

A Gentle Stroll

May 2026 — Issue Nine



Wasteland Critters

by Tiffanie Gray

Collation File

Wasteland Critters by Tiffanie Gray ... 1

Collation File ... The Collator Supreme ... 1

Ronin Engineer ... Jim Eckman ... 1

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade ... George Phillies ... 6

The Fox's Den ... N.C. Shapero ... 78

Editorial Note

The transition to bimonthly does not seem to have worked that well. Perhaps it will improve with time.

Please email PDFs of your zines to the collator, George Phillies, phillies@4liberty.net The due date of the next issue will be July 6, 2026.

General rules: Publication is bimonthly. Contributors are expected to stay on topic and remain civil to each other. Discussions of contemporary politics and graphic pornography will be rejected. Recall that A Gentle Stroll will appear with our other zines on our web pages, so matters you would not want seen by the public should go elsewhere. You retain all rights to your material, except that the N3F may use your submissions in this magazine, which may be distributed to subscribers and/or N3F members, and may be placed on our web site or other electronic archives.

Subscriptions: For the first some number of issues, A Gentle Stroll is free. After that, unless we end the project, contributors are asked to pay \$6 per year and be recognized as voting members of N3F (there is no obligation to vote or participate in other N3F activities). Readers are charged nothing. Contributors and readers have to opt-in to receive A Gentle Stroll. Contributors and readers also get to choose: (1) Receive only A Gentle Stroll and a rare issue of our other zines, or (2) Receive all N3F fanzines, including A Gentle Stroll.

Ronin Engineer for A Gentle Stroll #9

by Jim Eckman,
Mountain View, CA
alarum@roninengineer.com

Notes

Those interested in a copy of Wanderer can e-mail me.

IRL

Except for the Artemis launch, ugh.

Worldbuilding

Last issue I published the outline for the worldbuilding section. I've been working on an introduction, but things are a mess, it will have to wait until next issue.

Next issue

Some worldbuilding?

Reactions to Issue #8

Out of Time by Tiffanie Gray – Nice!

Mloki - Clark B Timmins – More mythos fun, I like Smith as a writer and own a couple collections of his shorts.

The Fox's Den - N.C. Shapero – Sounds like you had a fun campaign. The poem sounds familiar, I may have read it or listened to it as a child.

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade - George Phillies – I sympathize with your website issues, been there and still doing it. Congratulations on getting permission for using Schmitz's hub universe. He was way above average for the 60's, especially his handling of woman. No sexy lampshades here, unlike some (Looking at Christopher Anvil and a few others).

A Rhodomontadulous Promenade #9
George Phillies
phillies@4liberty.net
508-754-1859

News

The N3F Website has been largely reconstructed. Someday I may have time to do a more thorough survey and see what might have been missed during the reconstruction.

N3F activities have been somewhat constrained by health issues among our more active members. In particular, the plan to modernize the site is on hold until people recover.

For people who would like to do something for the N3F, but are not sure what they might do, I still have projects.

I had previously reported that I had obtained from the literary heir non-exclusive rights to write in James Schmitz's Hub universe. A Telzey Amberdon novel is now being written, and is currently up to 104,000 and then some words. I have a general idea for a cover.

Comments

Out of Time: A creative cover, with people from two different centuries. Tiffanie Gray regularly graces us with some of her fine artwork.

Ronin Engineer: That is a truly fine list of variables for any gamesmaster, or author for that matter, to keep in mind while constructing a city or other place. An author describing a scene or preparing an infodump might well find that list to be extremely helpful as a set of cues..

Arcane Drugs: That was an extremely creative use of magic for exotic ends. The time travel pharmacopeia was especially well-constructed. The Astrogator's Handbook, when last I looked, is still for sale at 3mpub.com

1PMG PBEM: Thank you for your discussion of the distinction between fiction based on character development and fiction based on plot. Historically, there have also been other sorts of fiction. Somewhat forgotten in the depths of time is American geographic fiction, in which the major emphasis in the work is the use of ornate prose to describe the scenery of, e.g., the Niagara River, one location at a time, places that the reader was highly unlikely ever to visit. This style of fiction was a replacement for painting or photography, and allowed readers who did not suffer from aphantasia to imagine the glories of the American West.

There is also a choice of person and tense:

Third person – He turned around.

First person – I pivoted on my left foot.

First person plural "Ours is a mighty species. Beneath our feet lie trampled..."

Then there is that abomination second person – You reach the top of the mountain, where reposes a shepherd's tiny cottage. You force open its door, and find a forty-foot wide staircase leading up. Fine for game modules. Unspeakable for novels.

In English-language sf/f the only legitimate choice for novel writing is past tense, notwithstanding faux artistes' use of present tense.

Having said that, a recent novel written in fair part in second-person present tense won a Hugo. I would have rejected the novel for Eldritch Science, but whatever.

Clark B. Timmins: Smith's description of the Mloki is indeed excellent for the period. One sees vast numbers of adjectives, all being written to create an emotional response rather than to create exact mental images. Only a cynic would ask what a blood-bright violet can possibly resemble. Turning the Mloki into a set of D&D characteristics seems to have required considerable creativity. The newer D&D rules feature a vast number of powers and spells, but I congratulate you on finding some that actually match the original tale.

Niall Shapero: Happy Birthday again. I much enjoyed reading what the planet explorers were doing. Much of it qualifies as truly hard science fiction, people doing scientific things in scientific ways. Then there was Auren. The situation certainly became very complicated quite quickly. The Terrans had a well-conceived plan. Then they encountered the actual situation. Following the human explorers was much easier than understanding the foxlike aliens in your earlier tales. My reaction is that this tale with some slight editing would become a saleable shorter piece of fiction.

Fiction

The Geyerine Elainatha

"Open my shields?" For that suggestion, Elaine wished she had left him in Arburg. It would have been so easy to slip away unseen, to move in quiet solitude through the moonlit night.

"Open? So any half-baked sorcerer can knock me flat with the snap of three fingers?" His argument had shaken her. He was right about one thing. She knew enough of the Art to see what path to take.

"There are compensations." His voice was a warm blanket.

"Compensations? For losing the better half of my armor?"

"Would you rather always be the one apart? Don't you feel the loneliness yet? I suppose that's more a problem when you're older. You needn't fear a sorcerer here; I'll ward us both. Besides, the loss isn't permanent; if you can silence your shields, you can recover them."

She clenched her teeth, furious with the old man. How dare he make his suggestion? She didn't really trust anyone that much, did she? Without her aura, she'd be at his mercy. Still, she knew who he was, who had trusted him, and that he'd kept that trust. Perhaps he'd been a little forward the other night. But he was famous for that, and he took 'no' for an answer. She didn't want to try, but what was her excuse? Was she afraid? Never! Besides, the whole thing was silly. She knew perfectly well she was no mage. Impatient, wanting only to say she'd tried and failed, she brought her mind's focus upon the Rune of Opening.

The Rune was a scatter of outbound arrows, the unfolding of a rose, the first burst of light through shutters flung wide to the rising sun. Without the slightest hesitation she found the pattern, subsuming its essence into her being.

Her aura shifted ever so slightly, like an attic door which had remained closed through the decades, its hinges slowly rusting into place until someone tried to open it. The movement as it yielded was so startling that she flinched. Then, angry that she had shown weakness, she forced the Rune's image into tighter focus. Her aura shimmered and faded.

It was as though she had been standing in a pitch-black quartz-lined cavern, and suddenly unshuttered a lantern. Grandoon appeared as a flicker of lights, red and green and white, wrapped in a shroud of mist. Grandoon's warding spell surrounded them both in a cerulean blue mosaic, whose tiles danced and whirled in an intricate sarabande. A night insect flitting above her head carried with it the faintest of inner glows, like a distant candle on a foggy moor.

"Grandoon?" Her voice trailed an echo as though her ears were full of water. What had happened? she wondered. What were the lights?

"Yes? Your screens vanished in an instant, but you're still hanging back." His voice had the same trailing echo. Then she understood. She heard him speak, then heard his mind, hearing their voices.

"Grandoon?" The name caught in her throat. She had read of magespeech all her life, but never hoped to experience it. She tried to reach out, thinking his name without moving her lips or throat.

"Yes, I am Grandoon." His lips were closed. As he spoke, their minds met. With his name came a flow of associations, of memories, of feelings as to who Grandoon thought Grandoon was. She followed his memories, recognizing the clockwork he was building, and understanding as automatically as he did how each gear and spring was supposed to function. She followed his gaze, seeing Tegel-La not as a mottled silver ornament, but as a massive ball of stone which whirled through the heavens without falling -- no, which fell without coming closer to the earth.

"I am Elaine," she answered. She looked at the woods, seeing them with a warrior's practiced gaze, showing him how to see trees. Here a man might hide. There one could take a horse. "But what are the lights?" She tried to emphasize the sudden burst of patterns around her.

"Lights? Those are... oh, I should have realized." He was slightly irritated with himself, in his usual avuncular way. "You must be united with the Presence, however much you deny it. Besides hearing magespeech, you have magesight -- at least when your aura isn't blocking it. Without your aura, you see with a mage's inner eye, perceiving the Presence, the power which lies beneath the merely material world. You even cast your mind as a mage should, very cleanly, though you are still cold and formal."

"Formal? Cold?"

"Merely lack of practice. When I cast my name, you should have caught -- you did? -- some memories, too. With you, I hear your name, the way you hear it with your inner ear, but all I hear is the name itself, with no trace of your personality." Grandoon fidgeted, checking yet again that his more powerful thaumaturgic protections were all in order. She seemed to be without a past. Things without pasts, some of them, were nasty traps.

"I could, well, but your memories are so organized. I heard the things that you want others to know about you. What can I show you? Flattening those three thugs?" Grandoon caught a flash of remembered pain, of the speed and lethal calculation which let one normal blade prevail over three enchanted ones. "Or maybe the gatehouse last week?" With her question came more remembrances: faces staring up at a door which suddenly, unexpectedly, fell open; a dozen men trying to stand and draw weapons, only to be cut down as they rose; the spell damper, a device of cut crystal and wrought metal which deflected a mace's swing but shattered at the blow of Elaine's gloved fist.

"Usually people go farther into their own past." Grandoon's observation was accompanied by a flickering vision of strange cities with impossibly tall buildings. "Perhaps some more spectacular feat?"

Elaine found her memories yielding to the pull of his words, bringing back shadows of battles fought and mountains climbed. It was no different than talking with someone, she thought, except that Grandoon knew what she was thinking, not only what she was willing to say. To have her memories exposed to a stranger's sight was unsettling.

"Perhaps something quieter? The sea? A Temple library? What you show should be something which signifies to you." As he spoke, images streamed from her past like dead leaves in a November gale, to be matched one-to-one by images of his own. "The lordlings of the Tressin are stunningly lacking in imagination. They work through their genealogies, beginning with their honorable parents..." There came from Grandoon the briefest image of a man and woman, most oddly dressed, in a palatial candle-lit dining room. Elaine's memories started on the same trail.

The Ancient D&D Campaign

"How can a piece of paper be worth silver pieces," Gowophilus asked. "It defies common sense."

"It could be a letter of credit," Herman Engolph said, "a piece of paper you carry to a specific merchant house in another city, confirm that you are entitled to change it into money, and they give you the money. It could be a bond. Someone borrowed money from you and you get it back. Neither of those resembles this document. But perhaps the captive will explain."

"Yes," the kobold said. "We are the Small Giant Class Liberation Army, here to free the world's smallcrofters from human, elven, and dwarvish oppression. For all too long, the known spells were human spells, constructed so that my people were unable to cast them. But we have broken free of this limit. Thanks to the innocent questions of our Human Comrade Leader from mystic China, a place now hidden forever, there are now a few spells that we kobolds, fairies, gnolls, least dwarves, and all the rest are able to cast. We are now through her brilliant tactics advancing to carve out a land of our own, a land where human plunderers dare not tread."

"What is China?" Emmanuel Lorne asked. He might not have understood every spell yet, he thought, but he surely did know the names of all the lands where the practice of magic was significant.

"China is a people's republic. It is the great land now being freed from foreign invaders and domestic traitors by the wisdom of Matzee Ung. It has sent its soldiers here to advise the Small Giant Class, the soldiers having made the ultimate sacrifice that no further communication with China will ever be possible. Their relatives will never know their fates. They will never again be able to pray at their ancestral grave sites."

"And how does all that cause these pieces of paper to be worth money?" Gowophilus asked. "They all have beautiful printing, but worth money?"

"It is the decree of the People's Working Committee for Small Giant Class Liberation," the kobold announced, "that all persons shall accept these bills as having the worth we assert, on penalty of death. Therefore, all persons are accepting them. After all, the People's Committee has so ordered, so it must be true."

The travellers all looked at each other.

"Have you ever heard such nonsense?" Vincent Goodheart asked. "Of course, I am a sensible stone mage, taking things by their solid merit, but that claim is strange, and as subtle as the roots of the rocks."

"As silly as the rabbits in the fields, you mean, Goddess bless them all," Sister Jennifer countered.

"Wait!" the kobold interrupted. "You are a mage. By decree of the People's Working Committee, you are required to report to Nicklheim to be assigned your duties working for the people."

Vincent stared at the kobold. "Are you offering me a job? How much do you pay? How much access to books of spells do you offer?"

"No, no," the kobold said. "The Mage Class owes reparations to all members of the Small Giant Class, so you will spend the rest of your life working for the good of the people to repay your debt."

"How much do you pay?" Vincent repeated, speaking very slowly.

"Why, nothing, of course," the kobold announced. "You are working to pay off the debt of the Mage Class, so you will be provided with bread, water, sackcloth for clothing, and a cot on which to sleep."

The travellers stared at each other.

"I suppose you have an army," Brian Northwindson said.

"Of course," the kobold said. "The People's Army of Liberation is the most powerful in the world."

"And what is your rank in it?" Brian asked.

"I am Comrade Citizen People's Commissar. I work to ensure the total loyalty and strive to improve the political understanding of the comrade soldiers."

"Is he actually speaking the *koine dialektos*?" Emmanuel asked. "Most of his words are real, and his grammar is proper, but those sentences don't make sense."

"Let me try a simpler question," Herman said. "Why were you trying to burn things down?"

"You are the occupiers of our land," the kobold answered. "We seek to drive you out by making it unprofitable for you to remain. You are part of the Corrupt Landlord Class, so we will deprive you of your profits and persuade you to flee to elsewhere."

"Interesting tales," Godwin Rifstaffel said. "Hiding behind it might be a coherent truth, if we wait long enough to hear all of it explained. Or at least to here why anyone believes this people's paper is worth money. However, the Shire Bailiff will soon be here. The fire here was certainly not the first, or so I gather from the innkeeper, but this is the first time anyone has taken a prisoner to learn what is happening. I expect there will be much interest in learning about this Mung Tzee and his followers."

Comments on A Gentle Stroll 8 – March 2026

Jim Eckman/Ronin Engineer rct me: I'm well aware of the "regular" little ditty. But as you may have noticed, a great number of the cultural memes of the Shidran-Kas are polar opposites to those in our society. "Males are the grass" is a reversal of a Chinese cultural "thing" – "women are the grass (they get stepped on)". Of course, since some of the behaviors of the Shidran-Kas are derived from fox behaviors ... (vixens, if they lose a mate, quickly find another but dog foxes, if they lose a mate, often never try to find another, but rather go into what could almost be considered "mourning").// "Kafka, the Roleplaying Game"? Ok, now *that* is something I may well steal ("only please, to call it research").

George Phillis/Rhodomontadulous Promenade: Why invest the likely year spent writing (not to mention rewriting) a novel in someone else's "universe" (in this case, Schmitz's Hub Universe)? Wouldn't this be a rather hard sell to a publisher? And if all you're planning on doing is writing fan fiction, well ... wouldn't it be easier to just get permission for that?//re AGS 5 character: If you mean Richard Fox, he's the "unstuck in time" character. If you're referring to Ishrikranaiva, the Sitekii, well ... she'll pop up again, eventually. But I have to decide if she and Tal-Sora Pa do Ashan ever get together again first, and if so, how. Then I have to write *that* story. If you want a story about her life as a nomad, going from Homeship to Homeship, and slowly climbing in the ranks of her "adjudicator" profession, well ... I'd have to learn a *lot* more about the legal profession here in the USA before I'd really feel like doing a "lawyer in space" series. We shall see what develops (a fair amount of the time, I feel like the characters are standing behind me while I'm at the computer, telling me, "no, I would *not* do that! I would do *this* instead, you numb-skull!").//rct me re Battle of the Bulge: I was playing the edition that came out when I was in High School (so, 1965-1968) and we had a group that studied things carefully, and the German side needed either a really ditzzy Allied player, or just plain incredible luck to win against our strategies. When I won as the German player against one of the group "talents", it was because I outthought him, and did have a bit of luck.//And thank you for the compliment. I was told (years ago) by Jerry Pournelle, that if I wanted to become a serious writer, I had to emotionally prepare myself to throw away the first million or so words that I wrote; it was good advice (and, of course, he also told me to rewrite until it was the best I could do – hardly the only pro writer to give me that advice).

What follows is a bit of silliness that grew out of what I call my "Cyberfur" campaign (using Other Suns mechanics, and set in the not-too-distant future).

Cry Havoc!

By G. S. Cole & N. C. Shapero

That evening, the President of the Greater United States addressed the People and a joint session of Congress. He requested that Congress meet for a special session to declare war.

Thursday, October 19th, 2102, The Oval Office

There were only four cameras in the Oval Office. The President, Joseph Randolph Pierce, sat behind the desk, tolerating the attention of the makeup artist. "Just how much more of this is there?" he said.

“Just a few seconds more, Mister President. You wouldn't want to go in front of the world without proper preparation, would you?” she asked.

“No, of course not,” he replied, closing his eyes and tolerating the process. Barely. “Richard, what time is it?”

“Twenty-six minutes after the hour, Mister President,” Richard Miles, the press secretary, replied. “You go live in four minutes.”

Fifteen-twenty-six local, Twenty-twenty-six Zulu, Twenty-three-twenty-six Moskva time. In Perth and Sidney, it's already Friday, zero-four-twenty-six and zero-six-twenty-six respectively, the President thought, the time zone offsets of the major cities memorized long previous. And he waited, while his makeup artist finished her work.

Finally, Miles called out, “Twenty seconds, Mister President.”

President Pierce took one last deep breath. The makeup finally finished, he opened his eyes and glanced up at the teleprompter mounted above the main camera. Behind the camera and off to the side, Richard was holding up the both hands with fingers out; he silently counted down the seconds.

“Fellow citizens of Earth, good evening.”

“Pioneering has been described as finding ‘new and interesting ways to die’. The scientists and explorers who have already begun this great adventure tell me that, like the early days of the space program, there are dangers for our new band of voyagers. Challenger, Columbia, Zvezda-Pyat, Exeter, Tycho Under – our slow horizonward, storm ward, crawl has always had a price, though one our brave explorers have always willingly paid. The High Frontier proved to be too costly, with too little return in the foreseeable future, and Humanity and the other intelligences of Earth turned away from that beautiful dream more than six decades ago. Our brave comrades in the Orbitals and on Luna have continued the fight, living on the razor's edge on that most dangerous frontier.”

“While the Orbitals have struggled on, the people of Earth have lived without a frontier for over sixty years. And, turned inward, the nations of Earth have fought over crumbs as the glaciers moved towards the equator. Not satisfied with fighting, one nation against another, we have fought amongst ourselves, wasting resources in civil wars that we could better spend protecting the civilization we have developed, and saving the new intelligent species that we have brought into the world.”

“But I come before you tonight not to speak of paths forsaken, of past bad decisions, but rather, of new paths that stand open before us. In the dark days following the Rebellion, in those last, most violent days of the War, our researchers opened a new frontier.”

“We now stand on the brink of a great new adventure; a new frontier previously dreamt of only by science fiction writers and poets – to visit and explore all the myriad worlds of ‘might have been’.”

“The Greater United States is a powerful nation; we have proved this repeatedly in the last century. We have demonstrated our ability to defend our territory, and we have demonstrated our willingness to fight – and if needs be, die, as did the eight million who laid down their lives in the Alliance War – to defend our way of life.”

“We have proven that we are a great military power, and we have proven that our scientists and engineers are capable of feats of wizardry that begin to touch on ‘Clarke’s Law’.”

“What we now have, is an opportunity to prove not only that we are a mighty nation, a military power second to none, but that we are also a great nation; that we are a power with ideals, devoted to the betterment of sophonts everywhere.”

“The scientists and engineers of the Greater United States have developed a method for opening ‘gateways’ to other worlds of probabilities – to worlds of ‘might have been’ and ‘as we once were’. One of those gateways that they have found leads to a world much like ours was one hundred and sixty years ago; torn by a world-wide war, a war between the forces of good and evil, a war for the soul of mankind.”

“We have a new frontier; one that contains dangers both harsh and deadly as well as new opportunities. It is a frontier that has already been found to contain untenanted and unlivable wastelands, and it has also been found to contain at least one world that is still inhabited and habitable. One world, designated Exodus Eight by its discoverers, is a Younger Earth, a healthier world that still has great potential.

“We have an opportunity now, for both good and evil. We can prevent the deaths of literally tens of millions of humans in death camps, in battle, in the misery and terror of another world’s equivalent of our Second World War. If we act, we can put an end to horrors and crimes that still echo across the decades to haunt us.”

“For some who hear my words in the Emirate, the year 1942 alone may mean little. But no citizen of the Greater United States – least of all those in the Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian states – have forgotten the crucial nature of that Great Patriotic War. It was a conflict whose consequences echo even today; for the first time in our history as a race, it defined a crime, a wrong, which every modern citizen both in GUS and Emirate territories, recognizes as an intolerable evil – genocide.

“Some of you might say, ‘but it is not our wrong’. Some of you might argue that we bear no duty towards these humans of a Younger Earth, this world so much like our own past. To these people, I say, ‘If we stand by and do nothing, allowing these evils to take place, then our ideals mean nothing, and the blood of tens of millions will be on our hands.’ This Younger Earth is our world as it was before the pollution, climate change, and biological horrors of the Century of War, before it was ruined by our hubris and folly. It is a world where the future can be made anew, a joint future, theirs and ours.”

“It will be difficult, and many will be called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice before we are done; but God does not give us tasks that are larger than our shoulders. Ours will not be an action without risk, or loss.”

“I know not what course others might choose, but for myself, I cannot in good conscience seek any other action than war against the German Reich, the Empire of Japan and the Nation of Italy of Exodus Eight. I have prepared a formal declaration of war, copies of which are being submitted to the Congress and Senate of the Greater United States, so that their deliberations might begin immediately. I ask that the Congress and Senate make it their top priority to review and approve this or a like declaration.”

“I thank you, and may God grant us the wisdom to make the right choices and may he bless us all in this endeavor.”

The red light over the camera dimmed, and the harsh floodlights died. The Oval Office was silent but for the soft breathing of the President. “And may God have mercy on our souls, because it will be war,” he whispered.

“God help us all...” Richard Miles echoed softly.

Friday 20 October 2102 0800 hours EDT, GUS Senate

Maureen Brigitta O’Conner rose to her feet. “Mr. Speaker.”

“The Senate recognizes the senior Senator from Ireland.”

“Mr. Speaker, I thank you. With your leave, I will make my address from the Speaker’s Lectern.” There were rustlings and murmurs as she made her way down the center-right aisle. Several of the pages scurried out from the Senate Chamber to fetch a number of the Senators who had asked that they be notified when Mrs. O’Conner spoke. As she walked across the short, flat, open space between the front desks and the raised plinth on which the Speaker’s Lectern was placed, she could hear the noise of more members coming back to take their seats.

Once at the Speaker’s Lectern, after placing her hand notes down on the slanted wooden stand – they were not just for show, she had trained herself to use them for both mnemonic and kinetic aids – she turned to her left, facing the Conservatives, and then looked across the NOTAs and her own Greens. “Senators.” She turned her head back, looking up to the gallery to her left and right. “Ladies and Gentlemen visiting Our Senate.” She dropped her eyes and focused forward to face the red monitor eye. “Citizens of the Greater United States, and all those who are or will be listening to this debate. I thank you for your kind attentiveness, and ask that you listen, and heed, what I say.”

She took a deep breath, and then smiled sadly and, shaking her head, let it out. “However compelling, however courageous, however righteous, our President may sound, we all know that he is winding the war-horns. We all know, too, that there is always a great difference between what is planned, and what occurs, when Mars rides ascendant in the heavens. This is not to fault any of the planners – I am morally, if not personally, certain, that they have wrought their best, thought their best – it is, rather, just the humble acknowledgment that no man, no Administration, can know any future. Even one which is analogous to our past. For however analogous it may be, the action we are being urged to take will shatter that past’s future beyond any recall.”

She paused and looked around the Senate chamber. “We are being asked to go to war. The Administration has, no doubt, many points to make – and this Senate will no doubt have many opportunities to hear – how valid such may be. Even though those against whom we will strike, both are completely ignorant of our existence and have no means to learn about us – let alone to strike at us. Even though we have not explored other, lesser actions to attain those goals this Administration speaks of. Right-hearted goals. Good goals. Valid goals.” She paused. “Goals good enough to die for...but are they goals not only good enough to kill for, but good enough to stay unsullied from our slaughterous hands?” She shook her head.

“Ladies and men, if we go to war under these terms, might we not forfeit, eternally, any claim to the modifying phrase, ‘gentle’? Do we risk an even graver injury to our nation’s spirit, our moral ethos, from acting with sharp, violent force? I have spoken with many veterans, men and women both, human and Uplift, who have placed their lives in the palm of God’s hand and risked all for their country. I have had them ask me to assure them that glory, honor, and above all, peace, are more than empty words or bland promises from rejuvenant but unrisking politicians. I have walked into the cells wherein stay the bodies of those so traumatized from their warfighting, that their souls, and selves, have seemingly strayed beyond recall or repair. So, when I speak to you of harm done from fighting war, I speak of the harm done to the warrior through splattering his hand red with his foe’s blood.”

She stopped, calming her voice and lowering her volume again. “We all know the price paid for waging war, at least that which had been publicly acknowledged. Let those who do not or will not remember and accept such, walk out into Arlington and into the Memorial. There, amidst the eight million named and yet lost, let him deny, if he will, the depth of lost opportunities, the width of the vale of grief, the cubic volume of the torrents of tears and blood that has been shed and lost and ever seeping, still, in the hearts and eyes of those who must carry on without the aid of those we have sacrificed to war.” She shook her head, and then pausing, held up her left hand to still any comment, while with her right she drew a handkerchief, tightly folded, from her pocket.

“I am not alone, in mourning a family member. Child or parent, close or far, we all know someone who is with us no more. Some paid more; there are entire lines of Uplifts, particularly among the fighter pilots, reduced back to the reproductive samples left behind.” Senator O’Conner wiped at her eyes, for one moment lowering her head. Only to raise it again and let a harsh bite enter her voice.

“Yet I am speaking now of the harm done to the survivors, and most particularly to the warriors, who are thrust into the arena and must, to survive and succeed, slaughter. For every blow they strike, they take a wound; for every wound they take, our society bleeds and suffers. Now, and in the future. For should we deny them their rightful place again, their just rewards, their security, then we would be and deserve no more than caitiff, foul, and treacherous ruination!” Her eyes flashed and she snapped the last phrase out with a cracking whip of her handkerchief.

“We have learned this, or so I thought! Centuries of strife and slaughter, where the innocent, and those who loved and lived with those who fought, were harmed as much by their fellows in peace and in struggle. Families torn asunder, marriages and individuals ruined, driven to despair, religious fanaticism, drugs, and all the horrid wasteful sins of over-emphasized ‘patriotism’.” She nearly spat that word out. “As if those who strive for the general, shared good are any less patriotic than those driven by dark and dangerous furies to strike at any who are or even will not actively support their harmful means! ‘Patriotism’, which was used to justify sins that would otherwise sicken sane men. There were ‘patriots’ 30 years ago, who tried to set our tired Ireland ablaze yet again, by bombing and killing and screeching of hatred.” She stopped and looked around the Senate chamber, floor and galleries and then floor again.

“Yet I must answer the logic and the reason of our President’s request. He asks us to go to war, to correct a wrong. To stop a horror unparalleled in our past.” She shook her

head. "Mr. President – I say that we must not, even if we can. For the horror which was suffered, and survived, created an awareness in the civilized world. An awareness of just how awful and terrible the marriage between modern technology and emotional demagoguery could be. We suffered, as a world, the horrors of the Holocaust. From it, like the phoenix arising from the ashes, we thought two words of wisdom had been gleaned, like the promise of Hope at the bottom of Pandora's chest: 'never again'." She shook her head.

"We learned, yes. The citizens of the Greater United States. But there were others who had not learned, because they had not directly experienced the struggle to repress totalitarianism. Others who, when the same crisis of modernization swept over their part of the world, but with a greater magnitude of power, repeated the same mistake. Others who, having hardened beyond redemption, resisted the new tyranny without counting the total cost of such resistance. And so, we saw Operation Final Temple extinguish all life and chance in the once and formerly Fertile Crescent." Senator O'Conner shook her head.

"What chance will this new past have to learn the importance of self-restraint, the need to watch and act within a society before it goes irretrievably wrong, if it does not suffer the pains and loss of the Holocaust? As a parent I had to learn a very hard lesson: it is the burned child who fears the fire." She looked around the chamber once again.

"We have also had many chances to learn, in Ireland, the horrors of alcoholism. I think you know that we Irish are rumored to lo–to enjoy a drop of beer or whiskey." There was a rattle, then a round of solid laughter to her offered sally and tension-releaser. She smiled, and then turned to her right, and gestured.

"Five years ago, Senator Kshecherin was one of my closest colleagues and friends. Where is he now?" She turned back to the center. "He is dead. And what killed him?" There was a startled, almost frightened silence. She let it draw out, before she answered her rhetorical question.

"Alcoholism killed him. Alcohol was the operative drug, but the genetic predisposition played its part. As did our mutual, joint, failure. We failed to confront him, in time, with the truth of what we knew. We failed to insist that he suffer the full pain from his condition. We covered for his absences, by pairing off 'as he would have voted'." She looked at her fellow Greens. "I hope there will be no such silent co-opting with this vote." She looked at the Conservatives. "We failed, by refusing to put up a solid, real, challenger at his last election...for fear of losing." She looked at the Visitors' Gallery. "We failed to let him suffer and pay the full price of his alcoholism. And so, he died of that all-too-remediable illness: cirrhosis of the liver." She shook her head.

"Senators, we are asked to intervene, to make a better world. Is ours so perfect, is our past so secure, that we can be fully assured that we are that much wiser, that much more perfect, that much closer to God's omniscience? What hubris might we be committing, if we claim to know better what 'ought' to be done?" She looked at them, and then shook her head.

"I do not feel that wise, or that great, or that powerful." Her head came full upright and her eyes sparkled, and she smiled. "But then, I am not the President!"

That brought a full laugh from the Greens, a partial laugh from the NOTAs, and no small amount of response (favorable and unfavorable both) from the Visitors Gallery. The

Speaker had to stand up and gavel the chamber into silence; during the reaction, Senator O'Conner took the chance to sip at a glass of water and refresh her throat.

When the Senate chamber had silenced again, she turned her face upwards and put her notes down...and then waited nearly a full minute. In the gathering silence the expectation and attention drew closer and tauter. Her voice started out soft and low, barely above the edge of inaudibility.

"I do not envy President Pierce the burden he bears today," she said quietly. "I want all to know, that whatever the decision of the Senate is, I will ask all to support that determination which we reach. This is a crucial moment in our civilization. We are here to debate it; we are right to debate it; and I would hope that even were I President, and Joseph Pierce standing here arguing as a Senator, that our mutual intent would be the same: to have this Senate, this body, raise and debate and consider and ponder the questions, implications, considerations, and concerns of all proposed actions. And their alternatives, as well." She looked about the chamber.

"If our debate takes time, then let it be, because this decision demands such care. If this Administration truly felt that there is a limited window of opportunity, then let them bear the burden for keeping the secret during their preparation – we would have been ready, able, and willing to consider these issues sooner had we had but the chance to do so!" Now she was glaring at the Conservatives.

"Do not, I say to you, let yourselves be stampeded into hasty folly or unconsidered action by the simple assertion that 'the time to act is now'. If more time is needed for the debate, then this Administration could have given us that time by starting this debate sooner! If there is no way that the inhabitants of this other world could know about us, then surely there cannot have been any 'security risk' from such deliberations!"

Senator O'Conner waited while the Speaker gavelled into silence the cheers, and boos, from her colleagues. When they had quieted down, she picked up her last notecard. Glanced down at it. Then looked up again.

"We, in Ireland, paid the price of another nation's Empire. For several centuries, we saw our freedoms and rights trampled underfoot, our economy distorted for others' gains. We endured repression and dissension, were the subjects of the old imperial cant 'divide and rule'. We could not learn to live as one nation, one people, because we were deliberately kept separate, lest we learn our own strength and unity." She looked about the chamber.

"That is the past, Senators. I pray you, do not our future, be akin to that of the English absentee landlords. What price are we going to demand for our 'protectorate' in this earlier Earth? Can we assert that there is not, and will never be, any urge towards our aggrandizement, our gain, at their expense? There is a world before the glaciation started – are we going to see an exodus of our citizens to a more green and pleasant land?" She looked over at the NOTAs and Greens. "Are we going to become the high-technology colonizers of a simpler and less-advanced culture?" She looked over at the Conservatives. "Are we truly pure enough of heart, that no risk of corruption from this new power will erode away our moral righteousness?"

She tore her note card in half, then put the pieces together, and tore them in half again. Then put those quarters together, and with a bit more effort, tore them in half yet again. “Much of the Administration’s argument for war amounts to little more than the assertion that because we could, we should. Yet that is an argument for intervention, not sufficient for a justification for war. We could aid the Allies. We could simply eliminate Hitler and his Generals. We need not invade and conquer the Germans, Japanese, and Italians. This could be done with a far lesser force – not one which would be unobserved, but one which need not be explained. A kinetic strike, or a massive ‘Daisy-Cutter’ blast, would be enough to decapitate the Nazi regime. Like the Tunguska explosion, it would become simply another phenomenon, inexplicable yet eventually accepted.” She looked around the chamber.

“I will admit that for this, too, President Pierce would have to have this Senate issue a declaration of war. He may well claim that no Administration has ever had to agree to a limit on its conduct, but that claim cannot stand against the tide of history. Had we but known several truths about how wars were conducted when the ills were done, there are few Presidents who may have ‘scaped chastisement for wrongs committed when the means became inextricably confused with the ends. We will have, it must be agreed, a tremendous technological advantage. So perhaps it is right and proper, that we agree to particular limits on our conduct?”

She shook her head. “Yet far better, still, would be the lesser intervention, of contacting and aiding the Allies of this alternate past. Guiding them, helping them to avoid the worst of their own mistakes – our past mistakes – not by taking away their chance to make decisions, but by making them aware of the consequences, for good or ill, of their various commissions and omissions. Let us move with and use the advantage of relative wisdom, rather than flex the national muscle of relative power. Let us restrain Mars and send forth Mercury, Apollo, and Jupiter instead, granting not War but Commerce, Arts, and Justice. If we dare do that, members of this Senate, citizens of this nation, then we can truly call ourselves ‘civilized’, and walk with upright pride and untarnished consciences.” She dropped the card fragments into the Lectern’s receptacle. “Thank you for your kind attention, Mr. Speaker, Senators.”

Friday 20 October 2102 0830 hours EDT, GUS Senate

Senator Grigorii Vasilievovich Vynushkin strode to the Speaker’s Lectern with all the vigor of the newly rejuvenated. His black hair was thick and full again, his skin tight and firm; though, like virtually all Muscovites, he was pale from the months of sun-free living in the glacial oasis of Moscow, 2102. “Fellow Senators!” he said strongly, even as he swung around to face the rest of the chamber. “Fellow citizens of our great nation! We have been called to a task which generations have dreamed about: the righting of a great historical wrong.” He looked about with his head thrust slightly forward, leaning forward on his hands which gripped the sides of the lectern strongly enough to whiten his knuckles.

“I will not take much of your time as I will make my viewpoint plain and clear. I, and the Russian Bloc, will support the Pierce Administration and vote for this declaration of war. There can be few of you who doubted that result.” His tone was sarcastic as he said the last, and lighter; it provoked a number of laughs and some scattered applause – and a few boos. He swiveled to face the latter.

“What you may not appreciate or know is the reasoning behind that result,” he said, his voice dropping into serious earnestness. “Those in the Press and emotionally opposed to this war”, he waved his hand vaguely in the direction of the Press Gallery, and glanced over at Senator O’Conner, “probably have their own ideas and would like to put their own, ah, ‘spin’ is the idiom, on why the Russian Bloc favors war.” He glowered across the Senate as a whole, his bushy black eyebrows coming down and together and his nose wrinkling. Then, to the astonishment of most present, he suddenly stepped back from the Speaker’s Lectern—and laughed!

“We all know the expected view. Revenge. Hatred. Wounded pride. Kinship for our fellows, suffering under the Nazi bootheel.” Senator Vynushkin stepped forward, taking hold much more lightly of the Lectern this time, and his voice became softer. “This last is quite correct, though the object of that kinship may surprise those opposing this declaration. Our kinship is for the Germans, and others, who are under the Nazi’s domination.”

That brought a moment of silence into the Senate chamber; a moment when many were forced to recalculate their arguments and re-assess their colleagues. Senator Vynushkin saw O’Conner’s face narrow, saw her mouth take on a grim frown, and he tipped the slightest of nods in her direction, then started to speak again.

“Yes, I said the Germans. I would include with that, the Japanese and the Italians. They each are at the peak of their nation’s conquests; the Axis is reaching its fullest domination, in September, 1942. Their larders and factories are full and whole, their populace essentially unharmed – in point of fact, they are at this moment the most greatly enriched from their conquests. Up until now, their war has been a very good one, for them. Or so they think.”

He looked around the room. “I admit, for the Soviet Union of that time, 1942 was a bad year. Almost as bad as 1941 – and in fact, the worst is yet to come, as the mutual inferno of Stalingrad has not quite yet begun to burn. In the next six months on Exodus 8 it will consume millions of dead and more millions of wounded and devastated. Entire armies, Russian and German, will be fed into that hell-hole and consumed entirely. Then after that comes the three years of bitter, savage, grinding warfare that will be necessary to drive back and evict the conquerors from the land they now occupy. After that, will come the devastation of entire cities – indeed, most of Germany and Japan will be flattened under the weight of the gathering Allied storm. The whirlwinds of their near-annihilation are gathering as we speak and argue, Senators. When we consider the ethics of intervention, let us remember all how closely we came, each of us, to harsher, crueler, more final slaughters in that war for survival.”

He paused, and looked over at the U.K. seats. “We now know that the British seriously considered dropping poison gas in mass quantities on the German cities in 1943 and even in 1944.” He looked over at his own Russian bloc. “We know that Comrade Stalin debated both biological assault and the slaughter of every German captured, whether soldier or civilian.” He looked over at the American delegates amongst the Greens. “We know that the United States came this close,” he held up his right hand, with his forefinger nearly touching his thumb, “to ordering the nuclear obliteration of all Japanese cities...and will order the firebombing of the top twenty.” He looked around the room in the silence which his evoked horrors created.

“During the war, which yes, we in Russia still today call ‘The Great Patriotic War’, we captured many German soldiers – and many soldiers for Germany from other nations, too. I say soldiers, because I want you to remember the men fighting, bleeding, and dying on the front lines. Not the officers making plans, and especially not the Nazis dominating the German Armed Services.” He looked around the room and bent forward, then straightened again.

“Many of those we captured expressed a similar emotion: they wished that the Nazis were not in power. Now, some of those would still have warred with us Russians – there were unsettled complaints from the First World War, if nothing else. Or they had accepted in their hearts the rubbish that Slavs were ‘subhumans’ compared to the mythic Aryans.” He chuckled and shook his head, denying and dispelling such fantasies.

“But even so, they had some idea of what the Nazis were doing. More specifically, of the wrongs which the Nazis were inflicting. On Germans, and on others. Most had no direct knowledge – they had the propaganda of their superiors, and the wisdom of good soldiers, which forbids the asking when answering will only mean more and worse problems. But they suspected. Or they heard others, who suspected, or had inklings, of what was going on. For the Einsatzgruppen, the Death Commands, were operating in their rear areas – and the soldiers knew how the population was shifting from viewing them as liberators, to viewing them as enemies. That is a difference the men began to recognize, even then.”

Senator Vynushkin flexed his fingers and took a deep breath. “That is whom we feel kinship with, Senators. The German soldiers, and the German civilians, who live under the Nazis. Who will in the years immediately ahead on Exodus 8, pay with their lives for the mad fantasies, the insane megalomania, of their Fuhrer and his power-mad criminal cadre. We will come as rescuers, but in this sense, we hope to rescue the dragon from the enraged knights who will otherwise slaughter and hack apart ones with whom, but for the structure of their repressions, they might have otherwise lived with in peaceful harmony.”

Now he looked directly at Senator O’Conner. “Some would have us debate, and quibble, and wonder if we are wise enough. Some have argued for lesser interventions, fearing that we will fail, or that those on Exodus 8 will not learn lessons which they otherwise will from resisting this wrong on their own. These are good points, or so they appear to be – yet even so, they are the counsels of fear, not of hope.”

He looked about the room. “We in Russia know something about fear. Fear, especially, of the power of the State, and of the Armed Forces.” There was a stir at that last, for though no one had mentioned the word, everyone knew the unspoken phrase ‘zampolit’ was whispering through each listener’s mind. “We also know, as perhaps our British and even more our American colleagues do not, of the importance of hope.” He looked once more over to the Greens.

“When we signed the Treaty of Consolidation, it was not out of desperation. Yes, the glaciers were coming and yes, we all were starving.” He flipped his hand lightly. “Russians have starved before, and starved since. We, as few others, know how to suffer. Mongols, Teutonic Knights, diseases, Germans, kulakization, purges, environmental devastations, and glaciation – we’ve had no little experience with suffering. What we recognized, and moved towards, was the golden sparkle of that small yet vital human glory: hope. The G.U.S. offered us all hope. In the midst of what some feared was the final end of Russia,

they said, 'We will strive to find a way ahead, together'." Senator Vynushkin turned and looked at the Vice-President. "We will always remember that moment, however long our nation lasts."

He turned back to the Senate floor. "We may not be wise enough. Then let us learn. We will make mistakes – that certainty, I grant. Yet without such mistakes, we cannot learn. Sages in their temples may mumble and mutter over ancient tomes, philosophers natter over negativities and nitpick about niceties, but no man reaches greatness save by trying. Trying, and failing, yes; the greatness comes from trying, and trying, and trying. Nothing worthwhile comes easy, nothing is safe from strife and doubt. Hope lies not in certainty of success, but in determination to try. As your own poetry says: 'to strive, to seek, and not to yield'." Senator Vynushkin stepped back from the podium. "Senators, the Administration seeks our vote to go to war. A war against evils which we all know have no parallel in scope and depth of the horrors and wrongs committed. We have the chance to save our neighbors from the Pit. Not just those who are victims, but those who are their victimizers, too. Not all of them – yet for every one such whom we can save, do we not even more greatly improve the world of Exodus 8?"

He looked around the Senate Chamber. "That is why we of the Russian bloc will support the Administration on this vote. The time has come when we can extend the torch of hope to another world, to those lost in the darkneses of their fears and time. We will not betray the lesson we were the beneficiaries of, two generations ago."

Friday 20 October 2102 0900 hours EDT, GUS Senate

Janine Richardson Wolf rose to her feet, arched her back and stretched, then readjusted her suit jacket. "Mister Speaker?"

"The Senate recognizes the junior Senator from California."

"Mister Speaker, I thank you. With your leave, I will, as have several of my esteemed colleagues, address the Senate and People from the Speaker's Lectern." There were whispers as the lupine uplift made her way down the aisle. That some of the whispers were from fellow NOTA party members did not escape notice – either by the lupine uplift or by her more restrained colleagues.

Once at the Speaker's Lectern, she faced the camera monitors and only spared a few glances for her present colleagues. "Fellow Senators, People of the Greater United States, I am not one to wax eloquent like my esteemed colleagues. No, I am not a long-winded Russian, nor a Bardic Irishwoman. I am a brass-balled bitch, and I have neither the time nor the patience for waltzing around the question."

She grinned a feral grin as she looked into the camera. *They just love this back home, I know it. Watch my numbers go up tonight.* "We had the Alliance War and, as my esteemed colleague pointed out, there are eight million names on the Memorial because of it. It has only been six years since the War ended. There are still casualties from that War which we must care for."

"We are still waiting for the medical care, the veterans' benefits, the support that this government – this administration – promised in 2100. We are still paying the bills for the *last* war. And now the Administration is asking us to go to war again?"

Her voice rose to a shout, “How many deaths will it take before we can acknowledge that too many people have died? We have bled ourselves dry in the defense of our nation. Let this war go; let us heal our *own* wounded, let us rebuild our *own* ruined cities, let us raise our children *and the orphaned children of our brothers and sisters* in peace!”

“My fellow senators, People of the Republic, this war is one war too many. We have bled enough, sacrificed enough, buried enough of our own children. This is not the time to ‘let slip the dogs of war’. Because the ‘dogs’ are tired, and this bitch has had enough of fighting and funerals to last her for ten thousand lifetimes.”

The uplift senator took a small felt case out of her jacket side pocket and set it atop the Lectern. “Fifteen years ago, I was awarded the Bronze Star for bravery, and the Purple Heart for being a damn fool idiot. I will not see my People,” her voice raised again, “*all of my People*,” her voice dropped to more normal speaking tones, “go through hell again. I will not associate myself with war or killing again, and I return the ‘awards’ given me by an earlier Administration. I will not associate myself with war again. Ever. I thank you, Mister Speaker, and I thank you, my fellow Senators, for your time.”

The “brass-balled bitch” turned, and strode away from the Speakers’ Lectern, the Bronze Star and Purple Heart still atop the Lectern. *I couldn’t have asked for a better platform. Now Barrington can weep all the way to the voting booths. I know my constituency, and this is just what I need to put that bastard Connie back where he belongs – on the outside looking in. No house seat, and I just can’t lose to him now.*

Friday 20 October 2102 0930 hours EDT, GUS Senate

“The Speaker recognizes the Junior Senator from Siberia, Ilya Kirlenko.”

“I thank you, Mister Speaker. Fellow Senators, I wish to say only this: I have always been a loyal Party member, but there comes a time when I must vote my conscience. Since I was elected as a Green, I cannot see remaining in my seat following the vote for this war. I will be voting in favor of the administration’s requested war against the Nemetzii. And after that vote has been recorded, I will be resigning my position here in the Senate. I pray that the Governor of Siberia will appoint a suitable replacement to serve out the remaining two years of my term before the month is out. I thank you, my colleagues,” he said, and sat. There was silence throughout the senate for easily thirty seconds before the murmurs began.

Friday 20 October 2102 0935 hours EDT, GUS Senate

“The Speaker recognizes the Junior Senator from Ireland, Brian McCoy.”

“I thank you, Mister Speaker. My fellow senators, it has been my experience that war is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses. Out of any war a few people make huge fortunes or gain great power, while there are thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions ruined or killed. How many of these ‘war millionaires’ shouldered a rifle? None. Newly acquired valuable properties are exploited by the self-same few beneficiaries, who wring their dollars out of the blood in the war. The general public shoulders the bill. What are the results? Newly placed gravestones. Mangled bodies. Shattered minds. Broken hearts and homes. Economic instability. Depression and all its attendant miseries, when the war fever subsides. Back-breaking taxation for generations and generations.

“For a great many years, as a soldier, I had a suspicion that war was a racket; not until I retired to civil life did I fully realized it. A racket different only in scale, for it like all lesser rackets pretends to legitimacy, because if the truth were known no one would ever fall for it. Now that I see the war clouds again gathering, as they are today, I must face it and speak out, telling all about what I see.”

“I ask that my fellow senators join me in rejecting this call for war.”

Friday 20 October 2102 OTS, Colorado Springs

“Captain Fox, just what is your cousin doing right now, do you think?” Sergei Kamirov asked, over the evening meal.

“To be honest, Sergei, I don’t know,” Captain Richard Fox said. “I imagine he’s praying.”

“Praying that the vote will be for peace?”

“No, more like praying that the right decision will be made, whatever that is. That, and ‘please God, don’t let me screw this up’, if it is war. What do you think your father is doing?”

“Repeating that last prayer, Captain Fox. Repeating that last prayer. But it is your cousin who will likely be in the hot seat. He will, as they say, be the ‘man on the scene’.”

The loudspeaker chose that moment to interrupt the students’ conversations. “Attention: class schedules will be posted for the weekend. All leaves suspended until further notice.”

“Cry havoc...” Sergei Kamirov whispered.

“And let slip the dogs of war,” Elena Kamirov whispered, completing the quotation.

EXODUS CHANNEL/ENCRYPTED

FROM: CAPTAIN RICHARD CHARLES FOX, OTS, COLORADO SPRINGS TRAINING COMMAND

TO: BRIGADIER GENERAL NICHOLAS CHARLES REYNARD III, 4TH AEROSPACE

DATE: FRIDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2102 2054 HOURS MDT

GOOD LUCK, GOOD HUNTING, GODSPEED.

Monday, 23 October 2102 0715 hours EST, Washington, D.C.

“Mister President?” Neil Sharpe called out as he knocked on the door to the bedroom in the residence.

“Yes, Neil,” the President answered. “I will be out in a moment.” His voice sounded ... older, somehow. “I take it that the vote is in”.

“Yes, Mister President. It is war.”

“God help us, then, Neil. God help us.”

“The Emirate Ambassador is waiting, Mister President. He will be asking you to permit the Emirate to send observers along with our troops.”

President Pierce sighed. "No doubt they will be most interested in our new adaptive camouflage." It was going to be a long day. He threw off the covers and began getting dressed. A very long day.

Monday 23 October 2102

The New York Stock Exchange, while it stayed open on Friday (the DOW closed at 1020, down from 1115, did not open on Monday. The NASDAQ closed Friday at 115, down from 190. The NASDAQ did not open either on Monday. "For the next week, the markets will remain closed." The New Chicago Stock Exchange closed at noon. The Djakarta Stock Exchange closed Thursday and did not reopen on Friday, and it remained closed on Monday. The New Chicago Commodities Market remained open, and continued trading through the weekend. For some reason known only to God (and perhaps some market manipulators) the price of mercury continues to skyrocket – the 4-month futures contracts are up another 22% since the 16th. Some analysts express concern, and compare the rise in mercury futures to the rise of tulip prices. "Why is it valuable? Because people think it is valuable."

23 September 1942, 1957 hours EDT Washington, D.C. Exodus 8

The silver-haired, slightly paunchy Army Colonel raised his champagne glass. "Congratulations, Leslie! Here's to the brightest of the new stars in our heavens!"

The three tables of guests gathered together around Fleigheiler's Restaurant all cheered, a chorus of approval that soon included cries of "Speech! Speech!" They broke into applause as the target of both toast and applause stood up.

Newly-minted Brigadier General Leslie Groves put down his own champagne glass and held up both hands, quelling the noisy, happy gathering of fellow officers, family, and those personal friends who he'd been able to gather together in the week intervening between his being told by FDR that his promotion was "in the works" and the official Senate vote. He took a preparatory breath and then started speaking.

"I think I'd better break my long-standing rule and make a public comment or two," Groves said, smiling as he looked around. "If I'm talking, that might slow down your drinking. At the wartime prices Fleigheiler's is charging, it may take me the entire war to pay off the debt I'll otherwise face for 'wetting down' my stars."

That got a happy laugh from many of those present. Lt. Colonel Ankeny called out, "You could always arrange for one of the Bechtel boys to invoice for this if you were really pinched!" And that in turn provoked even more laughter; for everybody knew that despite the most strenuous, and even subtle, efforts to obtain an advantage in government contracts by any number of corporations, none had ever managed to induce Groves to do so, regardless of his rank and title.

"Ham, I'd rather see the last project turned inside-out to form my star, first," Groves retorted. "Which might have a beneficial effect on the forthcoming tenants." That drew even more laughter and a few cheers. Groves smiled and made a gentle quieting motion with his hands.

"Seriously, I could never have done this last job without the tremendous spirit of cooperation, patriotism, and common-sense shown by virtually everyone who worked with us.

It is the best evidence I can imagine to contradict those newspapermen, apologists, and whiners who claim nobody in Washington has realized that there's a war on." Groves smiled and looked around. "We came in not just on time, but ahead of schedule; the Pentagon will be open for business by the end of January, 1943. That's a firm commitment, and without our having to worry about the walls having only primer coats or the plumbing not being connected." That drew a great deal of laughter; those had been among the most openly objected-to shortcomings of the great expansion works in the Armed Services' chief training establishments, from Fort Sill (artillery) through Ft. Benning (infantry) to Ft. Hood (armor). "Even more impressively, we came in under budget. Even our President thought that worth praising." Groves smiled, though the smile did not quite reach his eyes. "Bechtel and other contractors may be less impressed; I know that many individual Congressmen will be completely underwhelmed." That last barb again drew cheerful applause.

The newly-minted (as of 16:40 EDT that date) Brigadier General spoke for a short while longer, thanking those who had worked with and for him in building the largest single office building in the world, solving all of the myriad problems and resolving all of the design and construction glitches they had encountered. These had involved everything from providing additional foundation and paving for Virginia highways that had not originally been built to handle construction supply trucks, to ensuring the proper proportion of matching toilets for whites and colored service personnel according to rank, to straightening out the traffic chaos of deliveries that for weeks on end had minute-by-minute timetables. When Groves finished speaking there was sustained applause and further cheering from a largely pleased and happy audience.

"Whew," he muttered to his wife, Grace. "You'd think I'd been elected King, almost, the way these boys are carrying on."

"Some of them are probably wondering what you will be doing next. I can't say that I blame them," she replied.

"Now, Grace, you know that I can't talk about it. The President classified this project and I, for one, mean to keep the secret from being leaked." Groves shook his head. "If he hadn't guaranteed this star, I absolutely would have turned him down."

"Even if he is your Commander-in-Chief?"

"Even so." Groves paused, and then ruefully shook his head. "Well, no, I wouldn't have. It is important. Perhaps even critical."

"Don't you suspect that Franklin Roosevelt would have known you wouldn't have turned him down? Whatever one's personal feelings might be, he has shown himself to be uncannily accurate at judging people. What they will do, and what they will accept."

Groves snorted. "That bench-packing debacle argues against that, I'd say." Then he smiled and patted her hand. "You're right, dear. He didn't have to promote me to get me to take the job; it's my duty. Yet the promotion will help me get my job done, if it can be done." He paused and took a swallow from his drink.

"Speaking on that topic," he said quietly, lowering his voice so she could barely hear him over the noise level in the rest of the restaurant, "I'm going to be taking a trip in the near future. I've got several places I need to see first-hand. Only, 'see' isn't exactly the right phrase. 'Check out', is more appropriate." He had to raise his voice slightly as the

noise coming through the closed doors leading to the main part of the restaurant had increased significantly. "I will try to be back by Thanksgiving, or at the latest, by Christmas. It all depends on what I find, and don't find, where I'm going."

"Can't you tell me?"

He shook his head. "No, dear. Not even you." He looked over the three tables. "I'll be taking Ham, Robert, and Ernest with me. If there's anything that you need to bring to my attention, there will always be someone in my office who can reach me. Though there may be a delay – I won't always be in a major city or anyplace else where Western Union can get to me right away."

Both their heads turned together as the doors suddenly were flung open. Almost everyone in the private banquet room turned to look at the intrusion. Many were quite surprised; they had never, ever thought this event could come to pass.

"You must look! Quickly, quickly! The star! The new star!" Mister Fleigheiler cried out, his normal mien of impassive benevolence gone. On his face was fright, bewilderment, and wonder. "It, they, are shining!" He gestured towards the front, through which the majority of his guests had already exited. Even removed as they were in the inner, private banquet room, those present could hear the murmur of excited commentary coming from the outside front of the restaurant.

"New star? What in the world are you talking about, Mister Fleigheiler?" a somewhat portly Major inquired.

Grace looked over at her husband, and her hands clenched into fists. His face had gone bloodlessly pale, and he was swallowing. She had seen him return from a construction site accident after having dealt with multiple deaths and injuries. She had no idea why her husband was so afraid, but no doubt that he was.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I...I had better go see." He put down his napkin and stood up. Several others in the party were doing the same thing; within a minute, they had managed to press through the rest of the pedestrians and reach the sidewalk. Having done so, it was simple to find out what was causing the commotion; nearly every face was turned to the same point in the sky. There, now fading away into darkness, was a glowing ball of fire, bright enough to cast a faint shadow.

"It was first there nearly ten minutes ago," one onlooker was telling another as Groves and his party looked upwards. "It was like a, a, a world-sized photographer's flashbulb! When it first went off, you could have read a newspaper from the light!"

Groves dropped his head and looked around. Others were gesticulating and pointing, and there was a loud and constant babble of commentary, questions, and speculations.

"That must be what that radio message meant by 'proof'," another man was saying, his hands and head jerking and bobbing about. "A sign in the heavens – very Biblical. They must be really advanced!"

"Advertising stunt," somebody was saying. "Gigantic magnesium flare, that's all."

The light was almost completely gone now. Many of the patrons were re-entering Fleigheiler's, still speculating about what the bright light had been. Those who had been outside, however, were talking more about some radio broadcast.

"I heard it on NBC," a first man said.

"Well, I heard it on CBS," another man said.

"I heard it on my car radio, which was set to WGBY," a worried-looking bureaucrat said. "But I thought the speaker said he was the president."

The first man shook his head. "Had to be a hoax. He called himself 'President Pierce'. FDR's been the president for a decade now."

"It's not a hoax. He talked about making stars appear in the heavens," the second speaker retorted. He gestured at the sky, where the faint sphere still glowed. "I saw it. You saw it. It was there!"

"Magnesium flare, that's all. Damn fool stunt, what with all these idiotic blackout regulations," the bureaucrat said.

"Expensive stunt. If they're dropping sixty-four such flares, all the way from – what was that name? Oh, yeah – all the way from Losalamos to Moscow, that's a long way." The first man shook his head. As he did, his eyes caught sight of General Groves's face. "Hey, buddy – you okay?" He took a step towards Groves. "You got a heart condition, or something?"

"Where did you say?" Groves hardly recognized his own voice it was so hoarse and faint.

"I said Moscow. Yeah, the Reds' capitol."

"Not that – the other one," Groves husked.

"It was 'Los Alamos'." The bureaucrat emphasized the missing syllable. "BIA has a field office not too far away, in Albuquerque. There's only Indians out there. Completely useless desert."

"They also said something about a 'superbomb'...and some scientist's name. What was it? Oh, yeah: Teller."

The first man managed, with the aid of Lt. Colonel Ankeny, to catch General Groves before he fell onto the sidewalk. "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Take it easy, Chief! Take it easy!"

"Sir! I'll call for an ambulance – get a doctor – there's bound to be one in–"

"Nuh–no need," Groves grunted. He reasserted control over his knees and legs. "Fainting, not heart attack." Though if anybody would have cause for such, I would, he thought to himself. "Ham–get my car. Cars, rather. Somebody's going to have to escort Mrs. Groves back home. I've got to get to the White House."

"The White House?" The bureaucrat drew back, looking pale. "Uh, General, if you don't mind, I've nothing I can add that you couldn't get from somebody else."

"I still think you ought to get an ambulance, or at least a doctor, before you do anything else, buddy. You looked like you were going to die right here."

It was just like it had been described; it was as if the world's biggest photographer's flashbulb had gone off. General Groves could see hard, sharp edges to every shadow on the pavement. He could read the fine print on the newspaper sheltered underneath the display stand's overhand. He could make out the colors, even, of both his and other's clothing, and even of the debris in the gutter. Cautiously, using his hand to protect his vision, he looked skywards. The light was bright enough that he had to squint, even for the very brief moment that he looked at the new 'star' blooming in the sky. Exactly where the previously faded globular light had been. A brief glance told the story; that 'star' was lighting up the entire city. A quick glance at the shadows and Groves let out a single, heartfelt, "damn!" And then he turned back to his colleagues. "Get the car, Ham. Get it **now!**" he ordered.

0000 hours GMT 24 October 2102

0000 hours GMT 24 September 1942

This message is being repeated, both in the original English and in translation to ensure that the proper recipients do, in fact, receive this message directly. This message is an introduction, an announcement, a warning, and a caution to the Nations of Earth in the year of our lord, nineteen hundred forty-two.

We have assumed control of your airwaves; we have blanketed your world with this message. We are overpowering your transmitters with our own, across the entire radio spectrum, in order to that as many people hear this message as possible. We urge all who hear to listen, and listen carefully, so that you may repeat this message to those among you who do not have access to radios tonight; your lives and your future history hang in the balance.

My name is Joseph Randolph Pierce, and I am speaking from the Oval Office in the White House in Washington D.C. I am the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Greater United States in what is our Year of the Lord two thousand one hundred two.

Many who hear me in the United States, particularly those along the Eastern Seaboard, may think this a hoax. Another radio theatre production, perhaps from Orson Welles' in a variation on a theme of his 1938 production of H. G. Well's classic tale of interplanetary conquest, **THE WAR OF THE WORLDS**. But this is not a hoax, and it is not a work of fiction. In our time, we have learned to rip holes in the fabric of space and time; we have learned how to open gateways from our world to other worlds, and to step through them. And we have opened gateways from our world to yours. If you look up when this message is first transmitted, you will shortly see proof of our reality in your night skies.

In our world, in our time, the war you are currently fighting ended nearly one hundred sixty years ago. But our world is not your future; we are not your children, rather, we are your brothers. Our worlds have progressed at different rates, and though your world resembles the world of our past, it is distinct from it. But we know the reasons for your war, because it is much like the war our 'greatest generation' fought.

Under international law, in your world and in ours, a nation must have grounds for declaring war, and must issue a declaration of war, before it enters into conflict with another. The Empire of Japan ignored this rule of law, and attacked the United States without warning; it awakened a sleeping giant, and filled him with a terrible resolve. We, the

Government and People of the Greater United States of twenty-one-oh-two, do not intend to make the same mistake. We come to make peace throughout your world.

Our grounds for declaring war in your world are the same as they would be in our own world. We learned through the conflict, which you are now committed to, and the predecessor that gave rise to this current one, the folly of warring against peoples and nations, for conquest, pride, or "lebensraum". We have also learned through many more conflicts and contests and no few wars, that there are two equal follies: not distinguishing between a people or nation and an illegitimate leadership thereof; and, not assisting others who are threatened by such illegitimate leadership and their foul plans of aggrandizement at the cost of others pain, loss, and deaths.

We are declaring war against the Nazi regime that began the current conflict in Europe. This regime faked an attack on one of its own radio stations using prisoners and criminals in an attempt to justify its war against Poland. This regime struck at Norway using tourists and purportedly unarmed and civilian vessels bearing invasion forces. This regime struck at its treaty partner on June 22, 1941, within an hour after the last train bearing 'tribute' rolled through the borders into Germany. This regime which, above all else, is warring upon its own citizens, denying them their right to the protection of the law, their right to property, and their very right to live. We know what was done in Belsen, and what is being planned for Treblinka, Auschwitz, Chemnowitz, and a dozen more concentration camps. We know the details of Hitler's "Final Solution"; the systematic murder of a whole people at the hands of the State. This wrong in and of itself justifies our intervention.

We are declaring war against the Tojo regime of the Empire of Japan. This regime came to power through assassination and illegal means. This regime has violated the most basic precepts of the rules of war, through its failure to accept surrenders and take prisoners. This regime has used biological weapons, a violation of the rules of war so basic an atrocity so great as to call into question the right of the nation of Japan to survive in any form. This regime views the rest of the world as little more than prey, people outside their own 'tribe' as little more than subhuman cattle to be slaughtered for little or no reason whatsoever.

We are declaring war against the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini's Italy. This regime committed the Italian nation to a war of conquest not out of necessity, but out of pride and blindness to the evils of their partners. This regime formed an alliance with the Devil, and it must now pay the price for this alliance.

Now for our warning.

The governments of Germany, Italy and the Empire of Japan have until 0400 hours Greenwich Mean Time on the 24th of September, nineteen forty-two, to notify us of their surrender via radio transmission on any frequency – we will be listening, and we will hear you. The Armed Forces of the Greater United States will begin unrestricted military action against the governments and armed forces of any of these three nation states that does not surrender by the specified deadline. To the governments of Germany, Italy and the Empire of Japan: if you do not lay down your arms, if you will not take the first steps toward real peace yourselves, then we of the Greater United States will take them for you. For peace there will be: but it is up to you to decide whether it will be the peace of friendship and good will, or the peace of unburied dead.

If a regime signals its surrender, and orders its military forces to break contact with enemy units and withdraw to positions within pre-war borders, we will listen, observe and the armed forces of the Greater United States will refrain from engaging in combat with the armed forces of that regime. If the military forces of an Axis power do not act in accord with the intent of the surrender, if they do not begin preparations to retire from territories temporarily seized, or if they initiate combat either with Allied or Greater US forces, then we will treat the surrender notice as a ruse, and our response will be both lethal and widespread.

A warning to the armed forces of the Allies, the United Nations: if an Axis regime signals its surrender to us, and its military forces attempt to break contact and return to territories within the pre-war borders of that regime, you will not continue to engage them. If you continue hostilities after a surrender order has been issued and acted upon, we will enforce the peace, by lethal force if necessary. We will not allow military offensives to be launched against those who truly seek to end this war.

And a further warning to the Allies: we are not your descendants, neither are we, as yet, your allies. That may come in time – we will be making more direct contact, and soon. We know your plans, your strengths, and also your limitations. You must learn to look beyond your internal and national interests, and soon. For today, the future has come calling. And the knock on your door will be friendly only to the extent that you are willing to make peace with it, and with your neighbors.

Finally, but most importantly, is the beacon. We come to a world wracked by war, where victory and defeat, success and devastation, hang in a balance rarely seen before in history. We have come to a world where millions huddle in fear of the conqueror's boots, where nations lie supine and unable to free themselves. To those living without hope, in the depths of the camps, of the ghettos, in the labor brigades or the penal battalions or the seemingly forgotten prisoners' camps, we say: today your liberation begins. For the day of reckoning is near to hand, and your oppressors will be called to account, they will be brought to justice.

Those who have wavered in the face of the threat, or the truncheon, those who have bullied or been bullied, know this: now is the time to find the courage and the will to honor that which you know to be right. For a greater might than any the thugs and brutes who have seized their temporary power is coming. It comes as the whirlwind, as the tempest, as the typhoon; it is a wind of liberation and freedom, of righteous wrath and the scouring of evil from the high places of power. All the ills of the world may have been released upon you yet remember this: the last found is what we bring, and that is hope. For we are acting to ensure that tens of millions who otherwise would be lost may have the chance to live in a freer, better, richer, and happier world.

We have also prepared a warning, and a demonstration, to be displayed simultaneous with the completion of each broadcast of this message. Three hours before the first transmission of this message, from a position in the North Atlantic within view of an Allied convoy, one of our fleet ballistic missile submarines launched ten of its thirty-six intercontinental ballistic missiles and then disappeared beneath the waves. These missiles placed six hundred-forty warheads in orbit approximately two hundred fifty kilometers above the Earth's surface, and at the end of each repetition of this message, a new constellation of

sixty-four stars will appear in the skies of Earth, stretching from the skies over Los Alamos, New Mexico in the United States to the skies over Moskva, Russia, in the USSR. Each warhead will detonate with a force equivalent to five million tons of TNT. These warheads are direct descendants of what one of your scientists, Edwin Teller, calls his "superbomb" – the very stuff of stars.

Each of the six fleet ballistic missile submarines that we have sent through to your world contains a like complement of missiles, and each warhead on each missile is independently targetable. These submarines, and their missiles constitute only a small part of the strategic weapons arsenal of the Greater United States.

Zero four hundred hours GMT. Remember. This message will now repeat.

[Message length, twelve minutes]. The message repeated five times each hour for two hours. The fireballs of the Hellwind missile's warheads hang in the sky for nearly fifteen minutes, disrupting power grids and damaging sensitive radar and electronic equipment across half the world

A Blinding Flash and a Sobering Report

Blacked out, the Great White Way looked more like the bottom of the Grand Canyon at midnight, leavened only by the full moon a few dozen degrees over the skyline to the east. The flash went off overhead just as John W. Campbell Jr. carefully climbed up the darkened fire escape onto the roof of 79 7th street, with a piece of string tied to a bundle of paperclips in one hand, a protractor in his pocket. Hastily he tied the string to a radio aerial, looked up. The flash had now become a bright expanding globe, bright enough to endanger his night vision. Hastily he revised his plan and instead knelt down on the eastern side of the improvised plumbline to block out any influence from the moon. He used the protractor to compare the shadow of the plumb bob on the roof with the vertical line... As close to zero as made no difference. Straight overhead, then.

He scanned the horizon, saw nothing else unusual, then hurried back down the fire escape into the office, just as the phone rang. "John?" a near breathless voice on the other end inquired.

"Dona?"

"I took out the transit and checked like you said – the flare was 14 degrees from the zenith. Can you see it all the way from there?"

"Easily. It's as near straight up as makes no distance."

"From 15 miles away??? Are you sure it's the same flare?"

"Should be – I don't see any others on the horizon from the roof of the building."

John fished out his slide rule and did the math. Gave a low whistle. "I make it over 200 miles up. Well outside the atmosphere."

"And huge – they've got atomics." She was silent for a moment, then continued, softly. "John, I think you'd better come home now before anything else leaks out of that magazine of yours into the real world..."

0330 hours GMT 24 September 1942, The White House, Exodus 8

“Are we sure this isn’t a propaganda trick of some kind?” President Roosevelt asked.

“Yes. Absolutely. The only other government that could conceivably be working on this line of scientific research, is the Germans. We’ve no reason to believe that they’re anywhere near an operational superbomb, Mr. President. And even,” Donovan held up his hand, blocking several others’ attempted interjections, “even if they had, we do not know of any possible delivery means they have access to which could have managed this night’s display.” He shook his head.

“I saw that ‘star’,” FDR said. He clamped his jaw down on his cigarette holder – and looked quite surprised when it shattered. His gaze swept around the room. “Stars, rather. I gather there were sixty-four in all.”

“Sixty-four in each display, sir. Ten displays – ten sets of ‘fireworks’,” Donovan said. He gestured at the small pile of flimsies piled on the coffee table. “I’ve asked for Operational Immediates in clear text from Chicago, New York, London, and Moscow.”

“Clear text?” J. Edgar Hoover shook his head. “Anybody can read clear text!”

“Before you go on a rant, Edgar, you might think on this: probably everybody in the Northern Hemisphere from here to the Urals saw those stars,” FDR pointed out. “Their existence is the antithesis of a secret.” He looked over at the Director of the O.S.S. “Bill, you were right. I take it, they confirm what that apparently-impossible broadcast claimed?”

“Yes, Mr. President, they did. Although I had to ask Mr. Hoover to confirm if there was a star over Los Alamos. It’s his jurisdiction.”

FDR looked at the Director of the FBI, who had responsibility for all counter-intelligence and other activities within the Northern Hemisphere, as well as for enforcement of Federal laws. “Did a star appear over Los Alamos, Edgar?”

Hoover cleared his throat. “I...have no report one way or another, Mr. President.”

Donovan waited ten seconds, long enough to make his point, and then spoke again. “In all fairness, Franklin, both the telephones and long-wave radio operators were having trouble with their systems after those stars blazed in the sky. We don’t understand why, or how, but they had to have created some sort of interference.” He looked at the flimsies. “The Navy boys, technicians and operators, are both trained to deal with fouled-up communications or technical problems, and have vital national interests driving them to do so as soon as they can. That’s a different level of urgency entirely than Bell Telephone or even Western Union operate under.”

FDR snorted. “Hell, Western Union doesn’t even promise that it will deliver their telegrams; all they’ll agree to do is ‘try’.” He looked at Hoover, then at Donovan, and then over at his Chief of Staff. “We had a little example of that weakness last December, didn’t we, Admiral?”

Admiral Leahy nodded, but said nothing. All those present knew that the warning telegram sent to the commanders at Pearl Harbor had been delivered late. The Congressional inquiries had savaged many reputations in the search for the proper scapegoats.

“I think we can presume that there was a ‘star’ over New Mexico,” FDR said.

“Mr. President – why is that so important?” George Marshall asked.

“Because Los Alamos is one of the top five – no, let me be precise: it is the highest, on a very short list of locations where I was planning to situate the scientific research center for the super-explosive project,” General Groves said.

“I thought that was in Chicago?” Hoover asked.

“Only the very first phase is at the University of Chicago,” Donovan said. “Professor Fermi is trying to confirm if a controlled reaction can be created in the laboratory. But even if he’s successful, that’s only a first step in a massive effort.”

“Which is what I got Leslie signed on to manage,” FDR said. “Both the research support, and the production. We’ve got to push ahead simultaneously on as many different lines as we can, because we can’t wait to find out which theory or engineering approach works. Whoever put those ‘stars’ up, obviously knows; but I doubt we can ask them.”

“Why not?” George Marshall asked. “My staff tell me that the speaker announced that he was the President of the United States.”

“The ‘Greater United States’,” Donovan corrected him.

“As may be. They are declaring war against the Axis Powers, aren’t they?” Marshall said.

“So did the French. Are they, our allies?” Donovan asked.

There was a moment of silence, and then some rueful headshaking and tension-relieving chuckles.

“Thing is, George, nobody outside this room knew about that list. Did either you or Edgar know it existed? Could you name the other locations?” FDR asked.

George Marshall looked at General Groves. “I could speculate – might even be right on one or two of the places – but,” he shook his head, “it would only be a guess. No, I didn’t know.”

“My men have been checking out all the places you told me to look into, Mr. President,” J. Edgar Hoover said. “But I, too, would be guessing.” He looked over at General Groves. “You sure you didn’t share that list with your aide? Or your wife?”

“With nobody outside this room, Director. I drew up that list of a hundred and fifty locations, and typed them out, myself. I’m sorry about the workload, but the only way I could hide the needle I was looking for was to make you fetch in the whole haystack.” General Groves nodded at his superior. “General Marshall approved what I did, before the list was turned over to you.” He then turned to face Roosevelt.

“Mr. President, I am even more concerned over the security implications from other aspects of that broadcast. As far as I know, I am the only, the sole, person to whom Professor Teller has disclosed the phrase ‘superbomb’. Not even his colleagues know about it; I asked him to keep that private until they are gathered together. And the reference to ‘the stuff of stars’. That, together with this display, will almost certainly put the Nazis on to the potential of nuclear reactions.”

“They’re already working on it,” Donovan said. “As far as either the O.S.S. or the British can tell, at a low priority level.” He shook his head. “If they’d been more interested, they wouldn’t have driven Einstein and many of his colleagues out. Or they would have grabbed Niels Bohr out from Denmark.”

FDR nodded. “Still, I understand your point, Groves. Which means we’re going to have to press ahead on this even faster.” He looked at Donovan, then Hoover, then Marshall. “After tonight, we have to take it for granted that the Nazis are pushing their nuclear research efforts as a top priority. While some of us have argued in the past whether or not they were or might have been, given tonight’s dramatic fireworks, the race has just had the starter’s gun go off.”

“If whoever these people might be, knew about Teller, and Los Alamos, what else might they know about?” Marshall asked, looking first at Donovan, then at Hoover, then at Donovan again. “My staff noted that the message talked about biological weapons being used by the Japs. Have you any indication that this might be true?”

The Director of the O.S.S. shook his head. “Not one word. Not even a hint. The Chinese have made such a claim, but they’ve been saying that since the fall of Nanking.”

“If not before,” Hoover growled. “Little if any truth to be gotten out of Chiang Kai-shek. Even less of that liberal bastard, Luce.” He shook his head. “Mr. President – I haven’t always agreed with Director Donovan, and we have clashed occasionally. But I will say, for the record, that he has always understood the necessity for secrecy, and fully cooperated with the FBI in ensuring our nation’s protection.”

FDR looked at the right-hand wall, and at the clock ticking away the minutes there. “Eleven thirty-nine p.m.,” he said. “The deadline they gave was for 4 a.m. Greenwich, our midnight.”

There was a knock on the door, and everybody in the room jumped. Before anyone could speak, the knob turned and a Secret Service agent stepped through, closing the door behind him. He was holding a message flimsy in his hand. “From Naval Operations, Mr. President,” he said.

FDR gestured at the others. “Read it. Unless it’s personal,” he added quickly.

“Yes sir. No, sir. Message says: ‘Italians showing white flag.’” The Secret Service agent cleared his throat, and then stepping forward, put the flimsy on the desktop. As he did, there was another knock – and the door opened to show both the second agent on guard duty and an Army Colonel, accompanied by a Warrant Radioman.

“The Senior Service earned its sobriquet by a mere minute,” FDR said cheerily. “Colonel, I am going to show astounding Presidential perspicacity. The Italians are surrendering to these hoaxers, correct?”

“Ah, yes; yes, Mr. President. That’s what our radio intercept read. In clear, and both in Italian and English.” The Radioman Warrant nodded his head, indicating the message held in the Colonel’s hands with his eyes.

“With less than twenty minutes to the deadline. That can’t do much good,” Admiral Leahy said. “Still, I’m surprised that the Italians would do that.”

“Mussolini never bluffed very well,” FDR commented drily. “Given their losses in Eritrea, Libya, and Taranto, and their incapacity in Yugoslavia, he’s hardly got reason to be confident in the strength of his own military.” He looked about the room, and then back to the three message-carriers. “Thank you, gentlemen. Agent Sanders, I’d like to change your instructions temporarily. After this, I’d like you and your partner to pass the messages through without interrupting us. Just place them in my in-box. We’ll get to them as we can – but for now, I believe we need to be able to keep on working without being interrupted.” He waited, got the acknowledging nod, and then with a small gesture of his right forefinger got all three of the men moving out of the room. As they were leaving, the President sighed and rubbed his forehead.

“I’m not Winston Churchill and don’t keep his hours. Unlike him, I prefer to sleep once the witching hour has arrived,” he said to no one in particular. “If we do not hear anything more until 12:30, I am going to bed. Even if we do hear anything – which I must now say I consider quite a bit more likely than not – if there are going to be developments, I expect that we will hear only of the first steps being taken. It will take quite some time to get at the Nazis, let alone the Japs. After all, where could these intervening avengers come from? Shangri-La¹?” He snorted. “Ridiculous.”

***24 September 1942/24 October 2102 0335 hours Zulu
“Looking Glass”, in Near Earth Orbit, Exodus-8***

Only one person on board the mobile command and control aerospace plane knew, or cared, why she was called “Looking Glass”; the rest of the crew simply assumed that their CO was indulging in one or another of his obscure hobbies in the name selection. The call sign, and the original aircraft, had been retired for decades, but General Nicholas Charles Reynard III remembered, and that was enough for the moment. “Looking Glass” was in command of all the forces of the Greater United States on or about Exodus-8 Earth. Her Ops crew of forty hand-picked officers and airmen were among the best in C⁴I (command, control, communications, computers and intelligence) that the GUS Armed Forces had.

“Looking Glass” was at the top of the pyramid, relayed information through other C⁴I ships responsible for progressively smaller sections of the operation. The “big picture” of the battlespace was gathered here, and the strategic directives issued or modified to suit conditions and re-issued. Everyone connected to the network had access to that big picture – the Battlespace Awareness so eagerly sought by earlier generations – but out of habit (and out of a desire to avoid sensory and information overload) most of the service focused only on their little part of the battlespace. “Let the big boys play with their flags and arrows, I’m interested in what’s on the other side of that hill, what’s on my flanks, and what’s coming up behind me – don’t bother me with anything else!”

¹ In a very strange way, the invaders are receiving their orders from ‘Shangri-la’. FDR’s presidential retreat was called ‘Shangri-la’. It remained under that name during the Truman administration but, when Eisenhower took office, he decided that ‘Shangri-la’ was too exotic a name for the retreat, and renamed it ‘Camp David’, the name that it holds to this day. Since the final ‘go code’ had to be issued by the president, well...if not from ‘Camp David’, at least from someone associated rather directly with that location.

At the moment, everything was quiet. The Ops crew were sitting in their cradles, tied via induction webs into the ship's – and the Invasion Force's – network by a variant of the direct computer-neural interface that the cyber-implant used. Quiet, resting, but not idle.

“Command, Sigint, surrender signal received from Italian government.”

“Sigint, acknowledged. One down, two to go. Strike control, Command: redirect Italian decapitation strikes to secondary German targets. Reposition third wave garrison units to begin occupation of the designated Italian control points.”

“Command, Strike Control acknowledges.”

24 September 1942/24 October 2102 0355 hours Zulu
“Looking Glass”, in Near Earth Orbit, Exodus-8

“Communications, Command. Contact POTUS for final go code.”

“Command, Communications acknowledges.”

24 September 1942/24 October 2102 0358 hours Zulu
“Looking Glass”, in Near Earth Orbit, Exodus-8

“Command, Communications. We have Flash traffic from POTUS. Are you prepared to verify?”

General Reynard reached into one of his flight suit pockets and took out a small card. Major General Alexei Vladimirov Galyurin, the 4th Aerospace Vice Commander opened a gene-print locked cabinet next to him and pulled out a similar card. A nod, and General Reynard replied, “Communications, Command. We are prepared to verify.”

In a ritual that was old before his grandfathers were born, General Reynard cracked open the card, and set it in front of him on his desktop. As Communications read off the verification code, he wrote it down and compared it, letter by letter, number by number, with the entries on his card.

“General Galyurin, I confirm that the message is valid. Do you concur?”

General Galyurin looked once more at his card, at the codes he had written and looked up at his vulpine CO. “General Reynard, I concur, the message is valid.”

“General Galyurin,” General Reynard said, removing the key from around his neck, “please insert your key.”

Five meters across the cabin, General Galyurin similarly removed his key from around his neck and inserted it into the reader in front of him. “I have inserted my key.”

“On my command, then, three, two, one, press.” And the two officers pressed their palms against the confirmation pads. The DNA scan confirming their identities and the “live” state of the palm (or pad) pressed against the scanner took fifteen seconds.

On “Looking Glass” and, relayed through satellite and “lower pyramid” C⁴I craft, the battlespace network now showed status at DEFCON 1. The clock read 24 September 1942: 0400 hours Zulu. D-day. H-hour.

Invasion.

24 September 1942, Switzerland, Exodus 8

Four regiments (roughly 8000 men) are deployed against Switzerland. Within three hours of initiation of hostilities, the top leaders of the country and the banks are under guard in GUS controlled detention facilities. Casualties are “minimal”. The country is not, in the normal sense, conquered, although many of its leaders are “sleeping on pillows of stone”.

Switzerland is the first of the nations on Exodus 8 to learn that the GUS brings justice. It is also the first to learn both fear, and hope. Fear from those in power who acted wrongfully; but hope from those who are otherwise.

24 September 1942 In the air over South East England, Exodus 8

Lt. Colonel Nils Einarsen used his left hand to hold the control yoke for the Liberator steady, reaching over with his right to throttle back on the engines. “Crossing Angels 15,” he said into the intercom. “Crew shift to oxygen masks.” The bass drone of the B-17’s four engines softened slightly as he reduced their climb rate. “Navigator, give me a course.” As the lead bomber of Red Cell 1, the lead three-plane formation for the entire flight, Einarsen as the Flight Leader had the task of taking this strike to the target.

His eyes constantly looked around and about, from side to side and up and down as well, with only the briefest of glances, completely unconscious, to the gauges and indicators. Fuel status, oil pressure, engine temperature, rate of climb, pitch angle, outside temperature, all moved into his awareness yet barely disturbed his consciousness, so thoroughly assimilated had his training made the cockpit. It was the clear blue sky that was the greater threat; out of it, Einarsen knew, would come the 109B’s and FW-190a’s of the Luftwaffe’s interceptors. Though not for several hours yet; they had a small bit of England and all of the North Sea to cover yet. His right hand flipped the intercom switch without conscious thought. “Pilot to tail gunner. How’s the rest of the flight shaping up?”

“Forming up nicely, Pilot. Green 3 and Green 4 are still about fifty yards low and slow, but they’re pulling up as I speak. Yellow 2 lead is joining up with Brown 3 for a diamond. Out.” They’d lost Yellow 2’s 2nd and 3rd planes in a mid-air collision as the flight had formed up in the fog, but the remaining cells, and Yellow 1, hadn’t let that disaster shake their training.

His co-pilot, Captain Peter Drake, leaned over and pulled his mask aside. “What do we do about that radio message?” he asked, then put his mask back on. The boffins had said that if anyone took their mask off in the higher altitudes, they’d die. The pilots and crews of the massive, four-engine bombers had long since learned the limits of that assessment. If your breath was going out anyways, having the mask off didn’t do any harm. It was an utter necessity to get the mask back on before the next inhalation, or risk the slow descent into inanition and eventual death that was anoxia, which conditioned most to never remove their masks until instructed to do so. That, and the difficulties in finding and replacing a mask when their aircraft was bouncing in tens-of-feet-high turbulence, or while fighting the centrifugal force pinning you to your seat during an acrobatic maneuver while trying to avoid the fate of so many of the bombers – of recovering the formation after nearly being shot down by German flak or interceptors.

Einarsen pulled off his mask, correctly understanding that his subordinate did not want this to go over the intercom. "We do nothing. What did you expect?"

"I don't know," Drake said. "Some of the men heard about it when it was broadcast. Some heard about it between their wake-up and final roll-call. A lot of them thought it was a Hun hoax." He took a quick breath from his mask. "None of them said anything to me about it."

Einarsen shook his head; he hadn't heard anything. "The big domes?"

Drake shook his head, too. "Nothing. You were at the mission briefing." Which had begun at 4:00 a.m., as usual, and started with the weather forecast, as usual, for clear and calm, which was only beginning to slip from the norm for September, 1942, along the Rhine River. "Nobody said anything out of the ordinary." He put his mask back on and chuckled. "Beyond our target."

"It is a bit deeper than some of the earlier strikes, sure. Eighth Air's getting its feel for just how deep the Luftwaffe's active defense zones go with this mission."

"Yah. The real interesting fun begins when we move beyond the fighter range." Both of them fell silent at that. The theory and predictions were that the self-protecting box of armored, heavy bombers would be 'impenetrable'. Both pilot and copilot knew that none of the staffers who'd made those predictions, and none planning the strikes, would be flying those missions – but those who did, would pay the price for finding out just how accurate those predictions were.

Lt. Col. Einarsen leaned over. "We've spent a long time fighting to make Strategic Bombing an operational reality, Peter, against everything the Army and Navy brass could come up with." He took a quick breath from his mask. "Hell, I wouldn't put it past some of them to come up with that hoax, to keep 'Tooney' and General Eaker from proving our worth. That's why this mission is so important." He put his mask back on and straightened up, as the flights of B-17's continued to drone onward towards Essen. Any minute now, they'd be entering formerly neutral airspace.

"Passing Angels 27," Einarsen said for the crew's benefit. That meant they had 3,500 feet of altitude yet to gain to their mission's cruising altitude.

"Coming up on the Wash," Lt. Johns, their navigator, announced. A minute later he added, "Wet walking time." They were now over the ocean.

"Tail, give me an update on the formations," Lt. Colonel Einarsen said.

"Ten...fifteen...twenty-two flights, sir. The back units are still closing in, but the lead cells are tight and close."

"Anybody flying loose that you can see?"

"No, sir."

Drake looked over to his commander. "Order all units to close up?" he asked, his hand on the radio switch.

Einarsen shook his head. "No. We keep radio silence. The Hun's huff-duff is too good."

"Their radar will have us plotted already."

“We don’t know their accuracy. We do know that loose radio discipline costs lives. Orders, Captain. No radio chatter.”

Drake nodded, and his hand slipped back to the control yoke. The B-17’s engines growled and they flew onward.

Some forty minutes later, when they reached the assigned altitude, Einarsen slowed the engines and then reduced the mixture’s richness. He wanted to cut back the fuel expenditure without losing either speed or altitude; but, as he no longer was climbing, he didn’t need as much power.

“First turn point,” Lt. Johns said. “Come to course 137.”

“Right.” Einarsen put the plane into a gentle bank, increasing the power of the left outboard engine slightly as he did. Now they were heading towards what before the war had been the Netherlands’ coast, but now was German-occupied and German-defended airspace. “Course 137. Tail, how’s the rest of the flight?”

“Tight and close now, skipper! They’re turning like they’re on a string. Nobody’s shifting an inch!”

“Just the way I like it, now if the weather stays like this to Essen, it should be a breeze,” Einarsen said to his co-pilot. “I wonder why Bomber Command said this area was thick with German fighters?” He and Drake did another near-360 review of the clear, unlimited visibility and empty blue sky surrounding them. “Piece of cake, Drake.”

24 September 1942, Looking Glass, in orbit about Exodus 8

Lieutenant Mikhail Emitovitch Shyakin stared at the console, shaking his head. “Can’t be. It just can’t!”

“Something the matter, Lieutenant?” General Reynard asked, switching his console to match the feed from the junior officer’s console, from among the forty other consoles in the C⁴I spaceplane.

“The telemetry from our drones over the German 27th Army Group HQ on the Eastern Front showed a massive temperature increase, then cut out.

General Reynard looked at the display for a few seconds. “Run a quick spectral on the area, Mister Shyakin, and report what you find in two minutes,” he said, turning his attention to other matters. *Eagle flight is still three minutes out from that damned bomber group. If those idiots won’t turn back, we’ll have to splash them.* He tapped the display, zooming in on an image relayed from the surveillance satellite now passing over the North Sea. *Way too many damned planes. Didn’t they see the fireballs? Don’t they think we’re serious? God in heaven protect us from fools who won’t believe their own eyes!*

“Command, Strike Control. We have lost contact with Tango flight,” said one of the airmen.

“Display Tango flight statistics,” General Reynard whispered into his computer mike. His display flashed.

Tango flight Ground attack; Military decapitation (German 27th Army Group)
Viper 2301: F8E Tango One Captain Alana R.

Viper 2303: F8E Tango Two Lieutenant Janet Louise R.
Viper 2147: F8E Tango Three Lieutenant Mark Steven R.
Viper 2845: F8E Tango Four Lieutenant Daryl Alan R.

F-8E characteristics:

Crew: Pilot, Copilot, 4 gunners per plane.

Ordinance load: 8 JDAM-4, (1000 kilo HE), 2 ACVs, 10,000 rounds 40mm cannon

No, none of them were the newer vipers, so at least there's one less worry. But what would cause a telemetry loss from all four aircraft other than catastrophic failure? General Reynard thought.

“Command, Strike Control. We have also lost telemetry from Victor 1.”

“Strike Control, Command acknowledges,” General Reynard said. “Computer, display Victor 1 statistics,” he whispered into the mike.

Victor One: CAP (Single plane flight) loitering over German 27th Army Group HQ
Viper 3385: F8B+ Victor One Lieutenant Stewart Joseph R.

F-8B+ characteristics:

Crew: Pilot, Weapon Systems officer

H4B fusion pod power and propulsion system.

Ordinance load: 8 JDAM-4, (1000 kilo HE), 6 ACVs, 20,000 rounds 40mm cannon.

Damn! If someone scored with a magic BeeBee, and Victor 1 went down, it might just be possible that its fusion plant went 'runaway', and... General Reynard thought, a sick feeling developing in his stomach.

“Command, Intelligence. Bloom is nuke flash,” Lieutenant Shyakin said. “Confidence is high.”

The general's mouth snapped shut with a click that was clearly audible throughout the compartment as the other officers and airmen held their breaths. “Intelligence, Command. Acknowledged. SatControl, when is next spysat over the incident?”

“Command, SatControl. We can replot a KH-21 to overfly in...twenty-one minutes,” one of the airmen in the satellite control group said.

Damn! Not soon enough. “Intelligence, Command. Lieutenant Shyakin, the feed you're getting is...”

“Command, Intelligence. We're bouncing it off one of our weathersats,” Lieutenant Shyakin said. “Spectral is a match for nuke flash, intensity consistent with a two-fifty kay-tee burst.”

“Control, what is our nearest flight?”

“Command, we had Tango flight on site...and we've lost contact with that flight.”

“Control – next closest craft?” the General asked, his voice still calm.

“Command, we have two Nighthawks – Romeo Flight – approximately ninety seconds away...seeking tango-oscar-oscar²”

“Strike Control, Command. They have just found their target. Revector for surveillance pass. If it is a nuke flash, I want the overflight high and fast. Link their sensors directly to my console – I want a real-time feed.”

“Understood, Command. Revectoring...” the airman went silent for twenty seconds as he routed the new command information to the two night-fighter aerospace craft in Eastern Russia, the commands bouncing from Looking Glass to a satellite in geosynchronous orbit, to a NEO relay sat, and from there to the two Nighthawks silently orbiting in the Russian sky. “Time to target eighty seconds, counting down by twenties.”

“Good. Strike Control, Command. Reroute strikes around the ionization zone.”

“Command, Strike Control acknowledges.”

0530 hrs Zulu, 24 Sept. 1942, GUSS San Diego, North Atlantic, Exodus 8

Captain Williams was unusually tall for a submariner, 195 centimeters. He was young for a four-ringer, barely fifty-four, with twenty-five years’ service in attack submarines. There seemed to be no fat anywhere on his body, least of all his face. He looked as though he’d already gone through at least one anagathic treatment with his whippet thin body and jet-black hair.

“Conn, Sensors. Passive sonar contact bearing 052, range 60,000 meters.”

“Sensors, Conn. Classification?” Williams said, identifying the sensor operator by voice without effort. *Wolfie is the best*, he thought. *Well worth the battle with Fleet to get one of the few sensor operators to ever spot another San Francisco class boat.*

“Conn, Sensors. Contact is submerged, depth approximately 75 meters, speed 5 knots.”

“Sensors, Conn. Start a track with the next available number.”

“Conn, Sensors. Contact designated Sierra Nineteen.”

The captain chuckled. *Shooting fish in a barrel.* “Helm, come to course 052, make turns for sixty knots.”

“Conn, Helm. Coming to course 052, reducing speed to sixty knots.”

Williams picked up a mike and threw the ‘all stations’ switch. “All hands, this is the captain, rig for silent running. Major Wolf, if you would be so kind as to move your men to their boarding stations?” He turned. “Diving control, take her up to 2500 meters.” Wolf, the commanding officer of the San Diego’s marine complement was a lupine uplift and the Marine company commander, and an O-3 – a Captain – but on a naval vessel there is only one Captain.

0605 hours Zulu, 24 Sept. 1942, GUSS San Diego, North Atlantic, Exodus 8

“Conn, Diving control. Now holding at 75 meters.”

“Helm, Conn. Reduce speed to five knots.”

² Tango-oscar-oscar = TOO = Target Of Opportunity

“Conn, Sensors. Contact Sierra Nineteen coming within range of laser scan. Contact Sierra Nineteen showing markings ‘U-202’, I spell, ‘Uniform, two-zero-two.’ Range now sixteen hundred yards.”

“Captain,” the JAG officer, a lieutenant j.g., cleared his throat. “The ROE are quite specific. We are required to...”

“Lieutenant Stewart, I am quite well aware of the details of the ROE,” Captain Williams said, the grin and twinkle in his eye taking much of the sting out of his words. He picked up a mike, and threw a few switches. “Sensors, Conn. Connect channel four-zero mike to Gertrude.”

“Conn, Sensors, Aye. Mike channel four zero now connected to SO³.”

Walters chuckled, and thumbed the mike switch. “Kriegsmarine Unterseeboot Two Zero Two, this is GUSS San Diego. As of Zero-four-hundred hours GMT this date, a state of war has existed between the German Reich and the Greater United States. You are ordered to surface and surrender your vessel or we will attack.” The captain turned off the mike and turned to face the JAG. “Well, we have just unzipped our fly in front of everyone in the North Atlantic. Are you satisfied, Lieutenant?”

“Sir, yes sir!” the JAG replied.

“Conn, Sensors. Picking up Gertrude transmissions from other elements of the Fleet. Contact Sierra Nineteen is now making turns for nine knots. Target aspect ratio is changing.”

“Master of the boat,” Captain Williams said, “sound, ‘Away boarding parties’”.

“Aye, sir,” the Chief said, taking out his whistle, and the tones of ‘boarders away’ sounded throughout the ship. The four boarding pods slipped quietly away from the San Diego, barely crawling along at twelve knots, closing with their one hundred sixty-eight Marines on the doomed German U-boat.

Like four falcons all stooping on a single pigeon, the pods closed on the U-boat. The pods matched speed and course with the U-boat then clamped onto its hull, silent still. The U-boat crew only became aware of the boarding pods clamped onto their ship’s hull when the explosive breaching mechanisms cut through their hull; the first troops through the breaches weren’t human – they were uplifts selected for speed and dexterity. Two uplifted ferrets dove through each of four jagged openings, evenly spaced along the submarine’s decking and hull; eight musteline snakes screamed through the boat, dropping strings of flash-bang grenades as they ran. Still reeling and blinded from the noise and actinic glare of the grenades, the U-boat crew tried to stand up to the one hundred sixty armored lupine uplifts swarming through the ship.

They had no more to fight with than two pistols (both locked away in the captain’s safe), or for the engineering and torpedo staff, wrenches. The cook and his assistant had knives, but before they could even think of it one of the lupine boarders was standing guard in front of the rack. The lupine uplift took one of the knives off the rack and, with his thumb on one side of the blade and his index and middle fingers on the other, snapped the

³ SO = Sonar Output.

blade in two like it was a twig; the cook and his assistant, who had never heard of, much less seen, power assisted armor, took the hint and were very quiet. *If this creature can snap the finest Solingen blades with just his gloved fingers, what could he do to us with his fists?*

Outnumbered and outgunned, the U-boat crew lost the fight was lost before it began. From “breaching charges fired” to “ship secured” was just over ninety seconds.

Extract from Janes All the World's Submarines, 2100-2101 edition

SSN 3125 San Diego San Francisco Class Attack Submarine

Crew complement: 169 enlisted, 18 officers

160 Marine enlisted, 8 marine officers

Armament

72 Mark 81 torpedoes, 6 forward tubes, 2 stern tubes.

12 vertical launch missile tubes. 72 SLCM (submarine launched cruise missiles).

12 decoy/noisemakers

12 homing mines

4 breaching pods (3 standard on San Francisco class, prior to SSN 3124).

Displacement 28,145 metric tons, 32,000 metric tons dived

Maximum depth 6500+ meters

Maximum speed 90+ knots

24 September, 1942, Over the North Sea, Exodus 8

“I don’t understand, visibility is 50 miles easy, and I don’t see a single German fighter. Where are they?” Captain Drake asked. “If they don’t start scrambling, they won’t have time to get to altitude.”

“I would think, Captain, that you’d be happy not to see any enemy fighters. I know I am,” Einarsen said. He couldn’t help grinning. This was actually looking like it was going to be a milk run; well, as much of a milk run as any bombing mission could be. Intel said that they could expect heavy AA around the primary. “Waist, tail, keep your eyes open. We haven’t seen any Jerries yet, but they’re bound to be around here somewhere.”

“Maybe the boojums got them...” one of the waist gunners said.

“Shut up, Professor!” the ball turret gunner called out on the intercom.

“Ok, cut the chatter, people,” Einarsen said sharply. *All for show*, he thought. *Everybody’s feeling good about this one. Stupid German hoaxes. Serve the bastards in Essen right.*

The radio chose that moment to come alive. “Attention Allied bomber flight!” The voice was as unemotional and devoid of accent as if it had been produced by a machine. “This is the Eagle flight lead. We are Perimeter Patrol One-Three-Seven, operating under the authority of the Greater United States’ Aerospace Command. You are entering restricted military airspace. If you do not alter course towards your base within one minute of the end of this transmission, we are authorized to use lethal force against you. This is the last warning that you will receive. Ending transmission.”

“What the hell?” the radio man said over the intercom on Einarsen’s plane. “No broadcast source, Colonel.”

"Cut the chatter, Sparks. Tail, Waist? Do you see anything?" Einarsen and Drake did another near-360 look-around. There weren't even clouds for fighters to hide in.

"Port Waist, nothing in view. Visibility must be at least fifty miles."

"Starboard Waist, nothing here either."

"Tail gunner, I see absolutely nothing but our own planes. No Jerries in sight anywhere."

Einarsen looked over at Drake and shook his head. "Another trick," he said. Drake, who was carefully checking the sky ahead of them.

"Colonel, I don't see a damn thing in front of us, no Germans anywhere in sight," Drake said, then replaced his mask.

"And that makes it final. On to Essen!" Einarsen said.

Drake leaned forward, scanning the sky. He tried to forget about the voice on the radio. *Just a hoax. Like a dozen others*, he thought.

The cockpit lit up as if someone had set off a star shell on the plane's nose; the B-17 shuddered, as if hit by a gigantic hammer. Drake managed a single, heartfelt, "Damn!"

Einarsen didn't consciously hear that exclamation. He was too busy trying to control the aircraft as it bucked and threatened to spin out of control.

"Port outboard engine on fire, Skipper!" Drake called out, even as his hands went to the throttles.

"Feather engine one, increase power to both inboard engines," Einarsen said.

"Feathered one," Drake called out, "ninety percent power on two and three."

Einarsen's left hand was rigid on the control yoke, but his feet sawed momentarily on the rudder pedals. Their left outboard engine had just exploded, and he had to keep their bomber from skewing, yawing, turning, or losing either altitude or speed, lest they be rammed by either of the other two bombers forming the wings of his 'v'.

Thirty seconds later, he was sure they were back to steady flight. "Copilot, take it," he ordered. Feeling Drake's sure hold on the control yoke, Einarsen took his hands off, and looked over at their left wing. And blinked.

They didn't have left engine any more. He could see...nothing there, from the leading edge of the wing forward. Prop, cowling, cylinders, shaft, feedlines – all were gone. The glint of sunlight on the metal edges was unmistakable. "What the...?"

"Colonel! Sir!" It was the tail gunner's voice.

"Go ahead."

"Skipper – everyone has been hit!"

"What?" Einarsen put his right hand on his headphone. "Say again, Tail."

"Sir. The entire flight, every plane, just lost their port outboard engine. We lost four planes – collisions. Crippling, but not explosive." Well, no, they'd have felt the concussive blast from the tons of high explosive bombs if that had happened. "Formation's gone to

shit, sir. At least eight planes have already peeled off and dropped their bombs. It's a miracle the lower cells weren't hit."

Well, not a miracle, just planned basic physics; that was why the forward cells were at the lowest altitude. "How many are left?"

The radio crackled into life. "This is Green leader. Green flight, report status."

"Green 2, lost port outboard engine."

"Green 3 – shit, we're down one!"

"Green 11, lost port outboard engine."

"Green 12, ditto."

"Green 21, ditto."

"Green 23, ditto. Green 22's going down; we've seen six chutes already."

"Green 31, also lost port outboard engine."

"Green 32, ditto."

"Green 33, same here. What the hell hit us?"

"Green leader here. Green flight, return to base."

Lt. Col. Einarsen swore and reached for the switch. "This is bomb-group leader. This mission will continue. All planes that can maintain altitude and have enough fuel, must continue." He looked over at the gauges. "We've got at least a 10% reserve," he said to Drake. Then he went back on intercom. "Navigator. I want you to give me a least-fuel return vectoring, and tell me how much we're going to need."

"Roger. Wilco." There was a pause. "If the winds don't change on us, I think we can squeeze another eight to ten percent out." Lt. Johns read out the vectors. "It increases our exposure to the interceptors by a lot, sir."

"On the return flight only." Einarsen switched to the group frequency and radio. "This is bomb-group leader. We are replotting return flight. If you can make the round trip on 72% or less, even with the increased fuel consumption, you may not RTB." He paused. "If you're below that point, you need to tell me your fuel load before you may jettison and leave. Start from the front and work back."

"This is Red 2. We're at 76%, Colonel."

"This is Red 3. We're at 70%." There was a tone of disgust in Captain Reinberger's voice. "We're still working to put out the outboard fire, too."

"Red 3, you may abort and leave." The plane to their immediate right rear dropped its right wing and began to curve around. "Purple Flight?"

"This is Purple leader. We are at 50% and are continuing to lose fuel."

"Purple lead, you may return to base. Purple 2, you are now Purple lead. Give me your fuel status," Einarsen sent. The former lead plane for the secondary 'vee' turned and began opening its bomb bay doors.

“This is Purple 2. We are at 75%, and able to continue. No further fuel leakage, and the fire is out on engine one.”

“This is Purple 3. 74%.”

“This is Purple 11. We’re at 61% – we lost our outer tank to drainage.”

“Purple 11, you may leave.” On their left rear, a flight back, the center plane started opening its bomb-bay, preparatory to jettisoning its bombload.

“Purple 12, we’re at 71%. The drag is pretty fierce.”

“Purple 12, you may leave.” A second plane, the left-hand one of its cell, started to drop altitude and open its doors.

Seven others reported in with fuel loads below the cut-off. One, right at the cut-off, asked permission to continue, which Einarsen granted. Thirteen minutes later, the remaining planes finished closing up into their new formation slots. Nearly two-thirds of the planes were still on course towards Essen.

“Colonel...we’re below 70% of the flight, and still over the North Sea,” Drake said. “Should we...”

Another series of flashes, more like lightning strikes this time. The plane shuddered as if it had hit a wall. The outboard starboard engine had vanished, cleanly this time. *I don't believe in exploding engines...I don't believe in gremlins, I don't, I don't, I don't*, Einarsen thought, as he fought to regain control of the aircraft.

“Losing altitude, Colonel,” Drake said. Without being asked, he reached over, feathered engine four and slammed the two remaining engines’ throttles to full. But even at full throttle, with their full bomb load they continued to lose altitude.

“Flight Leader, this is Green leader. We were told not to fly into Germany, and damned if I’m going to lose my squadrons on obsolete orders.”

“Green Leader, that hoax –”

“Hoax, my ass,” a third voice cut in. “Blue Flight, this is Blue leader. Jettison your loads and return to base.” The bomb bay doors began to open for over two-thirds of the remaining bombers.

“Blue and Green...” Einarsen cut the radio and shifted to intercom. “Navigator. If we drop to fifteen thousand, or even twelve, can we still make Alternate Three?”

Reluctantly, Lt. Johns replied. “Yes, sir. We might have to land at the Canterbury diversion...” Einarsen cut off the intercom and shifted back to radio.

“This is Group Leader. We are diverting to Alternate Three, and we are dropping to Angels 15 first.”

The third voice came back. “Colonel, you’re a damned fool.”

“Whoever said that is ordered to put himself on report for cowardice on his return,” Einarsen snapped. Three-quarters of the remaining planes were dropping their loads and turning out and away from the formation. He looked over at his copilot.

“I hope they don’t shoot him. He may be right, after all.”

Drake shook his head. "Even if you say that radio broadcast last night was a hoax, how do you explain those 'fireworks'?" They'd all seen the glowing stars appear, glow, and die out, ten times repeated. As soon as the first set had appeared, outside power had failed, and it had taken the support crews nearly half an hour to get their generators going again.

"I can't. Any more than ..."

The sky lit up again, and the plane shuddered. Now the port inboard engine was missing. Drake cut the fuel feed to engine two, and looked over at Einarsen. They were dropping at nearly two hundred feet per minute. Einarsen clicked on the radio.

"This is Group Leader. Mission abort. Repeat, mission abort. All planes jettison your loads, drop to Angels 10, and return to base." He shifted to intercom. "Bombardier, this is the pilot. We are aborting. Jettison the bombs. Repeat, jettison the bombs. Navigator, give me a minimum-fuel return vector." Einarsen clicked off the intercom and, removing the mask, leaned towards Drake.

"I wonder what's going to happen to the cross-Channel mission, the ones going for the St. Nazaire pens?"

"How's that?"

Einarsen shrugged, as he put the plane into a banking right turn. "Even one engine would be enough to reach the target, though it might take a long glide. Most of those are twins, not four-bangers like ours. If I were leading them, we'd still be heading on after the first engine disappeared."

It would be nearly twenty-seven hours before he found the answer to that question; thirty-seven, before the official news caught up with the grapevine. None of those flights who tried to press on, either made it to their target or returned home. None of them were found by the Channel destroyers and MTB rescue teams, either. Four-hundred thirty men simply vanished in a vain attempt to deny the 'Hun Hoax'. Whatever power had declared that offensive flights into Axis-controlled airspace would not be permitted, clearly had the ability, and the will, to enforce their radioed diktat.

24 September 1942, 2200 hours Zulu

One regiment is deployed in Rome, Italy, to manage the occupation of Italy. One additional regiment is deployed and surrounds the Vatican, sealing it off from outside contact.

24 Sept. 1942, 2300 hours Zulu, Executive Officer's Cabin, GUSS San Diego, Exodus 8

Kapitänleutnant Günter Poser sat, stiff backed, facing the two GUS Naval officers across the table, his face a wooden mask. He didn't look at the marine guarding the door inside the cabin; it looked like something out of a terrible fairy tale, a golden eyed demon in fur and fang, its sole purpose to rend, tear and kill. Kapitänleutnant Günter Poser was an educated man, well read and rational. But there was something about a bipedal wolf standing 180 centimeters tall, in uniform. It didn't need to carry a weapon; Günter had already seen first-hand what it could do with its bare hands (if one could call 'bare' hands that were so covered with fur).

The senior GUS officer was a lean and hawkish sort; there was even a scar on his right cheek. Poser could almost imagine him coming off the dueling field at Heidelberg. His

eyes were a cold icy gray. *A commander*, Poser thought, *equivalent to Fregattenkapitän. He must be the commanding officer of this incredible ship.*

“Korvettenkapitän Poser, in accord with...”

Poser held up his right hand. “My apologies, *Fregattenkapitän*, but my proper rank is *Kapitänleutnant*. I would not want to misrepresent myself as something that I am not.”

“I beg your pardon, on board a GUS warship, there can be only one captain. It is our custom to grant a promotion of one grade for purposes of speech and courtesy to officers brought on board where there might be some possibility of confusion otherwise,” the GUS officer said.

“I understand, sir. My apologies for interrupting you.” Poser said, suppressing a chuckle. *They have their traditions too.*

“None necessary, Korvettenkapitän Poser. I am Commander Leo Richardson, with the Third Special Directorate of the Internal Security Force.”

Günter Poser felt a cold chill run down his back. *Gestapo.*

Richardson continued, either not noticing or ignoring Poser's reaction. “The gentleman at my right, Lieutenant junior grade David Stewart, is the ship's JAG – Judge Advocate General – officer. He is our ‘lawyer in uniform’, to see that your rights are respected. Now, as I was saying, under the Reykjavik Accords of 2094...”

“Excuse me again, sir, the ‘Reykjavik Accords’?” Poser asked.

Lieutenant Stewart answered. “Geneva, and most of Switzerland was obliterated in the nuclear exchange of 2035. Iceland became the ... ‘Switzerland’ of the 21st and 22nd centuries, if you will.”

“Ah...I see...” Poser managed to say. *An entire nation ‘obliterated’. Dear God! What are these people capable of?*

Richardson took a deep breath. This was not going as he had hoped. “Under the Reykjavik Accords of 2094, we are required to provide you with provisions and accommodations appropriate to your rank and equivalent to that provided to our own personnel. You are being provided, accordingly, with the cabin of our ship's Executive officer. As a former commanding officer of a subsurface warship, you are being provided with ration points equal to those given to the commanding officer of this ship.”

At least I won't be going hungry. It would be nice to have an apple or some fruit, Poser thought. Once the silence had stretched out to three or four seconds, Poser decided to risk a question. “*Fregattenkapitän* Richardson, is this cabin,” he waved his hand about, “to be mine for the remainder of my ‘stay’ on board this vessel, then?” It was a huge cabin, with a huge bed that he could lie in without bumping his head on a bulkhead or having his feet drape off the end. And there was this huge table – large enough to seat at least eight people. If it hadn't been for the bed, he'd have thought that he was being held in the Officer's mess; but the bed was an obviously integral part of the cabin.

“Yes, Korvettenkapitän Poser, and if you will bear with me, I will show you how you can order food.”

“Of course, *Fregattenkapitän*.”

Commander Richardson tapped a dark inlaid gray square on the table, a display lit up in the table. Günter managed not to jump back in surprise. But the images on the table surface – clearly the available foodstuffs – were almost amazing as the method of display.

“This is the fruit menu. For example, we have four different varieties of orange: blood orange, Valencia, navel, and strimmer – a strain developed specifically for hydroponic growth in the mid-21st century. Strimmers are a bit too tart for some people, but I happen to like them, and you might try one. The number next to each picture is the number of ration points required. The number here,” he pointed to one corner, “is your remaining ration points for the day. Since you will not, I am afraid, have access to the ship’s exercise facilities, you might want to avoid eating too much.”

“I would hardly think that would be a problem,” Poser said, even as he realized, looking at the points displayed in the corner and the ‘cost’ of the fruit. He would have to be careful; he could eat so much – if he wanted to – that he would be in serious danger of becoming sick. *Peaches. They have peaches. And six varieties of plum. Apples. Grapes – eight varieties. Are there really that many?*

“This is the vegetable menu. I’m afraid that it’s winter back where we come from, and our fresh vegetable selection is somewhat limited.”

I can understand that, Günter thought. But if this is a ‘limited selection’? He looked at the display, trying to count the different varieties presented. It would be hard **not** to overeat.

“Beverages,” Richardson said.

Water, six varieties of grape juice, three of orange juice – with ‘low pulp’, ‘calcium added’ and ‘original high pulp’ options? Prune juice, lemonade, a six-by-six array of different varieties of tea, coffee – four different types of beans, fresh ground?!? If there were beer, this would be heaven. This is not a warship this is a passenger liner! “I cannot help but notice, *Fregattenkapitän*, that there is no beer or wine on this menu.”

“All GUS Navy ships have been ‘dry’ for over one hundred fifty years, Korvettenkapitän Poser. We are not treating you any differently in this respect from any of our serving officers; alcohol is verboten on board all active warships.”

“Of course, *Fregattenkapitän*, it was not a complaint. Only an expression of surprise. Your ship seemed so otherwise incredibly well provisioned. It seemed an apparent contradiction.”

Richardson grinned. “I am afraid that you’ll just have to ‘rough it’ for a little while. Now this is the meat menu. We have chicken, beef, pork, as well as a wide variety of seafoods. The salt water fish have, of course, somewhat lower ration point costs, as the San Diego is capable of resupplying from ... ah ... local resources.”

Poser looked over the meat menu. “The Filet Mignon costs fewer ‘points’ than stew meat?”

“We have only limited supplies of some of the more flavorful and – I will admit – tougher cuts of meat favored by our Marine complement. The ration points are set

artificially high for these cuts so as to discourage consumption by non-Marine personnel. Our captain is human, so you will have to live with the dietary and ration restrictions placed upon him.”

“I think I will survive,” Kapitänleutnant Günter Poser said, perhaps for the first time believing it.

25 September 1942, Volga Steppes, South-Central Russia, Exodus 8

Gefreiter⁴ Gunter Henrich looked at his unit's Stabsfeldwebel⁵. That noncom in turn was looking around at the eighteen other German soldiers in the birch copse. It was a glorious autumnal day, bright and clear and warm. Once out of this fold in the ground, which held both the trees and a shallow stream crossing this part of the Russian steppe, their visibility would be measured in kilometers. Fifteen or so kilometers to the east-northeast (depending on how intelligently the NKVD units had been able to drive the villagers in their forced-labor draft) would be the defenses guarding the next nameless village which Henrich was certain he and his fellow soldiers would have been tasked to take. Whenever the next assault had started.

But that assault, which he had expected to come within a week – 10 days at the outside – was suddenly very doubtful. Times had changed; how, and how much extra life it might mean, Heinrich did not know. A lifetime for many of those who would be in the attack, and in the defense. For all who had seen that night heralding the change.

Henrich shivered. Those who'd been visiting, or guarding, the Panzer detachment or the communications section, had heard that voice on the radio. On all the radios. At once. No matter what channel the operators had tried. Followed by those lights in the sky, on the far northern horizon, like miniature suns. Then those awake had seen many flashes of light, far off to their west, a real fireworks display, culminating in an early dawn that lit the sky for nearly ten minutes. Whatever happened was dozens of kilometers away. Where the 27th Army Group HQ was reputed to be. Had been? They'd had no officer, no communication, since. There had been many other flashes, too, seen mostly over the horizon against the dark of night. But that was yesterday morning before the real dawn. The Stabsfeldwebel spoke.

“Listen close, grave-fillings.” The Stabsfeldwebel's jowls were shaved close, yet even so they glistened blue-black under his thick-lidded eyes. “Somebody was whining that there's been no word from the Oberst⁶. Or from his deputy. But we're still...”

“There's been no word from any officer,” somebody interrupted. Henrich blinked. The sheer shock of the affront silenced the Stabsfeldwebel, whose jaw dropped open. “Nobody's returned from their visit to HQ the night before last. Because they're all dead.”

“Silence!” bellowed the Stabsfeldwebel angrily. “Nobody asked for your opinion!” His hand dropped to his pistol holster and his eyes narrowed. “I should take your name...”

The sound of a Kar-98's bolt slamming home was paired with the snap of the rifle's butt to his shoulder as Karl Mueller, an older soldier, took aim at the Stabsfeldwebel. With

⁴ The Wehrmacht rank of Gefreiter was a Senior Private First Class.

⁵ The Wehrmacht rank of Stabsfeldwebel was something like Staff Technical Sergeant.

⁶ The Wehrmacht rank of Oberst is the equivalent of the US Army rank of Colonel.

his finger in the trigger guard. With the trigger slightly pulled. With the safety off. "We're done with that scheiss, now," the older soldier, a mere Private, said.

Henrich's jaw now dropped; the other sounded wearily amused, not filled with dread at his actions! "It's time to do what we did in '19, what we should have done in '17. It's time to go leave this insanity, to go home." The Private's hair was grey, and his eyes had black circles under them; but it was the wrinkles on his hands, forehead and around the corners of his eyes that clearly evinced he was speaking from personal familiarity with the near-dissolution of the Army in the days at the end of the Imperial Reich.

"This is mutinous talk!" the Stabsfeldwebel snarled.

"No, it's not," the older soldier said with calm assurance. His rifle barked. As the Stabsfeldwebel sprawled backwards, arms flung wide and the back of his head blown to shreds, the older soldier worked the bolt and looked around at his fellows. "It's action. It's also time we all went home. Like those voices on the radio said we should."

Henrich shuddered, but he couldn't help wishing that this nightmare war might end that way. He preferred that to getting further and further away from Germany, and losing more and more of his fellows to the endless Russian hordes. Six out of ten men in his unit had already become casualties, before the spring campaign had started; half of those, during the disastrous winter of '41. Two more, for a total of eight out of ten, had been wounded or killed as they'd driven past the Dniepr, over the Don, to within sight of the Volga. All that Henrich had learned of Russia was that death lay within that land. Now, however, there just might be a way home to Germany. He picked up his rifle and pack, and pushed his way forwards.

"I'm with you," he said to the mutineer. "If we're going to get home, we'd better start walking back. After all," he added with a rueful smile, "it took us months to walk this far in, so I guess it'll take us months to walk out again."

26 September 1942, Mid-Atlantic, 600 fathoms, Exodus 8

"There it is. MAD⁷, sonar, and visual all confirm it, sir – we've got the Bell cable located." The operator of the 'Trixiell' RSV⁸ tapped a key, thereby echoing his display to Captain Williams' main monitor. "10 meters and holding, sir."

"Good work, Mannheim." Captain Williams turned to Commander Richardson. "I am turning RSV command over to you, Commander."

"Thank you, sir. This will not take long," Commander Richardson replied. He looked at the main monitor. "Please close to five meters."

PO Nigel 'Nickles' Mannheim nodded. Despite himself, he was favorably impressed with the 'Eyesie'. Not once had he either forgotten to be courteous or ignored the requirements of naval discipline. "Closing, aye, Commander." The viewscreen displayed the steady approach to the black line running along the ocean's floor, half-hidden in silt. It became a perceptible tube even as he stopped the RSV's approach. "Five meters."

⁷ MAD = Magnetic Anomaly Detection.

⁸ Remote Submersible Vehicle

“Good. If you can, without stirring up the silt, move the RSV westward along the cable.”

“Yessir.” PO Nigel split his screen into a forward/downward display, and urged the RSV into motion. He gradually fed more power into the rearward jets, until he said, “Sir, with respect, it’s beginning to disturb the silt behind the RSV now.”

“But not ahead or directly underneath?”

“No, sir.”

“Keep that speed then. We’re going to need to slow and not disturb the silt unintentionally in a bit.”

“Aye, aye.”

For five, seven, twelve minutes the RSV followed along the transatlantic telecommunications cable. As a larger block appeared in the view ahead, Commander Richardson immediately ordered “Reduce speed to minimal forward drift.”

“Reducing, aye, aye.” Fifty seconds later Mannheim reported, “Minimal forward speed, sir.” The block had resolved into a rectangular shape about twice the cubic displacement of the rest of the cable.

“That’s a repeater element, P.O., and it’s where the RSV’s package should be placed,” Richardson announced. “The closer the contact between our package and that element, the better. You’re the operator, so I leave it to your judgment how to prepare and place our package.” He paused for a half-second. “Even if you think it’s a waste of this sub’s time to be here, if we don’t get a good enough fix, the CNO will order this job repeated. Maybe by another sub.”

“Aye sir. Don’t want that!” P.O. Mannheim said with a flash of injured pride. Richardson looked sideways to Captain Williams, and nodded approval of the latter’s crews’ *esprit de corps*.

Captain Williams nodded back. He also was impressed with his “passenger’s” interpersonal capabilities. But then, the best intelligence and security officers were those who not only understood how people thought and felt, but were capable of encouraging active, even willing cooperation. *It makes sense – if the CNO wanted the San Diego out here, the Directorate would want their best people along*, Captain Williams thought.

Now the RSV was hovering directly over the junction element. “Captain, please limit screening and records access as per I.S./GUSN Directive 02-495-EX09-564549,” Commander Richardson said.

“Acknowledging; so limited.” Captain Williamson tapped the pre-set security code invocation on his arm console. While he and Commander Richardson, and P.O. Mannheim could still see the display, all repeaters and recorders were now sealed against access by those lacking the precise security authorization.

“When and as you are ready and able, execute delivery please, P.O. Mannheim,” Richardson said.

“Executing, aye, aye.” Mannheim was still impressed; even at this, the climax to this operation, the intel and zampolit officer was courteous.

There were no currents down here to complicate the RSV's motion, and the handling arms behaved without a flaw. Three minutes later, after having tested both physically and logically the join, P.O. Mannheim was backing the RSV away from the junction box. “Package attached and functioning, sir,” he reported.

“Thank you, Petty Officer Mannheim. Please take the RSV back to 20 meters first, and then you can give it the RTS⁹ signal.”

Twenty seconds later, Mannheim reported, “RTS issued, sirs.”

Commander Richardson turned to face Captain Williams. “I am returning command of the operation to you, Captain. I expect that a strong commendation will be entered into your respective records.” He nodded, smiled a quick flash, and then strode off.

“All right, Boats, take us up and re-establish our ‘tow’ as soon as the RSV is recovered.” Captain Williams cancelled that image feed.

“Aye, sir,” the Chief said. *It should be fun seeing the locals' reaction to us towing one of their prize U-boats into harbor, a 'prize ship', he thought. 'Course, this little 'jaunt' has just put as a bit behind schedule.*

Captain Williams called up the electronic trace, looked it over carefully and shook his head. *So now we can read the primitive transmissions between London and the US. So what? Everyone knows that all communications, even those on 'landlines' are subject to interception, that's why we're all equipped with the auto-encryption and anti-jamming shells.* Then he blinked as the nature of what he was seeing finally sank in. Clear text. *We've cracked their codes?* he thought, amazed. *Ohmigod. No wonder the CNO and the General were both so insistent that this mission take place!* Beneath and behind him, the intercept box continued its squealing to the listening GUS ears of all trans-Atlantic communications.

26 September 1942, U.K. Bomber Command HQ, High Wycombe, U.K., Exodus 8

“Gentlemen, in less than forty minutes, I'm going to be facing the Prime Minister. And he's going to ask me what's going on. Both in the Axis, and with our air offensive.” Air Marshal Harris looked around the table. “If you want to have any effect on what I'm going to tell him, this is your last chance.”

No one spoke for a long minute. Several of Bomber Command's Air Group commanders looked at their hands, the far wall, or just away from the rest. Two of the ‘boffins’, who had been completely unable to explain any of the past two day's results, coughed, almost in echo – and then glared at each other. Harris glared around the table, yet was unable to get anyone to meet his eye. Until Deputy C-in-C Bomber Command Robert Saundby, his senior staffer, straightened and spoke out.

“Air Marshal, every reconnaissance flight...no, every reconnaissance plane, has been able to complete its mission. Excepting those suffering equipment failures. None were lost

⁹ Return-to-Sub (or Return-To-Ship), as opposed to the GUSAF's ‘Return-To-Base’ or ‘Return-to-Craft’.

to, ah, hostile actions. So, we can tell you what we've seen, but we still are not sure how to interpret what we've found."

"What about our bombers?" Harris snapped.

Group Commander Bennett, AOC 8th Group (Pathfinder Force) whose eyes were rimmed with black and whose hands were shaking from a caffeine overload, broke the silence. "They're...effectively grounded, Air Marshal."

"What do you mean by that phrase?" Harris snapped.

Again, it was Saundby who spoke up. "No aircraft with any bombload has gotten into Germany, or over any target in France, since the...since 24 September, sir." He coughed. "We've had to call a halt to all efforts."

"Had to call a halt?" Harris looked at Bennett. "How many planes did you send out?"

"The total, in five separate efforts... one hundred three. Every operational plane I had."

"How many are still operational?"

Bennett's voice broke down to a harsh whisper. "None."

Harris shook his head. "What?"

Totally unable to speak, Bennett buried his face in his hands. Group Commander Basil Embry, AOC 2nd Group, hardly recognizable since his usual debonair appearance and cheerful demeanor were completely absent, forced himself to reply. "Our only operational bombers, are those we've not sent out since...in the last two nights. Sir."

"How many have we lost?" Harris asked, stunned.

"Inoperative...sixty-nine percent. Two and a half percent were lost during forming-up. Nearly two-thirds of those, were lost on the second and third evenings," Embry replied. "Pilot error, mostly – the boys were scared. I can't blame them," he added.

"What happened to the other sixty-seven percent?" Harris asked hoarsely.

"There, we're luckier than Bennett, sir," Embry replied. "Most of my command's flights are Lancasters. When they lost their first engine, nearly half turned back. Only about a quarter the first night, but three-quarters, last night." He coughed, then continued on, his voice shaking. "Plus, since we're following behind the Pathfinder Forces, when they reported going down, a lot more of my boys turned back after the first engine was lost. When they lost their second engine, only some ten percent carried on. Those were all the first night, only." Embry looked over at Bennett. "The twin-engine flights just had that much less of a chance to learn, sir. And the Pathfinders...they knew the rest of us were counting on them continuing on. They made up nearly ninety percent of our full casualties."

Harris blinked. "What do you mean, 'full casualties'?" he demanded.

Embry shook his head. "The planes that didn't turn back. None of their crews made it back. If we're really fortunate, some of them survived their...aircraft's destruction." The hollowness of his voice made it clear that this last thought was a wish known to be unreasonable. "I gather things are so...disrupted...in Occupied France, that we've not had any reports from the Resistance. Maybe some of our boys hit the silk in time." He coughed and

looked down. "We're still logging them as MIA, officially. But we don't positively know of any survivors. Sir."

"Bloody hell you say!" Harris was dumbfounded. "How can this be? How are they even finding our planes?"

"Not by eating carrots, that's for sure," mumbled Bennett.

One of the boffins coughed. "We theorize that they've an airborne radar for their night operating fighters, Air Marshal."

"For all their fighters. Or whatever they've got. None of the daytime losses have reported even seeing their attackers." The other boffin shook his head. "And the damage is like nothing we've seen. Air Marshal, the only reason we've gotten any of our planes back, is because they want us to."

"What d'you mean by that?" Harris snapped.

"If they'd wanted to kill our people, they'd be hitting the pilots. Or the bombloads. Or cutting off their tail assemblies. Instead, they've just somehow cut off the propellers and the first few inches of the engine and engine housing. If their weapons can do that – and obviously, from outside our visual sighting range – then they could have just as easily cut through the wings, or the fuselage. Cut our planes into pieces." The boffin shook his silvery-grey mane of hair. "We lost more to our own in-air collisions than to direct damage."

Embry coughed. "That's why I've some hope the full casualties at least managed to get out of their planes and take to their parachutes, sir."

Bennett looked up. "We can't make repairs, either, Air Marshal."

"What?"

"Sir, the planes that turned back – every one of them, lost the same engine. Or engines, in the same pattern. In combat losses, damage is usually distributed. Makes the repair jobs, replacement efforts, easier to manage. But those that lost engines, most of them were able to make them back." Embry nodded in agreement, and Bennett continued speaking. "We lost another percent or so to bad luck, but of those, nearly half the crews still made it down alive. The only planes I have left are those I never sent up. Sir."

Embry pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his face, and looked up again.

Harris looked around the table, then his gaze came back to Saundby. "Are you telling me that in three days we've lost the air war?" he asked.

Saundby swallowed. Before he could speak, Bennett did. "Yes, sir. I cannot order another mission. Even if I could, or if you replaced me – assuming you could find anyone idiotic enough to take such an order – I don't think you could find a plane crew who would agree to fly it. The men know that any bombing attempt now will end with their aircraft rendered unflyable long before they could reach any Axis target. They're brave and willing boys, but they're not suicidal fools."

"Especially when the word is getting out that we don't have to bomb the Germans, sir," Saundby said.

Harris looked at Saundby. "What's that? I thought you said we didn't know how to interpret the photoreconnaissance results."

Saundby coughed. "Not entirely, no. But we know there doesn't seem to be a single operational Luftwaffe fighter or bomber. In any city with an airfield that we can reach, there are planes – or what we think are planes – and troops on the ground. Fighting Germans. In the major cities in Germany, Occupied France, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries, we've seen strange troops and very odd vehicles." He shook his head, apparently uncertain as to how to proceed. "Some of them look like tanks – but they're larger than any tanks either we or the Jerries have. And faster – we have reports of these 'tanks' moving across open terrain at what must be more than sixty miles per hour, and firing on the move. There are troop carriers of some sort – we have photographs of troops being ... ah ... 'landed' from them. They seem to be able to ... ah ... fly ... and one of them 'buzzed' one of our recon planes. The pilot was either wearing a very unusual mask, or ... he wasn't like any pilot you have ever seen, sir."

"I have seen a great many things. Did you bring any of these photographs with you?" Air Marshal Harris looked pointedly at Saundby's briefcase.

"Ah...we assumed that they were faked. They had to be a prank. The pilot didn't ... well he didn't look human."

Air Marshal Harris glared at his subordinates. *This is just a little bit too much. Next, they'll be telling me that gremlins really do exist,* the Air Marshal thought.

"We don't know what is going on, Air Marshal, but that doesn't mean we can't, that is, you can't tell the P.M. anything."

"Well, if I can't tell him what **is** going on, what do I tell him?" Harris demanded.

"That the Germans aren't in complete charge, anymore," Saundby said. "Whatever they are, those troops certainly aren't German."

"Are they Russian, then?" Harris snorted. "And don't you mean, 'whoever they are'?"

Saundby shook his head. "Air Marshal, I'm not sure you've understood me, sir. They don't look human. Not the troops on the ground, not the pilots in the air. Some of my people thought that some of the photos were ... ah ... hoaxed up. A stupid prank on some technician's part. But ... well ... we've gotten several runs with ... ah ... unusual photographs. But we haven't had enough time to really confirm our suspicions, and ... we didn't trust the prints enough just yet to let anyone else see them."

Air Marshal Harris looked at his 'boffins'. "Getting back to their planes – why can't we spot them? Why isn't our radar, or our radio intercepts, or even our ground spotters or sound spotters, telling us when they're up?"

One of the scientists looked at him. "We have no idea, Air Marshal. We get no returns on our radar beams. They may have made their planes of wood, or of some other material with a poor radar return. It works for the Mosquitos, after all. Certainly, what we've seen of the odd craft – their shapes are, well, they're odd. We think that they may be designed specifically to reflect what little radar bounces off them *away* from the source of the original radar beam."

The other nodded, interjecting, "While all our radio intercept operators say is there's maybe a touch more static. Maybe. There's not a single signal they can point to." He shook his head. "We don't even know if they're using radio, Air Marshal."

"And if they're not? What do you suggest that they're using instead? Signal flashers?"

"We don't know, but we can't 'hear' anything on any radio frequencies. Of course, they might simply have very good radio discipline, and they may suspect that we'd be listening."

Bennett shook his head. "We know that they **can** use radio. Each time they've struck, they've used radio to warn our boys to turn back first." He paused. "We can't afford to ignore any more of their warnings. And these invaders...they've spotted every single flight."

Embry spoke next. "As for why neither our ground nor sound spotters have been any help – Air Marshal, the photoreconnaissance pilots have been telling us stories about these, um, these, ah, futuristic fliers' performance. How they've climbed at three times our Mosquito's top speed, five times, and even 'much faster than that', until they've climbed high enough to disappear. They're clearly able to go at least ten thousand possibly twenty thousand feet above our highest-flying planes. That high up, the sound of their engines wouldn't make it to the ground. Even if it did, our sound spotters would likely get the distance and direction wrong. And the visual spotters simply wouldn't have a prayer of finding them."

Harris looked at his Air Group Commanders, his scientists, and his senior staffer. "Then I'm to tell the Prime Minister, that we have no hope of prosecuting the Battle for Germany in the air?"

"Yes, sir," Bennett said. "And you must add, that if these...Futurists...decide to move against us, we'd be criminally negligent not to immediately concede that Battle of Britain."

"We've no clear idea what their ground war capabilities are," Embry added. "The Jerries don't seem to be putting up much effective resistance – at least not in the cities we've sent recon planes over. They're fighting, but it's hardly their best units that these Invader troops are facing."

"Most of the German army is in Russia, over five hundred miles away. And what's not there is mostly in North Africa," Bennett said.

Harris looked at them all, and then stood up. "All right. I know what I'm going to say to the PM. As of this moment, I am confirming a unilateral 'stand-down' of all armed missions into Axis-controlled...or previously-Axis-controlled, territory. But I want our photoreconnaissance flights doubled. No. More than that. I want twice as many locations, and twice the frequency of operations, within a week. We've got to find out what these...whatever they are, are doing. That's all; dismissed." As the rest present stood up, Harris motioned for his senior staffer to stay where he was. The two men waited until the room had emptied, and then Harris motioned for the other to sit, seating himself again.

"Robert," he said, and his staffer acknowledged the informality as a signal that the Air Marshal was looking for input on his next directions. "I'm sending you to the Eighth Air Force. General Eaker has to be in the same spot we're in. I didn't see any B-17's heading

out today.” The weather was sunny, clear, and the winds low; it was perfect bombing weather from a meteorological viewpoint. “Tell him my decision. Add to it, that I advise him to do the same, if he hasn’t already.”

Harris looked at his aide. “We’re going to have to hope Winnie can pull a political solution out of this mess, because the RAF is out of this fight. If I can call such a one-sided situation that. ‘Debacle’ is a much more accurate description; my only consolation is that by stopping it now, before we suffer more losses – and by the fact that our personnel losses are no higher, that these strangers didn’t just shoot our planes down – we can minimize the political cost to our service. But the RAF is going to look pretty miserable.”

“Yes, sir.”

Harris then smiled thinly. “The only consolation I can give you, Saundby, or to the Eighth, Commanding, is that the Germans are in even worse shape. I’m going to get some pretty sharp words from the P.M. – but nobody, and I mean nobody, has heard a single peep out of any of the Nazis since Tuesday AM. That’s unbelievable. Not even Lord Haw-Haw. Nothing.” He shook his head. “There’s more, Briggs,” he said to his aide, “but I can’t tell you. I don’t think even the P.M. knows what’s going on. If he did, he wouldn’t be so antsy.” He looked over at Robert Saundby. “Well? Don’t wait around – get moving!”

0940 hours EDT, 26 September 1942, Washington, D.C. USA, Exodus 8

“All right, Bill, the full College of Cardinals is assembled.” The seven high-powered academics laughed as James Baxter¹⁰ sat down after closing the door; then, as one, they turned to face the tall, distinguished, man seated at the head of the table.

“I’m sure you know why you’re here,” William Donovan said. “I’m going to confirm it anyways: it’s about the new player who’s charged onto the gridiron, these Invaders.” He looked around as there were nods and grins. “I can’t call them ‘Americans’, because they definitely are not us. I don’t think, despite the reference to Welles, that we can call them Martians. It took only one time saying, ‘GUS-ians’,” (he made it rhyme with ‘Prussians’) to recognize how awkward that was. Not to mention the fact that they’re beating the stuffing out of the Germans.” He looked over at James Baxter. “I’ll finish this overview, then we can take up the taxonomic appellation.”

Donovan looked around his top analytic advisors. On his right was Edward Earle; to his right, William Langer; to his right, Edward Mason; then Baxter. On Donovan’s left was Donald McKay, Joseph R. Hayden, and Calvin B. Hoover¹¹. “I’ll be giving this same brief briefing to the Apostles,” he said, naming the ten men from private industry he’d picked for their expertise in various geographic, technical, and logistical specialties. “And to the formal staff,” he added, referring thereby to the officers and assistants who were the core of the growing Office of Strategic Services. “I’ll also be sure to pass on what comes in, as soon as we can. Yet I can promise this: it won’t be enough, either in amount or in time.

¹⁰ James Phinney Baxter III, President of Williams College

¹¹ Edward Mead Earle, Prof. of the School for Economics and Politics at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton; William L. Langer, Prof. History, Harvard; Edward S. Mason, Prof. Economics, Harvard; Joseph R. Hayden, Chairman of the Dept. of Political Science, Univ. of Michigan; Calvin B. Hoover, Prof. Economics, Duke University. [Source: Wild Bill Donovan, the Last Hero, Anthony Cave Brown, p. 4]

They're moving with incredible celerity. Already the Atlantic seems to have been scoured down to the seabed of every last U-boat."

That jolted the men at the conference table. "I'd heard a rumor there'd been sightings, and sinkings were way down – but you're saying it's more than that?" Calvin Hoover asked.

Donovan nodded. "Agents-in-place have counted over 20 U-boats which have been towed there already; and they say that the few Invader crewmen they talked to, told them that the rest of the Kriegsmarine's Unterseeboot force was on route." He looked at all of them. "That one fact, by itself, completely changes the tempo, let alone the nature, of this war. And of all of our productive, organizational, and operative efforts. Yet that's quite possibly the least of their efforts."

William Langer whistled a soft, low note of astonished agreement. Others nodded, or sat with the shock of that pronouncement written on their faces.

"I've also heard from Alan Dulles – the Invaders have overthrown the Swiss government, and seized or sequestered the Swiss banks which were most responsible for fencing for the Nazis," Donovan added. "He added that they had asked him to serve as a neutral observer to guarantee that their presence was for protective custody and recording purposes only. Oh, and that he had agreed to so serve. Then in the last sentence of his report, he tells me that among the Invaders he has seen walking, talking, reasoning wolves, bears, foxes, and tigers. Mostly bears, he says – with 'Swiss Protective Element Special Detail' shoulder patches."

"How much had Dulles had to drink?" Edward Mason asked.

"I think he was both stone cold sober, and accurate in his description," Donovan replied. "We're going to work really, really hard at accepting several impossible things before breakfast, gentlemen." Then Donovan blinked. "That reminds me – the Invaders include women in their military forces. At every level, and in both support and the front line. Eleanor Roosevelt, if nobody else, is going to be pleased."

There were a few vague grins, but little more; the shock was still too potent.

"Finally, the bombing offensive is over. Stopped cold, by these same Invaders. Arnold and Eaker are going to be disappointed; it looks as if they'll never get a chance to prove by their own acts that air supremacy is enough to win a war."

"Despite the fact that these Invaders might have just done that?" Hayden asked.

Donovan made a 'come-on' gesture with his left hand, and the political scientist expounded further.

"For them to have neutralized the subs, stopped the bombers, and simultaneously stymied the Germans and the Japanese, over three continents, two oceans, and several seas, they must either move at faster-than-sound speeds or have come through in overwhelming numbers."

"Or both," Mason pointed out.

"The gloomy profession's advocate is correct – or both," Hayden agreed. "The scant evidence still points to some form of air power."

Donovan frowned, then shook his head. "Not entirely. The same agents in Lisbon reported seeing multiple naval vessels. Leaving aside the question of accuracy of their descriptions, they were describing seagoing craft, not airplanes." He shook his head and then looked around the room. "We know two other things for certain, gentlemen. First, these invaders are considerably more advanced, technically, than we are. How much so, in what ways, and how we might try to match them, is completely up in the air. The second thing is far more frightening and worrisome, however." He looked around the room. "They claim to have come from a future we have been progressing towards. By their own admission, we are not their past – but they have to have a great deal of knowledge about their own past which at the least parallels our own."

"Why is that such a worry?" Calvin Hoover asked.

William Langer looked at him. "Because they know who did what – and even more, why. Because they know whom to be concerned about." He looked at William Donovan. "Which means they must know about you. If they come from far enough ahead, that is."

"Why d'you say that?" Edward Earle objected. "We have security – enough to be a real pain in the...rump." He shook his head. "Enough to keep secrets away from the Bureau and that egomaniac Hoover."

"It all depends on how far in the future they're from, I'd say," William Langer continued speaking to Donovan. "It has to be many generations, maybe even centuries, in the future. If these reports of walking, speaking animals are true. I can't believe that the surgical approach fictionalized by Herbert Wells could produce such beings. Even given the much shorter generations, breeding would have to take centuries, I'd guess – under Darwin, evolution is measured in near-geologic time." He shook his head. "Given that length of time, it'd be as if we were trying to intervene in the Crusades. We'd know the main players, the heroes and villains; we'd know the general pattern of events – but the details would be lost to us."

"On the other hand, they described the gap as being nothing near that. Just a hundred and sixty years. They claim to be from 2102," Edward Mason said. "That would put us..."

"At the tail-end of the American Revolution," Donovan said. "We know a lot, and could know quite a bit more, about that time period. If we had enough historians." He nodded at William Langer. "Enough to know their rough capabilities, too. While we know nothing, absolutely nothing, about them. Even less than we knew about the Japanese."

"What are you suggesting, Bill?" Earle asked.

Donovan looked around the table. "I want each of you, independently, to come up with three lists. On the first, put five to ten names of individuals you would suggest to replace yourself. Preferably in order, from first to last choice. That's be worth having anyways, given the actuarial chances we all face." There were some nervous laughs at that comment.

"On the second list, leaving everybody whom you know is working for the OSS out of the pool of choices, I'd like you to list two or three alternative groups for both this cabinet, and my Apostles. Include on that, separately indicated, the man who would replace me." Donovan looked them very keenly, one by one. "Leave any political consideration as to acceptability to either the President or the Senate out of that selection." Heads nodded in acknowledgment.

“The third list, will be the hardest. I want you to pick a baker’s dozen of individuals who meet two criteria simultaneously. The first, is that that group could replace the O.S.S.. Again, leave out political considerations. Also, you can balance one person’s strength against a second person’s weakness, if in your consideration, that group can function well enough. The second consideration, is that that group be as unlikely and unexpected a choice as you can imagine either I, President Roosevelt, or the Joint Chiefs making. I want a surprise option. Seal that list in a separate envelope. I don’t know who’s going to be opening it; but it may well not be me or FDR. Perhaps I should give that job to Mrs. Roosevelt.”

“That would be unexpected, all right,” Edward Mason said. There was a burst of tension-relieving laughter; the encounters between Eleanor and Donovan having been as few and limited as either of the principals, plus the President and their respective staffs, could manage.

“You really think these Invaders might now about us despite our security?” William Langer asked.

“I’d better at least consider both the possibility, and means of circumventing it,” Donovan replied. “We’re already certain that we’re completely outclassed in the technical field. I’d hate to let any other complacency ruin our already enfeebled chances at looking after our own interests.”

“They might be friendly,” James Baxter pointed out. “The Soviets were, despite what many people thought.”

“The Soviets had been invaded by Hitler, first. Before that, Hoover’s view on the problems caused by Reds and Red sympathizers made sense. On the docks, at least,” Donovan replied. “I certainly hope that they’re friendly, and will pray for that, too. But that is work for the real Cardinals. We have our own tasks and crosses to bear.”

27 September 1942

Organized resistance ceases in Germany proper. This is not to say that resistance ceases, merely that it is disorganized and totally under local control. The problem with decapitation attacks is that, if successful, there is no longer anyone who is still in command of the enemy forces. And there is no longer anyone, as a result, who can surrender the entirety of the enemy forces.

The anti-tank/armor killing rounds being used by GUSAAF forces are either depleted uranium or osmium shells, chosen for their density and thermal properties, without consideration of later environmental problems that might arise from the use of highly toxic materials.

In response to attacks by Vichy French forces against the advancing GUS forces in German Occupied France, GUS armed forces begin offensive operations against Vichy French forces. At the same time, Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, and Himmler are paraded in front of the cameras in prison dress. Ribbentrop is noticeable by his absence. It is reported that Rommel is leading forces in North Africa and is continuing to resist, as best he can. Only minimal GUS forces were devoted to operations in North Africa.

28 September 1942, Volga Steppes, South-Central Russia, Exodus 8

“Karl, I don’t like this. I don’t like this one bit.”

“Herr Henrich, I think that I agree, but do you see any alternative?” the older soldier said, as they looked at the burnt earth in front of them. He reached down and patted the ground. It ... crackled. A thin sheet of glass covered the ground. Green glass. The trees were all down, felled by something. And they were burned. “It looks too big to go around.”

“But I don't like it.”

“Neither do I. But I don't like a lot of things. Do you see an officer around to tell us what we're *supposed* to do, now?” Grenadier¹² Karl Mueller said.

“No, Karl, I don't. We go home, like we ... decided ... to. I ... this just makes my skin itch.” Henrich looked around at the felled trees. “It's as if some giant just reached down and made a huge firepit. And after he set fire to everything, he just stomped everything flat putting out the fire when he was done.”

“It's a long walk home, Herr Henrich. And if we want to finish it, we have to get going again.”

Henrich sighed. “You're right, again. Do you still have some of that cheese that you found the day before yesterday?”

Mueller chuckled. “If you still have a full canteen and those cigarettes you found...”

Henrich shook his head. “You drive a hard bargain,” he said, taking out the cigarette pack and counting out half of the remaining smokes. “How much?”

Mueller looked at the younger soldier. “You could have given me just three for half – but if you're going to be generous...” he said, as he pulled out the cheese, and cut the round into thirds. “I'll give you two for that many, and for a bit of your water.”

Henrich handed over the cigarettes and took one of the chunks and slipped it into a pocket, then broke the other in half and handed half back to Mueller. “It's a long way back home.”

“I thank you, Herr Henrich,” Mueller said, grinning. “Speaking of which, where is home for you? I've got to get to Berlin.”

“Heidelberg,” Henrich said, handing the other soldier his canteen.

“Well, we've both got a long walk still,” Mueller said, taking a long drink of the canteen before handing it back to the younger soldier. He took a deep breath and began walking West again.

“At thirty kilometers a day, it will take us...” Henrich began, as he caught up to the older soldier.

“Don't think, just walk.”

“Too long. You're right...”

The two soldiers walked on, in silence.

Signals Intelligence Intercepts received “Looking Glass”, in orbit around Exodus 8

SEP 26 23:44 GMT LONDON U.K.

¹² ‘Grenadier’ in the Wehrmacht is the equivalent of a Private (the lowest enlisted rank in the Army).

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS
LISBON EMBASSY CONFIRMS PERSONAL COUNT TWENTY, REPEAT TWO ZERO, U-BOATS DELIVERED QUAYSIDE. ALSO CONFIRMS REPORT LARGER SHIP THAN ANY BUILT BY ANY KNOWN NAVY IN ONSHORE PATROL. PHOTOS COMING BY COURIER EXPRESS. WHAT NEWS OF PACIFIC?

SEP 27 1942 07:45 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

ALL JAPNAV UNITS RECALLED TO BASES 0230 DCTIME. CHUNGKING REPORTS MAJOR INLAND DISTURBANCES UNFAVORABLE JAPCOMMAND. SENDING SUBS TO CONFIRM RUMORED DESTRUCTION OF FACILITIES SUMATRA, BORNEO. FORWARDING LONG-RANGE BOMBER TO CANAL FOR RA-BAUL MISSION, BUT TWO-DAY DELAY ESPIRITO SANTO TO REMOVE WEAPONS, FAIR OVER TURRET OPENINGS FOR RANGE AND COMPLIANCE AS PER EIGHTH URGENT REPORT. WHAT NEWS FROM FATHER S, SE ASIA, NA?

SEP 27 1942 23:27 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

SALAZAR RECEIVED ENVOY SO-CALLED GUSA SEEKING EMBASSY OR CONSULATE. ALL NA CONVOYS REPORT NO, REPEAT NO, HOSTILITIES SINCE 9/23 NOON. BURMA, NORTHAF HQS REPORT ALL CONTACT WITH ENEMY FORCES VANISHED. NO, REPEAT NO, AIR COMBAT EFFORT OUR PART. PHOTOFLIGHTS SUGGEST GERMAN GROUND FORCES INCAPABLE OF HOSTILE ACTION AGAINST ALLIES. NO WORD FROM BEAR. ADDITIONAL 13 U-BOATS DELIVERED LISBON. CREWS REMOVING TO CONVENT INLAND.

SEP 27 1942 20:06 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.:

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

WHAT LOVELY STORY OUT OF LISBON BUT IS IT REAL? ANY NEWS FROM AXIS, VICHY?

SEP 28 1942 05:33 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

SENDING PHOTORECON TO CONFIRM RESISTANCE REPORTS CONFLICT GUSA / VICHY FORCES YESTERDAY P.M. LOCAL ENVOYS REPORT NO CONTACT HOME FOR SWISS, VATICAN. YOURS?

SEP 28 1942 18:20 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

COURIER JUST ARRIVED FROM LISBON WITH PHOTOS BACKING YESTERDAY'S LOVELY STORY. BUT ARE THEY REAL?

SEP 28 1942 13:48 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

NEITHER SWISS NOR VATICAN CONTACTS CAPABLE CONTACT WITH HOME, AXIS OR ITALIAN GOVT. WHAT SAYS SALAZAR ABOUT DUCE? RE PHOTOS: OUR ENVOY PORTUGAL CONFIRMS SEEING SAME PHOTOS YOU MUST BE REFERENCING, ALSO SAYS SET COMING HERE BY NEXT FLIGHT. AM TEMPTED TO MAKE VISIT TO FIELD.

SEP 28 1942 23:31 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

SALAZAR SAYS DUCE WANTS TO KISS AND MAKE UP. DIFFICULTY IN FINDING CHANNEL TO SEND MESSAGE. WHERE IS SWISS GOV'T?

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland

TO: CNO, Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered

DATE: 29 September 1942, 0915 Hours Zulu

AT 0545 HOURS ZULU THIS DATE, AN AIRCRAFT OF UNFAMILIAR DESIGN APPROACHED FLEET AIR BASE REYKJAVIK. WHEN FIRST OBSERVED ON THE HORIZON, THIS AIRCRAFT WAS MISTAKEN FOR A METEOR, BASED ON THE ESTIMATED SPEED AND APPARENT ALTITUDE (IN EXCESS OF 2000 KNOTS, ABOVE 100,000 FEET). AS IT APPROACHED, THE AIRCRAFT BROKE UP INTO AT LEAST FOUR DISTINCT PIECES. ONE OF THESE PIECES IMPACTED 5 MILES NORTH OF FLEET AIR BASE REYKJAVIK, AND HAS BEEN RECOVERED. THIS PIECE IS BEING HELD AT FAB PENDING TRANSFER TO TECHNICAL AIR SERVICES FOR EXAMINATION AND ANALYSIS.

TWO INDIVIDUALS BELIEVED TO BE CREW OF AIRCRAFT ALSO RECOVERED.

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: CNO, Washington, D.C.

TO: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland

SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered

DATE: 29 September 1942, 1125 Hours Zulu

URGENT REPORT NATION OF ORIGIN OF AIRCRAFT AND CREW SOONEST.

SEP 29 1942 08:33 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

DULLES SAYS SWISS GOV'T IN POKEY BUT GUISAN TO BE NAMED INTERIM SUCCESSOR BY GUSA. WHERE IS POPE?

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland

TO: CNO, Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew information.

DATE: 29 September 1942, 1430 Hours Zulu

PILOT IDENTIFIED SELF AS REYNARD, JANET RACHEL, CAPTAIN, GUS AEROSPACE FORCE, SERIAL NUMBER V561388F109, DOB MARCH 30TH, 2071. WEAPON SYSTEM OFFICER IDENTIFIED SELF AS REYNARD, MICHAEL JOSEPH, LIEUTENANT, GUS AEROSPACE FORCE, SERIAL NUMBER V585229F115, DOB DECEMBER 15TH, 2074.

PILOT SUFFERED BROKEN ARM AND BACK INJURIES DURING 'EJECTION', WEAPON SYSTEM OFFICER SUFFERED SEVERE LEG MUSCLE SPRAINS. BOTH CONFINED TO SICK BAY UNDER GUARD. BASE MEDICAL PERSONNEL REPORT LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF BOTH PILOT AND WEAPON SYSTEM OFFICER. NEITHER PILOT NOR WEAPONS OFFICER HUMAN. REPEAT – NEITHER CREW RECOVERED HUMAN. BOTH ARE INTELLIGENT AND COMMUNICATIVE. UNIFORMS REMOVED TO TREAT INJURIES. MARKINGS INDICATED SERVICE IN GREATER UNITED STATES AEROSPACE FORCE 332ND TACTICAL FIGHTER WING.

BOTH CREW CARRIED WEAPONS AND DEVICES OF UNFAMILIAR DESIGN. AMMUNITION IN HANDGUNS ABLE TO PENETRATE ½" ARMOR PLATE. DEVICES OF UNFAMILIAR DESIGN POSSIBLE COMMUNICATIONS DEVICES.

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: CNO, Washington, D.C.
TO: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew information
DATE: 29 September 1942, 1840 Hours Zulu

PLEASE CONFIRM DOB PILOT AND WEAPONS OFFICER OF UNKNOWN AIRCRAFT AS 2071 AND 2074 AD. EQUIPMENT RECOVERED FROM CREW OF AIRCRAFT TO BE SHIPPED BY FIRST AVAILABLE SECURE PACKAGE TO WASHINGTON.

SEP 29 1942 15:11 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

POPE ALSO IN POKEY, ACCORDING SALAZAR, CIANO. HAVING TROUBLE SENIOR C. OF E. MEMBERS, UNPOLITIC REJOICING REPRESSING; DO NOT WANT TO COMMIT CARDINAL ERROR.

SEP 29 1942 11:58 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

SENIORMOST KITCHEN STAFF EN ROUTE FOR CONSULTATION WITH CHEFS REGARDING EUROPEAN DISHES. CURRENT ASSESSMENT: SCRAMBLED. ANY NEWS YET BEAR?

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
TO: CNO, Washington, D.C.
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew information
DATE: 29 September 1942, 2030 Hours Zulu

PILOT AND WEAPONS OFFICER OF UNKNOWN CRAFT STICKING TO THEIR STORIES. THEY GAVE DOBS IN 2071 AND 2074 AD RESPECTIVELY.

RECOVERED FRAGMENT OF UNKNOWN AIRCRAFT, TOGETHER WITH HANDGUNS, UNIFORMS AND DEVICES OF UNKNOWN FUNCTION SECURED AND ON AIRCRAFT BOUND FOR WASHINGTON DC DEPARTED FAB 2015 HOURS ZULU.

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: CNO, Washington, D.C.
TO: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew status
DATE: 29 September 1942, 2330 Hours Zulu

URGENT CREW OF UNKNOWN AIRCRAFT BE FLOWN TO WASHINGTON, D.C. EARLIEST POSSIBLE DATE, PREFERABLY YESTERDAY.

URGENT

FROM: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
TO: CNO, Washington, D.C.
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew status

DATE: 30 September 1942, 0115 Hours Zulu

CREW OF UNKNOWN AIRCRAFT NOT FIT FOR TRAVEL IN OPINION OF MEDICAL PERSONNEL FAB. WILL FORWARD CREW ASAP. QUERY THEIR STATUS. ARE THEY NEUTRALS, ENEMY COMBATANTS, ALLIES, CO-BELLIGERENTS OR WHAT.

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT

FROM: CNO, Washington, D.C.
TO: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew status
DATE: 30 September 1942, 0240 Hours Zulu

CLARIFICATION OF STATUS OF CREW OF UNKNOWN CRAFT – THEY ARE TO BE TREATED WITH ALL RESPECT DUE TO OFFICERS OF THEIR RANK. THEY ARE NOT TO BE PERMITTED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN FAB REYKJAVIK. THEY ARE TO BE TREATED AS REPRESENTATIVES OF A POSSIBLE HOSTILE FOREIGN POWER WITH WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS NOT CURRENTLY AT WAR, AND WHICH THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT DESIRE TO FIGHT.

REASON TO BE GIVEN TO CREW FOR TRANSFER TO WASHINGTON IS BETTER MEDICAL FACILITIES AT BETHESDA NAVAL MEDICAL HOSPITAL THAN AT FORWARD AIRBASE.

SEP 30 1942 02:44 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

AGREE WITH ASSESSMENT BUT HOPE NEXT SHORT ORDER MIGHT BE SUNNYSIDE UP. WORRY IS NEW DISHES BEING TOASTED, TOO. BEAR STILL SILENT.

SEP 30 1942 17:23 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.:

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

CNO REPORTS DIRECT VISUAL CONFIRMATION ADDITIONAL 15 U-BOATS HEADED SURFACE LISBON UNDER ESCORT. MORE HUNS FOR THE NUNS.

SEP 30 1942 18:30 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.:

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

CNO REPORTS ADVANCED AIRCRAFT CRASHED ICELAND 29 SEPTEMBER. CREW RECOVERED ALIVE, BUT INJURED. UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT EN ROUTE TO US. FRAGMENTS OF AIRCRAFT EN ROUTE AS WELL. AM TEMPTED TO VISIT. ANSWERS MAY FOLLOW.

30 September 1942/30 October 2102

Emperor Hirohito joins the Nazi leaders in prison dress, and his capture and person is displayed interminably on the ComNet. Training for the officers at the OTS continues, although it is now on a seven-day schedule, with four hours set aside for “religious services” on Sundays.

Tojo, unfortunately, is killed during the capture attempt, and his head is displayed on the ComNet, encased in a Lucite block.

Speaking in front of a backdrop of caged Nazi leaders, the Attorney General of the GUS announces, “the following criminals have been apprehended, and will be tried in a civilian court.”

Further Signals Intelligence Intercepts received "Looking Glass"

OCT 1 1942 00:30 GMT LONDON U.K.
FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS
HOSPITALITY AND GOOD MANNERS ALWAYS REWARDED.

OCT. 1 1942 06:45 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.
POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON
EDWARD HOTCHKISS EN ROUTE ICELAND TO CONFIRM DETAILS OF CRASH
AND CREW. TALLY HO!

FLASH TRAFFIC – URGENT
FROM: CNO, Washington, D.C.
TO: Commander, Fleet Air Base, Reykjavik, Iceland
SUBJECT: Unknown type aircraft recovered, Crew status
DATE: 1 October 1942, 1145 Hours Zulu

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL EN ROUTE TO EXAMINE SITUATION AND REPORT CINC.
YOU HAVE COME TO THE ATTENTION OF HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. GOOD LUCK, AND
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN.

OCT. 1 1942 13:30 GMT LONDON U.K.
FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS
DISCRETION THE BETTER PART OF VALOR.

OCT. 1 1942 09:18 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.
POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:
ENVOY LISBON REPORTS PHOTASET STARRING HIROHITO CIRCULATING
COURTESY GUSA THERE. AM SENDING TWIN D'S TO LISBON FOR CONSUL-
TATION WITH LOCALS.

OCT. 1 1942 18:55 GMT LONDON U.K.
FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:
SUGGEST TEMPORARY SUSPENSION OPTORCH EMBARKATION. UNCLEAR
SITUATION VIS-À-VIS VICHY, GUSA. DO NOT WISH TO REPEAT BOMBER
COMMAND LOSSES WITH SHIPPING. BEAR GRUMBLING BUT STATIC WITH-
OUT EXPLANATION. EDEN ARRIVED PORTUGAL THIS AFTERNOON BUT OUR
FEAR OF SNAKES NOT ASSUAGED YET.

OCT. 1 1942 15:30 EDT WASHINGTON D.C.
POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:
AGREE FIVE-DAY HOLD ON OPTORCH EMBARKATION. HOPE US WILL BE
HULL-UP IN LISBON AFTER TOMORROW WHEN HE ARRIVES FOR CONSUL-
TATIONS.

OCT 2 1942 04:13 GMT LONDON U.K.
FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:
SALAZAR GRANTED RECOGNITION GUSA; EMBASSY LISBON. STAFF THERE
MOST POLITE AND STRANGE. WONDERFUL PICTURES RELEASED; ALSO,
NEW DISPLAY DEVICE GIVEN OUT. BEAR GROWLING BUT STAYING STILL.
MOLOTOV FLYING TO LISBON.

1403 hours GMT 2 October 1942, Chartwell, England, Exodus 8

"Gentlemen. Welcome to my home." Winston Churchill looked around the other five men seated around the table in his study. "We are all here who are summoned and coming, so with your permission, I will propose a first toast, and then we may set to our task." He picked up the glass in front of him. "Gentlemen – King and Empire!"

"Hear, hear." "King and Empire." "Forever." The four who were members of the War Cabinet, and the Attorney General, Sir Donald Somervell, all lifted their glasses and drank. They then looked to the Prime Minister; to see he was looking out through the white-framed windows to the view down the lawn, past the walls he had built during his 'bleak exile' of the 1930's to the duckpond. The grass was green and the leaves were still on the trees; it was a sunny afternoon, though between the occasional wind flurries and cooler temperature, it was clearly fall in England. He turned his attention back inside and put his glass down.

"Stephenson¹³ tells me that quite a number of these Futurists have notable English accents. As well as American and Russian ones." The P.M.'s sharp glance shot around the table. "'Pears their nation is a super-agglomeration of the American, Imperial, and Russian forces. Though he added they did not come together out of this War, but a much harder time nearly a century later.'" The P.M. shook his head. "Intelligence is working on getting us more, but we're still very much in the dark about their intentions."

"I should have thought those were very clear by now," Herbert Morrison, Home and Home Security Secretary, said. "Bash the Axis and stop the War."

"Their full intentions," Churchill said. "You're quite right, Morrison. That's what they're doing now. This week. But what will they do next?" He looked around the table in the sudden silence. "The Service Chiefs tell me we've got nothing, literally nothing, that could stop them any more than the Jerries and Nips had. Less, really."

"Have they said anything about what they plan to do?" Sir Donald Somervell, the Attorney General.

Everybody around the table looked at the P.M., who shook his head. "Not a word," he growled; then started to light a cigar.

"Bit of a concern, that." Ernest Bevin, the Secretary of Labor scratched at his chin. "We damn well know they can talk to *us* any time they please. Wasn't that part of the reason for that all-channels blast they started their action with a week ago?"

"Have there been no official communications?" Somervell pressed.

Churchill shook his head.

Sir Stafford Cripps, Lord Privy Seal and the Leader of the House of Commons, cleared his throat. Everybody there present knew that he had, three days before the Alien Invasion, had a falling out with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet over the conduct of the war. A falling out so severe that Cripps would have retired, but for the seriousness of the English position at El Alamein. "I believe you might classify the warning messages they issued to our bombers, warning them to turn back or be shot down, as 'official communications', Sir

¹³ Head of Special Operations Executive, the 'field force' of British Intelligence.

Somervell. "There have not, however, been any direct communications with His Majesty's Government. These 'Futurists'," clearly, he did not like the word, but had no alternative to offer, "have not had any official communication with any government beyond their first global announcement."

"That's not quite true," Churchill said, putting his right hand with the cigar in it down on the table. "Don't mean to make you look behind the times, Cripps. In fact, this meeting," he waved his cigar at the men gathered around the table, "is to bring the War Cabinet up to speed on the most recent development. Got the cables from POTUS, Eden, and our Ambassador in Lisbon just this morning." Everybody knew that that meant sometime between 2 and 6 a.m., Winston's prime working hours. He took a puff on his cigar, then blew the smoke over everybody's heads. "The Futurists have just gotten themselves an Embassy in Lisbon." He smiled with his mouth, though his eyes were not involved. "Bit of good news that, for us."

"Is that why you sent Eden there?" Morrison asked.

Churchill shook his head. "No idea this was coming. I sent Anthony to Lisbon because that was the one place we knew these Futurists were."

"Outside of Germany, Russia, and the Pacific," Ernest Bevin said tonelessly. The rest of the ministers looked at him in shock. Then Churchill laughed, and the others joined in. As did Ernest Bevin, relieved that his humor had found fertile ground.

"Good point, Ernest, well done. I should have said, the only neutral place we knew we could contact these Futurists peaceably."

"What about – never mind, sorry." Morrison shook his head. "Do we have, as yet, any idea why these Futurists arrested the Swiss Government? Or, and I say this with all earnestness, God help us, the Pope?"

"The Archbishop of Canterbury might emphasize those words differently, Herbert," Somervell said.

"Or the Law Lords," said Cripps. He'd clashed with a few of them a time or two in the past months, ever since he'd been named the Leader of the House of Commons.

"Point of fact is, no, we do not know why those two neutral governments were treated like the Nazis and Japs," Churchill said. He tapped the butt-end of his cigar against the tabletop. "Not for certain. I suspect Viscount Volmer¹⁴, if he were here, would be able to argue very persuasively why arresting the Swiss Government was proper."

"For fencing stolen loot? Illegally taxing their own citizenry who also happen to be Jewish? Turning over, against Swiss law, Jewish refugees on Swiss soil to the Germans?" Somervell shook his head. "I don't care how good they've been as the 'Protecting Power' for our boys in the Stalaglufts¹⁵ and other prison camps; the Swiss have been accessories after the fact for the Nazis."

"Think you've put your finger on the key point, Somervell," Churchill said. "Our men in Zurich and Geneva say that these Futurists' presence is exceedingly limited. Essentially,

¹⁴ Minister of Economic Warfare

¹⁵ Prisoner-of-War camps for Allied Air Forces personnel, run by the Luftwaffe.

they've captured the top dozen men of the government and the leading banks, including especially the Swiss National Bank, and then sequestered the top dozen Swiss banks." He stuck the end of his cigar into the right side of his mouth, and continued talking while he held it there. "Heard that our lead MI-5 man and Dulles have been serving on alternate days on an observation team as witnesses as to how these Futurists are accessing and duplicating the Swiss National Bank's archives." He pulled his cigar out and gestured at Somervell with it.

"The Vatican, now...." Churchill shook his head. "I may be too contaminated by the C. of E. to objectively consider why this was done. It seems odd, but Pope Pius certainly has stayed very quiet about both the Duce and Hitler."

"He'd stayed even more quiet about the concentration camps and the Jews. Other than ordering the French Catholic hierarchy to support the German efforts," Morrison pointed out. Several of the men around the table shook their heads, remembering how shocked they had been when they'd first learned of that.

"My thought, when I sent Eden to Lisbon, was that if His Majesty's Government suddenly had an urgent need to contact these Futurists, it might be best if we had our Foreign Affairs Secretary right at hand where he could find them to talk with them." The others nodded; that had been the reasoning, and they still believed it had been sound and was sound. "Even though we all know Lisbon is just one big heap of spies."

"So, Salazar has both recognized these Futurists, and found them an Embassy. Interesting," Cripps said. "That man is a real survivor – he looks ahead and thinks."

"That he does. 'spect Franco'll be granting them recognition too by the end of today," Churchill said. "Unlike the Swiss, Salazar's honest and unbuyable." He put his cigar back to his mouth and pulled out another match, as it had gone out. "Thing is, I also expect Salazar will be a tad less friendly towards us, Portugal's 'traditional friends', if there's the least hint that that's not a good thing from these Futurists. That Doctor's a genius at recognizing who's got the bigger club – which they most definitely do." He scratched the match alight and touched it to the end of his cigar.

"The fact that the German U-Boat fleet is tied up at the Lisbon quays will make that abundantly clear for Salazar," Cripps said. He looked at the PM. "If you want me to resign now, or at any time at your convenience, Winston, you need but ask." His voice was steady as he spoke. "I had no more idea than you that this Invasion would occur when I said on the 23rd last that I could not continue supporting this Government's prosecution of the war. But I'll also admit that my preferred, separate Planning Board would have been just as badly caught out and useless." He did not look away. "You asked me to hold off resigning and stay on while the crisis in Alamein lasted." He took a deep breath and went on, standing up as he did. "It seems to me that this might be one of the best times for me to leave. Who will notice it, while these 'Futurists' have all the headlines and the miracle victory celebrations are gathering steam?"

Churchill looked at Sir Stafford Cripps. He took a deep pull on his cigar; held his breath, and then, after turning his head and blowing it towards the inner wall of his study, turned back to look at his colleague. "Cripps, I've never known a better, braver man. For some reason," again his mouth flashed a smile, one which for a fraction of the expression was

matched by the crinkle of his eyes, "I'm said to be hard to work with. Or for." He tapped off the ash his pull on the cigar had generated, and continued speaking.

"It takes a great man to admit that he was wrong. And it takes a greater one, to agree that, wrong or right, there has been a mutual loss of confidence which requires change – but even then, plugs ahead as if no change is needed while the problem which created that loss of confidence rages unabated, because to do otherwise is to let his erstwhile and current team down." Churchill nodded at Cripps. "So, I'll now say this: your idea is not necessarily bad. Thing is," he added, putting his cigar down and reaching for his glass, "I'm thinking we're desperately going to need a Planning Board to deal with the problems these Futurists are bringing." He looked around the table. "That's what I called this meeting to discuss, actually."

Sir Stafford Cripps eased back in his chair. "A Planning Board?" he asked.

Churchill nodded.

"For the prosecution of the war?"

Churchill shook his head. "God willing, no. The prosecution of the peace, more likely," he said.

Cripps blinked. "I'm...not sure I understand."

Churchill took a sip. "Thing is: we know these Futurists are here. They probably aren't going to go away, either. But *we* don't know what *they* want. Maybe *they* don't even know what they want." He saw some doubt and nodded acknowledgement of it even as he bulled onwards. "Most likely what they want, will change, as they find out more about what we've got, can do, and even more to the point, can't do." He put down his glass and tapped the table with a thick fingertip.

"Airmen say they can't fly except where and how these Futurists allow. To the point where we can put the exact same plane on the exact same route. The first time without bombs but equipped for photoreconnaissance, it gets its snaps and comes home. The second time, carrying but one 500-lb bomb and a sprinkling of incendiaries, it gets crippled." Churchill tapped the tabletop again. "Always crippled. On the first shot. Never missed, yet never destroyed. They're so bloody accurate, they knock the left engine off. Every time. Every flight. Every plane in every flight." He shook his head. "Channel's full of left engines, now." He leaned forward.

"Alexander¹⁶ tells me that the merchanters and escorts, both, on Convoy HX-153, Newfoundland–Bristol, saw one of these Futurist naval warships. He said it had to be a submarine, because it rose out of the water onto the surface. Only it was estimated to be somewhere between three and five times the size of the Queen Elizabeth or the Renown¹⁷. Moved at 45 knots on the surface, was their best guess – only," Winston's face grew very bleak, "it was *slowing* as it surfaced. They say it then fired off whatever-it-was, rockets of some type. About an hour before those temporary stars lit up like Drake's bonfires in the heavens." He looked about the room.

¹⁶ First Lord of the Admiralty

¹⁷ Two of the last-generation British battleships; between 29k and 30k tons displacement.

“These Futurists beat the German Kriegsmarine in a single day, gentlemen. There can be no doubt but that they control the seas, as well as the air. So, if they want to blockade us, we would have to surrender. I will not engage in futility for the sake of honor and tradition. Not because I’m afraid of seeing my head in a block of clear metal, like Tojo’s was in those photos we just got in from Lisbon. But because I’m more afraid of what historians would say, and rightly so, about my lack of sense were I to do anything but!”

That brought a few nervous chuckles out of those present.

“So, who’s to be on this...Planning Board, then?” Cripps asked. “And who heads it?”

“You do,” Churchill said instantly. “Your members include everybody present *except* myself, plus Eden, Lyttleton, Woolton, Attlee, Selborne, Dalton, and Portal.”

“That’s almost the entire Cabinet!” Cripps said; others murmured.

“Why aren’t you leading it, Winston?” Ernest Bevin asked.

“Rule Number One of Stage Magic,” the P.M. promptly replied. “Same reason I’m leaving the Services, War, Colonies, India, and Supply out. Your Planning Board’s for the future. Peaceful interactions. Where things might go. What we can aim for. What we’re currently doing, what we’ve currently got – I want a separation, gentlemen. Because I expect a number of you will be talking with these Futurists. I want them to be educating us, as much as we can get them to. If it takes making my cabinet members look stupid, or out-of-the-loop, then I’ll take the blame for that tactic.” He looked over at Sir Stafford Cripps.

“Never doubted which side you were on, Cripps. England, King and Empire first; personal ambition dead last.” He looked around the table, and picked up his cigar. “May have to continue to find a way to fight. That, I can do.” He coughed theatrically, then grinning at them, continued speaking.

“We don’t know that these Futurists are friendly. Or if they will stay friendly. Maybe they’ll favor our American friends, or our Russian comrade-in-adversity. Local diplomacy can help with that sort of thing, or try to counter any attempt at ‘divide and conquer’. Mind you,” Churchill puffed on his cigar, “given the strength that they’ve shown, I’d much rather we keep on their good side, than not.” He took his cigar out and looked at the ash on the end. “We’re not entirely pure in this war either, gentlemen.” He looked around, lowering his head and beetling his brows.

“But if it comes to that, then I insist on this: I will take – no, I will demand – all the responsibility for what has occurred since I took this office. The blame should, must, shall fall on my shoulders, and no one else’s.” He tamped out his cigar. “Goes with the job description, historically. Rather than the King taking the blame, thereby causing all sorts of troubles with the government’s legitimacy, embarrassing mistakes get laid at the feet of the ‘bad minister’, whose death or other punishment lets the King and nation escape safely.” He put both hands flat on the table. “Better that, than a broader loss of talent.”

There was a silence after this remark for over a minute. Then the Attorney General coughed drily. “Jurisdiction might be a problem, Prime Minister.”

“How’s that?” Churchill blinked. His right cheek twisted towards a grin. “Always want a clever man to be your barrister when one is contemplating facing the bar.”

“I mean to say, that we can argue for quite some time whether they would even have the jurisdiction to accuse, let alone to try, any member of our Government in the absence of any treaty rights,” the Attorney-General said. “That is part of the reason why I have said nothing about these rumors of an ‘International Tribunal’ for War Crimes, or High Crimes, coming out of Europe. We are not, that is, the King’s Bench is not, persuaded that supporting such could not create the risk of greater harm by setting a too-easy precedent for just that sort of action being prosecuted against His Majesty’s officers later on.”

Churchill’s brows drew together, and his face clouded up. “Are you saying that Hitler and his cronies shouldn’t be tried, and then hung?”

“I’m saying that if His Majesty’s Government officially supports the G.U.S. in doing so, we will not be able to oppose their doing the same to any of us,” Somervell replied.

“I will not stand by –” Churchill clamped his jaw down, hard, on his cigar stub. He very evidently was throttling back his temper.

“We can make common cause with the GUS without directly supporting any claim of theirs to direct jurisdiction, thereby reducing the risk of creating a dangerous precedent,” Somervell added. “Then we just need to be careful to avoid creating any impression that we view them as having superior legal rights arising from their control over the German and occupied territories.” He leaned forward, and was obviously warming to complexities which delighted him. “If, for example, His Majesty’s Government joined with those Governments-in-Exile here in London – especially the Polish, Norwegian, and Belgian governments – to claim the right to seek redress for wrongs committed on our own soils, we can assert jurisdiction based both on the act and the lands where they were committed. We would make an extradition request to the Occupying Power. One which the Weimar Government would have honored and the Hague Conventions allow. There are more than enough grounds, right there, for as severe a trial outcome as anyone could hope for, Prime Minister. We have Coventry, Rotterdam, and Norway, and that’s just for starters.” He did not mention anything about the conflicting claims between the Free French and Vichy.

“Yes, while the Vichy have Mers-el-Kebir¹⁸, and the Jerries have Lubeck, Rostock¹⁹, and Cologne,” Churchill replied. “Legalisms are all well and good, Somervell, but we have as yet little proof that these Futurists will recognize our laws.”

¹⁸ In July, 1940, the Dunkerque and the Strasbourg, two French battleships, were at harbor in that city (now Oran). The British demanded that they be surrendered to the Royal Navy or scuttled, and so denied to the Germans. As the French Government had surrendered, these ships counted as legitimate ‘spoils of war’ for the Germans, and the French authorities refused the British demand. The British attacked and badly damaged the Dunkerque, but the Strasbourg managed to escape with minimal damage. The legality of the British attack was highly questionable, but Churchill felt the risk to British control over the seas – particularly the Mediterranean – demanded neutralization of these ships.

¹⁹ In March, 1942, C-in-C Bomber Command Arthur Harris sent 234 planes against Lubeck. Using new navigational technology named *Gee*, which used intersecting radio beams that let the bombers triangulate onto their target, 10 Wellingtons first laid flares over the center of this former Hanseatic League city. Then 40 incendiary-loaded bombers dropped their loads on the cramped, mostly wooden center. Then the remaining main force with new, then-huge, two-ton bombs (called ‘cookies’) came in. Over 3,100 homes were destroyed or damaged. In late April, for four nights running British bombers hit Rostock, leaving the entire center of that city ablaze. Both of these were known to the British as being relatively inconsequential in industrial power, but highly vulnerable as ‘tinderboxes’ and relatively undefended. Finally at the end of May Harris put 1,000 bombers in one night over Cologne, setting that city on fire,

"I disagree, Winston." Sir John Anderson, Lord Chancellor, leaned forward. "The declaration of war that they issued argues strongly otherwise. They obviously believed they were compelled to give notice before they struck."

"Four hours' notice?" Ernest Bevin shook his head. "Four hours? That was supposed to be enough time for a government to respond? And in the middle of the night, even!"

"It was enough time for the Italians," Herbert Morrison said. That brought a laugh from everybody but the Prime Minister, and even he smiled. Then Churchill's face smoothed into a thoughtful expression.

"'El Duce' has not been happy with the way he lost control of the conduct of the war. He has been even less happy that the Germans had to bail him out of all of his military endeavors – Yugoslavia, Egypt, the Western Med. Mussolini knew that Hitler was the dominant one." Churchill looked around. "'El Duce' may have decided that he could risk a surrender. If there was nothing to back that radio broadcast, well, Herr Hitler probably couldn't think any less of the Italians."

"*That* would have been impossible," Anderson said, and everyone laughed.

"Whereas, if there was anything, it'd be the Germans who drew the weight of the response on their heads." Churchill shook his head. "Mussolini's a survivor, first and foremost. It looks as if he might, just might, succeed once more." He looked around the table. "That's one of the questions the Planning Board should consider: what should our attitude towards the Italians be?"

"What does Casey suggest?" Somervell asked, naming the Minister of State in the Middle East, who'd been appointed seven months before. "Or Eden?"

"Casey pointed out that having a non-friendly Libya actually allowed us to keep a tighter rein on Egypt and King Farouk than might otherwise be the case," Churchill said. "We're going to have to insist that Emperor Selassie be restored to his throne in Ethiopia, unfortunately." He frowned. "Bloody waste of potential. Those African highlands have the right climate and lack of diseases which make them particularly attractive and fecund." He tapped his two thumbs together. "Albania... a lot, a very great lot, depends on what happens with Germany. Do they keep Austria? What will these Futurists decide?" Churchill shrugged his shoulders. "Fact is, Gentlemen, there's not that much that the Italians have that any of us want to be burdened with."

"Their fleet," Ernest Bevin said. "If only for what they did to the Queen Elizabeth and Valiant²⁰."

"Considering what we'd already managed to do at Taranto, I'd say the honors are about even," Somervell replied.

destroying or damaging over 12,000 homes and 'de-housing' some 45,000 civilians. These cities were hit solely because Bomber Command could hit them and hurt the Germans, not for vital strategic interests or even tactical advantage. In many ways it was an exercise in 'military showmanship' in the air at a time when the British were still losing, badly, on all fronts on land and sea.

²⁰ In 1941, Italian special forces in mini-sub's managed to put torpedoes into these two British battleships while they were anchored in Alexandria. Had the water been much deeper, both would have been lost; as it was, they had to scuttle, but were refloated and repaired.

Churchill shook his head. "Admiralty might agree. I am not so sure." He took a pull at his cigar.

That brought everybody's head around, and the Cabinet members all stared at him. Winston Churchill, twice First Lord of the Admiralty, not wanting more battleships? The man who had ordered the seizure of the Reshadieh and Sultan Osman I in August, 1914 as both were being finished up for the Turkish Navy in British shipyards²¹, a move that galvanized the Turks into allying with the Central Powers? He looked around the table and his cigar twitched.

"All any ship of ours might be is a target," Churchill said coldly. "Battleship, cruiser, destroyer, or even the MTBs²², we have to wonder if they're equally impotent against these Futurists." He took out his cigar and gestured with it. "We may well be off having many smaller targets than a few big ones. If only because the political and military minds will accept losses of the first type where they won't of the second. As the Dardanelles showed²³." His face grew very hard and cold, and his eyes raked around the table. "We need new thinking, if we're to keep our Empire for our King. I don't want one plan; I want a number of them. Alternatives that I can pick and choose from. I'll see that you get what information we can scrape up, so you can fit it in. But you also make sure I'm kept current on what you know and even surmise." He stuck the cigar back in his mouth and turned to face Stafford Cripps. "That's why I'm putting you in charge," Churchill said. "I want a man with the courage to tell me when he doesn't know something. Who will argue with me. Who puts personal ambition dead last, our joint efforts first. God willing, we will not be facing a direct conflict with these Futurists. But I can't believe that their interests and ours won't collide. When they do, or even look like they might, I need to have ways to get around, by, or slip past those issues. Because," he jabbed his cigar down the center of the table, "judging by what we're seeing already, if we ever go head-to-head, we're going to lose right smartly."

²¹ The Reshadieh became the Erin and the Sultan Osman I the Agincourt, and both served with the British Navy in WWI. The Agincourt was the only battleship to have 7 main turrets and fought at Jutland, scoring hits on the Markgraf and Kaiser, while remaining undamaged.

²² Motor Torpedo Boat, the British equivalent of the American PT. For five years, 1940-44, these British small craft and their German opponents, the E-Boats, fought over the English Channel and the Dutch coastline. Only the U-Boats suffered a higher casualty rate on the German side.

²³ In 1915, after the Turks had joined the Central Powers, Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty ordered a primarily British naval force to thrust up the Dardanelles and bombard Constantinople. The admirals and battleship captains, after taking losses from the mines and Turkish forts guarding the strait, refused to press onwards. In doing so, they defied direct orders from their legal superior (Churchill). In fairness, they did so not from personal fear of death or injury, but from moral cowardice – their fear was of public reproof for losing the battleships which had so much British prestige and treasure invested in them. This defeat led to the Gallipoli landings, which also were not pressed forward at the very start because of a fear of loss of control over the troop movements. These defeats led to Churchill's being dismissed from the British Government and a life-time cloud over his name as a strategist. Long afterwards full analysis of the documents and evidence, including that of the Turkish forces and their German commander, showed that the naval force had been five minutes and a handful of volleys from breaking through the Turkish defenses. Even had the loss rate doubled or tripled (more likely, no additional ship would have been sunk), the effort would have been far less costly, and far more effective, than the subsequent three years of war in the Mid-East would turn out to be.

Morrison coughed. "What do you want me to do about Intelligence efforts and these Futurists, Winston?"

Churchill frowned. "Good question, Herbert. Got any suggestions?"

"I've already told the heads of Lisbon and Geneva stations, to tell their people we want every scrap of information they can gather." Morrison coughed. "Real problem, as I see it, is if they really are from our future, the—"

"An alternate future, not ours," Anderson corrected him. Morrison stopped to flash an angry glance at the Lord Chancellor, then continued.

"A future, they've got a hideously great advantage over any other opponent we've had to face before. Namely, they've got all our records up to the date they appeared. Which means they know, theoretically, every operative, planner, code, and detail of our internal activities and intelligence work. It's as if the Gestapo had a book detailing everything about Operation Double-Cross²⁴ available."

Churchill scowled savagely, but nodded. "Point's been already made. C and others are working on it." He looked around the table. "That's all you get to know about it, gentlemen. Your job is to be more up-and-up. Official government determinations, choices, those are what you are to focus on." He worked the cigar in his mouth. "If you do come up with any ideas, you're to tell 'em to me privately. Nothing in writing. Only in person. And only," he looked around and his voice dropped, "if I've first mentioned anything about Queen Boudicea, or the Icenii."

"Why?" Somervell asked.

Churchill looked at him. "We have no idea how good their intelligence-gathering capabilities are," he finally answered. "If we can't talk man-to-man privately, ever, then we've damn little chance of success."

Herbert Morrison frowned. "If we can't even talk privately, we've no chance."

Churchill glared at him. "The only time we have no chance is after we've given up!" he thundered. "And I, for one, will never surrender!"

There was a pause after that Jovian thunderbolt. Then Churchill, who had been glowering and looking up at the corner of his study, shook his head and chuckled. "It was a good line in 1940, and it's still a good line today," he said, and lowered his head to look at the other men. "You may be right, Herbert. We may not be able to resist any demand these Futurists can back with force. But then it's going to be up to us to look for some other way to get what we need."

Somervell coughed. "You may yet want to take heed of that nuisance, Gandhi, Winston."

²⁴ At the start of WWII, the British Counter-Intelligence managed to capture and 'turn' every German agent in Britain. Rather than close the German spying down, they used it to feed information to the Germans. The unit controlling them was called the 'XX Committee', and later became known as the 'Twenty Committee'.

Churchill froze. Then he turned to the Attorney General, and his glare was ferocious. Somervell stared back, unflinching. Then for a second time, Churchill surprised his fellows by chuckling. Ruefully, but chuckling.

“Be a sad day for the Empire if that comes true, AG. His doctrine of ‘non-violent non-cooperation’ hasn’t gotten him much from us, has it?” He jabbed his cigar into the ashtray, extinguishing it. “Would’ve gotten him even less against the Jerries or the Jappos, too. Yet you are right. If we won’t be able to use force, then we need to look to those who haven’t been able to use force against us. Take their failures and their successes as learning lessons. Better that, than repeat their efforts with all the wasted time and cost we’d have to pay.” He stood up and glowered.

“Need a name for you all. ‘Planning Board’ isn’t good enough. Just putting a temporal marker, like ‘Post-War Planning Board’, won’t sound good enough, either.” He looked over at Cripps. “Need something you can take to the House and feed to the MPs, which they can take to their constituents.” He stroked his chin with his thumb. “I’d thought of ‘Future Governance Inter-Relationships Council’, but that violated my rule about Anglo-Saxonist phraseology. Want something shorter, more punch. So. ‘World Peace Planning Council’, for now. Pronouncing the acronym, ‘Whips’.” He looked at them again. “Emphasize that, gentlemen. And think hard. Because if you don’t, we don’t, handle this right, it’ll go down as ‘whoops’.” Churchill picked up his cigar. “Dinner in twenty-five minutes, gentlemen. Your first session will be at nine p.m., last three hours. Give me your first thoughts after you’ve finished.”

Further Intercepts

OCT. 2, 1942 10:11 EDT WASHINGTON, D.C.

POTUS to FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

REPORTS FROM NAUTILOIDS IS THAT TRANSSHIPMENT CAPABILITY OIL PORTS SE ASIA NULLIFIED BUT FIELDS, FARMS, EVEN TANKS INTACT. NO SMOKE BUT NO EFFORT TO REPAIR BY JAPS. VERY PECULIAR. DONOVAN HIGHLY DISGRUNTLED AT DISGUISE FAILURE BUT GUSA GUARD REPORT-EDLY MOST POLITE. CONFIRM OPTORCH EMBARKATION DELAY TO 10TH. WITH FORCES FREED UP AND SILENCE IN NA, PERHAPS CAN SEND CONVOY 19 SIMULTANEOUSLY, RELIEVING BEAR’S ANXIETIES?

OCT. 3, 1942 04:14 GMT LONDON U.K.

FORMER NAVAL PERSON to POTUS:

SHORT NEWS FROM CONTROLLED BROADCAST, BURMA HQ UNITS. ALL CONTACT JAPFORCES BROKEN. NO SIGHT FOR DAYS. UNDER PROTECTIVE GUARD ANGLO-BURMESE GROUND FORCES BEING READIED FOR REPATRIATION NEW DELHI, ANTICIPATED DELIVERY SATURDAY NEXT. MONTGOMERY HOLDING IN PLACE BUT CONTINUES BUILD-UP AT ALAMEIN, ONLY FOCUSING ON TRANSPORT, POL, FOR LUNGE. AGREE CONVOY 19 NOW AN OPTION BUT BEAR’S CONSUMPTION MAY NOT NEED SUPPORT GIVEN SILENCE ON THAT FRONT. POLES GETTING ANTSY.

3 October 1942 0940 hours, Reykjavik Fleet Air Base, Iceland, Exodus 8

“You’re looking better, ‘Razor’. I was worried about you, day before yesterday. Especially after I found out just how primitive the medical care is here.” 1st Lieutenant Michael Joseph Reynard looked at his immediate superior and smiled.

Captain Janet Rachel Reynard pointed at the two canes her weapons’ system officer had used to walk into the room. “You’re looking pretty beat-up yourself, MJ.” She started to sit up straighter, only to hiss with irritation and subside.

“Pain?” Michael asked.

The grounded Viper pilot shook her head. “Pretty doped up, so sensation is way down. But I feel the strains.” She chuckled. “We beat the odds, though. Two for two, ejecting at Mach 12 plus. Even if I am damn near four centimeters shorter for the retros.”

“Pravda skazatt, I always thought our bird was lucky.” With perhaps only a third of his normal range of movement in his leg, Michael hobbled over to the chair nearest the bed and hissing from the pain, sat sideways on the armless backless chair.

“How bad?” Janet asked.

Michael put the two canes across his lap, holding them in place with his brush. “I’m guessing that I won’t need surgery. But E&E is out for now – and for the next three or four weeks,” he said, as he gestured to Janet. “Weeks will pass like days,” he subvocalized.

“Iceland is an island. Where would we go?” Janet shook her head. “I hate to say it, but we’re stuck here.”

“This is an air base. I heard some of our guards talking about the planes they’ve got moving through here,” Michael started.

Janet shook her head. “Out of the question. I might have fractured vertebra. Meaning I could be paralyzed like that,” she snapped her fingers, and he flinched, “after any jolt. Let alone after using my legs. The planes here don’t even have hydraulic assists, let alone our MAF²⁵ circuits.” She smiled at his downcast look. “Don’t worry, Michael. The General will get us out.”

He shook his head. “If we’re here,” he looked up at her. “You know we’re going to be interrogated again this morning.”

She nodded. “Of course. That’s why they’ve put us together. I’m pretty certain the room’s bugged.”

Michael looked around, and sniffed. Then he ran a hand over his muzzle. “Wish I was a Tango-Tango; I’d be able to spot it in a second.” He looked back at the vixen. “Well, I’m not going to start a fight, Cap.” He pointed at the vixen’s arm. “How’s the busted wing doing?”

Janet looked down at her left bicep, where the cast began. “It hurts. And itches. They shaved me,” she added, her voice rich with disgust and irritation. “Before they reduced the fracture. They said that they had to do it, because it was a compound break. I guess it was

²⁵ Muscle Amplifying Feedback; an interactive circuit to convert the pilot’s muscular impulses directly into control surface motion, which reports back the resistance and/or damage experienced.

so that surface antibiotic or whatever was in that yellow powder they sprinkled on it, could work.” She flared her teeth. “Then they used traction to re-set it. I promised them I wouldn’t bite, but they insisted on putting a rolled-up towel between my jaws...and then binding it down, too.” Janet forced herself back towards calmness; she could see her WSO getting more and more upset. “It wasn’t as bad as getting my teeth cleaned,” she said, shuddering involuntarily. “They weren’t torturing me, or deliberately trying to humiliate me. It’s just their primitive medtech, and their complete ignorance of Uplift physiologies.” She looked at her WSO.

1st Lieutenant Michael Joseph Reynard licked his teeth involuntarily. *How many months has it been?* he thought. “I’m not looking forward to having them try to do the cleaning. At least, not without a general anesthetic.”

“If they try,” Captain Reynard said, chuckling softly, “you have my official permission to bite them.”

#

Behind a closed door two rooms down, three men sat at a table looking at each other. A fourth, a Chief Petty Officer and electrical technician, kept watch on the wire recorder connected to the microphone hidden in Captain Reynard’s room, making sure that it captured everything the two GUSAAF officers said.

Commander Daniel Gallery flipped closed the speaker switch. “There’s the reason I ignored your ‘request’ to ship our find back to the States. I don’t think we’d score points with whoever sent these two if we crippled one of them.”

Admiral Leahy, Chief of Naval Staff to the President, looked at his subordinate. “She may be bluffing. They know they’re being monitored.”

Commander Gallery nodded. “She could be. But my one and only x-ray tech said that there were ‘probable disk fractures’. Not something I’d like to chance, unless there’s something important to be gained.”

“There is, Commander. We need to find out everything we can about these ... creatures, and the people behind them.” Edward Hotchkiss leaned forward. “What their capabilities are, what they know about their future intentions and plans – this is the single most important chance for intel we’ll ever get.” He shook his head. “If one of them gets hurt ... hell, even if we had to kill both of them to keep secret the fact that we’ve had access to them ... that’s a price we shouldn’t hesitate to pay.”

Commander Gallery hid his distaste for the OSS Deputy Commander’s suggestion. “What you say assumes that their superiors don’t know we’ve got them here, sir. We can’t be certain of that.”

“You were ordered to keep them in close quarters, Commander. Did you ever, have they ever, had access to your radio facilities?” Hotchkiss asked sharply.

“No, sir, they have not.”

“Well then – they can’t have radioed out.”

“Sir, each of the cannisters that they landed in were transmitting. The signal changed when we removed the two occupants, sir.” Gallery looked at Admiral Leahy. “We have to assume that their forces are aware that we have two of their personnel on-base.”

Admiral Leahy, frowning, nodded. “Did you examine the wreckage to see what was making that signal?”

Gallery nodded, then turned to his right. “Danielson.” The CPO took off his headphones and looked over. “Tell Admiral Leahy what you found.”

CPO Danielson cleared his throat. “It was the darndest thing, Admiral. The cylinders were both transmitting on 243 megahertz. A nice, regular signal.”

“Regular, how? You recognized it?”

“No, sir. Regular, as in it repeated itself. Figuring that out, though, took me nearly ten minutes. It was on a two-minute repeat. Which meant for two minutes, it was broadcasting the same pattern.” CPO Danielson shook his head. “It wasn’t Morse, sir, or anything I could recognize.” He looked down at his hands, then at Commander Gallery. “The pattern changed when we removed the ... passengers. Funny thing was, there weren’t any antennas or even an antenna lead that we could find.”

Admiral Leahy nodded, but didn’t interrupt.

“The one piece of the wreckage that we could find – it was transmitting, too, but on twice the frequency that the cylinders were using. The cylinders were pretty light – empty, they’re about 60 or so pounds. The chunk of wreckage, well...on one side it looked like it had been through some sort of really hot fire. It was faceted, like some big crystal, but there weren’t any antennas on the chunk, either.” Danielson paused, and looked at Commander Gallery.

“Go on, Danielson,” Gallery said.

“Well, it took five of us to haul that chunk out of the hole it had dug and onto a four-by. It only weighed about two hundred fifty pounds, but there wasn’t a way to really get a grip on the damn thing...pardon me, sirs,” Danielson said. “Well, when we got it back to the shed – our repair hanger – I thought it might help if we could get inside it. It’s pretty big, and I thought I might be able to spot *something* like an antenna. And while I was tackling the chunk, Richards and Binks were jury-rigging a ‘Faraday cage’ to cut off the signal the cylinders were sending. A lot easier than making up those big push balls, sir...”

“Danielson, I doubt that the Admiral wants to hear about push balls and parties,” Gallery said quickly, trying to head off another possible disaster.

CPO Danielson coughed. “Anyway, I figured that there had to be something installed inside. That’s why I got out an oxy-torch.”

“To cut it open?” Admiral Leahy asked.

“xactly, sir. Only, that didn’t work.”

“You mean you couldn’t cut the metal?” Hotchkiss asked.

CPO Danielson shook his head. “Well, it didn’t seem to *be* metallic. Not ferrous, anyway. When I took the oxy-torch to it, I had to set the cutting arc fine, and pour on the heat.

After about fifteen minutes or so, I was getting kind of tired, and I goofed up and put my hand down about a foot from where I'd been trying to cut through the chunk."

Admiral Leahy looked pointedly at the CPO's hands.

"No, sir. Didn't get burned. The chunk was cold to the touch. I thanked my lucky stars that it *was* cool. I kept at that spot for another ten minutes, and that's when things got interesting.

Admiral Leahy said nothing, but his cocked head conveyed the question.

"The stuff that I'd been trying to cut through for all that time – it just went 'poof', like it was a soap bubble. A hole you could put your arm through. And it smoked like a son-of-a-bitch," Danielson said.

"Ahem," Gallery said.

"Sorry sir, I must be getting it from your bird," Danielson said.

"Danielson," Gallery said, a warning tone in his voice.

"Anyway, sirs," Danielson said quickly, "For a moment, I thought I'd hit a booby-trap. The whatever-it-was right next to where I'd been using the torch started smoking and heated up something fierce. We all backed off, real fast. Damn near dropped the torch when I did – I had the welder's mask on, so I was the last to see the metal heating up." He shook his head. "That's all that happened, though. No explosions, no nothing. After that, though, most of the chunk changed color – it was a real dark black when we started on it, now it's sort of a mottled gray. That, and that radio transmission stopped and hasn't restarted." Danielson shook his head. "Then when we tried to examine those damn cylinders..."

"Petty Officer Binks is expected to recover his eyesight," Gallery interrupted, "in a few days." He turned towards the Admiral. "The cylinders that carried the two GUS officers, and that Chief Danielson so fortuitously radio-shielded, had some form of rockets built in. They 'took off', right through the roof of our repair hanger for parts unknown. PO1 Binks was looking at them when they took off, and is now suffering from flash blindness. That was at 1427 hours local time, yesterday. About an hour and a half before your arrival." Commander Gallery looked at his watch, then at the two Washington-based visitors. "It's almost 1015 hours. Do you want to speak with our guests now?"

#

Janet and Michael both turned to look at the door as it opened, to let five men into the hospital room. Two of them both Uplifts recognized; they were the treating physician and the X-Ray technician. One of the remaining three they had met, briefly, the previous morning. That was when Commander Gallery had informed each of them that they were to be considered 'involuntary guests requiring medical treatment – the best that can be provided locally'.

The Uplifts' ears lowered, their faces tightened, and their hands turned over in their laps. Four gold rings on the cuffs, the blue uniform, full insignia, and the medals on Admiral Leahy shouted both his rank and probable position. While the civilian attire in a most decidedly non-civilian location almost guaranteed that their other visitor had to be a very-

high-up political. *Security, or intelligence*, both Uplifts thought. *Only, a security officer would be in uniform. By process of elimination, intelligence.*

“Captain Reynard, Lieutenant Reynard, the doctor tells me that your conditions have stabilized,” Commander Gallery said. He looked at the captain, the lieutenant, and then back to the captain. “Ma’am, I want both of you to take note, that I ordered you not to be strapped down and your motion restrained, against the doctor’s medical advice.” Without looking away from the Captain, Gallery nodded at the physician attending. “I did so on the presumption that you would remain in control of your actions and stay quieter that way. We believe your spine may be damaged, and we fear that any undue exertion or strain may cause your spinal cord to be severed, at approximately the lower lumbar vertebrae. That would almost certainly cause you to become semi-paralyzed, an incurable and irremediable condition.” He looked over at Admiral Leahy. “It was the same reason I determined we could not immediately send our visitors to Bethesda, Admiral. I know that’s where our best doctors are, and where we can best take care of our visitors. But neither I, nor Captain Wanscombe here, could be sure they would arrive there in as good a shape as they had left here. Flying or by boat, the North Atlantic is rough in October.”

In point of fact, Admiral Leahy and Edward Hotchkiss had flown around the edges of a front which had pounded down on Iceland for nearly 24 hours before they had been dispatched. The same front which had delayed their departure and arrival, and the same one which had temporarily closed the cross-Atlantic bomber delivery flights.

“Admiral Leahy, Mr. Hotchkiss, let me introduce you to Captain Janet Reynard and First Lieutenant Michael Reynard of the Greater United States Aerospace Force. Captain, Lieutenant, let me introduce you to Admiral Leahy, Chief of Staff to the President, and Mr. Hotchkiss.” As agreed, Commander Gallery left out the latter’s title.

“Thank you, Captain.” Admiral Leahy looked at each of the two Uplifts, meeting their eyes. “First, let me reassure you as to your status. You are visitors, not prisoners. We are going to insist on restricting your movements for at least the immediate future. In your case, Captain,” he said to Janet, “it is entirely for reasons of your continued health.” He looked over at Michael’s canes. “In your case, sir, I hope that the health reason will fairly quickly disappear. However, Reykjavik is an active Fleet Air Base, and as such we must request that you stay within those areas we know are safe for you to move about in.” He looked back and forth between them. “This will also help us keep our personnel from coming and bothering you. There are some very wild rumors flying about, and we’re trying to keep a lid on the worst fears.”

“Thank you, Admiral. Commander.” Janet looked back and forth between them, and took a deep breath, trying to ignore the slight creaking sensation in her lower back. “Would it not be simpler, gentlemen, to repatriate us to our own people? *We* had to learn how to deal with spinal cord injuries a long time ago – or we’d have a lot fewer pilots.” She fought down the eagerness to escape, get back, run away. There were so many people staring at her, making direct eye-to-eye contact.

“The initial problem alone is enough to give us pause,” Gallery said. “We are not in contact with any of your people. Nor do we know how to initiate such contact. Nor, even, if such would be welcomed.”

“Our escape pods are equipped with SAR transponders. Strike Control should have a fairly precise fix on us by now,” Michael said.

Gallery looked at the WSO. “I must offer a second apology, Lieutenant. Because of our ... ah ... curiosity, I am afraid that those ‘escape pods’ are gone.”

“Gone?” Michael asked. “Where?”

“If I could tell you, Lieutenant, I would,” Gallery said. “They ‘took off’. Right through the roof of my repair hanger.”

The vulpine lieutenant winced.

“The Chief was investigating a piece of your wrecked airplane,” Gallery said. “He wanted to examine your crystal to find what frequencies we might tune to, to send and receive messages, and so he cut open what he thought was its protective cover. In that process, however, he apparently damaged it, as it has ceased broadcasting.” Gallery shook his head. “Shortly after this happened, your ‘escape pods’ took off on their own on some form of built-in rocket assists. We’ve been monitoring the frequency that the ‘chunk’ of your airplane was using, but haven’t heard any transmissions on it.”

“Without the beam-authorization codin—”

“Lieutenant!” Captain Reynard waited until her WSO eased back in his chair. *Damn, I wish I’d paid better attention to the legal briefing*, she thought. All she could remember was that they were near where the Laws of War had been signed. That, and the fact that they’d replaced an earlier set from a vanished city. She shook her head. “Are we detainees, then?”

Admiral Leahy shook his head. “No, ma’am; no, sir,” he looked at them both, then back to her, “you are not. Nor are you under arrest.”

Hotchkiss spoke up. “Though we almost certainly could do so. Even a U.S. or Icelandic civilian found the way you were found could be arrested and held, pending the resolution of their intrusion. We did not do so, however, as we believe your intrusion was not voluntary, but the result of an emergency.”

Captain Janet Reynard grinned at Hotchkiss. It was not a pleasant sight. “Unless your laws are a great deal different from ours, an aerospace craft that has an emergency can land *anywhere*. We may be liable for damages – that’s a matter for our respective governments to settle out – and I am sorry that your curiosity, Commander Gallery, may have cost you a roof. If the same thing happened to you,” she said, now shifting her gaze to the Admiral, “the worst that would happen would be that you would have to wait on the convenience of your ‘hosts’ for a departure window.”

“We are aware that there are a large number of, ah, GUS forces about. We do not know their location, nor even where they are operating,” Admiral Leahy said. “It would help us make contact, if you could tell us something about the disposition of your forces?”

“Reynard, Michael Joseph. Lieutenant, GUS Aerospace Force. V585229F115—” the WSO stopped as Gallery, smothering a laugh, held up his hand.

“You’re not an EPW²⁶ and this is not an interrogation, Lieutenant. Not at all. Yes, we do want to get some information from you. Just as,” he said keenly, his bushy eyebrows lifting, “you probably want to get a fair amount of information from us. May I point out to you, that we are talking about a problem in communication? A basic problem, in that we both need to do just that, before we can get much further on our own?”

“Ah...” Michael licked his lips.

Janet didn’t think it was the drugs in her system that were helping her to relax. She liked this Commander; he reminded her of the General, though Gallery’s eyes didn’t have the same cold haunted look that she’d seen in her distant relative’s. “The bulk of our troops are engaged with forces still loyal to the German Reich, in areas that were conquered by the Nazis. Most of the remaining ground forces are engaged with the forces of the Empire of Japan. Our aerospace and naval forces are ... not ‘tied down’ at the moment.” *I won’t be telling you about our Antarctic bases, or the ships we have in orbit. Let that be a surprise for your future, she thought. No need to let you know that we hold the High Ground. At least, not yet.* “By now, our fast attack boats should have dealt with the last of the German Kriegsmarine Unterseeboot fleet. Unless there are some hiding out in the Indian Ocean.”

Admiral Leahy cleared his throat. “We have had some information that the U-Boats have, ah, been suppressed.”

“Some information?” Janet barked. “The first packs were delivered to Lisbon on D-plus-Two. I can understand your people in Iceland not knowing, but not an officer of your rank.” She looked over at Commander Gallery. “You did say that he was reporting directly to the CinC?” At Gallery’s confirming nod, she turned back to face the Admiral. “Doesn’t State talk to the Pentagon here? Your vid stations, your net must have been alive with the news! We saw a fast attack towing a U-boat into Lisbon harbor on Armed Forces broadcast in real-time.”

Admiral Leahy exchanged a glance with Commander Gallery, who shrugged his shoulders and looked at Captain Reynard. “Pentagon? Broadcast? Vid stations? Net?” Gallery asked. “There’ve been radio reports about the Lisbon quays, but we’ve no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Ohmigoh—of course you don’t!” Michael interrupted, and turned to face Captain Reynard “they probably haven’t even got t.v!”

Admiral Leahy blinked in surprise.

“Of course we don’t have t.b.,” Doctor Wanscombe said angrily, his professional competency being stung. “I’d have quarantined any case, and they’d never let anyone showing the symptoms serve on Iceland. It’s managed to stay uninfected—” He realized that Admiral Leahy was waving him to silence.

“T.b.? What’s that? Tele-broadcast?” Michael hazarded.

“No, tuberculosis,” Captain Wanscombe said. “It’s a wasting disease of the lungs—” This time he was much quicker at picking up the signal to stop talking.

²⁶ EPW = Enemy Prisoner of War.

"I'm speaking about t.v., V for Victor, television." Michael said. "Ancient history – it had to have been invented back in the 20th century..."

"Think of it as radio for pictures," Janet added.

"I've heard of it," Admiral Leahy said into the momentary silence. "Columbia Broadcasting was looking into that, had been for almost a decade before the war."

"I saw it," Hotchkiss said, surprising all the others. "The Berlin Olympics." He looked at the two Uplift officers. "You're saying that we should have seen these broadcast photos of subs being interned at Lisbon? If we'd been in your world?"

Michael froze; he'd not meant to give anything away. Janet, either from the drugs or more resigned to some cultural contamination, nodded. "Of course you would. Intermixably. From every bloody-be-damned angle until you were sick of the sight of the ruddy things. Just like the vids that were sent out of the Nemyetsii bastards being placed under arrest."

Gallery blinked, as did the other Reykjavik-based military. Admiral Leahy and Hotchkiss did not.

God help us all if they're really Soviets under a different name, Hotchkiss thought.

The Admiral and Hotchkiss had both seen photos that had been delivered to the President of the captured U-boats in Lisbon harbor. They'd seen them the same day that the flying craft had crashed onto Icelandic soil.

"That wasn't so painful, was it?" Gallery said into the momentary silence. "Lieutenant Reynard – if we sent out a radio signal on the same frequency your beacon was broadcasting on, would your people pick it up?"

"If you sent out a signal naming us specifically, I'm sure that General would pick it up."

"Michael." This time Janet's voice was wearier and less sharp. She sighed, then looked over at the naval officers. "He's not boasting, sirs. The 'guard' frequency would be the best. We call it 'guard', because it's reserved for aircraft that are either in an emergency, or have gone down. It's live-monitored 24/7 real-time."

Admiral Leahy nodded. "That solves a first problem. Unfortunately, that's the easiest one: how to make contact with your, ah, 'Aerospace Force'. We know you are out there, somewhere, Captain. But your planes are quite literally invisible and unreachable."

Captain Janet Reynard laughed.

Commander Gallery chuckled and looked at the captain. "You might be considering mixing in some boasts with your descriptions of your technology, which is obviously far in advance of our own. We wouldn't know when you did, at least not right away. Might not even find out for years. Yet even so...would it really be wise, to start our mutual communication with deliberate lies?" He shook his head. "We're going to have enough troubles with mutual misunderstandings, missed or dropped assumptions, and in general all the problems anybody encounters when meeting each other the first time, without laying in long-term booby traps for trust that way."

“If we’re invisible, it’s because you’re not looking in the right place, Commander,” she said. “We make our planes hard to see, yes. But they’re not invisible and, as our presence here all too sadly demonstrates, they’re not invulnerable.”

Admiral Leahy nodded, and then looking at the door, nodded again. “Gentlemen.” He looked over at the two vulpine Uplifts. “Officers. I, we, will be back, by mid-afternoon at the latest. I need to use your communications to tell the President that yes, we are hosting two real live, visitors from that alternate future.” He smiled at them, and then looked at the doctor. “If you would please talk together with the medical staff here, and see if there is some way we can safely transport you to Bethesda? Not only would this let us provide the very best of medical care, and get you out of an operating Fleet Air Base – something that will ease our problems greatly – but also, it would give the President a chance to meet you directly. I can just about promise you a Presidential visit, Captain, Lieutenant. No matter what the Secret Service might say.” He shot a glance at Hotchkiss. “Or anybody else. You know what Franklin’s curiosity is like, once piqued.” He nodded once more at the two Uplifts. “Belay all salutes,” he ordered; and then walked out the door with Gallery and Hotchkiss.

Those remaining in the room looked at each other, singly and in pairs, with a mixture of resignation and apprehension. Older heads were not immune, it seemed, to impulses of questionable value.

#

Outside that room, Gallery led the other two into an unoccupied conference room just down the hallway. He held the door open for them, and shut it behind them. “Captain Wanscombe may try to pull rank on me, Admiral, if I try to send those two out in less than two weeks. I admit that he’s fascinated by their physiology, but I also think his concerns over her further injuring herself are very real.” The other two having seated themselves, he also sat down. “I had to put my order not to restrain her in writing.” Thereby putting his career on the line, if anything happened to her.

“Captain Wanscombe’s medical reputation is good, but not as good as the staff we’re assembling in Bethesda,” Admiral Leahy replied. “As to pulling rank...” he reached into his pocket, and pulling out a small package, tossed it to Gallery. “Congratulations, Captain.”

Gallery caught the packet, and looked at it. Yes, it was the exact size, shape, and weight, of the standard insignia-carrying paper sachets found in any Naval PX. He said, opened the waxed paper, and poured the badges of his new rank onto his palm.

“You were in line for that promotion, and a sea command, even before your ‘visitors’ arrived,” Admiral Leahy said. “Either on this world, or at your doorstep. Reykjavik’s been a well-run and tremendously useful Fleet base, Captain Gallery.” He looked at the other. “The promotion I had no trouble approving. The other part...” he shook his head.

Captain Gallery stopped unpinning his Commander’s insignia. “The seagoing command?” he asked. “Not another shore assignment, Admiral!”

“I don’t know,” Admiral Leahy said. “We’d, or rather the CNO, had been planning to make you a plank-owner on one of the new class of carriers we’re building. ‘Escort’ carriers, we’re calling them, or ‘babies’. They’re designed to work in special ASW Hunter-

Killer Teams. Which we figured we were going to need, to win the Battle of the Atlantic.” He shook his head. “But those plans are stumbling to a halt. Because there really isn’t any U-Boat war. Not anymore.” He looked at Gallery. “We don’t know of a single operational U-Boat anywhere in the world. Or any Japanese sub. The Italians have had all of theirs scuttled as a condition of their surrender.”

“I’d take a cruiser. Hell, sir, I’d take a destroyer again.”

Leahy shook his head. “I won’t promise what I can’t deliver. Franklin knows about you, Gallery.” He chuckled. “You should be glad about that. The CNO was about to take your head when you refused to send our two guests out on the next available flight, but he was stopped by Franklin’s supporting your decision.” Admiral Leahy nodded at the new insignia still lying on the table in front of Gallery. “But for the President, Captain, you’d be a Lieutenant Commander, or even a Lieutenant. One heading for Barstow, or Great Lakes. Not your new posting.”

“New posting? I haven’t heard anything about a new posting.”

Admiral Leahy nodded. “I’m predicting, Captain. You may have noticed that the air war, just like the naval war, has been called off.”

Gallery nodded. “There haven’t been any coffin flights coming back from England, sir, this past week.” He looked at Admiral Leahy. “I haven’t said anything, because the supply flow is still going strong into England. But we haven’t heard of any flights at all – and the weather’s had at least a couple of days when Bomber Command might have flown ops.” He spread his fingers out and curled them in again. “Fortunately, that was when the storm was blowing over us. So, I’ve a bit more time before anyone else on this FAB starts speculating about the end of the war. Not more than a week, though.” He shook his head. “Do the Joint Chiefs have any new directions?”

Admiral Leahy shook his head. “We’re all scrambling, son. These new players are still, essentially, a complete unknown.” He looked over at Hotchkiss. “Unless the OSS has any information it hasn’t shared with the Navy or the Joint Chiefs?”

Hotchkiss shook his head. “We’re working on it as our absolute top priority.”

Admiral Leahy’s eyebrows rose. “Absolute top?” he asked.

“Yes. Nothing, and I mean precisely that, has a higher priority.” Hotchkiss looked at the newly-minted naval Captain. “Captain Gallery, you’re one of the few men who have even seen these invaders. You’re also one of the even fewer who have actually met, and talked with, them. They’ve gained an embassy in Lisbon. That’s let us find out that they include humans as well as other species of these, ah, ‘Uplifts’. Apparently created by mixing humans and wolves, or humans and tigers, or humans and bears. Those were reported by Dulles in Switzerland,” he added more for Admiral Leahy’s benefit, and then continued.

“We can’t keep their presence secret, and we aren’t even going to try. God knows what the rest of the world’s reactions are going to be. We have reason to be grateful; it looks as if the Pacific War is just as strongly wrenched into our favor as the Atlantic, European, and Russian fronts have been. That doesn’t make them our allies, though, Captain Gallery. I think you picked up on that point.”

Gallery nodded.

“Good. We may, for some while, keep secret the extent of our contacts and interactions with these...creatures. I suppose I should say ‘people’, but it seems almost impossible to state that about anything with an built-in fur coat,” Hotchkiss added. “This is your formal notification, Captain Gallery, that you are now being made privy to information which has been classified Presidential Eyes Only, Top Secret, and given the codeword ‘Remus’.”

“As in ‘Bre’r Remus’?” Gallery asked.

Hotchkiss nodded. “That’s right, Captain. Your first task will be to identify, and then select, the number and members of personnel necessary to host, and protect, our visitors. Dr. Wanscombe and the treating personnel, and those who have had any contact beyond a fleeting glimpse of either these visitors or their gear. I will want that list by 17:00 this afternoon, when Admiral Leahy and I board our return flight to Washington.”

Gallery nodded.

“Captain—for the moment, you’re still in command of this FAB,” Admiral Leahy told him. “But an awful lot of our prior problems, with the U-Boats, the Luftwaffe, all of the Axis, even the Japanese, just got replaced with one big new one. Dealing with this GUSA. You managed to keep your head and keep those under and around you doing the right and necessary things. You’ve come, as I said, to President Roosevelt’s attention. I would not be at all surprised to find that you will be playing a role in executing whatever answer or answers we come up with as we start interacting with these invaders. So, tell me this: when BuPers asks, who should replace you here?”