



Blue Days

Yellow Optic

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Foreword

Last summer I was teaching a college public speaking class when a young student walked in the first day of class, who could have been mistaken for a middle school child, and greeted me with a joyful hi and glowing smile. This wasn't at all typical on the first day of class, for most students taking the required dreaded public speaking class. It just seemed like there was something special or different about this student. As the summer class progressed, this student demonstrated extreme confidence and skills in preparing and delivering very challenging speaking assignments. He just stood out amongst the rest.

That student is Ross Chan. In talking with Ross, I was simply amazed, amongst many other things, at the fact he had published his first book, *Fool Me Twice*, at the tender age of 16, and, was working on his second book.

After eagerly reading Ross's first book, I asked if I could get a copy of the next one whenever it became available. Although the book was not yet on the market, Ross asked if I would like to read the final draft. Which he delivered to me and I read. After finishing the book and discussing it with Ross, he asked if I would write the foreword to it. I eagerly accepted. I found his second book to be thoroughly creative, imaginative and engaging read—a fantastic work!

The characters prayed and hoped that everything would just be like it was doing what they might have gloriously remembered as "the good old days" in the great U.S. of A. However, had they really ever existed? Would political upheaval, political apathy, powerful and ubiquitous technology, violence and maybe a creeping revolution on

the arisen permit such youthful nonsense or folly?

And so the story begins. The year is 2096. A group of close friends go about life trying to do what young people do—work and enjoy life as best they can. Partying, barbecuing, playing games, searching for love, and, most important, trying to stay below the acute eyes and ears of an army of drones, and other technology beyond imagination. They thought-- politics were for the political. The consequences of saying the wrong thing or being in the wrong place put one's freedom and life in great jeopardy. A great mistake was made? Who, if anyone, will rise to the occasion? Friend or foe?

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book. The 19 year-old author has a vivid imagination and uncanny ability to create plots that twist and turn the reader's mind into a frenzy of eagerness to keep reading to the very last page. The depth and breadth of the author's skillful use of language in meticulously describing each scene makes one think they are actually watching a movie.

I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in a captivating, great read by an author who is far more mature, bright and imaginative beyond his 19 years on this Earth. I look forward to this up-and-coming young author's future gifts to the world of literature and imagination.

Frederick Berry
Assistant Professor, Communication Studies
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About the Author

Hello, I'm Ross Chan. Among my other interests in tech, filmmaking, and sports, my true love has always been with the literary arts. I started writing creatively (albeit very badly) at age 7 and realized my love for world-building and etching lifelike characters. Three and a half years ago, months before my 16th birthday, I finally first shared my passion with the world, and embarked on a path of even more world-building and even more lifelike character etching (maybe not as badly anymore).

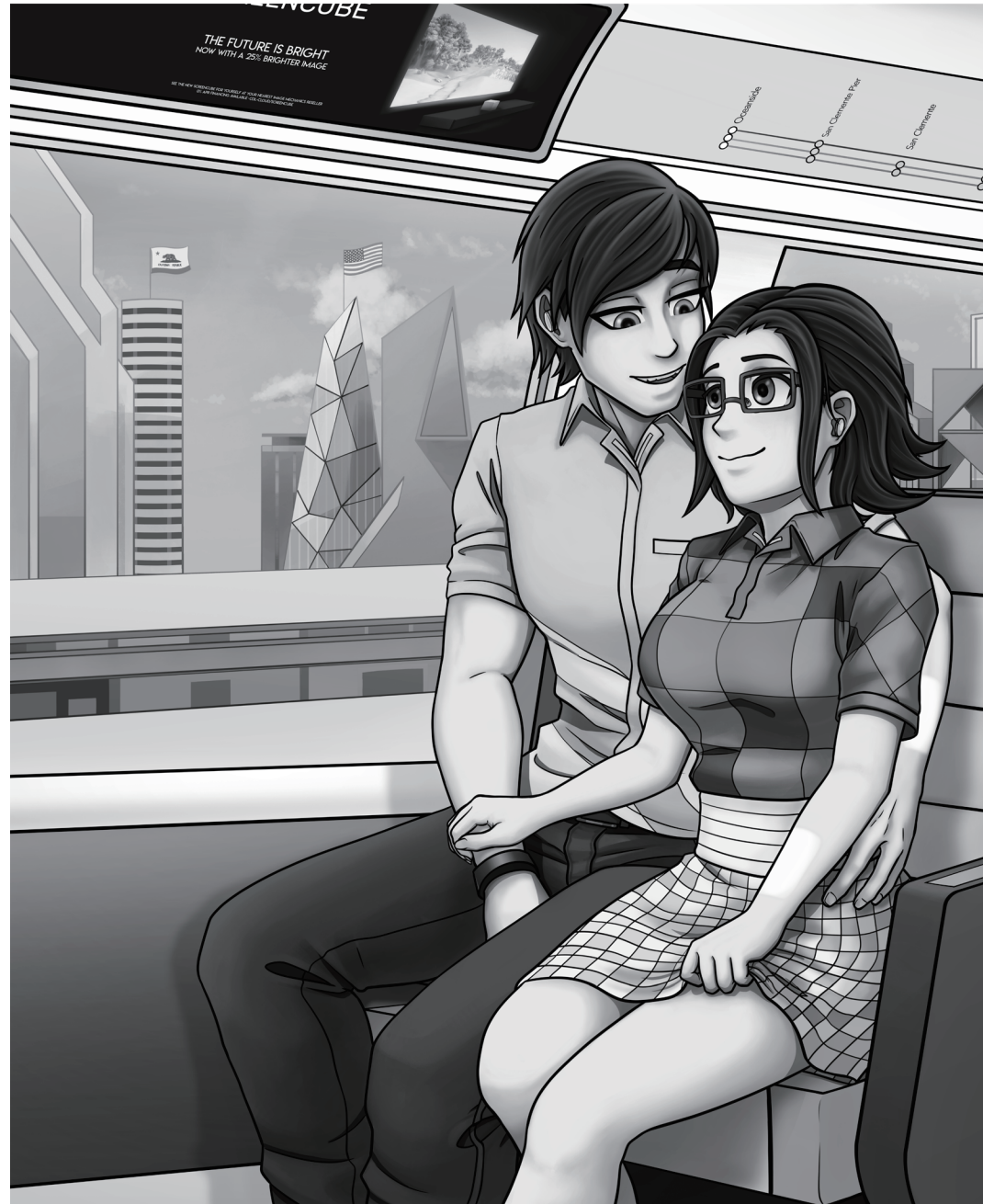
I consider Fool Me Twice an important first experiment. This book is the second.

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One Idyllic Image

The turn counter-clockwise detached the lens from the body. He places the two components in a drawer that was drawn with a sliding gesture on his touch-sensitive faux wood desk. The pieces return into their categories flanked by other modules, after which the box is pushed back into the desk, ending with a small click.

He rises as the hydraulics in his chair pushed him slightly. The second push, and he slings the black windbreaker he elected to hang over the back over his shoulder atop the electric blue shirt. The hand reaches for the door, and it slides open dutifully as the fingers made contact.

“Early leave.” He glances at the girl in the green jacket.

“Indeed. Remember the meetup’s tonight.”

“Yep.” He looks away for the door, and walked past not paying attention that the jacket was retreating to her seat at the end of the main room.

Tote bag in tow, she makes her way through the street.

A loose association of buildings, all varying in height, their metallic panels sprayed with hydrophobic paint in an attempt to eliminate decay, stares down at her. The glowing clouds duck behind their rooftops. The stores are open, their neon lights has been drowned out by the rays from the sky, yet it seemed like no one had entered.

The street is quiet. Few people remember the days when actual people had to actually walk the streets to preserve order. Tiny blue-white-black drones carry its insignias of the police department and its intentionally-blurry video camera as they fly overhead while the tiniest of whirs are manufactured by its blades. Only the truly unoccupied tread at this hour of the day.

The wind fly beside her. Furling and unfurling her dark hair and threatening to reveal what lay beneath her skirt and flashing the rainbow that splits with the white into a checkerboard. This is her small escape from the hanging sun.

Her metal soles stop the clacking on the marble tiling. She pulls out a small wrapper, and chucks it into a steel can. The sides of the cylinder explodes into light. The virtual counter ticks up, and the ancient relic of a glyph of a filled can appear. It congratulates her on disposing the city's twenty-five hundredth cubic meter of waste. The small piece of waste fall through the bin's hollow bottom into the subterranean sorting system.

The craft hovers overhead to prevent her from littering. She begins walking again, and the drone continues its patrol and moves away from her.

Angel Vernon turns her wrist. White graphics shine through the translucent plastic on her wrist.

Thirteen-twelve. June 13. Eighty-two degrees, cloudy.

Her finger attack the numbers. The lines and curves sink with the purple linen that form her sleeves.

Remember the tumbler Max wanted? Store's right up ahead.

An arrow points to where she will need to go.

The glass doors slide open to a packed wooden house. The oversized electric candlelights hang from the ceiling bounce off of the frosted glass tables as a motif to the deco from the start of the century. Above the transparency is a disorganized sort of items— A simple digital alarm clock whose glass cuboid on the top, meant to display the current weather has chipped and fractured. The “clouds” sculpted within flickers on and off with the display. A 300cc contour bottle of coke manufactured in 2012. An assortment of discontinued and worn rules and pencils whose materials have been banned since three decades ago. A small aluminum slab with a dark rectangle adhering to one side back when phones took solid, physical forms. Then there's a few toys.

The owner notices her and gets off his stool. Wrapped around his neck is a small pendant.

“What can I get ya, lady?”

“Excuse me, do you have a tumbler?”

“A tumbler.” His grainy voice made him almost seem like he was asking a question. “Hold on.”

His eyes shut themselves and he repeats the request back into himself with thoughts that will turn into neuron signals. Through his elimination of vision projects a minimal, alongside a photo record of it onto the dark background.

“Yeah, we have one.” He pulls open a sliding board, and brought the small blue-black pill to the table. It flopped around as it tries to balance itself on the black edge. The smile printed on its head stares at her as it bobs.

“Heh heh. People like the flop.”

She gives it a look, yet she won’t touch it. The scratches on the tumbler reveal the white plastic beneath the color coating. It throws her off slightly.

“Do you have another?”

“Sorry, lady.” He stops momentarily to point at the figure. “Only one left for sale.”

“I’ll take it.” She extends her wrist to the counter, and it lights up in green.

“\$25.” He gives the tumbler a push in her direction, as if it’s meant to be a send-off.

Both her and the owner watches as the display flashed as she begins the transaction.

Transaction for Tumbler at Coleman Antique

\$25.00

A green line crawls across the bottom of the text. An encircled checkmark replaces it when the line reaches the other end.

“Enjoy your tumbler.” The owner gives a little nod as he retreats back to the stool away from the counter.

She picks it up gently, and tosses it in her bag.

The hyperloop zips through the clear tunnels before the city skyline. The elevated track allow her to see the outside world. Buildings arch hundreds of feet into the sky as their reflective exteriors made them seem brighter than they really are. The tallest of the architecture were flanked by rows of smaller buildings. A few Airlift Taxis can be seen descending onto the marked landing spots. The downtown area of Irvine has become an everyday occurrence, yet to her it remains a marvel.

Her sack falter onto the seat as the train speeds into the suburbs. She otherwise wouldn’t have been able to hear the wind whoosh against the windows for the cart not be empty. It’s not a peak hour after all.

The glimmering sea had only been visible for a split-second before the white terminal blocks her view off.

The metal door gave way for her to reenter her home as she passed the hedges and the modest gate of their house. A blue-shirted male fitted with a black windbreaker stands up from the sofa to welcome her, as his hands move to remove said jacket.

“Hey, Alex.” She greeted the boy whose face flooded with warmth when he caught sight of her.

“Hey, syrup,” they shared a brief kiss and a gentle hug, “Aren’t you

supposed to come home earlier today? Is it lunch with Irene?"

"Had to go pick up something for Max." Her head nodded in the direction of her younger brother, also on the couch. "That store was, like, seven minutes away from here."

Angel got out of the embrace and dug one hand into her sack.

"Max." She kneeled down to look at her younger brother. "Is this what you wanted? I, um, bought it from somewhere."

He looked up from the floor, and the puzzlement turned to a small frown. He takes the figure from her hand, and placed it on the small table by the couch. It sprung itself upright.

"Mm hmm." He shoved the tumbler a few more times, and laughed at its reaction.

The sister smiled with approval, and rose to meet with her boyfriend again. His combed dark chestnut hair was barely hinted as the shade was camouflaged in normal light.

"About tonight." Alex Fritz looked at her while he placed a hand on her shoulder. "When we go see them tonight, don't bring up the dead puppy in front of Kevin. It hurts like hell for him."

"Spotty died? The dog we saw last summer?"

"Yes." His voice turned into a hush. "One day before it turns four. You might have heard— cake ready, decorations hung up for a pet who did not understand. We always had pitched in. Devastating."

Angel turned away in discomfort.

"I implore you to not mention it. The last time someone did that he went on an embarrassing diatribe. Something too near and dear to him." He was surprisingly calm despite what he just said.

"I thought he was over that by now. I'm not exactly sure on the details." She turned back around in curiosity.

"Heh," Alex distracted himself by pushing a rogue bang back so it sits on the edge of her face. The rightmost three-quarters of her hair was pushed to cover her forehead and the shadows sliced against her right eye. The rest flowed according to the shape of the left side of her cheek and strands curled outwards where it ended, covering her ear but not her other facial features. The width of hair visible outside her head never exceeded his ring finger. He always thought that the elongated tail at the back that floated an inch above her shoulder was a nice touch.

"Investigative eyes will tell everyone else that he isn't good at articulating his feelings. Descriptions comparable to talking about a painting blindfolded. You'll be disappointed if you're looking for something precise."

She moaned a little at the answer. Her boyfriend has always been verbose, but most of the time he would come up with something profound and truly interesting. Other times it gave her something to think about.

"Don't shoot the messenger."

"I'm a... little scared. I don't think he would, you know, act up though. Right?"

"I believe that he has adequate self-control. It's not like he's confronted with it."

She turned to look at her brother again. The tumbler is still struggling to get a hold of itself.

The auto cruised through the inner city air, levitating some twenty feet above the ground where more traffic went. The moon shone bright, yet the signs shone brighter. The billboarding and signs seemed ever more obnoxious today than ever. Every street and boulevard, every store that opens its doors in welcome, and now, a few of them walking, is an opportunity for a commercial. The streetlights rendered useless as the sky itself glowed blue and purple.

The road they're on stretched fifty feet across. But at this time of night, it was no surprise to see it packed. There is no chance for them to be hit, though it always looked like they could. Maybe it's the pavements whose wanderers spill into the noise-muffling asphalt. Perhaps it's the rush hour jam. Through Angel's black rims that housed thin heads-up displays hanging mere inches away from her cornea, the traffic became a blur of lights.

Angel huddled against him as if they would crash. Her arms laid against him while she leaned in his direction in return for a reassurance in the form of one of his arms protecting her shoulders.

It was a small habit that grew out of her desire for intimacy. The roles between them were clearly defined, but they never lost respect for each other. A pinch of security stirred with a dash of devotion.

It was in their common interest to love each other, and it wasn't greed.

She turned to look at him. He relaxed his arm a bit.

"Sorry about the grip. Too tight on you." He noticed the small pursing of her lips. "You can scream at me all you want. Don't bother holding back."

"I never did." They share a smile. "It's not you. I'm serious."

"Something's off with you." He tried hard to not to make himself look as if he was bothered by her.

"True. I feel like we are walled off into our own corner."

"I think this is how we grow." Alex replied after a moment of thought, "I don't know how to read minds. That said, I'm glad you're enjoying yourself."

"That's not... a problem. Angel lost it slightly and broke eye contact in the process."

"Exactly. Why make it one?" "Hm."

Angel turned back again and let herself fall onto him.

Their wrists simultaneously lit up.

Arrived at destination nineteen-oh-five.

The group of friends sat around red sofas as they watched the

autoplay on the projection on the opposite wall. Their audio was delivered through small, white wireless earpieces inserted into their ears. Exchanged were a few comments but more often was the laughter. Occasionally they will pick up and sip their drinks, all while fighting not to spit it out.

The earpieces that the pair wore on their way in fired up as the signals were detected. They walk through the sliding door inset into the polymer wall. The video paused and everyone stopped to look.

Alex nodded in their general direction while his girl helped with the talking.

"Hi guys."

"Don't worry, you're not late. Not a single bit." Kevin Chase raised his tone from the end of the table.

The room stopped to catch a collective breath.

The pair was barely able to catch an edge of the cushions as two of them scooted right to leave them some room.

"It's been a while!"

"About four hours. Long while, I know." Alex stilled his sight on Irene.

The red-haired girl in the fleece jacket pulled Angel closer to herself as some of the others stood up and moved.

"We're just looking at the videos from last year. The raft? Does it ring

a few bells?" Irene tried to help her return to their circle again. She tightened the knot that held her hair up.

"The raft. Yeah... It did not end well." Angel squeezed out a smile of mischief.

"You should have seen the look on Mr. P when they had the mini capsizes. Worth going back there with that memory snippet alone."

"You can always rewatch that, I suppose," Angel squeezed a smile.

"They have a controller firing to limit the sun. Next shot is in a week, I think. Maybe, um, that would be a good time to go?"

"We really should go again sometime." Irene Walker's red hair flicked slightly as she turned to check. "How's your homeboy?"

"Him?" She glanced in Alex's direction briefly to see if he is occupied while her face flushed pink. "He hasn't been away from me— in forever."

"I told you he loves you dearly. You two get along."

Angel awkwardly nodded and gave a small giggle as an acknowledgment.

"I'm just a bit curious, what do you people do?" Eric asked.

"What do you earn 'what do we do?' We go to work. Like normal people?" Kevin beamed back. "We clock in, and clock out? And then we put together projects?"

"No. This wasn't the answer I'm looking for. What do you people actually do? You guys edit videos, and film, and make advertising?"

"We don't work in marketing. Alex, do any of us work in that category?"

Alex's eyes shifted to the side as he conjured up details of their day-to-day.

"Not really, those positions are traditionally reserved for the associates that we coordinate and work with. We don't even wield the cameras. We just sit in our room, working on the minors. The likes of video timeline assembly work and audio optimization."

"Me and Ricky go edit videos. He's the master at putting together video, but I fix the visuals— Individual frames, and the color correction, and the detail. He's the master. You should buy him lunch when one of the projects end up being one of your favorites visually. A treat."

A small robot wheeled itself into the room while the door closes behind it.

The droid squealed for their attention as it displayed a question.

Did someone in this room order nachos? Yes. No.

Irene stood up to tap yes. The droid spun in delight, then its front panel flipped open for the group.

Alex stood up, garnered Angel among his arms, and brought her over to his side.

The lights were dimmed in their bedroom. Angel allowed herself a small drone of human conversation in the background while she waited for him. The mixture of bristles and whirring from beyond the glass. Then the grumble of water, followed closely by the splashes against the sink. The door moved out of his way as he headed for her, his footsteps muffled, his breathing slowed.

He surmounted the mattress, and pulled the nylon over them both. By now, she was used to his bare skin brushing against her own. She could have wandered a guess of what it felt like if it Alex wasn't there, though she dare not think of such a scene. She had long forgotten about life before him, and in her blurry memories she wondered if there exists a time where he wasn't by her. She was certain that it had, yet in the very next moment, she was not.

It's no coincidence that their thoughts drifted in the direction of their common love before themselves.

"About time?" He brushed her hair and pinched her cheek as if she was a child. "Is your mind clear?"

"Not quite." Angel strayed away from absolutes. "I haven't seen them... in a while."

"If I'm accurate, your parents will be coming home next week."

"They wanted to meet you, Alex. That's what they told me."

"Not a problem. I can hold myself together. They've never really talked to me and you told me they want to go to the wire with their

knowledge. I'm capable at showing them that I'm good enough for you."

"Wait, Dad broke his leg. He's contemplating whether to use a cane or to swap out of it. They don't like the idea of bionics. Anything they, uh, could print."

"I would recommend the swap. Two capsules a week for fourteen of them, I heard. Ditch the repellence, and he will be as good as new."

"We can't go out of town." The radio tuned itself down. "Now that—"

"I'd say we stay within the block. I'll take care of them both if you don't feel like it. Now that we have eight days to flow, slow up, syrup."

She looked up at him as his endearing call made them share smiles again. Her heeding it was a certainty.

"Let the gang know we'll talk more, sugar," The urge to return the favor washed over her. "We'll stay."

"Never an issue. Is that it?"

"It."

The couple lowered themselves onto the clouds their heads shall rest on. She curled up against him, their lips pushed against one another briefly and parted. The lights go out, the radio became quieter, the thermostat dipped to sixty-five, and the intimacy grew.

The Airlift slowly hovered above the city as Irene sat completely still within its cabin. She dared not look down through its enormous side windows. The relative serenity of its vehicle as it plowed through the early morning air was enough to make her forget she was a hundred feet above ground. The shade outside was just shy of black.

She extracted a small white pill from her pocket, and took the small thermos bottle beside her for a swig. Irene looked down again. The divide between the city and the suburbs seemed clearer to her retinas. She could distinguish the types of roofing for each house. She could see the birds perched on top of the uniformly-planted trees. The image of the city began to spin slightly, zooming in and backing out, defocusing and focusing constantly. Soon these visual anomalies would disappear, and both the city and the Taxi itself fell together into a single category of a clear, continuous image.

She let the breeze and the chirping enter the cabin. Her sight was locked dead ahead. Only until the presence of another Airlift running opposite to her path did she realize she was still in mid-air. She uncomfortably turned her eyes onto the stone-colored felt bar at the top of the front window.

56% traveled. 2.52 of 4.5mi. Est. Arrival 5:15am | Elapsed 04:15 of 08:30 min

Sat 6/14/96. Eighty-nine degrees, partly cloudy. 1.5mph breezes drift west.

She distracted herself by watching videos on her wrist. The film began to fade as one played. With one hand she tipped the bottle beside her, and pushed her palm against the screen. The colors came back. She pushed the water off of her arm, and wiped the rest against her pants.

She closed her eyes tightly as the voices of the podcast continued on, and took a deep breath.

The two lines of text scrolled up as two other lines appeared.

Nearing destination. Descending.

About half a minute remaining.

The text reverted back to the prior panel, and Irene found herself staring at her own apartment. Her friend hoped that it's worth the wait.

Two Different Paces

The two heaved a giant game board onto the dinner table. The pieces were retrieved from its drawer, initially by handfuls, slowly reverting to individual counters when the numbers dwindled. Eric sorted them by type. First, the tiny disks. Color by color, pattern by pattern. Then there were the downsized cars. The small cubes and the stick figures. Each category of counters received its own corner area of the board. Irene yanked the small string at one side of the board. The board glowed. Its pathways were lined with small diodes of red, orange, green, and blue. The ring display surrounded the central automatic dice roller. The purple glow on the button to shake the pair of dotted cubes enclosed by a glass dome, and sat on green felt before it spins and hurls. Four buttons that were color-coded to correspond with each player were placed in front of every corner, just outside of the ring.

The board itself was a perfect square in white polycarbonate plastic melded with a carbon fiber base that was situated at the center of the table.

"I'm orange." Eric sat in front of the orange corner. The diodes glowed for him.

"Blue." Irene sat directly across from him and her corner glowed as well. "You're going down for sure. Remember who lost by two in the Final Round of Doomm—"

The elongated reminder sent him into battle.

Future. Tense.

Much has changed in the late 21st century. The United States Federal Government has taken on a more nationalistic tone. A popular independence movement in California wants to break away, sparking warring protests, civil unrest, and fierce partisan engagements between the Federal Unionists and Californian Bearists across the state. When Alex Fritz's good friend Kevin was arrested in connection with a hostage bombing that he himself witnessed, he realizes with his girlfriend Angel Vernon that they cannot live their lives in isolationist bliss as the factions close in.



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