

Epilogue

Legitimacy Kingdom.

Official Military Death Count: 958,001. Official Civilian Death Count: 45,800.

(The majority of deaths occurred near the entrance of Central America when they attempted to invade the Capitalist Corporations and Information Alliance home countries from the South American Amazon District and were attacked by both world powers at once.)

Capitalist Corporations.

Official Military Death Count: 533,109. Official Civilian Death Count: 208,803.

(They had the least military deaths, but their civilian deaths were exceptionally high. This is thought to be the result of entrepreneurs and investors entering war zones in the hopes of profiting off of the world war.)

Information Alliance.

Official Military Death Count: 825,575. Official Civilian Death Count: 29,066.

(The Manhattan's civilians survived. They primarily fought the Capitalist Corporations in the New World and the Legitimacy Kingdom in Europe, so they were unable to concentrate their forces. Too little is known about the mysterious damage to the Capulet AI Network to run an analysis, so its strategic decisions cannot be judged at this point.)

Faith Organization.

Official Military Death Count: 1,018,300. Official Civilian Death Count: 84,901.

(They took the most damage due to the destruction of Rome, but their evacuation of the civilians was impressive. There are some witness accounts saying confusion in the chain of command led to a misguided retaliation, but the details are unknown. The leaders of Venerable Elder rank or higher are all dead, so it was officially announced no further investigation would be possible.)

There were also many other deaths among unofficial combatants who were not included in the above counts. These include non-PMC mercenaries, militia members, volunteer soldiers, security personnel, local translators, and battlefield students. Work is continuing to get numbers from the

blank zones that did not belong to any of the old world powers.

International society promises to carry a spirit of cooperation and work ceaselessly and in good faith to never forget these noble sacrifices and ensure nothing like this can ever happen again.

Today, we announce the establishment of the United Countries to help take concrete action toward that end.

"Nothing will change," whispered the old man reading an English language newspaper in a bar. "The old world powers structure might have collapsed, but human nature hasn't changed. Humans were greedy before that structure ever existed and they still spent all their time waging war. The United Countries? We're right back to the nuclear age."

"You know a lot about this, old man," said the middle-aged bartender, handing the old man a watered-down drink since what he had actually ordered would have killed him.

The old man was famous in this area for being braggart, so he nodded in satisfaction.

"You bet I do. I was born in the Island Nation, so I know a thing or two about the darker side of the world and how war works."

"Do you think the Objects your Island Nation introduced to the world are going away?"

The United Countries.

In the end, that was no more than another place for the world's biggest groups and organizations to talk things out and make decisions. But it looked a lot different when they did it in the light of day instead of in secret backroom deals.

The major companies and academic institutes had carefully rerun all the calculations and the historical Nikolaschka Royal Family had acted as a witness, but who could say how long the initial intentions behind its establishment would last.

"No."

The old man must have been drunk after just his first drink.

He couldn't even taste his second drink, so he failed to notice it was mostly just water.

"It turns out those remotely triggered earthquakes - or whatever they're called - can be avoided by

restricting the number of Objects, so I'm sure they'll draft a reduction treaty and declare the problem solved. The Object name might go away, but the 50m weapons will remain. They'll just be called something else."

"Will the people trying to get rich off of building Objects really accept that?"

"Some people claim it's too late for our world, but so what? If they investigate the bending of the tectonic plates and send Objects out to gradually allow the built-up forces to escape, they can actually reduce the number of disasters. Just like massaging the fascia to loosen up someone's entire body."

They had to find peaceful uses for Objects.

The task might sound ridiculous, but anyone who didn't keep up with the times would be weeded out. People always came up with whatever justification they needed to survive. Just like the special bullets even the military disliked because the wounds they caused were too nasty were slapped with a "self-defense" label and sold to the general public.

"With their numbers limited, each one will be a lot more valuable. So the developers won't be hurting. We're looking at a world where Objects are like rare French dolls designed for royalty. I'm sure it won't be a smooth transition though, so they might end up being little more than a decorative symbol."

"Hmm."

The nondescript bartender smiled politely.

Or maybe he was better described as having a thousand faces.

The fact that the old man did not realize who the bartender really was proved the old man was no more than a harmless civilian.

"Elina Silverbullet and currently imprisoned Louisiana Honeysuckle have marked their return to academia by releasing a more hopeful outlook on the environmental destruction by Objects theory. They are both founding members of the oversight committee established to ensure the new restrictions on Object usage are followed," cheerfully announced the flat screen TV hanging from the ceiling.

A new era had been ushered in very quickly, but the world had been given enough of a cushion to avoid dying of shock.

The bartender's smile was plastered to his face like his skin was being tugged on by invisible fingers.

"Will humanity never outgrow war?" he asked.

"I seriously doubt it. We don't even need stones and clubs to kill. Only humans have figured out how to kill each other with no more than the text typed into social media messages. Remember, we're the creatures that use even love as a weapon to harm each other."

This conversation was no more than a way to kill some time during the day.

The drunk old man said one last thing while staring off into the distance.

"Humanity isn't gonna change. Our cruelty will be with us forever."

"Ugh."

Melly Martini Extradry came to with a groan.

She found herself somewhere she didn't recognize.

She immediately realized moving would be dangerous. She became intensely aware of the "bomb" that was her spine visible within her two-piece surgical gown made of red oil paper. Without the swim ring full of a special fluid she normally used, any careless action could lead to an explosion of agonizing pain.

She moved just her eyes to check her surroundings and noted a dark forest outside the window. She appeared to be in a mansion designed by someone with old-fashioned tastes. She had a bad feeling about this because that felt like a Legitimacy Kingdom kind of thing. She had no memories at all after the Manhattan 000 broke in two, but she could imagine any number of people who would love to lock her in a room far from prying eyes and take their time exacting revenge on her. Which was more frightening at times like this: an operating room without a speck of dust or a musty basement?

She was no longer just #29 of the genius girls project.

Now she was the mastermind behind a world war.

She would never be acquitted.

She wanted to curse the Capulet for this, but it had already been determined that AI could bear no legal responsibility. It was always a human who gave the final go ahead. Whether or not that was actually true, that was how the official story went.

So now she was entirely alone. From beginning to end.

“Hi.”

“!”

Her shoulders jumped.

That was enough for her spine to send a warning signal: you don’t want to do that again.

The speaker sat in a chair next to the bed. He was a young man with long silver hair and wearing a tailcoat. He was gentle mannered, but the tool leaning against the wall was far too ominous: a sheathed katana.

Also, the positioning of the bed and chair didn’t feel like part of a living space. If anything, it was reminiscent of a hospital or clinic. But that also meant it would be perfect for destroying the body with torture or an execution.

“My name is Bloodrics Capistrano. Simply put, I am the person who retrieved you.”

“...”

“I believe these are yours.”

Smiling, Bloodrics returned Melly’s VR goggles and notebook-sized game system. They were no longer linked to the Manhattan 000, but it meant a lot to receive internet-connected communication devices after being abducted by a mysterious person. It could literally be the difference between life and death for her.

“Your swim ring didn’t seem to function without the AI’s assistance. Now, I brought a wide variety of crutches and wheelchairs, so choose any one that strikes your fancy. And if none of them do, you can always use their parts to create your own custom model.”

Did he think he could remain in charge even after giving her so much assistance?

Why would he give her a means of communication and mobility immediately after capturing her?

Placing himself at such a disadvantage only made him seem creepier.

“The Capistrano family isn’t as famous as the Winchell or Vanderbilt families, so maybe my name doesn’t mean anything to you. But I view philanthropy as my hobby, so I have no shortage of secret

contact points around the world. ...That means I had access to information from every world power, which allowed me to arrive first and retrieve you without anyone noticing. Ha ha. Officially, they say you died when your damaged reactors exploded."

That meant this wasn't just a coincidence.

He had used some kind of trick to pull it off.

She did not know how much effort he had put into that, but she knew the cost must have been significant. He had to have had some reason why he wanted to reach her first.

This was like another world where no one would hear her if she screamed.

The room had the unnatural layout of a hospital room.

And a katana that had to be real was leaning against the wall.

The Martini Series girl felt her heartrate rising. If she wasn't speaking through her device, her voice would have been cracking with nerves.

"What are you...going to do with me?"

"Let me ask you this instead: do you have anywhere else to go?"

She had no answer.

She was the mastermind behind a world war. However humanity would deal with its feelings on the matter, there was no better way to declare the beginning of a new era of peace than by hanging or beheading her. The world would turn the death of the great criminal into a holiday. Watching the enemy of the world meet her rightful end would confirm for them that justice remained in the world.

Bloodrics must have predicted her response because he smoothly continued on.

"I would like you to work for me."

"318. Is this work something you need to keep hidden?"

"Most people probably wouldn't care much if they knew, but it could affect the Capistrano family's reputation if word got out."

“...”

Was she supposed to bloody her hands behind the scenes for this man's benefit?

Or would she never be allowed outside of this mansion as she became a sandbag for a bloodthirsty sadist who enjoyed testing out bizarre tools with a long history and infamous legacy?

Melly's speculation on her depressing fate was interrupted by Bloodrics.

He explained the job he had for a teenage girl he knew could not refuse him.

“For living expenses, how about we start you at 2000 euros a month? You are free to save up anything leftover. Any money needed for maintenance for the mansion, such as tending to the garden or repairing a leak in the roof, will be counted separately as business expenses. But if you want to do something more extreme like changing the carpet or wallpaper, I would appreciate it if you contacted me first.”

“?”

“This villa is tucked back in the mountains a long way from the nearest city, but you should be able to acquire all your daily necessities using online shopping. Use this account here. The one called Capistrano Villa Live-In Servant 01. But be careful when browsing adult sites and other pay sites. If any expensive bills like that show up, it comes out of your own money. And getting tricked by a banner ad or cleverly-disguised link is no excuse. Maintaining proper internet security is a part of your job. You should be better at that than me since you were with the Information Alliance, right? Improve the system's security in any way you can.”

“W-wait! What are you talking about? 526. You make it sound like you're only ordering me to live here as I see fit!!”

“Eh? I basically am.” Bloodrics Capistrano sounded legitimately puzzled. “Your job is to live in this Capistrano family villa and take care of the upkeep since it would fall into disrepair with no one around. Like I said, we are a smaller family and it would hurt our reputation if the other families discovered the villa we built to keep up appearances was rotting away out here.”

Yes.

Hadn't he had said in the beginning that philanthropy was his hobby? There was no ulterior motive. The philanthropy itself was the goal for him.

“What, would you have preferred I treated you poorly? Were you hoping I would cruelly harm you so you could claim to be a victim instead of a perpetrator?”

She frantically shook her head.

His morality seemed twisted because it didn't seem to matter to him that he was sheltering the mastermind behind the world war. This could get complicated, but someone with a normal sense of what was right actually wouldn't have saved her. Yet Bloodrics had chosen differently just because he felt like it.

She could tell he wasn't just some harmless man. There was something terrifying about him, like he really would have tortured her if he thought it was in her best interest.

"Then it is time you started on a new and more hopeful life. Personally, I think the best way to cast out your old self and start anew is with a change of clothes. Tah dah! What could a live-in servant at a noble villa wear other than a maid uniform!? This choice has a long history behind it!!"

"Never mind. He's just a pervert. 749."

Melly Martini Extradry couldn't believe what she was seeing, so she failed to notice the news playing on TV left on in a corner of the room.

"This is Monica, the battlefield idol reporter who can both sing and kill! Today I am reporting from the Greater Canyon that divides North America between the old Capitalist Corporations and the old Information Alliance. Today this is the sight of a historical event to symbolize the end of the world war and the elimination of the four world powers! The deep canyon splitting North America in two will finally be filled in!! The internet is abuzz after the old Information Alliance's G-cup idol's mysterious announcement that she will be revealing her 'true form' today and a lot of attention is gathering around the Mojito Sisters who are joining her as guests from the Northern Restricted Zone. ...It's not fair. That should be me on that- ahem. An unbelievable number of people have gathered to watch today's event which also symbolizes the beginning of the peaceful and enjoyable new age of the Untied Countries."

"You have to be kidding me. You have got to be kidding me."

The sun beat down on them.

Heivia Winchell held a hand over his eyes and gave a resentful look up into the blue sky. The outdoor concert venue had no roof. The weather out here explained why the silo cities were built underground.

"This Greater Canyon is far from great in my book. It's only March! The sun needs to stop working overtime this year. We really are going to die when the expanding sun engulfs the planet, aren't we?"

"That isn't going to happen for hundreds of million of years, Heivia. Look, I've got the concert

schedule here. It has a lot of surprise events, so don't let the other guests see it. It'll cause a panic."

"Oh, I see how it is. If you're best buds with that Information Alliance idol Elite you get all the inside info, huh? On the other hand, I kind of wish you hadn't spoiled the surprise for me."

"The world powers don't exist anymore, so now she's just a global top idol."

"That's one hell of a 'just'."

All the concert information was listed on Quenser's mobile device.

Heivia grinned as he viewed it.

"So Oh Ho Ho destroys everyone's G-cup dreams and then performs alongside those Scandinavian twins, huh? I never imagined I'd get the chance to see something like this live."

"Don't let your guard down."

"I know. Although I'm personally more into that fried shrimp in glasses accompanying the twin sisters. And now that I know the G-cups are a lie, I think her commander is a lot more my type. ...Wait a second. Is my excellent taste informing me that I'm more into the managers than the idols themselves?"

"Yes, hello. Is this the general contact point for the Vanderbilt family? I have some important information regarding your young lady's shitty fiancé that I think she would be very interested in."

Quenser whispered into his radio and Heivia tried to snatch it away from him, resulting in a struggle over the device.

The boundaries between the world powers had been eliminated and the world would now be managed by the single large framework of the United Countries. To symbolize humanity's newfound unity, the giant fissure splitting North America was being filled in.

It was a historical day well worth celebrating.

"I heard Myonri got certified in something new again."

"She says she now has International Zero Gravity Fruit Cultivation Class 2 Certification. God knows where she'll ever use that."

The concert wasn't set to start for a while still.

Based on the size of the audience that had already gathered, there would likely be more than 100 thousand in all. Giving all the standard warnings sounded like a pain.

“By the way, Heivia, where’s your fiancée? I thought for sure she would be with you.”

“She was really looking forward to it, but she fainted after seeing this crowd. When she came to, she said it was the heat and smells of so many people. Apparently she started to imagine she was suffocating on their carbon dioxide.”

“She’s a noble all right.”

“Hey, lay off. That’s what makes her so cute.”

Several white lines were drawn in the blue sky overhead. The parallel claw marks slashing across the sky were Ice Squadron.

“Hello, Mariydi. How are you doing?”

“Call me Ice Girl 1 when using the radio, amateur. Plus, this is an illegal transmission. Would you call a gymnast’s phone in the middle of a performance? Shifting just 200cm out of place would cause a collision during these acrobatics.”

She sounded awfully cheerful for all the insults. She may have found these by-the-books ceremonies boring. There was also hard rock playing behind her voice for some reason.

The fighters weren’t the only weapons of war participating in the ceremony.

“So Objects aren’t going away after all, huh?”

“Did you hear about the plan to construct an Object as an ecological and harmless amusement park? It’s apparently a charity model to provide entertainment for kids in war torn areas.”

The Baby Magnum and Rush had been repaired after taking so much damage. The work had been completed faster than normal because so many Objects were being scrapped, providing a lot of spare parts.

Quenser changed his radio’s frequency.

“Princess, you need to focus on the ceremony. The entire world is watching this event, so show them that Objects have a place in a peaceful era.”

“Okay, Quenser.”

“Oh ho ho. When you put it like that, it just makes me want to find a loophole. Maybe we could change the schedule to include an Object sparring match so I can show her who’s boss.”

“Don’t you have a concert coming up!?” asked Quenser. “What are you doing in your Object!?”

“Ho ho ho. Oh ho ho ho ho!! I can complete this odd job with plenty of time left to prepare for the concert. I am the world’s greatest idol after all!!!!!!”

“(Could she be nervous about showing her true self to the world?)”

“Did you just say something?”

The Princess fell silent when Oh Ho Ho tried to hog the attention with her surprise Object appearance.

But she eventually spoke again.

“Quenser, don’t forget that you need to give me my White Day gift once this is over.”

“Bfff!!???”

“Which means you need to take me out on an afterwork date, won’t it? So where will you be taking me?”

“Oh ho ho. When did you two arrange this!?”

He felt like the radio’s speaker would break if he listened to that shouting any longer, so he twisted the volume control only to have someone shout at him in person.

“What the hell was that about!? What’s going on between you and the Princess!?”

“My eardrums don’t have a volume control, so please keep it down. Besides, you have a fiancée, so if anyone gets to be jealous, it’s me.”

The critics, researchers, and other experts were discussing the future path for Objects, but Quenser saw two basic options.

First, gaining appreciation and charisma by completing important noncombat jobs like disaster relief

and construction. War wasn't the only job for the military, after all.

And second, being the star attraction during parades. The colossal weapons would demonstrate their country's technological prowess but never be meant for actual fighting. The demonstration would inspire the people of that country and become diplomatic tools that intimidated other countries without the need for combat.

"The First Generations are being used for the dirty odd jobs and the Second Generations are the sparkling parade stars, right?"

"Don't tell the Princess. She's really looking forward to wearing a new marching band inspired uniform and piloting her Object around."

Quenser thought the first option was more useful for everyone involved. Using them in parades really meant no one had found a practical use for them.

For example, Oh Ho Ho may have been panicking a fair bit on the inside. If her Object wasn't needed anymore, it could get scrapped. That was probably why she had suddenly decided to reveal her true self to the world to give her Object a boost in the entertainment world.

Quenser arrived at the wing of the stage and changed his radio's frequency again.

This one wasn't an official military frequency.

"Putana, Catherine. Can you hear me?"

"I can, teacher," replied Putana.

"Oh, is it finally my turn!?" replied Catherine.

"Catherine, I can't give you any details since you retired from the military and count as a civilian, but I can say this concert is going to have a lot of surprises. Getting excited is fine, but don't cause any trouble. Putana, I can't trust Catherine in this and I seriously doubt my peaceful parents can restrain her. I hate to ask this of you, but can you stick with her and keep her under control until the concert is over? Knowing her, she might even try to climb up onto the stage."

"What's in it for me?"

"I'll treat you to a meal for babysitting her. Pick out a curry place in North America you want to try."

Putana ignored the displeased shout of "big brother!!" and gave a businesslike reply.

“Understood. I already tried the chili con carne and loco moco here, but neither one really did it for me. I need something with at least 8 types of spices.”

He was fairly certain some well-seasoned fried chicken would qualify by that standard, but he knew that kind of reply put her in a bad mood. He was asking her for a favor and she couldn't take a joke, so he opted to keep his mouth shut.

Just then, Frolaytia's voice came over the radio.

“Quenser, Heivia. Our intel was correct. We have confirmed the arrival of the dangerous element, so continue according to schedule.”

The two idiots immediately pulled out their weapons.

Heivia's gun was loaded with nonlethal rubber bullets and Quenser used concussion bombs that knocked people out with a shockwave. The way wars were fought had already changed quite a bit.

And taking the enemy alive was certainly more convenient for gathering intelligence.

(Gone are the wars of an army annihilating their enemy on the battlefield. Now we fight the wars of the hunter gathering hints and tracking the enemy.)

Today's event was meant to show the arrival of a new era, so they had known it would be the perfect target for anyone who didn't want that new era. Maybe the times were changing too quickly. Financial reparations were being paid and a great many new treaties were being signed, but there were people who felt left behind before they could come to terms with everything emotionally. And it was Quenser and the others who had proven that you could change the world by fighting.

That was why Mariydi Whitewitch and the Princess were here. He wished Oh Ho Ho would go prepare for her concert instead, but it certainly wouldn't hurt to have her with them.

“No, my real worry is Catherine. I hope she doesn't get overexcited once the enemy shows up.”

“Trust in Putana's overly serious Putana-ness to counteract that. We've got work to do.”

Quenser read through the information displayed on his mobile device's small screen and swiftly calculated the benefits and the risks.

(Mariydi's aerial photos let us mark all the suspicious people and cargo in the area. Now we'll have the Princess time her ceremonial cannon blasts with our gunshots and bomb blasts to drown them out.)

"So now wars are fought by terrorists and guerillas. Are you sure we've made the world a better place?"

"I'm sure they would tell you we haven't."

Quenser recognized one of the faces on the suspects list.

Carat Affinity.

The boy was still only 10. He had apparently been recruited as a child soldier at some point, but his training period had to have been woefully short. The people behind this must have only been gathering disposable soldiers who could keep firing for long enough to get the job done and then maybe break open a capsule of deadly gas before being shot to death. Not that any of them would have been told that was their purpose.

Every one of them would have been made to feel uniquely talented when they were recruited.

After revealing their complaints and frustrations, they would have been introduced to others in similar circumstances.

It probably felt pretty good.

(The stupid kid is overthinking all this. If he wants revenge for his dead mom, he should just come at me with a knife.)

It was definitely Quenser who had pushed the boy down into hell, so Quenser was intent on ending this safely and protecting the boy before he got himself killed.

That was why Quenser had volunteered for security at the world's largest concert.

"If this was an enclosed building, they would either drive a giant wedge into the seismic dampers at the base of the building to bring down the entire structure, or they would release a package of gas into the air conditioning system. But this is an open air concert out in the wilderness. What are they hoping to do?"

"You were complaining how hot the desert is earlier, remember? Everyone will be gathered in the cooler areas. Attack there and they can kill a lot of people pretty efficiently. My guess is a biological weapon slipped into the giant fans or the water tanks for the mist showers. Changing the angle of the lights backstage to shine on the audience and increase their temperature was probably in preparation for that."

"Okay, let's bet on it then. I've got 200 euros on them using a slow-acting radioactive material in the temporary biergarten."

“You’re on. You’re going to regret this.”

“Regret not betting more, you mean? Now, let’s go!!”

The two idiots parted the crowd ahead of them.

A new battle awaited them below the blazing sun.

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