

# Disintegration

## Chapter 13

"It could be a trick."

Following these words, the Russian soldiers stared at an umok corpse. A single foot was missing. Not to mention one of their improvised landmines, which included oil barrels in the design. Nonetheless, they retrieved a sphere-shaped device previously clutched between its talons, albeit the starting stages of rot and decay made being around the dead umok an overall unpleasant experience.

One soldier swatted away at a swarm of flies flocking around his squad and the alien's body. "We should try bringing it back anyway. If what the *prisholet* said was true, it's some sort of communication device meant for our leaders to use."

Another warily looked at the skyline. "Assuming it's not just a tracker they'll use to bomb us from orbit. Well, again..."

"Ah, come on, Sergei! There hasn't been any bombings for days! Besides, didn't you see those sphere things on the news before everything went to shit?"

"No." he replied.

"Well, the *prisholets* sent one of those things straight through the roof of the Kremlin and other places to issue an ultimatum."

"And now look at what's happened..." sneered someone else, "The Kremlin is in ruins, Boris Yeltsin is dead, and everything west of the Urals is occupied by alien invaders!"

One soldier scoffed. "It's a shame, but good riddance regarding Yeltsin..."

"There's no need for that, comrade. Regardless, it might have been a bad idea to wait for the damned creature to bleed out if it was one of their diplomats or something. Don't shoot the messenger and all of that."

"As if we could have done anything!"

"Yeah, what's done is done."

"...And nothing of value was lost."

A sergeant within the squad approached the group. "Stop staring at the dead alien and playing with your dicks!" He paused to point at a nearby truck. "LOAD IT UP!"

After several seconds of the soldiers glancing at each other in silence, they slowly surrounded the sphere. Each grasped it near the bottom. Their combined efforts were able to lift the device directly onto a truck bed, which rolled a little, prompting one to scramble after it. Ropes eventually secured the device. From there, a latch locked everything in place, and they all hopped into the military cargo truck before it began driving away from the bloody scene.

Its destination was a city called Omsk.

Historically, it was always something of a stronghold. A strategic crossroads between Europe and Asia. White forces during the Russian civil war even used Omsk as a temporary capital for that very reason. Ironically, it served that purpose once again since it was now the rallying point for whatever remained of the Russian military, which couldn't be more evident with the improvised traps, trenches, and vehicle emplacements concealed along any roads bordering nearby woodlands.

Over time, the cargo truck weaved its way through these obstacles. A few tanks and infantry transports acted as escorts, leading the convoy and protecting it on both sides. Signs of various battles and other struggles decorated the dreary landscape where winter was transitioning to spring. This included trees toppled over, destroyed human vehicles, and the occasional alien corpse ruptured by either plentiful projectiles or explosives. Once the city itself came into view, ruins revealed where it was bombed from orbit, but against all the odds, it was mostly intact and one of the rare settlements still under firm human control.

Whether this security came from the aliens unable or unwilling to seize the city didn't matter to the soldiers as the cargo truck entered it.

The usual guards greeted them. They passed by civilians on the streets, albeit most took shelter within buildings... regardless of whether they were partially destroyed or not. Others crammed themselves into churches to pray for salvation, and Orthodox Christian priests on the streets provided soup to others lining up on the sidewalk. Fellow comrades and vehicles strategically positioned around the area instilled what was practically martial law throughout the vicinity, restricting access to certain places where rubble and cold human corpses still posed potential dangers.

Soon, the cargo truck reached the entrance to Omsk's underground metro...

Their new field headquarters.

Then the soldiers started hopping off the truck and unloading the alien device. Unlike loading it up, transporting the metallic ball became much easier once they realized they could effectively roll it on the concrete. Naturally, this resulted in the sphere being rolled into the station entrance itself, where it bounced down some stairs as some other awaiting soldiers scurried away from its path of descent.

"God damn it, Sergei, you fucking idiot!"

"That was YOUR fault! Eat shit!"

Despite their blunder, the metallic device managed to reach the metro's interior once it ultimately descended down the stairs. It rolled past some command tents and a large map indicating a few other stations now serving as hospitals and armories for the city itself. Armed guards swarmed it. The professional soldiers in green fatigues were armed with modern Kalashnikovs, while the militiamen wearing civilian clothes with red bandanas tied to their arms had anything ranging from cold war era weaponry to Mosin Nagants.

Only one man stood out among them. He wore a uniform with a furred overcoat, a black cap, and similarly colored gloves. Ranks on his shoulders gave away his position as a high ranking general. With some aides and junior officers accompanying him, the sphere rolled directly in front of the group before nearly stopping altogether, prompting the general to momentarily place a hand on it to keep it stationary.

"I'm assuming this is the device they found?" he asked no one in particular.

Other soldiers lowered their weapons and joined him as they looked at the sphere's metallic shell, which was composed of abnormal alien alloys, and its strange engravings glimmered in the faint lighting of the metro.

Suddenly, the sphere sprung into action. Four metallic legs erupted from it, a panel opened up to reveal some sort of optics alongside inner circuitry, and a hologram emitted from a projector. The humans stumbled back and aimed their rifles again, except for the general as he held up a single hand. They lowered their firearms once they saw his open palm. Gradually, the hologram took a red shape... a familiar red and reptilian figure with glowing golden eyes and a crown on her head.

"Greetings!" hissed Empress Jenessa the Third.

Silence and a sense of dread filled the room as everyone besides the general backed away from it. Although the hologram was a bit hazy as it occasionally flickered, it still showcased Jenessa's overall outfit with royal attire reminiscent of an ancient queen thanks to her various golden jewelry. Nonetheless, her attention focused on the old Russian general giving her a death stare...

She stood on the tips of her clawed toes to exemplify her hologram's sheer size, albeit she was like a miniature zenari standing several meters tall. "Ah, and you must be a human leader within this particular nation state! Trying to contact you was a pain. I heard your previous government fell into disarray now that it is apparently a military junta of some sort. Regardless, what is your name, human?"

The general lowered his arms and balled his hands into fists. "Most call me..."

"Actually, I do not care." interrupted Jenessa. "Regardless of whoever you are, I have graced you with my presence to grant your new government with yet another opportunity to simply surrender. Other primitive nations have already done so. Yours is one of the more powerful ones and your resistance efforts have been admirable compared to others, but it is all for naught if you continue your pointless struggles, so ideally you can send my message to the right people."

"Primitive?" said the general with wary eyes.

"Yes. Primitive. Your species has not even established a colony on this planet's only moon. You select your leaders through popularity contests. When faced with an insurmountable opponent capable of rendering your entire species extinct, you chose to resist when offered mercy." Her tail swayed as she grasped an ornate warhammer. "Will your people make that same mistake again and be subjected to my judgement once more?"

The general spent a moment rubbing his eyes. "You annihilated most of our governments with little to no provocation... and you're calling us the primitives?"

"Of course, you uncultured vermin!" she exclaimed with a venomous hiss. "Your ways are backwards compared to my species, but we shall uplift you anyway. Whether you want to be civilized or not..."

"Who are you, anyway?" asked the general.

The empress's jaw went agape, then she snarled as she brought the warhammer behind her back like a shortsword. "Are you japing, human? How could you not know at this point?!"

"Considering the fact that you destroyed our satellites and other means of communication, descending my country into chaos, some of us still don't know who you are or what your people even want."

"Your submission!" exclaimed the empress as she stomped with a single foot. "We are..."

"I know who you are." interjected the general. "What you are. A great deal of us don't."

"...KNOWN as the Zenari Hegemony. To put it bluntly, your planet is being conquered, but we would prefer to do so with minimal bloodshed. You will be our new subjects."

"Or what?"

The empress narrowed her eyes. "Or you will be annihilated. Grinded to dust. A tragic page in a history book... which WE will write in the future... about how a stubborn species doomed themselves to irrelevance and extinction."

The general gestured with a free hand. "How is that any different than what you're currently doing? You're relentlessly slaughtering our people. Bombing hospitals. Killing medics, those that surrender... everyone."

"Woe to the weak." she sneered.

"You have no respect for any sort of rules of engagement..." continued the general, "Civilians aren't spared from your savagery either."

"Bah! That is rich coming from an uncultured savage living in a primitive society where males are mostly in charge of everything!"

"Really? Just look at yourself!" The general paused to bring attention to her outfit. "You look ridiculous! Your attire and demeanor reminds me of a medieval queen. In case you didn't know, monarchies are considered an outdated form of government by human standards. Meanwhile, your incompetent military has been composing themselves like a band of barbarians by destroying our cultural monuments... erasing our history!"

Jenessa scoffed. "What makes you think I care about your history, human? None of it matters anymore. Besides, I'll likely live longer than the entire history of some of your nations, such as the upstart United States from what little I know about them, hence why the Hegemony utilizes an autocracy compared to other species with the lifespans of vermin."

"So you call yourself cultured and civilized, but you don't care for history?" asked the general, shaking his head.

"Not yours, at least. I am more of a civilizing force."

He took a few steps forward. "Then let me tell you a little bit about my homeland. We call it Mother Russia. You see, we have something of a reputation for repelling invaders others considered invincible..."

The empress cocked her head to the side. "Do tell."

"As you wish." said the general as he took a deep breath. "A long time ago, Teutonic Knights tried to conquer our ancestors in the ancient Kingdom of Rus... but they failed. Napoleon marched his army into Russia, burned down Moscow, then returned with a fraction of his forces and nothing to show for his efforts thanks to our scorched earth policies. His empire fell apart once his illusion of invincibility was shattered by us. Then there were the Germans. The Nazi war machine seemed unstoppable to the rest of the world once they bloodied us during a surprise invasion where they violated a non-aggression pact... but we held firm, defended our homes at a great cost, and pushed them back until our banner was waving over their Reichstag!"

"So... you are resilient." she said with a swoosh of her powerful tail. "I do not know about half of what you are even talking about, albeit that seems to be the general message. Do you think any of that will matter when we eventually bomb you back to the stone age from the safety of your atmosphere and swarm your population centers with our warriors?"

The general closed his eyes for several seconds. "You're not invincible either. Once the bombings stopped, some of your infantry proved to be easy prey, and we finally managed to re-organize ourselves. Shock from people thinking it's some kind of Y2K apocalypse is finally starting to die down too, despite the anarchy..."

"You took advantage of my mercy," hissed the empress, "And you killed my diplomatic envoy, who is the only reason why we can currently speak to one another!"

"Ah, so you're full of it too." replied the general, rolling his eyes.

She practically growled in return. "Full of what?"

"Bullshit. We know that other aliens are interfering on our behalf."

The empress huffed and puffed. "Really? Excrement?!"

"And do you know what your bombings have accomplished, alien?"

Her serpentine tongue flicked from her muzzle. "Eradicating vermin?"

"Ugh. No. You ruined and infuriated our people. You've united humanity. Those Americans you called a bunch of upstarts for their nation's short history? We were enemies at one point, but now they're more amicable and cooperative than ever before now that a bunch of barbarians are burning humanity's home to the ground!"

"I should have known this would be a waste of time." Jenessa stopped speaking for several seconds as she faced away from the general. "Some human cultures, nations, and others will need to be eradicated I suppose. A necessary evil, really. Nonetheless, it is true that others are preventing us from providing full orbital bombing support, but you are about to learn the hard way that we can still deliver bombardments to a limited extent..."

Undeterred by her words, the general crossed his arms. "How can you even call your so-called Hegemony a cultured and civilized state when your merciless horde has been building it all on a pile of innocent bones?"

Jenessa's only response was an incomprehensible and venomous hiss before the hologram vanished. Afterward, the communication device became inert. Its lights stopped glowing, and it reformed itself into a metal ball. Everyone remained silent for a few long and tense moments... up until emergency sirens began blaring from the surface... and they all knew what it meant when combined with the empress making a threat.

Bombings were about to begin again.

Yet... the general smiled with the knowledge that they were now diverting attention away from elsewhere as others prepared to return the favor in kind.

"History has a tendency to repeat itself, Jenessa."

The thought of vengeance was the only solace the old general had as screaming and panicking occurred on the surface from human civilians, who could do nothing but swarm into whatever shelter they could find while alien ships re-oriented their positions and darkened the sky itself.

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Hegemonic forces positioned themselves along the Ural mountains. The natural barrier between western Russia and Siberia. Fortifications were erected as they created outposts and forward operating bases, allowing them to effectively capture and control some settlements near it. With few exceptions, they now owned everything to the west, while almost everything to the east remained mostly untamed... not to mention brutal for most of the cold-blooded creatures due to the climate.

Meanwhile, something stirred within Siberia itself. Old radio towers still intact transmitted orders to a collection of surviving military units and even stray insurgents. In one isolated Siberian village, soldiers removed snow-dusted tarps concealing a T-72 main battle tank. Another group prepared an assortment of new and old vehicles, which included ones not widely used since the Great Patriotic War, such as old Soviet tank destroyers and even a T-34-85. With most airfields annihilated by the bombardments, some aircraft used highways as improvised ones before taking off for the first time since the start of the invasion.

Soldiers armed with RPGs, machine guns, and anti-tank rifles boarded Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Angry young men emerged from their homes in cities occupied by alien invaders. What were practically flying tanks known as hind attack helicopters accompanied BMPs and civilian vehicles converted to technicals as they surged down several major roads.

They were all converging on several key positions.

During this commotion, a tent filled with alien soldiers slept. Unbeknown to them, plastic explosives were planted near them. A Spetsnaz soldier leaning against a tree outside took a puff of his cigarette, pulled out a detonator, then squeezed the trigger with a mechanical click. Explosives erupted. The tent looked like it was bursting before what remained became covered in flames. Many aliens were killed or maimed as their tent became a living hell where screaming from now crippled, blind, or deafened warriors would never wake up the ones that died during their slumber.



Elsewhere, brutalist architecture dominated a city, and Molotov cocktails descended upon alien soldiers on guard duty as they stood next to taller human buildings. Others moved RPGs through the sewers like rats. Complete chaos broke out as fires spread and insurgents fired down on the alien occupiers with whatever they could get their hands on.

At yet another location, rocket artillery screamed as they launched a bombardment of missiles, creating an orchestra not heard since the second world war's deep battle operations.

A squad of hegemonic warriors somewhere else prepared themselves once they detected mass movements. Worse yet, their communications were down. They took defensive positions around their outpost with their plasma weapons and laser rifles in tow while umok scouts investigated the situation. It didn't matter much when they were targeted by incoming SU-30 aircraft flying faster than the speed of sound, which unleashed payloads before darting away. As a result, missiles penetrated alien armor, depriving one sthara soldier not wearing a helmet of his brain matter once it imploded everything inside of his skull.

Additional artillery bombardments softened more hegemonic positions as shells and rockets alike rained down on them at multiple locations.

It all prepared human forces for the ground assault. Main battle tanks acted as the tip of the spear, albeit some were brand new and lacked any paint. Nonetheless, they fired upon any titanic figures from a safe distance. As hegemonic soldiers moved closer to engage them, another group of tanks emerged from a nearby hill, then fired downwards with nothing but their turrets exposed. The aliens struggled to target them. Any infantry accompanying the tanks disembarked to move into the woodlands or abandoned buildings, setting up heavy equipment such as mortars during the process.

Results of the combined Russian offensive varied.

At one location, umok auxiliaries threw down their weapons and fled. Attack helicopters chased them down, shredding their backsides with overwhelming autocannon and machine gun fire when they weren't moving behind natural terrain and structures to conceal themselves. Sthara accompanying the umok met a similar fate when either anti-aircraft vehicles or jet fighters shot down their drones, eliminating one of their main support tools.

On the contrary, elite zenari warriors stationed at a strongpoint shrugged off most of the projectiles sent their way...

The hegemonic vanguard. Sent down by the empress herself, their glistening and gilded golden armor stood out among the drab scenery as they eradicated approaching Russian tanks with their ornate plasma rifles. Drafted from the ranks of zenari nobility, they had some of the best training, weapons, and armor money could buy. A certain degree of arrogance created an aura as they towered over everything and chortled at the sight of fleeing human forces, but it mostly stopped once their augmented reality vision informed them about a lone strategic bomber flying near their position.

It launched two cruise missiles. Gradually, they descended towards a distant deployment zone, where a multitude of fellow alien warriors defended the area and prepared their own hovering vehicles to respond to whatever was happening. Although a laser weapon intercepted one missile and tried to target the other, it was a little too late when it began reaching the ground...

The missile detonated, there was a bright flash, then a strong shockwave. Some aliens were instantly incinerated. Members of the imperial vanguard that stared directly at the explosion without the proper protection of their visors were blinded by it. A mushroom cloud erupted from what used to be their deployment zone, and not even their expensive armor could fully protect them from the ensuing shockwave that disintegrated everything within the vicinity before nuclear fallout immediately washed over the area.

All across the mountain range, similar scenes played out as nuclear bombs shattered hegemonic forces defending it, allowing another phase of the massive human counterattack to begin in earnest.