

Epilogue I:

You are to be wed to the Empress of China.

Before the announcement, you had just been stepping onto the world stage. You were *significant*, yes. After your accomplishments in invading and occupying a major Chinese city, no one could argue that. Moreover, the fact that you'd done it without anyone being made aware of it until it was too late spoke volumes of your capabilities regardless of your success. Facing down the Empire of the Rising Sun merely cemented a growing legend.

But that was a *regional* fame.

For all that the people of Europa United like to picture themselves as more enlightened than the politically conservative and backwards Britanniains, the truth is that the bulk of the population of both regions simply did not care what was happening half a world away. Of course, the same could be said of the people of China about the affairs of either of the two other global superpowers. People and events might be noteworthy, but they are not *relevant*.

Relevancy, in this instance, being a function of *threat*.

A man with an army, no matter how loyal and capable, is limited by tactics, strategy, logistics, and political support.

A man with a *nation* is no longer so limited.

In the stroke of a pen and the announcement of vows, you move from a topic of curiosity and concern within the ranks of the political strategists and gossiping bar-stool analysts to a looming shadow in the minds of entire populations and the recurring discourse of news agencies.

Prior to this development, another strange aspect of your political status was that the EU public had been fairly warm to you, even as a Britannian prince. As someone who had joined forces with their forsaken Australian colony to fight pirates, your reputation was something of the 'Good One' of Britannian Royals. Even your intercession in the Chinese Civil War was looked upon optimistically, given the wide-ranging knowledge of the Eunuch's mismanagement of the country.

In Britannia, though, you were suffering a constant stream of negative press from all those who were either aligned against you or saw you as a developing threat to their own entrenched status. The announcement of your impending marriage with the Chinese Empress, moreover as her second husband, immediately took the sting out of your threat. No longer were you competition for the HBE's political power and a latecomer threat for the throne, but now an emissary representing Britannia's interests to a powerful ally.

Significantly, 'ally' was not too far off the mark.

With a non-aggression pact in place, a cooperative research grant to be finalized, and a Britannian prince both marrying into the royal family as well as taking a powerful position in the

Chinese government...

It is an alliance in all but name.

And it sends shockwaves through the global political order.

In the wake of an attack on the very heart of the Holy Britannian Empire, news of the new ties established with China and the possibility of increasing access to rare earth metals, sakuradite in Indonesia, and increased trade between the two nations acts as a stabilizing agent in the chaos. Further, China proves to be a fertile market for second and even third-generation Britannian weaponry in the wake of their civil war. As the country goes through a complete reorganization of their military under the revived Banner Army system, the stockpiles of semi-obsolete weaponry serve as a valuable stopgap between the completely outdated arms previously being used and the newly-announced weapons which will be domestically developed.

One of the most significant and immediate consequences of the semi-alliance, though, is the negotiated peace between the eastern half of the now-former MEF and Britannia. With the revelation that the Eunuchs had been smuggling resources, war materiel, and other supplies to the embattled state, that lifeline is abruptly cut with the final fall of High Eunuch forces and the destruction of their distribution network. Reorganizing itself as the Neo-Persian Constitutional Monarchy, the cessation of hostilities and establishment of a solid border allows Britannia to consolidate its gains and focus on the series of revolts and terrorist attacks in the wake of the attack on Pendragon.

The western MEF, fueled by the hope of a Europa United intercession on their behalf, refused to give in so easily, even as EU diplomats offered to negotiate on their behalf and Bulgarian forces close in on Constantinople. The ultimate resolution of the conflict results in a coup by the military to end the war after the MEF's western capital is lost to a combined assault by Bulgarian forces and Cornelia's army.

It is only then that the EU, slumbering beast it is, begins to stir.

Massive landships roll through the Balkans on the European superhighways, less 'vehicles' and more 'mobile terrain features' equipped with enormous guns most commonly seen on naval vessels than anything else.

A few tense months pass as Bulgaria and Cornelia's army regroup in Constantinople under the heavy shadow of the EU's First, Second, and Third Rolling Fleets.

The Bonaparte, in particular, casts an enormous threat on The City of the World's Desire from a secure base high in Balkans well over fifty miles away.

Schneizel eu Britannia personally attends to negotiations, bringing an end to the standoff after a lengthy round of debate between Bulgaria, the newly-formed Anatolian Republic, the Holy Britannian Empire, and Europa United.

In the end, Bulgaria will be allowed to retain its independence and Constantinople, and will be admitted to the Union as an Associate Member, a new designation created specifically for the occasion. Greece, a latecomer to the conflict in its waning days, declares sovereignty over a number of islands in the Dardanelles and a few small slivers of contested lands on the former MEF border. The EU backs these claims as a transparent attempt to hold some level of

control in the straits that connect the Black and Mediterranean Seas.

Cornelia li Britannia's forces retain the eastern half of the city of Constantinople, drawing an international boundary between the two districts and continents in the water between them. As part of the agreement reached, both sides will be permanently demilitarized, with representatives from the other superstates of the world forming an international inspection agency in order to ensure no heavy weaponry outside of a single company of disarmed ceremonial KMFs on the Britannian side and a similar unit for the newly-formed Bulgarian Legion on the European side.

Constantinople itself is isolated within a special district and, while the final agreements hold that it does not require authorization to travel across the straits, it will require documentation to enter and leave the city itself.

Britannia also lays claim to the southern shore of the Black Sea, reinforcing Greater Armenia and Kurdistan as buffer states between their own holdings and the Rus Republic. The Anatolian Republic retains right to much of the remainder of the peninsula, ultimately establishing the boundaries for the next Area as well. Lila la Britannia is formally inaugurated as the Viceroy of Area 11, reigning across much of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. A separate peace is signed with the Ethiopian Empire to finalize the borders of the southwestern corner of the Arabian peninsula.

Within Britannia, the year after your upcoming nuptials are announced, your brother and sister also announce an impending marriage. Guinevere and Odysseus, over the objection of the groom's mother, are to be wed shortly before you, yourself.

Closer to 'home,' you are eventually required to return the city of Guangzhou to the Chinese government. In a grand ceremony filled with pomp, you meet your intended wife for only the second time, handing over control of the area and honoring the various mercenary bands who were part of your forces for both their valor and self-control during the seizure of the lands and the occupation thereof. Each of them walk away with what is, to them, a large bonus.

In recognition of your own good treatment of the populace, Lihua grants you some small personal lands in the rural, inland part of the city as well as personal ownership of the former High Eunuch's governmental palace and its attendant grounds. Given that you are well-liked among the people and a nearly-unquestionably loyal part of her new administration, it accomplishes the dual goal of giving the new governor direct local oversight and ensuring that you don't show up at the capital too much.

The Ministry of Culture, Arts, Heritage, and Ceremonies is *largely* a figurehead, after all.

Your appointment, as a foreigner, to the position, raises a number of eyebrows among the population, but many see it as a promise by the new Empress to more closely retain governmental power within the immediate royal family. As Li Xingke is appointed head of the overall military in recognition of his successful inland subjugation of Eunuch forces and her cousin's fiance, one of the Ma Clique, is placed in charge of the Ministry of Education, Research, and Development, this theory is quickly borne out.

Kaguya Sumeragi is appointed as the new head of the Ministry of Diplomatic Affairs over her own objections. It takes some time to draw the girl out of her depressive funk after the

revelation that she almost killed her friend's cousin, but between yourself and Euphemia you manage to slowly drag her out of her self-imposed isolation.

Yet another thing that Lihua, privately, thanks you for after the ceremonial handover of her city, when it comes out that Kaguya had been so utterly distraught over the news that Lihua had a number of her most trusted staff keeping covert watch on her friend to ensure she did not make a tragic mistake while overcome by sadness.

It comes as a shock to you, but one which you are thankful to have avoided.

The last significant occurrence of your tumultuous recent years, unsurprisingly, revolves around Kallen Stadfeld. Shortly after transferring New Caledonia to Jeanne Rowe's personal ownership, along with its associated title, you get word that Japan formally detained Kallen and her family with accusations of spying for the Britannian Empire.

It is... a bit of a diplomatic clusterfuck.

Genbu Kururugi had been tenaciously attempting to keep himself in power, staunchly defending his position against all critics and challengers. The result of his retaining his position resulted in frigid relations between the empires of China and Japan, the effect doubling as the semi-alliance between China and Britannia was announced. With Euro-Britannia still largely under the control of the throne in Pendragon, this effectively isolated the island nation to the north, east, and west, with the only saving grace being Indonesia's newfound, if limited, autonomy meant that they could still ensure travel to the African Unions and the EU.

This becomes important as the remaining superstates begin to draw up mutual defense treaties to attempt to ensure their own safety in the face of an apparently consolidating power bloc. The African Unions, especially, appear to redouble their efforts to properly draw in the neutral states of the Central African Union into one enormous super-alliance spanning the majority of the continent. The EU, on the other hand, easily ratifies a treaty with Japan and, with the new threat at the very doorstep of Europa, attempts reconciliation with the Rus Republic.

To no avail.

Even as the rest of the world attempts to take a step back from hostilities in the wake of a major terrorist attack, a civil war, elevated piracy, and an attempted coup, the Rus Republic is determined to engage in increasingly daring acts of brinkmanship with Euro-Britannia.

It is into this new emerging world that you must make your decisions.

For Kallen, you decide to...

Rescue Kallen Diplomatically – You can't take the risk that your covert operations in Japan will be discovered.

Through Any Means Necessary – You'll send an elite team in to retrieve your elite pilot and her family.

In the coming years you'll focus on...

Your Leadership of the Chinese Ministry (Psionics)

Your Private Technological Development (Psi-Tech)

- [] Taking Over Australia (Finally)
- [] Coordinating Your Personal Relationships
- [] Ancient Ruins Exploration
- [] Target New Heaven
- [] Investigate Pendragon Terrorists
- [] Personal Oversight of the Taklamakan Research Grant

Epilogue II:

Perhaps of all ministerial positions, yours is the strangest.

The Ministry of Culture was the former High Eunuch's bastion of power within the Chinese government and gave an air of legitimacy to the power they claimed over ceremonies and official affairs. The idea that they were somehow 'protecting the cultural heritage' of China by instituting an insulating and byzantine bureaucracy is, on the face of it absurd, but looking over a brief history of the ministry, you can understand the slow and incremental steps taken which ultimately resulted in their *de facto* control of the state.

As such, what you inherit is a very mixed bag of an organization.

First, the office is much-reduced from its halcyon antebellum days. One of the primary reasons behind this reduction is that over half of the personnel nominally under your leadership are either dead, in prison awaiting trial or execution, or have fled the country to live in exile. A silver lining to this dark cloud is that you don't have to purge your ministry of Eunuch loyalists or corruption, as the new Empress has functionally done so for you during her purges of the government.

Second, your budget has been utterly slashed by Lihua's new regime, even if that still leaves you with more money than you've ever had access to in an official capacity than in your entire life up to this point. You also really don't have grounds to argue that your office deserves more funding, given the state of the nation. While the area under your occupation largely escaped the destruction of the war, there is a wide band through central China which had seen the High Eunuchs torch crops, tear up infrastructure, and all manner of other attempts to halt the Empress' advance southward. This is in addition to the millions of people displaced by the fighting, a potential famine looming large over the horizon, and the inevitable post-war banditry which has arisen.

There are, frankly, *better things to do* with the country's money than give it to a ministry whose main concern *should be* officiating government ceremonies, festivals, and funding other cultural events.

Like... say, burning the money to keep people warm.

That would be a much better use of the funds, you imagine.

Third, and something you only discover a short while after you've taken the position, while your own name carries significant weight as an Imperial Consort as well as your achievements before and during the civil war, any formal attempts to exercise power through the

Ministry of Culture are... not quite *ignored*, but not given any level of priority whatsoever. It becomes clear over a small period of time that your ministry is persona non-grata in an official capacity and your formal duties have been cut back to the absolute minimum.

When taking all of that into account, you come to the easy realization that your appointment was, if not explicitly intended to be, then at least taken as a happy coincidence that you would be paid off to do very little as long as you didn't make a nuisance of yourself. As long as you were willing to quietly fade into the background and do nothing to disrupt reconstruction efforts, you would be allowed to keep a luxurious position that required only very minimal official work from you.

So it is that, a month after you take your formal appointment to ministerial head that you lean back in your chair and stare off into the middle distance thoughtfully.

It appears no one realized that you did your best work in the background.

This is a situation you can work with.

You pick up your phone. "Euphie? I need to talk to you and Milly." You frown, then nod. "I suppose we can make a dinner out of it if you like. What I want to talk about? I have an idea about revitalizing Chinese industry and want to set up a schedule to flesh things out."

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Your first course of action is, oddly enough, getting Kallen and her family out of Japanese prison. Duke Stadtfeld has, of course, already filed a formal diplomatic complaint with the backing of the Emperor. The heiress to a major noble house and a personal knight serving under a prince in good standing isn't someone you take as a political hostage lightly. A communication from Schneizel informs you that talks are underway to secure Kallen's release, but it would take both patience and political leverage. In the meantime, he manages to secure a conversation between yourself and your redheaded knight, in which she says something that makes you sigh.

"I'm not leaving without my family."

Kallen's mother and brother are Japanese citizens. They don't even have up to date passports, much less some official claim to refugee status in Britannia. The problem is that they, along with Kallen, have been detained as spies and potential Britannian sleeper agents.

In the end, you take your daughter from Sayoko's arms, hand her a thick packet of information on the situation, and tell her to, "take care of it."

You end up minding little Sumire for two weeks on a surprise vacation to Hawaii, during which you receive an unexpected visit from your mother and make a few mild press appearances. All of which puts you firmly in the public eye and serves as an excellent break from your otherwise stressful job as well as your mother's introduction to her first granddaughter. All in all, it's a very productive period that ends shortly after news that the Taiwanese Liberation Front has staged a breakout of a political prison which, coincidentally, held Kallen Stadtfeld and her family.

You give an award-worthy performance of shock at the news and lament the efforts of your brother Schneizel as well as the ultimate fate of your knight.

Kallen, Naoto, and Sara arrive two days later on Oahu using falsified passports and are detained by security. A quick call to the King of Hawaii resolves the situation quickly and all three are honored at a state reception while Sayoko slips back into your shadow to quietly return to minding your mutual child.

You don't know how she did it and, quite honestly, plausible deniability is paramount in this situation. So you don't want to know.

Far more interesting is the tearful reunion between Kallen's father and her mother, as well as the far more restrained greeting with the Duke's wife. The entire thing is kept mostly behind closed doors, but you're given to understand that the mother and son will not be returning to Japan until certain political problems have been ironed out. Instead, Naoto will be taking a position under his father, even if he isn't thrilled about the turn of events, and Sara will be given one of the properties cleared out some years ago in the purge of his clan.

Accusations, of course, fly as soon as word spreads. Kururugi Genbu is *furious* as he is, finally, removed from office and the position of Prime Minister stripped of its hereditary privileges that he'd worked so hard to create. However, it says something about the resilience of the Japanese political system that the same elections bring Kaguya's father to power in a landslide victory... for a different faction of that same party.

As far as your reunion with Kallen...

Well, it appears her visit did settle her doubts, if in an unexpected fashion.

Your son is born nine months later, just a few months after your formal Chinese marriage to Lihua and a few months before your *Britannian* wedding to Euphemia. The entire stretch of time is packed with momentous events, so much so that you nearly forget the plans you have in motion behind the scenes. At least, you attempt to until the wedding gifts come in.

Then your phone rings, and the person on the other end is a definite surprise.

"Lelouch."

"Guinevere? I can't say this is expected," you replied to the one-word greeting.

"You say that like a sister isn't allowed to call her dear younger brother to wish him a blessed union on his wedding day," there's a pointed pause to her words. "Especially when said brother is marrying a foreign Empress."

You lean back. "When the invitation went unanswered, I thought you'd decided to snub me. Schneizel, Cornelia, Anastasia, and Mother made the time to attend. Even Carine and her mother decided to make it."

"You know as well as I do that I can't very well make an appearance at your wedding after I neglected to invite you to mine," Guinevere states tiredly with a sigh. In the background, you hear the sound of an infant sniffing and beginning to stir. After your own experiences with Sumire, you're quite familiar with the noises.

“Congratulations on your second. I can hear Loholt, but how is Hilde?” You ask, a sudden spike of empathy rising up from within you.

“She's with Ody. He's taken to fatherhood surprisingly well,” Guinevere sighed again. “At any rate, since it seems like we're dispensing with the common pleasantries, I'll admit the gifts you sent earned me quite the bragging rights. Even if they're just ancient clay by my tally, it definitely impressed a few of my more educated hobbyist supporters.”

You have to chuckle at the way a pair of terracotta soldiers from the tomb of The First Emperor of China are described as 'ancient clay.' Only Guinevere. “Well, I'm glad you got some use out of them, at least.”

“And I suppose it's time to reciprocate,” Guinevere stated, a bit of irritation in her tone. “The plan you forwarded to me. There are a few revisions we'll be making, but the consortium will accept the proposal, but you'll have to get Father to agree to it.”

You felt a wave of relief cascade over you. “He already has.”

Guinevere inhaled sharply. “I see. In exchange for the defensive pact and the research partnership, no doubt. I didn't think they'd be worth quite that much, but it's true they've helped stabilize the markets. And if you'd already revealed the Emperor's agreement to the plan, it would force my supporters into line and alienate me for forcing them to act in a way that potentially contradicts my aims and goals. Impressively light-handed, little brother.”

You spend the rest of the few minutes available working out the details, then present it to Lihua.

She manages to avoid leaving tear-stains on the elaborate outfit you're decked out in.

“Thank you,” Li states as the Empress excuses herself to have her makeup reapplied. Turning to the Consort-Emperor, your bride's first husband, bows to you. “You've saved an uncountable number of lives if this should work the way you've planned it.”

“I honestly thought I was going to be punished for overreaching given my status,” you admitted.

“The Empress is not the type of ruler to object to something done in the spirit of helping her people avoid starvation and poverty,” Xingke states, smiling fondly as he rises and turns away, looking towards where Lihua left. “Besides, after today you are a member of the imperial family. None would gainsay your ability to represent the state in good faith.”

When looked at that way...

You took a deep breath and finished the conversation.

Then you were married.

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“Part of me is incredibly jealous,” you admit over the radio, watching the aircraft taxi into position on the runway.

“Hey, you and ninety-nine percent of other guys on the planet. It takes a lot to be this good-looking,” Gino chuckled as you watched him complete the pre-flight checks. “Besides, you have your own toys to test out if I remember right.”

Thinking of the powered armor Kenshin had put together does bring a smile to your face, even if it's still tinged with envy. The aircraft in front of you is a world apart from what had been built for you. The sleek curves belied a powerful generator based on principles so freshly-developed they didn't even have serial numbers designated yet.

“HEHEHAHHAHAHAHAH!”

...speak of the devil and he will appear.

Kenshin, with Madison trailing him, and Xiǎobāo trailing her, holding the pregnant woman's hand. As your eyes skated over him, the albino child still flinches back, though it's less severe than it had been in the early days. His myriad friendships with the growing saplings your expedition had brought back from Japan had seen the boy break out of his shell.

“Today! Today is the day! The day I prove all those who thought I was *MAD* wrong! HAHAHAHAH!” Kenshin cackled gleefully, his hands up in the air before twisting and pointing directly at Xiǎobāo. “Lab Assistant #2! Is the co-pilot ready for takeoff!?”

The architecture of the prototype, notably, has space for a second pilot, but no seat. Instead, embedded in the arching dome of next-generation KMF-grade sapphire glass, is one of the same young saplings that Xiǎobāo had 'recruited.' The leaves sparkle with glimmering energy.

“I think Johnny's giving the go-ahead,” Gino laughed. “Man, this interface is something else. Even if I don't have a lick of that psycho-talent, it's a trip feeling something else in the back of my head.”

“Johnny is agreeable to taking off. He says he finds the idea of flying strange, but he enjoys new experiences,” Xiǎobāo relayed, the psionic pulse between himself and vehicle something that you could feel, but not quite interpret.

Such fine applications of your talent weren't something you'd particularly researched.

Instead, with the full power of your new suit on-hand, you were able to face down a modern KMF unit in single combat. The flight module was still giving your people some trouble in getting it to a size they could attach to your smaller form. At that thought, your eyes dart back to the experimental craft Gino was sitting in as its psionic engines distort the air with the waves of energy cascading off it. It was an odd thing, the craft stripped down to a cylindrical frame bearing an obscene amount of gold and alchemically-produced sakuradite adorning it in strange patterns.

You watched as that energy coalesced, forming bands which branched off the craft, then-

-it hovered for a moment, then took off like a rocket.

Kenshin's laughter echoed throughout the room.

Gino's voice, though, was the only thing in your ear. "Permission to test the weapons systems, Your Highness?"

"Granted," you replied, as eager to see what they could do as your friend.

The targets ceased to exist shortly after.

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"The fleet is ready, Your Highness," Jeanne stated.

"Very good, Countess Rowe," you replied, your eyes still on the distant vessels even as you feel your subordinate preen. Even if she only owned New Caledonia now, it was still a fief and had suitably enobled her. You, yourself, had no more use for the island save for its staging ground and base. Jeanne was still beholden to you by personal oaths, but the land was now in her name rather than yours. Given everything, it was a small concession to the idea that Britannian lands were still under Britannian control, but it kept anyone from getting excited about you removing part of the Empire's territory.

Secession was treason, after all.

"They're sending over messengers," you note, watching as the wooden sailing vessel from centuries past raised up a flag of truce.

"Do we trust them? They are pirates?" Admiral Romano asked, frowning.

You hesitate, humming to yourself before you turn to the final officer on your command deck. With the Empress' help, you've taken The Crowns and turned them into a private military force instead of just a PMC. This leaves you with their two fleets and associated other military forces in addition to your own military forces, and the one Chinese fleet you'd managed to pry away. The last, although it is technically only a single fleet, is over-strength and has one of the floating iceberg carriers as its centerpiece.

"What do you think, Commander Ronas?" You ask, one eyebrow raised.

"I think you should at least hear them out, Your Highness," the severe man advised you with a nod. "I've had a great many occasions to interact with them, and a truce like this is sacrosanct, even among pirates."

Greta sneered slightly, "I suppose something would have to be."

You hold up a hand to forestall any infighting.

"We'll hear them out, but unless it's an offer of unconditional surrender, I doubt we'll have much to talk about," you state with a scowl.

Once the corsair pulls up, tacking its sails to expertly glide to a stop next to your modern aircraft carrier, you receive the pirate delegates. To your surprise, it is not only La Cosa Nostra and The Calico Casts of the South Caribbean, but also the Sons of Teach. All three of the pirate powers on the Australian east coast not under your control have sent representatives.

The first words out of the leader's mouth are at once, both a blinding surprise and completely expected. The Crowns had been the major military power, such as they are, in Australia. La Cosa Nostra is a coalition of organized crime groups running all manner of smuggling and information trading operations with a side of blackmail and extortion. The Calico Cats are honestly more akin to a particularly well-armed theme park. The Sons of Teach are the only truly legitimate threat to your operations and they're a group of ambush predators.

You simply hadn't been betting on them realizing those facts and coming to the only logical solution.

"We surrender."

Greta and Jeanne are visibly surprised while you school your expression. Alexander Ronas, though, shows no emotion at all, which tells you he at least had his suspicions about what was coming. The initial terms you hammer out that day are far from complete, but they cover the most important points. The territories these groups control are now yours, they will cease any inter-group conflict and defer to your judgment as their liege lord, their military assets are yours to control, and they will cease any activity which would be illegal under the Britannian Law of the Sea or the Code of Conduct of Britannian Areas.

You will doubtless have to clean up a lot of trash in the coming years, as many of these groups are populated by people who explicitly left society to pursue their desires. Not all of them will take kindly to the reintroduction of law codes and the oversight of a royal authority, be it either the Chinese Empress, the Britannian Emperor, or your own independent throne.

Regardless of the details, though, you conquer more than a third of a continent with the stroke of a pen.

Epilogue III:

You are Lelouch vi Britannia, Second Consort and Minister of Culture to the Empress of the People of China and Sovereign Monarch of the Empire of Australia, Protector of the Islands of Indonesia, Bane of Pirates, and Prince of the Empire of Britannia. For today, though, those titles are unimportant. Today, you stand astride a much greater achievement that will doubtless be recorded in the annals of history.

You stand aboard the bridge of the first great vimana to take to the skies in tens of thousands of years as it makes its maiden voyage across a desolate portion of the pacific ocean.

The massive construction floats freely in the air, its propulsion a mixture of psychic waves manufactured by the complex matrix of gold and sakuradite woven into its construction and the next-generation levitation engines produced by the CAMELOT program under Lloyd

Asplund. Reverse-engineered and completed by your own subordinates, the FLOAT and Druid Systems augment the impressive capabilities of the ancient psionic technologies you'd unearthed last year.

Bleeding edge holographic screens light up at the speed of thought, your already-incredible psychic talents allowing you to coordinate the many parts of the vimana effortlessly.

"Greetings, my consort," Lihua smiles at you from where she is perched atop a raised platform, attendants and guards surrounding her as she is brought various different pieces of paperwork. "How goes the test flight?"

"My Empress," you smile, taking a slight bow. "We are making headway back to port in Australia. The test is almost complete and we have experienced no problems. We even—"

"We're flying! *Tou-san, Tou-san!* We're flying!" The five year old child behind you yelled as they ran from one window to another.

You and Lihua stared deeply into each other's eyes for a long moment, her lips quivering just the slightest bit. Truly, a testament to her near-absolute control of her visage.

Sayoko, suddenly to your right, bowed. "My deepest apologies, Lelouch. Lady Lihua. Sumire managed to slip my watch briefly."

"Lookit the ships! They're so tiny!" Your daughter cries out energetically.

You close your eyes briefly and inhale through your nose as Lihua releases a strangled noise that's very clearly a cough and not stifled laughter.

"It's... it's fine, Sayoko. See if she wants pudding down in the cafeteria, I suppose. I'll be down to sit with her a little later." You wave her off.

"It is times like these I suppose we should both be grateful for staff to help us take the pleasant, if undeniably weighty burden that young children can be," Lihua states, smiling impishly.

"I take it Prince Hàoyú is doing well under Xingke's care?" You ask, trying desperately to recover some hint of your previous regal bearing.

Lihua smiled softly and nodded. "He is. I will be entertaining my General and my heir tonight at dinner. We will have to arrange an evening next month when you return to the capital."

"Perhaps Euphemia can attend. She is due to return from St. Petersburg visiting her sister within the next week," you muse.

Lihua shook her head. "I had actually actually wished for it to be a private affair. Euphie is always welcome at our table and you should not doubt that, but there are times when I would like to see my second consort for personal business."

You blinked, Lihua's words accomplishing what Sumire's interruption hadn't been able to and bringing a subtle blush to your face. "Ah... I see. I'll be sure to clear my schedule, thank you

for the invitation, My Empress.”

“In other news, Europa United has pushed for further concessions in trade treaties to prove that our alliance with Britannia is purely defensive in nature.” Her expression soured a bit. “I do not enjoy their defense of the previous Japanese administration's actions, nor their devotion to offending me by supporting the riots in India.”

“It's an unfortunate state of affairs,” you agree readily enough, being careful not to advise on that matter. You were already extremely busy with matters that were distinctly outside the mandate of your ministerial office and the riot-protests in India weren't something you had any real attachment to 'solving.' Yes, losing them would weaken the Chinese Federation's standing on the world stage, but it was looking more and more like an eventuality.

Which would, obviously, give the EU another member for their *own* defensive pact; if not immediately, then within a decade or so of the Indians achieving independence. Joining the motley crew of the African Unions and what was left of the MEF, there wasn't much the 'Bastion of Democracy' would be able to truly do to stop Britannian expansion outside of their own continental borders. Japan was at least *nominally* in this political bloc, although the belated fall of Kururugi Genbu and the rise of Kaguya's father to prominence meant that, for all practical intentions, Japan had returned to a fully neutral stance. Even if the island nation was to commit to the thinly-veiled 'Antri-Sino-Birtannian Pact' it wouldn't mean all that much given Japan could be overrun in a month or two by a dedicated Britannian invasion force.

No, the main culprit stopping your father from simply conquering the Europeans outright were the growing pains of the empire itself. Digesting the former North Africa League, half of the MEF, and dealing with the Russian Empire's rebirth under Cornelia's rule as Catherine III was taking much of his attention. It didn't help that suspiciously well-equipped terrorist units had been popping up in both regions as well as India.

There was also the looming shadow of Charles' advancing age.

Even with Britannian medicine being what it was and your father being a particularly healthy individual, the man was still in his seventies now. If no significant health concerns arose, he likely had one more decade of good rule within him, but he was not the man he'd been a decade ago. If only just slightly, he'd slowed and weakened. Not visibly so, not outside those who knew him well, but it was enough to be concerned.

After finishing things up with Lihua, you flexed your awareness of the hulking vimana to ensure you were making good time before putting in another call...

“Ah, it's Marianne's boy again. I'm sure this won't lead to more work for me,” the golden-eyed woman on the other end of the screen sighed and swept back a curtain of long green hair to look at you with a put-upon expression so masterfully-crafted from equal parts disdain and exasperation that you wondered if she'd broken lesser men with a simple glance at some point in the past.

“Lady CC,” you greeted neutrally, looking over the background of her image and taking in the excavation work being done deep within the caverns you had discovered. “I'll keep things brief, since you appear to be otherwise occupied-”

You pointedly ignored the slice of pizza she lifted to her mouth, not daring to challenge the authority of someone who knew even more underhanded tricks than Milly to get back at you.

“I simply wanted to check on the progress being made towards the inner vault.”

CC swallowed her bite of pizza and sighed with all the regal stature of an ancient queen. “We’re still making our way through. Given that geass does not affect the animate statues, moving deeper into the ship is extremely hazardous. Since I have you here, though...”

“Yes?” You asked, already knowing where this conversation was going.

“Have you given any thought as to what you’ll be *doing* with what we find?” CC asked, a bland curiosity coating her voice that utterly disguised whatever she truly felt.

“I’ve given a great deal of thought to it, but made no decision yet,” you stated bluntly.

CC hummed, picking up her pizza again. “You should get on that.”

Then the screen cut off.

You sighed.

It was a complicated matter, what you believed lay in the innermost vault of the crashed vimana which you had discovered underneath the ancient megaliths humbly known as ‘Potbelly Hill’ by the natives of the Anatolian region.. Normally, you’d have been loath to invite your father’s close confidants into the investigation of the ruins, but this had very much grown beyond your own ambitions. There was also the matter of your half-sister Laila needing a ‘win’ politically to stabilize the region. Unveiling the forgotten past of the giant stone pillars and the origins of mankind, even without being fully transparent over the true discoveries had made international headlines and helped reignite a political narrative that the region was much older than the MEF or the petty squabbles of the religious and cultural differences involved.

It wasn’t as though you were going to get access to a site so firmly under Britannian military control without a *few* concessions, anyway. And, truthfully, you didn’t actually have the kind of trained personnel to do the site justice, either. Once the project was over, though, you would. Any further discoveries you made would be fully within your own ability to exploit however you wished.

Psionic technology would pave the way to the stars very soon and even now it was assisting in the first unmanned probes being sent up by the empire.

The issue was, though...

At the center of the vault was 'Heart of the Immortal' you remembered being, once long ago. The small orb you’d found had made you a ready vessel for its power, but you did not have to accept it. There were other candidates. Specifically, your father. You were new to the revelation that was the 'Power of Kings,' but knew enough to understand that the job of holding a geass was to allow that power to make you ready to receive true immortality.

You *recalled* nothing of the sort from your ancient memories, but there had been many thousands of years between then and now. There was nothing stopping one of the survivors of the apocalypse from reinventing the wheel, so to speak.

It had even turned out that Kaguya and Sayoko had a number of very *peculiar* gene-markers which indicated a much stronger lineage from those ancient days than you thought could reasonably survive. It was possible, with a great deal more research and experimentation, that the true root of psionic potential could be developed with those clues. Even now, Kenshin had constructed an elaborate screening process as part of the new immunization protocols wiping out infectious diseases among the remote Chinese populus.

Combined with what the Geass Institute and OSI had secreted away, life-extension technology would likely be possible within the next few decades.

But that would not be the same as the 'true immortality' you had glimpsed in CC and VV, the later of which had been revealed as your uncle. Death, for them, was an impossibility as they stood frozen in time even after decades or, in the greenette's case, *centuries*.

It was a heady thought. Not just an extended life, but one that was completely free of any danger of death by accident or disease.

But, there was the possibility of not taking it for yourself. Of, instead, granting it to your father. Regardless of your rather complex personal feelings on Charles himself, it would undeniably be for the Empire's betterment. Even if Charles went into 'seclusion' and slowly faded from public consciousness, Guinevere and Odysseus would hardly have the kind of will to oppose an immortal emperor ruling from behind the scenes.

The question was... did you want to take up the mantle?

Yes. Lelouch Becomes Immortal.

No. Charles Becomes Immortal Instead.

A flare of *attention* drew you from your musings as your focus shifted towards where you knew Australia to be. Specifically, you looked towards the northern coast, where the European settler colonies lay.

Something was happening.

Then, a bright pulse of pink light created a second sun against the bright blue sky.

"Psionic Energy Wave detected!" One of your operators called out.

"Massive spike in energy implies a weapon of some kind!" Another concurred.

"We're getting a read on something huge!" A final soldier on the bridge yelled.

"Why didn't we detect this before!?" You demanded, looking around as you felt the *vimana* you were piloting shift into a state of combat readiness.

"A combination of distance and a lack of active scanning, My Lord." You looked to the soldier who'd spoken. "We'd already tested the active arrays on the way out and shut them

down for diagnostics. We were limiting ourselves to passive scans given the isolated nature of the region.”

You grimaced, realizing there was nothing to be done. Instead, you focused your will into the scanning arrays and brought them online to direct where you'd felt the pulse of energy.

Immediately, an image of...

It was a golden craft straight out of your ancient memories, laced with sakuradite to give it lift and propulsion. Around you, you heard gasps of shock and horror as you caught sight of the smoking ruins of the capital of the settler colony.

As impossible as it seemed, there was only one way to explain what you were seeing.

Another vimana, this one looking as though it was ripped from ages long past.

New Heaven had, incredibly, managed to resurrect a slumbering beast.

Your mind raced, evaluating the forces you currently had at your disposal. Jaeger had, thankfully, contented himself with being present for the numerous test runs of the various systems before pronouncing the project complete and turning his manic energy towards other pursuits. The man had become a *machine* in recent years, turning out revolutionary technology after revolutionary technology as he barely stopped to enjoy the triumphs he'd earned for himself. You trusted Madison to keep him healthy, at least. But what was important for the moment was that you didn't need to evacuate one of your most important subordinates from the vimana before flying into combat.

That said, you *did* need to get Sumire and Sayoko off the vessel. That was relatively easy, though. Jeanne and Gino were combat personnel and would be invaluable. Kallen and her squad would be as well, but they were not here at the moment. You could summon them for a rendezvous, but that would take a bit of time to scramble and coordinate before meeting the New Heaven vimana in battle. As it was, you only had Gino and a flight of next-generation FLOAT-enabled KMF units and the flotilla of ships patrolling the waters beneath you. Granted, that included a dreadnought and an aircraft carrier as well as a host of support and guard craft, but it was overall a patrol group. Not a full assault fleet.

In addition to Kallen, you could also call Nunnally back from her own excursion with her guard group hunting pirates. That would give you another group of elites to deploy against whatever other surprises New Heaven had. Or to distract their main force while you moved in for the kill. It would also give you time to scramble the Chinese fleet under your command in Indonesia, the Crowns who were guarding Britannian shipping, and your own primary fleet stationed in New Caledonia.

You *would* have called in the Sons of Teach, but they were half a world away in the Black Sea under Euphemia's nominal command.

Which was one less thing you had to worry about, honestly.

The downside was that while *you* could respond in a matter of hours, calling up the various forces under your authority would take *days*. That meant letting New Heaven do whatever it wished in the meantime, such as continuing the destruction of Port Talleyrand.

Which... would remove a thorn in your side as well as a valuable and technologically-advanced pseudo-ally frenemy.

Regardless, you'd put the call out for everything you could reasonably count on to assemble, but you couldn't be sure they would arrive in time if you chose to engage directly.

The final option you had was to call up a *true* coalition force. Which would take at least a week, perhaps more. Even if the Europeans could hold out days, they could not hold out that long under the kind of assault you were seeing now. Calling in a proper multinational combat force from the EU peacekeeping fleet in East Africa and a Britannian main battle fleet from one or more of the Areas, as well as possibly the Imperial Japanese Fleet in Taiwan...

Well, it would doubtless be a force to reckon with, but it would mean the largest number of casualties. And you were unsure if New Heaven would be willing to keep their destruction to Australia or if they would begin striking out elsewhere.

The choice is yours.

- Meet the New Heaven forces head on. (+25)
- Regroup and strike them from a position of strength. (+50)
- Call up a coalition force. (+75)