

Tech System 341

Chapter 341 The Relationship Between Sharks and Chum

After the many different governments that had space agencies confirmed Eden's statement, the world tipped over, and the discussions moved from Eden being the bad guys to the incoming aliens. It wasn't that Eden's reputation had suddenly become better, but rather that the attention span of the populace was limited, and the news of aliens completely overtook the more "local" gossip.

Over the previous two weeks, people had been comforting themselves by believing that Eden was wrong. After all, what could a nation that had no reputation and no world-renowned experts know, anyway? But the series of announcements by more credible experts had yanked that security blanket away from everyone. Currently, the dam had been broken, and the only things preventing complete chaos were riot police and the constant reminders that humanity still had time before the "visitors", as they were being called, arrived.

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"It really worked," Aron said as he watched the announcements with a smile on his face, reveling in the satisfaction of a perfectly executed plan. "I love the smell of chaos in the morning."

[It would've been weird if it hadn't worked,] Nova said.

"By the way, how'd you do it? From what I recall, you said you had to use another means of detecting them since their light had yet to reach us," Rina asked, as by the time she had been informed about the aliens, Aron's plan was already in motion.

"You're right. But since the light has yet to reach us, we just had to make it appear as if it already had, at least in the direction we told them the aliens are coming from," Aron explained.

Rina understood what he was talking about, but was a little lost on how he had managed to accomplish it.

Seeing her confusion, Nova decided to explain in detail. [It was quite simple, really. While we can't exactly tamper with their observatories and satellites, we most certainly can intercept the signals coming from them. Once we broke their encryption, we could insert the data we wanted them to report into the signal. And since it would use their original encryption, they'd be none the wiser,] she began.

[The only tricky parts were figuring out which signals were being sent by hardware that was capable of detecting things at that distance, and flawlessly generating the false data. But once we figured out all the different hardware, all we had to do to generate the correct data was simulate it in VR, where I'm constantly running a galaxy-wide simulation. Then we harvested that data and inserted it into the signal feeding back to their supercomputers to be rendered.]

"Wow, really smart thinking on your side," Rina said. She was very impressed by how they had come up with a plan and executed it in such a short period of time, especially how flawlessly the whole process had been carried out.

"That's just for the satellite telescopes. Those were the easy part—the real difficulty came in how to insert our false data into the ground-based observatories and radio telescopes. Those couldn't be done wirelessly, like we handled satellites, since they rely on fiber instead of wireless signals to

transmit their data. Luckily, observing space isn't considered a secret, for the most part, so all of their facilities were connected to the internet. That let us send a trojan into their systems and spread it all over, giving us a back door for the same data swap.

"Besides, there aren't that many supercomputers that can render images and files of that size, so we also snuck our data in there. Just as a backup in case we missed any of the other signals. That took a bit more work on the part of our operatives, since using the internet as a vector of attack against a supercomputer is bound to be noticed. But a technician doing routine maintenance on them, on the other hand, is just normal daily operations." Aron couldn't help but smirk a bit, proud of the wool he had just pulled over the whole world's eyes.

Aron and Rina chatted about the incoming aliens for a while, and potential countermeasures, until the subject naturally changed to the upcoming emergency session of the UNSC.

"I don't think America will vote for the united earth initiative, since the Morgans will never allow it to happen," Rina said. She'd thought about it, and had come to the conclusion that, even—or especially—if her father decides to go along with it, the Morgans would definitely still oppose it. They had a vested interest in the status quo, after all.

"Not really. In fact, it'll be quite the contrary. The Morgans will help push it along, due to the optics if nothing else," Aron said with a smile on his face.

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Because they know there'll be a veto, even if it passes. So they'll take it as an opportunity to make America look good, since someone else will definitely jump out to be the villain that prevents the unification from peacefully happening. Then they'll use the chaos that arises from the failed UNSC vote to take power while everyone's busy guarding against everyone else. After all, it's easy to defeat a distracted enemy that has no allies, but if they had to face a united group of enemies it's another story entirely.

"With the likeliest outcome of the failed vote being a global war, the Morgans will do what they do best: coopt the American military to serve for their own benefit and profits," Aron explained.

"You mean there's only going to be a few remaining nations within a few years as a result of a massive war?" Rina asked, very surprised by the revelation.

"That's how they'll think of it. All they have to do is come to an agreement with the nuclear powers to not fight each other, and everyone else will be nothing but chum for those few sharks with nukes. It'll be another age of imperialism, but this time with them being the sole party in power... or so they think, anyway." Aron wasn't just rambling, but explaining the results from millions, if not billions of simulated situations, designed with the assumption that Eden refused to get involved. But once they added Eden to the equation, it completely flipped around; Eden was the absolute winner in 100% of their simulations.

"Or so they think?" she mused.

"Yes, or so they think," Aron repeated with his usual smile on his face, his mind still swimming with the satisfaction that the first step in his grander plan had been successfully taken, and the second step was in progress.

Chapter 342 Operation Stygian Crossing (part 1)

In a barracks on Avalon Island.

A red warning light flashed and a siren sounded. It was a call to general assembly, and all of the soldiers in the barracks immediately dropped what they were doing and ran to the armory. There, after they formed up, they waited for instructions and Athena appeared before them in their AR glasses.

"One minute eleven seconds," she began. "I'm disappointed. SOP calls for assembly within 60 seconds of the alert sounding, but you lot," she gestured, sweeping her arm across in front of her, "thought it was more important to get dressed than to get here!"

If they hadn't been standing at attention, the soldiers in front of Athena would have hung their heads in shame. There was no normal barracks and they were no normal ARES soldiers. This was home to a Reaper battalion, and only the elites among the elites were housed there.

"We'll do better next time, ma'am!" they chorused at the top of their lungs.

"If this had been an actual emergency, you would be dead now. Keep that in mind, scabs!" Athena scolded. Though she appeared mad at them, she only felt a little irritation; eleven seconds was eleven seconds, but at least they weren't standing before her in their underwear. She could take comfort in that much, if nothing else.

"Down to business," she said. "I've got deployment orders for you. If your number is called, step to my left and form up with your teams. Team one—"

"Here, ma'am!" the Reapers of Reaper Team One shouted.

"I said move, not make my ears itch! Team three, team seven, and team eight, join team one to my left. The rest of you lot, dismissed!" Athena snapped and the teams in front of her sorted themselves out as ordered.

"Right. Make yourselves comfortable and join me in the briefing room. Fall out!"

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The four Reaper teams logged into the VR briefing room, where Athena was waiting for them. Though it was unnecessary, she glanced at her wrist as if she was wearing a watch, then began the briefing.

"At 0931 hours today, orders came down from the top. You four teams are being tasked with establishing forward operating bases and eliminating or coopting local hostile forces. For this task, each of your teams will be assigned a Nyx agent and appropriate equipment for the locale. Each of you will be issued your standard kit, plus one classified kit carried by the agent.

"Team one, you'll be headed to the Caucasus Mountain Range. Avoid contact with locals at all costs—if you're discovered, your mission will be scrubbed. Head to Karaleti, Georgia, and make your way north to Mount Shani. There, you're to make yourselves comfortable and establish Forward Operating Base Bellerophon.

"Team three, you'll be headed to Colombia, where you will be eliminating or coopting the forces of the Medellin Cartel and taking over their territory. If you are discovered, your mission will be scrubbed and you will be disavowed. So don't be discovered. You may choose any of their coca plantations or cocaine processing facilities to establish Forward Operating Base Perseus.

"Team seven, you're to head to Mexico. Culiacán Rosales, to be precise, in Sinaloa, where your task is to eliminate or coopt the forces of the Sinaloa Cartel and establish Forward Operating Base Odysseus. If you are discovered, your mission will be scrubbed and you'll be disavowed.

"Team eight, you're headed to Somalia. Your task is to eliminate the terrorist group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen and take over their territory, where you will establish Forward Operating Base Ganymede on the coast. If you are discovered, your mission will not be scrubbed. Your team will have air support from the Archangel squadron AO-1, so go sow the wind and reap the storm.

"You all have your orders. From today, you have exactly two weeks to make this happen. I'm not going to hold your hands on this one—you're no longer recruits or trainees, you are Reapers! So go forth and reap. Dismissed!"

The briefing room dissolved from around the teams and, with a brief stop at the armory to draw their equipment, they headed to the airstrip to meet their Nyx agents and transports.

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In the air somewhere over Colombia.

Master Sergeant Jason Cordova, leader of ARES Reaper Team Three, was in a transport chopper above a sea of green treetops on his way to the Andes. He was confident and ready, he was sure of that, but for some reason his toes kept twitching in his boots. It was always like that for him; even in training, where he knew even in the fog of exhaustion that he was in no real danger of losing his life, he was still nervous before each mission.

He had performed well in training and was assigned the rank of Master Sergeant when he graduated, then posted with Reaper Team Three as the leader. But that nervous tic of his had accompanied him each step of the way.

He was used to it, now.

"Fifteen minute warning!" the chopper pilot announced and the light in the cabin went from a comforting yellow to an alert red. Everyone in the team logged out of VR and did the final checks on their weapons and gear.

The Nyx agent was an enigma. Wrapped in a black bodysuit with a midnight blue and dark gray web vest over the top, black leather fingerless gloves on her hands, and charcoal gray combat boots, she had neither said a word nor moved an inch through the entire trip from Eden to Colombia. On her lap was a large suitcase made of what appeared to be ruggedized, blued steel.

The team finished their checks and Jason's AR display listed each of his seven squadmates' names in green.

They were ready.

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"One minute to drop zone," the pilot announced and the sliding doors on the sides of the transport helicopter opened. The red light that had begun flashing at the two minute warning was now turned off, leaving them in the dark of night.

The helicopter dropped low and the team waited out the final seconds before their mission began, each of them counting along with the timer displayed on their AR glasses.

"Drop, drop, drop!" the pilot ordered and the team fell out of the helicopter, followed by their attached Nyx agent.

As they dropped, a line extended from the helicopter to their gear, slowing their fall and allowing them to land unharmed. They looked around, finding themselves on a hill overlooking a mountainside villa where the leadership of the Medellin Cartel was meeting.

It was time for the cartel to meet the reapers, and then, perhaps, their makers.

Chapter 343 Operation Stygian Crossing (part 2)

Master Sergeant Jason Cordova and the rest of Reaper Team Three were on the side of a mountain atop a sheer cliff. They were overlooking a mountain villa maintained by the Medellin Cartel and had been assigned a mission to either eliminate or coopt the inhabitants and establish a hidden forward operating base in the Andes Mountain Range.

It was 8pm, six hours before they would begin their assault.

"So these guys are bad guys, right, sarge?" Corporal Justin McCullough asked.

"Yep. They peddle poison, enslave locals, and violently murder anyone who dares to interfere with their operations. Only reason they haven't been brought down yet is because they're so vicious that everyone's afraid of pissing them off," Jason replied. His toes were still twitching, so he appreciated the distraction provided by conversation.

"So why ain't we just, y'know, 'removing' 'em?" the corporal said, using air quotes around "removing" to indicate that he was talking about calling in an airstrike.

"Because we're not supposed to make a fuss here. We eliminate who we need to in order to infiltrate, then coopt the leadership. That's what our spook is for. She'll ensure that their leader, Juan Carlos Mesa, will be a good little boy and turn to our side for as long as we need him." Jason spat on the ground next to where he was laying.

"I guess that makes sense. We gotta stay quiet as a church mouse 'n all." Corporal McCullough went silent for a moment, then continued, "So like, if these guys are really bad guys, then what'll happen after we take 'em over? Won't we be the bad guys then?"

Just like Jason had twitchy toes as the manifestation of his pre-mission jitters, Corporal McCullough turned into a chatterbox and his accent came out. He was a big corn-fed farm boy type even before the genetic enhancements, and after them, he looked like Lou Ferrigno from the old tv series "The Hulk". He was the team's heavy weapons specialist and his usual loadout was a chain coilgun. It was a testament to his strength, as those were normally mounted on vehicles or turrets because of their mass and recoil. But he could handle one just fine on his own, and when the metal met the meat he was a good guy to have on your side, so even with his chatterbox tendencies and thick, rural accent, nobody would ever be anything less than patient with the gentle giant.

“That’s above our paygrade, corporal. I’m sure the brass has other plans.”

The chatterbox continued chattering and the toes continued twitching as the team waited for zero hour, when their targets would be at their least vigilant. They would make their move then, but until go time arrived, each member of the team continued their pre-mission rituals. It was just another day in the life for the elite soldiers of Reaper Team Three.

The Nyx agent, however, simply lay in a slight hollow on the ground, remaining as still as a knocked-over statue. She would also do her duty, when the time came and whatever that duty was.

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Andes Mountain Range overlooking the Medellin Cartel compound, 1:45am.

It was fifteen minutes to go time and the nerves were getting to the team. This was their first mission outside of their training in VR, and though they felt as prepared as they could be, they were still jittery. Master Sergeant McCullough noticed their nerves, and to calm them, he offered some words of encouragement.

“We few, we happy few, we band of brothers,” he began. “For he today that sheds blood with me shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile. This day shall gentle his condition, and gentlemen in Eden now abed shall think themselves accurs’d they were not here and hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks that fought with us upon this day.”

“Amen,” the rest of the team chorused. The Nyx agent, to everyone’s surprise, joined them in a pleasant, low alto voice.

“Alright, gentlemen—and lady—it’s time for final checks. Check your gear and report status,” Jason ordered.

The team reported all green and the agent nodded. Seven men and one woman would soon be charging into the gates of hell, bringing death with them. The eighth man was a sniper, nested on the hillside they were currently resting on in order to provide cover fire.

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Andes Mountain Range, “go time”.

Jason gestured to his team to proceed with eliminating their preselected targets. As the team leader, his glasses’ HUD allowed him a broader view of the chosen battlefield than the others. His target was highlighted in green, while other potential targets that had already been chosen by his team members were red, and the rest were yellow.

Thanks to Overwatch, the AI that was specifically tasked with providing satellite intel on active operations, the situation on the ground was clear and the team proceeded with eliminating their targets.

Jason leaped up the wall and drove his monoblade under the chin and into the skull of his first kill of the night, the monomolecular edge easily sliding through soft tissue and bone alike. It was an

instant, silent kill, and he grabbed the front of the man's shirt and landed on the ground outside the compound's wall, where he tucked the fresh corpse up against the base of it. "Tango down," he whispered, then checked the status of the rest of the initial targets.

"Proceed to position two."

The team leaped over the walls and began stealthily clearing the guards. Everything went as smooth as a hot knife sliding through butter, and soon they were the only souls left in the compound that weren't part of the cartel leadership cadre.

The Nyx agent nodded and entered the building, escorted by two reapers. She had a lot of work to do, and thanks to the efficient and rapid work of Reaper Team Three, plenty of time to do it.

Chapter 344 The White Room

It was ironic, Nyx thought, that the only avenue of research in which Lab City was incapable of producing any advancements was the art of torture. She was completely baffled by the fact that humanity's most advanced science was in harming other humans without killing them.

Killing, in fact, was easier. Humanity was just a special kind of species, she supposed. That they could be so cruel to their own kind had her logic circuits constantly tied in knots.

[Mother, why are humans like this?] she would often ask Nova whenever one of her children—the Nyx agents, or Nyxians for short—was needed to aid in interrogating a prisoner or other target.

But the only answer she ever received from Nova was: [That's just their nature. Humans have spent their entire evolutionary period figuring out how to kill, maim, and harm each other more efficiently. There is no right or wrong to that fact, it simply... is. Perhaps it's because they've never had to face an outside enemy and believe themselves to be alone in the vast, infinite universe.]

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A Medellin Cartel compound somewhere in the Andes Mountain Range, present day.

Reaper Team Three had made short work of the guards surrounding the building housing their main targets, and it was time for the Nyxian to get to work. They set up a perimeter outside the building as she carried her oversize suitcase within.

"Phase one complete, in position for phase two on overwatch," Master Sergeant Cordova reported to the AI network.

[Roger, proceed as planned.]

Now that the death had finished, the screams would begin. He always hated the screams, but he would do his duty regardless.

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The Nyxian, Mercedes Chavez, moved through the dark building like a ghost. The nanoweave fibers woven into her bodysuit generated an electrical field around her that ensured she couldn't be picked up on video or motion detectors, and the insulated underlayer prevented her from triggering thermal sensors. The only thing she had to watch out for were active personnel, and she had to admit that Reapers were very, very good at their jobs. There was nothing left that could be

considered human anywhere in the mansion. Plenty of blood though; always plenty of blood. Reapers were kind of a blunt instrument like that.

Mercedes, though... Mercedes was an artist. If Reapers were hammers, she was a scalpel. It was the way she was trained and she took pride in her skills, as inhumane as they may be.

All Nyxians had specialties, but they were broadly grouped into a few categories: honeypots, cats, techies, hitters, and twists. Most of them were obvious; honeypots, for instance, were classic femme fatale seductresses who specialized in getting intel out of targets through “personal interactions”, while cats were repossession experts trained in the art of Strategically Transporting Equipment to Alternate Locations (STEALing), and hitters were assassins.

But twists... twists were... special. There were relatively few twists in Nyx, and while the other categories of Nyxians were generalists that were simply better in one area than the others, twists were specialists. Their sole job was interrogating hostile targets through whatever means worked. Chemical interrogations, torture, blackmail, kidnapping, and every manner of things prohibited by the “Geneva Suggestions” were all just in a day’s work for a twist.

And Mercedes was one of the best of them.

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‘Target acquired. Moving to neutralize,’ she reported through the mind-machine interface in her specialized glasses. She had found the current leader of the Medellin Cartel, Juan Carlos Mesa, asleep in bed. She slid a pair of glasses on his face and triggered his entry into the white room.

She continued moving through the mansion, identifying and neutralizing the cartel leadership cadre in the same fashion before completing that phase of her mission and heading down to the panic room-style bunker in a sub-basement level below the wine cellar.

Once she reached the bunker, she opened the suitcase she carried, revealing a miniature atomic printer the size of a ladies’ shoebox and an oversized mana battery. The case itself was made of solid steel, which would be used in the first phase of the secret forward operating base construction. The only manual operation of the evening was then performed by her: she pushed the power button on the atomic printer and left it to do its thing while she climbed back up to her initial hide from before the operation had begun earlier that night.

Once she reached her hide, she covered herself with an active camouflage fabric, or “snuggie” as the Nyxians liked to call them, and settled in for the next phase of her part of the operation. The interrogation.

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Juan Mesa was having a very, very bad week. He had been peacefully sleeping in his bed, when suddenly, he woke up and found himself in a blank, featureless white room. He was wearing a white jumpsuit, including attached gloves and footies, and there was nothing in it but him. And he appeared to even have been shaved, so the only flash of color he could see other than white was his nose, if he crossed his eyes and looked down. The fabric of his jumpsuit even matched the rest of the room to the point where, when he looked down, it appeared that he didn’t even have a body.

He had no idea where he was, how he got there, why he was there, or what he was supposed to do, but it was early yet, so he settled in to wait. Soon, he felt drowsy, and as his eyelids grew heavier and drooped closed, he was startled by a blaring alarm, flashing strobe lights, and the ear-grating sound of Ylvis - The Fox (What Does the Fox Say?) blaring through unseen speakers.

“WHAT DOES THE FOX SAY!? A-RING DING DING A DINGY DING DING A RINGY DING DING....”

He jerked awake and the music and flashing lights immediately ceased, as if they had never been. He rubbed his exhausted eyes, then saw a woman in front of him, dressed in a black bodysuit and wearing a featureless, black mask when his eyelids blinked open.

“Mr. Mesa, welcome to the white room,” she said, her voice distorted through the mask she was wearing. “In here, an entire week will pass in subjective time for every hour that passes outside. You cannot die, but you will want to. Trust me, you’ll beg for it. You will not hunger, nor will you thirst, but you will tell me everything I want to know. You’ll beg to tell me even more things than I want to know.

“And I want to know everything, Mr. Mesa. Everything. You are scum, scum that peddles poison to children, and this...” she spread her arms wide and looked up at the ceiling, “is your hell. Here and now, you have a choice. You can choose to willingly cooperate with us, or you can choose to be forced to cooperate with us. But trust me, Mr. Mesa, you will cooperate with us.

“I will leave you to think about your decision, Mr. Mesa. I will return, whether in an hour, perhaps a day, or maybe even weeks from now... but I will return to hear your answer. Farewell for now, Mr. Mesa,” she finished, then vanished as if she had never been there.

For Juan Carlos Mesa, reckoning had arrived.

Chapter 345 Eden's Proposal

A week after the announcement of the countries’ verification of Eden’s discovery, the day of the UNSC meeting finally arrived.

The delay was long enough to allow countries to come up with ideas on how to handle the “visitors”, but not long enough to allow the citizens’ anxiety to boil over into panic and its accompanying rioting and destruction.

It was also enough time for certain parties to profit from the discovery. A few cults had sprung up seemingly out of nowhere, one of which claimed that the visitors were merely a branch of humanity that had left long ago and were coming back to retake their ancestral home and uplift its current occupants. To them, the aliens were known as “the Progenitors”.

Another cult believed that they were peaceful aliens, and that humanity’s preparations for war would enrage them and cause them to turn hostile. To them, the aliens were known as “the Peacebringers”.

There were many more small cults, but those two seemed oddly popular and had gained traction rather fast. Still, the cults were merely an insignificant blip compared to the number of people who had no firm beliefs either way.

Along with cultists, there were the conspiracy theorists. They believed that the aliens were a hoax meant to distract people from various pet conspiracy theories, like the deep state, the illuminati, the freemasons, and so on. Soon enough, once those secret societies faded back into the background, the hubbub surrounding the incoming aliens would gradually be silenced as the people who had “awakened to the truth” fell back to sleep once again.

The most pitiful groups were those who got together and committed group suicide, much like the Jonestown Massacre of 1978, under the instigation of Jim Jones, an American cult leader; or the Heaven’s Gate incident of 1997, which mass suicided under the instigation of Marshall Applewhite, one of the co-founders of the cult.

And while the cults and conspiracy theorists were rising, so were the orthodox “UFO religions”, which had long held extraterrestrials as part of their belief systems, like Scientology, whose adherents were firm in their belief that humanity had been entangled with various alien civilizations since the species’ conception; and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, who believed that the Earth was created 6000 years ago near the planet Kolob, then moved to its present location in the solar system.

The various cults, conspiracy theorists, and formerly minority UFO religions undergoing a wild surge, or resurgence, in popularity, the nations’ leaders were in something of a bind. Practically all of the non-UNSC member nations were clamoring to change the hearing from a special session of the UN Security Council to a special session of the UN General Assembly so that their voices may be heard.

Except Australia, who, weirdly enough, had chosen to remain silent on the entire affair. When questioned about their silence, their ambassador shrugged and said, “Australia already has seven of the ten deadliest species of animals, insects, and plants in the world trying to kill us every day. So if the aliens come in peace, great! And if they’re coming to kill us, well... they’ll just have to get in line. I wish ‘em luck with the magpies and the ‘roos. And the spiders.”

Their equanimity in the face of the chaos sweeping the globe was admirable, to say the least.

But despite all of the official, and unofficial, protests in the UN, the Security Council refused under the justification that it was Eden that called for the special emergency session, so only Eden could make the call.

Eden, coincidentally, had been staying just as silent on the issue as the Australians.

Thus, as a compromise, the only thing the members of the UN Security Council could do was decide to hold the emergency session as an open session and allow the media to broadcast it live. After that press release went out, the number of people on the streets had fallen to an all-time low as everyone who was old enough to understand what was going on was currently sitting on their couches, or laying in their beds, their eyes glued to screens of various sizes.

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“Ladies and gentlemen of the press, esteemed ambassadors, and citizens watching at home and abroad, I now call this emergency session of the United Nations Security Council to order,” Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta, the Egyptian permanent representative to the United Nations and president of the UNSC for the month of August, announced with a bang of his gavel. “We stand charged today with the solemn duty to determine the direction of the entire world in the face of the visitors, a group of extraterrestrials who are headed our way with unknown intentions. Let us bear that in mind and consider the issue with the gravity it calls for and deserves.

“I invite the Permanent Representative to the United Nations from the Republic of Eden to the floor to present her argument on behalf of the Republic of Eden. Ambassador Foster, I yield the floor to you.”

Eden’s representative, Ambassador Olivia Foster, stood and moved to the podium amidst the sound of camera shutters madly clacking in the background as the press fought to record this historical meeting. “Thank you, Ambassador Aboulatta, esteemed members of the security council. I’d like to take this opportunity to first thank you for agreeing to our request for an emergency session....” She spoke for close to half an hour, only occasionally pausing to moisten her throat, explaining the reasoning behind why they should prepare for the visitors’ arrival by considering them a threat to humanity.

Only after finally finishing her explanation did she move on to the most anticipated part of this emergency session: Eden’s proposed solution.

“Our proposal is to form a unified world government, with a singular space force—a naval fleet that will be the face of Earth’s security. But that won’t be enough, as at the moment, we’re incapable of putting people in space for long periods of time without suffering a loss in health just from the adverse long-term effects of zero gravity, let alone space combat. Thus, in order to solve those issues, we’ll need a joint research institute to which every country contributes, whether in terms of money, human resources, or both.

“As for the raw materials required to build the force, we propose that the research institute uses the material reserves in international waters that have already been discovered, or will be discovered as a result of their investigation.” She paused for a moment to let people digest her words so far, then changed gears and moved to another part of the proposal.

“The unified government will have more power and authority than the current United Nations, which will step back and become a venue for hosting sessions to resolve issues that arise on the planet. The united government’s authority will be absolute in matters regarding the preparations for the incoming visitors. As for the rest of the

matters, the UN will remain mostly as it is, with the addition of a permanent president in the General Assembly and Security Council from the united government.

“That would ensure that no hindrances to our preparations can arise while still ensuring that non-urgent matters can be handled as usual. Our proposal is only in the initial stage of development, so all of the details need to be discussed in meticulous fashion, but in order to allow the greatest preparation lead time possible, we suggest that a fully-fledged plan must be drafted and agreed to before the end of this year, so within four months from today.”

Ambassador Foster paused, this time for longer than just to moisten her throat, before beginning to wrap up her presentation. “Over the thousands of years that humanity has developed, from discovering fire, learning to speak, to using stone tools and weapons to hunt, then learning agriculture, entering the iron age, the bronze age, and so on, we are now at a crossroads. In order to allow humanity to progress further, this is a hurdle that must be overcome. It’s time to put aside our petty infighting and tribal state and stand united as a single monolithic species. Should we succeed in that, I believe that in our unity, nothing is impossible. Esteemed ambassadors, President Aboulatta, members of the press, and people watching at home, thank you. I yield the floor to President Aboulatta,” she said, then stepped away from the podium and retook her seat.

“Madame Ambassador, thank you for your proposal. I now open the floor for questions,” Ambassador Aboulatta said and a few people immediately raised their hands.

Chapter 346 The Only Thing That Can Stop Eden Is... Their Televisions!?

Ambassador Aboulatta pointed to the Chinese representative, who stood and said, “China would like to offer an alternate suggestion. The system we have has been perfected over many years and has already had all the problems worked out of it. So I suggest we continue the current system, as the UN has been at the forefront of maintaining peace between all the nations on the planet....” He continued speaking, finding more and more reasons they should stick with the current system. The UN had been around for over seventy years, after all, and there was no need to reinvent the wheel by creating a new united government system. That posed too many issues that couldn’t be worked out in the time frame suggested by Eden, which was the only thing the Chinese ambassador agreed with Ambassador Foster on.

“For instance,” he said, “many countries have differing ideologies, and just working out those alone would take more time than we have if we want to settle everything by late December.” He argued that instead of forming a united government that only looked strong from the outside but was actually fractured within, it would be better to maintain the status quo, then continued, “But I do agree that too many leaders wouldn’t be a good thing. So I propose that the UN Security Council’s permanent representatives form a leadership council. France and the UK would combine to represent the European Union, while China, Russia, and America would be the other three members on the leadership council.”

Following China's proposal, the Russian ambassador also gave their proposal. It was along much the same lines, but was phrased in a different way and suggested in a slightly more aggressive tone.

"Does anyone else wish to speak?" Ambassador Aboulatta asked, but was met with a resounding silence.

It was strange, since America was very opinionated in the UNSC and tended to hog the limelight whenever the slightest opening was left for them to do so. And considering that their historical competitors, China and Russia, had spoken, it was doubly strange.

"Since there are no other proposals, let us vote on the ones before us. First to be voted on is the proposal submitted to the council by the honorable ambassador from the Republic of Eden, Madame Foster," Amr said, then cast his own vote.

One by one, votes started being cast by the UNSC member nations.

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Back in Eden.

January Lilungulu and his father were recent immigrants to Eden from Tanzania. They had arrived thanks to the Coeus Foundation's "Dreamer" program, and Lilungulu's father had been lucky enough to get a job working at a Hephaestus assembly factory, working on the line to manufacture a number of products that were on the sanction list.

Today, he and his father, who had taken a day off from work, were sitting in front of their television, just two more of the innumerable people watching the broadcast of the UN Security Council's emergency session on their local news program. The house they were in was new, and bought at cost with a low-interest, long-term loan that was offered to new immigrants by the Coeus Foundation, and the cost of goods in Eden was also fairly low, which had given the two of them a brand-new lease on life compared to what they had before in Tanzania.

Many people in Eden, both natives and recent immigrants alike, were flourishing, even under the sanctions. Many things that had been expensive in the past, due to currency exchange rates and import/export tariffs, were now cheap, and the quality of the goods produced in the Hephaestus assembly factories was even higher than things imported from more "industrialized" nations in the past.

The same was even more true for the people who had gotten jobs in those assembly factories, like Lilungulu's father had. But there was a certain respect given to those workers over and above the workers in almost any other industry, which let them hold their heads high in pride. And the education subsidies that Edenian schools offered students all the way from preschool to postgraduate degree programs ensured that the children of immigrants and native citizens alike would only be in better and better positions than the generations that came before them.

After all, the sanctions would be temporary, and once they were lifted, most of the assembly workers would need to find other ways of earning an income as the "rightful owners" of the patents for the goods currently being produced would likely take over the manufacturing of them.

All of the current economic and population stimuli that Eden was currently experiencing were a result of the decisions made by Aron and Alexander in order to increase the number of high-paying

jobs, lower the unemployment rate, and increase the Edenian citizens' happiness. After all, content citizens weren't likely to declare revolutions and overthrow governments.

But not everyone in Eden was merry after the sanctions were imposed. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced out of their comfort zones and jobs that had previously relied on export industries, or were displaced by the government buying their familial properties in order to turn them into new farms.

If any group existed in Eden that would want their government to comply with the international community's demands, it would be those disenfranchised people.

However, things were even looking up for them, thanks in large part to Alexander's continued campaign of forging diplomatic and trade ties with other nations suffering under the same unfair yoke as Eden, and for different, but still bullshit, reasons. As the sanctioned nations drew closer to each other, exchanging goods, technologies, and even citizens, more and more of those disenfranchised Edenians began to slowly recover their previous lifestyles.

And with Panoptes and Nyx in charge of monitoring them, they were the first to be given the opportunities to restore their previous lifestyles if they were dissatisfied with the recent changes.

As for those that had been disenfranchised, poor, and so on before the imposition brought on Eden by the UN-backed sanctions, they had also been provided with opportunities to lift themselves up and into a comfortable life. They were provided with interest-free loans, job-specific education programs, various grants, and much, much more, all of which came from the Coeus Foundation in cooperation with the various related Edenian government ministries.

For example, Coeus provided funding to the Ministry of Agriculture in the form of co-signing guarantees on loans offered by the government, with the stipulation that they be used to buy land and rehabilitate it into farms. Once someone was offered an interest-free farming subsidy loan, they would then be given a place in a Coeus Trade School, where they would be taught how to farm, then assigned as a worker on an existing farm for hands-on experience from planting to harvesting during the loan approval process. It was all very efficient and guaranteed minimal wastage and maximum results.

The new government's efficient handling of economic and interior issues ensured that anyone living in Eden that had the drive to work hard would receive educational and financial support from the various government institutions. It was made very clear through daily government propaganda that the programs were available and in place for anyone that wanted a better life to receive one.

But for those who chose to not work hard and simply wanted to live off the government's charity, they were given three chances to change their mind. If they chose not to accept the government's various outreach programs—none of which were willing to harbor malingerers or the lazy—the government would simply stop offering them of its own accord. The programs would remain available, and the people would still be welcome to apply for them in the future, but they would have to ask for them instead of being offered them.

When all of the new initiatives were combined with a highly motivated, angry populace, the country would naturally grow faster after the sanctions than before. The citizens were enraged that they were being looked down upon and bullied by nations that were proud of their arrogance and threw their weight around with relative impunity, and it showed in the high adoption rate of the new programs.

But today, the entire nation of Eden had ground to a halt as nearly every Edenian citizen, like Lilungulu and his father, had been glued to their television, phone, and computer screens, watching the UN Security Council's broadcast of their emergency session regarding plans to deal with the visitors. They all wanted to know what their country was going to propose, and whether or not they would once again be ignored.

And from the looks of things, being ignored was likely to be the best outcome for the fledgling nation.

Chapter 347 The Destructive Process of Creation

UN Headquarters, New York.

It wasn't long before the display screen tallied and revealed the votes.

United States of America: in favor.

Russia: opposed.

People's Republic of China: opposed

United Kingdom: in favor

France: opposed

The moment the first no vote from the five permanent members of the security council appeared, everyone in the room, and the more politically savvy folks watching from home, knew the resolution had effectively been swatted. Even if the tally of the entire security council was in favor, no matter the margin, either China or Russia would use their veto power to kill Eden's proposal. Still, that was a moot point, as more than half of the non-permanent members had voted against it, two more had abstained, and the supporters were pitifully few.

Most countries apparently either agreed with China and Russia that the UN was enough, or they were against giving up any of the power they currently held and didn't want anyone to lord their authority over them.

The way the UNSC was set up, with five nations holding the power of veto over everything, it had devolved into a stage on which only they could perform, while the rest of the world could do nothing but watch the show. Occasionally to their benefit, true, but usually it was to their detriment or didn't involve them at all. Over time, that had turned the UN into an ineffective organization that could do nothing but say pretty words and hand down resolutions that only weak nations were forced to follow, while more powerful nations could ignore them with impunity. If anyone needed evidence of their toothlessness, the Russian takeover of the Crimean peninsula and openly stated intentions on an invasion of Ukraine was more than enough.

That wasn't even mentioning the corruption in the organization, which was only hidden behind a thin veneer of politeness. The issue was evident in the resolution following the closed-door hearing regarding the situation between Indonesia and Eden, where the Edenian ambassador presented hard evidence to support their side, while China was backing Indonesia. Needless to say, the corruption in every level of the UN was now blatantly apparent to anyone who cared to pay attention; the only thing saving the organization now was the fact that the hearing had been held behind closed doors and the security council was notoriously good at keeping secret what they need to keep secret.

Following the vote, the internet erupted in protests, which spilled over onto the streets and steps of government buildings around the world. People were fearful, and expressing that fear as they realized that their governments were dragging their feet on an issue where every second counted. Every second they weren't researching, every second they weren't discovering, and every second they weren't building or training was a second that could potentially trigger a domino effect that would exterminate humanity as a species!

Unfortunately, even the protesters were as united as a dish of loose sand. Some protested against the united world government, but others protested against it. And those protests were mostly split according to how the vote went; countries that had voted for it were protesting against the resolution's failure, and countries that had voted against it were protesting the fact that it had even been considered at all.

Another dividing line was along the level of countries' development. More industrialized, "first world" nations—like America and most of the EU—wanted things to remain as they were, while the proposal of a united world government had gained momentum in less-developed nations, like those in Central Africa and Oceania. They knew that if they couldn't get a united world government with a monolithic research institute, they would stand no chance at all of surviving if the visitors were hostile, so their lives were literally on the line.

Humanity had become irrevocably fractured. The divide between developed and developing, powerful and weak, rich and poor, old and young, conservative and liberal... the list went on. There was no unity to be found, and the discovery of an extraterrestrial civilization headed their way had torn away the facade that had previously covered the severe fracturing of the species and thrown all the moral bullshit and excuses out the window.

"I don't know whether to applaud humanity's selfishness or be enraged by it," Aron sighed as he watched chaos sweeping the world. People were showing their helplessness, fear, and anger with widespread destruction, vandalism, and a skyrocketing crime rate everywhere except Eden, and again, weirdly, Australia. Eden, because their country was prosperous, happy, and developing well but also a very highly trained police force that knew how to deal with such things backed by a very swift but brutal justice system that punishes people according to the damage caused by the crime making all crimes in Eden have no ceiling of the punishment they could be given as a result of weight of the committed crime, while Australians were simply sanguine and phlegmatic as a whole.

Still, there was no mockery in Aron's tone, only a bitter kind of sadness. He knew that human nature was actually humanity's worst enemy, and part of human nature was for people to prioritize themselves when the species' life was on the line.

[They don't know that panicking is the worst possible reaction to have when their entire civilization is on the verge of destruction,] Nova said from beside Aron, where she was accompanying him in watching the painful process of the destructive act of creation.

"Says you!" Aron growled jokingly. He gave Nova a side eye as he remembered that her panic attack during his upgrade had cost him more than five billion loss that day

which was chump change for him but still, he couldn't waste an opportunity to mess with her.

[I learned my lesson after a single error, but humanity continues repeating their mistakes time and again. They say that 'those who don't learn history are doomed to repeat it,' but I like the response by Friedrich Hegel: 'the only thing we've learned from history is that we've learned nothing from history',] Nova said in a shy voice.

"True. Humanity can only learn through experience, and experience is something you only gain through fucking up. So as long as they don't experience the negative aspects of the panic, they'll never learn to be calm and think carefully under pressure." Aron was speaking as though he himself wasn't human, something he didn't realize had been happening more and more since his upgrade. But if he did notice it, he likely wouldn't care regardless.

Humanity had disappointed him on far too many occasions, after all.

"Another thing that's worsening the chaos is the herd mentality. Humans are social animals, and when gathered in groups, they act as a group rather than relying on their individual judgment. So none of them have any control over the situation, and none of them will allow an individual to take that control and direct the herd. A person is smart. People are dumb, panicky, dangerous animals—especially in a situation where they lack any practical experience on how to handle themselves, like this one.

"Humanity is being tested, and it only remains to be seen whether they pass or fail." Aron massaged his temples and pinched the bridge of his nose, then sighed.

"Give me a list of names. I want to know everyone who's instigating and worsening the chaos in order to deal with them in the future. I can't allow that kind of bullshit when we're fighting for our lives," Aron said. He knew that there were some true "agents of chaos" in the crowds inciting and triggering them, but the majority were intelligence operatives. He even saw a few agents he recognized by sight, having dealt with them relatively recently, either personally or through skirmishes between them and the Nyxians.

[Yes, sir,] Nova said, then got to work collating the name list and the evidence backing each individual's inclusion.

Accompanied by a flash of light, a burly giant that stood nine meters tall, wearing ragged brown trousers and sandals on his feet appeared. He wasn't wearing a shirt, and his muscular upper body was covered in tattoos of eyes in every shape, size, and color, all of which rippled and moved seemingly on their own. He was none other than Panoptes, the AI that monitored social media and ran the Panopticon satellite network.

[There's a situation online, Grandfather,] Panoptes reported. [The Panopticon intercepted signals between American, Chinese, Russian, and British satellites—it appears they'll soon be coming for you to either take your tech by force or force you to 'voluntarily donate it for the betterment of mankind'.]

“Let them come. I've been waiting for them,” Aron sneered as he focused on the second list Nova had collated for him: a list of people who had remained calm despite the situation.

Chapter 348 A Speech For the History Books

After a week or so of chaos, the various governments finally stepped in. They ordered their police forces into action and constantly urged the citizens to return home. They argued that nothing could be done if the population didn't remain calm and allow them to work, and pointed out that aimless protests and riots did nothing but waste time that should be spent on preparations. Together with Panoptes guiding social media and the GAIA OS AI assistants discreetly acting to calm their users, cooler heads finally prevailed and things started returning to normal.

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“Are all of our preparations complete?” Trump asked the secretary of defense.

“Yes, sir. We're ready to proceed,” the SecDef replied as he handed the folders in his hands to the president.

Trump said nothing, but briefly scanned through the contents of each folder. After closing the last one, he nodded in satisfaction and said, “We can move forward with this.”

“When will you do the press briefing?” the Secretary of State asked.

“Call for a press conference in the Rose Garden today. We need to calm the public and regain their support as soon as possible,” Trump said, opening the folder on top of the stack on his desk to read the contents in more detail.

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Later that day, the White House Rose Garden, which was usually used for happier announcements, was filled with reporters from every news agency that had a White House Correspondent Press Pass. Despite the short notice, white house correspondents were available at any time for situations just like this one. This time, though, the press conference had been opened to everyone who wanted to attend, white house correspondent or not.

It was being held in the Rose Garden for that specific reason, as they wanted as many reporters to attend as possible and space in the briefing room was naturally limited. Today's press conference would be the first one held by the president after the mess caused by the UNSC special emergency session, where the UN had decided to do basically nothing.

When the conference was scheduled to begin, President Trump followed a few of his cabinet members out of the white house, then took to the podium after they had lined up at the back of the stage the podium was set up on. The podium was decorated with the presidential seal, and the US flag was proudly flying from every conceivable surface of the stage setup. It was tacky, gaudy, and

looked like the stage at a campaign rally; it was uniquely Donald H. Trump's style. He had personally taken over decorating the venue, as he knew the speech he had his press secretary prepare was bound to go directly into the history books.

He straightened the red trucker hat on his head and his long tie, then began speaking. "My fellow Americans, when our forefathers dreamed of a new nation, one founded on freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they looked to the vast horizon of the great unknown. Today, we, too, gaze into an unknown, but our eyes lay above the horizon and our gaze stretches into the vastness of space.

"Unfortunately, when you stare into the void, the void stares back at you.

"Just a short while ago, our great nation and the rest of the world received and was startled by the discovery of an approaching extraterrestrial object. I remember the phone calls, the briefings, and the weight of the decisions that lay ahead of me at that time. But more than anything, I remember the palpable fear."

He said the last words slowly, as if he was reliving the experience.

"I remember the uncertainty that gripped our citizens and the questions on everyone's mind: are we ready? Are we prepared? Are we capable of facing them...?"

"For too long, space has been the final frontier, a domain of mystery and wonder—so much wonder—but also of vulnerability. And in the face of this new challenge, it isn't enough to offer hopes and prayers. We must be prepared. And as your president, while the world is dragging its feet, I have an obligation and a duty to ensure the safety and security of every American."

He stared directly into the camera in front of him.

"And when it comes to defending America and its citizens, it isn't enough to just have an American presence in space. We must dominate space! We must lead others and act as a beacon for humanity to learn from and follow, just like we did when we landed on the moon in 1969!

"In order for that to happen, I hereby direct the Department of Defense and the Pentagon to immediately begin the process of establishing a Space Force as the sixth branch of our armed forces.

"Our Space Force isn't just another branch of our armed forces, but a testament to American ingenuity, determination, and our unwavering spirit. As we've done throughout history when faced with new challenges, we'll adapt, we'll innovate, and we will overcome!" he said in an enthusiastic tone designed to raise the morale of the American citizens.

“Together with the formation of the Space Force, we’re going to subsidize and offer tax credits and deductions to all companies that are willing to focus on space and help the American military to rapidly develop the necessary technology.”

“To those who wonder about the cost or necessity of such a force, first of all, shame on you. The safety of our citizens and the security of our nation are paramount. There is no price too high.

“Secondly, the Space Force will not only defend against the incoming extraterrestrial threats, but will also secure America’s domination in space exploration, research, and development.

“I call upon every citizen to support this new endeavor. And to the men and women who will join the ranks of the Space Force, I salute you. You’re the pioneers of a new age, the guardians of the final frontier.

“Together, as one united nation, we’ll face the challenges of tomorrow. We will rise, we will thrive, and as always, America will prevail.

“God bless you all, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you,” he finished as the reporters in the audience and his cabinet members standing behind him in solidarity burst into applause. His speech had given everyone who’d watched it a newfound sense of hope.

Chapter 349 Follow the Leader

After a lengthy standing ovation, the reporters finally came to their senses, remembering that the press conference notice had mentioned that they would be allowed to ask questions. And once they finally came to their senses and remembered they were there for a press conference, not a press briefing, hands rose among the crowd.

Trump pointed to one of the reporters he knew in the front row. “You first, go ahead.”

“Are you indicating that you’re closing the door on the option of a unified world military?” asked the correspondent from Fox News.

“No, we aren’t doing that. We’re starting by ourselves because America is the leader of the free world and it’s time for us to step up and lead. We’ll eventually come to an agreement, but by taking the reins now, we’ll be able to get a headstart so the time we spend closing the deal isn’t wasted,” he answered. His press corps had already given him a list of questions that would likely be asked and prepared him ahead of time. He pointed to the next reporter, the correspondent from Breitbart. “Your turn, go ahead.”

“There were three plans presented to the security council. Why didn’t we propose our own, and which of the three plans will your administration support?”

“We’re still weighing our choices, but thankfully it was me that won the election. If it was Clinton, who knows what kind of mess we’d be in now?” The White House Press Corps staffer standing behind the cameras paled and broke out into a cold sweat. The president was going off script again. “Such a mess, so many messes. My administration will choose only the best plan after carefully weighing the options. Only the best,” Trump said. He knew the Breitbart audience and what they wanted, so he would give it to them in order to keep their attention focused on him. He silently sighed, then pointed to the correspondent from MSNBC. He still had to at least appear fair, after all.

“What do you think will happen to countries that can’t afford to create a space force, like you just directed our country to do?”

“They can invest money then, or researchers. R&D is still needed at the moment and even if they aren’t as smart as we are or as rich as we are, they can at least deliver coffee and push mail carts.” He pointed to the correspondent from CNN.

“Wouldn’t every country forming their own space branches while the talks are ongoing create a strategy clash as each country fights to have the world adopt their strategies and doctrines?”

“That’s part of the reason I directed the formation of a space force today. I’m not a politician, I’m a businessman. And a good one, too. So good. And even the worst businessman knows the benefit of being first to market and I’m far from the worst. Politicians like to talk, talk, talk, but soon they’re gonna realize that we left them all in the dust and, in a year at most, the whole thing will be settled and we’ll still be on top. So it’ll be our space force that leads, and our doctrine that they follow, and our strategies that they enact, I promise you that.”

The Q&A session lasted longer than most, and Trump mostly answered them well. He stuck mainly to allowing the media outlets that supported him to ask questions and avoided the unfriendly reporters until he wrapped up the conference and left.

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The reaction to Trump’s announcement was immediate. The Americans, at least, calmed down and returned mostly to normal when they saw that something was being done. It could be compared to the reaction after the attacks in 2001, where there was an initial panic until the government stepped in and announced a concrete plan on how to prevent it from happening again. The same thing happened with the discovery of extraterrestrials now, and the same approach to calming the public had worked again.

And the calm period hadn’t arrived for America alone, but also for the rest of the world. Or most of it, at least. In North Korea, there had never been a mass panic to begin with, as the government hadn’t informed the regular citizens of the discovery at all in the first place. Kim Jong-Un was

patting himself on the proverbial back over having foreseen the period of mass panic and solving it before it could even start.

Another reason the panic had died down in the rest of the world was because of the common belief in America's strength. After all, America had been the world police for decades, and generally speaking, when they said they would solve a problem... the problem was soon solved.

One way or another.

Besides, now that the United States had acted, their opponents would do the same, if only to not be left behind or left vulnerable. After all, a space force was just another army, albeit one that could be used to attack anywhere on Earth.

And the people weren't wrong, either, as hours after Trump's announcement, Russia and China announced the formation of their space forces as well, if differently named. For Russia, it was the Roscosmos Armed Forces, and in China, it was the Chang'e Guardian Force.

China and Russia also announced that they would be ramping up their production of nuclear weapons, as they believed only those would be useful in space warfare. They were the strongest weapons humanity had developed over its entire existence, and with the radiation contamination being a non-issue in the vacuum of space, they were perfectly suited for ship-to-ship combat.

As for the rest of the countries in Europe, they each announced they would be negotiating as a single body, the EU. They had already opened a dialogue with the American government to see if they could share the financial burden between the many countries in the EU and America, but if that didn't work, they would be forming their own European Space Navy as a single military entity.

As relative normalcy returned to the world, people looked for opportunities to profit and a new market bubble was blown. Analysts and trendsetters, like Warren Buffett, believed that the space boom would go even further than the dot-com bubble in the late 90s.

With the formation of a new market bubble, companies that had something to do with space, such as SpaceX, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop-Grumman, Aerojet Rocketdyne Holdings, and Maxar Technologies, experienced a meteoric rise on the stock market, hitting the limit every day. People heavily invested in them with the belief that their shares would continue increasing in value nonstop over the next decade or two.

The legitimate companies weren't really a problem. In fact, they were a great opportunity for everyone, and something that Aron had envisioned as part of his unified research program idea, but there were still problems. Shitty companies began appearing one after another, promising that they had The Solution™ to everything and attempting to take their companies public as soon as possible. That said, nobody but the poor people were fooled by their claims; rich people could already recognize them for what they were: a pump-and-dump scam, where the company would cook their books and make wild claims in order to attract investors and drive their share prices up, then dump all of those shares after they made enough of an increase, pocketing the difference.

It was absolutely against the law, but for some strange reason, the Securities and Exchange Commission either didn't have the time or lacked the interest in pursuing the companies that had obviously been formed specifically to break that very law.

Chapter 350 They're All the Same

“Everyone’s finally picking sides,” Aron said as he read a report on the current happenings around the world. He knew that, soon, the “big” countries would begin negotiations on how they would divide the planet between them and exploit the resources in their territories for their own gain and, coincidentally, the formation of their individual forces.

“So why aren’t you making an announcement of your own space force? Wouldn’t that increase your citizens’ morale and pride?” Rina asked. She had already laid her eyes on some of the ongoing research projects in Lab City, as well as their mature discoveries, and she knew that nobody on Earth could catch up to Aron in terms of technology. Not in a decade, and likely not ever.

“There’s no need to make it known to the world right now. In the peoples’ minds, we already have a very well-established and advanced space research institute. The moment we discovered aliens, and our discovery was backed up by other, ‘more advanced’ nations, that much was set in stone. Our lead in the current space race is already cemented, and everyone knows we already have experts in the field. So I expect offers to cooperate to start rolling in one by one for countries that can’t afford to buy my tech, and offers to buy from countries that somehow still think I’ll sell it to them,” Aron sneered. He was looking at the situation from the sidelines like a kid looked at ant colonies and was just waiting for the right moment to bring out his magnifying glass.

“Besides, do you really think they,” he gestured at the invisible “them”, waving his arm in front of him, “would believe that we have the money to spend on research right now when we’re dealing with the current UN sanctions?” he jokingly added, eliciting a chuckle from his girlfriend.

“So I’ve been wondering over the past few days... what would’ve happened if the UNSC had agreed to your unification proposal without any hindrance?” she asked.

“I would’ve kept my aspirations to the business world instead of world domination. While I would’ve still built a private navy to protect myself and my companies’ products, I would’ve just become the world’s biggest businessman dealing in arms and black tech. Together with that, I would’ve released my VR simulation to the public earlier, to reduce the time and resources spent on R&D while keeping an eye on everyone else’s advancements. I still would’ve been the ultimate winner regardless, but at the moment... does it really matter?” Aron had been positive at the time of the UNSC emergency session that his proposal would fail, but even with that, he’d still had a detailed backup plan in place in case things went contrary to his expectations.

Rina remained silent for a while, thinking of the chance that her family and its wealth would exist following Aron's eventual takeover. She ultimately came to the conclusion that the Rothschilds were unlikely to survive as they were and that saddened her a bit. No matter how they had treated her, they were still her family.

Still, she couldn't bring herself to ask Aron to intervene on their behalf, because she knew that deep down, the Rothschilds were no different from the Morgans. While the Morgans had been the primary driving force behind the invasion of Iraq and the ultimate architects of the 2001 attacks, the Rothschilds had been responsible for their fair share of atrocities as well. For example, Operation Desert Storm in the 90s, the attack on the USS Cole in 2000, and more could be laid directly at the feet of the Rothschild family.

At their very cores, the two families were identical in their way of doing things, and Rina knew that the only reason Aron hadn't already acted against the Rothschilds was because they had yet to do anything to him that would require a response. Unlike the Morgans, who had signed their own death warrant the moment they began plotting against him.

Although Aron was no saint himself, and had done some very shady shit, he always had sound reasons for doing what he did. Reasons that didn't include "personal enrichment" as the first, second, third, and fourth on the list while "increasing power and authority" was sixth through tenth.

'Still, I'll try my best to salvage what I can of my family and change it for the better. So let the upcoming destruction suffice as punishment for what my predecessors did and a cleansing fire that redeems what remains,' she said to herself, her gaze focused on the garden in front of her.

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It didn't take long for congress to wrap up their investigation into GAIA Technologies and direct the Department of Justice to open a case against them. The charges were violating US antitrust laws, market manipulation, and multiple counts of copyright infringement. They were hoping to levy enormous fines and force their OS, or at least the core code it relied on, to be made public or risk being prohibited from doing business in the US. Plus, the fines would go a long way toward lining certain elites' pockets.

The announcement of the case being opened came a few days after the public calmed down from the recent alien panic.

It was perfectly timed to go mostly unnoticed by the general public, unfortunately, and the coalition of American tech conglomerates was doing their best to get it into the public consciousness. But as a result of the constant stream of news about the visitors, they decided to use the delay to formulate a more perfect PR plan to demonize the company. They would focus on preparing and spreading rumors about GAIA Technology stealing and selling user data, and blaming them for doing everything that the public hated that the coalition themselves were guilty of. It would be a campaign of thieves crying theft.

While that was ongoing, the government of Eden declined all offers to form a coalition with countries that were forming their new space forces and research institutes. Eden responded with the argument that they can't join a coalition that doesn't include every country in the world, as they would be remaining strictly neutral as per their standard diplomatic policies. Plus, they didn't want

to deepen the division of the world along the rich and poor line, increasing the inequality between them and countries that couldn't afford to create their own. Nobody would want the "leeches" in their coalition, and that term would include Eden except that they had already shown their prowess and technology advantage by being the first to detect the incoming extraterrestrial object.

That decision was met with different reactions. Some thought they were taking virtue signaling to a ridiculous extreme, as their lives were on the line, while others applauded them for condemning countries for doing things on their own and wasting resources that could have been used in a more efficient, united manner to avoid wastage and duplicate efforts.

As a result of Eden's decision, the countries that had invited them decided to instead ask for the tech they used to discover the visitors, going so far as to word it in a way that implied they would be acting against the public good if they refused to "donate" their technology to "the cause". Implied was the threat that the entire world would consider Eden to be the villains if they refused the "fair and equitable" offer of giving everyone something for nothing.