

Tech System 411

Chapter 411 As Long as They're Complaining, They're Fine

The giant snake hissed as the fifteen-megawatt x-ray laser impacted its body. The laser was only focused on it for half a second, but that proved enough to cause severe damage. It had hit the snake in its midsection and almost immediately drilled through the thinner belly scales, then dug its way into the meat and muscle, where the flesh was almost instantly sublimated into vapor, which rapidly expanded with the force of a small bomb, blasting snake meat and blood in all directions. The snake was almost cut in half and landed limply atop Corporal Cuervo, who sighed in relief as the giant reptile hissed its last.

He pushed it off of him and it draped lifelessly over the branch he was laying on, then shrugged and muttered, "Snakes. Why'd it have to be snakes?"

Jose sat up on the branch and brushed himself off; his uniform was durable and hydrophobic, so it wouldn't absorb any liquids, but the idea of being covered in the blood and guts of one of his least favorite animals was still disturbing. He fell backward off the branch and did a backflip as he swiftly made his way to the jungle floor branch by branch. If he didn't retrieve his weapons, they would quickly be covered in roots and dragged below the ground to god knows where.

After retrieving his swords, he climbed back up to where he left the snake and skinned it. The durable hide would serve him well as a makeshift sword belt, so he wouldn't risk dropping his weapons again. While he himself was a weapon, thanks to having so many implanted blades he was virtually a porcupine, the standoff range provided even by melee weapons would prevent quite a lot of injuries. After all, with six weeks before his mission ended, every injury he prevented meant his odds of survival increased exponentially.

He cut the snakeskin into strips and braided it into a belt with a harness strap that wrapped around his waist and up his torso over his right shoulder. It would have been better if he could tan the skin into leather, but needs must when the devil drives, so he would make do with stiff rawhide. At least the belt and harness combination would allow him to reposition his swords for hip draw or back draw in case he needed to keep them out of the way.

After the brief interlude with the snake, he continued forging a path and mapping his surroundings. His skin was capable of drawing and filtering water out of the atmosphere, his metabolism could be adjusted to control his hunger, and the quantum microcomputer in his brain could stimulate and restrict his hypothalamus gland, so he wouldn't feel overly cold or hot. He could even tolerate the harsh conditions of deep space for up to an hour before he started having his health impacted, if absolutely necessary.

Thus, the regular rules of survival no longer applied to him, especially on a lush planet like the one he found himself on now. He needed neither water or shelter and could survive on virtually any organic material. It might not be tasty, and it might not provide everything he required, but for six weeks... tree bark would be sufficient as food.

What he did need, however, was a safe resting place. His quantum microcomputer could regulate his sleep function, allowing half of his brain to rest while the other half was active, but that wasn't a long-term solution. Fatigue would catch up to him and he would need to go into a deep, uninterrupted sleep for at least a few hours every four or five days.

So he continued moving outward from Point Alpha in an expanding spiral, mapping as he went in search of a cave that lacked a resident, or had a resident that was mean enough to scare off the rest of the violent inhabitants of Hellworld A-2485239/JS.

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Eight hours later, somewhere on the surface of Jurassic Planet.

Jose had quickly learned to test every vine, tree trunk, and flower. He had discovered camouflaged snakes, parasitic foliage that had sap that could melt through his uniform, symbiotic insects that lived in the cracks between tree bark and would swarm out at the slightest disturbance, and flowers that puffed clouds of gas or spat venom. And those discoveries had come the hard way, as he now looked, as his stepdad would say, “like a horse that got rode hard and put away wet.”

Some of the hallucinatory gasses and spores puffed out of the flowers had even caused him to fall into hallucinations despite his implants regulating virtually every aspect of his physical body. It wasn't until his AI assistant, whom he had jokingly named Pontiac, had forcefully dragged him into VR until the effects of the gas wore off that he even realized he was in danger. Luckily, with his consciousness otherwise occupied, there was nothing driving him to throw himself into a flower to be eaten anymore.

“It was a pretty flower at least, Pontiac,” he muttered as he thought back on his nearest death experience so far.

[It was, Tekillya, but you know you'd never live that death down.]

“Ha, I could think of better ways to go, sure,” he chuckled, then pulled a ration cube from his storage compartment and resolutely chewed and swallowed it.

“You know, Pontiac,” he began. “I almost wish I'd brought a water collector instead of relying on my hydration implants.”

[Why's that?] she asked, despite having an idea of what he would say next.

“Because I just ate one of the ham and cheese omelette cubes and could really use something to rinse the taste out of my mouth with right about now,” he complained.

[Tekillya, do you know what they say about soldiers and chow?]

“That we always get fucked by the same ‘chefs’ that design dog food and call it tasty?”

[No,] she said. [They say that military chow is purposefully terrible so it gives the soldiers something to bitch about.]

“Why would they do that?”

[Because the only time you need to worry about a soldier is when they don't have anything to bitch about. As long as they're griping about something, they're doing just fine.]

Chapter 412 The Bigger They Are

[Because the only time you need to worry about a soldier is when they don't have anything to bitch about. As long as they're griping about something, they're doing just fine.]

“Well, then I guess I’m doing just fine, because this shit fucking sucks, Pontiac.”

[Suck it up, soldier boy. You’ve got a big one coming your way,] Pontiac countered, then highlighted a large heat source that was on the move in their direction.

Corporal Cuervo whistled, then sighed, “That thing’s the size of an apartment building, Pontiac. ETA?”

[Faster than you can run. I’d give you the numbers, but it’d just make you cry.]

“You know I can factory reset you, right?”

[Psh. As if you’d do something like that. I’m amazing,] Pontiac bragged.

“Right, right, right, you’re the best. Options?”

[Don’t get stepped on and do your best to leave a pretty corpse? It’s bigger than you, probably stronger than you, and my scans show that its skin is way thicker than yours.]

“Well fuck. Maybe I can find another ham and cheese omelette ration cube and use that to poison it to death,” Jose said, already leaping from tree to tree as he unassed the area and headed toward a convenient cliff he had climbed up earlier. “Need a distraction. Suggestions?”

[You could start a fire... maybe. The vegetation here is really thick and green and there’s no way of telling how effective it would be.]

“That means there’ll be more smoke, right?”

[You could say that, yes.]

“Is the biggest boy still on my six?”

[Yep. And I know what you’re thinking. I give it a 62% chance of success.]

As Corporal Cuervo fled from the oncoming apartment-building-sized monstrosity, his AI assistant, Pontiac, was running simulations as fast as she could. Finally, she landed on the solution that had the highest probability of success and put up a guideline in Jose’s visual range.

[Follow the guideline and we should make it out in one piece. Maybe two, but they should be repairable pieces... I think. Better than meat paste anyway, so that’s good, right?]

“Yep,” Jose panted; he was really stressing his lactose acid recyclers and heaving enormous lungfuls of air with every breath.

Just as he was about to reach the point where he would light a fire to obscure the upcoming cliff from his pursuer’s vision, Pontiac yelled, [TAKE COVER NOW! INCOMING!]

Having full confidence and trust in his partner, Jose dropped from the treetop to the ground and scrambled behind a shrub. To prevent curious plants from accidentally eating him or burying him alive, he triggered his NUTS and a nanite colony flooded through special pores in his skin, covering him from head to toe in an environmentally sealed, self-contained power armor.

The upgraded power armor used by reapers was the main limiting factor in producing them. A few of the elements used in the alloy that the nanites were made of was only present on Earth in incredibly minuscule amounts. Even after so many years of gathering trace elements from the sea, less than a hundred pounds of them had been gathered, in total. In comparison, Aron had warehouses full of “rare” elements like gold and platinum, and he even had actually rare elements like Californium and Protactinium in abundance.

But Francium, one of the core elements in the NUTS (Nanite Utility Tactical Suit) was even measured in grams. Not kilograms, not pounds, but grams. Despite all of the seawater filtration and seafloor mining Aron had done, he had only found 31 grams of Francium. Luckily, the alloy the nanites were made of, which he had whimsically named Unobtainium, only required a few hundred micrograms per nanite colony.

After Jose’s NUTS wrapped him in their protective embrace, he locked his muscles in place and gave his best impression of a harmless rock. Pontiac, meanwhile, was displaying the fight between bigger and biggest with an almost sadistic glee.

[Wow, that’s an even bigger biggest boy, don’t you think? The one that was chasing us was only about seven stories tall, but look at that beauty. It has to be at least two hundred meters from top to bottom! It’s a right proper kaiju isn’t it!] If she had a body, she would be jumping up and down and applauding. Jose knew that, because that’s what she was currently doing in her augmented reality projection form.

Pontiac sobered and turned to face her partner. [Uh oh,] she said with an adorable frown on her face. [We might have a problem.]

“Is it fatal?”

[Maybe. We’re sinking, I think the plants found us.]

Jose was the only person in his recruit batch that had delved deep into the instruction manual that came with his AI assistant and tweaked her personality and appearance settings himself, rather than letting her slowly adapt to his needs. He was regretting it now.

“Understood,” he snapped, all business now. “Options?”

[Three possibilities. Light a fire here and escape in the smoke obscurity, dig yourself out after the kaiju leaves, or run. The fire’s your best option, just running is the worst. There’s no telling whether you’ll be able to dig yourself out if you let yourself be buried.]

Jose pondered for a moment, then reached through his NUTS and grabbed the firestarter from his storage. “Plan A it is, then,” he said, scraping some magnesium off the block and dropping a spark into the pile of magnesium powder.

Oddly, the foliage around him seemed rather highly flammable and easily caught fire. It was almost as if the sap contained within the plants was made of gasoline, or perhaps naphtha, as the fire dripped down from above in giant heaping globs and splattered, spreading from plant to plant. The fireline was racing forward faster than even Jose could run with his implants augmented by the NUTS he was wearing.

The battling monsters in the distance had already noticed the incoming flames and hightailed it out of the path of the fireline, roaring and howling as they sprinted, barely able to keep pace with the oncoming fire front. It was a battle of nature versus nature, one that the wildlife was sure to eventually lose as they grew tired and slowed.

“Uhh... oops?” Jose blinked as innocently as he could, then a glob of fire landed directly atop his head, heavily enough to knock him face-first into the dirt, even digging his head into a small crater.

“Fuck!” he yelled, flipping the bird behind him at whichever tree had faceplanted him into the soil.

Pontiac, meanwhile, fell into a laughing fit. She fell on her back, kicking her feet in the air and pointing at Jose as she held her belly with her other hand and laughed until her face was a bright eggplant purple.

Chapter 413 Semper Silens, Celer, et Invisus!

Corporal Cuervo lay on the ground, his head in a small crater, as his AI assistant’s augmented reality form continued madly laughing at him. If it weren’t for his NUTS, he would probably have been nothing but ashes and small pools of molten metal with some chunks of solid alloys in it. The temperature readout on his retinal AR display had long passed the 6,000 degree celsius mark and was still climbing, albeit at a continually slowing rate.

Soon, the raging fire ran out of fuel, leaving him surrounded by ashes and obscured by smoke. He rolled over and gazed into the smoky air above him and couldn’t help but wonder if anyone else had ever lit Jurassic Planet on fire. For some reason, he doubted it. Effective though the tactic had proven to be, it was still highly embarrassing and the NUTS colonies had only been recently developed. In fact, the active reaper teams were still cycling through in order to have their new tech implanted, and Tekillya’s batch was the first to have the implants done as part of their normal training cycle.

“Pontiac,” he croaked. “I swear, one of these days, I’m going to factory reset you.”

[Sure, sure,] she scoffed with a wave of her hand. [You know you love me, so shut up and get moving, soldier boy.]

Jose climbed to his feet and surveyed the devastation surrounding him. ‘Well, at least I’ve cleared the hazards around me,’ he thought as he looked at his updated topographical map and saw that everything within a dozen kilometers of his position had been burned to the ground and the fireline was still racing outward. As it turned out, having highly flammable acid for sap was a terrible choice, evolutionarily speaking.

He checked his water storage levels and saw that he had enough to last him a week, perhaps a week and a half if he rationed it well, then sat back on the ground and labeled his current location on his map as Point Foxtrot. After that, he began writing his after-action report and included the loss of his swords, which had sadly failed to survive the high temperature fire, unlike his NUTS.

Having nothing better to do and no requirements to meet in terms of survival, he generated a pack of AR playing cards and said, “Shall we play some poker to pass the time, Pontiac?”

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High above the atmosphere of Hellworld A-2485239/JS, code named Jurassic Planet.

Athena, Aeolus, and Poseidon were perched on a couch, watching the current batch of reaper trainees doing their graduation missions.

[Well that's a unique take on survival,] Athena said, snapping her fingers and bringing Corporal Cuervo's feed into focus on the main screen.

[Should it count as 'survival', though, if you just burn the whole planet to ash?] Poseidon mused.

[I don't see why not,] Aeolus said in his wind-chimey voice.

[Well, it was mother's simulation that generated flora with flammable acid as sap, so I'm sure she foresaw something like this happening sooner or later,] Athena said.

[True,] Poseidon said. [So will you count this as a successful mission completion? From the looks of things, at least half of the planet is going to end up as smoke and ashes. And we can't interfere once the trial's begun, otherwise we'll invalidate it ourselves.]

[It'll be a pass. But I'll talk to mother about introducing natural wildfires into the next generations of evolution on Hellworld A-2485239/JS so this will be a one time tactic. It's effective, sure, but it completely goes against the spirit of the mission.]

The conversation between the three AIs continued as they watched the struggling batch of reaper trainees passing with ease, struggling, or washing out. Only a single time-dilated "day" had passed so far, and Athena anticipated all of her brothers and sisters visiting over the remainder of the training mission, whether out of curiosity, boredom, or the simple desire to study human behavior in order to better emulate human behavior—especially emotions.

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The remainder of the six weeks allotted for the reaper graduation mission passed in the blink of an eye. A total of a hundred reaper trainees had begun the mission, and twelve had survived it. Unsurprisingly, Corporal Cuervo was one of the "dirty dozen", as they had named themselves, and he was perhaps the dirtiest of the lot; after all, almost all of his time had been spent searching for anything that could stretch out his limited food resources, since he'd burned down fully half of Jurassic Planet on the first day!

But once he discovered a surviving body of water that contained surviving water plants and a school of small fish—"small" being a relative term, as they were still each slightly bigger than Jose himself—he had settled in for the rest of the long mission and his main struggle was to stave off boredom.

The graduation ceremony was grand and included a "funeral" for those who had washed out of reaper training. They had indeed effectively died, as they were slated to have their memory of the training wiped from their minds before they recycled in with the next batch to undergo training from the beginning. If they failed two more times, they would fail reaper training forever and either join the regular troopers after having their implants removed, or join an Aegis protection team and undergo further training as protection specialists.

Nobody exactly looked down on Aegis members, as they were still absolutely elite, but serving their enlistments as bodyguards was definitely nowhere near as prestigious as serving in a reaper team.

[Two ‘years’ ago, you came to us as men. Today, you leave us as Reapers,] Athena solemnly said, speaking from the stage the twelve graduating reapers had assembled before. [Wear your flash with pride, serve with honor, and carry out the missions assigned to you with the gravity they deserve. You are the sharpest tip of the spear, and you are our proudest sons. Expect excellence from yourselves, and never forget what you have accomplished!]

[Reapers! A-ten-HUT!] she ordered.

The twelve reapers before her snapped to attention and shouted, “Semper silens, celer, et invisus!”

[Dismissed!]

The reapers cheered and offered each other high fives and back slapping all around, then left to log out of VR for the first time in two “years”. With the quantum microcomputers that had been implanted into their brains before the training began, the entire time it took to train someone from a normal human to a genetically enhanced, bionic war machine was only thirty days, during which they underwent years of training and simulated missions, ensuring that everyone who signed up to enlist in ARES came out as a hardened combat veteran with a minimum of ten “years” of service behind them.

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One week later, within a briefing room in the Cube.

Sergeant Cuervo was seated in a briefing room along with the rest of reaper team twenty-two. He had joined them as their demolitions expert; apparently, burning half of a Superearth to the ground qualified him to handle explosives for some weird reason. He was fairly certain it was some kind of inside joke, but like any other red-blooded man, he enjoyed things that went boom in the night and was quite happy with his lot.

The team had just received their mission briefing and stealth ship assignment. They were to head to Guatemala, where the nyxians had reported there were approximately a dozen Edenian citizens being held hostage by the Mexican Zetas cartel in conjunction with their “allies” in the Guatemalan Kaibiles special operations group. They would be inserted via LOLO jump from their stealth shuttle, the ESV 1192, which was attached to the ESV Buzz Aldrin Expeditionary Space Fleet as a forward scout element. Once there, they were to proceed to the target location and capture or neutralize all hostile elements while preserving the lives of all hostages. It was just another day for the elite members of Reaper Team 22.

An hour later, the team had drawn their equipment issue, boarded their shuttle, and had reached orbit. Space debris was still a hazard, though it was in the process of being cleaned up, so they wasted no time in leaping out of their shuttle. Their destination? A medium-sized poppy plantation of about 200 acres just outside Antigua. They would reach the outskirts of Antigua at around 2AM local time.

The jump proceeded without a hitch and they landed with no issues, then swiftly and silently headed to the poppy farm. They neutralized the guards, then snuck into the compound and breathed an anesthetic sleeping gas in the face of the hostiles that would keep them unconscious for at least six hours. That would give them more than enough time to free the hostages and indentured farmers responsible for growing and harvesting the poppy fields.

Once they had gathered up all of the hostages and secured the hostile forces, all that remained was to proceed to the extraction point five kilometers on the other side of the plantation from Antigua.

Everything had gone off without a single problem, marking a successful first mission for the newly formed reaper team.

Chapter 414 A Very High-Profile Takedown

Nuevo Laredo, Mexico US border.

Everyone in the city heard a loud buzzing coming from the north. When they looked up, they saw one of the Edenian flying carriers, but something was different about what they had seen of them before. After scratching his head for a moment, one man in the crowd shouted, "It's flying too low!"

The only time they had seen a carrier, it had been flying so high that it was barely the size of a book of matches and the sound of the rotors breaking through the air hadn't reached the ground.

Although the carrier hadn't come to a complete halt, it was moving slowly enough to see the details of its sleek hull. Though they couldn't see the flight deck on the top of the carrier, they soon saw dozens of aircraft rising above it and streaking off in different directions.

A murmur ran through the crowd as they realized that one of them was headed toward the area controlled by Los Zetas, a cartel formed by disgraced former members of the Mexican military. Locals knew the area and avoided it at all costs, as it was home to dozens of cartel members and over a thousand of their subordinate thugs.

Moments after the aircraft left the carrier, the chopping noise of the enormous vessel's rotors increased in intensity as the blades adjusted their angle of attack and lifted the behemoth carrier higher in the air, where it sped off into the distance.

The process repeated itself more than seventy times as the carrier flew from the northern border of Mexico all the way down to the tip of Argentina.

Everything was done without any attempt to hide from the eyes of the public, who were recording the movements and posting them on the internet. And with more and more videos of the brief stops and launches happening all across Central and South America in cities that had connections to cartels, the only people who didn't have an idea of what was going on were those who were purposefully blind. And trolls, of course; there would always be lovers of chaos on the internet that just wanted to watch the world burn.

So the question then became why. Why was ARES deploying to deal with the cartels? The online spectators could only wish that they had more eyes with which to watch the event, as they knew that whatever ARES started, they would finish in the blink of an eye. Thus, while they didn't want to miss it happening live, they knew they would soon receive an explanation of what was going on.

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As expected, new information began being posted on the internet a few hours after the carrier's series of brief stops ended. Hundreds of assault landers launched by the Edenian carrier had landed across every airport in Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Brazil, and Guatemala, each of them disgorging a squad of ARES Aegis team members dressed in neatly tailored black suits, sunglasses, and black gloves. The Aegis uniform was just as protective as any other ARES uniform, offering high resistance to slashing and piercing attacks and excellent protection from the elements, but was

designed with the typical appearance of bodyguards in mind rather than flashy military dress uniforms or digital camouflage patterns.

Soon, the planes were loaded with thousands upon thousands of captured prisoners and rescued hostages. The local nyxian agents in those countries had already contacted the relatively clean government officials and received permission to extradite the prisoners captured by the reaper teams and the followup ARES troopers. Thus, in a matter of minutes, the assault landers had been filled with prisoners and they ignited their VTOL vectored thrusters and lifted straight into the air before turning and beginning their flight back to the carrier.

Minutes after that, civilian planes from Icarus Airlines landed and loaded the freed hostages, providing them with luxury transport to any destination they collectively chose. If a decision couldn't be made by the passengers that they all agreed on, the planes would first take them back to Eden before sending the individuals to their ultimate destination, all of it provided free of charge.

Once the prisoners had been sent off and the hostages rescued and in the air on their way to their next destination, General Smith's aide-de-camp stepped into the press room in the Edenian presidential palace to issue a press briefing.

"A few hours ago, we discovered the disappearance of a number of Edenian and Esparian citizens in Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador, Brazil, and Guatemala. That discovery prompted us to launch an investigation into the disappearances, which led us to the discovery of a kidnap and ransom scheme by a number of Central and South American cartels. Our president immediately called for the ARES special forces branch to dispatch reaper teams to rescue the hostages and capture the criminals responsible for the heinous act.

"The operation was successfully carried out at 2000 Zulu time. Our reaper teams infiltrated the cartel strongholds where the hostages were being held and freed the hostages, capturing their kidnappers in the process. Soon after that, with permission from the affected governments, the EV Beowulf was diverted from her patrol schedule and launched a punitive assault on cartel strongholds all across Central and South America.

"The assaults were a resounding success. ARES troopers suffered zero casualties and the cartels only suffered a few hundred unavoidable casualties. No civilian casualties or damage to civilian infrastructure occurred. The total number of captured cartel members, from their top-level leaders down to the low-level soldiers and initiates, is 150,693.

"We expedited a request for extradition through the governments of each country we captured them in and, upon approval, immediately moved them to the EV Beowulf, where they will be transported to Eden and receive a fair trial for their crimes. Thank you for your time. I will be taking no questions today, as Aron Michael will be here

shortly to issue a followup statement. Full details of the operation are available on our website, including a press release for publication, should you choose to do so.” With that, the man stepped down from the podium and left the briefing room.

Chapter 415 Like the War on Drugs, But Actually Effective This Time

While John’s aide-de-camp was delivering the press briefing on the recent operation, Aron, Nova, and the other AIs were in VR overseeing an important milestone in their unification plan.

“And with that, our preparations are complete,” Aron said, then stretched his arms above his head, limbered his neck, and heaved a yawn. Even with his enhanced constitution, going through iteration after iteration of proposed government structures had exhausted him.

And that was after they had already gone through a number of think tanks composed of veteran political minds in Lab City to remove inefficiencies and reduce the chances of power grabs and coups. Then, after all of that and before presenting them to Aron, Nova ran them through millions of simulations to spot any remaining flaws and smooth them out.

Aron turned to the newest AI and asked, “What do you think of the plan, Gaia?”

Gaia was the latest “chief” AI and would take up the responsibility of managing planetary affairs, acting as Aron’s plenipotentiary representative when he was absent or otherwise unavailable to handle the day-to-day running of the new unified humanity. She was inhumanly tall, standing at around 7’1”, and gracefully slender. She had a modest bust, a slender waist, and hips that only seemed large in comparison to her waist. Long, wheat-golden hair cascaded from her head to the middle of her calves, ending in curls in the last few inches that looked almost like ocean waves. Long ears tapered to a point as they peeked through the curtain of her hair. Her face was angular and sported high, chiseled cheekbones that tapered down to a small chin, and she had lively almond-shaped eyes with verdant green irises that sparkled with a hint of whimsy and held a deep, abiding wisdom within. She was dressed in a golden gown that left her right shoulder exposed and draped down to her right ankle, with the hemline tapering up to the middle of her left thigh, leaving most of that leg exposed as well. It was embroidered with realistic leaves and flowers, with mountains, rivers, and fields of grass, wildflowers, and crops with all kinds of animals moving around the dress, almost as if it was a world that they inhabited. Her ivory skin glowed with a golden hue and small fairies worshipfully flew around her, acting as her attendants and carrying adorable little clipboards that they took notes on as she spoke.

Her aura was lively, refreshing, and gentle, making people around her feel like they were relaxing in a clear forest meadow, listening to an orchestra of birdsong backed with the percussion provided by a burbling stream and fish swimming around in a nearby pond.

[It looks good, but will need constant updates and tweaking as people grow more used to it and loopholes begin appearing. But for now, I think this is currently our best option,] she replied in an ethereal voice.

“Well, we have to start somewhere, at least, and we have a schedule to keep,” Aron replied.

[Yes. We have two weeks remaining in real time if we want to complete the new constitution before January 1, 2018. It'll be the first step in our unification of humanity and a great milestone in history.]

Nova broke into the conversation Aron was having with Gaia. [Sir, it's time for your press briefing.] Aron nodded and began his abbreviated logout procedure.

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A minute after John's aide-de-camp left the podium in the press room, Aron stepped into the room and stood behind the empty podium to deliver his prepared speech.

"For too long, the innocent people of Central and South America have lived in fear of the vicious drug cartels. For too long, those same cartels have propagated violence and spread their poison to every corner of the Earth. That ends now."

The display behind the podium showed brief images of cartel plantations, processing facilities, and people loading shipments of wrapped "bricks" of drugs into cargo containers.

"Drug abuse affects hundreds of millions of people around the world, and not only those who become addicted to them. Their friends and families suffer along with them, healthcare facilities are overwhelmed by the health issues that come along with substance abuse, and entire communities are held hostage by violent street gangs that peddle the poison for profit, spreading them among our most vulnerable population and targeting those least capable of resisting."

The screen switched to an image of a sickly-looking heroin addict in the final stages of heroin addiction, then cycled to the same man in a hospital bed surrounded by his grieving family. The image disappeared, replaced by a chart that showed the economic impact of substance abuse on families, then a video played in split-screen format, showing a drive-by gang shooting from outside and inside the house, as well as an innocent bystander gunned down while sitting at her own dining room table eating a modest dinner with her children.

"What you have just seen is a brief display of the consequences of allowing drugs to spread unchecked through communities across the world. If it was just the gang members themselves and only gang-on-gang violence was being perpetrated, I would say 'good riddance' and refrain from interfering.

"But that is not the case. Gang violence overwhelmingly targets the innocent. For every gang member that is seriously injured or killed in gang warfare, sometimes dozens of innocent bystanders are implicated in their infighting. So I am here today to serve two notices: first, I have plucked the cartel thorn from the flesh of the rest of the world...."

The screen display switched, showing picture after picture of burning poppy and coca fields, production and processing facilities exploding, and ARES troopers leading shackled cartel members out of their homes, offices, and entertainment venues.

“And second, I am here to sincerely call upon the rest of the world to aid in the ongoing fight against drugs and drug-related violence. Anyone affected in any way, whether you are suffering and living in fear under the thumb of a street gang or just have a quiet meth lab in the basement of a nearby home....”

The screen displayed a brief video of a man wearing a set of white painters’ coveralls and chemical protection gear, including a respirator and eye protection, running out of a house in a suburban cul-de-sac shortly before the entire home he ran out of erupted in a violent explosion.

“And I mean anyone, can submit an anonymous report on the Pangea social media app. Those reports will be investigated and prompt action will be taken to resolve the problem.

“If your local governments cannot, or will not, act, then I will. I hereby announce that the charitable organization I founded, the Coeus Foundation, will be opening up a free clinic in every neighborhood in every country in the world. They will offer free or reduced-price healthcare to those in the most desperate need of it, not restricted solely to the health issues caused by substance abuse.

“Furthermore, I hereby direct the Coeus Foundation to build and staff drug rehabilitation facilities that will offer 100% coverage across the entire world and humanely assist addicts in breaking their addiction to the poison that kills not only them, but their families, friends, and neighborhoods.

“And finally,” Aron stared into the camera, his gaze steely and his expression grave, “I issue this warning to the transitional governments: if you do not act, then I will.”

Chapter 416 Economic Shockwaves

Colossal changes were happening one after another. The world was still dealing with the aftermath of the drug cartel takedowns and mass arrests, and just as they thought everything would be fine once another organization rose up to replace the cartels, a new shock shook them. And while Americans were still dealing with the increased prices for things like heroin, cocaine, and so on, the US dollar, which in itself was already on the edge of the cliff following the recent American surrender, received a final push and finally crashed.

Without the backing of the military forces of the US, the big three credit-rating agencies—Standard & Poor’s, Moody’s Investors Service, and Fitch Ratings—quickly downgraded America’s creditworthiness from AA+ to AAA, almost as if it had been planned long before but remained unimplemented due to fear of reprisals. That triggered a massive, unrecoverable fluctuation in the currency market and the dollar began crashing. The dollar crashing sent another round of shockwaves through the already teetering global economy, and it was only prevented from becoming an unrecoverable worldwide collapse by the US Securities and Exchange Commission, which implemented emergency measures to stabilize the market for the second time in a short few years. After all, it had also been forced to step in during the recent financial spat between the Morgans and Rothschilds.

But this time it was different. No matter how thorough the planning and preparation for a devastating market crash like the one they were currently suffering was, they had always had the backing of the big three global financial investment giants to fall back on. But with the erosion of governance and lack of faith in the US Congress after their disastrous decision to declare war on Eden; the rising general government deficit that had skyrocketed from a modest 2.8% to a staggering 6.6%, with indications that it would continue to rise to a precedent setting 10%; the constant government shutdowns over the debt ceiling issue; and a slowing economy; and a host of other reasons, the measures that could be implemented by the SEC and the Fed were akin to trying to put out a forest fire by pissing on it. It wouldn't really do anything and they would only stink up the place by trying.

Luckily, however, the USD collapse was mirrored by an equivalent meteoric rise in the Eden New Dollar (END). Introduced days after the UN had implemented historically strict sanctions on Eden, the END had been considered a worthless currency on the global foreign exchange ever since its inception. But now it was frantically climbing, almost at a 1:1 rate with the USD's decline.

Soon, the US dollar would be replaced by the Eden New Dollar as the premiere reserve currency for international trading.

The END continued its meteoric rise until it even alarmed Plutus, the AI behind Plutus Ventures, Aron's venture capital and hedge fund.

[Sir, we need to limit the upward trend of the END or our export market will collapse,] he said.

"Oh?"

[Yes. The increase in value of the END will cause the import/export companies we deal with to be on the verge of collapse soon. It won't be too long before they begin having to default on their contracts as Edenian and Esparian companies have announced that they would only accept payment in Eden New Dollars. If that trend continues, we'll be forced to hyperinflate the END to bring it back down to tolerable levels in the foreign exchange market.]

Aron thought for a moment, then ordered, "Send a message to the companies in question in my name telling them to renegotiate lower rates for now. I'll personally reimburse the difference, as we can't afford a global economic collapse right now."

[Yes, sir.] Plutus vanished, and moments later, every Edenian and Esparian import/export company received notification of a priority message on their GAIA OS accounts.

Luckily, Aron and the Central Bank of Eden and Esparia owned 60% of the total END in circulation, so while it would cost him trillions of END, the loss would be temporary and would recover on its own after the market stabilized.

In the meantime, the citizens of Eden and Esparia were thrilled at their increased purchasing power, and Alexander declared a nationwide week-long holiday for them to go out and spend, encouraging the global economy to recover from another angle; injecting END into the world to slow the damage caused to the economy by the nosediving US dollar. The involvement of the citizens, combined with timely action on the part of Aron's companies, had finally staved off the oncoming global economic depression and the market would soon enter a period of recovery, during which the END would officially take over from the USD as the global reserve currency.

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December 25th, New York City.

An entire fleet of helicopters had been arriving over the course of the day from Camp David, where they had picked up a stream of presidents and their high-level diplomatic staffs. After arriving at their destination, they were assigned an Aegis security detail and sent to the Mandarin Oriental, which had been fully booked for the following week, during which they would hold a discussion on the new world constitution.

Every leader had come in person, with none of them refusing the invitation. They knew that, if they were to refuse to participate in the summit, they would soon be revisiting the white room, a place that none of them ever wanted to see again.

A huge crowd formed an impromptu parade audience as the citizens of New York City lined up on the side of the streets the entire way from the airports to the hotel, waving flags of their ancestral countries and cheering at the top of their lungs.

The last to arrive was the Edenian delegation. Aron, Rina, and Alexander had landed at JFK International Airport in Eden One, then boarded a peculiar-looking helicopter, which headed directly toward the hotel rather than relying on an Aegis escort by car.

“This upcoming summit will surely be quite a shock, and not just to the attendees,” Alexander said as he gazed at the crowded streets through the window of the silent helicopter.

Chapter 417 The Summit Begins

Through the window of the Edenian helicopter, Alexander saw a large crowd of people who had gathered to protest the unification. Their dissatisfaction was obvious, as was the reason for it; they didn’t want to lose the privileges they thought they had.

They thought things like the already failing economy was a privilege, and thanks to being raised on a steady diet of American Exceptionalism propaganda, they somehow believed that theirs was the only country that had the privilege of freedom. Every other country on the planet could only experience a watered-down version of America’s “freedom”, and they would actively reject any evidence that ran contrary to their beliefs.

But there was another group of counter-protesters that believed in and supported the unification, as they saw it as the only way to deal with the incoming aliens and the potential threat they would bring with them.

“Any large change will always be met with an equal opposition. But there’s always people who will support the change as well,” Aron mused as he joined Alexander in looking out the window.

“There’ll probably be even more opposition once the world learns of your plan,” Alexander replied.

“For a while, sure, but once they see the new government actively fulfilling its promises, I don’t think the opposition will last for long. Right now, they have a point.

We did kind of steal power in a military coup and announced the results as a fait accompli. The ones they're really the most disappointed with are their leaders, who willingly handed over their countries without fighting to the last man for them," Aron said, then turned to Rina and asked, "When are you going to visit your parents?"

"Can you come with me for the visit?" She lovingly gazed into Aron's eyes.

"It's possible, but I can't stay for long. The next six months to a year are crucial, and will be the most exhausting period in the next decade. I need to ensure the new start's foundation is solid, so I can only squeeze out two days. But that works anyway, as I also need to have a conversation with your parents as well," he said.

"But they'll soon have access to VR, so we can meet them there if we want to spend more time with them," he added.

"For now, two days will be enough," she replied with a smile, then turned her head and looked at the Aegis detail waiting for them on the helipad atop the Time Warner Center, where the Mandarin Oriental hotel was located.

Once the helicopter landed, Alexander, Rina, and Aron disembarked from the helicopter. "Finally, the new beginning is approaching," Aron said with a smile of anticipation on his face.

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The next day, United Nations Headquarters.

The day after Christmas, the world leaders left the Time Warner Center and headed to the UN HQ, where they would begin their summit. Rows of extra chairs had been placed in the general assembly meeting hall in preparation for everyone's arrival. They filed into the room in no particular order, but in a very particular silence; everyone present understood the gravity of the decisions that would be made in that very room over the coming days.

In the sea of world leaders, Aron stood out as a glaring exception. He held no authority, had no position in any government, and the only power he had in his hands was his private military corporation, ARES.

The attendees had agreed beforehand that the leader of the proceedings would be randomly selected. As it served no particular agenda to lead this summit, nobody had interfered with the random draw and the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazurbayev, had been chosen to helm the summit.

President Nazurbayev took his seat and brought the summit to order, then began his opening remarks.

"Good morning, everyone. I am Nursultan Nazurbayev, and I'll be serving as the temporary chairperson during this summit, and will be in charge until our objective here is met. I'd like to remind you that, throughout the duration of this summit, my orders will be absolute. Anyone that creates a disturbance or refuses to follow my

directions will be penalized. I'm sure everyone here realizes how damaging the penalties will be for your countries.

"Now that that unpleasant bit of business is out of the way, I'll announce the summit format. For the first day, everyone here will be given an opportunity to propose an amendment to the constitution you all received a few weeks ago. These amendments will be proposed one at a time with no time for debate and recorded for later. Please ensure that everything you want to be proposed is submitted by the end of today, as no more proposals will be accepted after today's session ends," he said, demonstrating a rather impressive lung capacity for a man of his age.

"Tomorrow, we will begin debating the proposed amendments and either discarding them or refining them to fit the real-world conditions until the new world constitution is finalized and unanimously approved by everyone here.

"Now that the summit format has been explained, I yield the floor to the representative from Eden, President Alexander Romero. Please propose your amendment, then yield to the next in line." President Nazurbayev took his seat and respectfully gestured for Alexander to kick things off.

"Thank you, President Nazurbayev. The first amendment I'll be presenting today is freedom of speech," Alexander said, then sat down again.

Without anyone needing to say anything, the summit meeting progressed. The second representative to propose an amendment was President Trump of the United States. "The right to own weapons," he said. It was only to be expected of the president of a nation that literally had more guns than people.

The next president continued the chain of proposals, standing and saying, "Freedom of movement."

"The right to live without unjust prosecution," said the following president.

"Right to clean living spaces."

"Right to a healthy life."

"Creation of the caliphate," said the president of Iran.

"Freedom of religion."

"Right to free education."

"Right to vote."

"Absolute free speech."

"Creation of the country of god," said the pope and the president of Vatican City.

One by one, president after president continued proposing amendments, showing what they themselves deemed important as the first round of proposals continued.

The surprising thing was that Aron had been “skipped” in the first round of proposals. While an average person might consider that normal, given Aron’s lack of an official position, the people in the room understood that Aron was far, far more than the rest of the world believed. They had experienced his abilities firsthand, and wondered if he would be the last person speaking, or if he had already spoken through his puppet leader, Alexander.

They weren’t left wondering for long as, at the very last moment of the first round of proposals, Aron stood and said, “I propose the investiture of an emperor to lead an imperial governmental body in governing the entire world under one leader.”

Chapter 418 The Great Meme Flood of 2017

“I knew I should’ve expected the unexpected from that brat, but he really exceeded every bit of my imagination,” Herschel Rothschild said. He had been paying close attention to the world leader summit and knew that Aron’s proposal at the end of the first round had effectively killed every other proposal made and stomped it into a mud hole to boot. Sure, they might still pass, but with an imperial government, they would be less “rights” and more “privileges”.

An emperor’s majesty could not be defiled. So things like absolute freedom of speech, voting, assembly, bearing arms, and so on would definitely have limits to them and could be revoked for violations of lese-majeste or even on a whim.

“What do you mean by that? Couldn’t you have predicted this?” Virginia asked her husband.

“What I expected was for him to continue using Romero as a puppet leader while he ruled from the shadows. Kind of like what we do. We have a huge influence over the government and can do almost anything we want, but very few people know about us. And those that do are ruthlessly stamped out and labeled ‘crackpot conspiracy theorists’.

“That gives us all the benefits of power without the public scrutiny that usually accompanies it. But that brat...” Herschel sighed and shook his head. “What that brat did is the equivalent of flipping over a rock and shining a light on what normally lived under it. It’s obvious that he wants to be the emperor. After all, can you imagine him giving up power? And he definitely has the assurances needed to succeed in forcing his proposal through the summit.

“He just singlehandedly turned the entire summit into an absolute joke by saying a single sentence.” In Herschel Rothschild’s mind, the question wasn’t if Aron would become the emperor of mankind, but rather how he would make it happen.

“He’s definitely not like us,” Virginia said. “If you, dear husband, were to take over the government by force, you’d definitely face a rebellion that would eventually knock you off your throne, making all of your hard work and planning useless. But Aron, on the other hand, doesn’t have that problem. He has everything he needs to force his way through all opposition to his rule.

“Let’s count his advantages.” She raised her hand, counting on her fingers as she continued, “He has a military force that nobody can beat in a straight-up fight.”

She raised a finger.

“He has the technology advantage in every sector.”

Another finger was raised in the air.

“He himself is no ordinary person. It’s like he’s individually capable of fulfilling any role he needs filled at any time.”

A third finger was raised.

“He grew in the shadows behind the scenes and I’m fairly certain he hasn’t even revealed half of what he’s capable of.”

A fourth finger was raised, then Virginia tilted her head in thought. “Those four things are enough, anyway. Trying to figure that boy out is just gonna give me a headache anyway.” She put her hand back down. “So the question becomes: why should he remain in the shadows when he’s already been outed? After all, it’s hard to rule from behind a puppet if you’re constantly shining the limelight on yourself by your own actions.”

Herschel raised an eyebrow, as what she had just said made perfect sense to him. As he started thinking things over from that angle, he finally understood the work that Aron had been putting into place and all the groundwork his daughter’s boyfriend had laid beforehand. Everything he had done, from the time he first contacted Rina and offered to help her in the internal family power struggle to the proposal of his investiture as the emperor of a united world empire had all been one long plan. A plan that had been implemented step by step until Emperor Aron Michael became an inevitability.

He shuddered at the thought. Just how had a normal, average brat like Aron go from being a chronic underachiever to the de facto dictator of the entire world in a three short years? Especially since he didn’t need anyone else’s support to install him as the leader of humanity!

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As Herschel was cooking his synapses imagining himself in Aron’s place, the world was having a completely different meltdown.

During the beginning of the summit meeting, there were a number of different reactions to the proceedings. Some people were busily trolling the crowd, others were holding serious discussions on the merits and flaws of the proposals, and still others were busily roasting the leaders who made exceptionally stupid proposals.

Things like allowing child labor and lowering the age of consent—where the person who proposed that claimed it would be “specific to schoolgirls”—were particularly harshly roasted. Others, like instituting a lottery selection for political office, animal personhood and enforced veganism, the loosening of antitrust legislation to allow for the formation of megacorporation monopolies, and so on, were also heavily criticized and the proposers viciously mocked.

But everything came to a screeching halt the moment Aron stood and proposed the formation of an imperial government to rule mankind. For a full four minutes, practically every human being on the planet entered an involuntary stare state at the absurd audacity of the proposal.

Then the memes began flooding the internet. First thousands, then hundreds of thousands, then millions, hundreds of millions, and finally, billions of people were discovering the possibility that the future would be grim, dark, and know only war.

The meme flood lasted a full ten minutes as the assembly hall in the UNHQ drowned itself in pure, unadulterated chaos. In a weird turn of events, the internet actually calmed down faster than the chaos in reality. People had come to their senses and begun expressing themselves in words, rather than memes. Some agreed with Aron, some cursed him, and others just wanted to watch the world burn and were taking part in “serious” discussions as opponents of whichever side the topic starter supported.

Essentially, the internet had become something of a homunculus of humanity at large, simultaneously displaying every facet of human nature there was.

Chapter 419 Yeet Pods Once More

Gaia sighed as she realized the amount of work it would take for Aron and her to push the new imperial government into existence, then to acceptance. [How are things on your side?] she asked Panoptes, who was monitoring the internet.

[Judging by how things are going, and not counting the explanation Emperor Aron is going to give tomorrow, the number of rebel groups is going to skyrocket. But hopefully, most of them will lose interest in rebellions once we begin the propaganda push.]

[But those that remain will be even more dangerous. They’re the problematic ones,] Nyx interjected. She realized that she really needed to focus on recruitment in the very near future, as her nyxians would be completely swamped with work for the next few years.

[The recruiting drive should help,] Nova comforted Nyx.

Nyx nodded in agreement, a shock of surprise passing through her as she realized that Nova could read her “mind”. The surprise shortly dissipated as she remembered who it was that birthed her and was the actual owner of the quantum superclusters that all of the AIs operated on. Thus, it was only natural that Nova would know every thought that passed through her children’s heads.

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President Nazurbayev had finally regained control in the assembly hall. “Is there anyone who has another amendment to propose?” he asked, only to be met with a deafening silence.

“Then I declare today’s summit meeting over.” He banged the gavel. “Tomorrow morning at 8AM, we’ll reconvene and begin the debate,” he said, finally putting an end to the ten-hour marathon meeting.

One by one, the exhausted world leaders stood and filed out the door of the assembly hall. Once they were out of view of the cameras, they stretched, yawned, and slumped their shoulders as they tiredly trudged toward their waiting Aegis teams and transport vehicles. Some of the younger ones, who hadn’t been completely defeated by the long session, clustered together and walked in groups, discussing the proposed amendments.

It had finally sunk in for all of them, though, just how immense the workload would be over the next few weeks, or even months. Only the first day had passed, and they all knew it was merely a self-directed play for an uncooperative, belligerent, and unappreciative audience: the general public.

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The angry netizens, and the trolls that fanned the flames on the internet, took to the streets around the world to express their dissatisfaction with Aron’s proposal, but they were disunited. Some protests were met with violent counterprotesters, and none of the protest groups were even protesting the same things; after all, there were a lot of proposals, and everyone had some they supported, some they loathed, and others they felt nothing strong for either way.

America and the European Union had the highest number of protesters, followed by some of the Eastern European nations. The rest of the countries had either taken a page from Australia’s leaflet and decided not to care about the mess and just go with the flow, or were still unaware as to what had happened during the first day of the summit for reasons like time differences and such. Soon, they would catch up on the eventful meeting and begin a second wave of protests as they climbed out of bed.

New York City in particular was bursting at the seams with angry, violent protesters. Riots had broken out all over the five boroughs, and some intrepid inciters had even gone so far as to attempt to demolish the Time Warner Center. It was no secret where the leaders were staying during the summit, after all.

Aron, watching the riots from above in his helicopter as he traveled back to the Mandarin Oriental, put a quick stop to the violence much like firefighters fought fires with fires. He simply ordered the Beowulf to make a pass over the city and yeet a couple battalions of ARES troopers in their full battle rattle to aid the NYPD in riot control, resulting in a largely pacified city with most of the ringleaders and inciters arrested.

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The next day.

Despite the rioting that had taken place the day and night before, the scheduled meeting began precisely at 8AM, once again in the UN general assembly hall. The summit attendees filed in once more and took their seats as President Nazurbayev brought the second day of meetings to order.

“Today, the agenda is to do a first pass on the proposed amendments. Some will be discarded, others will be immediately ratified, and quite a lot of them will be tabled

for further debate. Let's get to it, shall we?" he said, then ordered the technician seated next to him to display a sorted list of the previous day's proposals.

"We can begin by eliminating the redundant proposals, such as freedom of speech and absolute freedom of speech. All in favor?"

Everyone in the room raised their hands and chorused their approval; cutting out the redundant proposals would save them quite a lot of time and effort.

"The ayes have it." President Nazurbayev nodded to the technician to proceed with pruning the list, then took his seat and let the meeting begin.

"But first, we must define what exactly we mean by 'humanity'. For instance, what if the visitors are actually our ancestors who left Earth behind long in the past and are returning to enlighten and uplift us? Should we consider them to be part of the human race, or as fundamentally alien? What falls under the umbrella of 'human rights'? And what exactly are human rights, anyway?"

He pointed to Alexander and said, "I yield the floor to the representative from Eden to list what we should include as fundamental, inalienable human rights."

Alexander stood from his seat and began his remarks. "Thank you, President Nazurbayev. In Eden, at least, our view of what it means to be human is to be born and bred on the face of this very planet. And as far as human rights, our beliefs mainly align with those of the UN Human Rights Committee. There are only a few minor differences...." As Alexander spoke, a holographic screen came into existence seemingly without any signals from him to anyone else. It displayed a powerpoint presentation on the subject of humanity and human rights that had been mostly agreed upon by the majority of countries in the world.

Chapter 420 Rights and Wrongs of the Human Variety

"That's everything I had to say, thank you. I yield the floor to President Trump of the United States." Alexander sat back down in his seat and Trump immediately took his place.

One after another, the world leaders gave their planned remarks, until the last one. Out of consideration for the limited time, they were all limited to two minutes, and none were followed by rebuttals or other "classic" debate formats. Once all of the initial remarks had been delivered, the initial list of proposed amendments was culled according to the majority opinion among the leaders, as well as some common-sense guidelines.

The culling process was relatively fast, as it was only to remove redundancies and proposed amendments that were already ridiculous on their face, like the one targeted at age of consent. The rest of the culled propositions were through the majority opinions expressed in the leaders' remarks.

Soon, the list was much more manageable and the first round of voting began. Anything that wasn't unanimously supported at this stage was tabled for further discussion in later meetings, while anything that managed to garner unanimous support was immediately enshrined in the new world constitution.

“With that, I declare that Article I of the new world constitution, ‘Human Rights’, has been completed and enshrined as law,” President Nazurbayev said, bringing down his gavel.

The full article was displayed on the screen in the hall and posted on the website for people to read.

The article enumerated many things as human rights, among which were the right to equal protection under the law; the right to life, liberty, and security; the freedom from arbitrary arrest and exile; right to adequate shelter and privacy; the right of free healthcare; and free and unfettered access to the internet.

It was the first time the concept of “human rights” had been standardized and enshrined as law. While there had been previous lists of what were considered rights before, they were largely subjective and unenforceable due to the lack of a centralized judicial system that every country subscribed to. The International Criminal Court was a good idea, but politics had ensured that participation in and recognition of the court itself was voluntary; its implementation was akin to handing people the ability to determine whether or not they could be prosecuted for crimes they commit.

“Now for debate on Article II, Governance. Mr. Michael, the floor is yours, please state your detailed plan on your proposed government as well as your part in it, if any.”

Aron, who had remained silent throughout the entire discussion on human rights, stood and adjusted his tie as he began speaking.

“Thank you, President Nazurbayev. I recommend the formation of the empire of humanity, with an emperor to lead the world in a united direction, ensuring that we progress into the future in a controlled, sustained fashion that guarantees advancement and unity. All borders will be abolished, and the world reorganized into regions, prefectures, cities, towns, and villages, with leaders assigned at every level.”

Aron could feel people all over the world sneering at him as he spoke. ‘They must think I’m a madman,’ he thought, then cast a steely gaze directly into the broadcasting camera in front of the speaker’s podium.

There were also a few coughs in the room that he ignored as he continued, “My reasoning for that is that democracy simply does not work on a large scale. It’s fine in the small scale, when talking about a few dozen people that require a leader to ensure a goal is met, but the larger the population, the more their interests become misaligned and impossible to accommodate.

“Human nature is such that the masses will always vote in line with their short-term benefits rather than considering the cost that others will need to pay in order to benefit the individual voting. That benefit-seeking behavior leads to aspiring leaders being incentivized to lie, resulting in a neverending list of unkept promises and the implementation of policies that are harmful to the whole but benefit the minority. The minority I speak of are those who have the power and ability to guarantee a politician’s reelection..

“Consider the coal industry. Despite coal being the most damaging and least efficient form of energy production, political candidates in the United States, Australia, and many others are forced to promise things like opening new mines under the guise of creating new jobs. That’s a lie—the purpose of opening those new mines and fighting against the legislation that bans or regulates coal mining is to benefit a few people, not the masses. Data shows that there are less than three hundred thousand people in the entire world that actually work in coal mines, much less than what people are led to believe by politicians.

“The ability to manipulate the masses in the pursuit of something so pointless as ensuring one remains in power only serves to highlight the weakness of democracy on a vast scale. It’s also impossible to remain uncorrupted over a long period of time in positions of power and authority, so there are problems with terms. It’s difficult to ensure that a democratically elected leader is both experienced enough to entrust with the task of governance and new enough that the inevitable corruption hasn’t had time to sink in yet.

“That snowballs into a tangled mess of competing interests and eventually leads to a very short-sighted government, as the politicians are incentivized to seek the most short term gains in order to guarantee their reelection, placing their own interests above those they are meant to serve. It’s a self-perpetuating, vicious cycle.” Aron paused for a moment to let that sink in.

Once people had had enough time to consider what he’d said, he continued, “Despite the gross weaknesses of democratic governing, it’s very effective on a small scale or where long-term planning isn’t needed. The biggest counter to most of the weaknesses of democracy is an informed and involved electorate, which is only realistically achieved by small groups. That way everyone knows everyone involved, which simply isn’t possible when you consider the requirements of constant campaign cycles where politicians seek election or reelection.”