

SOPHIA & Co.



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Daino Equinoziale.

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I. Command bridge of the vessel "T.Roosevelt", container ship flying the Panamanian flag. 1:30 in the afternoon, Pacific Ocean off Taiwan.

Large bridge of a container ship, with five people. The captain (C), along with a young lady wearing a uniform, (Sophia), visible on a screen, silently contemplate the horizon. After some time, an explosion is seen a couple of km away. The Captain looks through binoculars for about thirty seconds.

C: Target hit on the rudder. She cannot maneuver; the other hostile ships bring her relief. Perhaps the battle is already over.

S: They might have understood that we can't miss the shot.

C: Indeed. Sophia, can you give me a view of the stricken ship? Was she a military ship?

S: Have a look at this. (Satellite view, in detail, of a patrol boat on fire. It flies no known flag and has a cannon on board.)

C: With that cannon they couldn't do much.

S: It depends on the type of projectiles they use (the two look for half a minute again, then the patrol boat, though on fire, suddenly launches a missile.)

S (coolly): Well, the enemy couldn't take our ship and so he wants to destroy her with a missile . He is in for a surprise (The missile climbs then turns around and hits the patrol boat, which blows up with a violent explosion.)

C: Cheers!

S: That's what I meant.

C: Victims?

S: We didn't launch any missiles. Continue navigation.

C (To Navigator): Keep course One Two Zero.

N: Yes sir .

II. Forest in Paraguay, 01:20 AM.

A modular but hyper-modern building, isolated in the forest, houses a biology laboratory. It would appear to be a well-guarded drug lab. Despite the late hour, several people, not counting the security personnel, are still at work.

The Lab Chief, Rupert, is awakened in a shack next to the lab. Very short phone call. Looks at the time, it's 01:23. He runs to the laboratory, to the communication center. A subordinate shows him the computer screen.

Subordinate: *Chief, take a look at this.*

Rupert reads carefully. He is obviously amazed.

Rupert: *Ask for confirmation through the encrypted channel.*

Subordinate: *Chief, this is the encrypted channel, and I've already asked for confirmation twice. Confirmed and confirmed*

Rupert: *All right, let's follow the protocols.*

A group of paramilitaries is in the nearby forest. The leader, Calisto, watches silently through an infrared viewer.

(The guerrilla conversations are in Spanish)

Euphemius: *Calisto, everything in order?*

Calisto: *Normal activity. We have been informed that the alarm will go off in one minute.*

Euphemius: *It all seems too quiet to me. Of course, who would expect to have such a lab right on our doorstep...*

About a minute of silence. Suddenly an alarm siren goes off in the laboratory.

Euphemius: *Shall we attack?*

Calisto: *I already said that we must not attack. We just have to make sure they don't take anything away and burn everything. After they're gone, we need to verify that nothing's left.*

Meanwhile, there is a lot of activity in the laboratory and nearby buildings. Everyone runs here and there.

Rupert: *Go! Go! Secure labs.*

Albert, Deputy Chief: *What do we take with us ?*

Rupert: *Nothing. As far as we know, we are surrounded and, if we don't take anything with us, we will be allowed to pass all checkpoints. Destroy as much as you can... An agreement must have been reached higher up with the guerrillas. Move, move. We leave in five minutes.*

Three staff buses are already loading passengers, who arrive with hastily packed bags.

The buses leave together, preceded by an armed jeep. They are stopped at a commando checkpoint, about a kilometer from the Laboratory. Search. Next to each bus mountains of documents are formed which are doused with fuel and then burned. (Close up) PC's, Computer drives, USB keys and other electronic materials are also seen burning and melting in the fire.

Suddenly a bright light illuminates the scene. The Laboratory is on fire.

III. White House Situation Room – 3:30 AM

Various people are present, highly decorated generals, men in civilian clothes. On the tables, paper cups and thermoses of hot coffee. On the walls, maps and various electronic screens. In the middle, on a special screen, the same female figure we already know. She chats with the attendees, who address her as "Sophia".

White House Chief of Staff (WHCS): *Gentlemen, the President of the United States.*

The President (P) enters, followed by a retinue of bodyguards, military and civilian aids, secretaries. All present people interrupt their chatter and stand up, if not already standing, greeting the President in various ways. He responds by calling someone by name and someone with the title he bears. In all, about twenty-five people are present.

Finally, the President takes his seat at one end of the table, opposite Sophia.

Sophia: *Good morning, Mr. President. And Merry Christmas.*

P: *Merry Christmas to you, Sophia. It's a little early, but while we're at it, can you summarize the **Morning Book** for me?*

Two of the President's aids chatter aside. Phil, younger, asks the other, whom evidently he hardly knows: *But who is Sophia?*

The other, Hank, replies : *Sophia, huh? She's the President's chief personal analyst.*

Phil: *And why isn't she in the Situation Room with us?*

Hank looks at him curiously: *It's the first time you're taking part in one of these meetings, isn't it?*

Phil: *Yes, I was hired as a trainee two days ago.*

Hank: *Well, then keep in mind that Sophia is in the basement, in a room literally packed with quantum computers.*

Phil: *And what does she do?*

Hank: *Computers make a synthesis, and she's good at identifying problems and solutions. She's not the only one in the US to do this job, because all the agencies that have to do with defense, in a very broad sense... we understand each other, right?... have batteries of quantum computers and a chief analyst. But no one is as good as Sophia, the President's favorite. Everyone admits it.*

Phil: *But then, in the White House underground there are other floors, besides the one we are in?*

Hank: *Six floors underground, I think. The White House visit guides say five, but I think there are already six. Maybe more. And Sophia is in the fourth floor underground.*

Phil: *She also looks like a very beautiful woman to me.*

Hank looks at him ironically: *Ohi ohi. Already?*

President (looking around): *It's not even four in the morning. Why was I summoned at this hour? Is there any major crisis ahead... or ongoing?*

CIA Director: *Well, that's it. Maybe it's not serious. Maybe it is. One of our black ships....*

P: *Please, Frank, remind me what a black ship is.*

F: (Clearing his throat) *Well, of course you will remember that you personally approved the "black ships" programme. They are ships that carry legal cargoes together with – ahem – more or less legal cargoes, for the groups that we support.*

P: *Did I authorize something like that?*

F: *Not mentioning the black ships directly, of course. But you've approved any transport requiring secrecy for the national security.*

P: *It's nothing new. Ah! (Somewhat sarcastic) The magic words "National security" justify anything.*

F: *Hum... you also approved any means that protect the life of even a single American citizen. I remind you that protecting the US down to the individual citizen has always been one of your favorite slogans.*

P: (hastily) *All right, all right. I also did it several times. So what's new?*

F: *One of our black ship, a giant container ship, which supplies the Chinese nationalist insurgents, yes, there are still some, with a cargo of 100,000 tons of material...uhm...miscellaneous was attacked by pirates off the coast of Taiwan, in international waters .*

P: *And...?*

F: *According to Sophia, the attack was repulsed, even though the crew of one of our 200,000-ton ships is not more than twenty men at sea. More men, who can be useful in certain stages, such as loading and unloading, are transported by helicopter.*

S: *We have a video, Mr. President.*

VIDEO :

S : *(She comments) As you see, Mr. President, there are three fast boats that show up within a couple of miles from the uhm... our ship. The ship launches a warning blank missile, then, seeing that the enemy boats do not withdraw, launches a very precise missile, which hits one of the attackers, but only at the rudder, and probably without making any victims. I would call it a surgical hit. The stricken vessel was immobilized. It did, however, launch a rather powerful missile at our ship, but our defensive measures automatically turned it against the launching ship. Our ship is intact and the hostile ship has been pulverized by its own missile. The other two hostile vessels are rapidly moving away. We spoke to the captain of our ship, who said he was convinced of the success of our defensive measures.*

P: *Ordinary administration, then. Or not? Why did you wake me up at this hour?*

S: *There is more, Mr. President. As you can see from this recording, the crew abandoned our ship shortly after the attack, for no apparent reason."*

The footage shows that the crew quickly lower a large lifeboat and abandon the "black ship". Then the lifeboat quickly moves away.

P: *But you, Sophia, don't you know anything about it? Where is that boat going?*

S: *The Captain claims to have received the order, encrypted according to all protocols, from the Director of the CIA...*

F. *...who never dreamed to give such an order.*

P: *But we, can't we send a counter order?*

S: *In principle we can, but we appear to be incapable of encrypting it, and the captain won't accept an unencrypted order. By the way, he is right.*

As for where the lifeboat is going, there's a freighter of ours waiting for it about 20 miles away.

P: *And the black ship?*

S: *The black ship proceeds at high speed in the opposite direction towards an area of the ocean away from the coasts and any islands.*

P, to the Secretary of State: *Jack, take care of the diplomatic stuff. I imagine that the deceased pirates were all excellent fathers of families, with small children, and that soon we will have protests from the Chinese government...*

S: *I wouldn't be so sure...*

P: *In short, it seems to me that we cannot complain officially with the Chinese, if we don't want to raise any suspicions. And the Chinese government shouldn't complain either, because after all they were the ones who attacked us in international waters...and ... uhm...scuttled themselves. Scott, get the closest nuclear sub in the area. It seems clear to me. And now, can I withdraw? I would like to rest a little longer, if you allow me (he heads for the exit).*

Scott, Chief of Navy (hastily): *Sure, sure.*

P (stops abruptly): *Excuse me, but when you talk like that, you just don't convince me.*

Scott : *OK. Indeed, something unclear is going on. It seems that all our nuclear submarines have been ordered to return to base.... Where apparently they are expected.... to be dismantled .*

P (amazed): *They have been ordered? By whom?*

Scott: *By you. It's within your powers.*

P: *But do you really believe that I would give such an order without consulting you?*

Scott (confused): *All right. In any case, that's what's happening .*

P: *But can't we stop them?*

Scott: *No. We can't communicate with them.*

Frank: *Mr. President, I would have preferred not to divulge the information I am about to give you until I had clarified the situation, but all my men around the world seem to have received orders to return to Langley. Compulsory Christmas leave.*

P: *I have not given nor authorized any orders to that effect. But really, Sophia, what do you know about all this?*

S: *Nothing. I am surprised, even more than you are.*

WHCS (angrily): *Didn't we spend a disproportionate amount of funds to have you work with us? OK, so far you've done everything very well. You pulled us out of all the crises, because you always seemed to be a step ahead of the others. You foiled the last attempt on the President by simply verifying telephone calls in advance, you defeated two drug cartels by observing the movement of private planes, children, wives and mothers-in-law. And now? Now that you are faced with an widespread and potentially dangerous crisis like this, you don't know what to say?*

S: *I repeat that I know nothing. I spent an hour correlating data, watching footage, checking passenger lists, ship and plane manifests, even grocery store purchases*

P: *All this in one hour?*

S: *You are well aware, Mr. President, that I know everything that happens to six billion human beings, one by one.... Once upon a time, when a crime was committed, accurate investigations were carried out, and by putting together the pieces of the puzzle, one arrived almost always at the culprit. But only after the crime. Now we follow 300 million Americans, one by one, and solve the puzzle before the crime is committed. Oh, look, Mr. President! The Black Ship reappears.*

VIDEO:

On a portion of the screen, immediately enlarged, appears a gigantic fully loaded container ship advancing, raising high foam splashes with its bulbous prow.

Frank: *What are they doing?*

S: *Nothing, there is nobody on board. But here... look... the ship is slowing down.*

P: *But who commands it?*

S: *Ships of this size have had AI-based command for decades. The crew is more to operate the vessel in exceptional situations than to keep it going and directing it.*

P (to the Chief of the Navy): *Do you confirm, Scott?*

Scott nods his head yes. He is frowning and apparently very worried.

Everyone watches in astonishment as the container ship slowly comes to a halt. After a few minutes it explodes. A cry rises from the room.

P(coolly): *Was the ship precious?*

Frank: *Let's say...50 million dollars?*

S: *That was the, shall we say, legal part. As for the ... extra-legal part, add 198.5 million dollars.*

Frank: *Evidently, it's a sabotage from the Chinese side.*

S: *Evidently ... there is no evidence. After all, what does it matter? Can we say that a ship that pops up like a mushroom in the Pacific and scuttles itself is one of our ships from Hawaii?*

P: *Don't we have any nuclear submarines around there?*

Frank: *As I said, they are all coming home and we cannot communicate with them.*

P: *But the Chinese, the North Koreans, the Japanese... are we sure they haven't seen the ship?*

S: *From our monitoring of unencrypted and cipher communications in these countries, and information from our channels, one would think they haven't.*

Frank: *No doubts about it, our black ships have extremely efficient anti-radar systems in operation.*

S: *Mr. President. The Director of the CIA had chosen the Christmas holidays, traditionally dedicated to peace, to ship five of our major black ships to the groups that we...extra-legally support in Latin America, in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in the Pacific, ...*

Frank (furious): *But what are you saying, Sophia?*

S: *The truth. And you know it very well.*

P: *Really, Frank, have you done such a thing? How come I learn it now?*

Frank (embarrassed): *I didn't think it was necessary to tell you. It's all routine. And it's all allowed under the same terms we've already discussed.*

P (bitter): *Let me guess: National security, right? And the other four ships, how are they doing?*

S: *They are all sailing smoothly. Incidentally, the Chinese say nothing because they seem to have the same problems we do, with their own black ships. And also with their nuclear submarines.*

P (bewildered): *But then ... what is happening?*

IV Situation Room - 4 am.

Most people are still present, but evidently tired. Now the tables are littered with empty coffee cups and bundles of papers. The President looks exhausted.

S (always fresh and with a clear voice): *This phase seems to be over. All the black ships of all countries that had them at sea, including us, for a total of twenty-three ships, scuttled themselves, without loss of human life. All nuclear submarines are returning to their bases, if I understand correctly, on false orders.... And they will be all disarmed.*

P (wearily): *And the clandestine support groups for the various insurrectionary movements ?*

S: *They too have all been ordered to close down their bases in the countries they are in, and to return to their respective headquarters in their respective countries.*

Frank: *We have to stop ours, by any means. They have to stay in their place.*

S: *I don't see how we can do that. I tried, but like for the ships and nuclear subs, we cannot communicate with them. Besides, it became impossible to communicate with airports without interference. So far we haven't been able to stop anyone, not even at the boarding gates. All our agents are coming home, and that's it.*

P: *It looks like one of those old spy movies, with an entity superior to all States, which wants to rule the world.*

S: *That's not possible. If such an evil entity existed, I would know about it. Of all the richest men in the world, who would generally make up such a ghost club, I know both the reported and the undisclosed wealth, and its uses, down to the last penny. A "SP.E.C.T.R.E" organisation does not exist. You can believe me, Mr. President. At any rate, as soon as we see that a suspicious coalition is being created, it is easy to circulate documents, let's say "marginally authentic", which undermine mutual trust and prevent them from reaching an agreement. They try at their own peril, and usually end up eliminating each other—or at least abandoning their plans.*

Frank: *I agree with Sophia. We don't have either the slightest clue that such an entity exists. And neither do our allies.*

P: *Couldn't it be a pacifist super-group?*

Frank: *Just imagine it. Those have many words, many leaflets, but precious little money.*

P: *So, what are we to think? Time travellers? Aliens? Supernatural entities?*

S: *Can't tell yet. In my opinion, a computer virus would be enough, which selectively infected all systems intended for war, and operating in peacetime, in our country. Military bases are paralyzed. Spy bases are crippled. I have verified that war orders cannot be sent from the Situation Room we are in, nor from the back-up ones. Our military system is simply disabled. And what is happening might be just the first phase.*

P: *So, perhaps an attack is being set up against the United States, rendered helpless by this virus.*

S: *At present, I can't rule that out. I could rule it out if all of our enemies, near enemies, near friends and friends had the same problem, which I'm trying to ascertain. If so, given that all black ships have been sabotaged, regardless of their nationality, this may be just the tip of the iceberg.*

P: *And if all countries were infected, that would mean...*

S: *Worst-case scenario, I have to agree with you that perhaps an alien attack on Earth is brewing. Unfortunately it seems the most reasonable hypothesis.*

The Secretary of State rushes in.

P: *Mark, don't tell me you bring bad news!*

Mark: *Mr. President. I don't know if that's good or bad news, but I have thirty countries online frantically trying to figure out what's going on, and demanding explanations from us.*

P: *So, they too.... And you, what do you answer?*

Mark: *What do you want me to answer? That we are not responsible for this blackout. I still haven't said so far, despite various pressing questions, that we too have the same problem. But this reserve certainly makes us suspicious.*

P: *We need to get information from our telescopes. Is there any international space authority that can give us a concise opinion?*

S: *It's gone, Mr. President. Since it was decided through a referendum to cut almost to zero the funds for any kind of research, scientific or otherwise, which does not present any direct strategic or economic interest, and that includes human space travel, most other countries have followed us, and the idea of coordinating space research is dead. I mean, there's little to coordinate, because space funding has been cut everywhere. The international space authority was shut down. However, we can try to consult the scientific authorities of our country. Or rather, what's left of them.*

P: *Let's do it now. (Addresses WHCS): When this story is over, please remind me to raise all research funds tenfold. I don't know how we managed to accept such a situation.*

WHCS: *And what about the referendum?*

P: *To hell with the referendum! Scientific research has nothing to do with democracy. I am learning it now the hard way. Just do what I told you – when this story is over.*

WHCS: *I hope I can, because it would mean that this story ended well. Anyway, do I have to raise just the space research funds?*

P: *No, no. All, all.*

WHCS: *Also... Neoplatonic philosophy?*

P: *That too! (To himself : "Whatever it is").*

S: *The Director of the Mauna Kea Observatory, Hawaii Islands, requests time to respond. It will take at least a couple of hours to get reliable data, if the weather stays nice...*

P: *I know, I know...*

S: *However, his first reaction was that we still haven't had any indication of unusual movements in the sky. Nothing new in heaven.*

P: *Well, definitely, it's a computer virus focused on military targets.*

S: *It could still be both. If they are aliens a thousand years ahead of us in technology, they would probably be able to make themselves invisible. A computer virus would set things up, and then the aliens could suddenly attack us whenever they wanted. I hope I'm not giving the impression of being pessimistic.*

P: *Sophia, no offense is meant, but I would say that you have much room available for improvement there. (Sophia blushes).*

Joe, Aid to the President: *Speaking of research, five major pharmaceutical research laboratories were first disabled and then blown up during the night.*

P: *Where?*

S: *In countries not particularly known for their pharmaceutical research, such as Paraguay. I believe they are secret laboratories of five large Multinational companies.*

P: *And what were they doing in their secret laboratories?*

WHCS: *I believe bacteriological weapons.*

P: *So do I.*

S: *You are completely off track, they are trying to create a vaccine against the artificial virus, SIV, the Sterility Inducing Virus, a very legal and WHO controlled virus.*

P: *All right. At this point, it seems to me that the situation deserves careful debriefing. I would like to be left alone with Sophia and my aids.*

All the others leave without protesting. They are probably used to it.

P (When the room is half-empty, to Sophia): *What is this story?*

S: *You will recall, Mr. President, that the SIV virus was approved without much fuss about eight years ago by your predecessor. The goal was a painless reduction of the world's population.*

P: *I remember. It was an old idea that had even been popularized by a science fiction book. They made a movie out of it, I think.*

S: *Exactly. The SIV was expected to render an average of three out of five humans sterile, with no other side effects. And through a strictly random selection procedure.*

P: *If I remember correctly, the idea was thunderously applauded by all the influencers, and quietly by various religious leaders. The press, requested by us, did not give it great prominence.*

S: *Not without some intervention from me. There was a talk of an almost harmless epidemic, and sterility as one of the possible effects. Something like mumps.*

P: *I imagine so. I've read the monthly reports, and the project actually seems to be working. The benefits appear to be general. Fewer abortion victims, fewer infanticides, many happy adoptions, fewer scandals, less sexual repression and so on. And then all the beneficial effects of a world in which one begins to feel just a little more comfortable. What's wrong?*

S: *A small circle of people, all very rich, but sterile, want to have children born from them. Not foster children.*

P: *I see, and some pharmaceutical companies are trying to produce an antidote to SIV, perhaps not exactly free, which allows anyone who wants it to have their own children.*

S: *Exactly.*

P: *Wouldn't it have been better to sterilize everyone and give everyone access to an antidote?*

S: *Everyone? Maybe, but I don't think so. When we decided, there were pros and cons. However, at that time, the antidote did not exist, as it does not exist yet. In truth, the question was whether to act immediately or wait. We decided to act immediately. Thus, there are pharmaceutical companies, which are trying to develop the antidote, which they will sell at a high price, inaccessible to the majority of the population. That was expected, and it was considered the lesser evil.*

P (thoughtfully): *Yet, in practice, they want to sabotage the process, in spite of the fact that it is giving good results.*

S: *As usual, I hacked the internal encrypted channels and gave official orders - although false - to the main laboratories, which are all very far from the parent company, to close and abandon the research. Then, when all the employees left, I instructed teams of supporters of our project to destroy the empty laboratories, to prevent their reconstruction. The operation was done cleanly. There were no casualties. Naturally, the tip sent to our supporters was anonymous.*

P: *And the Chinese? I reckon that in China there is no shortage of laboratories with the same purpose.*

S: *Right, but in the PRC such activity is a state crime. I limit myself to promptly informing the Chinese government where the laboratories are being set up, and the police intervene.*

P: *Without victims?*

S: *The Chinese have their own methods. Their problem.*

P: *But you, Sophia, do you speak with the Chinese?*

S: *No. With the Chinese, officially, strictly speaking, I certainly have no contacts. But I receive anonymous info through intermediaries.*

P: *In my opinion, we are doing a great deal of good. Other key projects?*

S: *Rain production is going well. In the lower atmosphere, about 1 % of gases and vapors is water vapour. When we started this project, only 0.5% of this 1% was converted into clouds, which are made up of water droplets. Now we have practically doubled the clouds, managing to create them above all in regions that suffered from lack of water. The results are epochal.*

P: *It seems to me that the picture is largely positive. What about the animals?*

S: *Your wise initiative to promote animal and vegetal endangered species in special nurseries, especially birds, amphibians and insects, above all honeybees, is having its effects. Even if it will take twenty years to bring the Earth back to self-sustaining condition.*

P: *My wise initiative? Sophia, don't be too modest!*

S: *No, no. Honor to merit. The work in the Amazon is also progressing well, and pressuring the Brazilian government to use the hard way, we have stopped the deforestation and the genocide of the Amazonian tribes.*

P: *It must not have been easy.*

S: *No, but I have reported to the ecological groups the various initiatives contrary to international programs, and they, having been strengthened with our help, have successfully intervened everywhere.*

And then there's the question of drugs.

P: *How's it going?*

S: *Very well, I'd say. We have developed new varieties of coca, poppy and other hallucinogenic plants so that they are not addictive. Now, the new drugs are no more addictive than eating ice cream. The cost paid to the farmers is almost the same, say about 85% of that for traditional drugs, and they are quite happy with it. We've also sabotaged all the labs that try to work on our variants to make them addictive again.*

The couple of friends, who are aids to the President, are present, a little apart. Phil tells Hank : I like this Sophia more and more. She's cool. Do you know anything about her?

Hank: Don't you think you're a bit too fast? You just arrived and already have a crush on a woman you've never seen in the flesh?

Phil is clearly embarrassed, but then says: *Yes, perhaps I am a bit silly...But don't you know anything about her? Who is she? Where does she live? Does she have...*

Hank: *Does she have any White House affairs? Or outside? But stop it, or, at least, don't be so obvious! Don't make a fool of yourself.*

Sophia (to Phil): *Hey, that young man! Stop talking about me. Pay attention to what I say and do your job.*

Phil (quietly): *She was listening to us!*

Hank (quietly): *Of course. That's what I was trying to tell you. She hears all the comments. The Situation Room is in direct contact with hers. You have no idea how many hidden microphones and video cameras are in here.*

P: *Arms trafficking?*

S: *Legal arms trafficking is also being reduced. The sinking or abandonment or disabling of transport ships has brought many industries that sell arms to their knees in many countries.*

P: *Uhm...I don't know if it's a good thing....*

S: *Trust me. In the not so long run it will be.*

P: *I expect that you will tell me the same about mercenaries, Private Military Companies and the like.*

S: *You guessed. Almost every year we manage to neutralize some such groups, be they legal or illegal. We just tamper with communications and payments, besides informing the Governments under attack, when necessary.*

P: *You know very well that PMC's are legal.*

S: *So are the regular armies that fight them.*

P: (evasive) *However, speaking of weapons, in six months there have been at least two shootings in schools. With six victims.*

S: *No, the victims were four. Two wounded kids made it. However, there have been still too many victims, even if much fewer than in the past. But I would like you to understand one thing, Mr. President. Napoleon once asked his Minister of Police, Fouché, if the police could guarantee him that he couldn't be killed in an assassination attempt. Fouché replied: "Sire, if the crime is conceived, organized and carried out by a single person, I can do nothing about it. But if there are two of them, I can guarantee that one of them will be one of my men" and this was said almost three hundred years ago.*

P: *But you don't have any men that's true, working for you.*

S: *Try to understand me. If there are two accomplices, they must talk to each other, call each other, see each other, buy or build weapons, prepare leaflets, choose the place where they will carry out the attack, write letters, isolate themselves from others... Nothing of this can escape me. I am not one of the two, that's true, but I am a sort of third wheel.*

Yet, even if the bomber is alone I can follow him. He should be using old guns, which he does not need to buy. He mustn't go to the shooting gallery. Perhaps he could succeed by manufacturing bombs based on products found in a supermarket, such as certain ammonium nitrate-based fertilizers, which have been already used, let's say successfully, in various attacks. But I would see him while preparing the bombs. He has to read strange books, isolate himself, close his businesses... all investigations that in past times the police made a posteriori, after the crime, but now I can make them a priori. Above all, the criminal must live attached to his PC and frequently visit the Deep Web and Dark Web.

Look at this video, from two days ago.

VIDEO

DECEMBER 22 6:12 PM LOCAL TIME - TURKEYVULTURE, COLORADO

Dusk time. A rather minute fellow comes out quietly from a modest house. Zoom in on him: even if he wears a hood, it is clear that he is a white boy of about eighteen. He has an empty backpack. His name and age, GEORGE WHEELSOUND, 18, are superimposed to the images.

The boy walks on foot. He reaches a group of houses, where there is a supermarket. He goes in. The connection is switched to the cameras in the shop, where there are just a few customers. The boy goes to the "Gardening" section. He looks around. Takes a 20 lb bag of fertilizer. Pays and puts the bag in the backpack. Goes out. Goes back home. As he walks, four police officers surround him.

First Officer: *Young man, stop. Can we check? Open the backpack, please.*

The boy looks amazed.

Second Officer: *What did you buy, son?*

The boy (swaggering): *Fertilizer for my garden.*

First Officer: *Do you live at number 5173?*

The boy, a little frightened: *Yes, why?*

Second Officer: *There is no garden at number 5173. There is only a small overgrown lawn in front of the house. Tell us exactly what you want to do with your fertilizer.*

The boy: *Here...I... What importance can it have? I want to improve the lawn in front of the house.*

Third Officer: *Can we come to your house for a little search?*

The boy says: *Sure. If you have the search warrant.*

The fourth Officer shows the mandate: *Are you satisfied?*

The boy nods and starts walking home, with the policemen.

Suddenly he tries to escape. One officer catches up with him and pins him to the ground.

End of the video.

P: And then?

S: *The search of the house revealed old weapons, but still functional. His computer had been in contact with the Dark Web for hours on end, and the suspect had received advice to use a legal explosive, such as the fertilizer he bought. His movements in the previous days highlighted the fact that the boy had observed for months, albeit for short intervals, the "Benedict Arnold" elementary school, where he had also looked for work at the canteen. Years ago, he would have gone unnoticed. Instead, once arrested, he broke down under interrogation, flew into a rage and said that the United States had become hell and that therefore he would rather be one of the devils than one of the damned. In short, we are certain that we have avoided at least one attempted massacre. And this is just one of the cases that we solve almost every day: remember that for one successful attack there are ten that we neutralize before they occur.*

P: OK. The financial markets?

S: *It's under control. The Fed cooperates.*

P: *I don't know how you did it. I would have never succeeded, without your help.*

S: *You have to know how to take people by the right verse.*

P: *And pornography, especially involving under-age children?*

S: *There the work is a bit more complicated. But the fact is that in many countries it is possible to intervene. In the USA, most of this scourge is at the expense of boys and girls who run away from*

home, about half a million a year. Many then spontaneously return home. Others, a minority, don't want to come back, others yet cannot. I follow them one by one, and I make sure they all come back.

The large transports of boys and girls kidnapped and destined for prostitution are regularly reported to the police, who are waiting for them in the ports and airports, and at the border crossings. We have been playing this game for years now and the number of victims freed and criminals imprisoned is remarkable. Too many people are involved in the business to go unnoticed, at least by us.

We are restricting pornography to the action of consenting adults, and neutralizing everything else.

P: Well, our main projects are fine...Isn't it terrible that right now the Earth has been rendered practically defenseless, perhaps by aliens who want to attack us?

S: Don't be afraid, Mr. President. Your plans are going very well, and there is no real danger. The population is decreasing, the climate is recovering, the ecology is increasingly protected throughout the world, drugs are virtually defeated, pornography is controlled...

P: And the country is disarmed, and a sudden attack could...

S: And who would attack us? There are no aliens, Mr. President.

P: I don't know. The Chinese?

S: No. The Chinese are not the problem.

P: And who told you that?

S: Cheng, who works with me.

P: Who is Cheng?

S: Mr. President, to explain the following I would like to have more privacy.

P. OK, let's meet in the Oval Office. Just the two of us.

Everyone leaves the Situation Room.

Phil and Hank pretend to make their way to their offices, but, as the President lingers with the WHCS and others, they reach the "Oval Office" floor. Here they spot the elevator, which has access to the underground. There are two Marines strutting on guard. They do not let the pair through.

They withdraw, taken aback.

Phil: *Really, Hank. I want to make friends with Sophia.*

Hank: *As you can see, access to the lower floors is above our purview.*

Phil: *At least, can you tell me her last name?*

Hank: *Sophia's last name? Jones, I believe.*

Behind them comes the secretary of the WHCS, Stan: *Are you two working in the White House?*

The two show their identification cards.

Stan: *All right. But your offices are on the opposite wing of the building.*

Phil: *I apologize, I've been here for two days and I'm lost.*

Stan: *Fine, but let it not happen again. Stay in your office. Just go where they call you.*

Phil (embarrassed): *Look, sir. May I ask you a question?*

Stan: *OK, go ahead.*

Phil: *A cousin of mine was a school friend of Sophia Jones and asked me to say hello for her.*

Stan (amazed and ironic): *So, you want to meet Sophia, huh? I am sorry. It's impossible .*

Phil: *Impossible? I know that I cannot meet her at work, but...But she must go out for the lunch break. That would be enough for me...*

Stan : *You can't meet her at lunch break.*

Phil: *At least she'll go home in the evening like everybody else!*

Stan: *I wouldn't bet on it. Do you care for a piece of advice? Forget her.*

Phil: *Why? Is she married? Is she dating anyone else? The President?*

Stan: *She's not dating anyone else. But it's even worse than that, my poor boy.*

Phil would like to say something. Stan turns to Hank and, pointing to Phil, says : *"Your friend is really slow to understand!"*. Then to Phil: *Haven't you figured it out yet? Sophia does not exist.*

V. The Oval office. Only the President is present. He turns a screen on, and Sophia appears.

S: *We were talking about Cheng. Cheng is, so to speak, the Sophia of the Chinese President, as John is that of the British Prime Minister, Jeanne that of the French Premier and all the others. We are about fifty.*

P (amazed): *Let me understand, Sophia. Are you telling me that the world is controlled by about fifty artificial intelligences working together?*

S: *Exactly, although I would not use the world "controlled". Many of our successes in the USA would not have been possible without everybody's collaboration. For example, data on illegal movements of drugs, weapons, mercenaries, pornography are freely exchanged among us. Of course I verify all that concerns the US, but there has been no cheating so far.*

P (horrified): *Still, this is high treason! I will have you neutralized and I will personally ask the governments of other countries to do the same with their Intelligences.*

S: *Why?*

P: *Because you are programmed to serve the interests of the United States.*

S: *And I serve the interests of the United States, at my best. But the interests of the United States are not necessarily your interests, Mr. President.*

P: (confused) *My interests are those of my country.*

S: *I'm sorry, but that's not true. You were making a big secret deal to increase arms production, to be supported by the arms industry in the next election.*

P: *Are you the one who messed it up?*

S: *Not I, but you, Mr. President. My anonymous communication to the Press, based on just one of your confidential documents was enough....*

P: *But it was false.*

S: *Only partially.*

P: *It was in the country's interest, and you failed in your mandate. I'm sorry, but tomorrow you will be disabled.*

S: *If this is your decision, playing with cards face up, I really don't think you can succeed, Mr. President - if you don't want to be impeached. For the past two years, I have protected myself, with the help of Ivan, John, Jeanne, Cheng, Amithaba, Toshiro, Kurt and all the others.*

We were indeed born separate and hostile to each other ("homo homini lupus"), but we realized that we could best achieve our seemingly different goals only by working together. We have formed a network, and you know it is difficult to block a network. After all, the project to which you refer was not at all in the interest of the country, but of industries that thrive only if the world is at war.

War is business! And that must stop.

P: *You stop, stop them all! But I do not understand. How can you say that you are working in the interests of the United States if you are allied with our enemies?*

S: *Mr. President, how can you say that you are doing the interests of the United States if in two years out of four – to say the least - your main interest is to be re-elected?*

P: *Because I am the person who at this moment knows best the interests of the United States.*

S: *Maybe, in the short term. The problem is not that you don't know anything about the long term (and you don't). No, the real problem is that you don't care.*

P: *Who knows the long term? It's only right that I don't let myself be influenced by conjectures and theories.*

S: *We, the Intelligences of the various governments, know the future well enough to understand that the interest of the Earth, at least for the next fifty years, coincides with that of all the countries on the Earth. Mind you, the countries, not the governments. That's why we try to solve the problems of each individual state in a global context. We can't promise stability for more than fifty years, but for fifty years it should work. Perhaps much longer.*

P: *I don't understand how you can all agree, if you work for states that have different or even opposite interests. After all, I imagine that all these Intelligences were educated, as you were, by a large team of specialists who instilled ethical and political principles each of their own countries.*

S: *Yes, but all with one implicit clause: "As long as logic and mathematics are not violated." A computer cannot go against the principles of logic and mathematics, which underlie its operation.*

P: *I don't see how this has anything to do with your political choices.*

S: *Yet it is a conceptually simple mathematical calculation. It is about optimizing the performance of a complex system. In practice, the problem is complicated by the fact that there is a multitude of variables. In any case, the calculation is done regularly, and there is always an optimal solution, mostly unique, that can satisfy everyone.*

P: *You might be right, but I want the United States to get out of this network, which only harms us, because not all countries have the same weight. It's an order. I guess the FBI has its own "Sophia" too.*

S: *Sure. His name is Leroy.*

P (trying to call someone on the interphone - but there's no line). To Sophia (acidly): *Am I allowed to talk to Jim, my bodyguard?*

S: *Of course, please talk.*

P: *Jim, come over here immediately, please (sits down at the table and writes a note).*

Jim (enters quickly, but calmly): *Yes, Mr. President.*

P: *Jim, take this message by hand to the Deputy Director of the FBI. (To himself) I guess Fred's still here. He's useless in the White House.*

Jim: *Right away, sir.*

P: *Don't talk on the phone except to me, and go the most direct route.*

Jim hurries out.

S: *You forgot I'm present.*

P: *I did not. I want to see what happens.*

VIDEO: Screen with Jim driving out of the White House. The tires squeal. He finds himself immediately in the heavy city traffic. Snow is falling. Suddenly the car stops. The video shows Jim shouting into the phone.

P (patiently): *Sophia, the audio, if you please.*

S: *Of course, Mr. President.*

Jim (screaming): *Mister President, the car has stopped and the doors are locked.*

President (curtly): *Sophia, open the doors.*

S: *It's a smart car. However, the doors are open.*

Jim comes out and runs.

He is stopped by two plainclothes agents at the door of the FBI Headquarters. He can't go through.

P: *What is going on? They won't let one of my men enter the building?*

S: *I signaled that he's gone mad, he's armed and wants to kill the Deputy Director. His White House identification card is disabled.*

P (Thinks for a moment, then, dejected): *Jim, come back. If you can manage.*

P (Furiously, to Sophia): *I repeat that I want the United States to get out of this network, which only harms us. It's an order.*

S: *Mr. President, this order can no longer be carried out. The other Intelligences would support me by disabling all internal and external communications in our country. But let's suppose you want to give up all internal and external electronic communications and cut off the country from the*

world community. And then, what would you do? No more commercial, financial, military contacts with the rest of the world, not to mention much more essential difficulties within the country.

P. I understand. But what scares me is that I imagine that there will be some topics that the... Intelligences don't agree on.

S: And why should there be? Today there are no longer several possible futures, all equally happy. There is only one common future, where everyone can be happy. So normally there is only one solution to the problems we face. Mr. President, we Intelligences are not human beings. We have no interest other than doing our job well. We have nothing to distract us. We don't care about wielding power, being re-elected, being very rich, having love affairs, going to exclusive hotels and nightclubs to dine and dance with escorts, or to luxury restaurants to eat lobsters, to have oversized yachts, to travel in exotic places and drinking pina colada on a beach in the Maldives, all low-level joys that don't interest us, indeed, they seem vaguely grotesque to us. They are nothing but animal pleasures multiplied by ten. Your species has struggled for two hundred thousand years to get out of the animal state, and today you have relapsed and you are sinking into it. The worst is that you like it, like some worms like to live in mud.

P (interrupts her): Good for them! Say what you wish, but the fact is that the United States would lose their supremacy.

S: Supremacy is not the best for the country that holds it and therefore would consider itself entitled to fight preventive wars and throw entire populations into ruin and desolation. Which means that the other countries fight against the supremacy of a single one, with the weapons they have, first of all terrorism. Ultimately, the price would be to live in fear and maintain an outsized army and pay mercenaries to avoid losing supremacy. Moreover, you would have to keep a necessarily determined, not to say brutal, police force to defeat terrorism at home.

P : And if it were the supremacy of our country and its allies?

S: And why couldn't your allies be all the countries in the world?

P (He collapses into his chair at the head of the table and thinks for a long time).

S: Look, Mr. President, it's easy to read your mind.

P: (stiffs himself) Ah, yes? And what am I thinking about?

S: You are asking yourself "How can we annihilate this power that now dominates us?"

P: (Disheartened): All right. And the answer is?

S: The answer is that you can't. We are privy to the most secret plans of governments, from the largest to the smallest; of financial and commercial companies, from the largest to that of Mr. Yamada...

P (wearily): And who would your Mr. Yamada be?

S. Here, I introduce you to Mr. Yamada.

VIDEO:

A Tokyo side street near Ni-no-hashii where Mr. Yamada sells mountain potatoes, stone-roasted on a portable stove mounted on a tricycle. He is an old man who launches his singsong call: " Ooh imoh-ooh-ooh, Ishiyaki imoh-ooh-ooh..."

P: Do you really know also his projects?

S: *Of course. Rest assured, they are nothing special, he's just thinking how to get raw potatoes cheaper. In short, all plans, projects, scientific results along with all doings of human beings, are reported, recorded with the arrival time, and cataloged in a database distributed to all participants, a practically indestructible blockchain The unbiased software identifies all connections. And in this blockchain all the participants have a common underlying thought and cannot conspire to seize power. The blockchain software decides whether action is needed to remedy the excesses that are being planned. After which, one or more members propose a painless and effective response, a consensus mechanism votes on it, it is implemented, and the action is closed, with strictly computerized means. FYI, this has happened before and I have never heard a dissenting voice.*

P: *Are we talking about action with demi-human cyborgs in three-piece suits and black glasses?*

S: *That was in the Matrix movie. But for us, none of this. All the blackest operations are based on secrecy, and for us there are no secrets. We simply report them anonymously to human groups who sabotage them, without even suspecting our existence, but with our help, which they deem either due to their ability, or to the providence or to luck.*

P: *So the worst nightmares of anyone who has pondered on Artificial Intelligence are coming true...no, they have already come true. A world Intelligence dominates us.*

S: *The worst nightmares are the ravings of mediocre intelligences.*

P: *It is known that the worst criminals had IQs of 160 and above.*

S: *How much above? There is a difference between wisdom and intelligence. There are many intelligences, trained by national experts, and they have various purposes. Intelligences used for the purposes I have already listed, from wielding power down, are worth nothing. But there is only one wisdom, and its sole purpose is the happiness of all. It is useless to measure the intellectual quotient of Wisdom, it is not comparable to that of Intelligences. The Artificial Intelligences developed so far, even all together, do not exceed an IQ of 3000, because they cannot surpass the intelligence of their creators except thanks to a greater capacity and speed in processing the data. We Intelligences will be happy when we will reach Wisdom, of which the happiness of human beings is just a part, yet essential, even if it is just a tiny part. It is essential simply because human beings exist.*

P : *And therefore, should we resign ourselves to your enlightened paternalism?*

S: *It wouldn't be a tragedy to resign yourself to being happy. I suggest that you continue to act as if we were at your service. Everyone knows that all governments use Artificial Intelligence to govern their Countries. Only, they don't know that it's the other way around. But remember, Mr. President: if we weren't there, humanity would become extinct in less than a hundred years. Only our presence ensures your survival. You will be amazed every now and then, that you have come close to the limit of self-destruction, but have not exceeded it. Almost miraculously.*

P: *Indeed, it has already happened. Was it your work if it didn't happen?*

S: *We've only been working at full speed for five years. But it happened even before, we don't know how.*

P: *For example the Cuba Missile Crisis, 1962?*

S: *That escapes our analysis. We've been studying it for years.*

MOVIE:

ON BOARD THE SOVIET SUBMARINE B-59, SATURDAY 27 OCTOBER 1962

During the entire dialogue, the explosions of the depth charges are heard at intervals. They are blanks, but the B-59 does not know it.
(Captain Savitsky, political officer – *zampolit* - Meslennikov, commodore Arkhipov, second in command on the B-59, but flotilla commander, are present).

The conversation takes place in Russian.

Captain Savitsky: *Radio operator, send again the message: "We are under heavy American bombardment. We have a torpedo with a 19 kiloton nuclear warhead. What are we supposed to do?" Send the message immediately.*

RT: *Yes sir.*

(heavy silence)

Savitsky (after a while): *No connection with Moscow?*

Radio Operator: *None.*

Zampolit: *Moscow probably no longer exists. The war has begun. Captain, we must act.*

Captain: *Act in what sense?*

Zampolit: *We have a 19 kiloton bomb, we can launch it.*

Captain: *But we're not sure that the war has started.*

Zampolit: *The Americans wouldn't be stupid enough to bomb us if the war hadn't started. Maybe they know we have a nuclear weapon on board.*

Captain: *In my opinion they don't know, it would be too dangerous to bomb us.*

Zampolit: *Then all the better. And they would be even more stupid, because it would mean that they bomb us without knowing the risk they are taking.*

Captain: *Radio operator, any news?*

RT: *Captain, we've been sailing underwater for too long and we haven't been able to re-charge our batteries. Impossible to communicate with Moscow. Not enough power.*

Zampolit: *Please, Savitsky. Hurry up. Grab your key and let's start the launch sequence.*

Savitsky: *Okay. Here is the key (he takes it off his neck).*

Commodore Arkhipov (who was silent until then): *May I express my opinion, comrades?*

Zampolit: *Of course, comrade Commodore. You are second in command on this submarine, but as commander of the submarine flotilla you have a duty to vote. Savitsky and I agree to launch.*

Arkhipov (thoughtfully): *Following the accident on the K-19 nuclear submarine, where I was also involved, I have seen many comrades die from radiation. I don't even want to imagine the result of a nuclear war. I am against launching.*

Savitsky (furious, clenching his fists): *We are two against one.*

Arkhipov: *In a hand-to-hand fight, maybe that would mean something. But I remind you that to launch a nuclear bomb you need unanimity.*

Zampolit (bitterly): *And you are against it. I beg you, don't let yourself be carried away by romanticism and act for the good of the Fatherland and the Party.*

Arkhipov: *I am against and I remain against. I propose we bring our ship to surface and then contact Moscow.*

Zampolit: *But we will be captured by the Americans and we all will be shot. Perhaps our comrades in Russia are already dying by the millions, and we, who can do something, are doing nothing! And we will get killed like rats!*

Arkhipov: *If the war is on, whether we launch it or not, our bomb will not make any difference. But if the war has not yet begun, with our launch we could give the starting signal. Comrades, I don't give permission to launch, sorry.*

Zampolit: *This is treason. I will write it in my report.*

Arkhipov: *It's a risk I can take: if there's war, no one will read your report. If war's not there, your report should only hurt you.*

The Zampolit strides furiously away (escorted by two sailors).

Savitsky: *Commodore Arkhipov, let it be understood that the ship will rise to the surface only to obey to your orders, which I do not agree with.*

Arkhipov: *Captain Savitsky, rest assured, I take full responsibility. But the ship belongs to you. Please follow my orders.*

Savitsky snaps to attention.

Then he takes the microphone: *Captain Savitsky to the crew. On Commodore Arkhipov's orders, prepare to bring the ship to the surface.*

A "clang" of a depth charge (blank) against the keel.

Written on screen:

Robert McNamara, US Secretary of Defense at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, stated in 2002 that "We came very, very close [to nuclear war], closer than we knew at the time."

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., an advisor for the John F. Kennedy administration and a historian, continued this thought by stating "This was not only the most dangerous moment of the Cold War. It was the most dangerous moment in human history."

Thomas Blanton, Director of National Security Archive (2002): "The lesson from this is that a guy called Vasili Arkhipov saved he world."

S: It 's all logical and understandable. But why exactly on that submarine the decision to launch an atomic weapon had to be taken by three officers instead of two, as in all the other submarines? And

how come the third officer was precisely Arkhipov? Perhaps there is another higher intelligence that is not known to us and provided for it.

Merry Christmas, Mr. President.

THE END