

Dire, Book 1 – "One Small Step"

by

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## CHAPTER 1 — PUT ON YOUR WAR PAINT

### PAGE 1

#### PANEL 1

"The Hangar" a black and pink bar at the end of narrow, dusty street, sits with customers coming in and out. On the first floor, flashing neon lights seep through the stained-glass and the door frame.

On its second floor, we see windows with metal blinds, half-open, and a dim white light.

#### PANEL 2

Medium shot. ICHIKO (late 20s, Japanese, long blue hair) sits in a fluffy pink chair and reads on her hand terminal. There's two suitcases leaning against a closet door, and a photo of a boy and girl on the table by her terminal.

The room is dark, save for the light coming from the terminal and the outside world.

Ichiko looks concerned, frustrated.

#### PANEL 3

Detail shot. The terminal shows a budgetary bar graph. The details don't matter much, but at the top it shows:  
"3.000.000/5.000.000 credits acquired for secure arrangements"

A robot head sits in the upper left corner of the screen. FRANK. He looks an awful lot like a robotic Sinatra...

On the right, a column of widgets shows 10,000 email notifications, and 24 missed called from "Kame"

When Frank speaks, it appears on screen as a text bubble.

FRANK

Your current flow of income from the Hangar bar suggests you will have the credits necessary to execute plans in three months, dame.

#### PANEL 4

Wide shot. Ichiko sits in the foreground, and the half-open blinds are in the background, revealing a stretch of neon signs and lights, all headed toward an oceanside beach.

There are floating carts and small VTOLS in the distance, flying over the water. An airship (blimp) sits closest, with a sign showing Samuél de Toro, head of organization **Salvador**, grinning with his golden veneers and geared nose piercing.

Ichiko is a silhouette in the foreground, a hand pressed to her forehead in stress.

ICHIKO

No good, Frank. Someone from the Symphony will catch on before long. We can't stay here.

FRANK

Agreed. Dean and Sammy share the opinion that it may be best to contact the prince—

ICHIKO

No.

## PAGE 2

### PANEL 1

Detail shot. We see the picture. Two Japanese children waving at the camera with big, toothy smiles. Ichiko is clearly the older of the two (taller). They're standing beside a sign that says: "HUMANITARIAN TOWER GALA HALL" and dressed fancy, but with clothes too baggy for them.

A robot in metallic fancy wear stands beside them, one hand behind his back, the other crossed over his stomach. An engraved nameplate on his breast reads: "LUDWIG"

We see Ichiko hover a hand over the edge of the photo, touching it longingly.

ICHIKO

I don't want him involved.

### PANEL 2

Wide shot. Ichiko stands from her seat and paces around the room. She's heading to the suitcases.

ICHIKO

I made my choice. I saw what our organization really is.

### PANEL 3

From within the zipped open suitcase, we see Ichiko crouching down and peering inside.

ICHIKO

If anyone knew what they were planning,  
it would start a war between the  
organizations.

FRANK

And you'd still like to prevent this,  
doll?

#### PANEL 4

Detail shot on the inside of the suitcase. We see a sharp,  
glistening blade that appears to almost be made out of stars.  
But it also includes patterns that are only half-complete.

It seems alien.

ICHIKO

Hell no. I've been thinking, Frank. If  
the gods are gonna wipe us out anyway, we  
may as well cast judgment on the ones who  
ended the world.

#### PAGE 3

#### PANEL 1

A wall of TV screens (think news broadcasting station) shows the  
gods from different angles, always floating in the sky, in 100+  
places around the world.

They're in these places all at once, all in the same position.

They have no discernible features, but one is made of pure white  
light, one pure darkness, and the other three splotchy and  
varying grays.

Human beings of today's world (2020's) look up at them in awe.  
One or two people are already being evaporated (their matter  
stripping apart as though it were made of thin clay).

The god made of light waves a hand forward, gesticulating.

RADIO BROADCAST

Good morning New Roosevelt! Today marks  
the first day of the 97th A-Week,  
celebrating the arrival of humanity's  
creators and our promise to better their  
world.

PANEL 2

Wide shot of Paris, France, at the moment of a nuclear detonation. We can see war has already been raging for some time in this panel (barred windows, burnt vehicles; a large white sheet on the Eiffel Tower that says "FALSE GODS" in red text, with the three Abrahamic religious symbols on it).

## RADIO BROADCAST

Despite periods of conflict, the last decade has shown major improvements in climate, birth rate, and resource depletion!

PANEL 3

Extreme close-up. BECKETT's (late 20s, black, brown eyes) eyes sleep restlessly.

PANEL 4

On a single, half-crumbled wall, we see the shadows of children fleeing in terror from a nuclear blast. There is also a spray painted pentagon of circles. The top most circle is white, the bottom-right most is black, and the others a splotchy gray.

Everything else around the scene is dust/debris.

## RADIO BROADCAST

If your children have never seen snow, tell them to keep a lookout! Forecasts predict a 20% chance of flurries in the northern district this week!

PANEL 5

EOD squads huddle around a futuristic bomb in a facility, actively trying to disarm it. It's not going well, and is about to explode.

We can see more of the squad hold guns at the enemy, who are huddled in the corner of the room with their hands raised. They all wear modern religious paraphernalia.

PANEL 6

A white sphere of an explosion wraps around the entirety of what appears to be Tokyo (little Akira reference).

PANEL 7

Beckett, as an EOD soldier, has her helmet off, her face and uniform splattered with blood.

DES stands behind her, trying to pull her away from something. He looks horrified, but angry. He's a soldier trying desperately to keep to his orders.

#### PANEL 8

We see a fellow EOD soldier on the ground, blood spilling from their sizzling neck. Their laser rifle has clattered to the ground, and is bubbling/shaking unstably.

RADIO BROADCAST  
And remember folks, it's up to each of us  
to make the world so many died for a  
better, brighter reality.

#### PAGE 4

##### PANEL 1

Splash page.

Beckett wakes up. She's laying in a shabby metal bed in what appears to be a cubicle. She's missing her right arm up to the shoulder.

There is a small bedside table beside her with a digital clock/radio (which reads "6:04 a.m., Nov. 7, 2135"), and a number of self-help books ("Disposing Trauma: Life After the War"; "The Disposal: a 100-Year War"; "Finding Meaning Like a Badass Bitch"; etc.).

She smacks the radio/clock to mute it.

RADIO BROADCAST  
So go out there and make a diff—!

DES  
Yo, Beckett.

#### PAGE 5

##### PANEL 1

DES (early 30s, hispanic) is sitting beside Beckett in a foldable chair, wearing a gray tank top that says "**E.O.D. VET**" on it, and basketball shorts. He has two robotic legs and a robotic arm. All three are thin, wiry, and cheap-looking.

He's holding Beckett's (similarly cheap) robotic arm in his lap, and he's grinning at her.

Beckett folds her left arm over her forehead and sighs, looking up.

DES  
Dreaming, soldier?

BECKETT  
Remembering.

## PANEL 2

Extreme wide shot. They're walking out of a gymnasium of cubicles. A screen on the furthest wall reads in huge text: "DISPOSAL VETERINARY HOUSING: SPONSORED BY THE HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION... THANK YOU FOR SAVING THE WORLD!"

There are vets of all sorts, many of whom are majorly augmented (robotic limbs, faces, torsos, etc.)

DES  
Remembering four minutes too late. We've gotta vasc. Double-time.

BECKETT  
Our shift doesn't start until 7:30, Des.

## PANEL 3

Wide shot. A bus rolls past a synthetic park (with flowers and foliage that look like plastic). A sign reads: "please do not pick synthetic flowers".

DES  
Not anymore. I pushed us up to 7:00.

BECKETT  
Why?! We take public transport!

DES  
You know how I got promoted to squad leader? By going the extra mile.

## PANEL 4

The bus drives through a large barrier. In the city of New Roosevelt, there are four districts which are walled off by economic standing. Des and Beckett live in the furthest district, and they're headed to the second-innermost.

Far in the distance, we see the massive spire of Humanitarian Tower rising above the rest of the city. It's over a mile tall, breaching into the clouds.

On an electronic billboard by the district entrance, we see DRACO LA MANCHE (50s, black, blue eyes) in a purple suit/gown, bowing his head slightly and smiling. Next to him are the words: "WELCOME TO THE KENNEDY DISTRICT! TWO DISTRICTS OUT FROM THE HOUSE OF THE FIVE!" There is also the pentagon of circles on the billboard, beside Draco.

We can also see T.R.E.E. soldiers, dressed as "Humanitarian Security" (white and blue kevlar suits, laser rifles, etc.) standing atop the barrier entrance to the district.

BECKETT

We're not in a squad anymore, Des.

DES

No, but how else are we going to get a job at H-Sec? Putting in the effort. That's how.

(New bubble)

Anyway, we're married. That's a squad.

BECKETT

A squad of two? Don't think so. Plus, we married for benefits. So double-no.

## PAGE 6

### PANEL 1

Inside the bus (four seats to a row, split down the middle), the window beside Beckett lights up with a projection of MARCUS and CAMILLA JASPER, blocking the outside view.

They're a white, rich-looking couple in their 50s wearing sleek, expensive clothes with ironed-on smiles.

Camilla's words are spoken over/covered by Beckett's groaning face.

MARCUS

Hi there! Thanks for riding Humane Transport. We're so pleased you chose: **BUS #A3-112**. Right Camilla?

CAMILLA

That's right my love! Did you know that by riding Humane, you save on carbon emissions by up to—

BECKETT

Bleh. That's a married couple, Des.



PANEL 2

From outside the window, we see an out-of-focus screen, and Des and Beckett behind it. Des leans forward, his face behind Beckett's. While Des watches the screen, Beckett seems to be looking out the window with a frown.

We can make out on the screen that NEIL JASPER (6, brown hair, wearing overalls) has popped up.

MARCUS

But don't take our word for it!

NEIL

I wuv da bus!

DES

I wonder if the kid knows he's a glorified prop. Youngest registered citizen alive, and his prepubescence is steeped in sponsorships.

PANEL 3

Detail shot on the interior window. We see Beckett's fingers double-tap the edge of the screen, minimizing it toward her fingers.

Out the window, a group of dirty-looking people are being led outside by Humanitarian Security. Some are holding boxes with religious paraphernalia (crosses, rosary, bible, etc.).

A guard holds one man's arms back. Another guard stands before him, whipping out an iron cudgel. He's rearing back to hit the Abolished, who is fighting to free himself from the other guards.

PANEL 4

Wide shot. The guard slams the rod into the Abolished's chest, electricity spurting out and running up his neck and arms.

Smoke singes from the man's chest. The guard looks pleased.

The other abolished, behind him, are screaming.

PANEL 5

Wide shot. The bus rolls onward, and the man continues to be beaten on the ground. While Des looks down in his lap, Beckett still gazes out the window with a troubled look.

PAGE 7

PANEL 1

Establishing shot. The bus stops just outside a large, black, box-like building with "CONGO SHIPPING" on the front. Each word has a smile-like curve beneath it, and a slogan that says: "Making a difference, once package at a time" below.

Outside the building is a mass of union protesters. They're holding signs asking for a fair wage, worker's rights, etc. Some signs ask "Is this what the Five asked for?" and similar notions. H-Sec hold them off.

PANEL 2

Medium shot. Beckett and Des are sliding on their Congo jumpsuits as they walk past the crowd of protesters. H-Sec security lines the walkway, protecting them from the protesters.

One of the protesters, a woman with long brown hair looks over at them with surprise.

Des looks at Beckett, saddened. Beckett stares ahead, ignoring everything.

DES

I agree that guard was a junker, Beckett.  
We'll report him. There's no need to beat  
on them like that.

BECKETT

Right. World of difference that report  
will make.

PANEL 3

Overhead shot. As Des and Beckett walk toward the double-door entrance, the brown-haired protester weaves through the edge of the crowd and grabs Beckett by the sleeve. This is ALLI, we just don't know it yet.

An H-Sec guard only just notices, too late to stop her.

DES

Right. Well, I'll see you at lunch.

ALLI

Millicent Beckett!

PAGE 8PANEL 1

Medium shot. Beckett recoils from the woman's touch, and the H-Sec guard already has his hands on her, pulling her away. But so are the other protesters...

Des watches curiously from the front doors.

BECKETT

Hey—!

ALLI

You should leave.

## PANEL 2

Close up on Beckett. She looks concerned. She also spots something on the protester...

## PANEL 3

Medium-close up. As the protester is dragged back into the crowd (by other protesters, no less...), we see she's wearing a skin-tight nanosuit beneath her jacket, which covers her from neck to toe (fingers included). There's an Olympus-brand logo on the chest...

ALLI

You both should leave!

## PAGE 9

## PANEL 1

Est. shot. Beckett walks into a large room with CONGO vans being filled with packages.

There's a huge sign on a wall showing a fat man in a white suit pointing judgmentally at an embarrassed worker. A spilled open box sits between them. Above it, a message reads: "All Damaged Packages are to be DISPOSED! Fines will be automatically taken out of employee wages."

A wall of screens showing the news sit below this.

There are aisles of packages on red, metal shelving, and Beckett is there with one other woman, CASSIE (50s, buzzcut, heavier-set). They wear the same jumpsuits.

BECKETT

Hey Cass. What's with the protest?

CASSIE

S'Unionizers. You know how they are. Lo-Rez. Always wanting more.

## PANEL 2

Medium shot. We're on the racks, and Beckett just took a box that was blocking our view.

Cassie stands behind her, holding a package of her own, glancing at Beckett with some concern. She's about to speak when...

BECKETT

Yeah... There was a woman who knew my name, though. She told me to leave. Didn't sound like a "join the union" leave, either. I haven't seen her around before.

ICHIKO

(Off-panel, broadcast)  
Attention world. Gods, I can't believe just I said that...

### PANEL 3

Wide shot. With Beckett and Cassie in the foreground, looking over their shoulders at the screens, we see Ichiko broadcast on all of them.

The quality is staticky, but we can tell she's sitting in the same room as the start of the chapter.

ICHIKO

Doesn't matter. My name is Princess Ichiko Maki, heiress to the Symphony empire. I need you to hear me, before they shut this down, and likely kill me.

CASSIE

Is that the missing princess?

BECKETT

The people's own. Nobody's heard from her in over a year. I thought she'd gone Dark.

### PANEL 4

Wide shot. From an office encased in glass, overlooking the whole department from the ceiling (like a ceiling light, almost), we see nice work shoes and white slacks on a tile floor, a cigar dropping to the ground.

In the background, we can still see the screens.

BOSS

Who turned this on?! Get it off before I fire the lot of you!!

ICHIKO

I left the Symphony after learning what their true intentions were. They're not

some altruistic tech organization. None of the big four orgs are.

#### PANEL 5

Medium shot on one of the screens. We see Ichiko alone, speaking to us.

ICHIKO

They've taken it out of our education. The Arrival wasn't just a random call to do better. The gods gave us instructions. We don't have to wait on their judgment.

#### PAGE 10

#### PANEL 1

In a newsroom, we see journalists watching in their open space on the spherical TV screens throughout the room.

ICHIKO

I don't know how long my family has known about this. I don't know how much each org knows. But the gods left us pieces of their puzzle.

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Pérez! Where the hell's Arty Pérez?! I need him on this, now!

JOURNALIST #1

(On phone)

Drop that interview. Are you seeing the news?

JOURNALIST #2

Do we have a trace on this? Is it live?

#### PANEL 2

A crowded group of families in a hostel watch Ichiko's message on a small holographic screen. Several of the children have cheap, augmented limbs. Some have bandages around their eyes, face, torsos, etc.

All listen closely.

ICHIKO

The Disposal wasn't just a war over abolished beliefs. It was a scavenger hunt. They were looking for the artifact of the gods.

(New bubble)  
The Symphony never stopped searching. I  
can't speak for the other organizations,  
but my guess is they're still doing the  
same.

PANEL 3

Inside the House of the Five (place of worship), we see a congregation staring up toward the pulpit as Ichiko's message plays on a giant screen.

Draco La Manche, standing at the pulpit, looks furious. He's been interrupted. Everyone else is confused.

ICHIKO  
I don't know what it does. I don't even  
know what it looks like. But I know its  
pieces are dangerous. Because I took one  
from the Symphony.

PANEL 4

Detail shot.

On a screen, Ichiko holds up the half-blade we saw earlier.

ICHIKO  
It's hard to describe when you're not in  
person, but it radiates some kind of...  
energy. It's not technology like I've  
ever seen.

PANEL 5

Wide shot. Desmond runs into the room where Beckett and Cassie stand watching the screen. There are a few more workers in the room, too, who came to watch.

The message continues.

DESMOND  
Beckett. We've gotta vesc.

ICHIKO  
There are three pieces out there. And  
when they're brought together, it will  
call forth the gods.

BECKETT  
Are you listening to this? The princess  
lost her mind.

PANEL 1

Medium shot. Des grabs Beckett by the organic arm with his robotic one. She glances away from the screen confusedly. Des looks concerned, determined to leave.

DESMOND

Yeah, maybe.

(New bubble)

The protestors are getting violent toward H-Sec. Jimenez said he thinks they might break in.

BECKETT

Already? They've been out there for all of thirty minutes.

DESMOND

A lot of them are still wearing company clothes. I don't want to be anywhere near the blame when it starts flying.

PANEL 2

From the screen's perspective, we see Des try to lead Beckett away. But she stops him, looking back over her shoulder at the screen.

DESMOND

Let's grab breakfast. We'll get knocked for the time, but we can make it up.

BECKETT

Des, put some ice on it.

ICHIKO

(off-panel)

But don't take my word for it.

PANEL 3

We look at the screen again. We see another shot of the gods on A-Day, and now we can hear the audio.

LIGHT

**YOU WILL BE GIVEN ONE-HUNDRED YEARS TO  
BRING TOGETHER OUR GIFTS TO HUMANITY.  
THIS WILL BE THE FIRST STEP TOWARD  
SALVATION.**

(New bubble)

**WHOSOEVER GATHERS OUR GIFTS SHALL BE  
TASKED WITH THE FINAL JUDGMENT.  
OTHERWISE, HUMANITY WILL SUMMARILY JUDGED  
AT THE END OF THE CENTURY.**

(New bubble)  
**A FRACTION OF HUMANITY WILL STILL BE  
 PRESENTLY TAKEN AS CONSEQUENCE—**

PANEL 4

Wide shot. The whole packing room stares at the screen in shock, except for Des, who looks at the slanted ceiling windows, concerned.

We see a dull, yet growing buzzing noise "BUZZZZZZZZ" come from the ceiling.

CASSIE  
 That was Light's voice. I-It's impossible  
 to mimic that, isn't it?

BECKETT  
 Has to be some sort of explanation....

DES  
 Beckett, you hear that?

PANEL 5

OVS. Between Des, Beckett, and Cassie, we see the screen. The buzzing noise grows louder, and we see a red laser shot through one of the ceiling windows toward our group. We can barely make out a silhouette of a person in the sky.

Des is the only one to see it.

ICHIKO  
 If the Symphony puts together the  
 artifact, I promise you, the world will  
 end. Whoever finds it will be the  
 representative of our world. And they're  
 getting close.

BECKETT  
 Is she trying to start another war?

DESMOND  
 Millie...!

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PANEL 1

Desmond tackles Beckett to the ground. She's shocked, but Des is in full soldier mode.

We can still see the corner of the screen. We also see/hear the "BUZZZZZZ" end with a "ZZZZING"



The red laser grows wide.

BECKETT  
What the hell, Des?!

DESMOND  
Stay down!

ICHIKO  
If you know anything, if you have any  
ounce of fight left in you, do not let  
them win. If you've ever wanted to make a  
difference in this world...

#### PANEL 2

Detail shot on the ceiling window. It smashes apart, tearing most of the ceiling open and sending it toward the floor. A human shape pencil-dives through it, with a massive concussive burst of air surrounding it like a tube.

#### PANEL 3

Wide shot. Everyone in the room is sent flying backward, save for Beckett and Desmond, who slide against the ground.

Some are crushed by the falling debris. Others are flung into walls, packages, aisles and trucks.

The human shape lands on the ground, a swirl of dust around them. Most of the screens are shattered.

ICHIKO  
...now's the time.

### PAGE 13

#### PANEL 1

Between Des and Beckett's shoulders, we see the man stand. This is MICHAEL.

He's in a smooth, chrome exosuit which covers his whole body. His helmet is smooth, with only two glowing blue eyes as discernible details. The suit sings with heat, releasing steam in the seams of the armor.

He looks over at them, head cocked. His stance, hunched over, makes him look like an animal.

#### PANEL 2

Close-up on Des and Beckett. They're both in shock. Beckett is bleeding from the temple.

DESMOND  
What the hell...

JIMENEZ  
(Off-panel)  
They broke in! It's a riot!!

### PANEL 3

Wide shot. In the hallway leading to the packaging room, Jimenez tries to outrun a horde of protestors. One in particular, a gigantic, pale, blond man, rushes in behind him.

JIMENEZ  
Get the hell out of here!

### PANEL 4

Medium shot. The large man, ELK, sprints past Jimenez, who cowers mid-run, thinking he'll be hit.

ELK is grinning, and wears a skintight nanosuit with Olympus branding on the chest and back.

### PANEL 5

A man in a black and red combat jacket peers in from the broken-open ceiling, and leaps down. He's wearing an Olympus nanosuit underneath his clothes. This is LOCK.

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### PANEL 1

Wide shot. Lock falls down on top of Michael with his feet out in a kick. Elk reaches him at the same time, throwing a fist at Michael's body.

Michael reacts to both, one arm thrown above his head to block, and one out toward Elk, also to block.

The impact creates a further swirl of dust.

Large blocky text slides beside Elk and Lock both. Each reads:

"Agent Ethan "Lock" Lockhart; Mercenary"

"Agent David "Elk" Helm; Ring Fighter"

### PANEL 2

Wide shot. Beckett and Des stare at an utter loss. We can also see in this shot that Beckett's augmented arm has been crushed by debris, trapping her.

A woman runs over in a fluffy purple jacket and slacks. This is Alli.

DESMOND  
What is happening?

ALLI  
Hi!

### PANEL 3

Close-up shot. Alli smiles and kneels down, helping them up.

Large blocky text slides beneath her, reading: "Agent Allison "Alli" Fremont; T.R.E.E. University of War Tactics and History Valedictorian"

ALLI  
Hell of a day, huh? Tried to warn you, earlier.

### PANEL 4

Wide shot. Alli helps Des and Beckett to their feet. Beckett, now without her augmented arm, looks around. Des wipes the dust off his face.

ALLI  
You two should come with us. You've been scouted to join Olympus's task force.

BECKETT  
What?

DES  
Does it pay well?

### PANEL 5

Wide shot. Lock and Elk struggle with Michael, who fighting back far better than them

HIRO walks over lazily. He's pulling something from his pocket (also wearing a nanosuit).

HIRO  
You junkers. All the same... Thinking with your limbs, not your heads.  
(New bubble)  
Yo, I love a good mosh pit as much as anyone, but we've got to vesc. The scary lady is waiting for us.

PANEL 1

Medium shot. Hiro pulls out a small, simple disc. He clicks the center.

Large blocky text slides beneath Hiro. It reads: "Agent Hiro [REDACTED]; Mechanical Prodigy"

HIRO  
Watch this, meatheads.

PANEL 2

Wide shot. Hiro throws the disc and it lands on Michael's thigh. At once, it shocks him, locking his suit's movements in place.

We also see that four "pincers" emerge from the disc, digging into the armor's seams.

HIRO  
Alright, he's locked up. Won't last forever, so let's vasc, yeah? Unless you want to keep punching and kicking the hardest metal on Earth.

PANEL 3

Medium shot. Elk and Lock stand up, winded. Elk glances at the tech.

ELK  
Roight.

PANEL 4

Wide shot. The six of them all run through the rear entrance of the building. Elk carries Beckett in his arms, and Des limps along with a damaged augmented leg.

Alli leads the way.

DESMOND  
Can anyone give me a sit rep?

ALLI  
Sure. We were all hired by Olympus earlier today to serve as a covert task force—you included!

PANEL 5

Wide shot. The squad B-line it into an alleyway as we see Michael's silhouette, in the far distance, burst through the Congo building and rise into the sky again.

ALLI

They had intel that Princess Ichiko was going to release her message to the world, prompting espionage and... treasure hunting, basically, on a global scale.

## PAGE 16

### PANEL 1

In the alleyway, Alli presses a brick jutting out from a wall, clicking it in.

The ground begins to give way, revealing a stairwell leading underground.

ALLI

Someone must have also leaked that Olympus was looking to hire you, because whoever's in that suit orchestrated a riot to take you out before we could reach you.

BECKETT

Olympus knew the princess was going to send that message? Is it a conspiracy?

### PANEL 2

Medium shot. We're looking up the stairwell as the squad hustle down it, the hatch closing up again.

Des is walking beside Alli, now, talking to her. Elk is behind them, carrying Beckett. And Lock and Hiro are in the back, Lock looking behind them as the floor closes up again.

ALLI

Not sure. My best guess is that it was a hail Mary. Keep in mind she didn't get specific on anything to do with the artifact.

DES

If she knows more, someone will want to take her alive. It was a survival tactic.

ALLI

My thoughts exactly. Until a few minutes ago, most of the world didn't know the artifact existed. If she's telling the truth, we can assume the four major organizations did.

(New bubble)

Plus, we were just hired, so... Have to assume there's a connection.

PANEL 3

In the sewers of New Rosevelt, we see a Mariner (VTOL aircraft) sitting in the water. Beside it, on a small dock, is TSU CHIAO. She's holding a briefcase in one hand. A large suitcase sits beside her.

The cargo bay door is open, and all the squad but Des and Beckett walk into it.

CHIAO

Well done, agents. We will be heading to Olympus shortly, so strap in.

(New bubble)

Millicent Beckett, Desmond Rosario-Salgado. Pleasure to meet you. My name is Tsu Chiao.

PANEL 4

Fifty-fifty shot. Chiao stands on the left. Des and Beckett approach from the right.

Chiao hands over the briefcase, and pushes forward the suitcase with her foot. Beckett shoots a hand out to stop her.

CHIAO

No time to waste. We've provided you with premier augmented limbs. Put them on, and—

BECKETT

Hold on! Ma'am, things have gone to hell in the last few minutes. Now, we've been in combat before, but not like this.

(New bubble)

I want— We want to save the world. It's what we fought for. If you say that's what Olympus is doing... okay. But is what Princess Ichiko said true?

PANEL 5

Medium-close up on Chiao. She sighs.

CHIAO

Yes, it is true. And now the whole world knows it. So we best be on our way, agents.

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PANEL 1

Detail shot. The briefcase and suitcase are opened, revealing the new augmented limbs. They're much beefier, and have metal tendons for musculature.

CHIAO  
(Off-panel)  
We've got a lot of work to do.

PANEL 2

Wide shot. A group of teenagers point at a wall projection screen, frozen on the half-blade Ichiko showed off. The area around them is urban squalor—think a dirty corner of the Bronx. They're slinging on backpacks and taking pictures of the image, others trying to lead them off on this new adventure.

PANEL 3

Inside of a shipping-crate-turned-apartment, we see a spherical TV screen showing the same image. On the walls behind it are dossiers on soldiers who served in the Disposal, most of which are "X-ed" out in red. Two of the soldiers not crossed out look familiar...

In the foreground, we see a hand pin a knife down on a map of the world. Already there are smaller pins placed on different locations.

PANEL 4

Est. shot. A gigantic oil rig in the middle of the ocean is made up of old spaceship parts, with the branding "T.R.E.E." in its center. This is YGGDRASIL, the world government headquarters.

Mariners and sea vessels take off or land all around it. We can see this station also dips underwater, unclear how far down...

PANEL 5

Inside T.R.E.E. headquarters, we look down from a raised panel of three commanders. Their backs are all we see of them.

In the background, a throng of special operatives salute them. They're all packed and ready to be shipped out on some mission....

PANEL 6

A prisoner in a cell (with a porthole showing he's underwater) leans out his cell bars, looking up at the screen which reflects light back at him.

We can also see a large inmate in the background, masked by shadows. His arms are visible, and they're gorilla's arms.

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### PANEL 1

In a boardroom with a bright, summery decor, we see the filled chairs turn to the end of the room to view the screen.

Many of them are excited or determined, slamming their fists down on the long table or grinning.

The head of the table, whose back is to us, has a mane of silvery golden hair. The back of the chair, furthermore, shows a gridded country of Australia, with the Abolished "A" branding woven in.

### PANEL 2

In a lush living room with windows looking out at the clouds, Marcus Jasper holds his son, Neil, in his arms, looking at the TV before him (behind us). He looks concerned.

Camilla Jasper is behind him, already on the phone, pointing at the TV as she talks annoyedly.

Neil has a sippy cup full of purple liquid that he drinks idly.

### PANEL 3

The same Editor in Chief from earlier now barks orders at ARTY PÉREZ (Mexican, Gael García Bernal inspired), a wimpy journalist in glasses and a large black globe (camera) around his neck.

Arty takes frantic notes on his holo tablet, nodding. We can also see an image of the half blade on the tablet.

### PANEL 4

Medium shot. Michael floats in the sky amidst a swirl of smoke and dust. He speaks into his wrist, some kind of comm device.

In the reflection of his chrome armor we see Ichiko's distorted figure/recording playing on a giant screen (a la Times Square).

### PANEL 5

Inside the Mariner, now soaring through the sky, we see our squad sitting all together in the cargo hold. They're a mix of bored, nervous, and inquisitive.



Des and Beckett huddle over a tablet of their own, gaining intel. Lock seems the least interested in everything. Alli chats to Hiro and Elk.

END OF CHAPTER ONE.