

“So, what’s happening out there?” Matt asked. “It’s gotta be chaotic, right?”

“That might be an understatement,” Amos said. “The United Nations met yesterday, as some of you know, but they adjourned without coming to any consensus on a resolution to condemn the terrorists. Everything proposed by the U.S., the United Kingdom, or France was blocked by China or Russia.”

“What resolutions were they trying to get approved?” Jason asked.

“When President McCormick couldn’t get Saudi Arabia or Russia to admit they were behind the terrorists…”

“The president went to the UN?” Matt interrupted, surprised.

“He did, five days ago. It’s not the first time a president has spoken before the UN General Assembly,” Amos said. “Though it’s a bit unexpected under the circumstances, with all the global tension. He openly accused the Al Saud family of funding Al-Qaeda, who he said were building a bomb in Mexico so they could smuggle it into the U.S. through a drug route. He also accused the Russians of delivering bomb-making materials to Al-Qaeda and North Korea.”

“Wow!” Matt said. “North Korea would love to put a nuclear warhead on one of their ICBMs and launch it at the U.S.”

“That’s what the president accused them of planning. He gave the Saudis and Russians an ultimatum to stop the bombs or the U.S. would retaliate with nuclear weapons.”

“Oh—oh my,” Brittany said. She seemed to want to say more, but didn’t find the words.

“Was he serious?” Jason asked skeptically.

He wasn’t sure he believed Amos. *Amos can say anything he wants. Who’s going to contradict him?*

“There’s more if you want to hear it,” Amos said.

He ignored Jason’s question. When nobody spoke, he continued.

“China said it would enter the war on the side of North Korea. England and France said they would come in on the side of the U.S. That was Saturday. Since then, the King of Saudi Arabia, King Salman, has assured the U.S. that they are doing everything in their power to locate the bomb and the bomb makers.”

“You said Saudi Arabia funded the terrorists. Can’t they just tell them to stop the bomb?” Matt asked.

“It’s not that simple. Years ago, a radical form of Islam, called Wahhabism, evolved in Saudi Arabia. The Wahhabis believe that the West has become godless and decadent.”

“They have a point there,” Brittany said, under her breath.

“Maybe we have, to an extent. But the Wahhabis have twisted the words of the prophet Mohammed to convince their followers to commit atrocities in the name of their god.”

“Like women and children strapping on explosives and blowing themselves up in a crowd of people,” Matt added.

“Exactly,” Amos said. “Keep in mind that the Wahhabis don’t represent mainstream Islam. They’re a small splinter group and very radical. They believe it’s their duty to kill anyone who doesn’t believe as they do. They also believe that any Muslim who sacrifices his own life for the cause, whether intentionally or as an innocent bystander, instantly goes to paradise, where he or she is rewarded.”

“That’s disgusting,” Brittany said, wrinkling her brow. “They really believe that?”

“They do,” Amos said. “The worst part is that the Saudis spent millions to set up indoctrination camps to teach young men and women Wahhabism and train them in terrorist tactics. But now the terrorists are out of control, carrying out attacks all over the world, including some in Saudi Arabia. Some of the Al Saud family—the ones currently in control of the country, including King Salman—want to stop them. In fact, Saudi Arabia’s ruling family probably holds the strongest anti-terrorism position in the Middle East. They do what they can to help control the threat of terrorism, or at least that’s what we’re led to believe. The problem is that the terrorists have gone elsewhere.”

“Where?” Matt asked.

“Iran, Syria, other countries,” Amos said. “Now they recruit young people all over the world, including England, France, and the U.S. They indoctrinate hundreds of people, usually young men, and then return them to their homes as sleepers, just waiting for Al-Qaeda to call on them. The number of Muslims in Europe is apparently increasing at about ten percent per year. That creates a lot of places for terrorists to hide.”

“You included the U.S.,” Jason said. He didn’t believe everything Amos was saying, but it was an intriguing story.

“That’s right,” Amos replied. “Since the bombings of September 11, in 2001, the U.S. Intelligence Community has stopped numerous terrorists before they could act. The U.S. has done a better job of stopping the terrorists than other countries.”

“But we’ve had to give up a lot of our freedoms as a result,” Matt said. “Like the TSA checkpoints at airports that are so intrusive.”

“True,” Amos said, “but it’s worked so far.”

“So, is war inevitable then?” Jason asked. “Was the president serious about retaliating with nuclear weapons?”

“That’s what he said. Like I said, our allies tried to pass a resolution condemning Al-Qaeda, with sanctions against any country sympathetic to them. It’s questionable whether sanctions would have done any good, anyway. I don’t see Al-Qaeda or North Korea standing down without being forced, even if Russia and China went along with the sanctions. The Russians would love to see the U.S. embarrassed on the international scene...”

“Come on,” Jason said, mockingly, “Russia isn’t going to intentionally push the world toward global nuclear war.”

“I wouldn’t have thought so either, Jason. But it looks pretty grim. Most, if not all, of the countries with nuclear weapons have begun bringing their weapons online. The majority of the foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. have shut down. Their diplomats and families have left the country.”

“Really?” Chris asked “Maybe I should contact some of my friends in the State Department.”

He pulled out his mobile phone and tried to dial, then frowned when he didn’t get a signal.

“Watchdog groups estimate that there are over ten thousand nuclear missiles, with multiple warheads, in the world,” Amos said. “Maybe as many as fifteen thousand. If the nuclear powers launch them all, we would see a nuclear winter that would change the environment to the point where most life on Earth goes extinct.”

“What?” Jason asked, incredulous. “You’ve got to be joking. We have the greatest technology the world has ever known and you think it’s going to be snuffed out just like that?”

He snapped his fingers for emphasis.

“Like the dinosaurs,” Brittany said.

It wasn't a question. Jason turned on her, ready to snap at her, but just as he opened his mouth, he saw Amos looking at him and changed his mind. There was silence in the room while they processed this information.

"I can't get a signal," Chris said, alternately punching keys on his mobile phone and putting it up to his ear.

"I couldn't get a signal last night either," Jason said angrily. "What's going on Amos? Have you blocked outbound calls?"

Jason stood and took a step toward Amos.

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Amos debated not answering, but realized the issue wasn't going to go away without an explanation.

"The mountains, and being underground, would normally block all signals, although we have equipment to overcome that problem. Yes, we've blocked all calls. We don't want anyone outside to lock on to a signal and find out where we are."

"So you've isolated us from the outside, and we have nothing but your word as far as what's going on out there. Is that it?"

Jason spit the words out, furious, as he took another step toward Amos. Amos's pulse quickened as he got ready for Jason to lash out physically again. He stood and took a step toward him, to show that he wasn't afraid of him—he wasn't going to be caught off guard a second time.

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Lillie saw Amos's reaction and decided she had to jump in now if she was going to prevent another fight.

"Amos is telling the truth, Jason," she said. "Several of us have heard and seen the reports."

Jason turned on Lillie. He didn't speak to her—she hadn't thought he would. He had a contempt for women. It was beneath his dignity to acknowledge them. But she hoped he would back down. He turned back to Amos, breathing hard.

"You're lying, aren't you. There's no war coming. You're saying these things to keep us here against our will."

“Oh, right Jason, sure” Amos spat. “I forced you to come against your will. I tricked you—somehow, I’d love to know how that happened—I tricked you into *wanting* to come so we could have these little fireside chats. They’re just so much fun for all of us.”

Jason moved another step, but before the confrontation could get physical, Lillie and Brittany moved to stand between the two men. Mike stood as well, and moved toward Amos, clenching his fists, ready to defend his father if he had to.

Lillie pushed against Amos’s chest.

“Amos, this isn’t the way to deal with it,” she said.

Amos slowly relaxed, and she was able to move him away from the confrontation. Brittany did the same with Jason, though it was more work.

“Stop it Jason,” she said sternly.

But she had to struggle against him, and he was nearly twice her size. He seemed to have lost his senses, and was spoiling for a fight. When the two men were finally several feet apart, with their wives standing between them, Amos turned away and sat back down. Jason was slower to respond, but eventually sat down as well, his face beet red.

“Amos,” Becca said slowly, seemingly concerned that her words might stir up his anger again, or perhaps Jason’s. “You were telling us about the possibility of there being a nuclear war. We haven’t reached the deadline yet. Is it possible they’ll prevent it?”