law didn't hold sway and gave way to international maritime law.

The display switched to a detailed breakdown of ships in each task group of the home fleet. Each of them would consist of two subfleets, one for training and one for active patrolling and defense. The subfleets would each contain an Odin-class battleship, two Thor-class heavy cruisers, four Mjolnir-

class cruisers, eight Heimdall-class destroyers, and sixteen Njord-class frigates. All ships would be armed with batteries of Heracles' Bow Mk. IV coilguns.

The decision had been made to switch from railguns to coilguns for a number of reasons. First, maintenance requirements. Although atomic printers negated the need for extended downtime in order to maintain equipment, they still required the correct resources. Atomic printers weren't alchemists, after all, and couldn't transmute one element to another. So if something called for steel, for instance, the raw materials of carbon and iron—plus any others for specific alloys, like magnesium, manganese, aluminum, or others—were still necessary in order for the printer to create it. Since the operation of coilguns and railguns differed, and coils didn't rely on contact rails to propel projectiles, the material requirements were lowered. Over time, that would save a lot.

Second was the performance. Even with Aron's advancements in materials sciences, there would always be fundamental limits to the stresses materials could have applied to them. Coilguns, unlike railguns, didn't require any physical contact between the projectile and the "gun", thus eliminating one of the material requirements entirely. The only material requirement for a coilgun was a superconducting material capable of pushing enough charge through it at a reasonable operating temperature, and Lab City was already dozens, if not hundreds, of generations ahead in that area.

Third was increased range and accuracy. While the railguns that the US Navy were using were capable of launching a projectile at Mach 6 up to a distance of 110 nautical miles (about 126 miles or about 200 kilometers), testing of the Heracles' Bow Mk. IV coilgun in Lab City had revealed a pinpoint accuracy range of 500 kilometers, and a projectile velocity of Mach 14. So, coilguns had a longer range and higher velocity than railguns, which meant they were far more devastating as a weapon.

Lastly—though Aron would likely rather die than admit it—was just the sheer "cool factor". Coilguns were just plain cooler than railguns.

The only advantage that railguns had was that they had lower requirements for capacitor banks and overall availability of electricity. But given the advanced technology at Aron's fingertips, thanks to Lab City's constant work in a greatly time-dilated environment with literally unlimited resources at their fingertips and zero budgetary constraints, the current Thunderbolt Mk. XIII capacitor was more than compact and efficient enough to offset the sole advantage that railguns had over coilguns. And when combined with Aron's fusion reactor tech, comparing railguns to coilguns would be like comparing a potato gun someone made in their backyard to a "rod from god" kinetic space-based weapon.

[Each task group in the home fleet will be responsible for interdiction, patrolling, and counterpiracy operations in Edenian or Esparian territorial waters. The training fleet would be for live training and switching out so maintenance downtime won't affect our ability to defend ourselves....] Athena continued detailing the breakdown for the home fleet, including personnel numbers and specific tasks and areas of operation.

[The second major fleet will be the Merchant Marine. They'll be responsible for escorting civilian shipping convoys and counterpiracy operations in international waters. The Merchant Marine will consist mainly of destroyers and frigates, with a reaction force of one heavy cruiser and two cruisers in case more standoff firepower

capability is needed. It'll also incorporate gunboats to board and chase pirates if and when they're encountered.

[Later, when we're ready to project our power outward instead of focusing solely on defense, we can build a reaction fleet.]

As Athena spoke, the display continued updating. The plan was for the Navy to become the largest single military entity in Eden and Esparia, as from the next day onward, all enlistees would be entirely dedicated to becoming sailors.

[The new admiralty will be appointed following an assessment period to discover people who are suitable for the positions. Any questions or concerns?] she finished. There were no questions, though, as everyone at the table knew they would be given folders with detailed information inside.

Athena's presentations continued for each branch of the new military structure with occasional breaks for questions and revisions as the humans at the table came up with new ideas to incorporate into the structure.

After more than eight hours of meetings with no breaks, but without anyone losing focus thanks to their genetic enhancements, the changes were approved and Athena was given the go-ahead to implement the changes in ARES once the meetings had finally been concluded.

Chapter 307 Explain It Yourself

When everyone left after the meeting, Aron remained behind with Alexander as they had something important to talk about.

"How's being president going for you?" Aron asked.

"I can't complain, since it was what I was dreaming of throughout most of my youth. Then I fought for the changes, and now that I have the ability to seize my dreams I can't be caught complaining, now can I?" Alexander jokingly replied, then added, "But I'm really enjoying it. Especially with my new body—it's very rare for me to feel tired, no matter how hard I work. And that helps me do more than I could've done before." He was incredibly grateful to Aron for the genetic enhancements he had received.

"Yeah, I can see the results of your hard work in the faces of the citizens," Aron said. The happiness level of the citizens in Eden had, and was continuing to increase as more and more people benefited from the new government.

"The discovery of oil did all the work. And now that we've been exporting it for about a year, it's about time for the investments to start benefiting the citizens," Alexander said. Just five months after they had started selling oil internationally with the help of Hermes, they'd received enough money to immediately implement the universal healthcare plan he'd promised the citizens. There were even no increases in any tax brackets. And with Aron's tech as the backbone of their new universal healthcare program, together with the hospitals that had been built and funded by the Coeus Foundation, they were using the most advanced medical equipment in the world. The government-funded and Coeus-backed hospitals were the best in the country... or even the entire world; there was no question about that at all.

"So, I asked you to stay behind because I wanted to warn you that the upcoming years will be very rocky. Trump is about to be sworn into office in January, and we have to make some plans and act

accordingly in order to benefit from it and come out on top when things calm down again." Aron shifted to the main topic. He was sure that, although Alexander might not be physically tired, he would definitely soon be mentally exhausted after the earlier eight-hour-long marathon meeting.

"I assume you already have a plan and are about to present it to me," Alexander wryly said. Whenever Aron said something or wanted him to do something for him, he would only ask after he had come up with a plan. The man was nothing if not an excellent planner, and his plans were always out of this world.

"Yes, but the plan has to be flexible. Trump is an unpredictable man, and nobody can control him. The people who got him elected are just fools if they ever thought otherwise. So we need to be ready to react based on the situations that occur, since there's no predicting his actions in advance. The political world is about to undergo the equivalent of a 10.0 magnitude earthquake," Aron said as a folder materialized in his hand and he handed it to the Edenian president.

Alexander took it and started reading the contents, just to get the gist of the plan, but after he finished reading the third page, he looked at Aron in shock. He couldn't believe what he had just read.

"The benefits of being neutral," Aron said with a smile, as he knew what had caused Alexander to react that way.

"If things go wrong... you know there's a risk of a war, right?" Alexander asked, but then realized why Aron had only handed him the folder after the Ministry of Defense meeting. He had obviously realized the risks and been preparing for the worst-case scenario long ago.

"Looks like you already expected it," he said after he realized the meaning behind the timing of the ministry meeting and military reorganization.

"Although war isn't something we're aiming for, we still need to prepare in case it starts," Aron said. He was fond of the saying popularized by the former US President, Theodore Roosevelt, about speaking softly and carrying big sticks. But war wasn't his end goal, even if it was a risk of his plan. "But for us to come out on top of the shuffle in the end, we have to take equally huge risks. Thus—" he gestured at the meeting room and the still-hanging infographics, "—our heavy preparations," he added.

Alexander continued perusing the documents with a serious expression on his face. As he read, though, his surprise returned and his eyebrows climbed higher and higher on his forehead until they practically reached his hairline. The plans only grew crazier, riskier, and more dangerous the more he read of them.

When he was done reading, he didn't say much, though his mind was still working on them, but he managed to bid farewell to Aron before logging off and heading to bed. Nova would assimilate the detailed plans while he was asleep, and if he had any questions he could ask them once he knew the ins and outs of everything.

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The next day, the military began their reorganization. All the soldiers who would be involved had already received the order to assemble, so they returned to their barracks or duty offices, got comfortable, and put on their assimilation devices.

The patrolling Odin class battleships of the home fleet immediately changed course and headed to their new designated bases, where they would meet up with the rest of their subfleets and reorganize. Four of them would be docked for live training and maintenance rotation, as an unmanned ship was just as prone to severe failures and rapid decay as an unoccupied building, and another four would be receiving and cycling through new crew members at Naval Command in Elysium before heading out to their assigned quadrants with the rest of their subfleets. The remaining pair of battleships would be kept in reserve in case they were needed outside Edenian or Esparian territorial waters, and would be allocated to the reaction fleet once that was implemented in the third phase of the Naval Organizational Plan of Eden.

As for the army, they headed to their base quartermasters to turn in their current equipment and be issued the new gear.

While the reshuffle was taking place in the Army and Navy, the Ministry of Defense uploaded their new recruitment ads to Pangea, as well as put them into rotation on the television and radio stations in both Eden and Esparia. They expected a surge in recruitment soon, likely within a few days.

Together with that, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Defense held a press conference announcing the reorganization and recruitment effort on official channels, with a press release going out to the paper news media. It was an all-out blitz to ensure that every citizen of both Eden and Esparia heard of the recruitment push. Together with that, ARES leased serviceable offices or buildings in each city and village, no matter the size, and stationed a few soldiers there to act as recruiters.

Other countries' reactions varied, ranging from Trump rattling sabers on Pangea and lambasting the "warmongering" Edenians in incoherent posts, to the Esparian president's strong support for the initiative. He was just as aware as Alexander of the realities of being a neutral country, and thanks to the surrender accord, he had to rely on them. So in his mind, the stronger ARES—and by extension, Eden—was, the better it would be for Esparia as a whole. Besides, he really enjoyed the oil income he was receiving for doing essentially nothing. There was no better income than "free" income, after all.

Edenian citizens were awed by the look of the new weapons, and the global netizens created a number of hilarious memes surrounding them. Conspiracy theorists went on rants about supersoldier projects and eugenics, comparing Alexander's government to the Third Reich, and some even mocked the new gear for focusing on form over function and saying they were little more than embroidered pillows.

No one could really refute that, either, as Eden was still considered a "developing nation", which was basically a polite way of saying "third-world shithole". So it was implausible at best for them to actually have developed any working hardware, and those rumors couldn't be refuted without showing the gear in action or having an impressive usage record behind it, like the AK-47 assault rifles, which were still the most popular rifle in the world by sheer number of sales.

Speculation was running rampant and wars of words between netizens broke out everywhere, but the Edenian government remained silent and simply watched. Not only that, the monitoring AI of Pangea, Panoptes, was actively fueling the debate and further muddying the water.

There was even more rampant speculation on the Edenian government's silence. Edenian and Esparian citizens correctly pointed out that it would be incredibly stupid of Alexander's Ministry of

Defense to give detailed specs on the new weaponry, or even to show it in action, and also pointed out that no country in the world ever showed their weapon prototypes in action. As Eden had only ever been involved in "local disputes" with Esparia, the new weaponry would remain classified as prototypes until they had proven themselves on various battlefields. But other countries mocked that decision, and it was even noted by Panoptes that a few governments had even hired batches of trolls to try provoking the Edenian Ministry of Defense into revealing the classified details of their weapons.

But no matter what their specific reactions were, the entire world had heard of the new weapons and Eden's entry into the military/industrial complex. As for explanations? They could explain it themselves.

Eden certainly wasn't going to.

Chapter 308 A Political Offensive

January 20, 2017, U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C

The streets, once ordinary thoroughfares, were now transformed into arteries of democracy, coursing with the lifeblood of the people. A sea of faces, representing the rich tapestry of America, converged upon the National Mall, where history was about to be rewritten. The quadrennial presidential inauguration was more than a ceremony; it was a ritual, a symbol of continuity, a testament to the enduring spirit of the United States.

In the distance, the gleaming white dome of the Capitol Building stood as a sentinel, a beacon of hope and a reminder of the nation's resilience. Its hallowed halls had borne witness to countless chapters in the American story, and today it would play host to another. The Capitol Building's steps, flanked by fluttering flags representing the fifty states, had become the stage upon which the future of the country would be unveiled.

Inside the Capitol Building, the air was charged with a blend of excitement and solemnity. Elected officials, dignitaries, and distinguished guests gathered in the ornate chambers, reflecting on the weight of the moment. The President-elect, resolute and contemplative, prepared to assume the highest office in the land. A page was about to turn in the annals of American history, and the world watched with bated breath.

But beyond the ceremonial grandeur and political pomp, the inauguration held a deeper significance; it was a celebration of the people's will, a demonstration of the peaceful transition of power that lay at the heart of American democracy. It was a reminder that, regardless of the challenges faced, the nation's commitment to its ideals remained unwavering.

Not too long after all of the invitees had taken their seats did the inauguration program begin, and things moved fast and as noon approached the swearing time too got closer. Not long after noon reached and passed the swearing in arrived as the president elect Donald H. trump took to the podium together with his wife, who would stand near him as he was sworn in.

As he reached the podium, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court who was already there. He shook hands with the President-elect and had a short greeting before handing him two books that he would swear on: his childhood Bible and the Lincoln Bible, which had only been used by one president before him for their inauguration.

"I, Donald Hunt Trump," he said, repeating behind the chief justice word for word as he read the oath, the final piece of the puzzle before he become the president of the world's most advanced and powerful country, "do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The moment he finished reciting the oath, the thousands of the now-president Trump's supporters cheered as they expressed their happiness and excitement.

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"Now it begins," Aron said as he watched the inauguration through his glasses. He rose from the chair he was sitting in after taking off his seatbelt. The alarm had begun ringing in the plane he was in, a warning light that had flipped on when the alarm rang out painting the chamber a red hue. The plane's rear cargo ramp slowly opened, equalizing the atmospheric pressure inside and outside the cargo bay he was in, dressed in a light tracksuit.

He walked to the ramp with his hands in his pockets, and the moment the ramp was fully lowered, he took two running steps and leaped from it, despite not wearing a visible parachute at all.

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"And so it begins," Alexander said as he watched the same live broadcast event, but not a single semblance of worry was anywhere to be seen. He'd had more than enough time to prepare for the upcoming chaos, and both his government and his person were absolutely ready for the unprecedented global power shuffle that was about to take place.

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"Now let's see how you reshape the world order," Rina said from her room in the Cube. There were two screens in front of her; one showed the US presidential inauguration and the other was focused on Aron, who was falling through the air. Although she knew he was set to benefit from the upcoming chaos, she hadn't asked for full details; not only was she a woman who enjoyed surprises, but she also knew that if he needed her help, he would let her know.

After all, the two lovers wholeheartedly trusted each other.

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The same air of expectation lingered in the atmosphere in the Kremlin, despite the ceremony taking place at 8:00 PM in Moscow.

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The ceremony continued.

Following his oath, Trump stood at the podium and began delivering his first speech as the 45th president of the United States.

"Today's ceremony has a very special meaning. Because today, we aren't merely transferring power from one administration to another, or from one party to another, but from Washington, DC back to you, the people." He began his speech by showing his fangs to the people that he had been keeping them hidden from, but in a subtle enough manner to leave him at least some plausible deniability.

"For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government while the people have borne the cost." He paused due to people screaming their agreement with his words, then continued, "Washington flourished, but the people didn't share in its wealth. Politicians prospered, but jobs left and factories closed. The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories! Their triumphs have not been your triumphs! And while they celebrated in our nation's capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across our land...."

He continued his speech, making sure every word of it was heard by the attendees. Once he had finished speaking, he was escorted back to his chair to wait for the event to continue.

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The president started wielding his sword of power that night, beginning with something that would make the public believe him to be a president for the people and not for corporations by signing Executive Order 13765: Minimizing the Economic Burden of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Pending Repeal. It directed federal agencies to take certain actions to "minimize the unwarranted economic and regulatory burdens" of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) while the administration worked on plans to repeal and replace the healthcare law.

The next day, women across America took to the streets in a nationwide march, protesting the misogynistic and hateful comments during the 2016 election. They had organized beforehand on Pangea, and Nyx agents were here and there in the crowds, stirring up the mud. Trump took to Pangea and made a few contradictory posts himself, at first posting, "Watched protests yesterday but was under the impression that we just had an election! Why didn't these people vote? Celebs hurt cause badly" early in the morning.

But an hour later, he did a complete about face and posted, "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views".

People who were at first worried heaved a small sigh of relief that the loose cannon hadn't started shooting people moments after becoming president.

But that didn't last long as he immediately drew proverbial first blood on the 23rd of January. It was the fourth day of his presidency, and he withdrew the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was a multinational trade agreement between 14 Pacific Rim countries, including Eden and Esparia.

He didn't stop there, either. The following day, he approved the Keystone XL Pipeline, a network of pipelines that transport crude oil from Canada to refineries in the United States. That reduced their import demand from other countries—including Eden, which was among the top exporters of oil to the US, thanks to a deal signed by the previous administration's State Department. Obama had wanted to make peace with Eden, seeing it as a "better friends than enemies" situation after they'd demonstrated the capability of ICBM launches.

But Trump didn't care at all, thinking that America was still the most powerful nation on the planet and held the biggest stick.

He truly was like a bull in a china shop as he continued an increasingly blatant political offensive against Eden. On January 27th, he delivered another hit to Eden and Esparia by including them in a travel ban that he had signed into enforcement by executive order. While it was primarily targeted at

majority Muslim nations, people were wondering about him including the "third world shitholes" of Eden and Esparia. After all, they had just begun their development as nations after shedding their brutal dictatorships and people assumed that they were in a recovery period from that.

Still, regardless of the reasons people came up with as to why he had included them, no one could argue that Trump's travel ban would make it very difficult for those from Eden and Esparia to enter America.

Chapter 309 Proactive Protection

An airplane with the Edenian flag on it was on final approach to Beijing airport. It was given priority clearance, skipping the line as other planes were sent to maintain altitude.

The plane landed without any problem, then was directed to one of the VIP terminals that had been prepared to welcome the people in the plane.

After coming to a full stop, the ramp extended and the door opened, revealing a red-carpeted walkway that was lined by members of the People's Liberation Army's ceremonial guards standing at rapt attention.

A few seconds after the door was opened by the flight attendant, a man walked out of it wearing a clean suit. He strode forth with confidence in his steps and a smile on his face. He walked down the walkway and met the leader of the welcoming team. He extended his hand and, in Mandarin Chinese, said, "We are very honored to welcome your arrival to China."

Just as his translator was about to translate it to English, the guest replied, also in perfect Mandarin Chinese, "Thank you very much for your warm welcome. I am happy to be here." The translator was surprised by the dignitary's clean Chinese. He sounded no different from a Chinese native who had studied Chinese literature. Everything from the tone to the sentence structure was perfect.

The surprise wasn't only visible on the face of the translator, but on the face of Wang Yi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China as well. He was the one who was welcoming his Edenian counterpart. "I didn't know your Chinese was this good," he said with some pleasant surprise.

"I learned it during my free time, as I knew it would be needed one day. It seems I was correct," replied Gabriel de los Estrada, Eden's Minister of the Exterior.

"If you mastered it just by practicing during your free time, it means you are truly blessed with a gift for language," Wang Yi said as they started walking to the VIP immigration checkpoint, where they were quickly cleared and directed to a waiting luxury car convoy.

Moments after they got in their assigned cars, the convoy left with the sirens of their police escort blaring. It ensured that they wouldn't be stopped anywhere during their journey, since they were going to visit a few events before their first official meeting to present the Edenians' diplomatic credentials to Zi Jinping, the president of the People's Republic of China.

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A few hours later, the two people who had met at the airport were in a meeting room with a few secretaries to record the minutes. They obviously didn't include translators in their discussion, so after a short bout of polite small talk, they went directly to the main subject.

"Although we can import oil from your country, the quantity we need is triple the amount your nation is pumping from the ground," Wang Yi said.

The main thrust of this private meeting was to negotiate an oil import contract. Saudi Arabia was China's second-largest source of crude oil behind Russia, but Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the president of Saudi Arabia, had been growing too close to the US and China feared that the newly sworn in President Trump would make trouble for them. Since he was so unpredictable, Zi Jinping had directed his foreign affairs minister to begin laying the groundwork to replace as much of their oil imports as possible. The deadline he was given wasn't a firm one; it would depend on if and when Trump began throwing tantrums and biting at random people to compensate for his tiny "hands".

Saudi Arabia, though, was constantly increasing the amount of oil they exported to China, and it wasn't expected to be long before they completely overtook Russia. Thus, any instability in American politics that bled over into any of the OPEC nations—four of which supplied oil to the communist republic, namely Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and Venezuela—would affect the market and lead to wild fluctuations that could negatively impact Chinese industrial growth. Especially in the industrial production of petrochemical products like plastics, rubbers, synthetic cloth, and resins like those used to produce motherboards.

So the probability of President Trump affecting China through the oil market was enough for President Zi to consider stabilizing their imports in advance as a high priority. While relations between China and the US had been warming over the past few decades, the Chinese nation was historically slow to adopt changes and their insular nature had been fostered over many, many generations. Thus, the Chinese Communist Party felt a pressing need to settle things in advance, much like a spouse would often begin separating assets before filing for a divorce from their "other half".

"You don't have to worry about that. During the construction of the oil rigs, we built them with enough spare capacity to compete with any of the OPEC nations. Currently, we're only limiting the production because, as they say, too much is as bad as not enough," Gabriel said in a measured tone.

Wang Yi was a little surprised, as he had planned to use the modification period together with the construction of new oil wells as leverage to make the deal lean in their favor. He hadn't expected that the Edenian oil production wasn't at capacity and had thought they would definitely have been working at full power, given the number of barrels of crude the country was currently producing.

"That's good, that's good," he said, expertly hiding his surprise and disappointment at missing the chance to take control of the negotiation.

After about half an hour of back and forth, they had some agreements and some disagreements, but it ended with them agreeing to sign a contract for Eden to sell about two million barrels of crude oil per day to China, or roughly about 25% of their overall amount of imported oil. They would finalize the agreement a few days later, after their respective staffers negotiated some final details. The official signing would take place after Gabriel presented his credentials to Zi Jinping.

Chapter 310 Saving the "Best" for Last

"Our president is very interested in your advanced chip industry, and he said he'd like to initiate technological transfers to strengthen our ties, if possible," Minister Wang moved to the next topic. The oil negotiations were nothing more than an appetizer; the thing China was most looking

forward to was breaking the technology blockade and entering the computer chip and semiconductor markets. And having come to a preliminary agreement on the oil trade gave him a lever to use to open the door for cooperation in chips and semiconductors.

"In what aspect, specifically, does he want to cooperate? To the best of my knowledge, our country's chip technology isn't that widely used." Gabriel was playing dumb using GAIA Technology not selling the chips to anyone as a shield. He knew that no matter what exorbitant prices buyers promised—and there were many buyers and truly exorbitant offers—the company absolutely would not sell under any circumstances. But he was curious as to what Minister Wang really wanted.

"We would like to open a jointly operated production line for some of the devices in your country in order to meet the demand of the billion-strong market in ours," Wang Yi said. He even specifically reinforced the size of the Chinese market as a psychological negotiation tactic.

"Although that offer is tempting, I'd like to remind you that we don't control the company in question. But I'll deliver your suggestion and the benefits you offer to them and leave the decision in their hands," Gabriel replied with a straight face. But on the inside, he was wondering just how big a fool the man across the table thought he was.

Giving up their manufacturing lines to China was the same as stripping yourself and parading naked on a battlefield in front of your enemy's soldiers. Gabriel had been briefed by the intelligence department about the intellectual property theft that was rife in China; in a nutshell, if they could steal the technology and produce knockoffs of it, they had probably already stolen it long ago and the products were already on their store shelves. They would bribe technicians and factory workers of Chinese descent, hire professionals through LinkedIn and other headhunting sites for online work through shell corporations, and would even go as far as kidnapping researchers with covert operatives (spies) and even insert industrial espionage specialists into any and every company they thought made a useful product.

That said, they were far from unique in that tendency. Most countries did exactly the same things, but China had always had friction with outsiders so it became a bludgeon they used to beat their reputation with.

"Then please deliver our offer to them and I'll wish them happy cooperation in advance," Minister Wang said. He knew pushing any further would only have the exact opposite effect.

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"We've already lost more than half of our market share during the past year! What're you planning on doing to stop this downward spiral?" Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, was in a meeting of the board of directors, silently listening to them vent their irritation on him.

After asking that, they remained silent and waited for an answer from the CEO, who started answering the question as it was one that was to be expected based on the company's recent performance.

"Although the loss in market share can be attributed to a strong competitor entering the market, that isn't the entirety of the reason why our stocks aren't recovering. That's mostly because someone leveraged a short position on our shares about a month before GAIA Tech even hinted at their next release being in our space. It's suspicious in and of itself, and it means whoever took that position is somehow connected to GAIA Tech and knew the impact their entry into the mobile market would

have on us. But you also have to remember that we aren't the only ones caught off guard by that... our former competitors were as well." He fell silent and waited for the next question, which really did come moments after he finished speaking.

"You had more than a year since their release, yet you're still using it as the reason for your failure? Haven't you had enough time to learn from their product and even patent a thing or two, since they haven't been bothered to do so themselves? Also, you're saying that our competitors are facing similar troubles. But as far as I know, LG already stabilized their shares and even show signs of recovery!"

"GAIA is unique in that they haven't even bothered with patents for most of their tech, yet we can't even figure it out when it's handed to us. If we were to try that, the knockoffs would be on store shelves within the week. Besides, the reason LG managed to stabilize is that they manufacture more things than we do. We're limited to the mobile market, phones and laptops, but LG has their fingers in everything from mobile phones to home appliances," Tim answered, prepared as usual.

Another question was immediately thrown at him. "So what are you going to do?"

"I've devised three different plans, depending on how the situation unfolds. First, we can buy chips from them and continue competing with them in the high end market, like we do with Samsung's screens.

"Second, we can lower the price of our devices to the mid range. Although our profit margins will drop, it'll still be a profitable business since we'll make up the shortfall in volume. It will, however, cost us our premium prestige and brand recognition will be diluted. But that isn't really important since we've been losing that since they released Zeus One and the Olympus models." There was a commotion in the room and he waited until it had almost completely died down before continuing.

"Third," he said, silencing the room, "we could spend a few billion dollars lobbying and have the government implement a ban of either their software or hardware. Since they aren't an American company, we can claim it's a national security risk and force them to make their programs and processes public. Otherwise, they can just be banned from operating in the US at all. And it won't be just us—we could cooperate with companies like Facebook, Samsung, Twitter, and all the other tech companies that were harmed by GAIA's products. We'd form a coalition of benefits to force GAIA to submit or be kicked out.

"As we know, America leads the world in tech research and hardware. One mere GAIA isn't enough to shake that foundation," he finished. He had saved his best plan for last.