

Tech System 421

Chapter 421 Sunshine and Smoke

Aron, deciding that he had said enough about the downsides of democracy, changed tack and began speaking about imperialism.

“Just because democracy has its downsides doesn’t mean that imperialism is perfect. No form of government is perfect except on paper, and we can all extoll the ideals we hold and praise them until they shine. But that’ll never negate the inherent downsides in each form of government.

“And the main weakness of an imperial system is the exact opposite issue that democracy has: it functions well on a large scale while tending to fail on small scales. After all, when your governmental authority is vested in a single person, you run into issues like lack of time, as well as an overreliance on others to faithfully report things to the emperor since he can’t be in every place at the same time.

“But just as its primary weakness is the opposite of democracy, its primary strength is the opposite as well. Imperialism functions best in long-term planning and projects. After all, without the need to focus on constantly keeping your power through a short election cycle and inattentive electorate, there’s nothing holding you back from seeking long-term gains over short-term benefits.

“I know some of you may argue that hereditary succession itself is flawed, whether by the infighting whenever the issue of declaring an heir, the risk of power hungry and mad emperors, coups, or even the chance that the successor chosen by the current emperor is incompetent, but I have countermeasures planned for the fixable issues. I don’t suggest that we take the idea of an empire and institute it wholesale, flaws and all, but that we implement a modified form of imperialism that fixes the majority of the issues we know about, while leaving a framework in place to fix future issues that may arise that we know nothing about.”

Aron was blowing pure sunshine and smoke up people’s asses with that statement, as after hundreds of millions of simulations, the problems with an imperialistic feudal dynastic government had all been made very apparent, as well as solutions to those problems. That said, nobody listening to him speak was aware of the sheer effort that had gone into planning his empire.

“The problem of a successor will be solved by constantly monitoring the chosen imperial crown prince and those around him, as well as pouring the best resources into training him to be the best possible person for the job ahead of him. Combined with round-the-clock protection provided by Aegis teams, whose loyalty is guaranteed, there will be no infighting in the imperial family or power vacuum if the heir dies.

“With the resources poured into the imperial crown prince’s training, we can ensure that he will grow to be a responsible, just, and wise ruler, making each generation improve on the previous. After all, with each emperor personally training their successor, the students will definitely surpass their teachers.

“As for the power struggle, everyone in the imperial family except the imperial crown prince will be forever banned from participating in politics or business, and heavily monitored should they choose to enter the military. Thus, their greed for power and wealth will be limited and they will also be trained as they grow up to instill within them the concept of noblesse oblige rather than lese majeste.

“So you may ask, ‘what if the emperor goes mad with greed and attempts to harm the citizens in order to satisfy his twisted desires?’ I’ve thought of that as well and have three countermeasures for it.

“First is that the imperial family will take no money from the government. None. I am currently rich enough to give every person on the planet two thousand dollars and still spend a million dollars per day on my own leisure and pleasure for the rest of what I assure you will be a very, very long life. Thus, there is no need to be greedy and no way for greed to twist my family’s thinking.

“Second is that there will be an absolutely anonymous imperial senate drawn from all over the world and from every walk of life, whose sole authority will be to depose the emperor upon unanimously deciding that he is incompetent, corrupt, or insane. They will work in conjunction with the third countermeasure to make the final, impartial determination as to whether or not an emperor or heir can be deposed. And that third countermeasure is Gaia.

“Gaia is the final check on imperial power run amok. She will be the overseer of all administrative tasks in the government and the planet at large. Should she see that policies are harming the citizens they’re meant to protect and enrich, she’ll step in and offer solutions to the problems causing those harmful policies, as well as the harm caused by the policies themselves. She will always be thinking on behalf of the people, rather than the imperial family.

“Now on to what I’m sure you all really want to know,” Aron said, an enigmatic smile flickering across his face. “What will be the practical benefits of an imperial family for the rest of the world?

“The answer is ‘many’. In fact, there are simply too many benefits to elaborate on in the short time I have to speak on my proposed form of government. So I’ll give you the two main benefits: I will be releasing all of my non-classified technology increases

to the world, and I will personally cover seventy percent of the military budget for the entire empire.

“Currently, as you know, my companies and technologies are so far ahead of cutting edge that they border on pure fantasy. And that’s only what you’ve seen so far, as I’ve been holding upwards of 80% of my true capabilities in reserve, as they really haven’t been needed, nor has humanity been ready for them.”

Everyone in the assembly hall felt a chill run down their spines as they thought back to their trip to the white room, as brief as it turned out to be in real time. Even those viewing the broadcast from home or elsewhere also felt chills as they thought of the ten behemoth flying carriers that had yet to land even once.

“Just to name a few, I currently possess controllable nuclear fusion, biomedical healing pods, genetic correction and enhancement technology, and my actual military tech is hundreds of generations beyond what you’ve already seen during the last war. I can singlehandedly lift our entire species out of the muck and mire of our current lives and fling us light years into the future in a very short time frame.

“As to the second benefit I mentioned, I will be incorporating every member of the military, active or otherwise, into ARES and covering 70% of the total combined budget myself. The rest will be left to the lower levels of government to cover, as I believe that humanity as a whole will only be properly invested in our own defense if we need to at least partially support the brave men and women that choose to join that defense and fight for it.

“Furthermore,” he paused and, once again, gazed directly into the camera before continuing, “I guarantee that, within five years, our military will be fully space capable and humanity as a whole will be 50% ready, or higher, within that time frame. The concrete milestones are available on our website, and you all can feel free to hold me to that promise.”

Aron took a deep breath and briefly closed his eyes, then opened them again and continued, “Should I fail to meet those goals, I will personally abolish my government and hand over control of everything I have to who or whatever is chosen to replace me.”

Chapter 422 Sacrilege Against the Nectar of the Gods

Aron retook his seat, allowing the next speaker to stand and introduce their preferred form of government. Once all of the proposals were in, the world leaders would vote to see which would be adopted.

President after president stood, some of them using every second of their allotted time and speaking passionately about the forms of government that they thought best while others simply announced their support of one of the previously mentioned suggestions. Alexander, of course, had strongly backed Aron’s proposal, which came as no surprise to anyone at all. Those who knew the situation already knew that Alexander was basically Aron’s sockpuppet, while those who didn’t know the

situation, or only thought they did, assumed that Alexander was backing the much younger man due to having worked alongside him for a time and received much help and many benefits.

Esparia's president, Jose Inez, also joined Alexander in supporting Aron. After all, why wouldn't he? He was only the president thanks to Aron's intervention in the Eden-Esparia War. And besides, it was Aron's companies that were searching for and extracting the natural resources in their country, allowing them to profit without lifting a finger.

The other suggested governments were mostly truly ridiculous, but there were a few that also garnered strong support. President Zi Jinping's communist utopia, Pope Frank's theocracy, the Iranian caliphate, and President Trump's suggested republic, which would be led by a senate comprised of an elected representative from each country.

Support for those suggested governments was mostly split along geographical and ideological lines. For example, Pope Frank's theocracy was supported by Italy, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, while President Zi's suggested communist utopia was supported by most of Southeast Asia. One odd exception was "President Putin", who was wholeheartedly throwing his support behind Aron's imperial government despite running a communist country of his own.

But by and large, most of the spoken support was given to President Trump's suggestion, prompting him to display his signature smug smirk.

"Ladies and gentlemen," President Nazarbayev banged his gavel, "we have a number of proposed governments to choose from. One of them needs to be selected by unanimous vote, so let's begin the process."

Everyone except for Pope Frank groaned. The government selection process would be run almost exactly like a Papal Conclave, and the pope had already gone through that process once before.

Aron stood and cleared his throat. "President Nazarbayev, may I have the floor for a moment?"

"Certainly, Mr. Michael. What do you need?" the temporary chairman respectfully said.

"I'd just like to take a moment before we move on to the voting process that will likely change the voting process," Aron explained.

The Kazakhstani president thought for a moment, then said, "Please make it brief."

Aron thanked him, then began, "What I wanted to say is...."

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"I'd really like to know how the boy will salvage the situation and wrest power from the rest of the world's leaders," Herschel Rothschild mused. He was in his study with his wife, both of them glued to the television screen as they watched their future son-in-law's performance and trying to predict how all the twists and turns would play out.

“Is he ballsy enough to threaten them in front of the rest of the world, live? No, he’s smarter than that. He should well know that a public threat would make it impossible to control the masses even if it gets him what he wants.

“Then maybe he’s threatened them beforehand? No, that would still be too obvious. Nearly 90% of the people in the room have already signaled their support of the democratic republic proposed by Trump. So they would never be able to convince people that there was no shady backroom dealing going on if they were to flip-flop so suddenly.”

“Do you think there’s any possibility of the world ever thinking he didn’t manipulate the leaders into voting under duress?” Virginia Rothschild asked her husband, who was still muttering to himself.

“I don’t think so,” he replied. “Any vote that ends with an imperial government will be assumed to have been cast under duress, so the constitution they’re working hard to write will be quite weak.”

Herschel continued wracking his brains, but there was no scenario he could imagine that would allow Aron to legitimately seize power.

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Netizens seemed to have arrived at the same conclusion as well; nobody thought that Aron stood a chance, so even the flame wars and meme floods quieted down as they waited to see what Aron had to say. As for the few netizens still commenting on the process, they were all essentially just coming up with the likeliest method Aron had used to strongarm the other leaders into supporting him to the imperial throne.

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“Good luck, boss. I’m rooting for you!” A man in a fitted suit and glasses was sitting at a bar, watching the summit on the televisions mounted above the liquor shelves. The ice in the drink in front of him shifted and clinked against the side of the glass, the drink itself going unheeded as the man’s attention had been wholly riveted on the broadcast since it had begun.

The bartender took the ignored drink away and began pouring another. It was obvious that it wasn’t the first time she had refreshed the drink for the handsome man sitting on the other side of the bar from her station. She expertly dropped three perfectly cubical pieces of ice into a short glass and poured two fingers of Glenlivet Founder’s Reserve over the neatly stacked ice cubes, then laid a napkin on the bar in front of the man and set his new drink on it.

“Oh come on, Zak. You’re killin me here! This is the best scotch we’ve got and you’re just... just wasting it!” she grumbled at the man. “You’d better pay up, bro. My tips can’t cover this much sacrilege against the finest drink on god’s green earth!”

The man blinked and focused his gaze on his sister, behind the bar across from him. “Don’t worry,” he waved his hand dismissively, “I get paid plenty good over at GAIA Tech.”

He fished out his wallet and handed a credit card to his sister. “Just open a tab.”

“It’s not the money! It’s the... the blatant sacrilege! See this?” She shook the bottle of single-malt scotch whisky in his face. “This is the nectar of the gods, bro! It’s the best of the good stuff, and you’re just... you’re just wasting it by ignoring it!”

The bickering siblings were interrupted by a short man in jeans and a faded t-shirt. “You work for GAIA?” he spat through clenched teeth. “You work for that bastard!?”

Zak blinked. “Yes, why?”

“That asshole cost me EVERYTHING!” the man shouted in Zak’s face. “I’d been working so hard and invested every last penny I had into my company, but that shitstain bankrupted me!”

Zak’s expression chilled, and even his sunny sister seemed disturbed. Zak wiped the spray from his face and asked, “And who are you?”

“Leonardo da Silva, former CEO of AgSpace agricultural company,” the man puffed out his chest and replied. “Who’s asking?”

“Mohammed Zakariya Talukdar, team lead on the GAIA OS accessibility team.”

Leonardo da Silva clenched his fist and, without another word, swung a wide haymaker at the head of Zak, who was sitting down and couldn’t dodge the incoming punch.

Zak blinked, then stood up, towering over the much shorter man who had only been speaking “face to face” with him when he was seated. He puffed out his chest and, in a deep voice, growled, “What the fuck was that for!?”

“You work for the devil! That makes you just as bad as him!” Leonardo spat, swinging a punch at Zak’s diaphragm. He had recently been taking martial arts classes in preparation for his ultimate revenge against the devil that had driven him into bankruptcy. “You devils all deserve to DIE!” he screamed, spraying spittle on Zak’s face.

Zak’s sister, Aisha, reached under the bar and pulled out the “beatin’ stick”, then slammed it on the top of the bar and shouted, “Knock it the fuck off! You—” she pointed the bat at the short, black-haired Brazilian man, “—get the fuck out of my bar! You’re not welcome here anymore!”

The short ex-CEO came to his senses and raised his hands as he backed away from the bar, muttering something under his breath about the end times and devils, then turned and ran out the door.

Aisha put the bat away and heaved a sigh. “Bro, your boss may be a good guy to you, but....” She shook her head and sighed again. “He’s kind of a megalomaniac.”

“He’s a good man, little sis, and he’s going to change the world,” Zak countered with the beginnings of a fanatical gleam in his eye.

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Chapter 423 Campaigning for the Enemy

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The entire room fell into a suffocating silence. Then, a wave of clatters rang out as pens dropped from the hands of the surprised attendees, who had thought that Aron would simply just threaten them into passing his suggestion for the article.

“Thank you for your time, Mr. Chairman. I yield the floor,” Aron continued as if he hadn’t just put more than two hundred world leaders into a collective stare state, then retook his seat.

President Nazarbayev cleared his throat after realizing that he had frozen in shock. He banged his gavel and announced, “With Mr. Michael using one of his demands from the surrender accord, Article II has passed without amendment and with no vote required.”

“Now to the third article....”

The summit meeting continued, but far fewer people were paying attention to it after Aron used his trump card to ram his proposal down everyone’s throats.

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Herschel broke out into loud, braying laughter. “That damn brat did it again!” He was equally amused and angered by Aron’s ability to continuously pull rabbits out of his hat at the perfect time.

“No one, not even me, stopped to think about the surrender accords. They all probably thought they wouldn’t be used, since there was an alternate way to get his proposal passed. But he just straight up said ‘no votes allowed’ and slapped everyone in the face with a reminder of their unconditional surrender to him,” Herschel continued, still laughing.

Virginia, as uninterested in politics and conflict as she may be, still understood that point even without her dear husband explaining it to her. She was a highly intelligent woman with both IQ and EQ to spare, and if she were to be honest, her husband’s habit of explaining everything to her as if she didn’t understand it was rather amusing to her as she considered it his expression of love. And despite more than forty years of marriage, she was still to get used to it and just enjoyed it as a happy grin crossed her face.

Herschel finally calmed himself and returned his focus to the broadcast, where the world leaders had already recovered and begun discussing the next amendment on the list. But something seemed missing; their dispirited appearances—well, most of them anyway—showed that Aron setting a precedent by using one of his “free” demands had demoralized them. Now, no matter what they did, they had to consider that he might just bring his demands in to not level, but flatten the playing field and everyone on it.

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The moment the day’s broadcast ended, people once again took to the street. The day before, they had been protesting his desire to be the emperor of mankind, and today their protests had grown with all the people who were in a frothing rage over his short-circuiting of the summit proceedings.

That wasn’t the only thing that had changed, either. Not only were there more protesters out, they were also far more united. After all, Aron had just thrown up a giant middle finger to the world, then used it to crush the freedoms of everyone alike; thus, the protesters were very much united as compared to the day before.

Police everywhere were overwhelmed by angry protesters and began calling in ARES support....

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“Good, good, good!” Rick Ashley, the leader of the underground cult arrayed against Aron, laughed. His recent losses caused by the devil, who was acting in the name of “eliminating vile drug dealers” were finally looking like they would reverse.

His ultimate enemy had gained much goodwill over the past few days as his actions in combating substance abuse issues and stabilizing the global economy caused a significant number of people who had been enraged by his conduct in the war to change their faces.

It was just more evidence that what was said about the attention span of humanity only surviving a single news cycle was true.

“Looks like you really are my lucky star. You were the one that put me in my position, and now you’re becoming the perfect catalyst for me to use to increase my power as I gather up the disaffected and disenfranchised scum that are willing to be cannon fodder in a fight against you and your power-hungry, mad actions.” He thought of all the wannabe freedom fighters and defenders of democracy that would soon come flocking to his organization in order to etch their names into the history books and madly cackled again.

Once he got himself back under control, he picked up the landline phone handset on the table in front of him and dialed a number.

“Orders, sir?” a woman said on the other end of the line.

“Prepare a dinner party for after the concert is over. We’ll be inviting new people to each party from now on, just to keep things fresh,” Rick said, speaking in code.

The woman on the other end heard it as ‘call for another meeting after the constitution is signed. It’ll be the best time to recruit new people to our cause’ and replied, “We can do that, sir, but I’m worried that we might not have enough silverware to host dinner parties if the number of invitees grows too large.” (We might run out of money if we grow too fast)

“I know, I know. But we can always ask our guests, new and old alike, to turn our dinner parties into backyard potlucks and they can bring whatever dish they can make.” (We can raise funding from the people in the organization)

“Will do, sir,” the woman replied after a brief pause.

“Also, have you heard any news from our friends who moved away and went overseas?” he asked. (What’s the update on the envoys we sent to other groups?)

“They haven’t emailed anyone that I know of, but from what I can tell, no news is good news. They’re busy living their lives and settling down after the moves, and I’m sure they’ll let you know when they get settled. You’re all good friends after all, and it’d be rude of them to ditch the old when they find the new,” she replied. (Nothing yet, secure communications haven’t been established and we’re still looking for a method that can’t be spied on other than face-to-face meetings)

“I guess they’ll let us know when they can. But I can’t help but worry about them. Should we send a care package? It’s been a long time since I’ve heard from them. What if they got in an accident or something?” (We need to hurry and find a secure communication method. Do you suppose they’ve been captured or discovered?)

“I’m sure they’re all fine. After all, even though accidents happen, they don’t happen that often! It just takes time to settle into a new place is all. After all, they got important jobs high up in their offices, so it’s sure to take longer to adapt to their new workplaces and responsibilities.” (It’s only been a week, so it isn’t time to really worry yet. Chances of them having been caught are slim, so it’s probably just the negotiations that are taking a longer time)

“If you hear from them, call me. You know me and my worrying, after all!” Rick said, then hung up after more small talk. (Call me immediately when they return, no matter what I’m busy doing at that time)

Rick returned his focus to the ongoing broadcast from the summit meeting, then muttered, “Yes, yes! Go on, continue campaigning for me!”

He broke out in maniacal laughter and slumped back in his seat, continually giggling to himself as the broadcast went on.

Chapter 424 Constitution Ratified

Over the next few days, the summit continued without interruption. That wasn’t to say that nobody tried to sabotage or interrupt the proceedings, but they were easily fended off by the ARES troopers

patrolling the city and the Aegis teams guarding the leaders. But while New York City was relatively peaceful, that wasn't the case for the rest of the world, as protests sprang up with every article of the new world constitution that was ratified.

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On December 30th, President Nazarbayev banged his gavel for the last time as he said, "With the ratification of the final Article of the Universal Constitution—"

Everyone in the room applauded for a long while, feeling the heavy burden lift from their shoulders. The applause lasted until President Nazarbayev tapped his microphone, causing the raucous applause to slowly die down until it was quiet enough for him to continue his speech.

"I would like to say that our job is completed, but Article II has yet to be completely enshrined into the constitution due to the circumstances in which it was ratified. Mr. Michael, I request that you complete it and make everything clear so the Universal Constitution can be put into effect."

Aron stood and walked to the podium, not planning on speaking from his chair like he had the previous few days. He calmly rested his hands atop the podium and adjusted the microphone, then looked at each world leader in the assembly hall before saying, "Thank you, President Nazarbayev, for providing me the opportunity to clarify the article of governance.

"I've thought long and hard about the weaknesses of empires. And I've developed counters for them and will be introducing those as part of the empire I'll be establishing here."

The holographic projector Aron had brought to the assembly hall came back to life and began providing visuals for people again, as was almost always the case whenever an Edenian delivered a speech or press briefing.

"So the empire will be an improved form of historical feudal governments. First, all authority will be vested in the emperor, and there will be no permanent nobility or strictly defined classes. There will be three main ministries: the ministry of the interior, the ministry of the exterior, and the ministry of defense.

"The ministry of the interior will be responsible for all governance within the imperial sphere of influence. It will be led in day-to-day operations by a minister appointed by the emperor, who will in turn appoint roving positions. All appointments will be for a single lifetime and based on a 100-point assessment that judges potential appointees based on their history, experience, education, service record, and personality traits. There will be no hereditary positions, but descendants of a currently serving government representative will be awarded a set number of bonus points for their assessment, should they choose to continue in the government.

"A government can't be run by a single person, thus those appointees will be granted limited representative power. And in order to limit corruption as much as we possibly

can, appointees will be transferred to new duty stations every five years. Those transfers can be promotions, simple transfers, or demotions, depending on their actions in their current duties.

“The positions will be broken down into regional lords, city mayors, town barons, and village chiefs. There will also be chief judges and constables responsible for investigating crimes and putting criminals on trial, once caught by the constabulary, at each level as well. Once we have outgrown the cradle of our civilization here in the solar system, there will be sector representatives and cluster governors as well.

“The ministry of the exterior will be responsible for exploration, scientific research and discoveries, and negotiating with any non-hostile aliens encountered in the course of exploring the universe.

“And the ministry of defense will be responsible for dealing with threats both internal and otherwise.” Aron paused to give listeners and watchers time to digest the overall structure of the government, then cleared his throat and continued speaking.

“There will of course be imperial agencies, such as the imperial police agency, imperial fire and rescue agency, imperial health agency, imperial education agency, and so on. You can check our website for a detailed list of agencies and their areas of responsibility.”

As Aron continued speaking, the holographic screen continually updated itself with links to various websites for ministries and agencies.

“The ministry of defense will be directly under imperial control, and completely centralized. Every chain of command requires a direct line from the top all the way to the bottom, after all. And since the imperial family will be paying the vast majority of the budget for the ministry of defense, isn't it only fair for the imperial family to control it?” Aron grinned.

“Now on to anti-corruption measures. I've already spoken of one of them, that is, the necessary transfers for imperial representatives. No government is perfect and there will always be a certain level of corruption inherent to it. But by transferring everyone on a five-year cycle, we can limit that corruption and control its spread.

“The imperial family will also establish an imperial court consisting of every imperial representative above the rank of city mayors that will be responsible for advising the emperor and bringing events to their attention that would otherwise go missed.”

While Aron was set on becoming the emperor of humanity and controlling all of the power, he recognized the need to give up some concessions for the appearance of fairness, at least. These positions would be necessary in the future, regardless; there

would definitely come a time when he wouldn't be able to maintain control over everything everywhere at all times, like he was nearing on Earth.

"More information will be released on our website, but that is the broad strokes of the empire of humanity as I envision it. But in the interests of time and getting things done," he looked at President Nazarbayev and continued, "I would like to move for the empire of humanity to be immediately ratified and enshrined in the constitution as Article II: Governance."

The Kazakhstani president nodded to Aron, then banged his gavel and announced that the constitution was complete. "With the authority vested in me," he said, "I declare our new constitution complete. It will take effect on the first of January, and that day will also mark the day the Terran Empire."

Chapter 425 Thirty Minutes to Midnight

Like a virus, the protests only continued multiplying day by day, ever since Aron had forcefully pushed through his empire proposal. It was really beginning to bother Nyx in particular, as she knew there had to be someone behind it, but none of their monitoring had discovered them yet.

It seemed there would be a teething period as the world adjusted to the new order.

But despite all the protests, there were still people that supported Aron's plan. There were actually four categories that people fell into. Those that absolutely hated everything about the empire plan, those that disliked it to the point that they fell victim to incitements and joined the protests against it, those that didn't like the plan but supported Aron himself, and those that would be happy to see the empire formed.

Most of Aron's support came from nations suffering under overwhelming poverty, rampant government corruption and oppression, and other assorted negative conditions that affected their day-to-day lives. The way Aron had uplifted both Eden and Esparia had given the downtrodden citizens of the world hope that he could do the same for them.

Eden and Esparia were the best advertisements for Aron, as they were in the same situation just a few short years ago, suffering under brutal, corrupt dictatorships and the oppression of the world at large. Their recent turnaround and rapid rise over the past few years seemed almost magical, like all Aron had to do was wave a magic wand and everyone around him would be uplifted from the dirt and given back their dignity. And that was without him being in direct control over a country; what more could he do if he was actually the one in sole control?

And with those thoughts in mind, Aron's supporters took to the streets as well, staging counterprotests in support of his agenda, which had become inevitable with the ratification of the new constitution. In a few short days, he would be officially taking his place as the emperor of humanity.

The only thing that could stop him now was if the world suddenly stopped turning.

Other than the people who supported and were against Aron, there was another, much smaller group of people. They were those who were much more calm and rational, and they were absolutely

convinced that there was no way Aron could be stopped no matter what they tried to do to prevent the change from happening exactly on schedule.

Herschel and Virginia Rothschild were two such people.

"I wonder how he's going to do it," Herschel said to his wife, who was sitting next to him.

"Do what, exactly?" Virginia asked.

"Well, he needs to do a lot of things in an impossibly short time frame." Herschel began counting them on his fingers, a habit he had picked up from his wife over the past decades of marriage.

"He needs to implement the government—" One finger went up.

"At the same time, he needs to implement the new constitution and enforce it—" A second finger went up.

"And he needs to publish a Universal Code of Imperial Law and teach it to lawyers, judges, and police," he continued, raising two more fingers.

"There must also be guidelines for every imperial agency, as well as the ministries—" Another two fingers went up.

"And he needs to select, appoint, shuffle, and train all of the millions upon millions of newly hired government employees." Herschel glared at his hand, having run out of fingers to count on. "It'll take years for all of that to happen. Years during which even more variables will arise. So it seems like he's taking on an impossible task. Did he really bite off more than he can chew, or is he just that confident in being able to accomplish the impossible? Oi, that boy really makes my head hurt!"

Veins had popped out all over Herschel's forehead, almost like his body was signaling its agreement that, yes, his head hurt.

"So why not call him then? I'm pretty sure you'll faint if you keep trying to figure out what he's thinking on your own," Virginia said, rather exasperated with being constantly dragged into her husband's thoughts when all the answers would naturally be revealed later on.

"Oh, right!" she continued. "I remember Rina said they were going to visit soon, I wonder when that'll be." She picked up her Zeus One and dialed her daughter's number.

"If that boy can surprise me again, I'll acknowledge him!" Herschel muttered under his breath, then laid his head on his wife's shoulder so that his ear was nearer her

phone, a more convenient position from which to eavesdrop on the phone call between his wife and rebellious daughter.

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New Year's Eve, half an hour before midnight.

The streets of New York City were unusually empty as the clock inexorably ticked toward the new year. It was even the first time since 1943 that Times Square was empty and without a crowd awaiting the Times Square Ball to fall, ringing in the new year. Dropped for the first time in 1907, the ball had remained a tradition year after year, come rain, snow, or bitter cold, save for in 1942 and 1943 when it was suspended as part of the war support and conservation efforts.

This year, the ball would be falling as usual, but everyone who would have been watching it were glued to their screens at home, where the media was talking about the first appearance of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Aron Michael of the Terran Empire, First of His Name, the Peacebringer, the Unifier, the Defender of Earth and All He Surveys, Leader of Mankind and Conqueror of Space. He was scheduled to appear for the first time in all of his imperial glory at 12:01am, New York time.

Even the protests had temporarily gone silent and all of the protesters were home around the world, glued to their screens as firmly as the residents of New York City. The mood was somber as people thought back on the recent troubled times; the discovery of aliens, the aborted fight for supremacy in the United Nations, the war for unification and the reveal that followed.... It had been a truly eventful year.

And the year to come promised to be just as, if not more, eventful. After all, everyone would be losing something—their freedom—and it remained to be seen whether losing that ephemeral concept of freedom would be worthwhile or a bad trade.

Thus, it was either a time of mourning or a time of hope for everyone on Earth. But despite their individual feelings, everyone had decided to watch the first official speech from their new leader, Emperor Aron Michael. It would mark the end of the old world and the beginning of the new, and everyone was interested in what he had to say. He would be their new emperor, like it or not, after all, no matter how long or short his reign may be.

Soon, the clock struck midnight and the screens switched to the now-familiar empty podium with the blank blue wall behind it. This time, there were no flags in the flag holders at the back of the stage, nor was there any iconography on the podium. It was a simple wooden stand without even a single microphone atop it.

Then, the clock struck 12:01 AM.

Chapter 426 The Royal We

When the clock ticked over to 12:01 AM, marking the new year's arrival in New York City, Aron took his place behind the podium, dressed in his new imperial regalia and carrying the symbol of his rule, a short, golden rod with a platinum globe on top of it. His manner was dignified and a serious expression was on his face.

“Good day to everyone around the world. We are Emperor Aron Michael, the first emperor of the Terran Empire. We're here tonight to explain how the empire will

function, what the unification process will entail, and the rights and responsibilities that you, as citizens, possess and owe as well as the benefits We will provide you," he began, keeping in mind that every word and action of his would be recorded in the history books for posterity.

"Currently, Earth is home to over eight billion people divided along many different lines. Divisions of ethnicity, culture, government styles, laws, living standards, and many more fractures have caused endless wars and misery thanks to corrupt government leaders and those behind them, who benefited from humankind being as united as a dish of loose sand."

The screen flickered to life behind him and cycled through image after image of human suffering; the empty villages left behind by the Russian march across the border into Ukraine, children with empty eyes wandering around the streets of Kosovo, holocaust survivors from WWII, POW camp survivors released long after the Vietnam War, children in Central Africa with swollen bellies and stick figure limbs—a sign of severe malnutrition having reached the penultimate stage—and many more.

"That division served to propel our species forward in the past, but it can serve no more. Not after the visitors were discovered. Now is the time to unite all of humanity and overcome our baser nature to face the challenges brought to us by things beyond our control."

The screen switched to a satellite image of "the object", what many believed, including Aron, was a manned spacecraft and was headed for Earth with its intentions unknown.

"We were the one that personally discovered the object, and Ours the technology that determined its purpose. But when We went to the United Nations with good intentions, We were shunned, eventually culminating in the large nations forcing Us to release Our technology. But even after We released it and entreated the global community once again, hoping beyond hope that the world would unite as one, Our words were dismissed and Our hopes crushed beneath the greed and lust for power those 'leaders' displayed.

"That eventually culminated in a coalition of almost two hundred nations banding together to attack Us and steal our technologies and weapons. We could have tolerated it, had the coalition been formed out of a true sense of unity, but it was not. It was formed from greedy power brokers pulling the strings of the so-called leaders from the shadows behind their gilded thrones. Thus, We were forced to take action."

The screen switched to images of the carriers lifting off from the ocean, then skipped to images of yeet pods raining down from them all over the world.

“We resolved that conflict and it ended with the surrender and ultimate annihilation of those power brokers and kingmakers that scuttled around in the shadows for fear of being exposed by the light. They were the ones that sowed the wind, and We were but merely the one that brought the whirlwind for them to reap. And We took full advantage of that to push a unification that We are sad to admit would never have occurred in Our lifetime had We waited for someone else to step up.”

The screen behind Aron changed again, this time cycling through images of the still-ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, Southeastern Asia, and other nations that were less well known.

“Even today, if it weren’t for Our patrolling transports, the world would remain in conflict with itself. What a joke! Potentially hostile alien forces are on our doorstep and we’re still busily killing each other and spreading misery!” Aron banged his fist atop the podium and his face showed the rage of a monarch. “Thus, We are once again being forced to raise Our hand against Our fellow man to put a final end to all ongoing conflicts. As We speak, Our transport vessels, the EV Arngrim, EV Kjarr, EV Nidhad, and EV Vikar are transporting ARES peacekeeping forces to ensure the temporary stability of those war-torn regions and bring them under imperial control.

Images of landing craft after landing craft launching from four of Aron’s massive carriers were displayed behind him on the four-way split screen as he continued, “Internal conflict among the human race ends now. Now is the time to come together and make peace with our fellow man, not only because we are one humanity, one planet, and one empire, but because enemies are at the gate and now is not the time to be having internecine strife!”

“And to achieve that goal, I hereby declare the dissolution of all militaries around the world. There will be a thirty-day grace period for them to surrender their persons and equipment to the nearest ARES enforcement post,” the image switched to a prefabricated building with two ARES troopers in full dress uniform seated at a table in front of the door to the building, “where they will be given the option to either retire with full honors and the benefits that their nation promised them in their enlistment contracts, or to sign up with ARES to defend their home from alien incursions from beyond our solar system.

“The offer extends beyond those formerly in the militaries of the various nations to anyone, man or woman, who chooses to enlist in ARES. To those brave souls, We make this solemn vow: you and those you love will be cared for and given the honor you deserve for volunteering to serve the human race as a whole, rather than individual political agendas. To you, We offer our gratitude and support. For more information on exactly what our demand and offer entails, visit the ARES website to have your questions answered.”

The ARES web address was added to the existing image of the prefabricated building and troopers behind Aron.

“We also issue a most solemn warning: should any disgruntled former soldier attempt to try anything funny, We will retaliate. And We guarantee you that our sense of humor is much more overwhelming than yours, so do not test Our patience.”

Chapter 427 Retraining, Recertification, and Retirement Options

“With that out of the way, We will move on to other things.

“Every police department will cycle through a period of retraining. Each cycle will last one week, and will be attended by a quarter of your police forces, including all leadership cadre down to the newest recruits. Some of you have already received notification of your appointment as constables, and your training will last the entire month. During the first week, you will be free to call in reinforcements from ARES peacekeeping forces if you are unable to keep the peace in your areas. This training is both optional and mandatory. Should you choose not to partake in the retraining, you will be considered to have resigned your position in the police force.

“Along with the police retraining, all current government employees will also have the opportunity to choose retraining for absorption into an imperial agency of your choice or to retrain into a different career. You may also choose to retire from government service and be awarded all of the benefits of your career so far. It will be considered an honorable early retirement, should you choose that path.

“Altogether, the retraining period for police and other government employees will take place over the month of January through the first week of February. Your leadership cadre should be receiving a notification of the schedule as We speak and will speak to you over the next week to settle any matters that may arise from the scheduling.

Aron closed his eyes, clenched his fists, and took a deep breath before continuing in a solemn tone, “Another thousand of you, chosen from all walks of life, have been selected to uphold a most serious and grave duty to the empire. To those of you who are currently meeting with Our representatives, or soon to meet with them, know this: the heavy burden you are being asked to bear is completely voluntary. You, Our Imperial Censors, have a duty, not to the emperor, but to the empire. We do not know who you are, and We do not know where you are. And We never will. Your task, should you choose to accept it, is to keep the faith of the empire and, should any emperor prove unworthy of his crown, your votes have the power to pull him from his throne.”

He went silent for a moment to allow that to sink in to everyone watching, then continued, “Yes, even me. I may be the first emperor, but should my anonymous Imperial Censors unanimously agree to dethrone me, I’ll be dethroned. I promised you all that there would be a countermeasure against corrupt, petty, weak, and useless emperors, and this is it. A thousand anonymous eyes to keep the emperor honest.”

Aron cleared his throat and lightly coughed into his fist, then continued, “As for the financial and banking sector. We know that some of you have already noticed that all trading has been halted. This is not a bug, nor is it an attack. We are dedicating a vast amount of supercomputer time to determine exactly what currencies have spending power, and how much they have, exactly. Once We have that information, all banks will begin reissuing a new universal currency: the Earth New Dollar. All currency reserves will be replaced by the end of this week, and private citizens will have until January 21st to replace any cash they have at any bank, whether it is your bank or not.

“As for national debts owed between governments. Those debts will be entirely forgiven, as it is fundamentally impossible to lend money from your right hand to your left, just as it’s impossible to repay your right hand once your left has earned money.

“Debts that governments owe to their own private citizens, on the other hand, will be repaid from imperial funds in Earth New Dollars or offered in trade for services or merchandise should you so choose. All interest-bearing government bonds will cease accruing interest as of this moment, and citizens of the empire that hold those government bonds have until January 31st to trade them in at the bank that issued them for whichever option you so choose.

“After the repayment of bonds and the reissue of the new currency, all currently extant banks will be rolled into the Imperial Treasury Agency under the Ministry of the Interior and undergo retraining periods as We mentioned earlier.

“Next, We’ll move on to the introduction of a new agency. The Imperial Historian position is a position filled by a member of the imperial family, and he or she will preside over Imperial Scribes, who will record everything in the empire, from the grandest events to the most mundane incidents. Those will be entered into the Akashic Record, where they will be digitized and verified by the AI, Akasha.

“It is to be a true record of humanity, completely unbiased and open to any who choose to browse it. It will also contain a record of humanity’s development, from the first time we picked up sticks and rocks to use them as tools all the way into the future. Anyone who is interested in joining the Imperial Historian and contributing to the Akashic Record is welcome to do so and can find the procedure for joining on the imperial website.

“That said, classified information is still classified until Akasha, the Imperial Historian, or the Emperor chooses to declassify it. Currently, Akasha is working on exactly that, and the Akashic Records will be available to everyone to view no later than February 3rd.

“After all, We believe that we should always learn from our predecessors, lest we find ourselves doomed to make the same mistakes they did.

“On to more immediate benefits, of which I will address three. As mentioned in Article I of the constitution, human rights are inviolable. Included in that article are the right to a healthy life, the right to free and unfettered internet access, and the right to housing.

“As we speak, the Coeus Foundation, in conjunction with Asclepius Biotechnology, is dispatching technicians to construct clinics and hospitals with the aim of 100% coverage for healthcare. Our new medical pods will be debuting there, and are capable of completely restoring a person to full health within a matter of hours. The fee will be 2% of your net worth after taxes, simply to prevent abuse of the system where the limited number of pods will be clogged by people who visit for minor ailments like papercuts and scraped knees. We expect that you will respect your fellow citizens and allow normal triage guidelines to apply, and everyone will have their first visit to the clinics free of charge.

“Also as we speak, construction of a new quantum internet is ongoing. It will be completed by the end of February, and internet access will be offered free of charge to every household, and the speed will never be throttled. The internet will be governed by the Imperial Internet Agency in order to guarantee that it remains free, unfettered, and everyone has access to it. This has begun in Eden and is working the network out from there, We expect its completion within the next six months.

“The right to shelter will be met by new cities. Our company, Hephaestus Heavy Industries, is currently surveying locations for new cities to be built, which will offer zero-interest home loans and steeply discounted utility pricing to everyone. Once those cities are constructed, we will offer land sales with zero interest loans around them with the goal of relocating all of humanity to new, high-efficiency, carbon-neutral—or even negative—living environments with built-in security in case of alien attack on our planet. We expect this will be the longest process, but it will still be completed in five years or less.”

Aron paused for a moment to let the possible alien attacks sink in; he needed people to be living in the new cities in order to facilitate some of his future plans for Earth, and the humans that lived on it.

Chapter 428 Stardust and Stars

“Now I’m absolutely positive he’s gone insane with power,” Rick Ashley said, watching Aron make outlandishly impossible promises one after another. He looked at the mirror-topped coffee table in front of him, dusted with white powder and littered with razor blades and once-tightly rolled hundred-dollar bills that had slightly loosened up.

“But that’s just even better for me!” He paced back and forth in his study, alternately cackling, smiling, and sarcastically applauding. “There’s no way the implementation of all those ‘rights’ will be anything but an absolute train wreck. The longer things go on, the more cracks will appear, cracks that the sheeple in my flock can survive and thrive in. The man is an idiot... an IDIOT! Some things just aren’t meant to be integrated, and the divisions will get wider and wider as cultures and beliefs and indoctrinations begin clashing with each other!”

He imagined himself climbing to those lofty heights of power and wealth, leading a revolution against a failing empire and conquering the broken Earth left behind. In his mind, he redrew the map over and over again, carving out ever larger territories for him to rule over as the Savior of Mankind, reshuffling borders on a whim after he becomes one of the inevitable winners.

He scraped together a small pile of cocaine on the mirrored surface of his table, then chopped it into a series of five long, eyebrow-thick lines. Once the lines had been cut to his satisfaction, he rolled one of the hundred dollar bills back into its former tight roll, then, like a demented vacuum cleaner, moved his head back and forth as he snorted all five lines in a row on a single, prodigious inhale.

He rubbed his nostrils from side to side, preventing himself from sneezing and wasting all that gorgeous stardust—which was already increasing in price and growing scarcer as panic buys swept the community—and sneered, “And just think! I’ll have HIM to thank for it all! All that military hardware I can pick up for free, just laying around after he abolished the militaries.” He cackled again, thinking of all the weaponry that would soon be flooding the black market as corrupt military leaders all over the world abandoned their loyalty in pursuit of quick profits and quicker exits.

The deeper and deeper he spiraled into his drug-fueled, manic delusions of grandeur, the more grateful he became for Aron, who had stuck his neck out to allow it to be chopped off by the great Rick Ashley. He even pictured Aron’s head rolling off of a guillotine or chopping block in his mind as he smirked. “What a great guy!” he sneered, then clenched his fists and giggled insanely.

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Aron was still speaking, unaware, as of yet, of the chaos brewing elsewhere.

“We are not delivering empty promises, nor are We overestimating Our abilities. This is no ploy like those perpetrated against you in the past by the greedy, the power hungry, the people that sought control above all. Every promise We gave you is Our most solemn vow and We will deliver on it within the stated timeline.

“How, you may ask? Because of this,” he said, raising his hand and pointing at the empty room around him.

As soon as his finger extended, the room began changing around him. It first disappeared, leaving Aron standing in a white void that was soon painted blue, then loam began spreading from his feet. As it spread outward, saplings began sprouting from it, then the sun and moon chased each other through the sky at an ever-increasing rate as the newly born forest passed through a rapid cycle of seasons. Aron snapped his finger and his entire surroundings froze. He reached out and plucked a reddish brown leaf from one of the trees and let it sit in his palm as the environment went through

more changes. He stood atop a sand dune in a desert and began walking atop a river, over grassy hills, up game trails on mountains, then leapt off the cliff of a fjord and nimbly landed atop the ocean.

Despite the spectacle of Aron interacting with different environments, people were mainly confused as to what he was attempting to show them; but still, they waited.

Before long, Aron returned his surroundings to the familiar podium with the flat blue background behind him. He laid the leaf he plucked from the forest in plain view on the podium, then said, “We are currently addressing you from virtual reality. Not through an outdated headset that puts a stereoscopic screen in front of your eyes or a bulky helmet that does much the same, but Our consciousness has been truly transported to a digital realm. We are speaking to you live from a different world, where all of Our senses are faithfully served. Taste, smell, hearing, sight, and touch are all perfectly recreated, as well as our other senses that are more ephemeral or obscure.”

The screen behind him split, replaying a video clip of Aron walking through different interactive environments on one side and the video of him resting in a futuristic-looking recliner in an office, surrounded by an alert Aegis team.

“Here, We, and soon, you, can do anything you want in a new body, all while your real body is resting,” he said, dropping an absolute bombshell on the people watching him.

“Many of you have surely wondered how I managed to amass such a large, well-armed force and create so many advanced products in such a short period of time, no?” he chuckled, then paused to give the people watching his address time to think of their own answers without realizing he was actually advertising to them.

“We managed all of that with this technology as the core advancement. In Our virtual world, We can simulate reality to perfection, allowing for true research environments unfettered by budgets, limited materials, and worries about destroying the environment. Research done here, in this virtual world,” Aron snapped his fingers and was teleported to the emptiness of space outside the blanket of shrapnel that was still covering most of the Earth, “We can do all the research We want to do.”

Chapter 429 Dilated Reality of the Virtual Variety

For the first time since the beginning of Aron’s first imperial address, he warmly smiled at the camera.

“But just having unlimited access to experimental materials and resources in virtual reality wasn’t enough alone. After all, there’s only so many hours in a single day, so time becomes the most limiting factor when it comes to research. Hence the saying that time is a researcher’s worst enemy. So Our researchers set time to pass faster in the simulation than it does in reality. Currently, the human consciousness is the

limiting factor, but the researchers are tirelessly working on increasing the dilation without negatively affecting the human brain.

“So the three years you think We spent building Our technology advantage was actually much, much longer. Not to mention the benefit of time dilation and virtual reality environments when it comes to training soldiers, especially in conjunction with purpose-built medical pods that translate beneficial gains in virtual reality to actual reality.” He grinned again as he revealed the final piece of the puzzle as to how he had developed so fast.

“Thus, We will be opening it to the world to be used in the training and retraining of the people We previously mentioned, as well as a form of entertainment for citizens, and many other things. But due to the requirements on computing power, the time dilation will be fixed at two times as our server expansion is an ongoing effort. Building things still takes time, after all.

“To that end, every citizen will be provided a one-time 1000 Earth New Dollar subsidy to purchase the equipment required to access virtual reality. There are a number of options, from the cheapest Augmented Reality glasses all the way to the cutting edge VR Medpod, which is the equipment used to train the ARES troopers, though the efficiency will naturally be lower in the civilian model. The goal is to ensure that virtual reality is accessible to everyone at all price points. The specific models are available on the imperial website.

“And before you think that We are simply trying to enrich Ourselves by forcing you to purchase a product, note that the price for the entry-level AR glasses is 1000 END. Thus, you can choose to use that and not spend a single dollar of your own money. The reason why We are subsidizing the purchase for you is because many of Our government operations will only be available in VR or, at a minimum, AR.

“By that, We mean things like issuing IDs, opening bank accounts at the Bank of the Universe, driver’s training and licensing, applying for government positions and interviewing, applying for land purchases in the soon-to-be-built fortress cities, and even designing your own living spaces there instead of using the standard design templates.

“But the most important service provided is education and training. We are moving, by necessity, into the true space age. Soon, everyone will be required to at least be able to function outside the atmosphere of Earth, whether that be as a crew member on a fleet vessel, an explorer of the cosmos, or even simple manufacturing jobs that can be done in space to save the planet’s environment.

“Moving on, We are also offering conditional amnesty for criminals. Nonviolent offenses will all be forgiven and existing criminal records of nonviolent offenders will be expunged. Crimes committed that caused harm to any human or property will be continued, with some cases automatically being scheduled for a retrial under the new universal code of laws.

“Anyone currently imprisoned will be allowed to petition for retrial, in which they will be judged based on the new legal code. If found to be innocent under the new laws, they will immediately be released and their records expunged. Compensation will also be paid.

“The new universal code of law is simple to understand and will be written in plain language. Punishments will be proportional to the crime committed, and instead of serving jail time, those convicted of crimes will be sentenced to work crews. For the worst offenders, those who are deserving of the death penalty or lifetime imprisonment, We will be establishing a penal corps branch of ARES where they will serve humanity as soldiers fighting on the front line until such a time as they have earned their freedom, which will be judged on a case-by-case basis.

“One specific issue that We will address now is the issue of free speech. The universal code of law includes a lese majeste law. You are free to speak your mind, to assemble, and petition the government for redress. But We will remind you now that freedom of speech is a privilege extended to you by Us, and that freedom of speech does not mean freedom from the consequences arising from your speech.

“The full universal code of law will be released to the public a week from now. Of note, the law applies equally to everyone, no matter who they are.”

Aron paused to let people catch up with and digest what he had been talking about. A lot of information had been delivered so far in his first imperial address, and there was still more to come.

“Now to the most hated part of any government,” Aron continued. “Taxes.”

Though his expression was once again solemn, he was internally chuckling over his mental image of the look on people’s faces when he said the dreaded “T Word”.

“There will be no complicated tax code. Instead, there will be a flat one-time 2.5% tax applied to all current assets and all taxes other than income tax will be abolished. All people over the age of 18 will be charged a flat 10% income tax on any income above the first 6000 END every year, without deductions and without any writeoffs. All forms of income are included, even inheritances.

“Quite uncomplicated, isn’t it?” he said with a grin, sure that the vast majority of people watching his address would be thrilled with the new flat tax system. After all, most people were paying up to 30% of their income in taxes, and some countries set

even higher tax rates. And in addition to income taxes, there were sales taxes, luxury taxes, and a host of other taxes that were applied to practically everything.

And for those who were seasoned tax evaders, such as the ultra-rich who could afford to bribe politicians into passing loophole-infested tax laws that allowed them to shelter their assets in tax-free havens, Aron felt a thrill of schadenfreude when he thought of the impotent rage they would be feeling right now. But that thrill soon passed when he considered that his girlfriend's family would be included in that group of people.

Well.... They weren't exactly good people, either, so he wouldn't feel too guilty for too long.

"Those of you who have been enjoying the wealth you have earned through the labor of others and have been sheltering it in tax havens or abusing other tax loopholes, there will be a six-month grace period. Any income or assets that are currently hidden must be reported. Anything you report will be fined 30% and the rest is yours.

"If it remains unreported after the six-month grace period, it will be confiscated entirely. And for those of you who are thinking that you will somehow be able to escape notice, trust Us—you will not.

"Taxes will be settled the first week of January every year moving forward, and the first tax will be due this March, to allow for everyone to get their finances in order in accordance with the new tax code. For more information, visit the Imperial Treasury website. All funds collected and used will be listed there with full transparency for anyone interested in viewing."

Aron was firm on government transparency. He believed that government should serve the people, and in order to do that, they must be as transparent as possible in their actions. Some things naturally had to be classified and hidden from the public eye, but for everything else, it should be done in as forthright a manner as possible.

"As for the environment, We firmly believe that Our home should be protected and left unharmed as much as possible. So to reverse the harm that humanity has already done to the planet, Our researchers have developed atmospheric scrubbers and new methods of recycling."

As he said that, the screen behind him finally changed again, showing a video clip of the "Trashman" disintegrator recycling junk in The Pit on Avalon Island.

"So within the next few years, humanity will become carbon negative. Our seas will be cleansed of harmful chemicals and excess carbon dioxide, lowering the surface acidity and allowing the sea life to recover. Our air will be filtered of harmful chemicals and excess greenhouse gasses, allowing for the ozone layer to recover, and our species' reliance on unrenewable resources, such as oil and coal, will be dropped to nearly zero. Oil will remain useful until we discover a way to create synthetic plastics without using crude oil as a base, but We have already developed alternative

fuels, such as hydrogen cells that require nothing but water to function, to power vehicles.

“As for energy, Our researchers cracked the ‘Holy Grail’ of controlled nuclear fusion two years ago.

“And finally, regarding our preparation to receive the visitors, you may see detailed progress reports and inspect Our ongoing preparations in VR, where you can visit the sites and see for yourselves. Our virtual reality environment is 100% accurate to reality, and We will hold a bi-yearly lottery for citizens to visit in person in reality, as well as sell a limited number of slots on a first-come first-serve basis for those who choose not to participate in the lottery, or those who don’t qualify to participate in it. We don’t have time to elaborate on all of the preparations being done in this address, so you’ll have to see for yourself in VR or wait until the first lottery trip takes place this June.”

Chapter 430 Begin as You Mean to Go On

Aron took a deep breath and relaxed, a compassionate expression on his face as he wrapped up his first imperial address. “I know the many changes coming all at once are difficult to accept. Especially as drastic and bold as they are.” He smiled wryly. “But there’s an old saying in my family: ‘begin as you mean to go on’, and that’s what I’m doing here. There will be an inevitable teething period as everyone grows accustomed to the new changes to, well... everything, really, but I believe in humanity. I believe in our ability to adapt to anything, and overcome what we can’t adapt to.

“Mankind isn’t the fastest animal on the planet. We aren’t the strongest ones, either. We can’t swim in the ocean or fly in the sky unaided, we aren’t particularly stealthy, and we don’t have a very thick, robust hide. What we do have, however, is a sapient mind. We can imagine, we can develop, and we can make conscious decisions to follow our better natures instead of our worst.

“I know I’m asking a lot of everyone, but at the same time, I’m not asking much. What everything boils down to is this—I’m asking for time. Time with which I can fulfill my promises to all of you, so that you can see the improvements for yourself instead of leaping to conclusions based on the worst case scenario.

“Thank you for your time, and I wish everyone a happy new year.”

Aron disappeared from the briefing room and the feed cut out, leaving the imperial seal as the only thing on everyone’s screens.

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The world was silent after Aron’s address. A minute passed, then two, three.... Eventually, eleven minutes crept by after he disappeared.

Then the internet exploded.

The people who watched his address flocked to the websites he had mentioned, but not in an even distribution; practically 90% of them went to the GAIA Tech website to check out their VR tech. After all, anyone who claimed they weren't interested in VR was basically sure to be lying.

What they saw there was shocking to them. It almost seemed like the equipment had been plucked straight from dreams! The equipment claims were straight out of a novel, almost, but GAIA had a reputation for delivering on their promises and, if anything, they tended to understate their technology, rather than hype it up and present software or hardware that failed to match up to their promised capabilities.

Pictures of Aron and others known to be close to him wearing glasses started spreading on the internet, showing that they had been using the augmented reality hardware years ago, meaning it was already a mature technology even then!

Discussions about the tech spread everywhere as scientists and normal people alike wondered just how the hell Aron had managed to pull everything off. Especially an accurate simulation of the universal laws of physics, since not even the physicists with the most exalted reputations could claim to know everything about their field of study.

Yet Aron had just claimed exactly that!

That sparked a number of conspiracy theories ranging from Aron having sold his soul to the devil all the way across the spectrum to Aron already having had close contact with a far more technologically advanced alien species. Some even claimed that he had regressed to the 21st century from a time far in the future.

But the most impactful conspiracy theory was the malicious and intentional spread of rumors that claimed Aron was using his tech to brainwash people into acting against the best interests of humanity. It was especially believable, as it was basically only a hair's breadth away from the actual truth.

The people spreading the conspiracy theory pointed to the world leaders and how easily they had given up as evidence. The only difference, really, was that they hadn't been brainwashed into giving up, but rather tortured into it.

But despite having a wider spread than usual, the rumors and conspiracy theories still failed to travel outside of their own social bubbles, as Panoptes was on the job. He identified the topic starters and passed their information on to Nyx for further investigation and closer monitoring under the suspicion that there was a single driving force motivating the spread of negative information.

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Even before Aron began his address, the Edenian carriers in the sky had gotten busy. Their patrol schedules had been altered to pass over every major city on the planet, where they would choose a location on the outskirts of the cities and transport troopers and giant blocks of raw materials in durable shipping containers to the surface.

Once the men and materials had been landed, the carriers would move on to the next cities in their itineraries, where the process would repeat.

After landing, the “shipping containers” broke apart into millions of tiny multi-legged robots, which were collectively known as Type XVIII constructor swarms.

The small constructor bots were what researchers in Lab City had come up with to allow Aron to have the highest flexibility in construction while keeping the atomic printer technology hidden. They had an atomic printer base, which would print the bits and pieces that went into making the design, and the constructor swarm would assemble the pieces into the final object like putting together a 3D puzzle.

The constructor swarms immediately got to work building copies of the Cube from Avalon Island, which would be packed full of VR pods to be used for retraining. Each Cube would be able to comfortably process a million people at the same time.

After the buildings were assembled and the pods installed, the constructor swarms switched to building multiple things at once. They divided themselves into teams that would work on fulfilling the orders for VR devices that were coming in in droves, teams that would work on assembling enormous buses that would transport those due for retraining to their nearest Cube, and trucks that would ship out the newly ordered VR and AR devices.

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As the building frenzy was ongoing, everyone scheduled for retraining received messages asking whether they would choose to retire or be folded into the relevant imperial agencies to continue working for the imperial family.

Based on their decision, they would either receive a time, date, and location to report to for transportation to the nearest Cube, or they would receive a discharge form they could submit to the bank of the universe to dispense their “retirement payment” in END.

Beyond that, messages were sent to every parent of a school-aged child as well as their teachers and educators informing them that schools would be closed for the month of January in order for children to get used to the VR environment their new schooling would take place in.

Many more things, ranging from the critical to the most routine operations were taking place in a coordinated chaos that was arranged and conducted by Gaia herself, who had officially taken her position as the administrator of Earth.